

Drawing Out the Darkness

**A One-Round Low/Mid-Rank SHADOWLANDS
Adventure for Living Rokugan (Champions of the
Emerald Empire)**

Chapter Three of “The Soul of Iuchiban”

by Robert Hobart

A Kuni witch-hunter is in pursuit of a suspected Maho-Tsukai. If you help him, the path will take you to the most dreaded region in Rokugan.

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This is a RPGA Network adventure game. A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing the game (or this round of the game), but the actual playing time will be about three hours.

It is a good idea to ask each player to put a name tag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name, race, and gender at the top. This makes it easier for the players to keep track of who is playing which character.

Scoring the game for RPGA points: The RPGA has three ways to score this game. Consult your convention coordinator to determine which method to use:

1. *No-vote scoring:* The players write their names and numbers on the scoring packet grid, you fill in the top of the grid. That is all. No one is rated. This method is used for people who are just playing for fun.
2. *Partial scoring:* The players rate the game master and the scenario on their player voting sheet, and provide personal information, but don't vote for other players. The game master rates the scenario and completes personal and event information, but does not rate the players as a team or vote for players. This method is used when there is no competition, but the convention coordinator wants information as to how the game masters are performing, or the game master wants feedback on his or her own performance.
3. *Voting:* Players and game masters complete the entire packet, including voting for best player. If this method is used, be sure to allow about 15-20 minutes for the players to briefly describe their characters to the other players, and about 5-10 minutes for voting. This method is used when the players want to know who played the best amongst them, or when the adventure is run in tournament format with winners and prizes. Multi-round adventures usually required advancing a smaller number of players than played the first round, so voting is required for multi-round adventures.

When using Voting, rank the players in order of your voting choice while they are completing their forms, so that you are not influenced by their comments on your abilities.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment and weapons their characters are carrying.

Some of the text in this scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in **bold italics**. It is strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

GM's Information

THIS TOURNAMENT SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD!

This adventure is a Low/Mid Rank adventure. This means that only Rank 1, 2, or 3 characters should be allowed to play. This adventure was not written with Rank 4 or higher characters in mind and cannot anticipate what these characters may bring to the table.

The world of Rokugan is a cross between feudal Japan and China. It is set in an age of honorable samurai, serving their Lords (Daimyos) and Empire. Remember that family names come before personal names. Akodo Toturi is from the Akodo family and his personal name is Toturi.

A note on female designations: If a samurai has the designation of -ko, then the samurai is a female. For example, if you see Samurai-ko, then this denotes a female samurai.

A note on commerce in Rokugan: Samurai are not supposed to care about worldly possessions, especially money. A samurai pays a commoner as if the money is meaningless, a concession to the commoner's silly needs. Between samurai, the exchange of money and merchandise is an exchange of "gifts."

Important Note: this is a SHADOWLANDS adventure. As such, it presents a higher-than-normal threat of death, maiming, and Taint. The GM should warn the players up front what sort of adventure they are facing, since some types of characters (courtiers, for example) are apt to be ill-suited to this sort of challenge.

Adventure Background

Kuni Vistan is an aged but dedicated Witch-Hunter who has spent a lifetime hunting the dreaded Bloodspeaker Cult across the Empire. Last autumn he nearly caught the cult's leader, the body-hopping sorcerer Yajinden, and in the process learned that the cult might have found a way to free the soul of its founder, Iuchiban, from his infamous Tomb.

In the months since then, Vistan has redoubled his efforts, crossing the Empire repeatedly (despite age and growing infirmity) in search of Bloodspeaker infestations. Many of the Cult's leaders are on the move, recruiting new cells of followers and conducting

dark rituals in hidden places. Vistan is determined to capture one of them and learn the truth of their plans.

Isawa Kakusu-Sakana is a shugenja of the Phoenix Clan and one of the five secret Masters of the Bloodspeaker Cult. Last winter he left the Isawa School to conduct a “pilgrimage in search of knowledge” across the Empire. In actuality, he was joining the rest of the Cult in their search for the Tomb of Iuchiban, to gather the materials they would need to free their master. In recent weeks, however, Kakusu-Sakana has begun to behave erratically, feeling strange urges and violent emotion swings, and an irresistible impulse to seek out the lands to the south of the Empire: the Shadowlands, domain of Fu Leng. The Taint which Kakusu-Sakana has accumulated over a lifetime of Maho practices is finally overwhelming him, calling him home to his true master, Fu Leng.

Isawa Kakusu-Sakana’s Taint-addled mind has grown careless. A week ago his erratic behavior drew the attention of Kuni Vistan, who was searching the area for Bloodspeaker activity. Vistan led a raid which destroyed the local cult cell, and Kakusu-Sakana himself was barely able to escape with the aid of his Maho powers. Now the half-insane Phoenix is fleeing through the southern lands of the Crane, trying to escape the relentless Vistan and reach the beckoning realm to the south.

Kuni Vistan is determined not to lose this lead as he has lost so many before. Stumbling into the PCs on route, he will try to enlist their aid in the pursuit. If they help, they will be facing a dangerous and terrifying odyssey into the Shadowlands.

Player’s Introduction

It is a chilly but clear day, the rays of Mother Sun stabbing through thin scuds of clouds that drift down from the Spine of the World Mountains. Light gilds the gray-green waves that toss in the bay of Jukami Mura, a Crane port in their southern territories. You stand at the stall of a pudgy, middle-aged food-seller. Your business here is finished, and you enjoy a midday meal of rice and fresh-caught fish alongside several other samurai.

Have the players describe and introduce their characters. The players should feel free to come up with whatever duties or missions they wish to explain their presence in Jukami Mura. They might be here to negotiate a trade agreement with the Crane, to deliver a message or a gift, arrange a marriage, or any number of

other reasons. The city is a major center for ronin, so perhaps the PCs were hiring such wave men to serve their daimyo – or seeking to be hired, if they are ronin PCs. Or perhaps they are merely stopping here on the way to somewhere else.

The quiet day is suddenly disrupted by a commotion from the dockside. An old, gray-haired man in garments of dark gray and red stands at the foot of the gangway to a kobune (ship) tied up on the quay. He is shaking a heavy walking-stick in the face of an angry commoner who appears to be the ship’s captain. As you watch, the captain’s crew gathers behind him, many of them holding clubs or improvised weapons, and glaring at the increasingly agitated elder.

The old man is Kuni Vistan, a Witch Hunter, and he is demanding that the ship’s captain take him to sea at once in pursuit of the Bitter Wind, a ship which has just set sail with Isawa Kakusu-Sakana aboard. Any PC who rolls **Heraldry/Perception** at TN 5 will notice the mon of the Crab clan on the back of Vistan’s kimono; closer examination (or making TN 15 or better) will also discover the mon of the Kuni witch-hunter school.

If any of the PCs have met Vistan before (such as in the adventure *The Falling Darkness*), he will immediately recognize them and beg for their help. He will also ask the help of any Crab Clan PCs (especially Witch-Hunters), as well as anyone who wears the mon of Phoenix Inquisitors or Emerald Magistrates.

Speaking with Kuni Vistan

Vistan is an old man, weary and with dark rings under his eyes, visibly on the edge of exhaustion. He is haunted by his repeated failures to thwart the Bloodspeaker Cult. He knows more about the Cult than anyone else alive – perhaps than anyone since the Cult’s discovery 600 years ago. He knows that Yajinden, the pupil of Iuchiban, is still alive, leaping his soul between different bodies to cheat death. He also knows that the Cult has recently stolen extensive magic documents from the Phoenix Clan, documents dealing with the imprisonment of Iuchiban in his legendary Tomb. Since that time, the Bloodspeaker Cult has become far more active throughout Rokugan, and Vistan fears they may finally have learned a way to free their dreaded founder.

