

MIRROR, MIRROR

an Adventure of Politics and Passion
written by Jennifer Brandes and Chris Hepler

"Hide a scroll in a library.
Hide a flower in a garden.
Where, then, do you hide your murderers?"
-Doji Nashiko

Kyuden Hida, the dread fortress anchoring the Kaiu Wall, rarely rings with the sound of laughter and music. But as ice blankets the Shadowlands, joyous tidings brighten the homely court of the Crab. Where once there was only a dead-eyed berserker now stands a man, a daimyo bent on winning the heart of a Phoenix maiden as beautiful and chilling as the snows.

Hiruma Kage is in love.

But rumors weave through the court, subtle murmurs of blackmail and lust and politics the honest Crab Clan cannot stomach. And then the bodies begin to fall.

"Why?" is not a question many ask when signs of blood magic are everywhere. But a calculated plan soon becomes apparent. Mutilated courtiers and sorcerous killers alike will cower before an evil older than the Wall itself.

Who do you defend as the Shadowlands close in, and the death of a single man or hundreds are the only options? Where can you turn when dark sorcery strikes in the mightiest stronghold of the Empire?

And how can you choose when you don't even know who you are?

* Suitable for 4-9 player characters of Ranks 3-5. Recommended: 2-4 bushi, 1-3 shugenja, 1-2 courtiers.

* At Kyuden Hida, courtly intrigue doesn't stop just because the Shadowlands come to visit. Filled with deception, gruesome horror and heroic sacrifice, *Mirror, Mirror*, may be used independently or as part of an ongoing campaign.

* The *Legend of the Five Rings* basic rules are required to use this adventure. *Bearers of Jade: The Second Book of the Shadowlands* is strongly recommended.

CREDITS

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Dedication:

This adventure is for Rodora dela Rosa, to remind her that she can do anything. Her letters always arrive when we need them most, and inspire us to live and write as well as we can. (Just between us, I think the praying works.) Thank you.

Special Thanks:

Jeff Gilmour needs an extra mention here for all his work and the 9 a.m. e-mail ideas. Thanks to all who played in the Origins '99 tournament. You were all phenomenal, and it was a tough choice for the winning team. Their 22-hour marathon wasn't just successful, it was downright heroic. They are: **Ethan** "Isn't This Ironic, Kikuzo-san?" **Sapperstein**; **Elisa** "That's Hida Kikuzo-ko" **Ford**; **Mike** "I Scream Like a Doji who Finds a Zit" **Brodeur**; **Chunkai Kevin** "Truest Test of Courage" **Wang**, **Anthony** "Sacrifice Yourself for All Things" **Gitcho**; and **Amul** "Every Hiruma Daimyo for the Last 200 Years" **Kumar**.

About the Authors

Chris Hepler remains locked in a maximum-security cell, where he is restricted to writing with soft paper and crayons, and is consulted by game companies in only in the direst of circumstances. Chris recently gamemastered the third round of this adventure from eleven p.m. to eleven a.m., and never once did his pulse get above eighty-five, even when he ate three player characters.

Jennifer Brandes has yet to sell her soul for beauty, although she has a time-share plan available for companies who publish her writings. She has spent most of the last few months saying, "No, Chris!" to tasteless suggestions, and would never in a million years allow her player character to go on this adventure, glory be damned.

INTRODUCTION

What is *Mirror, Mirror*?

Mirror, Mirror is an adventure for the *Legend of the Five Rings* roleplaying game, which was run as the official *L5R RPG* tournament at Origins '99. It was originally written as a companion adventure to *Bearers of Jade: The Second Book of the Shadowlands*, and was intended to playtest the book in more than one sense.

Bearers of Jade contained, like all of our works, a deluge of different things: new fiction in new formats to make it fun to read, new antagonists that warped the existing rules but didn't make old ones obsolete, and new details about the Shadowlands that made it far more mythic, unknowable, and undefeatable than before. But one of the sections we enjoyed the most was the advice on running horror campaigns in Rokugan.

To us, gamemastering and campaign advice is cheap. Once you get down the basic "research response" to your campaign -- that is, when the campaign gets slow, you don't abandon it but look around for everything possible to throw in -- there is a whole planet full of material. Gaming magazines, books, and now Internet sources are everywhere. You can even walk into a gaming store, skim through the sourcebook of the month for campaign advice, and put it back on the rack. Why pay for advice when you can get it by asking?

The answer ought to be: *Because this guy is a better GM than anyone I know. Because he's logged more hours GMing this genre than I have, with more players of differing play styles and he's gotten a more intense reaction and sustained the fun longer and he can boil down the principles, give them to me, and improve my game.*

That's what we were playtesting. Reproducibility. We wanted to see if the advice in *Bearers of Jade* was not art, but science. It had to create a good time for whoever took those instructions to heart. So we wrote *Mirror, Mirror* and got some friends to run it following our own advice. Because creating horror in Rokugan is a different dance than trying it in *GURPS Horror* or *Call of Cthulhu*. If everyone is in character (which we are assuming in an otherwise functional game) you aren't trying to scare reporters and debutantes. That's *easy*. In *L5R* horror, you have to scare six hard-core, heavily armed martial artists, some of whom come from an entire clan of professional demon hunters who do not fear death because they know for a fact they will reincarnate.

So we wrote an adventure that did. We sent it in to Alderac Entertainment Group. It was rejected.

Why? Well, as D.J. Trindle, the line editor of *L5R*, put it:

"You guys cranked this up to 11..."

"I got chills reading it..."

"You're not supposed to scare the GM."

We respect the decision that Alderac made, and the reasons for doing so. From a business standpoint, the rejection makes sense. Developing an R-rated adventure creates a risk that someone's parents will freak out, and it only takes one to financially damage a game company. And creating an "adult" adventure that one has to be an elite gamer to survive is indeed narrowing your market.

But we know there are attentive, intelligent, tough roleplayers out there who follow the advice in the *L5R* books and would see *Mirror, Mirror* as a challenge. Because every year when we go to Origins and run a tournament, we meet at least twenty more of them.

They are our audience, and where the serious roleplayers go, the casual ones can follow.

Mirror, Mirror is meant to teach a critical lesson about Rokugan: just because the samurai are facing the forces of darkness doesn't mean the situation is straightforward, that good is good and evil is evil, or that the former will always defeat the latter.

Ideally, *Mirror, Mirror* will be a look into the souls of the samurai present for Kyuden Hida's Winter Court. The Shadowlands will systematically strip away every physical and mental defense until bushi and child alike find out who they are. But it is not only death that threatens. Courtly intrigues continue, even while the armies of hell are at the gates, grinding the PCs between the literal soul-destroying demons of Fu Leng and the metaphorical demons of pettiness, politics and war. They learn first-hand the awesome sense of responsibility that created the Hida motto: "I will not fail."

Each of the three mini-adventures in *Mirror, Mirror* takes place during the Winter Court at Kyuden Hida, and are generally meant to be run back to back, although the social scenes can be expanded with sub-plots and extra characters from your home campaign.

Mirror, Mirror is a horror story. While PCs of any Rank may survive, it will only be if they are intelligent about when and why they fight. Going toe-to-toe with the hordes of Jigoku is foolish. If high-Rank characters try to do so to the villainess, she will teach them the virtue of guerrilla war one way or another. The adventure was tested on groups of six Rank 3 characters. Eleven of eighteen died in the final round. One entire team became the playthings of evil. The characters used in the tournament are provided here as a suggestion that your gamers try on a different face... or faces... for the duration. When using the pre-generated player characters, the mirror analogy fully blooms, as the dark secrets they possess are not so different from the villainess herself.

We suggest reading the adventure thoroughly at least once before running it. To keep from giving anything away should players peek at the beginning, many of the secret truths are not revealed until the end of Part Three, and to properly play the first part, GMs will need this information.

The Theme of *Mirror, Mirror*

The theme of *Mirror, Mirror* is "when you look for secrets, be ready for what you find." Knowledge gives the heroes a chance -- but it will not save the court without wits, resolve, and skill. A question to prod the players while they hunt for a *maho-tsukai* among the gentry of Rokugan is, "well, if it *was* him, what could you do about it?" The political situation is such that even if the antagonist is, by a freak chance, revealed early, within seconds it can compensate, appear as another person, and begin again from a new angle. Or in the case of low-Glory PCs, they may know... but be without a legal recourse.

This does not mean the players are helpless, only that there are no simple solutions. When fighting an evil which can take on any form, someone proven innocent one day could be guilty the next.

But as Osano-Wo said when he set the course for the next thousand years of Crab history, everyone fails; the important part is to know how to recover and try again. Failure and new attempts are a recurring motif, the most notable being the Hiruma family's failure, which drives Hiruma Kage to both heroism and suicide, and the villainess' failure long ago that turned her to Fu Leng. It is up to the heroes to salvage honor, virtue, and the lives of

brave samurai when darkness finally falls.

PART I: ...ON THE WALL

Background: The Heir to the Hiruma

Winter Court at Kyuden Hida is usually a tense, dour affair. While the Yasuki host most guests at the Razor of the Dawn castle, Kyuden Hida is the heart of Crab-Crane relations. Daidoji diplomats honor Hida Kisada's court with their presence, and the winter is spent "eating breakfast two *ri* north of the mouth of hell" as Kisada's *karo* puts it. Often, Crabs who haven't been off the Wall in months are given leave to relax at court and more socially adept, lowland samurai are brought in to help them adjust.

At its best, this buddy system means the Wall samurai shows the clan's might around court and the lowlander tempers him with gentility. More often, the result is a paranoid, trash-mouthed killer stuck with a rookie village-watcher who doesn't know where anything in the castle really is. After a few weeks, they part and settle on opposite sides of the castle from other Clans, who know they must have done something wrong to get such a lousy diplomatic post.

But this year, all that promises to change. Hiruma Kage, the genteel warrior-poet and daimyo of the Hiruma, turned twenty-seven in the month of the Monkey. Having no siblings, no spouse and no heir, if Kage were to die, the Hiruma family noble line would effectively end. Since the average life span of a Crab berserker is rarely past thirty, Kisada demanded Kage choose a bride.

Kage had in mind Doji Rumiko, with whom he had exchanged haiku the previous summer, but when they met, he found her a sincere, wealthy courtier who was mostly good at getting talented friends to write letters in her stead. Annoyed, he continued his search through the Matsu and Ikoma, and wound up far to the north, where, to everyone's surprise, he fell deeply in love.

As an acting daimyo, Kage has the unique leeway to (with selected women of at least 6.5 Glory) marry whom he wishes. Isawa Mutsuye, a seventeen-year-old cousin of Shiba Ujimitsu, qualified. She was from a traditional, wealthy background, attractive, educated, devout, interested in history, and best of all, she impressed him even when they went walking alone. Kage returned to the Crane lands carrying her fan.

After the Crane lodged complaints against him for "implicitly" agreeing to marry Rumiko, Kage told them just what else they could imply and where they could lodge it. Furious, the Crane withdrew their *nakodo* (go-between), forcing Kage to rely upon a Scorpion to be the neutral messenger as he arranged to bring his chosen bride to Crab lands for their marriage.

The wedding of a family daimyo is never small news, and a large retinue of Phoenix, and delegates of Lion, Scorpion and Unicorn are taking advantage of the court to talk business face-to-mempo with Hida Kisada.

Kisada, of course, already knows this is too good to be true.

Getting the Samurai to Court

There are a number of reasons the PCs may be invited to the Crab court. For low-

Glory courtiers and gentry, Kyuden Hida is seen as a kind of "training court" where promising samurai can cut their teeth before facing the political labyrinths of the Phoenix or Lion (let alone Crane, Scorpion or Imperial).

High-ranking courtiers, on the other hand, are only likely to attend the Crab if they have no other options. So bring out all their enemies and rivals... who pull a few favors, bribe a messenger, and the horror ensues. It's the end of autumn and the only invitation the PC holds is from Kisada. Their daimyo commiserates, but he's a busy man, and he assures them that other members of their clan have stayed in Crab lands before. One even enjoyed it. His name was Nanimaru, and it was three generations ago: practically yesterday! The daimyo promises he'll write.

The PC is then sent to the Wall.

If the courtier PC works fast, he can get his enemy assigned to Kyuden Hida, too, letting the one-upmanship continue throughout *Mirror, Mirror*.

For characters less concerned with their own social standing, the quickest way to get them here is to have their family invited -- spouses, parents, siblings -- and the PC comes along as part of the retinue. Having loved ones along makes Part Three all the more intense.

For player characters already married or courting, another, more risqué opportunity may present itself. The Crab court, it is sometimes said, "has hard walls, but many pillows to make up for it." While, for example, a Matsu man's prestigious wife may be gracing the Imperial Court with her fiery glory, he only qualifies for the trip south. That the pretty Kitsuki girl he'd pursued throughout his youth is also here is a complete coincidence. The two of them will simply suffer through the cold winter nights together... keeping up old relations.

Hida walls are a lot more sound-proof than a paper screen.

STANDARD HIDA PROCEDURE

When the characters arrive, it is a cold, dry day, the sort that gives wind-burn, but at least it's blowing from the north. They are escorted to the lower gatehouse, where a servant fetches Kaiu Takakana, a rotund Crab keeping warm in armor. Takakana is drill-sergeant loud and never laughs (though he won't get too offended if players do). His opening remarks, as he leads them beneath the twenty-foot oni skull, go something like this:

"I am Kaiu Takakana, karo of this castle. That makes me responsible for keeping this court secure. It also makes me responsible for the entire right flank of the Kaiu Wall. If you have any idea what that means, you will not interrupt me unless your need is that great. We have more than three thousand bushi stationed here, so rest assured that if an Oni attacks, we can keep casualties down to less than half your number. That count does not include whenever a bunch of pony samurai whose sole purpose here is to get drunk and chase kimonos start playing with their swords in public. I'll be keeping your katana safely locked away from such miscreants. Any wakizashi I want in your room or on your person at all times.

"If you ever hear a rapidly clanging bell or see a red flare explode outside, do not panic. Gather those you care about and march in a quick but orderly fashion to your room and bar the door. Open it for no one, not even me or Kisada-sama, until you see the green flare. If the flare does not come, stay in that room until spring. If you see a blue flare, which,

I should point out, we have never had to launch in the last one thousand years, please line up your loved ones in an orderly fashion and look beneath your futon for a sandalwood case. Inside are three parts of a naginata and a set of instructions. Assemble this naginata. Take a position by the door where there is room enough to swing. Then behead your loved ones, because you don't want them here for what happens next.

"So relax and enjoy your Winter Court."

Note that the securing of katanas is not only standard Rokugani custom, it is a useful plot point for the GM. If a player brings a crystal katana, it has the potential to detect Shadowlands creatures by glowing in their presence and causing them pain. This could undercut the mystery in Part 1 very quickly. To get around this, first enforce that the katanas are taken away. If a PC has a *really* good excuse (e.g. your campaign established she's Kisada's personal Kuni Witch Hunter and she rolled sky-high on Sincerity) have it glow in the presence of a Crab guard with the Shadowlands Taint, as many Crab here have. This Crab promptly complains to Takakana that he and his guards can't work with that sword around. The sword is secured, or else the PC is sent on patrol duty on the Wall while everyone else chases the plot. If all else fails, you can rule that because the villain of the piece is adept at preparing for eventualities such as this, the crystal simply doesn't glow in her presence. Done.

A MEETING WITH THE SHADOW WARRIOR

Shortly after the player characters arrive, they are approached by Yasuki Kurako, the official hostess of the court, and told that the honorable and fearsome Hida-sama has requested their presence immediately. If asked, she repeats... it is *the* Hida-sama.

It should be apparent within the first five minutes that Kurako is not someone to go to with a serious problem. Though much higher Glory than the PCs, she is nervous, warning them Hida-sama is quite... *sudden* when angry. She does not know why they are summoned, and assumes that the worst of any guesses the PCs make must be true.

On the sixth floor, several Kaiu bushi offer to polish their wakizashi and stitch their satchels during the meeting. No one other than his bodyguards enters the daimyo's presence armed.

The bushi slide the iron shoji aside to reveal the Champion of the Crab Clan -- Hida Kisada -- sitting on a raised dais, surrounded by a dozen enormous yojimbo in demonic mempo and armor, backs to the wall, carrying spiked tetsubo. There is no tatami mat... just stained stone. A formal bow puts the PCs' heads in just the right position to be whacked off should their escorts slam the shoji.

"Enter," Kisada says in a voice like a waiting volcano. "Sit. You are welcome."

The formal greeting is not complete without a shared tea ceremony. Yasuki Kurako sits to Kisada's left and pours the tea without once raising her eyes. Kisada and his bushi stare rudely and aggressively. The ceremony is completely silent. For those without the Death Trance Advantage, it takes a Willpower + Tea Ceremony or Etiquette test, TN 15, to avoid looking away or having their hands shake. Characters who fail are escorted from the room. (They can still play the adventure; they just don't report directly to Kisada.)