Isawa Kakusu-Sakana is Vistan’s latest lead on the cult. He spotted the Phoenix ranting incoherently at a merchant in southern Scorpion lands. Recognizing a

possible Taint symptom, he tailed the man back to a meeting of a Bloodspeaker cell. Vistan managed to round up some of the local samurai for a raid (it took some doing, since the Scorpion were quite reluctant to believe that an uncouth Witch-Hunter could have unearthed a Bloodspeaker cell in their territory). The raid annihilated the cultists, but the Phoenix shugenja's magic allowed him to escape. Vistan learned Kakusu-Sakana's name from interrogating a captured cultist, and has since pursued him doggedly. He suspects (correctly, as it happens) that Kakusu-Sakana is a major member of the cult, perhaps even one of its five leaders, and he is desperate to capture and interrogate the man. Now, however, it seems his quarry may be slipping away.

How much of this Vistan will share with the PCs depends on how trustworthy he considers them. He will certainly tell them he is in pursuit of a dangerous Maho-Tsukai who poses a threat to the Empire. "I have been investigating the heavy Bloodspeaker activity in the southern Empire. I believe them to be seeking the Tomb of Iuchiban, perhaps in hopes of finally freeing their immortal master. In the course of my investigations I discovered and destroyed a Cult cell led by the man I pursue." If the PCs participated in a previous adventure with Vistan, he will tell them more.

He will also be more honest if the PCs are Crab Clan (especially fellow Witch-Hunters), Inquisitors, members of the Scorpion Black Watch, Emerald Magistrates, or anyone else who is an obvious foe to Maho. With non-Inquisitor Phoenix, however, he will be quite cagey, since he fears they will not be willing to recognize a threat from one of their own. He will admit the name of Isawa Kakusu-Sakana if he is sure the PCs are trustworthy; otherwise he simply identifies him as a "fallen Phoenix shugenja." "I have been in pursuit of him for six days, scarcely stopping for sleep. Now he is on that ship, the Bitter Wind." He points to the ship dwindling in the distance. "I must pursue at once, bring this criminal to justice and learn with certainty what the Bloodspeaker Cult plans."

If the PCs ask how Vistan knows his quarry is on the ship, he explains impatiently that several local dockworkers identified him as boarding the ship. If the PCs question the relevant dockworkers, they explain (with much bowing and scraping) that the "crazy old Witch-Hunter" ran about asking "whether a bald Phoenix had boarded any of the ships." They saw such a Phoenix board the Bitter Wind just before it sailed. "It did seem a bit odd, o-samurai-sama. The Phoenix was quite impatient, he practically threw the money at the Wind's captain."

This encounter is deliberately designed to give the PCs a few doubts about Vistan's truthfulness and reliability. Is he really a dedicated Witch-Hunter pursuing a suspect, or just a half-senile old man chasing a random Phoenix?

Convincing Captain Genzou

The ship which Vistan is attempting to seize for his pursuit is the Lotus Blossom, a Daidoji trading ship, and currently the only other vessel in port. The captain is a commoner named Genzou ("Vision"), a tough-looking middle-aged man, his head shaved bald and his arms covered in garish tattoos. Although he is not of samurai rank, he directly serves a wealthy Daidoji nobleman, Daidoji Konsetsu (whose daughter Mei appeared in the adventure *Face of Fear*). With that strength behind him, Genzou is prepared to refuse orders from other samurai. "My lord has ordered me to await a shipment of fine trade goods for the Mantis Isles. I cannot disobey him, whatever your wishes might be, noble samurai." He and his crew do not like Kuni Vistan – Witch-Hunters are figures of superstitious dread in much of the Empire, and their status as members of the samurai caste is a bit doubtful. If the PCs do not intervene, Genzou and his crew will eventually physically assault Vistan, driving him away with blows from clubs and ship's spars.

If the PCs support Vistan, they will still have to convince Genzou to let them commandeer his ship. There are several possible approaches they can take:

- They can attempt to bully or threaten Genzou into submission by virtue of their superior social position and/or fighting skills. This will require a Contested roll of the PC's **Willpower/Intimidation** against Genzou's Willpower. If successful, he grudgingly backs down and orders his crew to make sail.
- They can bribe Genzou. This approach will cost 2 points of Honor for anyone but a Scorpion. A bribe of at least three koku will be required – four if the bribing PC is Crab, Lion, or Minor Clan (except Mantis, who he respects), five if the PC is ronin. (A Yasuki family PC will never be able to bribe Genzou.) The PC will also need to role-play a good verbal appeal (one that satisfies Genzou's concerns about his patron's business, and avoids the sin of making the bribe overly blunt). If the bribe is successful, Genzou will pocket the money and reluctantly agree to assist Vistan's pursuit.

- PCs who have Daidoji Mei (the daughter of Daidoji Konsetsu, Genzou's patron) as an Ally can "cash in" that Advantage to persuade him to help them. The PC in question must role-play a suitable request, and then delete the Ally advantage from their character sheet.
- The PCs can invoke the needs of the Empire, the threat from the Shadowlands, the duty of all Rokugani to help resist Fu Leng and the Bloodspeakers, etc. This kind of approach will require a good role-played speech, followed by a Contested roll of the PC's **Sincerity/Awareness** against Genzou's Awareness. If successful, the ship captain reluctantly agrees to help, but asks the PCs to promise to explain things to his patron later.
- If any of the PCs are Emerald Magistrates, members of the Otomo or Seppun families or schools, or are Crane with Glory of 4.0 or more, they can simply use their social position to order Genzou to comply. He will reluctantly agree, again asking their word to explain later to his lord why he undertook this "madman's errand."
- Clever players may come up with other ways of persuading Genzou to cooperate. The GM should adjudicate such options based on the examples listed above.

The Good Ship *Lotus Blossom* Sets Sail

Once the PCs have convinced Genzou to let them use the Lotus Blossom to pursue the Bitter Wind, the Daidoji vassal wastes no time in getting his ship ready to sail. His crew grumbles and mutters at taking a Witch-Hunter aboard, but does not disobey his orders. Within fifteen minutes, the Lotus Blossom is rowing out of the harbor of Jukami Mura. The single square sail of the Bitter Wind is just barely visible on the horizon, making for the south. The ship is beyond the range of any spells, although ambitious shugenja PCs may decide to try other methods (such as controlling the wind or water spirits) to slow the enemy vessel.

The pursuit heads south, driven mostly by oars (the single sail of Rokugani ships does not catch the wind very well), and the land shrinks to a gray line on the horizon. The minutes stretch into hours across the afternoon, and a brisk breeze draws choppy waves from the water. Captain Genzou grows steadily more anxious, while Vistan, pacing back and forth on the deck, continually urges more speed. The rowers, already working as hard as they can, glare at him.

More Talk with Vistan

If Vistan did not tell the PCs his complete story before, he may do so now, since the PCs have demonstrated their own trustworthiness by getting him aboard the Lotus Blossom. He may also recount the story of the recent Bloodspeaker activities in Phoenix lands, particularly if none of the PCs played through *The Falling Darkness*:

"I was in pursuit of another Bloodspeaker, one even more cunning than this one. He had the power to change bodies, devouring the soul of each body he entered. I had followed his trail, with great difficulty, for many months until it headed north to Kyuden Isawa. I persuaded a group of samurai to accompany me on the journey – to my good fortune, in fact, since I would never have been allowed into the Isawa palaces without their help. But," the old Witch-Hunter's face tightens in old, weary anger, "despite all our efforts we never managed to capture him. He escaped the palaces with many secret scrolls of the Phoenix, and only a few were recovered. Our pursuit outside the city was blocked by a pair of fearsome oni which the Bloodspeakers summoned with their vile magic."

NPCs on the Lotus Blossom

Captain Genzou: Genzou is respectful to samurai, but never cowers or simpers before them, even if they bribed him. He has a "working man's wisdom" toward the world, and does not hesitate to assert his authority as captain of the ship, even in the face of samurai belligerence. "You think you can pilot this vessel, samurai-sama?" The only samurai from whom he will accept advice on such matters are Mantis. He is respectful to Cranes and Imperials, polite to Dragons, Scorpions, and Phoenix, and distantly hostile to Crab and Lion, as well as to Minor Clan samurai who are not Mantis. He has mixed feelings toward ronin, having suffered a number of encounters with ronin pirates over the years, but will instinctively respect any of them who jump in and assist with working the ship.

Hikui ("Short"): the ship's mate, a stubby little woman in her thirties who habitually chews on an unlit pipe. She is actually a former Crab maiden who ran away from an arranged marriage to a man she despised. She carefully avoids speaking to any Crab PCs (including Vistan, who she favors with the occasional doubtful look), but will converse cheerfully with anyone else and may even make a pass at a handsome male PC. She is fond of wise-cracks and puns, but turns deadly serious if anything threatens the ship or crew.

The Fog

As the glowing orb of Mother Sun dips ever lower in the sky, a thick gray fog begins to drift in from the south and west, shrouding the sun until it is leaden red.

If the PCs look north, toward land, they can roll **Simple Perception** at TN 20 to catch a glimpse of a single tall watchtower. It is the Crab tower which watches the western end of the Tidal Landbridge. The sight of it signifies that the Lotus Blossom has sailed south of the Empire's border. If this is mentioned where the crew can hear it, anxious mutterings spread quickly, and Genzou begins demanding that the ship turn back.

Ahead, however, the Bitter Wind is slowly drawing nearer. Genzou squints at the distant ship and frowns. "Their rowing's gone all to Jigoku," he growls. "What's wrong with their crew? Tegetai keeps a better ship than that."

A few minutes later the Bitter Wind vanishes into the quickly swelling fog-bank. Tendrils of gray mist begin to reach out, embracing the Lotus Blossom, and the crew's disconsolate mutterings get louder and louder. Genzou looks about, spits over the side, and makes a decision. "Back water!"

Vistan, furious, shouts for them to pursue at once. "He'll get away, he must have summoned this fog to slow us!" (If any PCs ask, there are indeed Rokugani spells which can summon fog.) Genzou refuses: "We are farther southwest than any ship has sailed and returned alive. If the Bitter Wind continues on this course, she'll wind up in the Shadowlands, and that'll be the end of all of them, including your precious Maho-Tsukai. I don't care to join that fate, old fool."

Vistan will appeal to the PCs to convince Genzou to continue the pursuit, while Genzou will invoke his expertise and experience as a ship's captain. If any of the PCs are Mantis, he will appeal to them to back him up. "No ship has ever returned from the waters around the Shadowlands." While this discussion continues, the fog continues to drift around the ship, cutting off the sunlight and leaving everything dim and vague. The crew's mutterings fade to an anxious silence, their eyes wide as they dart glances around and clutch at their oars.

No matter which route the PCs take, the discussion will soon become academic: the Lotus Blossom is about to be attacked by Shadowlands forces.

Battle Afloat

The argument between Vistan and Genzou is abruptly interrupted by a terrible scream. A bloated, vaguely human shape has climbed over the side of the ship on powerful webbed claws. Its skin is rippled and slimy, eel-like, and its black eyes stare blankly as a saw-edged tongue wraps around a shrieking rower.

The attackers are Umibozu (sea-trolls). Statistics for these creatures are given at the end of this adventure (in the NPCs section), but the number of creatures is not specified. This combat is intended to be a terrifying blur of action and horrific violence. Everywhere the PCs turn, the Umibozu are killing the crew in ghastly ways, blood is fountaining through the air, and leering demonic faces bare slaving fangs. Hikui dies bravely but brutally, trying to bash in a troll's head with a club even as it's tongue saws into her torso and drags her overboard into the dark swirling waters. A disemboweled Genzou slumps against one railing, staring stupidly at the ruin of his own body. And so forth.

The PCs should feel that their own survival is seriously in doubt, but they should ultimately be able to survive with only modest injuries. Kuni Vistan should survive unhurt, his jade-tipped staff blazing with a holy light that holds the vicious sea-trolls at bay.

At the end of the combat, the crew of the Lotus Blossom is dead, about half of them sprawled on the deck while the rest are dragged under the waves, meals for the retreating trolls. The ship is badly damaged as well, its oars snapped off and water seeping in through a strained and fractured hull. There is no wind to move the thick fog, but a current pushes the ship forward... toward the Shadowlands.

Shipwrecked!

As the PCs' ship drifts landward, the fog thickens until they can see nothing beyond the ship itself. Vague, ghostly shapes drift past in the fog, identifiable (with a **Simple Perception** roll at TN 10) as the wrecked hulks of other ships. Finally there is a shuddering crash as the PCs' vessel grounds itself, tearing its belly open on the jagged, barnacle-encrusted skeletons of past shipwrecks. Water rushes in, and the PCs may at first panic and attempt to swim to shore. In fact, the ship will not completely sink, settling onto the rotten wrecks below and leaving about half its mass above the water.

The PCs can swim ashore (rolling **Athletics/Strength** at TN 10), but must make an Earth roll at TN 10 to

avoid ingesting the filthy water and gaining a point of Taint. Or, they can try to climb across the tangle of wrecked boats (**Athletics/Agility** at TN 10, two rolls). PCs who can't swim or climb can eventually use wreckage as makeshift floats to make their way ashore, although this will again require an Earth roll (this time at TN 5) to avoid getting a point of Taint.

The PCs may decide to search the Lotus Blossom for useful supplies and equipment before they go ashore. Such a search will yield the following:

- An assortment of sailor's weapons, including clubs, kama, and knives.
- Food (rice balls and dried fish, mostly) sufficient for twenty men for two days (forty man-days of food altogether). This food is not warded against the Taint, and unless protected with jade will become tainted and dangerous within 6 hours.
- Three kegs of drinking water, each containing sufficient water for twenty men for one day. Again, no Taint protection.
- A single two-quart keg of sake. This will not become Tainted, but anyone drinking more than a few sips risks temporary intoxication (sake is notoriously fast-acting).
- Spare clothing and blankets.
- Ship's tools (hammers, saws, etc.).
- Rope (about 300' in miscellaneous pieces).

Effects of the Shadowlands

Once the PCs drift ashore, they will be in Fu Leng's deadly realm. The following effects will apply to the PCs while they are in the Shadowlands (pretty much the remainder of the adventure):

- Wood, cloth, and other flammables will not burn properly, emitting only a weak, sputtering blue flame which offers little or no heat (but does attract nocturnal predators). Dead bodies also are reluctant to burn naturally, should the PCs need to perform an emergency cremation (the Crab usually use spells).
- Wounds will not heal naturally. Curative magics (such as *Path to Inner Peace*) and nemuranai (such as Crane fetishes or Dragon Clan potions) will work normally, however. Also, any time a PC is injured in the Shadowlands, they must roll **Simple Earth** at TN 10 or gain a point of Taint.
- All spells cast in the Shadowlands (except *maho* spells) are at +10 TN due to the unfriendly nature of the local spirits.
- Void points and spell rings do not recover naturally (e.g. through rest). The Meditation skill will still work for recovering both Void and spell rings. It

is impossible to perform a Tea Ceremony in the Shadowlands.