Once satisfied that they have some measure of courage, Kisada begins:

"Your lords (the PCs themselves if using the pre-generated ones) have sent me a

letter offering your services during this court. I have need of you now."

Kisada has chosen the PCs as the best suited from among the guests at Winter Court. This works best if they have a reputation for political skill and investigatory work. Competent Emerald Magistrates, the pre-generated characters who serve the Phoenix Inquisitors, and similar samurai are the team he wants: professional, fearless, knowledgeable, aware of court subtleties, and not all Crabs, so no one will suspect they are under assignment.

Though he'll take ronin if he must, Kisada has all the uneducated, brash, dirty swordsmen he'll ever need. Ronin will be hired to fill out the party for dishonorable but necessary tasks and escorting the courtiers, not to compose it entirely.

"You of course know of the lord Isawa Hikaru (Intelligence + Courtier, TN 15, to know he is a prominent landowner and father of Kage's perspective bride). He has proven his worth as a shugenja and as a man, and we respect him above many. You also know of my general, Hiruma Kage, daimyo of the family who has lost the most to our ancient enemy. Kage's loyalty to their memory burns in every assault he makes, and he is of an age now to ensure that such valor continues in the next generation. I have been pleased to arrange for him to wed Hikaru-san's daughter."

Kisada doesn't look all that pleased, and Intelligence + Courtier, TN 20, lets characters know of the rumors that Kage defied Kisada's matchmaker, fell in love with Isawa Mutsuye, and refused any other candidate. With Raises, they know that this caused no end of petty court difficulties for the Crab. Kisada and Kage have not been on the best of terms lately.

"Tonight, during the hour of the Dog (8 p.m.) I meet with the Emerald Magistrate who bears the chop of the Emperor's approval while the old man sleeps in Ootosan Uchi. The magistrate's word will formalize all the marriages I approve this winter." He glowers. "If I commit my most loyal daimyo to marry this woman, I expect that there will be NO FURTHER DIFFICULTIES. Investigate quietly and make this so. Now."

The bushi step forward to escort them from the room. If the players were not paying strict attention, they might be confused. That's all right. Kaiu Takakana is right outside to explain the orders and answer reasonable questions.

"You have that look many people get when meeting Kisada-sama for the first time. He is often... brief. Allow me to clarify."

"Between you and me, this isn't the place for flower arranging. But gentility and politeness can be weapons that pose needless dangers for those with better claims on their time." He looks at each PC in turn. "Kage-sama will marry a woman pure of virtue and station or no woman at all. We ask you to go into the court and make certain this Isawa meets those requirements. Discover if she harbors any secret that might harm us, now, or in twenty years when their child is grown and commands his own army. Make certain there aren't any treacherous sc... vipers... hiding in the court who would fabricate such secrets."

"Find all you can, but do not arouse suspicions. If it is known there are doubts about her, rumors will breed. Let Kage-sama learn nothing of your investigations. He's... fond... of the girl, and would not take kindly to those who do not believe in her. You will report before the evening banquet, when Kisada-sama shall announce the betrothal. Be warned: those who make trouble for this house often bait the spears to the south."

Neither directly mentions the reason for their agitation. With the Crane alienated and the Phoenix too closely involved, they were stuck with a Scorpion *nakodo* (go-between), whom Kisada trusts about as far as he can throw the Kuni Wastes. It doesn't help that Bayushi Masayari appears to be a harmless *junshin* (honorable Scorpion). Kisada knows that just means the real threats are lurking somewhere in the shadows.

Give the PCs time to plan, but not too much. The betrothal announcement is in four Western hours. The sundial is ticking.

WHAT'S WHERE AND WHO'S WHO

There is a map of Kyuden Hida on page 111 of *Way of the Crab*. The seventh floor is where Kisada sleeps. Six is his audience chamber. Important Crabs like Kage go on five, high-Glory personages on four, three is for the Unicorn, Scorpions, Phoenixes and player characters, and two and one are for most court functions. The shoji of former barracks have been removed and the floor whitewashed to create spacious lounges with private quarters around them.

The important guests at court this year include the following:

KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE (Glory 9.0-8.0)

Hida Kisada (Glory 9.0): The Great Bear. Daimyo of the Hida family. Daimyo and Champion of the Crab. He started killing when he was five years old, and hasn't stopped yet. No one, man or Oni, has ever injured him and lived. Kisada's statistics can be found in *Way of the Crab* and *Twilight Honor*. When angered, he's more like a tsunami than something player characters or Oni can withstand. Besides his combat capability (which involves many 5s and an Earth of 9), he knows practically everything about the Shadowlands (10k5 on Intelligence + Shadowlands Lore), rolls 9k9 for Intimidation, and has a base TN of 25 to be convinced of anything. Player characters can only see his eyes; the rest of him is concealed in a mountain of metal called the Armor of the Shadow Warrior. His children are not here this year.

Kisada is Brash and cannot afford *any* disobedience. This castle is the anchor for the entire Kaiu Wall. If it falls, there will be no reinforcements, no second chance; the Shadowlands will roll down the Wall and no one in Rokugan will be safe again. Samurai who talk back to Kisada may be turned over his knee and publicly *spanked*. Such utter humiliation will probably cause some Wounds and the loss of an entire Rank of Glory and Honor. Serious offenses earn swift death.

In Kisada's mind, someone is *always* responsible for any wrongdoing. If a noblewoman gets mutilated, her yojimbo is at fault for not protecting her; if it was a mahotsukai, the Phoenix Inquisitors were at fault for not finding it earlier. Kisada knows well the number one cause of death at the Wall: relaxation of vigilance.

Hiruma Kage (Glory 8.5): Hiruma Family Daimyo. A dead-eyes berserker and Crab general who had to be physically dragged out of Hiruma Castle a few years ago when he tried to retake it. PCs may see him socializing downstairs, in good spirits; he's in love and all is right with the world. Four Rank 5 Hida guards accompany him at all times, carrying swords and spears. Kage's statistics can be found in Part 2 of this adventure (p. 30).

PEOPLE TO BE SEEN WITH (Glory 7.9-6.5)

Asako Wataru (Glory 7.2): A Phoenix Emerald Magistrate here to sanction all inter-clan marriages Kisada approves this winter. He also has the blessing of Shiba Ujimitsu and the Council of Five to marry off any other Phoenix here if there is a suitable match made. Wataru is above using his station to block others' marriages. He is a Rank 4 Doji Courtier. His wife died a year ago.

Asako Kuhime (Glory 6.9): Wataru's daughter, Mutsuye's friend. She is sixteen, and this is her second Winter Court. She has attended no formal school, but has brought herself honor with ink paintings, dance, tea ceremonies, and embroidery. Her dedication to her arts shows great resolve; she might have been capable of anything if properly educated.

Bayushi Tatsukoro (Glory 6.6): The leader of the Scorpion contingent, he was glorious enough to get to court, but not enough to go anywhere good. Tatsukoro is an irritable Rank 4 Bayushi bushi trying to impress the Crab through strength. He has taken up the practice of wearing armor (and a metal-barred mempo) around the court, and is itching for a duel, since winning one would be the fastest way to convince Kisada that he is a genuine, serious bushi. His wife, Bayushi Kazeko, rarely leaves her room, preferring scrolls to company.

Isawa Akiko (Glory 6.5): A thirteen-year-old, wide-eyed girl who's never been near a real bushi before, let alone three thousand at Winter Court. She has two modes when talking to heroic samurai: murmuring and letting out a few vowels, or blurting out every feeling and bizarre small detail about her life, "except the bit about the carp pond and the exploding Togashi."

Isawa Hikaru (Glory 7.5): A landed, wealthy noble and first cousin to Shiba Ujimitsu, Hikaru can arrange for a number of Phoenix shugenja to aid the Crab's overtaxed Kuni, give forth a dowry of thousands of koku worth of lumber, fish, pearls and enamels, and he's a Rank 1 Isawa shugenja, mostly out of tradition. His wife Otsu is here as well, and they seem close by Rokugani standards; they sometimes touch in public.

Isawa Mutsuye (Glory 7.0): Kage's intended, she is a noblewoman of seventeen. She has not attended a formal school, for her father feared it might inevitably entangle her in politics. Her older sisters Yoko and Reihime attended the Doji courtier school, and her father still owes the Crane favors. She is a devout scholar of Shintao and Rokugani history, and is perhaps a little shallow.

Kaiu Takakana (Glory 7.5): *Karo* of the castle, he is responsible for keeping court secure. He controls access to Kisada, and when the Shadowlands attacks, he controls who gets rice and jade and who does not. When no one else is meeting with Kisada, Takakana is. He is all too aware that courtiers do not panic well. He is unmarried.

KAIU TAKAKANA, CASTLE KARO

Rank 4 Hida Bushi (Honor 3.6, Glory 7.5)

EARTH 5, FIRE 3, AIR 3, WATER 4, VOID 3

Skills: Archery 3, Battle 4, Courtier 3, Defense 5, Engineering 4, Etiquette 2, Jiujutsu (Kobo) 4, Kenjutsu 2, Law 4, Lore: Maho 2, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Siege 4, Sincerity 2, Subojutsu 3, Traps 3, Yarijutsu 5.

Advantages: Large, Way of the Land (Crab), Kaiu Blade.

Disadvantages: Unluck (3 points)

Takakana is a rough, self-assured, foul-mouthed drill sergeant ("I like you, boy! I'd let you court my sister!") who is also an effective, charismatic leader. He's been to over four hundred funerals for the men beneath him, and you can't do that without picking up some wisdom. He uses a naginata ("Course I got a woman's weapon! Men are dumb enough to fight fair!").

Matsu Bushime (Glory 7.1): Glorious commander of a brief Matsu-Daidoji war and a Rank 4 Matsu bushi, Bushime is rather cheerful that the Crane aren't here this year. Her husband Kenichi (a Rank 1 Ikoma bard) displays these emotions for her. Bushime wants to arrange a number of political marriages, including for her bodyguards **Matsu Hitomi**, **Matsu Hiroko**, and **Matsu Chizu**.

Shinjo O-Shito (Glory 7.0): Liaison between the Hiruma Scout School and the Shinjo School. O-Shito is organized, methodical, and knows a great deal about the law. She is a Rank 4 bushi nearing forty, and has a husband and six children (fifteen through three) running about the castle in many different directions at any time.

Yasuki Kurako (Glory 6.3): Daughter of the Yasuki who arranged Kisada's marriage, Kurako usually hosts court at the Razor of the Dawn castle for Unicorn and Lion visitors (where her husband Uchibe is now). She's been brought here to put a pleasant face on the castle. Kurako is easily flustered, and desperate not to mess up in front of Kisada, because she's heard about (shudder) The Penalty for Failure.

Kurako has Frail Mind and a heart to match. If a PC gives Kurako severe stress (like showing her a corpse), she rolls her Earth (2) at TN 10. If she fails, she clutches her left arm, gasps, and collapses. If this happens in public, the offending PC loses 3 Honor and Glory points. Anyone reviving her with Advanced Medicine (TN 25) may gain 2.

THE COMMON HERD (Less than Glory 5)

Bayushi Masayari (Glory 4.5): Kage's *nakodo*. For security reasons, Takakana stuck this Rank 2 courtier with a few hard-drinking Yasuki and told them to let him out in the spring. Masayari's wife, Bayushi Shihito, is busy with her Ide lover, of whom he is aware, so he's fine getting drunk and flirting on the sly. There are perhaps fifteen Scorpion guards at the castle, all of whom have been assigned beefy Crab shadows.

Hiruma Ryoichi (Glory 1): Ryoichi is a Rank 3 scout, but his Glory suffered when he

broke his family katana and started using peasant weapons. He works as a messenger between Hiruma Kage and his father.

Ide Toshimitsu (Glory 4.5): A diplomat, Toshimitsu is past his heyday and content to have a little fun rather than gouge the Crab in leather deals the way he once did. His wife Bassaiko, though a little aged, still catches the ear with her cultivated Ide accent.

Ide Keiyomi (Glory 3.5): Toshimitsu's daughter is sixteen and thinks she is far wilder than she actually is. While versed in political manipulation, she has never experienced it.

Kuni Taira (Glory 3.4): A Tainted, creepy shugenja who likes to discuss troll anatomy and selective uses of obsidian with his friend Yogo Shigeru.

Shiba Noboru (Glory 4.0): Mutsuye's bodyguard, a self-effacing bushi who credits his sensei rather than himself for any accomplishments. He guarded Mutsuye's two older sisters until they were married, and seeks a recommendation from her father to find a cushier job in Phoenix lands. He has never been in a duel. See "The Archery Contest" (p. 17) for statistics.

Shosuro Shiko (Glory 2.6): A Rank 2 Bayushi Courtier who was disgraced by Yogo Shigeru and ended up in Kyuden Hida. She loves to be the center of attention, and cares little for her reputation, drinking sake and sharing venomous put-downs with anyone who can stand chatting with her. Sample cuts include:

"I don't care what anyone says, it was very... *brave* of you to go up there and dance like that. I don't think I could have done it."

"Ah, no doubt she is more honorable than I, dancing with the Fortunes rather than, oh, *people*." (If anyone points out the Fortunes are ancestors: "Thank you for edifying me. The Cranes have been spreading this awful rumor about you. They say you see sunlight occasionally. Is it true?")

"My dear, if you need another fan to represent your favors, I hear the lady (insert name here) brought twenty spares."

"I see the Shiba school trained him well. He's even *dressing* using the technique of No Thought."

"How devout of her to wear clothing that belonged to her ancestors. Those sleeves haven't been in fashion since the time of Hantei Genji."

"*Shigeru?* Lecher does not begin to describe it. Doshi-chan, if you thought Iuchiban wanted to possess body after body, you should see the sag in his futon. Those girls with him, they're... geisha. Actually, they're something a lot more basic, but I'm not supposed to know words like that."

Yogo Shigeru (Glory 2.4): A Rank 2 Yogo shugenja with the combined misfortune of his family curse, the Taint, and being personally repellent. However, the fault is not solely Fate's. There's a reason Rokugani noblewomen are not left alone with men, and it's people like Shigeru. He watches women from the corner of the room, waiting until they approach to smile and ask for favors in a grating, deadpan voice. He tests defenses with "accidental"

touching, and sees how far he can go before they scream. Fortunately, he is anemic, easily fought off, and his Sincerity needs work. His thick veil covers the sores of his chin, neck, and shoulder, and he can often be found dissecting trolls with Kuni Taira.

AND THE RETINUES

About Three Thousand Crab Bushi (Glory 0-4), whose typical dress is unwashed kimono under full heavy armor, two swords, and an iron-studded club. The worst of these is **Hida Sachiko**, a foul-mouthed, gleeful Wall Crab so thick that if someone told her there were rice balls on the other side of the Kaiu Kabe, she'd go looking for them. While capable of reason, she has the troublesome combination of Dangerous Beauty, an Awareness of 1, no Etiquette, and a big hammer. By the third day, the Phoenixes will recruit samurai for "Sach watch" just to avoid her.

About Fifty Crabs On Good Behavior (Glory 3-5.5), shaved down, unarmored, and taught to speak. A number of these are Kuni shugenja, and while a few provide friendlier faces than a metal mempo, some ten or more have the Taint.

About Fifty Matsu (Glory 4-5.5), in Bushime's retinue, a glut of samurai-ko and samurai in bright gold, who look totally unafraid of any Crab. Among them are **Matsu Ryuha**, **Matsu Shunji**, **Matsu Sohei**, and **Matsu Suneo**: eligible, single Lions who are courteous, obedient, and praying not to get married to Hida Sachiko.

About Fifty Phoenix (Glory 1-6), primarily the families of the Isawa and Asako, their servants, and Shiba bushi retainers. There are no more shugenja; they had more prestigious courts to attend.

About Fifty Unicorn (Glory 1-5.5): The Shinjo are primarily here to help Kisada forget the border disputes being argued at the Razor of the Dawn. O-Shito knows this is critical to go from a cease-fire to genuine peace; if she can get Hiruma Kage to take charge of overseeing it, half the negotiating is already done.

THE NOBLES

Most "courtiers" here have not gone to a formal school, but were invited by dint of whose spouses or children they are. Sharp player characters might pump them for information rather than their more savvy wives, husbands, or parents.

The young gentry are not "extras." It is imperative Akiko, Keiyomi, Kuhime and Mutsuye be played in a likable manner to appreciate the full feel of the court. These girls have grown up in a far different world than bushi, but it is no less real. And in the crowded castle, the PCs will run into them everywhere, hearing them giggling in high-pitched squeals, spotting them engaging in a pillow fight before they realize they're being watched, or even catching one with a boy in her room when the servants are elsewhere. Everyone in the castle lives on top of one another during Winter Court. Let the PCs notice them, and do what Rokugani do... politely ignore it but never forget.

THE NOBLES

Sweet Little Nobodies (Isawa Akiko, Kitsu Hanako, Ide Keiyomi, most wives)

EARTH 2, FIRE 2, Intelligence 3, WATER 2, Perception 3, AIR 2, VOID 2.

Skills: Courtier 1, Dance 2, Etiquette 1, Lore: Shugenja, Bushido, Gaijin and Myth and Legend 2, respectively, Shintao 1, Sincerity 1, Tea Ceremony 2.

Advantages: Social Position, Gentry.

Disadvantages: Small. Akiko has Bad Reputation: Talkative.

Cultured Gentry (Isawa Mutsuye, Asako Kuhime)

EARTH 2, FIRE 2, Intelligence 4, AIR 2, Awareness 4, WATER 2, VOID 3

Skills: Commerce 2, Courtier 3, Dance 3, Etiquette 3, History 2, Ikebana 2, Lore: Shugenja and Bushido 2, Painting 2, Shintao 3, Sincerity 3, Tea Ceremony 3.

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Social Position, Gentry.

Professional Courtiers (Asako Wataru, Ide Toshimitsu, Yasuki Kurako, Bayushi Masayari, Shosuro Shiko)

EARTH 2, Willpower 4, FIRE 3, AIR 2, Awareness 4, WATER 2, Perception 3, VOID 3

Skills: Commerce 2, Courtier 3, Etiquette 3, Heraldry 2, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu 2, Intimidation 2, Kenjutsu 2, Law 2, Lore: Crab 2, Lore: two other Clans 2, Sincerity 4, most other High Skills at 2.

Techniques: Wataru can call upon eight favors from the court per adventure, influence people by talking to them for five minutes, make a Contested Honor roll four times a day to make someone fail their next action (his Honor is 3), and cannot fail a Simple social roll without Raises.

Toshimitsu and Kurako add 3 points to skill rolls in a social situation and can avoid making *faux pas* with an Awareness + Etiquette roll, TN 20. They can also remember anything said during a meeting, and gather information through conversation.

The Scorpions get a Free Raise in social rolls for every 2 points of Disadvantages the other person has, and can spend Void to find out someone's lowest Trait.

HEADING INTO COURT

As the PCs leave their meeting with Kisada, they go through the main third floor lounge, where many of the guests have congregated. With a Perception test, TN 15, they can hear Isawa Akiko mention how much she will miss Mutsuye when she leaves home to get married. This should be enough to nudge them in her direction, though they can interact with people in any order they choose.

Akiko, Kuhime, Shiko, Hanako, Kurako, Wataru, Kage, Toshimitsu, Masayari and a lot of extras are in the third floor social areas. Noboru, Tatsukoro, Hikaru, Ryoichi, O-Shito,

and Bushime are outside with a crowd of Crabs, Lions and Unicorns. Kisada and Takakana are upstairs; Taira and Shigeru work in the basement, but Shigeru comes up for the dance.

So Where's Mutsuye?

Isawa Mutsuye is currently cloistered in a women's-only shrine on the mountainside, guarded by three Rank 2 Hida samurai-ko (assume straight 3s for all Rings); Akemi, Aiko, and Shakuko. They do not let anyone near the shrine without the word of someone of seriously high Glory, and *no one* is allowed inside. Mutsuye is participating in an orthodox Phoenix ritual, burning joss sticks and praying to her entire family line from oldest to most recent, ending with her pacifist grandmother who wanted her to marry an artist and whose forgiveness she must beg. She requires complete silence for this ritual, and will be furious if interrupted, yelling at the offender: *"I've lost my prayers to Benten and Jizo because of you! If the Fortunes see to it that Kage won't marry me now, it will be YOUR fault!"*

Mutsuye's Friends

On the stairs, checking over each others' obi before they dance, are Isawa Akiko and Asako Kuhime. Akiko is excited, naive, and frequently tongue-tied. She speaks in a breathy, high-pitched voice, and looks everywhere *but* people's eyes. Kuhime is more reserved and self-confident, occasionally kicking Akiko's ankle and taking over the conversation to save face and cover for her friend.

As long as samurai are polite and don't try to get them alone, Akiko is a good contact, easily impressed and willing to talk openly about many subjects. She is *so* excited about Mutsuye's upcoming marriage. A sample talk with her sounds something like this: *"Kage is so romantic. Like, Kakita-pillow-book-romantic. Can you believe he already sent her a kimono in Crab colors? He must have made it specially for her, because it's all silk and gold, and I mean, for him to think of that when he doesn't even have any lands! And when her dad wouldn't let him visit for more than four hours, he pitched a tent outside her window. And he's so sincere. Not like Scorpion sincere, but like, Mutsuye gave him her fan, and then he went off to the Crane court, and he was still carrying it when she saw him in Otosan Uchi the next month, and oh, no, you're frowning. Don't leave. We could talk about... um... swords. Men like swords, right?"*

If asked where Mutsuye is now, Akiko says she's gone to ask her ancestors' blessings on the upcoming marriage. *"She's off praying. She's really devout. Her father started her reading the Tao when she was four. I don't think she's done yet."*

Either of them will also mention Mutsuye's (hunky) bodyguard Shiba Noboru. He's currently participating in an archery contest on the northern grounds, and as Akiko puts it, *"I bet he's gonna win. He's a real good bushi, and he's like, all hers. Can you imagine having your own bushi? I guess you could. Do bushi always scowl like you?"* Kuhime excuses them. They'll be on stage soon.

If the PCs haven't asked by now, Kuhime tells them that many of the young women will be dancing in a few minutes and invites them to watch. Akiko tells her not to be so modest – Kuhime's in the dance herself. Most likely, the PCs will split up, with some staying at the dance and others going to find Noboru outside.

THE DANCE

Court dancing is a solo performance usually done by women with ribbons, fans, and wailing singing. It is one of the more eagerly watched events at most courts. Yasuki Kurako hosts and coordinates it. Any PCs wishing to enter must speak to her, select a dance, (a TN), make Raises for their performance, and start competing with Shosuro Shiko, Asako Kuhime, and Ide Keiyomi. Successful participants gain 1 Honor and 1 Glory.

TIES THAT BIND

Two of the pre-generated characters, Kitsu Kikuzo and Ide Masafumi, have wives at court: Kitsu Hanako and Ide Michiko.

Ide Michiko

Michiko keeps an eye on Masafumi whenever she can. If he ever ends up in another woman's room or similar locale and she hears about it, there will be hell to pay. If he disappears into the Shadowlands for two days, she might not believe him unless he comes back wearing sludge and wounds. She is four months pregnant, and stoically enduring nausea.

Kitsu Hanako

Hanako wants to get her new husband's attention, as he seems oddly distant. At the dance, she announces she will be performing *The Ball of the Matsu Court* from Ikoma Jijo's play "Virtue," in honor of her husband, Kitsu Kikuzo (TN 15, +1 raise). You may have noticed some of the other PCs don't know Kikuzo is married. They do now.

Shiko performs the *Song of Sparrow's Flight*, an older number (TN 20, 1 raise). She dances quite well, but few people applaud (they know her reputation).

Kuhime dances the *Five Elements Dance* (TN 20) exquisitely (3 raises), sticking rigidly to tradition, the way it was done some twenty years ago by the Doji before the Phoenix modified the song to make it easier. Shiko walks out of the room, defeated and grouchy. "Excuse me, I have to go crawl under a tatami somewhere." There's polite applause from the more cultured audience members. Kuhime claps her hands and bows over and over at the attention before skipping off like the cute, demure little teenager she is.

Unfortunately, Kuhime has little time to bask in her glory, because Ide Keiyomi arrives late, and Yasuki Kurako announces she will show off a quaint dance from the Burning Sands entitled *The Tunnel of Quiescent Flame*, in which she imitates a spectacular sight the Unicorn once witnessed, a spark becoming a forest fire, sucked into a tornado. The Ide start drumming.

Her building storm starts in the extremities and moves throughout the body until it makes her very core tremble. Her arms are *half-bare*. As she dances, the blood pressure of every man in the room rises. The drunk Crabs start cheering, "I like quaint! Quaint! More quaint! Quaint! Quaint! Quaint! Quaint! Quaint!"

Keiyomi blushes furiously, and a tipsy Kage, egged on by his friends, stands. The

room goes silent as he smiles and tries a haiku in homage:

*"White arms and red cheeks
between them the hottest of fires
in any Empire."*

Everyone applauds. One of his friends roughly yanks him back down. Everyone laughs, including him. Keiyomi blushes furiously; she's garnered quite a compliment.

After the dance, Keiyomi runs to the nearest PC bushi who looks more appealing than a drunken, amorous Crab or Yogo, and asks if she can pretend they're together as they leave the room. If they seem inclined to talk to someone else, have her mention *"I'm so glad Mutsuye wasn't here. She'd have put me to shame."* If asked, she mentions she and Mutsuye were friends when they were little. *"Sure! I used to pull her hair all the time down at Shiro Shinjo! Oh, Fortunes, I hope she's forgotten about all that. I wouldn't want her to get Kage to toss me out a window or something. Sure, we can talk. Maybe after I change?"*

She is open for romance, and any characters who flirt (politely) or suggest introducing her to eligible friends get a wide smile. *"Sure, let me slip into uh... something with sleeves, and you can come up to my room."* A pause. *"Uh... not come-up-to-my-room, 'come up to my room.' I mean... walk."* If possible, arrange for at least one PC to meet her in her room in a half hour or so.

THE ARCHERY CONTEST

Shiba Noboru is on line behind Matsu Hitomi, Shinjo O-Shito, Bayushi Tatsukoro and several Crabs, waiting for his turn in the archery contest. If PCs approach him, the burly Hida Ocho and Hida Keneru quickly stop them with crossed yari. *"Contestants only."*

The quickest way to chat with Mutsuye's faithful bodyguard is to enter the contest. There's five events, the first three intended for courtiers, shugenja and pre-gempukku children, and the last two the only ones informally considered suitable for bushi. They are: stationary target (Perception + Archery); stationary target judged on artistic appeal (Air + Archery); speed shooting (Reflexes + Archery); *inuri mono* (shooting target-plastered dogs from horseback: use no more skill than you have Horsemanship, base TN 20); and "duel" shooting, which is three mounted passes with bushi firing humming-bulb arrows, trying for a clean hit to the opponent's armored torso. (In this case, a successful hit does no damage, and a near miss hurts the target, which is frowned upon.)

The winner receives 3 Glory points, the second-place 2, and anyone who did well 1. Remember, real samurai never refuse challenges of skill.

If anyone asks why they're shooting dogs, a Hida grunts, and says "keeping up appearances." Usually, when the other Clans aren't here, the Crabs shoot captured goblins. But the screams and defecations were unpopular last year. So today, it's dogs.

SHIBA NOBORU

Rank 3 Shiba Bushi (Honor 3.3, Glory 4)

EARTH 2, FIRE 4, AIR 2, Reflexes 3, WATER 3, VOID 4

Skills: Archery 3, Courtier 1, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 3, Jiu-jutsu 1, Kenjutsu 3, Meditation 2, Shintao 3, Sincerity 2, Tea Ceremony 3, Yarijutsu 3. **Advantages:** Quick

In the stands, Hiruma Ryoichi is talking to Hiruma Yoshi (Kage's father). Isawa Hikaru is watching Noboru's performance, surrounded by retainers.

Talking to Noboru is easy, especially for Phoenix and Crane characters. He is polite and reserved, humbly claiming any victory in the contest is due not to the arrows he fired today, but the several thousand he fired before them. At the first mention of Mutsuye, he tries to end the conversation. If the characters say anything that sounds like a challenge to her honor, he calls them on it.

This should seem suspicious to your PCs; if she didn't do anything wrong, why is he so defensive? A Perception test, TN 20, lets them see him glare at Bayushi Tatsukoro. If the characters smooth things over, Noboru apologizes, and mutters something about not wanting to hear any more insinuations against the lady Isawa. If they set him at ease by disparaging the Scorpion (not blatantly; he doesn't want to attract attention), he may even be willing to talk a bit about Mutsuye. *"I feel like my other half is gone when I'm not with her."*

It is very difficult to get anything useful from Tatsukoro. He is an experienced Scorpion, smooth enough to slip neatly through any cracks in the PCs' questions, or simply cover himself with lies if he has to. On the other hand, there was the much chattier Shosuro Shiko, back on the third floor...

SHIGERU'S GAME

Shiko is easy to get talking. Once she has a few cups of sake in her and won't be blamed for what she says, she gleefully latches on to anyone willing to listen. Especially if they join her in insulting members of the court in better standing than she. Kuhime and Keiyomi, the most talked-about dance contestants, are a good place to start.

If the PCs bring up Mutsuye, Shiko makes a face, takes another gulp of sake, and asks why they're interested in that little tart. This is one of the first negative things they've heard, so it should make paranoid player ears perk up. Shiko continues. *"Now, I'm not one to repeat rumors, but have you heard the way Shigeru-san talks about her? It's 'Mutsuye this. Mutsuye that. Where's Mutsuye now?' Obviously, there's something going on between them, but I'm sure I won't be the one to tell you what it is..."* An old flame of Shigeru's, Shiko is jealous of the attention he's paying Mutsuye (though she denies it vehemently) and assumes it is romantic. In actuality, Shigeru's interest is much more pragmatic: he's gathering information for the Scorpion.

Now that they have a name, it's simple to ask around and find a creepy, masked Kuni who says that Shigeru (no "-san") is in the basement with Kuni Taira. He warns the characters *"You might not like what you'll find down there."*

Shigeru and Taira are engaged in the perfectly productive, legitimate scientific project of vivisecting and torturing a captured troll, whose howls echo off the walls. The room has occasional squishy parts underfoot. (Remember, it's indoors. Shoes off.)

Shigeru likes making samurai-ko uncomfortable. If he figures out that they want to know about Mutsuye, he smiles and says *"If there are gifts you wish from me, I could not do so without a promise of... reciprocity."* He wishes to speak alone with one of the samurai-ko (or samurai... he's not picky), and for each question he answers, in order, he asks for their fan, their obi, an outer kimono to remember them by (the one they're wearing now will do), a nice shiatsu, and a bottle of their saliva.

This is meant to be uncomfortable. Of course, if the *player* gets uncomfortable, GMs should, with utmost sensitivity, *stop*.

Shigeru has asked Noboru, Hikaru, Akiko and Kuhime about Mutsuye, but he got nowhere, partially because he's not very good, and partly because Mutsuye is neck and neck with the driven snow. However, he's willing to tell the player characters all sorts of dirty secrets about Mutsuye and her old suitor Isawa Heizaemon, and the affair where they were supposedly caught by Isawa Tadaka himself and he decided to foist the sullied girl off on the Crab as repayment for their not helping him hunt Oni no Akuma. An Awareness roll, TN 25, allows them to see he's making it all up.

If the samurai threaten him with violence, he'll fold, but mutter darkly on his way out "*I have prettier women to see today anyway.*"

I KNOW THAT SOUND...

By this time, the meeting with Keiyomi is rolling around and one or more characters should be heading toward her rooms. There is no one else present in the Unicorn guest quarters, and no one answers their knock. But the door is unlocked, and with a Perception test, TN 20, they hear a sound every magistrate dreads: buzzing flies.

In winter.

Keiyomi's Room

In the second room of the suite, a maid is lying on the floor, throat slit. Just behind her are a pair of legs. There is some brown, thoroughly Tainted balloon-like flesh a few feet away. A little farther off are a pair of shoulders, and a long streak of familiar-looking black hair. The face, including eyelids, has been cut off with a sharp implement. The brown eyes remain, untouched by the blade. The body is female, dressed in a Unicorn kimono.

Much of the blood has black, stool-like streaks in it, indicating the body has Taint, but the blood furthest back is clearly red. She did not have the taint *then*.

The spirits in the room have been commanded into silence. The window is shut and the frost on the sill is undisturbed.

Touching the body requires an Earth roll, TN 10. Failure inflicts 1 point of Taint.

A Perception + Investigation roll, TN 15, provides the following information.

Keiyomi's sleeveless gaijin kimono was hung out to dry in the other room. Her other maid's body floats in the tub, with three stab wounds and a slit throat. That maid's kimono collar is ripped from a fast jerk; she was dragged down, crawled upon, and stabbed. The final blow pierced beneath her chin; the weapon was probably a knife.

Keiyomi herself was killed by some kind of explosion in the torso that blew outward. The Taint is heaviest at the center.