- Unless the PCs have some jade (solid jade, not jade powder) with them, they will be vulnerable to the Taint. They must roll **Simple Earth** for each day and each night they spend unprotected in the Shadowlands. The TN is 5 for the first roll, 10 for the second, 15 for the third, and so forth. If a roll is failed, the PC gains a point of Taint immediately, and one additional point each day and each night thereafter until they leave the Shadowlands.
- Food and water brought into the Shadowlands will quickly become Tainted and diseased unless it is stored in proximity to jade. Likewise, any food or water the PCs scrounge or hunt while in the Shadowlands (except the food offered by the ratlings) carries the Taint. Eating Tainted food or drinking Tainted water requires a Simple Earth roll at TN 15 to avoid getting 1-5 (1 die halved) points of Taint.

Ashore in Fu Leng's Realm

Eventually the PCs will get to the beach: a swath of gray, foul-smelling sand, the fog drifting past in thick billows, the air stinking of decay, rotten wood, and other things best left to the imagination. Looking around, the PCs can roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 10, **Hunting/Perception** at TN 10, or **Simple Perception** at TN 15 to discover Isawa Kakusu-Sakana's ship, the Bitter Wind, grounded on the beach. The footprints of a single man move off down the beach. Mangled and horribly shriveled corpses are piled about on the ship, and something that looks like a swollen, distorted crow picks greedily at the flesh of one corpse's hand. As the PCs watch, the hand twitches, then clenches on the "crow," squeezing it to death in a burst of feathers and blood.

The dead crew are starting to reanimate, brought to un-life by the Taint. If the PCs look back at their own ship, they can see figures moving erratically on its deck as well. The PCs can run, or they can stay and fight. (Vistan's impulse will be to fight, but he isn't suicidal.) If they try to set fire to the ship (to incinerate all the zombies, perhaps), it burns sullenly and reluctantly, with a flickering, unhealthy blue-green flame, and pours out thick clouds of foul smoke. The zombies are hardly troubled by this, and the thick pillar of smoke will be visible through the fog for some time once the PCs leave.

In any case, it will take the zombies quite some time to climb out of the ship and flounder ashore. A party which moves reasonably fast will be able to stay well ahead of the sluggish undead horrors.

Following the Maho-Tsukai's Trail

From the shipwreck, the trail of Isawa Kakusu-Sakana wanders down the beach for some distance before turning inland. The PCs will notice that their quarry appears to be dragging one foot, as though his leg has been crippled, and there are drops of some foul, greenish-red ichor spattered along the trail. (If any PC is foolish enough to touch or taste the vile ichor, they automatically get 1 point of Shadowlands taint.)

About two hundred yards down the beach, the trail pauses at an old, nearly collapsed shipwreck that appears to be a small fishing boat, one which would crew only one or two men. Mangled skeletons of the crew are still scattered within the boat, and piled against its side is the twisted, rotten mess of a fishing net. The decayed, nearly-skeletal corpse of some vile aquatic monster is tangled within the net, along with fish skeletons and various other things (dead creatures and inanimate objects) dredged from the bottom of the sea. It is evident that Isawa Kakusu-Sakana pulled something (a long, thin object) from the net and dragged it away with him, leaving a single wavering line in the sand next to his uneven footprints.

This was the Bloodsword Passion. After untold years waiting here, it has found someone who may be able to bear it back to the Empire.

From the wrecked fishing boat, Isawa Kakusu-Sakana's trail gradually turns inland, the ground changing from sand to mud and rotten leaves. Scattered, twisted trees appear, soon becoming thicker and taller, some of them festooned with leaves which are, to all appearances, dead, hanging limp and brown-black in the drifting, damp fog. The trail is harder to spot here, but can still be followed with a **Hunting/Perception** or **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 10, or a **Simple Perception** roll at TN 20.

The Fate of a Tsukai

The trail ends in a marsh, thick mist coiling and slithering over its slimy surface like a living thing. Something is thrashing and splashing about in the marsh, something vaguely man-shaped that moans and gibbers in agonized madness. With a **Simple Perception** roll at TN 10, the PCs can make out that the figure wears the torn remnants of a kimono of dirty,

mud-soaked Phoenix orange... and that the wearer is no longer precisely human-shaped.

Isawa Kakusu-Sakana is finally succumbing to the Taint he has carried within his body for so long. His bones swell and twist, bulging beneath the flesh, and he babbles his agony through a mouth which rends and shifts in indescribable ways. One bloating, misshapen hand still clutches the sheathed, barnacle-encrusted sword he dragged here from the shipwrecks. His bulging eyes, looking as though they are about to pop from the sockets, roll wildly and fasten on the PCs. He gabbles, "Help me! Help me!"

Vistan will reply before any PC can do so. "There is no help for the doom you have brought upon yourself, Tsukai!"

Kakusu-Sakana is more or less helpless, too agonized to do more than thrash helplessly. He still tries to clutch the Bloodsword Passion, but it can be pried from his bloated fingers with a **Contested Strength** roll (his Strength is 3). Vistan will try to interrogate him, asking questions about the Bloodspeaker Cult's current activities, why they stole the scrolls from the Phoenix libraries, what they are seeking in the southern lands of the Emperor, and so forth. The PCs can ask their own questions as they wish. The fallen Phoenix can answer as follows:

- He is (or was) one of the five Masters of the Bloodspeaker Cult.
- He will boast that the cult has found a way to free their master, Iuchiban, from his tomb. "Lord Yajinden-sama stole the secrets from the fools in the Phoenix."
- They are currently seeking Iuchiban's tomb. They need something from the tomb (Kakusu-Sakana will never say exactly what) in order to free Iuchiban.
- "Iuchiban will cast down your foolish Emperor! The blood of the Hantei will set him free, for it is the same as his!" Vistan's eyes will widen in shock at this revelation, and he will murmur to himself, "So that is the truth."
- If any PC mentions the sword Kakusu-Sakana has dragged here from the shipwrecks, he gibbers that the sword is his and that its power will never serve "ignorant fools like you." If the PCs take the sword, he shrieks feebly and tries weakly to take it back, moaning that the blade is "mine, all mine, you cannot have it."

The Shadowlands Takes Its Due

As Kakusu-Sakana finishes telling the PCs what he knows, his body suddenly wrenches and distorts with a horrible popping and crackling sound. An endless, saw-edged scream erupts from his ravaged throat as his physical shape loses all resemblance to the human form, becoming little more than a flexing, shifting bag of flesh from which the underlying bones protrude in bizarre ways. Vistan, with a disgusted snarl, brings his jade-tipped staff down on the thing's distended, warped head, shattering it, and the body judders and flops through its death-throes.

The Witch-Hunter shakes the Taint-blackened blood from his staff and turns to the PCs. "I am sorry to have dragged you into this terrible place," he says quietly. "Hopefully the knowledge I have learned will be worth the danger. Now we must survive and make it back to the Empire."

The Bloodsword Passion

Outwardly, the sword does not appear particularly impressive: both the hilt and the saya (sheath) are covered thickly in mud and barnacles. Only with difficulty (and a **Heraldry/Perception** roll at TN 10) can the PCs make out the faint colors and mon of the Crane beneath the encrusted filth.

When the sword is drawn, however, its steel is still pure, keen, and bright enough to reflect light with blinding clarity. It is clearly a blade of exceptional quality, and all the PCs (especially any bushi among them) are struck by its beauty and excellence. Any PC who draws the blade, or who carries it sheathed for more than an hour or so, will begin to feel a deep possessiveness toward it, and starts to think of the sword as "theirs."

The sword has a number of powers and dangerous effects.

- It is, to begin with, a Rank Two Bloodsword, meaning that the wielder may re-roll any attack or damage die-rolls of 2 or less. Further, for every ten additional lives which it takes, this power increases by one Rank.
- As a *maho* nemuranai, the sword can affect any and all Invulnerable foes.
- The sword inflames the baser passions and desires of its wielder. Anyone carrying the sword will be unable to resist seduction attempts, nor will they be able to ignore the calls of Disadvantages such as True Love, Lechery, or Compulsion: Geisha.