With 1 Raise -- The face was removed by a sharp implement with one nick in it, and the girl's *kaiken* (knife) is missing. Her hair is wet and brushed -- she just bathed.

2 Raises -- They know for certain it is Keiyomi. Her neck and hands are familiar.

An Intelligence + Battle test, TN 20, informs them that whoever did this was fast, prepared, and horribly silent. The other guest rooms are only a few wooden walls away.

An Intelligence + Medicine roll, TN 15, shows that Keiyomi's lungs were burst from the inside out. This can only be done through magic. An Intelligence + *Maho-Tsukai* Lore

test, TN 15, reveals that it was a *maho* spell called No Pure Breaths.

With 1 Raise -- The spell was elemental *maho*, which Taints its target as well as the caster, rotting the body. Whoever did this was extremely proficient with both *maho* and Air spells, and very sadistic: usually a small rupture is sufficient to kill.

With 2 Raises -- The spell was designed by Isawa *maho-tsukai* of the Burning Stone monastery some two hundred years ago, and the high Mastery level indicates whoever did it probably had a scroll. The attacker could not have hit Keiyomi with the spell simultaneously with cutting her face; anyone that close would have been in the blast radius. Whether spell or mutilation came first is unclear.

Hopefully, the PCs know better than to run around screaming "maho." If they do, the court panics, and they'll have to answer to Kisada. People are starting to come up to dress for dinner, so let them sweat a little to keep the matter covered up. If they try to dump it on Takakana, he orders them to investigate.

What Really Happened

Our culprit took two of Shigeru's scrolls, Mists of Illusion and Call Upon the Wind, and forged its own copy of No Pure Breaths in his handwriting. It followed Keiyomi up to her room invisibly, silenced the room, killed and mutilated her, then left by the door, shape-changed into a blood-soaked Mutsuye. It silenced the spirits inside the room, but "forgot" the ones in the hallway.

It then changed to look like Shigeru, got close to Mutsuye's room (leaving no footprints), turned invisible, flew to the sill (disturbing the new-fallen snow there) and planted the spell scrolls and knife inside, in one of Keiyomi's maid's satchels. It visited Mutsuye in the shrine, where it cast a Sinful Dreams spell to make the girl believe she was having religious ecstasies while using the Breath of Taint power on her. Then it returned to court after eating Keiyomi's face. With sake.

Bad breath is not ladylike.

THE HUNT BEGINS

If the PCs never go to Keiyomi's room, Toshimitsu finds his daughter a half hour before the feast and is insane with grief. Takakana takes over and calls in the player characters; either as *maho* experts, as Kisada's team who should be informed on this matter, or as suspects. Keiyomi *was* seen inviting a PC to her room, after all.

The snow is falling. No one is leaving the castle.

A *maho-tsukai* is among them.

Spirits and Evidence

One of the first things shugenja might do is commune with the spirits. They can get nothing from those in Keiyomi's room, but those in the hall describe Mutsuye leaving. However, spiritual evidence is meaningless legally. They'll need more.

Did Anybody See Anyone Outside?

There is a clear view of the Wall from Keiyomi's window, but the Crabs there saw nothing. There are no footprints or spirits outside suggesting such an escape.

Did Anybody See A Murderer in the Hall?

Yes. Hida Sachiko was on the third floor heading for the kitchen. Did she see anything? *"No... wait, yeah, just the girl."* What girl? *"The one with the blood on her hands."* Did she report it? *"Not yet. Nobody was screaming, so I figured it's either a lady thing or she already killed the oni."* She is completely oblivious to accusations of shirking her duty, and does not comprehend the severity of what happened. She can, however, give a fairly good description of Mutsuye.

Who's Got Taint?

In any other setting, this would be a dead give-away -- the first person who sets off a Sense Taint spell is obviously the *maho-tsukai*. But at Kyuden Hida, nearly a fifth of the active troops have Taint, as do Kuni Taira, Yogo Shigeru, and the masked Kuni who directed them downstairs (Dokushojin).

Smart PCs may look for forearm scars, figuring the *maho-tsukai* had to have practiced on himself. Characters with blade scars include Bayushi Tatsukoro and Ide Toshimitsu (who have been in tanto fights) and Shosuro Shiko (who tried to slit her wrists when she was fifteen).

Where's Mutsuye?

Mutsuye has returned to her rooms and is dressing for the banquet (less than an hour away by now). If the heroes ask to come in, Noboru tells them she's dressing and cannot be disturbed, but if they have a decent excuse (one that does not accuse his mistress), he tells her to throw on a kimono and lets them in. Neither of them seem like they are hiding anything, and if the PCs ask to search the room or attempt to interrogate her, Mutsuye looks confused and offended.

She should. She's innocent.

It's not tough (Perception + Investigation, TN 10) to find the scroll satchel pushed under a pile of clothes on the corner of the futon. Mists of Illusion, No Pure Breaths, and Call Upon the Winds are wrapped around Keiyomi's bloody knife and a rag. Mutsuye and Noboru are appalled to find those, and may ask if the characters know who put them here, but this does give them grounds to ask her to touch jade. They both submit... and Mutsuye drops the jade in surprise. Her hand stings. Terrified, she rushes to the table to pick up the jade comb she used that morning. She drops that, too. An Awareness + Sincerity test, TN 20, tells the characters that she's completely genuine.

She now has a Taint rating of 1.6. Effectively, this ends her prospects. Tainted people cannot marry.

If the samurai ask what she did that day, she says she spent it praying, but if pressed, will haltingly and ashamedly mention a..."vision" she had. *"My heart started beating faster, and a shudder passed through me. My skin was crawling, and I... I writhed on the floor. It was like my blood was on fire. My ancestors were with me. The Phoenix was with me."* She is reluctant to speak, which may make it look like she is lying, but it is only her shame at the Sinful Dream. The sexual material involved her ancestors; Mutsuye would rather *die* than admit that.

Noboru believes the PCs are trying to frame her and demands a duel for her honor unless the PCs immediately head him off by giving him someone else to blame.

Is it Possible Mutsuye Did It?

Unless the PCs were with her at the exact time of the murder, yes. The Hida guards at the shrine saw no one enter, but it is possible she slipped out, headed down the mountainside, and got back in. There are no footprints in the snow. Mutsuye did leave to return to her rooms at sunset, and that was an hour ago.

But what's her motive? Mutsuye never particularly liked Keiyomi ("*A big, rude, horse of a girl who always taunted me for being... proper.*") and her husband-to-be just called Keiyomi the most beautiful thing in the Empire. But she's not a shugenja as far as anyone knows.

If they think to ask the spirits in Mutsuye's room who put the scrolls there, the Air spirits describe Yogo Shigeru climbing in the window. (He would have been be out of Air spells and could not silence them at that point.) For a touch of verisimilitude, the real killer even made the spirits dislike the slimy little shugenja, and they will complain about his attempts to silence them. The scrolls know nothing; they were stored in the dark. The one mistake the *real* killer made is that the spirit of the knife remembers being held by a small woman's hand and would not be fooled by Mists of Illusion.

Might That Dancing Girl Have Been Jealous?

Kuhime, if told the news about Mutsuye or Keiyomi, is horrified. Mutsuye never deserved anything so cruel. As for the dance contest, Kuhime would be fine with Keiyomi melting the heart of Kisada himself if it meant she wasn't harmed. The opinion of Crabs is not something she worries about.

What of the Scorpion?

Anyone comparing Shigeru's calligraphy can confirm the scrolls are his. He is known for his facility with Mists of Illusion, and it is easy to theorize that Sach's sighting of Mutsuye was actually him in disguise. And wasn't he *trying* to spread nasty rumors to frame her?

Finding out where Shigeru was at the time of the murder is a short trail. Kuni Taira says he left just after the PCs, and no one else of samurai caste has seen him for a half hour or more. Asako Kuhime, in the room next to Mutsuye, saw Shigeru not long ago. Kuhime is timid near angry samurai, and fears the Scorpion, but will courageously testify if asked. Ide Toshimitsu can verify that Shigeru had made advances on his daughter, and if told about the scrolls, will consider that evidence enough.

Shigeru claims that two eta women can confirm he was in his room, but their reputations are *far* from trustworthy and their word is worthless. No one else vouches for him. Shosuro Shiko, if asked, helpfully adds that he's looked through captured *maho* scrolls at the Yogo school before. This is not true, but Kisada's not interested in a lot of back-and-forth, and Shigeru's Sincerity is low.

POLITENESS COUNTS

As the player characters look for suspects, they may try to let a spell do the work, and put up Evil Wards, waiting for the culprit to burst into flame. Or slather jade powder on people and see who recoils.

Remind them this only works against a target with the Shadowlands *Trait*: a minimum Taint of 1.0. They also create false alarms: Taira, Shigeru, Dokushojin, and many Crabs could get their skin burned off and demand to know what's going on. If it happens in public, they'll demand a duel or reparations. Tossing jade powder on someone is basically saying "You're touched by the Dark One, and I'm so sure I'm not even going to ask." And in Rokugan, silence implies consent. If the offended party doesn't respond, he's implying it's true, so he *has* to challenge the PCs. Sure, not everyone's their match in duels... but Bayushi Tatsukoro would *love* to gain favors and Kisada's attention by championing his loyal samurai.

If they try to test the Asako, see page 48.

THE PROSECUTION

Their time is up. If they don't remember, Hiruma Ryoichi tells them Kisada wants their report. No matter how far they got in the investigations, up they go now. They are disarmed, led in, seated, and Kisada booms, "*Report.*"

That's their cue. Kisada at various points demands people be brought in to confirm or deny statements. If they accuse Mutsuye of committing the murder, Kisada and Hikaru grant Noboru the right to duel a PC for her. Winning the duel proves her guilty, and she is executed. Hikaru dares not earn Kisada's enmity by objecting, but he leaves court shortly thereafter. Losing means anyone who verbally backed the dueler's accusations commits seppuku, and any who kept quiet lose 5 Glory and Honor and never work for Kisada again.

If they give forward Shigeru (or any other well-argued scapegoat), Kisada executes him (or has him tortured for the names and deeds of his accomplices, if the PCs suggest a conspiracy). The one thing Kisada does not allow is confusion. If the PCs don't give him a culprit, he'll go over to Shigeru, club him like a steer at the slaughterhouse, and declare the matter settled. *No one* is allowed to think there are free *maho-tsukai* in his court.

If the characters have already told people about the *maho*, Takakana announces that, "*The maho-tsukai is dead. This court is safe. If we find, by some terrible chance, there is another witch here, we will know whose incompetence let it live, and who will pay the price for any deaths it causes.*" He glares at the PCs.

Hiruma Kage, once he is told Mutsuye is Tainted, wants *somebody* to swing for this. For an extra-torturous session, have Kisada ask the PCs to tell him themselves.

Noboru commits seppuku unless he can die honorably in a duel, and the three samurai-ko who guarded the shrine are humiliatingly tested for Taint and made ronin.

If the characters have been professional and efficient, Kisada compliments them. "*This news is grave, but it would have been graver were you not here. Because of you, Kage will not be tricked and the other clans will have no place to sink in their claws. He might be pained, but Crabs have borne pain before and they will bear it again. There are others he*

can choose that are less... soiled."

With a nod, they are escorted out.

If anyone continues their own inquiries, they find that Shigeru was eventually beheaded, after maintaining his innocence to the end and swearing vengeance on the souls of his accusers.

GLORY, HONOR AND EXPERIENCE

If all goes well, Kisada recognizes any Glory gains: 1 point for serving him, 1 for rooting out Shigeru, 4 for winning a duel with Noboru, and others at the GM's discretion.

They get 5 experience points. They'll need them.

PART II: TEARS AND SMOKE

"Is it worse for a man to be ignorant, or to live with the knowledge that he has failed?"

--Hiruma Kage

A DESOLATE DAWN

Four days later is Ide Keiyomi's funeral and burning. While the Unicorn mourn openly over the incense and offerings, Kaiu Takakana's speech is surprisingly warm. Every day, samurai die in the Shadowlands and do not even receive a proper funeral. But this does not make her death any more right, and thanking the Fortunes that more did not perish with her only turns death into a cold accounting. Every samurai who lives at Kyuden Hida has lost loved ones and attended their funerals, often for children far younger than she. *"All we can do is promise her life will not be in vain, and bring justice wherever it is not."*

Depending on the PCs' previous actions, the majority of the court may or may not know the cause of death. If they have not raised an alarm about *maho*, the Crab pass the death off as a passionate murder by Shigeru or say she was exploring, unauthorized, in the Kaiu Wall and triggered a gruesome trap.

Hikaru's family leaves the court almost immediately, heading into the winter snows for no announced reason. Everyone at court assumes there were insults traded with Kisada. If a PC killed Noboru in a duel, Mutsuye's "scandalous affair with her bodyguard" will be whispered as the reason the wedding was called off.

The truth is uglier, and PCs close to Takakana or the remaining Phoenix may find it out. If Mutsuye wasn't already executed, she cuts her own throat to spare her family the shame of having a Tainted daughter with only the paper-thin excuse of "not knowing where she got it." She will be burned and her ashes buried in Phoenix lands.

Hiruma Kage does not attend the funerals.

Give the players time to interact with people and follow up on threats or promises made in Part One. The reactions they get vary depending on their previous behavior. Those who openly denounced Mutsuye or insulted Noboru get cold stares from the Phoenix. Those who arrested Shigeru are treated with courtesy by the Scorpion, who smile and reassure them Shigeru "was never a team player." That should make them hire a poison taster for the next year.

At an appropriate moment, have PCs make Awareness tests, TN 20, to hear stifled sobs from behind a shoji. If they investigate, they find a vulnerable, weeping Asako Kuhime. She tries to compose herself, but her voice is choked. The following comes out as the PCs ask what's wrong.

"I'm... I'm not stupid, you know. I know her family doesn't just leave like that. I heard rumors. About crimes and... the Taint.

"I thought I knew her.

"I wish...I could have stopped it. Stopped her. Something. So I... I thought about Kage-sama, because he was so quiet at dinner. Like nothing was wrong, but now I know how he must have been... inside. I wanted to... (blush) ...I'm certain he can take care of himself, but there are some times, you know, when it's just important to have someone else with you.

"I would not speak ill of him, but I heard they had to drag him out of Hiruma Castle. He wanted to stay and die. So I wanted to tell him... I know how he feels... if he's lost her now.

"But I looked for him and he wasn't in his room. His servants don't know where he went. I'm... I'm very worried for him."

If they tell her to trust his guards to take care of him, she looks down, and says, *"Oh... well... I'm sure they're fine bushi,"* implying they aren't going to serve as friends or counselors, which she thinks he needs.

It may occur to courtiers (Intelligence + Courtier, TN 10) that Kage, who has a history of depressive fits, has no brothers and sisters. Yoshi, his father, is beyond marrying age. If he runs away, or dies, there will be no more Hiruma noble family. Kuhime knows this, too.

"Yes, Kisada-sama wanted to talk to Father this morning about Kage. Father is... I know he's an Emerald Magistrate, and I know he approves... things... carrying out the will of our lord the Son of Heaven."

She is obviously uncomfortable at the idea of Kage being married with no time to mourn, especially if her father has the final decision. An Awareness + Courtier roll, TN 15, reveals she is one of two eligible girls currently in the castle. Her father and Kisada could be marrying *her* to Kage right now and neither of them would know until after the fact.

If cynical players want to sniff for lies, they'll find that she is exactly what she seems to be -- a young girl faced with many big decisions, torn between sorrow for two friends, worry over a noble man, muted excitement that she may marry a family daimyo, and shame for even thinking about that at a time like this. Roll 10k10 behind a screen. See if the players beat that number, just to keep them guessing. If they somehow did it, tell them Kuhime was sobbing a little loud to deliberately get someone's attention.

"I just want to make sure Kage-sama is all right. Would you please try to find him... for me?"

The opportunity to do a favor for the probable future wife of the Hiruma daimyo comes along once in a lifetime. The correct answer is yes. If you need to, bribe the players with favors in return.

LOOKING FOR KAGE

Physically searching for Kage doesn't get them much further than it got Kuhime -- an

empty room, and some servants who hit the floor bowing and say Hiruma-sama asked not to be disturbed yesterday, and they have not been back since.

If the characters don't figure it out on their own, they can roll Intelligence + Etiquette, TN 10, to know that if word gets out that the Hiruma daimyo is missing, it will be deeply embarrassing for Kisada and Kage. Telling Crabs might make them doubt their leaders, and no Crab can afford doubt. Worse, Kisada might publicly punish Kage if he finds out, and starting a civil war among Crab families is not something anyone but an Otomo wants on their resumé.

Asking around or listening in on the second-floor conversation brings them quickly to Shinjo O-Shito, who complains, with Unicorn bluntness, that Kage broke his appointment with her. Though she understands that he may be upset, she feels that coddling weak emotions just feeds them. Yasuki Kurako attempts unsuccessfully to soothe her. During this conversation, the PCs may make a Perception test, TN 15, to notice Shiba Masatora glance up at the name Kage.

If they question him, his attitude varies depending on their treatment of his friend Noboru. As long as they were courteous and clearly acting out of duty, not spite, he is willing to reveal that he saw Kage go into the basement donjon that morning, and he hasn't come up since.

The stairs down take them to a large, mostly empty room, used for storage, or possibly as an indoor training hall in inclement weather. It takes a Perception + Investigation roll, TN 25, to find the secret exit concealed among a stack of hollow sake barrels. Raises let them know it has been opened recently. If they need an extra clue, Sachiko or another Crab bushi could be returning from a trip to the Wall, where they saw Kage heading.

Anyone who knows Kage's history can probably guess where he's going to sulk. Again, common sense should let them know not to tell *anyone* that the heirless, suicidal, fighting-with-Kisada Hiruma daimyo just stormed off into the Shadowlands. If they insist on saying something, the best person to find is Hiruma Ryoichi. He knows Kage well, and instantly confirms their suspicions that losing his beloved might send him over the edge. He prevails upon the PCs, especially Crabs, to go after him and bring him to his senses.

It is possible that courtier and shugenja characters might choose to stay behind for this portion of the adventure, reasoning that their skills are not well-suited to the Shadowlands. This is a reasonable argument... for a peasant.

Samurai should understand the fate of the Hiruma noble line is at stake, and even if they die to save it, that is little next to a thousand years of ancestors. Their friends will be going there alone, and the presence of one or two more people, even just to drag out wounded bodies, can make the difference between life and death. If they don't go, Shinjo O-Shito eventually scours the Shadowlands for him and is showered in Glory a week later.

GETTING PAST THE WALL

Though it's not technically forbidden for the characters to travel into the Shadowlands, the guards will ask questions, especially of any Scorpions or Cranes. Telling the truth is not the best solution; the guards would be obliged to report it to Kisada, and Kage would be shamed when he returned.

Bribery gets them nowhere. Lying isn't tough, as long as the story is plausible (e.g. a

Crab saying he has challenged his friends to survive a day in the Shadowlands). Talking a trustworthy NPC like Ryoichi into getting them permission to leave also works. Pulling rank on the guards is possible for Crabs or someone who has been decorated by the Clan in the past.

If they go back into the castle and grab weapons, armor and provisions for a several-day journey, courtiers might notice and ask questions, or spread rumors that they were insulted along with Mutsuye's parents.

ON THE TRAIL

The characters exit the Wall through nearly a mile of underground, lightless tunnels which twist back on themselves and are filled with trip wires they must tiptoe around, pits with grinding rollers, a swinging spiked bar that knocks invaders back, and a thousand-pound iron disk that rolls into place as a door. Unless they are sneaking out, Ryoichi or a guard gives them a lantern and a map they say to burn once they reach the other side. Be sure to describe the traps. It's dangerous down here.

If they are taking horses, they must leave through one of the big tunnels, which is disarmed by an engineer. The final steps are underneath a five-ton stone cylinder held up by old, weakened chains, to be rolled down after them, sealing them out. Ask the PCs who's going first. Every time they walk under it, roll dice. If they seem cocky, the block falls and kills a horse, or pins it there, screaming.

Trying to get horses into the Shadowlands is a Willpower + Horsemanship test, TN 15, each hour they are there, jumping to TN 25 if they actually encounter any Shadowlands creatures. If they ever dismount, the horses bolt back to the wall unless tied to something solid.

They emerge from the tunnels into a world of fog which smells like burning plastic and settles like spray paint over bare skin, itching and burning. Their eyes tear, and it is difficult to see in the gloom. Behind them, the Wall blots out the horizon, with a moat of garbage and semi-liquid corpses left from the last war.

With a Perception + Hunting test, TN 20, the characters find a beheaded goblin... then its skull... then another pair, a few yards away. There are several footprints in the area, and they can guess that these are Kage's leavings. Oddly, the trail leads not west, to Hiruma Castle, but south.

Kage's got at least half a day's head start, and he knows the terrain well, so there will be a significant time before they catch up which can be filled with bushido discussions, updates on what happened at court, or other personal conversations. The PCs are alone for the first time in days, with no one but each other to hear them cry, argue, or scream. Sumiko and Kikuzo, the pre-generated characters, will no doubt have some choice words to say.

The following optional encounters can liven up the trail.

The Chasm

Two hours into the trip, their way is blocked by a twenty-eight-foot wide chasm. The walls are sheer, and the bottom swiftly flowing tar, so scaling the sides is nearly impossible. A rope-and-slat bridge hangs on the far side. Inspection of the samurai's side reveals two bridge stakes with rope-cutter arrows lodged in them.

Trying to shoot a roped arrow into the bridge and drag it up takes an Archery test, TN 30. Attaching the bridge takes an Intelligence + Engineering test, TN 25. Making it hold a horse is TN 35, and leading horses across requires Awareness + Horsemanship, TN 20.

It is also possible to use Wings of Fire or Call Upon the Winds to get one PC over, carrying the ends of the bridge, but remember the +10 TN penalty for casting spells in the Shadowlands. Bright lights in the sky may also attract... attention.

The Upside-Down Forest

These are the Lava Trees described on page 42 of *Bearer of Jade*. They appear to be a vast forest which grows upside down, with leaves on the ground and twisted roots reaching into the sky. The leaves are actually sensors; anyone who touches them triggers the root-like tentacles. The tree makes a Water test, TN of 5 x the approaching character's Stealth skill (automatic if they have no Stealth), attacking anything it finds.

If its attack is successful, the target is entangled in a root, requiring a Contested Strength roll to slip free, or he takes 1k1 damage every round as the tree strangles and digests him. If cut, the trees leak lava-like sap; it takes an Agility + Weapon Skill test, TN 15, to avoid being splattered for 2k2 damage. The trees ignore fire attacks.

It takes an Agility + Athletics test, TN 30 to get across by walking, climbing, or swinging from the roots.

LAVA TREES

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 5

FIRE: 1

Agility: 3

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.

Poppy Fields

Apparently a caravan from Ryoko Owari took a serious wrong turn a few years back, because this field is covered with opium poppies. They have grown to be 8 feet tall in the Tainted soil, with gray teeth along the petals (which can cut an incautious horse or rider). Their scent makes humans sleepy (Willpower test, TN 20, every five minutes to remain awake. Slapping or pinching each other grants a Free Raise.) Undirected horses turn back to the Wall.

If anyone falls asleep, the plants start growing slowly toward the heat sources, eventually consuming the fallen bodies over a period of days.

Rules for carrying unconscious teammates are in *Bearer of Jade*, page 138.

NIGHTFALL

As the sun sets, the gray sky darkens to starless black. Torches don't burn, and light spells draw attention, so bedding down looks like the only option. The ground here is swampy and acidic, filled with leeches that can eat through Unicorn boots, and water that dissolves the hems of their kimonos (What do they do? Strip? Wash themselves in their drinking water?)

Uphill, there is a relatively flat field with room enough for a camp, and a hilly cliff

area with what look like caves. Crab samurai know that it's *never* a good idea to go inside a cave in the Shadowlands. Frequently, no one comes back out. On the other hand, camping in the open where the wind will carry their scent isn't comforting either.

If they take no precautions, they awaken when teeth hit their flesh.

Otherwise, an hour past midnight, any awake characters roll Perception + Hunting, TN 20, to hear the snuffling of some large animal just past the camp, circling and waiting. If anyone has gone off alone to talk, they are attacked first, in classic horror movie tradition.

There are six onikage, demon horses with purple-green flesh in strips on skeletal bodies, with claws, crocodilian snouts and tentacular manes and tails. Their eye sockets flare green light when angry. Once they scent humans, they steal towards the camp, attacking prone people or isolated horses and dragging them off. If the PCs have laid down an Evil Ward, the air fills with green light and the scent of burning flesh.

If our heroes abandoned their horses earlier, there are new onikage with this pack... still wearing their saddles. They fight like wild dogs, ganging up on the weakest, but retreat if the leader is seriously hurt.

If the characters chase them (Agility + Hunting, TN 15) and leave the camp alone, six goblins sneak in, eat their food, and defecate on the rest. They follow the onikage and eat their leavings regularly.

CRIES FROM AFAR

Their sleep is disrupted before dawn by howling onikage. It sounds like they have caught something. A Perception test, TN 25, can recognize the sound of claws on armor. Then everyone hears a human scream. What do the samurai do?

If they interfere, the onikage are fairly simple to chase away, especially if the characters wounded them last night. Somewhere in the middle, they see a human man, curled up in an armored ball, being batted around like a ball of yarn.

Their prey is Hiruma Hojiro, and on an Intelligence + Courtier roll, TN 15, the samurai recognize him as one of Kage's personal guard. Both his legs are broken and his pelvis shattered. It is a miracle he is still conscious. With quiet, breathless dignity, he thanks the characters for rescuing him, asking who they are and what brings them into the Shadowlands.

If they say they seek Kage, he relaxes a little. *"Thank the Fortunes. Have you been sent by Lord Hida-sama?"* If they say they are here on their own accord, he looks less confident, but continues anyway. *"My lord Kage-sama, he is... terrible in his grief. The strength of his fury is admirable, but none would expect even the greatest samurai to defeat the Dark Brother himself to avenge his love. I fear that is just what Kage-sama intends to do. They left me for dead in the bog over there, and Kage-sama barely slowed his steps. I do not believe he will return until he has faced down the Forgotten One at the Festering Pit*

ONIKAGE (6)

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 4 **FIRE:** 2 **WATER:** 4 **Strength:** 6 **AIR:** 3

Attacking: 5k2

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

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 5

Wounds: 16: -1; 24: -2; 36:-3; 48: Down; 64: Dead

itself." He hesitates. *"I do not believe he would be saddened were this journey to instead take him to the realm of the ancestors."*

An Intelligence + Medicine roll, TN 15, can quickly see that Hojiro will never walk again. The Path to Inner Peace can soothe his pain and keep him alive, but it does not heal broken bones. He might survive... if brought back to the castle right now.

What do they do? Do they bring him back (and risk losing Kage), split their forces to guard him while the rest go on, or try to carry him further into the Shadowlands with them? Or do they take his head, give his daisho to his family, and grant the only "inner peace" they can?

TOSHI NO KIJO

Hiruma Kage's trail stops in Toshi no Kijo, the ancient ruin of the troll civilization Osano-Wo destroyed a thousand years ago (see page 47, *Bearer of Jade*, for more information. It is a Shadowlands Lore test, TN 30, to recognize the place). There are half-crumbled ruins of old marble buildings, painted frescos of trolls engaging in decadent behavior, and a scattering of old pottery.

Anything could be in those shadows.

There are two badly wounded Hida guards with bows in front of the central (Roman-style) coliseum, from inside of which can be heard the sound of cursing and smashing pottery. The third guard was lost along the trail.

It takes some roleplaying to convince the guards -- Hiruma Naoto and Hiruma Yutaka -- to even let the characters close to the frenzied Kage. Telling them they are under orders from Kisada will work (a Contested Awareness + Sincerity roll). Otherwise, they must show that they are both compassionate and authoritative, sympathetic without being sycophants, and likely to convince him to return rather than drive him further over the edge. Once convinced, Naoto accompanies them inside with a slight, grateful bow. The guards care deeply about their lord, but dare not contradict him.

This being the Shadowlands, the PCs are allowed to keep weapons on them in the daimyo's presence, but they are watched.

HIRUMA NAOTO, HIRUMA YUTAKA

Rank 5 Hida Bushi (Honor 2, Glory 6.3)

EARTH 5, FIRE 4, WATER 4, AIR 3, Reflexes 4, VOID 4

Skills: Archery 4, Athletics 5, Battle 5, Courtier 1, Defense 5, Etiquette 1, Goblin Cultures 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 3, Jujutsu (Kobo) 4, Kenjutsu 4, Ratling Speech 2, Siege 2, Shadowlands Lore 4, Stealth 3, Subojutsu 5, Traps 2.

Advantages: Large, Strength of the Earth Level 1, Hands of Stone

They each carry a jade-studded tetsubo and have taken 50 Wounds: they are at a -3 die penalty and 10 points away from Down. Each has 2 Void Points left, which they will use for Mountain Does Not Fall.

HIRUMA KAGE

Rank 4 Berserker (Honor 3.0, Glory 8.5)

EARTH 4, FIRE 4, AIR 3, WATER 3, VOID 4

Skills: Archery 2, Athletics 3, Battle 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 1, History 3, Horsemanship 1, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 4, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 4, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Meditation 2, Poetry 1, Tea Ceremony 2.

Advantages: Quick, Death Trance, Ancestor: Hiruma, Kaiu Blade (3k3)

Disadvantages: Driven, Haunted (1 point)

School Techniques: When berserk (8 rounds) Kage rolls and keeps four extra dice to hit and damage, and ignores all wound penalties.

Note: Kage has slightly improved from *Way of the Crab* due to his continued studies.

They see Kage's broken tetsubo and die tsuchi amidst the debris on the ground. He draws his blade back as the PCs enter. *"Why do you bring these men here?"* he snarls at his guards. *"Send them back to whatever silken hole they crawled out of."*

Kage is not insane. He is, however, depressed, furious and deep in mourning. This is a man for whom nothing has ever gone right. He is the daimyo of a broken family, a ruler of lands lost to the enemy for fifteen generations, and when he finally found a wife he loved, the Dark Lord touched her, too.

It will take some very delicate roleplaying for the characters to convince him his life is worth living. He sees immediately through flattery. But there is a part of him that wants to be talked out of this decision. Use the following speech as an approximation of Kage's thoughts.

"For what purpose would I return? To lie in bed like a cripple and make son after son to send into the embrace of the Dark One? To be given like a stallion to any mare Kisada wishes bred? That is not my future. I have heard the call of the Fortunes, and if I am not to live in the lands of my ancestors, the only duty I have in this life is to give the Fallen One some measure of the pain he has delivered.

"Why should I hurt my family further? It is clear that my future is cursed, and I would take such ill-fortune away from those innocents I might hurt by it. Let the Hiruma family continue its struggle with another man to lead it. I have had my turn, and I have failed. Perhaps I will live in this castle of his and continue to deface it for a hundred years, and we shall see if the Dark One likes how it feels."

If the PCs can honestly remind him of all the reasons he has not to die, he will be almost humble for a moment. (One Hiruma playtester threw down his katana, told its story through three generations and said if that meant nothing, Kage could keep it.) He thanks the PCs for reminding him of the duty he once understood.

HORNS AND A DILEMMA

Once they convince him, Kage is ready to start for home immediately, although it's only a few hours to sunset and they're all hungry and exhausted. As they move slowly through the shifted landscape (the Changing Lands may get them lost; see page 33, *Bearers*

of Jade), they hear a horn in the distance. And again.

Shadowlands or Unicorn Clan Lore, TN 20, reveals the only family who used such horns. If anyone scouts ahead, a Perception + Heraldry test, TN 20, reveals a squad of ten riders a half-mile away, in purple with a red chrysanthemum on their banner. One Raise can tell they are scouts for a larger army.

Moto.

Their eyes glow a dim orange. The skeletal horses gallop this way.

Kage's face loses all flexibility. He turns to his Crabs. They nod... and these Rank 4 and 5 bushi *run*, looking for a place to hide.

If the PCs foolishly decide to attack, four Moto akutsukai sprout skeletal wings and fly, raining arrows down from the air. Kage's guards might distract them for two rounds while they scream to the PCs to get him away, but the Moto are on *horseback*. Unless the heroes change that, the Moto continue shooting and lancing. Then they come back for the Down and Out people, and start to play.

For sane heroes, build the tension as they scrabble for a place to hide. Those tall, concealing poppy fields and a misty swamp are not far away... but as soon as the Moto lose sight of them, the PCs lose sight of the Moto, too.

Did they remember to mask their smell? How about their footprints?

There are few places to go, and the best option is digging a trench or going underwater (make that Earth roll if open wounds touch Tainted water or soil), and staying perfectly still as the Moto ride past (Stamina rolls, at constantly increasing target numbers). They can only see the large, clawed hooves of the onikage as they cross just in front of them... and the human-skin boots of the Moto who dismount. If they find anything suspicious, like a dropped scroll satchel, or a horse, they stay for a time... searching.

They kill and eat any horses left behind. Or Hiruma Hojiro.

And then they ride on.