- Anytime the wielder is in public, s/he must make a Contested roll of Willpower vs the sword's current Rank to avoid publicly confessing to any and all such romantic/physical weaknesses and indulgences. Such confessions will typically result in a heavy loss of both Honor and Glory.
- A PC who makes such a confession, or witnesses another do so, may roll **Lore (Bloodspeakers)**, **Lore (Maho)**, or **Lore (Crane)** (all using the Intelligence trait) at TN 20 to remember the story of Doji Tansei, a Crane Clan champion from nearly 600 years ago, who committed suicide after publicly confessing to his love for a geisha half his age. If the PC makes TN 30, they also recall that Tansei made his infamous confession due to the influence of one of the four Bloodswords created by Yajinden, the disciple of Iuchiban himself.
- If the wielder of the sword wishes to give it up, s/he must roll Contested Willpower against the sword's Rank. Otherwise the desire to possess the sword will be irresistible.

Escaping the Shadowlands

It should be clear that the PCs' sole objective now is to make it back to the Empire alive. Vistan, who has an excellent sense of direction, will argue for a straight northward hike to the Kaiu Wall as the quickest option. An alternative is to follow the coast northeast until reaching the Kuni wastelands – this option will take longer, but may seem safer to some PCs, since it eliminates the risk of getting lost. In either case, the encounters will be the same, although the GM should adjust the timing and scenery (the encounters are written on the default assumption that the PCs take the quickest route and strike north for the Wall).

It is growing dark as the PCs must make their decision, the coiling fog bringing nightfall on even quicker. The PCs can choose to try to sleep until morning (perhaps mistakenly expecting to heal injuries or regain spell rings), or they can set out immediately. If they do travel at night, light will be a problem – fires, as mentioned, burn with only the palest of flickering greenish illumination, and the thick fog cuts off what moon- or star-light might otherwise reach them.

Traveling straight north will require either two days of travel (if the PCs rest at night), or a little over a day and a night (if they travel straight through). Traveling up the coast will require three days (or two days and two nights) of travel. Note that in either case the PCs' food and water will become Tainted within 6 hours, unless

they have solid jade to store with it. PCs who choose to fast rather than risk eating or drinking Taint will lose 1 die off all actions for every 12 hours they do without such necessities.

Shadowlands Encounter One: A Glimpse of Terror

As the PCs trudge through the mist-shrouded trees (or, perhaps, huddle in their cloaks in search of sleep), have each of them make a **Hunting/Perception** roll at TN 10. Alternatively, they may roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 15. If they succeed, they hear what seems to be the rumbling of many hoofs. Smart PCs take cover hide immediately; if they stay in the open and wait (or if they failed their rolls), they will have to roll **Stealth/Intelligence** or **Hunting/Intelligence** at TN 10 to find last-minute concealment.

The sound grows louder and louder until it seems to fill the world, like the beating of terrible drums. Through the drifting mist, you glimpse a horde of cavalry, their mounts thin and skeletal, dark ragged purple banners fluttering from their lances. Eyes gleam green-blue, and unholy light flickers around the points of yari and lance, as the Dark Moto gallop past on some unknown errand.

If a PC failed to hide in time, a squad of the Moto draw up and regard the PC with their sunken eyes (or, sometimes, empty sockets), skeletal hands clenched on lances. “Join us, little samurai,” one of them says, a deep and powerful voice emerging from its ravaged throat. “Join us and serve the one true master. Join us and discover how truly powerful you can be.”

The PC must roll **Contested Willpower** against the Moto’s Willpower of 4. PCs who do a good job role-playing their refusal gain an additional die to roll (but not keep). Failure means the PC feels a yawning hole open within his soul as the power of Fu Leng enters him, inflicting one **full Rank** of Shadowlands Taint. The Moto laugh and ride away, one of them calling back over his shoulder: “When you have truly gained the power you seek, return to us.”

If the PC(s) successfully resist the Moto’s demand, the dark riders hiss in fury. “You will never leave our master’s realm alive,” one of them snarls as they spur their Onikage mounts forward. Each unconcealed PC suffers one lance attack (5k4 attack, 4k2 damage) from the Moto as they ride past and rejoin the rest of the column. The rumbling thunder of their passage fades

in the distance, leaving the battered and bleeding PCs to contemplate their fate.

Shadowlands Encounter Two: Swamp Goblins

At some point after the Moto encounter, while the PCs are resting or otherwise paused in their journey, one of them notices something: a short, slime-covered, naked creature with huge pointed ears, staring at them from behind a rotten stump. The creature will squawk and dive into a nearby pool of water as soon as it is spotted.

Thereafter, however, the PCs will find themselves frequently noticing these swamp goblins scuttling through the mud, peering from behind trees, popping their eyes out of pools of water, and so forth. At one point, one PC should glimpse (through the thick haze which lies constantly over the marshy forests) a whole row of the creatures walking in a line: each goblin is imitating a party member in some overt way (for example, carrying a stick to symbolize a spear, or scowling to represent a samurai of serious mien). As soon as they are approached or attacked, the imitators scatter. (A PC who becomes enraged and loses face due to such goblin mockery could potentially lose Honor, at the GM’s judgment.)

Although the swamp goblins appear to be primarily a distraction, they are not entirely harmless. In point of fact, they are spies for the powerful oni, the Oni no Shuryou (Hunting Demon), which lurks in these lands. If the PCs stop again to sleep, or to rest for more than a few minutes, the goblins will attempt to sneak up and steal some of the PCs’ belongings, preferentially something small but valuable (such as a personal heirloom, a jade item, etc.). The targeted PC must make a Contested roll of their own **Perception** against the goblin’s **Stealth/Agility**. Success means the PC notices before the goblin reaches its objective (discovered, the goblin utters a startled squawk and flees precipitately). Failure means the PCs do not notice until they see the goblins cavorting with their belongings in the nearby swamps. The items cannot be recovered – if the PCs chase the goblins, they scatter into the trackless marsh. If a PC is lucky enough to kill a goblin with an arrow shot, the creature falls into a puddle of swampy muck and its loot is lost forever in the bottomless slime.

Shadowlands Encounter Three: A Broken Leg

At some point while the PCs are trying to deal with the harassing and infuriating swamp goblins, have them all make **Simple Void** rolls. The PC with the lowest roll puts his leg into a small sink-hole hidden under the watery muck that covers the ground. The unfortunate PC pitches forward, thrown off balance, and breaks the trapped leg with an ugly snap, causing 3k2 wounds. The PC must roll **Simple Willpower** at TN 10 to avoid an honorless scream of pain (which, if uttered, costs 1 point of Honor).

The PC in question is temporarily crippled, unable even to crawl. The leg must be splinted (roll **Medicine/Intelligence** at TN 10) before the PC can function at all (otherwise the pain is too intense, keeping the PC helpless). Even after splinting the leg, the PC will be unable to walk unaided – the unfortunate victim must either be supported by another, or the PCs must make crutches or a stretcher. The trees and vines of the swamps can be used to create such items, although some PCs may find such manual labors demeaning. (No honorable samurai – except maybe a Crab – would use their daisho set to cut branches.)

A PC walking or standing with only one working leg cannot use archery or other ranged attacks, and is at +15 TN for all other physical actions. Some actions are, of course, impossible (such as running or jumping).

A PC who is sitting or lying down can perform archery at +15 TN or fight hand-to-hand at +10 TN.

Other than rest (about four weeks' worth), the only way to heal the broken leg is the Water spell *Regrow the Wound*. Healing items and potions, the spell *Path to Inner Peace*, the Arrowroot tattoo, and other such healing devices will ease the pain of the injury (wound rank penalties) but will not knit the bone.

Shadowlands Encounter Four: The Odd-Eye Clan

Several hours after suffering the broken leg, the PCs should notice that the swamp goblins are no longer plaguing them. Have each PC make a **Simple Perception** roll at TN 15. Those who succeed spot the distinctive form of a ratling watching them from a clump of trees. The ratling can be recognized for what it is by any Crab PC, or by any non-Crab who rolls **Lore (Shadowlands)/Intelligence** at TN 10.

You catch a faint “chitter, chitter” as the furry ratling shifts from to foot, one paw nervously scratching at its jaw while the other clutches the short, crudely-forged sword tucked through his belt. The creature’s eyes are mismatched, one black and one gray, and its whiskers twitch as it visibly considers whether to run.

The PCs have entered the territory of the Odd-Eye Clan, a tribe of ratlings who have recently returned from exile in Crane lands. They have brought back with them the Jade Bow, an ancient Crane relic, with which they hope to destroy the Oni no Shuryou. They are suspicious of the PCs, who may be Tainted or otherwise dangerous, and will be especially cautious if some of the PCs are Crane (they remember well the hostility they met in Crane lands).

On the other hand, if any of the PCs have allies with the Odd-Eye Clan (as a result of playing the adventure *Winter Court: Kyuden Asahina*), the ratlings will immediately approach them in a friendly manner. The PCs can also gain a friendly response by speaking in the Nezumi language, by offering gifts of small shiny objects, or simply by taking a firmly non-hostile attitude. Any overt hostility will cause the ratlings to immediately flee and not return.

If the PCs do succeed in making a non-hostile approach to the ratlings, the creatures will soon send forward one of their bushi, Rit’chuk’Tak, to speak with the human visitors.

Rit’chuk’Tak

This ratling bushi can be recognized by the streak of white which runs through the fur of his head. He wears crude light armor and carries an actual katana (stolen from who-knows-where) in his belt. Rit’chuk’Tak knows Rokugani (in the usual chittery ratling accent) and will speak with the PCs, asking what they are doing here in “Odd-Eye lands.” If any of the PCs are allies from *Winter Court: Kyuden Asahina*, Rit’chuk’Tak will recognize them and address them specifically. (He does not know any Rokugani names, and will instead remember them by distinctive physical features or mannerisms.)

Assuming the PCs manage non-hostile contact with the ratlings, Rit’chuk’Tak and his tribe can provide the following information:

- They have only recently returned from exile in the lands of the “blue-blue men” (Crane). While there they acquired a “green bow” with which to kill the monster which has occupied their territories.

- They have not yet fought the “stinky bad-magic thing” which lives here now, and are obviously still nervous about facing this terrible creature despite having the “green bow.”
- The “gray-gray men” (Crab) are also trying to hunt down the “bad-magic thing,” but are having no luck. If the PCs travel north (“away from sun,” the ratling says, pointing), they might find some of the gray-gray men.
- The “bad-magic thing” is hunting through these lands constantly; the ratlings stay on the move to avoid it. “We ambush, shoot-shoot with green bow, hurt it lots. Soon it get tired of hurting and leave.”
- If the PCs offer to help the ratlings with the “bad-magic thing,” Rit’chuk’Tak will give the equivalent of a ratling sneer. “You too slow-slow, make noise, never sneak up. Bad-magic thing only hurt by blast-blast magic, or by green stone. You try to fight, you die-die. Better you run.”
- The ratlings know nothing about the Bloodsword, but can tell instinctively that it is a powerful and dangerous item. “You careful-careful with that,” they warn. “It hungry-hungry.”
- If the PCs ask for information on the “bad-magic thing,” the ratlings describe it as “big, big-big, with furry body but legs like bug. Big mouth, sharp-sharp teeth, likes to eat, yes-yes.” Any PC hearing this description can roll **Lore (Shadowlands)/Intelligence** at TN 10 to realize this creature is obviously some sort of Oni, and that Oni are normally only hurt by jade or magic.

The PCs may decide to ask the ratlings for direct help (such as food or water). They must offer something in return, preferably an assortment of small shiny objects. Thus induced, the ratlings can provide the PCs with food and water which is free of Taint (just how the ratlings manage to keep themselves and their belongings free of Taint is a mystery not even the Kuni have solved).

If some of the PCs are seriously injured (down to the +15 or lower Wound Rank), the ratlings may offer to let their shaman heal them (especially if one or more of the PCs have the Odd-Eye Clan as allies). It is up to the PCs whether they accept the healing magic of a ratling shaman. If they agree, the shaman dances around them, waving a totem staff covered in feathers and bits of bone, and chanting in a high chittery voice. Each seriously injured PC is healed one full Wound Rank. The shaman’s spell will not heal the broken leg, although it will ease the pain of that injury.

Ultimately, the ratlings will not accompany the PCs, limiting their help to the food, information, and healing listed above. They depart with a chattered “good luck, man-mans” and a final warning to beware the “bad-magic thing.”

Shadowlands Encounter Five: The Ambush Site

This encounter occurs about two hours after the PCs meet the ratlings. The GM should adjust the description depending on whether the PCs are moving inland or along the coast, and whether it is day or night.

You push ahead through thick trees, strung together by slimy vines that seem almost willfully resistant to your efforts. As you forge ahead, the dank stench of rotten vegetation is interrupted by the sharper smells of blood and battlefield death. You shove out of the vegetation and find yourself gazing on the site of a desperate battle. The torn and mangled remains of Crab samurai are scattered across a muddy clearing, their corpses intermingled with broken weapons and bits of armor. Fresh blood is everywhere, turning the mud an ugly red-brown. One partly intact body, already reanimated by the power of Fu Leng, half-shuffles, half-drags itself across the field, groping blindly for something to kill. As you watch, you see one other figure move – a young Crab, his leg badly bloodied and his handsome face creased with pain and fear, struggles to lift his katana and face the zombie.

The ambush and slaughter are real, but the Crab is not. He is actually an Oni no Pekkile, an obscure sub-race of shapeshifting oni that specialize in infiltration...to the point of becoming almost human themselves. This one is a servant to the Oni no Shuryou which inhabits these lands, and has been left behind to infiltrate any other samurai who come seeking the lost Crab patrol. It is the PCs’ bad fortune to encounter him instead.

The Oni no Pekkile will identify itself as Hida Keihaku (“Hida Superficial”). It has no detectable Taint, and thus cannot be identified by Kuni Witch-Hunters or Moto Bushi. Evil Ward and other such effects will not harm it either, but instantaneous anti-Shadowlands attacks such as Jade Strike will affect it. Jade applied to its skin will not burn it.

The Oni no Pekkile will improvise an extended false history and background for itself, speaking of its fictional older brother Asai (killed by an oni four years

ago), little sister Jun (“almost old enough to marry, it’s strange to think of that”), and so forth – basically whatever tale seems likely to win sympathy from the PCs. It will particularly target non-Crab PCs, recognizing that they will be less inclined to suspicion. If any PCs actually do discover its Tainted nature, it will do an excellent job of imitating a Crab bushi stricken with the knowledge that he is Tainted and must join the ranks of the Damned.

The Oni has rehearsed a story to account for the doomed patrol: “We were searching... there were reports that an Oni no Akuma had been sighted, the Hiruma scouts... Lord Tampako judged it best to send a strike team to destroy the beast before it could gather an army and repeat the horrors of Twilight’s Battle two years ago. It was... it was my honor to accompany the attack team. But we did not... did not expect it to be so terrible... lured us into these awful swamps...” The Oni no Pekkle will recount the battle in considerable gory detail, given the chance, inventing tragic and heroic deaths for all its “comrades.” It will describe the Oni no Shuryou accurately as a “great beast, running on four legs faster than a horse, tearing with claws and teeth, and with strange magics that make the air cut like knives.” PCs who roll **Lore (Shadowlands)/Intelligence** at TN 15 can tell that the creature described is not an Oni no Akuma.