MOTO SCOUTS (10)

EARTH 5, FIRE 3, Agility 4, WATER 4, AIR 2, Reflexes 5

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 3, Defense 3, Iaijutsu 2, Jujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 4, Horse Archery 4, Horsemanship 4, Hunting 4, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Stealth 4, Subojutsu or Yarijutsu 3

School: *Maho-bujin* 5

Spells: Animate the Dead, Corruption of the Earth, Stealing the Soul, Touch of Death

Powers: Fear, Spellcasting, Undead Strength, Wings, Eyes of Hell.

Shadowlands Taint: 6.0

Damage: 7k2 with katana, 6k2 with bow, 8k2 with yari, 6k2 with tetsubo

Wounds: 80: Dead.

Akutsukai Powers

Fear: As the oni power, rating 4.

Wings: They can fly, adding +10 to the TN to Be Hit while flying, but +5 to their TNs on the ground while their wings are unfurled.

Eyes of Hell: Their eyes glow, they see in the dark (a +10 penalty to normal humans) and they cannot be blinded.

Undead Strength: They no longer have wound penalties or "Down" or "Out" ranks, and can fight until destroyed.

Maho-Bujin Techniques

The Moto akutsukai, the maho-bujin, and the ultimate villain use a form of blood magic to power their school Techniques. Like maho spells compared to normal elemental spells, it is dramatically more powerful than normal bushi School Techniques.

Rank 1: They attack a number of times equal to the highest Honor rank of their opponents +1.

Rank 2: They may use the amount of damage inflicted in their last strike as their initiative total for the following round.

Rank 3: They may recover a number of Wound Ranks equal to the Honor of anyone they bring to Down, Out, or Dead.

Rank 4: They roll a number of additional unkept dice equal to their Shadowlands Taint for all Bugei skills, maximum 10.

Rank 5: They gain the Oni power of Invulnerability.

THE CRAB PATROL

By the time the Moto pass, it is night. The furthest they can hope to get is the chasm. There is a camp of six Crab samurai on the north bank. They warn the PCs about the Moto and invite them to join their camp. If the characters suggest they face down the Moto together, the Crab laugh and agree. Five of them are bushi, and the sixth a pale, anemic man in a Kuni-style black cowl. The others explain he has Taint and doesn't like to show it.

If told who Hiruma Kage is, they smile politely and bow.

A Perception + Investigation test, TN 20, reveals that none of them carry jade. Don't make this a free roll. Wait until the characters get paranoid. Otherwise, the Crab wait until the PCs are asleep or heading after the Moto before they make their move.

Don't let the header fool you. That's there in case the players flip through the adventure. Five of them are *maho-bujin* -- sorcerous bushi -- and the last is an Oni no Kommei, whose second, skeletal face is on the back of his head.

This fight should be rude and terrifying. The bujin *each* get a number of attacks equal to the highest Honor in the group plus one, and the only victim they want alive is Kage. Don't hesitate to use Kage's berserker abilities and the two Hida guards to even the odds, but don't let them steal the scene from the PCs. Stringing out the bujin or knocking them into the chasm can save lives. If you really need to soak up all the bujin attacks, having them shred the Hida guards who are using Mountain Does Not Fall is a good place to start, until the Hida run out of Void.

The Kommei goes after weak or wounded characters to eat their souls. For the full experience of the adventure, make sure two PCs, preferably those most directly opposite in morality, gender, or station, get choked and switched by the Oni no Kommei. This immediately knocks them unconscious, so they do not realize the effects until after they are carried back into Kyuden Hida.

MAHO-BUJIN (6, or 1 per player character in non-tournament settings)

There are two Average, three Experienced bujin, and one "special catch" who was a corrupted Akodo.

| Average Maho-Bujin | Experienced | Rare Prodigy |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|
| EARTH: 3 | EARTH: 4 | EARTH: 4 |
| AIR: 2 | AIR: 2 | AIR: 4 |
| FIRE: 2 | Reflexes: 4 | Reflexes: 5 |
| Agility: 3 | FIRE: 3 | FIRE: 5 |
| WATER: 3 | WATER: 3 | WATER: 4 |
| Schools: Hida 2 Maho-Bujin 1 | Hida 2 Maho-Bujin 3 | Akodo 4 Maho-Bujin 5 |
| TN to Hit: 10(20) | TN: 20(30) | 25(30) |
| Bugei Skills: Rank 2 | Rank 3 | Rank 4 |
| SHADOWLANDS RANKS: 4, 5, or 6. | | |

ONI NO KOMMEI

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

Shape-changing: 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.

Spirit Trading: If Oni no Kommei's attack is successful, it may breathe fog on victims to draw out their spirits. If the target knows to avoid breathing, he may roll Willpower + Athletics, TN 10, +5 each round, to a maximum of 25. Wound penalties apply. Failure means their spirit is drawn out, leaving the body a lifeless husk. If it simultaneously grasps *two* victims, it cannot consume them, but sends their spirits into each other's bodies. In game terms, two people whose bodies are switched take the physical attributes of their partner, but retain their mental Traits, school techniques, skills, and any supernatural advantages or flaws. Recalculate Rings appropriately.

AFTERMATH

The return, once the bujin are killed, is uneventful, and the PCs will be grateful to see the Kaiu Wall looming over the horizon as the sun peeks through the clouds.

The PC who made the final argument to get Kage to return gains Kage as an Ally, and 2-3 Honor points. Everyone involved gains 4 Glory points and 5 Experience.

PART THREE: THE FAIREST ONE OF ALL

This is the final, harrowing night, and it should be the longest in the samurai's lives. In a moment, we're going to explain why the fate of the entire Crab Clan, most of whom aren't even here, rests in the hands of four to eight seriously handicapped player characters, some of them courtiers.

Start looking for mistakes. If they're stupid, the PCs suffer. If they're reasonable, an NPC suffers. Suffering comes in many forms. Death. Taint. Mutilation. Soul-eating. Being commanded or tricked into killing a loved one.

Make the players understand *Mirror, Mirror* is not going to end with a clean sword stroke. It's a war story, a disaster story, and most importantly, a horror story. In other words, a lot of named, likable characters are going to die -- nobly, pathetically, or gruesomely -- *just because they're there*.

The villainess is a gamer's worst nightmare: not only more powerful than them, she's sadistic, has had time to prepare, and worst of all, she's smart. If the samurai aren't at top form, they will be just another little smile on her face before she gets bored.

Convince them they cannot fail. Then try to make them.

A FEW NEW FACES

Begin this section by taking aside the players whose characters were breathed on by the Oni no Kommei last session. Tell them that they're feeling... different. As though their heads are too heavy, or walking would be difficult, and... what in Jigoku are they doing staring at their own *face*?

This works extremely well if you have written up adjusted character sheets reflecting the new combination of Traits, Rings, Advantages and Disadvantages. The two players are now roleplaying the *other* person's character, stuck in their character's body. (The effect one can get from not telling the other players what has occurred is priceless, as the player's voice and appearance doesn't change, just the mind... just like what's happening to the characters.)

It is likely the exhausted samurai may refuse to sleep until they find a cure for the body-switching. The Shadowlands Lore TN for the Kommei is 35 just to know what the thing is. Any Kuni will be intrigued, but most of them know as little as the PCs. They may *imply* they know more to get a chance to (heh heh) examine their bodies.

Magical evaluation convinces the Kuni that the spirits have indeed switched and they seem unTainted, but any cure would require a multiple-shugenja ritual that will take weeks to prepare. Unless, of course, the characters want to assist the Kuni in summoning another oni, let it breathe on them, and see what happens.

More likely, they will be deemed mad unless they pretend to be the other one.

This will take a *long* time to roleplay as they come to terms with each other, then try explaining it to the rest of the group, who only know that their friends inhaled something Tainted and now seem to be insane. All the small details of Rokugan have changed; who calls them "san" or "sama," whose swords they are expected to wear, and whose reputation gets ruined by their actions.

And let's not forget who they're married to.

A NOBLE'S DUTIES

When the characters get Kage cleaned and into his rooms, Kisada shows up, in a foul mood. Kage has missed four appointments in the last three days, and *he* has had to deal with the complaints. He is not interested in discussing where Kage has been.

"I see you've decided to resume your duties," he says, looking at the armor and weapons lying beside the freshly-scrubbed daimyo. "You are getting married at the Hour of

the Goat. Get dressed."

You can see the beginning of the blank look of berserker fury building around Kage's eyes. "Does my lord have a name for the woman I am to wed, or is that not to concern me?"

Kisada stares at him flatly, eyes barely visible through the helm of the Shadow Warrior. "We have signed a treaty of aid with the Phoenix. There are two eligible women here -- Isawa Akiko and Asako Kuhime. If you have a choice, speak now."

Kage scowls. "Hida-sama, Isawa Akiko is thirteen winters old..."

"Is that your choice?" Kisada is implacable.

"Ku... Kuhime. Let it be Kuhime."

You have never seen a daimyo look so defeated.

The PCs have the next eight hours to rest and recover, or, as is more likely, vent all their paranoia. It is quite possible that they are still not convinced they found the *maho-tsukai* from Part One and will want to look now. It takes a Willpower or Honor test, TN 25, to stay awake after two days without sleep. At the Hour of the Hare (breakfast), Kurako announces the wedding; characters who did not stay with Kage hear about it then.

Characters may wish to check Kuhime for Taint or guard her from Mutsuye's fate. Getting near her is only possible if guarding her, and even then, only women are allowed in the room as she dresses for the wedding. Wataru is frenetically busy and excited; this wedding makes him the father-in-law of a family daimyo.

The wedding itself goes smoothly, though it is closed to any who are not members of the immediate family. When they emerge, Kuhime is dressed in bright red, and teary with wonder, Kage looks resigned. Kisada steps forth to begin the reception with the decree: *"By this time next year, I expect to be naming your son on this podium."* A Wall Crab starts a cheer and it is contagious. Some even make lewd comments about the need to make an heir right now, and all it gets is laughter. The party will last for hours, but Kage and Kuhime soon retire to Kage's rooms.

A GRAVE CONCERN

Smart characters will realize that no matter how secret their trip to the Shadowlands was, *someone* needs to be told about the Moto scouts. If there is an army heading this way, that trumps any amount of shame. If they told Kisada as soon as they saw him, it only makes him more determined to get Kage married before he might die in a Shadowlands attack. Kisada orders the characters to meet with him right after the ceremony.

If the PCs don't remember on their own, Takakana approaches them after the wedding, saying that he received several reports from Kuni medical staff that the PCs were injured. The characters are likely to get defensive, but Takakana doesn't really care what happened. In fact, if it will get Kage in trouble with Kisada, he'd rather not know. But he's in charge of the safety of Kyuden Hida, and he needs to know of anything unusual they encountered near the Wall.

When told about the Moto, Takakana looks about to see who heard, and immediately tells them to follow him. He says nothing as he leads them up a familiar six staircases toward Kisada's audience chamber. This time, no one stands on ceremony. Takakana brushes past the guards as if they weren't there, and barely gives the characters time to toss their wakizashi on their table before he slams aside the shoji.

"Tell Hida-sama EXACTLY what you saw. Leave nothing out."

Kisada's fingers tighten as the samurai describe the Moto hunting horns. By the time they finish, he is standing. He claps, and a bushi runs out of the room, returning with a large sheaf of maps with movable sections to represent the Changing Lands. He motions the characters over as Takakana joins him at a large table.

"One of our scouts went missing," Kisada says, "so we sent four. None of them have returned. That was four days ago... here." He points. "Where did you see the Moto?"

Takakana frowns. "Hmm. The way Moto ride, the main army would be to the southwest, in the fields of human hair. That force could attack Shiro Kuni... or if it went east... it could be here in hours."

As if on cue, there is a burst of drunken laughter from the garden outside. Kyuden Hida is never more vulnerable than right now.

Kisada turns to Takakana. "Gather all the bushi with experience against the Shadowlands, and those shugenja who would join us. Tell the yojimbo to get the rest of those fools downstairs, somewhere secure. Make sure no one panics, or it will destroy them. Go! You..." He turns to the player characters. "You have served us well this winter. We would be glad to have you in either place."

Time for the characters to make a choice. Encourage them to split up. Kisada wants their individual responses, based on where they think they would be the most useful. Remind them this may be the last time they ever see each other, and both jobs are honorable and necessary. Outside, they can help lead the Crab against the armies of the Shadowlands. Inside, they might be the only ones protecting the inter-clan court from anything that breaches the defenses.

TENSIONS RISE

From this point on, the indoor and outdoor events separate. Both run as a continuous story line. Two gamemasters or fast "cutting" back and forth can help create a great climax.

The Castle

Characters who choose to become bodyguards have the unenviable task of convincing a hundred or more courtiers, many of high Glory, from four different clans, to leave the rooms where they are celebrating Kage's marriage or cloistering themselves in mourning for Keiyomi, Mutsuye or Shigeru, and go downstairs into the damp, musty, cluttered, sweat-smelling barracks. Without causing a panic.

Obviously, this takes some competent roleplaying ability. Most NPCs get moving if convinced that there is an official well-wishing ceremony for Kage down there or told that the shugenja must purify the room for future weddings. Most also cooperate... for a little while... if simply told that it's Kisada's orders. Assume that any Courtier or Sincerity tests to move large groups of people are a minimum of TN 25.

If the characters let anything slip about an army outside, it starts ripples. People react in a variety of ways. Some insist that the Crab are perfectly capable of handling this sort of thing, and refuse to change their own behavior. Others prefer to be under their own bodyguards' protection, in their rooms, and refuse to stay with the characters. Still others panic, faint and cry, insist on bringing along their every possession, or demand that the PCs

bring Kisada down here right now to protect them personally.

Naturally, the PCs' behavior in previous sessions will affect the crowd's attitudes now, so let's summarize who's left and their likely reactions (those bushi Kisada trusts are listed under the Outdoor events).

Shinjo O-Shito: Her husband's a courtier, and they are both at the reception. Their children are upstairs, supposedly asleep but probably staying up late. If told what is happening, she is a solid, reliable bushi (her stats are on page 41) once she has rescued her children. Until then, nothing will hold her back.

Shosuro Shiko: Has no idea of the severity of the situation. She insists on staying in her room, although she invites bushi to guard her there, if they like.

Hiruma Kage: Upstairs with **Asako Kuhime**. Celebrating.

Yasuki Kurako: Can help convince courtiers that the PCs' orders are legitimate, but if she finds out the real situation, she nearly starts a panic trying to make sure people don't panic. She falls apart in the real chaos.

Isawa Akiko: Her father tries to protect her and her mother with his one combat spell, Bo of Water. Akiko is bright enough to run and hide, but clings to bushi if she can.

Asako Wataru: Slightly drunk, and arrogant with the pride of the wedding. He takes it personally if the PCs spoil his celebration, and will listen to orders from no one but Kisada, though he is old and weak and can be physically intimidated.

Ide Toshimitsu: Speechless with grief about his daughter, he will pick up a yari or furniture and make a suicide charge if he finds the person responsible for her murder.

Bayushi Masayari: Not good at taking orders, and would broker a deal with a *maho-tsukai* if he thinks it will buy other people time.

Kitsu Hanako and Ide Michiko: Go where the PCs tell them, though Hanako begs Kikuzo to stay with her. They make great hostages in the upcoming scenes.

The Wall

The PCs stay with Kisada as Takakana runs out to gather the armies. *"Mmmm," he muses. "Tsume changed patterns fourteen years ago, when he attacked Kaiu Shiro. Perhaps it has been so long he thinks I would forget." He looks up. "I need to know who commands them. The general of a Shadowlands army is its black heart and mind. If it screams in fear, its followers will flee.*

"The Moto do not listen to all of Fu Leng's bastards. That is to our advantage. There are only a few possibilities. Oni no Akuma would never attack here. It is afraid of me. Oni no Chi never hits in only one place. If it is Chi, we must warn the entire Wall. If it is Tsume..." he pauses. "If it is Tsume, we should pray for an early dawn. I need fresh scouts. Someone to see who commands."

Whoever volunteers gets 4 Glory Points. Even if they don't come back.

If the PCs volunteer, they enter the catacombs through yet another secret exit, this one leading directly to the Wall. They are given a map and instructions on how to avoid the many traps, then sealed in behind an iron plate.

Did they remember to bring a light?

They proceed, step by cautious step, past a wire-triggered rock fall. It is an Agility test, TN 20, to avoid tripping it. Did they bring horses? If so, have them make a Reflexes +

Horsemanship test, TN 30, to lead the horses past. If they fail, they hear a *snap*. Nothing happens. Do they go forward?

The next trap is a pressure plate, designed to start a roller of spiked jade. This one takes an Agility test, TN 25, to avoid, and there's no way to get horses over without tripping it. *Click*. Nothing happens.

The metal has been twisted and jammed from within.