The wound in the Pekkle’s leg is faked, the Oni no Pekkle’s flesh shaped to resemble an injury, and blood from a fallen Crab is smeared on the “injury” to give it the proper look. The Oni’s own blood is black, so it will try to avoid real injury at all cost. It will bind up the “wound” itself, attempting to use the false injury to garner sympathy while, at the same time not letting anyone examine it too closely. If any PC offers healing magic, the Oni no Pekkle will accept gratefully, and shape-changes the “wound” away.

Any PC who actually manages to examine the “injury” closely can roll **Medicine/Intelligence** at TN 10, **Kenjutsu/Intelligence** at TN 15, or **Simple Intelligence** at TN 20 to realize that the wound is not real. A PC who does not see the wound, but watches the Oni no Pekkle’s limping walk, can roll **Medicine/Intelligence** at TN 15 or **Battle/Intelligence** at TN 20 to determine that the limp is exaggerated and the Pekkle is in little or no actual pain.

Aside from examining the false wound (or simply attacking), the only real way to uncover the Oni no Pekkle’s true nature is for a player to be suspicious enough to specifically ask whether the Pekkle is lying. This will allow a Contested Roll of the PC’s

Investigation/Perception (or **Nazado** or **Acting**) against the Oni’s **Acting/Awareness**. The Ichi Miru skill, if available, can also be used. If the roll succeeds, the PC realizes there is something shallow, superficial and fake about “Hida Keihaku”, as though all the feelings and emotions he expresses are merely someone trying to behave in the way that is expected.

If one or more PCs try to confront “Keihaku,” accuse him of lying, and so forth, he will try his hardest to talk his way out of things, using excuses such as the stress of the situation, the fear that he might be Tainted, the pain from his wound, and so forth.

Kuni Vistan will be inclined to trust “Hida Keihaku” – he is a Crab, after all, and his field of expertise is the Bloodspeaker Cult, not obscure Oni infiltrators. If the Pekkle’s true nature is exposed, however, a furious Vistan will be first in line to smite it with his Jade staff.

Searching for Useful Things

Although the battle scene has already been looted, PCs who search carefully and roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 15 might spot some useful items. However, acquiring some of these items may require that the PCs dishonor themselves by touching dead flesh.

- There are two undamaged katana and an undamaged tetsubo. The tetsubo still has some jade powder smeared on it, enough to do half damage on its next strike. Although these weapons are the property of the Crab Clan and should be returned, the PCs could justifiably use them while they fight their way out of the Shadowlands. The Oni no Pekkle will try to lay claim to the tetsubo, claiming its own was broken in the battle.
- There are also a total of 25 intact arrows (18 standard and 7 armor-piercing) scattered about the battlefield, some of them in quivers and some lying in the mud.
- At first, it appears that all jade has been taken or destroyed. However, a PC who can nerve themselves to actually search a body (losing a point of Honor in the process) will find one jade finger with half its strength still uncorrupted. Also, any PC who searches the whole area for jade and rolls **Simple Perception** at TN 25 will discover a torn bag of jade powder half-hidden under a torn body. There is enough powder to coat one weapon with a half-strength dose.
- A PC who searches the torn and scattered remains of the Crabs’ traveling packs can find a few rice-

balls and other bits of Taint-protected food, enough for a mouthful or two for the entire party.

- If a PC is clever enough to try to match up the number of broken weapons to the number of Crab in the supposed raiding party, they find they are short one daisho set. (The Oni no Pekkles took it.) There are also insufficient tetsubo and bows/arrows to arm the entire group, but not every Crab carries those weapons.
- PCs who search for personal belongings will be able to recover a personal chop for “Hida Ittetsu”, an origami hawk trampled into the mud, and a hand-woven blanket of brown cloth with the Hiruma mon. The Oni no Pekkles will make up suitably heart-wrenching personal stories about all of these discoveries.

Shadowlands Encounter Six: The Oni Hunts Tonight...

The Oni no Shuryou is hunting throughout this region, enraged by the continual pin-prick attacks from the Odd-Eye Clan. It has scented the PCs and is closing in on them. It will wait until night to attack, counting on the darkness and confusion to magnify its already considerable power. If possible, this should be the last night of the PCs’ trip, so that they feel as though they are close to escape.

If the PCs are resting, have those who are on watch make **Simple Perception** rolls at TN 10. If no one is on watch, have everyone roll **Awareness** at TN 20. If the PCs have chosen to travel, have them all make **Perception** rolls at TN 15.

PCs who succeed in their rolls glimpse something huge and misshapen stalking through the fog-shrouded trees. If “Hida Keihaku” is with the party, the Oni no Shuryou will not attack immediately, instead stalking the PCs for some time, uttering occasional howls/growls or other ominous sounds, or whispering “Eat you all, yes, nothing left, your souls will be lost here forever.” The impression should be of a cat playing with its prey.

Shuryou will restrain itself for some time, waiting for the Pekkles to sabotage the party’s defenses. The Pekkles will attempt to get rid of the party’s jade, filch scrolls from shugenja, and so forth. (It will not touch the Bloodsword, however.) It will be cautious and clever, but the PCs who are being robbed can still detect its actions by making a Contested roll of their

Perception against the Oni’s **Sleight-of-Hand/Agility**.

The Oni no Shuryou will attack when the Pekkles have destroyed at least half the party’s effective weapons, or when the Pekkles are detected, whichever comes first.

If the party was smart and suspicious enough to unmask the Oni no Pekkles before this encounter, the Shuryou will not bother stalking the party and instead attacks immediately. In that case, if all of the PCs failed the Perception rolls listed above, the Oni will strike by surprise (making the PCs TN 5 to be hit on the first round).

In either case, the Oni’s attack is a terrifying experience, requiring a Fear check at level 3.

There is a sudden terrible roar, and the nearby trees shatter like kindling as something the size of a bear, but lean as a wolf, hurtles through them toward you. Its body is covered in shaggy dark fur, and its headlong charge is propelled by four legs that resemble nothing so much as the limbs of a gigantic spider. Its body tapers to a head which seems to be nothing but gaping, slavering, razor-toothed mouth, and a terrible stench of death and corruption pours from the four-inch teeth which still trail shreds of torn human flesh.

The Oni no Shuryou is an Invulnerable creature. This means that only jade, crystal, obsidian, magical items, and spells will harm it. Unless the PCs have jade left from previous adventures, it is likely that their only weapons against the Oni will be the Bloodsword, Kuni Vistan’s staff, spells, and whatever jade powder they scavenged from the dead Crab patrol. Of course, some of these weapons may have been stolen and destroyed by the Oni no Pekkles. The Bloodsword (which the Pekkles will not touch) is the party’s “ace in the hole” and they are unlikely to survive this fight without it.

The Oni no Pekkles in Battle

The infiltrator Oni will not normally directly expose itself during the fight. If the PCs have already caught it while it was sabotaging them, it will try to claim it was being mind-controlled by the Oni no Shuryou. Similarly, in battle it will fumble or fail in various ways which, while excusable on the surface, nevertheless serve to disrupt and hinder the PCs’ efforts. For example:

- Fumbling an attack in such a way that it trips or stumbles into a comrade.

- Getting knocked back by a blow from the Oni no Shuryou so that it collides with an archer or shugenja, spoiling their action.
- Fumbling or dropping jade powder (if the party has any).

The Pekkles will do its very best to keep its identity secret, even to the point of keeping silent after the PCs kill the Oni no Shuryou, so as to fulfill the infiltration mission it has been assigned. If the PCs do realize that the Pekkles is deliberately sabotaging them, it will try to claim the Shuryou is mind-controlling it. If the PCs actually attempt to attack or disarm it, the Pekkles's first impulse will be to flee, lest its black blood betray its true nature. Only if trapped or otherwise critically endangered will the Pekkles reveal its true form and attack openly.