Let them continue on, always careful in case one is intact. If some brave samurai runs through them all, he can bring back the bad news. Every single trap has been triggered, destroyed or disarmed. There is a tough portcullis and a thin stone wall between here and the basement where the courtiers are gathering. A portcullis that will never come down with its gears fused in place, like it is now.

And the closest people they can tell just sealed them in.

The only way out is single file, into the Shadowlands.

Once they tell someone (perhaps shouting up at the Wall from outside) the message gets to a Hiruma runner to warn the court.

The characters' Crab horses are trained to tolerate the stench of the Shadowlands, but it still takes a

Willpower +
Horsemanship test, TN 20, to get them to run *toward* the massing army. It takes Raikes to do this quickly or stealthily. From a mile away, they can see that the army is three thousand or more, with larger forms mixed in with the goblins and zombies.

How close do they get?

With a Perception + Horsemanship or Stealth test, TN 30, they can stay out of sight for a few minutes.

Combine Horsemanship and Stealth skills in the case of PCs riding double (such as if they are in each others' bodies). This gets them close enough to see columns of roughly 3,000 goblins,

ONI NO TSUKAKORO

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

Special Abilities:

No Eyes: Tsukakoro cannot be blinded, but fire and smoke increase their attack TN by 5, and if damaged by fire, they get TN penalties equal to half the number of Wounds taken.

Ricochet: Tsukakoro can attack up to three targets per turn, but never twice in a row. This damage is 6k2. The opponent must make a Strength test with a TN equal to the Wounds taken or be knocked down.

Squeezing: If Tsukakoro constricts an opponent, he takes 8k1 damage per round. Victims must roll Earth, TN 25, or take two points of Shadowlands Taint. It is impossible to escape without killing the oni.

2,000 zombies, 500 Oni, 50 Moto *akutsukai*, and four 250-foot long millipede-like Oni.

A Perception + Battle roll, TN 15, shows that the army is broken into small units under the command of the Moto. There is no recognizable general.

Did they mask their scent?

If the PCs are spotted, the army sends an Oni no Tsukakoro after them, a giant, bouncing cage of bones which ricochets off the ground and trees and collapses over the body of anything it catches. It is a Horsemanship test, TN 30, to outrun the thing, and unless they propped the door open, re-entering their tunnel takes at least a round and a Strength + Athletics roll, TN 25. The Tsukakoro won't fit inside.

As a prop note, throwing a Hoberman sphere (available at most educational toy stores) onto the gaming table provides for a good visual.

TOBE-SUIHI

Indoors

Hiruma Ryoichi runs in and urgently whispers to the PCs: *"Somebody's sabotaged the traps. This room isn't safe. There are some storerooms on the first level, on the north side. It'll be tight, but it's safer than here."*

If the Wall has been violated, smart samurai will want to search any room thoroughly before leading the court inside (if not, Ryoichi reminds them). The room is twenty feet by ten, and mostly empty, though the outside is lined with barrels of sake, vinegar and pickles.

On a Perception + Investigation test, TN 20, characters smell something funny inside a barrel. It's not moving. Inside, they find the corpse of Asako Kuhime, with a dry, bloodless wound across her throat, and the skin stripped from her face. On an Intelligence + Medicine test, TN 15, they know she has been dead for at least two weeks.

In other words, the whole time they've known her. And whatever took her place is upstairs with the wounded Hiruma daimyo *right now*.

Decision time: do they leave Kage to his fate, abandon the innocents, or split their forces further? They *could* take everyone with them as they go upstairs, but is that a good idea? They'd better come up with a plan, because the courtiers are getting tired, complaining and trying to go to their rooms (if they aren't already panicking).

They have a dozen Rank 1 and 2 Hida bushi and three Kuni who can help enforce their orders, but without a player character guiding them, they're bound to let someone slip through the cracks.

Outdoors

Kisada is commanding atop the Wall if the PCs bring him news of the enemy and the traps. Several high-ranking bushi from the court are with him.

"Traitors," Kisada growls. He turns to his battle-masters. "Arm all the peasants. Heat the pitch. Get the Kaiu to re-set as many traps as possible. All shugenja prepare Evil Wards. Get the Hiruma to send an alarm down the Wall! Which general is it?"

If they did not get close, he assumes there was a general hidden in the rear of the main force. If the PCs say there was no general there and suggest the general is inside, he gives them leave to search for it, but he is needed here.

"Tell Shiro Kuni I want reinforcements by dawn, a quarter of their garrison!"

Takakana! Without the traps, just sealing the tunnels, arming the heimin and laying wards, how long can we last?"

Takakana pulls an abacus from his obi and there is a quick clicking.

He stops after a moment, and looks up. "If the millipede creatures can surmount the Wall..." He shakes his head.

The room gets very, very quiet.

If the Kuni can place a carpet of Evil Wards in front of the Wall, they may kill the giant millipedes before they hit the stone itself. Bushime announces that her Matsu can lead a charge directly into the enemy to buy the Kuni time.

Kisada agrees.

PCs joining the charge get 5 Glory points.

HIGH-RANKING BUSHI

(Crab commanders, Matsu Bushime, Bayushi Tatsukoro, and Shinjo O-Shito)

EARTH 4, FIRE 3, Agility 4, AIR 3, WATER 4, VOID 5.

Skills: Archery 4, Athletics 3, Bard 2, Battle 4, Courtier 1, Defense 3, Heraldry 4, Horsemanship 3, History 3, Iaijutsu 3, Jujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Bushido or Shadowlands 4 (the other at 2), Sincerity 2, Subojutsu or Yarijutsu 4.

Advantages: Crab Hands, Quick, Leadership, Inheritance (4k3 katana)

Techniques: Rank 4 for appropriate School (Hida, Akodo, Bayushi, and Shinjo)

Whether they go or stay, it's time for mass combat at the Wall.

If you want to give them a visual, we recommend taking a few miniatures or dice to represent the protagonists. Announce to the players, "*Here are you.*"

Then dump a bag of Skittles or M&Ms onto the gaming table.

Announce to the players, "*These are them.*"

Characters on the charge begin at Heavily Engaged, while those back at the Wall are in the Reserves... for now. Use the Mass Combat in the Shadowlands rules from *Bearers of Jade*, page 134-138. Kisada's army is led by a Kaiu battle master (Perception + Battle of 8k8); the oni are led by akutsukai (10k5 for generaling). Our heroes have the Wall on their side, which means the oni need to win the Tides of Battle seven times in a row, but they get two Free Raises for being larger and composed of monsters.

The squads led by player characters will be fighting packs of zombies and oni, which generals at 4k4; the akutsukai know who's really in charge here, and they'll aim to get rid of *them*. Remember, no more Battle skill than they have Shadowlands Lore.

Other characters out here include:

Hida Sachiko: She thinks fighting the Shadowlands sounds *swell*, and asks to join the PCs' unit.

Kuni Taira: Taira is made of steel; he'll try to make his Evil Wards a wall rather than a circle, but he'll burn *himself* in the casting if he has to.

Bayushi Tatsukoro: He volunteers to lead a unit of Crabs into the catacombs and hold them until the gates, locks, and traps are repaired.

Hiruma Ryoichi: He runs messages up and down the Wall, gets oni to chase him, and can help indoor and outdoor PCs communicate if needed.

Kaiu Takakana: Kisada's right-hand man stays with him. Their tactics are simple. They, and their bodyguards, hunt the enemy generals, and kill them.

As the charge takes off, the millipede's bodies open, releasing akutsukai and winged oni in a stream so thick they blot out the moon. They scoop up goblins, Tsukakoro, and Tobehifu in their arms and dive at the Wall, ignoring the Evil Wards our heroes are risking their lives to lay down.

For Heroic Opportunities and skirmish-level combat, feel free to use any creatures listed in either *Book of the Shadowlands*, or roll on the following table for a random selection. Stats for many creatures are reprinted in the sidebars.

THE ARMIES OF FU LENG

Roll a D10 to find what a PC might "duel."

- 1) Goblin, Zombie, or Goblin Warmonger
- 2) Ogre
- 3) Oni no Sanru
- 4) Oni no Ashi
- 5) Oni no Tobehifu
- 6) Oni no Kyoso
- 7) Mamono or Oni no Kommei
- 8) Oni no Tsukakoro or Rank 2 Maho-bujin
- 9) Oni no Satsujinko or Rank 3 Moto Akutsukai
- 10) Oni no Kamu or a Rank 4-5 Moto Akutsukai

ONI NO KYOSO

All physical Traits 3

All mental Traits 4

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: 2k1 hand-to-hand, 3k2 with Unholy Fire.

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 10

Wounds Per Level: 12: -1, 24: -3, 60: Dead

Shugenja Rank 2

Spells: 4 Fire, 4 Earth, 2 Water, 1 Air.

Special Abilities: Fear 3, Invulnerability, Multiple Attacks (3/round)

Unholy Fire: Ignores armor, victim rolls Void, TN 10. Failure means they lose a Void point. When all Void is gone, victim falls unconscious.

ONI NO SANRU

EARTH: 4

WATER: 3

FIRE: 3

AIR: 4

Attack: 5k3 (6k4 swooping)

Damage: 5k3 (6k4 swooping)

TN to be Hit: 20

Armor: 3

Wounds: 10: -2, 20: -3, 40: -4, 60: Dead.

Can spend a round flying out of range; treat this as Full Defense. They're armed with poor quality naginata (Str + 2k3).

MAMONO

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, Shape-changing (takes 15 minutes), can cast the Body of Air spell in one round. If struck, victim must roll Earth, TN 20, or take two points of Taint.

Resurrection: The mamono, if killed at night, awakens in two hours, completely healed. They are permanently killed if cut in three parts and buried separately.

ONI NO KAMU

EARTH: 5

WATER: 5

FIRE: 7

AIR: 6

Attack: 7k7

Damage: 8k5 (10k5)

TN to Be Hit: 30

Armor: 4

Wounds: 40:-1, 60:-2, 80:-3, 100: Dead.

Special Abilities: Fear 3, Invulnerability.

If it rolls more than double the TN, Kamu has picked the target up and will do 10k5 the next turn: jiujutsu/sumai, TN 30, to escape.

ONI NO TOBEHIFU

(stats in parentheses are for individual skin-pieces)

EARTH: 3 (1)

FIRE: 3

WATER: 2 (1)

AIR: 3

Attacking: 4k3

ONI NO ASHI

EARTH: 3

WATER: 4

FIRE: 5

AIR: 3

Attack: 5k5

Damage: 1k1

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 6

Wounds: 20:-1, 40:-2, 60: Dead.

Special Abilities: Fear 3.

Multiple attacks: 1 per opponent.

Wounds are poisonous, roll Earth, TN 5 x the number of wounds taken, or lose 1 point of a physical trait.

Damage: 3k2 (4 points)

TN to be Hit: 15 (20)

Armor: 5 (None)

Wounds: 30: -1, 50: Dead (4 points: Dead)

Special Abilities: Sends 2-20 strips of skin to burrow into opponents, doing 4 Wounds each. Days later, these grow into baby oni. They can be removed with Agility + Medicine, TN 30. Failure means the oni crawls deeper, doing 1 additional Wound. Path to Inner Peace has no effect.

ONI NO SATSUJINKO

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 (only enchanted jade or spells hurt it), can be banished.

Taint Contagion: Victims take Taint points equal to the Wounds received. Touching the oni inflicts one point of Taint per round. If burned, the smoke gives one Taint point per round to everyone breathing.

Taint Cloud: Approaching the oni requires an Earth roll, TN 20, every round or the victim takes 1-10 points of Taint. (Jade absorbs 10 points per finger.) Casting spells in this cloud adds a +10 TN penalty for all but *maho*.

GOBLINS (WARMONGERS)

EARTH: 2 (3)

FIRE: 2 (3)

AIR: 1

WATER: 1 (2)

Attacking: 3k2 (5k3)

Damage: 4k2 (5k2)

TN to be Hit: 10 (15)

Armor: 3 (5)

Wounds: 6: -1, 12: Dead (10: -1, 20: Dead).

OGRES

EARTH: 2

Stamina: 6

FIRE: 3

AIR: 1

WATER: 1

Strength: 6

Attacking: 4k4

Damage: 8k2

TN to be Hit: 20

Armor: 7

Wounds: 15: -1, 30: -2, 45: -3, 60: Dead

Powers: Fear 2

KAGE'S CHAMBER

Hiruma Kage's room has one lantern lit, knocked on the floor. His bodyguards are dead. He is in the corner... exhausted, scared and badly wounded, with a black ichor covering the hand in which he holds a finger of darkened jade in a death grip. His room is a wreck and stinks of blood and sweat. He has gathered blankets around him, his underkimono lies on the floor, and his legs have been bitten by something with shark-like teeth. He has spent his berserker rage and all his Void.

"Nashiko," he whispers. "Doji Nashiko."

With a Maho Lore test, TN 25, characters remember the Doji courtier who sold her soul to Fu Leng centuries ago. Kage fills them in on her vast array of powers, and mentions she's killed regiments of prepared Crabs before. He says, *"If you do not understand her... you cannot fight her."*

If she's the one who murdered and replaced Kuhime, then there is an *akutenshi*, a Lord of Hell who makes *maho-bujin* look like kittens, roaming the castle where dozens of women and children are protected by only a handful of bushi.

And they're all locked inside.

If the PCs don't stop her, the entire inter-clan court will die. The Scorpion and Unicorn would demand retribution and war with the Crab, and the Matsu and Phoenix would support them. Worse, if Nashiko is Kage's legal wife, she could kill the witnesses, feign innocence, and have station sufficient to be allowed into nobler courts... including the Emperor's.

Kage is close to unconscious; hitting her with the jade was the only thing that saved him. Path to Inner Peace can get him limping, but little more. Nearby Hida and Kuni promise to take Kage upstairs to Kisada's impenetrable chambers, leaving the characters free to hunt the concubine of Fu Leng. That's when Nashiko blows an icy wind through the castle.

All the lights go out.

This is a Job For... You

Some players may suggest running outside and fetching the Great Bear. Sure. They'll just fight their way *into* the heart of a deafening mass battle, find Kisada in the midst of 8,000 combatants, mosey past his guards, get between his tetsubo and an oni, talk, and fight their way out again. It's possible, but even if they pulled it off, Nashiko would have time to kill the whole court before they returned.

THE PLAYERS NOW COME UP WITH A BRILLIANT PLAN

The Battle

Without traps to stop them, the catacombs flood with creatures. Bushi and goblin alike die in the dark as tunnels collapse from burrowing oni. The Shadowlands attack from above and below, forcing the Crab to the stairs. Four Oni... from no one knows where... are summoned onto the roof and battlements of Kyuden Hida, throwing bushi off. There are no reserves left.

Everyone is now at least Engaged.

The Stalking

Dim the lights. If you have appropriate music, (there are many others, but we use the soundtrack to *Halloween*), start it.

The PCs move cautiously through dark halls. They must head down at least a staircase before they find another lantern. Everywhere Nashiko has touched has residual Taint now, so setting up an Evil Ward makes the place glow like daylight, and creates a sign for Nashiko to steer clear.

The upper levels of the palace are silent but for the battle outside. The characters are led along by a trail of ripped walls, open doors, and flayed bodies.

They find a Hida bushi, neck snapped. He never saw it coming. There are bite marks all over, and his body is deflated. She drank his soul.

Anyone running slips on something wet (Reflexes + Athletics, TN 10, not to fall). If they look, it is Shosuro Shiko's severed face, recognizable by her face-paint "mask."

Perception tests, TN 15. There's a cry; someone running and screaming, "No!" When they arrive, there's only a corpse, nailed to a beam with a wakizashi, forty feet up. Bloody footprints lead to the door... and disappear.

Down the hall is another body... it moves. It's Shiko. *She's still alive.*

Shiko is crying and incoherent, but she may have talked with Nashiko and found out one of her Disadvantages or lowest Traits.

A long, beautiful laugh echoes through the halls, like a prima donna of an opera. "*All alone in the caaaastle...*" she sings.

DOJI NASHIKO

Rank 4 Doji Courtier, Rank 3 Maho-Bujin

Lore TN: 25 (Crane, Lion, or *Maho-Tsukai* Lore)

EARTH 6, **FIRE** 4, **Intelligence** 6, **WATER** 4, **Perception** 5, **AIR** 8. She has no Void.

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 (including Mizu-Do and Dance).

Spells: All Air spells and most *maho* spells. Touch of Death, Summon Oni, Dancing with Demons, Sinful Dreams, and Truth is a Scourge (*Bearers of Jade*, page 146) are innate.

Akutenshi Powers: 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, Shape-changing, Soul Drinking, Undead Strength

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Dangerous Beauty, Voice, Crafty, Crab Hands.

Disadvantages: Vanity, Phobia (Disfigurement), Colorblind

Shadowlands Taint: 9.0

Wounds: 96: Dead

WHAT NASHIKO CAN DO

Doji Courtier: Rank 1 lets her pull favors among the nobility. Rank 2 lets her make a Contested Awareness roll to sway a target's emotions after five minutes of conversation. She cannot use the Rank 3 ability, and Rank 4 means she cannot fail at any non-contested social action.

Maho-Bujin: see page 33.

Akutenshi: see *Bearers of Jade*, pp. 133-134, for fuller descriptions. Most of the offensive powers take one "attack" to perform.

Armor of Death: gives armor equal to the damage she did the previous round.

Blood Shouting: lets her transfer Wounds to anyone she has kissed who is within shouting distance. This means her human shields die first whether or not they are physically in the way of a player's attack. (You could limit this to one shout per round... or not, depending on how much damage the PCs are dishing out. Players will be giving everything they have to bring her down, so keep the fight dramatic.)

Body of Damned Time: she can take 6 Wounds and make a Taint vs. Void roll against anyone who sees her. They age a number of years equal to the difference.

Command the Taint: with a Contested Willpower roll, she can order Tainted targets to perform any action. Victims receive a Free Raise if Taint is not their highest Trait, and two Free Raises if it is their lowest.

Calligraphy of Thought: she can read minds with a contested Awareness roll.

Disrupt Chi: she can force characters to add their lowest Trait to any skill.

Eyes of Hell: her eyes glow and she can see in the dark.

Invisibility: adds 20 to her TN to be hit.

Flight: adds 10 to her TN to be hit if used in combat.

Invulnerability: works like the oni power.

Sense Purity: she can find UnTainted people with an Investigation test.

Undead Strength: she does not take wound penalties.

Soul Drinking: she can eat the souls of people she's killed.

Shape-changing: takes 1 round to become another person, 3 rounds to become animals or furniture, or 5 rounds to become something like a swarm of flies.

Sensing the Taint

The TN to check Nashiko for Taint with a spell or Witch-Hunter/Hiruma School Technique is 45 (5 x her Taint rating). If characters pull this off, they get a blinding sense of Taint so strong, it's impossible to pinpoint. Unless the roll is spectacular, tell them it might be coming from her, the room, all of Kyuden Hida, or possibly all of Crab lands. It's like trying to stand in New York City and take a good look at North America. If the players can roll this *anyway*, it is a simple matter to give her a hollow back support under her kimono filled with corrupted jade, increasing the TN by 10 +5 per extra piece.

Jade burns her and darkens... but only if it touches her bare skin. She can make

gloves look like flesh with Mists of Illusion (though she will run out of Air spells eventually), and hide jade combs in the thickest part of her hair so they don't touch her scalp. Her Acting and Sincerity rolls are 10k10 and some change. If she does get detected, all is not lost... she'll retreat, wait a few hours, and frame or imitate someone else.

YOU CANNOT FIGHT...

Anyone they meet could be Nashiko in disguise. But she tries to play innocent until she gets prey alone. For example, in a bathroom, the PCs could hear a splash and find Isawa Akiko hiding in a bathtub, her hair spread out like a lily pad:

"Oh, thank the Fortunes! Is she gone? Did you find her? She's the most beautiful, terrible thing! She got to us down in the basement, and at first we thought it was just Kuhime, then she called over Ide Kuniko, and... Oh, Shinsei, protect us from her. She... she started breathing on the children, and then O-Shito jumped on her, and she blew the lights out, and I just ran. I don't know where anyone is..."

This could be Nashiko.

Or she could be the tatami mat beneath them.

NPCs might try to kill Nashiko in the dark. They'll fail, and if she brings someone Down, she regains 12 Wounds per Honor Rank they had. It's in the PC's best interests not to let her "refuel."

This is where the psychological torture starts. If Nashiko can get a PC alone (in the above example, saying she hears Nashiko down the hall, and urging them to split up and lead others to safety while another stays with her), she whispers, *"Footsteps! Oh, Fortunes! Should I bar the door?"*

Once the door is barred, she smiles... eyes turning Doji blue.

On comes the Fear power.

"Shhh. Sit down. You're safe now." She strokes their hair pleasantly. *"I want you to do me a favor,"* she says, *"I want you to find _____ for me. (Their wife, their lord, or the highest Honor PC) Tell him to come in here. Why? If you don't..."* She smiles and her face shifts to mirror yours. *"I think you'll tell them anyway."*

If they bargain with her, she agrees to let them go... if they just give her a little kiss. If they do, remember it -- if they hear her Blood Shouting, they take the damage.

One more thing. Could they call her Empress?

She just likes the way it sounds.

...WHAT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND

If Nashiko can't get them alone, she's content to play her games in public.

The basement storage room where the gentry hide is lit by only two lanterns. Shinjo Ichiro and Shinjo Oda (O-Shito's son and husband), are coughing... deep, phlegmy sounds. They don't yet know this is because Nashiko Tainted them. If the PCs put up an Evil Ward or dust the area in jade, they start screaming and burning. So do some of the other kids, which will make their parents go berserk. There's enough Taint in the air that the inside of an Evil Ward is like walking into a microwave filled with iron filings -- tiny explosions everywhere. Nashiko, in whatever form, waits until she is surrounded by as many innocents as possible.

"Oh, no," she says in mock-sorrow. *"Trapped in the castle again while all the bushi*

play outside. How dreary. Why don't we play a game to cheer ourselves up?" The children stop coughing and cheer, gathering at her feet like a flock of ducklings. *"All right, children, this game is called Empress Nashiko. And the first rule is, you have to play."* They cheer with a high-pitched goblin's shriek, and she takes her true form: an unearthly woman, a little petite, with long, unbound hair and a kimono of smoke.

Slightly hot to the touch.

If the PCs Try Violence Right Away

Nashiko won't reveal herself to more than one PC unless she's got an edge, such as human cover. So for the PCs to get close to Nashiko, they'll first have to go through the children. She's using Command the Taint to call over the children or whatever innocents the characters care about the most (she's been in court with Calligraphy of Thought, she'll know who they are) and get *them* to take the first sword blows. If necessary, she'll skip or fly out of reach. Any relatives will go berserk: *they* still don't know what's going on.

If she can get off an intimidating comment ("*Do you really think that sword will hurt me?*"), she will. If she can use Blood Shouting on innocents she Tainted and have them die rather than be injured, she will. If a blow gets through, with her Acting skill, it's possible for her to absorb the first blow without apparent effect and glare at them in disdain. If she can physically humiliate her opponents (which she will try to do with artful flair), she rebukes them *"for engaging in such behavior with your Empress"* and will go back to the game.

If they do more than 30 Wounds, Nashiko gets mad. Now she needs deaths and maimings to heal, and she's more than willing to deal them out. She eats at least one soul or ages half the room.

The characters should not win a slugfest without at least a 50% casualty rate. Give players a chance to try something heroic, but make it clear a direct fight is not the right answer. Remind them of rules such as permanently burning out Void points or their lives for desperate strikes and spells.

If Nashiko takes more than 60 Wounds, she retreats, refuels, and tries again. Her life is the most precious thing to her, and she won't give it up easily. If seriously afraid, she heads for a window and flees north. This helps for a moment, but if the PCs don't chase her back to the battlefield, she's loose in Rokugan.

Nashiko's Game

Talking to Nashiko is like licking a straight razor. There's a right way, a wrong way, and it's disturbing at any speed.

Draw out the conversation and torture as long as players will stand. Nashiko is an extremely powerful creature of sorcery, but she still has the psychology of a disturbed, hurt, lonely, sadistic and very human woman. While she could simply age everyone to death in two or three rounds, that hardly satisfies her need for attention. She sold her soul to be acknowledged as the most beautiful woman in Rokugan, and then spent the next five centuries surrounded by ogres and Moto who are more attracted to rotting flesh. This is her chance to play, punish, and convert.

Nashiko has been gathering information via Calligraphy of Thought the whole time she's here. She'll also ask questions that prompt interesting thoughts to read. It is probably

best she demonstrate her cold, very short temper on an NPC first if you want to remind them who's in charge right now. If a PC mouths off, choke his father. That's Nashiko's idea of a conversation starter before she gets to the loaded questions.

"So... I'm going to ask you a question, and be careful how you answer... how attractive do you think I am?"

"The Crane say beauty is a virtue of its own. How true is that?"

"Of what good is love for a woman?"

"Kage and I are starting a family, too. It is the foremost duty of a wife, isn't it? To bear her husband's heirs?"

"Where is your wife to keep you in line? Michiko, Hanako, please come and discipline your husbands."

"Could you craft me a haiku on the difference between Hantei and Fu Leng? You are aware that on this Wall, failure equals... oh, but I'm certain you know."

Nashiko has her own obsessions. She was an only child, raised by a loving father, before he died and her stepfather began fourteen years of dirty, horrible abuse no one in Rokugan would admit existed. She was brought up as traditional Doji are: to cry in the dark and behind fans, and escape through marriage. Her only recourse for revenge was to wed a man with Glory higher than her stepfather (9.1), who could accuse him. The only possibility was Doji Komatsu, the Emerald Champion. When he jilted her for a pretty face, she turned to maho and returned to seduce and destroy his whole court.

Thus, she has a *large* personal stake in proving that Rokugan's value system is skewed. If necessary, she'll command the Tainted and those knuckling under to create a caricature of court with the sex roles reversed. The women will choose the ugliest men, and if they can't woo the women here, Nashiko will have them executed, since they have no other purpose. The most beautiful are forced to dance and sing for the crowd. If there's a dispute, she'll hand a Tainted child a Katana of Air and ask him to duel "for her honor."

Using Calligraphy of Thought, Command the Taint and Truth is a Scourge, she pulls out people's Dark Secrets, forces them to acknowledge their hidden lusts and hatreds and prompts them to admit that the ways of Hantei and the ways of Fu Leng are not so different. Nashiko will read husbands' thoughts and tell their wives about affairs or indiscretions, hoping to get the women angry enough to *enjoy* the killing.

She promises them anything they want if they swear to serve her master -- all the Advantages in the book, equality before the Dark Emperor, love, loyalty, faithfulness, and of course, power. Anyone who momentarily agrees to serve Fu Leng gets a long, Tainted kiss to seal it which makes certain they aren't going back.

Getting Out Alive

Characters should know by now how vain Nashiko is, and they may have learned those blue eyes are color-blind (all smooth rock looks like jade to her). She hates other beautiful women and may underestimate men, especially hedonistic ones. By a combination of insulting and appealing to her, it is possible to lure her from the innocents.

The PCs must pick their time. She can only read one mind at once.

This is all roleplaying, so play it by ear how much it takes to taunt her without driving her to kill them, or in what way they can flatter her without her catching on

(Awareness + Defense to shield their thoughts). Crane women have the best chance of evoking her ire, and Crane men are the ones she is most likely to believe captivated. She does not know there was a play written about her (p. 94-97, *Bearers of Jade*).

A Perception + Engineering test, TN 25, reveals a corner of paving stone which looks like it could be lifted up. If there's a tunnel there, it's a way to lead her out of the building to the army. (This could also be whispered to them by Ide Michiko if the players need a hint).

If Nashiko realizes she's been tricked, she'll bring out the artillery, but by then, they'll be somewhere they can use the terrain to their advantage, and there won't be innocents to worry about.

IN THE CATACOMBS

It is pitch black inside the tunnels, lit only by the blue glow of her eyes. There is a shape up ahead in the darkness. A glint of jade.

The PCs must make an Agility + Athletics test, TN 25, or take 3k3 as the rollers start grinding. On the other hand, if they trip it, she takes the damage, too.

Up ahead is a string tripping a rain of jade dust, which sizzles like acid on her skin, and makes her visible despite the Invisibility power.

There is a spiked pit ahead -- Agility + Athletics, TN 20, to jump it. On the other hand, if they cling to the inside (TN 40), they might drag Nashiko in; she cannot support much weight when flying. 5k5 for anyone who falls.

Add more traps if you like, and draw out the description. The PCs should be on their last legs (and probably missing at least a member or two), as they make a Strength test, TN 20, to push the iron door open, and emerge into the glow of a hundred Evil Wards.

THE ENDING BLOWOUT

The Crab army is exhausted, and bushi and goblin corpses lie knee-deep. The noise is deafening, as another load of screaming, burning goblins hits the wall, and a gumball-machine of Tsukakoro bounce in chaotic patterns against the sides.

With a Stamina + Sincerity roll (use the Teamwork rules if there's more than one surviving PC), TN 20, they start to get the attention of some Crabs, who move toward Nashiko, bloody tetsubo in hand. If there are surviving PCs outside, they lead the final charge, trapping Nashiko between them and their teammates.

Nashiko takes one look at how outnumbered she is and tries to flee. The Moto, as if a single creature, freeze in their tracks, and watch her trail.

If a PC actually *kills* Nashiko, her body fades into an inky void, her face covered by a white, slightly jeweled, artistic porcelain mask, which breaks into delicate motes of light; the souls she has consumed being freed. The world seems to go silent, and a scream, deep and rumbling, starts beneath the earth of the Shadowlands, as if something there were bellowing in grief. The Wall shakes with an earthquake a minute long.

One of the Oni no Shikibu spawn lets loose a howl that can only mean one thing.
Retreat.

CONSEQUENCES

If the samurai don't resist at all, Nashiko eventually marches them back through the tunnels to Fu Leng for torturous initiations into the akutsukai.

If all the characters die, Hida Castle does not fall, but only because there are 500 Crab and 900 enemy standing in the morning, too tired to move and hunkered down for reinforcements. Kisada suffers great shame, as the families of those non-Crabs killed in what should have been the empire's greatest stronghold blame him, and likely make war against his already bloodied armies. "Hiruma Kuhime" survives, as the bereaved wife of Kage (who was "killed in the attack"). She passes off her child as the new heir to the Hiruma nine months later.

If Nashiko flees, you can be sure that she'll become a recurring enemy who can appear at court, do things in the PCs' names, seduce their daimyo, and manipulate their families until joining the Shadowlands is the only thing that makes the pain go away.

Samurai who deserted innocents in need or betrayed Kage or their teammates are only allowed to commit seppuku if someone makes a plea on their behalf. Otherwise, they are ignominiously executed, or, if Crab, allowed to give up their swords and take a naginata into the Shadowlands to "look for Hida."

Assuming the heroes' actions keep Hiruma Kage alive, he ultimately recovers. Nashiko's games give him a renewed sense of purpose; if she tried so hard to destroy his family, there must be something there she coveted, and he has a duty to preserve it.

Despite everything, he still needs to marry. Heroic samurai-ko might well have caught his or Kisada's eye, or male PCs can suggest eligible sisters or cousins. Kage remains friendly with people who have impressed him, and can make a good impetus to future adventures as word of his praise spreads to other daimyo.

All victors are hailed for their bravery in battle, and just for a little while, the enemies at court put aside their clan rivalries once the truth is revealed. This night, everyone looked into the mirror and discovered that they are brothers in arms if not birth.

EXPERIENCE

For surviving Part Three, characters get a minimum of 5 experience points, plus the following:

Heroic actions and taking risks to save innocents: 1-3.

Creative roleplaying with Nashiko: 1-3.

Sacrificing themselves to save others: 5 extra points for use with the Karma rule.

In addition, all PCs receive Shadowlands Lore 1, and *Maho-Tsukai* Lore 1 if they do not already have the skills.

GRATEFUL REWARDS

The characters' actions in this adventure go above and beyond the call of duty, and Kisada recognizes that, even if the other clans don't. To temper the Glory awards, try replacing them with offers to attend the Hida or Kuni schools, gifts of Kaiu blades or jade-studded tetsubo, offers to marry or be adopted into the Crab Clan, or a future boon from Kage or the Great Bear himself.

If the Oni no Kommei body-switching shtick is getting old, the Crabs may have

conveniently maimed one in the fighting, and the Kuni keep it alive for experimentation. The Players may force it to try to switch their bodies back. If you want to make them work for it, they can go on an adventure to faraway shugenja to try to find a way of untethering their souls and putting them back in their proper place.

HONOR AND GLORY

Characters who lead Nashiko out of the building and save the innocents receive 5 Glory points. If they kill her, they receive one Glory Rank. However, if they made enemies of important courtiers (such as by killing their children), this award is halved.

Any actions one PC took while in another's body affect the body's Honor and Glory, and may change their reputation significantly. Any new Enemies or Allies should be obvious.

Honor awards and losses are up to the characters' personal code of ethics, but letting the Hiruma daimyo die is a 5-point Honor loss, minimum. Characters who used *maho*, seduction, lies or other tactics similar to Nashiko may well feel the echoes of her fate in nightmares for years, dropping Honor as they realize they may not be so different than her after all.