Help From Ratlings

If the PCs are losing the battle with the Oni no Shuryou quite badly (if, for example, several of them are down, or if they have no jade and nobody dares to use the Bloodsword), the Odd-Eye Clan ratlings will suddenly appear with help, in the form of an arrow-shaped bolt of sizzling green fire which flies out of the trees and smites the Oni. The monster howls in rage as it takes 5k3 wounds.

Depending on the circumstances, the ratlings may make only a single attack, or they may stay and continue shooting, taking advantage of the Oni's continued distraction with the PCs.

Aftermath of the Battle

The Odd-Eye Clan ratlings emerge from the trees, poking at the Oni's rapidly decomposing corpse with swords and sharp sticks. Rit'chuk'Tak chitters cheerfully at the PCs. "These lands now ours-ours. Nasty bad-magic dead, bothers us not-not." He thanks the PCs for their help. "We kill-kill eventually, but you make much faster." The ratlings will give the PCs another Taint-free meal and point them on the shortest route to the Crab lands.

If "Hida Keihaku" made it through the battle without exposing his true identity, he will give an excellent imitation of being just as triumphant as the PCs, and asks to accompany them back to Crab lands. He may even suggest bringing back the Oni's head as proof of their deed. After all, what better way to infiltrate the ranks of the Crab?

In any case, after the PCs defeat the Oni no Shuryou, the rest of their journey through the Shadowlands

passes uneventfully – the inhabitants hesitate to attack those who have struck down such a mighty foe. A few hours later, the PCs reach their objective (either the Kaiu Wall or the Kuni wastelands).

The Kaiu Wall

Mother Sun's thin rays turn orange-red on the mighty edifice of the Kaiu Wall, marching relentlessly from one horizon to the other. Before it, the gelid, muddy waters of the Last Stand River flow slowly toward the sea. You can see the distant glitter of metal on the wall's top, where samurai stand guard against the terrible evils of the Shadowlands.

As if to punctuate that thought, you hear a sudden angry hum, like an enraged insect. An arrow fletched in the dark red and gray of the Crab thunks into the earth at your feet.

The PCs must convince the Crab sentries that they are humans and citizens of the Empire, and not Shadowlands infiltrators. The Crab are careful and suspicious to the point of paranoia – with good reason, for they have stopped countless imposters who were just as convincing as the PCs. This is a role-playing challenge – the PCs must find ways to convince the Crab of their truthfulness. Of course, if "Hida Superficial" is still with them, they will actually be convincing the Crab to allow an infiltrator into their ranks...

Any Crab PCs can roll **Simple Intelligence** at TN 20 to try to remember what the passwords should be at this part of the wall. Of course, yelling out the wrong password guarantees a hostile response from the Crab.

Other possible approaches:

- If Kuni Vistan is still alive, he can call for the local Witch-Hunters to identify him (there are few enough Witch-Hunters that they all know each other to some degree). PCs who are Witch-Hunters can use the same approach.
- PCs from the Imperial families can invoke the Emperor's name (perhaps with the help of the Obeisaseru skill) to overawe the sentries. This may or may not work, depending on how the PCs role-play their appeal.
- PCs who tell the actual tale of how they came to be in the Shadowlands will need to explain themselves in detail. The Crab do not accept incoherent or poorly thought-out tales.
- Invoking the help of the ratlings will be useful, since the Crab know that the ratlings are enemies

to the Shadowlands, and any samurai willing to credit them as friends is a wise fellow.

- If the PCs brought back the personal belongings from the destroyed Crab patrol, they can show them to the Wall guards to prove the truth of their story.
- Showing severed oni heads or similar prizes will be very convincing. Showing ratling heads is guaranteed to bring hostility.
- The PCs can ask for jade to prove they do not carry the Taint. Of course, by this time, some of them may actually be Tainted...

If the Crab decide the PCs are hostile, they will begin firing arrows (rolling 3k3 to hit and 4k2 damage) at the PCs, and continue firing until the PCs are dead or in retreat (fallen PCs will be peppered with arrows until the Crab are sure they are dead). If the PCs want to try again, they will have to either march a half-day or more along the wall (north or south) or wait until the guard changes (the Crab have three eight-hour shifts).

The Kuni Wastelands

If the PCs chose to march along the coast to the Kuni lands, they had to keep the seashore in sight, slogging their way through stinking marshes, mudflats, and tangled lowland forests, along with the occasional jagged, bitter heap of rocks. Finally the PCs reach their destination:

Ahead, all vegetation ends as though cut off by a knife. The land beyond is empty, nothing but bare soil and naked rock beneath the pitiless light of Mother Sun. Nothing lives, nothing moves, and not even an insect's drone breaks the ominous silence. In the distance, you can just make out a low, rugged hut squatting between two hills. Surely, this must be the infamous Kuni wastelands.

The PCs will have to convince one or more suspicious Kuni shugenja of the truth of their story. The same principles apply as in the Kaiu Wall encounter listed above. The Kuni will be less overtly violent than the Kaiu sentries, but they will not hesitate to employ spells if they feel threatened. They are also not above using the spell Jade Strike as an immediate "Taint detector." On the other hand, if Kuni Vistan has survived to this point, he will be able to quickly win the trust of these Crab shugenja.

If the Kuni do decide to accept the PCs' story, they will offer food, drink, and shelter, and listen carefully to everything the PCs tell them. They will be especially

interested in the Oni and in any stories about the Bloodspeakers.

Aftermath

Ultimately, regardless of whether the PCs learn anything from Isawa Kakusu-Sakana, their real goal in this adventure is simply to survive and make it back to Rokugan. It is probable that at least some of them will have the Shadowlands Taint as a result of the trip, though it will not be detectable to Witch-Hunters unless it exceeds Rank 1.

If Kuni Vistan survived, he will be deeply grateful to the PCs for their help. Any PCs who did not already have Vistan as a Major Ally gain him as one now. He announces his intention of setting out in search of Iuchiban's tomb, hoping to intercept the Bloodspeakers before they complete their plans, and asks the PCs to report back to their various daimyo about what they have learned. "If enough of the Empire can be warned in time, we should be able to thwart their plot." If any of the PCs are ronin, he pays them each 2 koku for their efforts (unless they were cowards or failed to fight on his behalf, in which case he condemns their weakness and they do not get him as an ally).

If the PCs brought back the Bloodsword, Vistan regards the blade doubtfully and finally suggests that they hand it over to the Crane Clan. "It is theirs, after all. Perhaps the Asahina will know enough to hide it away."

The Fate of the Bloodsword

Regardless of whether the PCs return "Passion" to the Crane, give it to some other Clan or authority, or keep it for themselves, the result is the same: A few weeks after this incident, the blade mysteriously vanishes in the middle of the night. Whoever was watching it remembers nothing from that night – literally nothing, for whatever they might have seen has been wiped from their minds with magic.

The blade has been taken by the Kolat. It will be seen again... in other hands.

Rewards and Consequences

At the end of the scenario, any PCs with Shadowlands Taint must make a Simple Earth roll with a TN of 5 + (5 x Taint Rank). If the roll is failed, the PC acquires one additional point of Taint.

Experience Points:

Playing through the scenario:	2 XP
Good role-playing:	1 XP
Learning what Isawa Kakusu-Sakana knows:	1 XP
Killing the Oni no Shuryou:	1 XP
Unmasking the Oni no Pekkle:	1 XP
 TOTAL POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE:	 6 XP

Honor:

Crab, Emerald Magistrate, Inquisitor, and Witch-Hunter PCs gain +1 Honor for helping Kuni Vistan track down Isawa Kakusu-Sakana.

Glory:

Crab PCs (only) gain +1 Glory if they killed the Oni no Shuryou and brought back proof.

Other Consequences:

PCs who do not already have Kuni Vistan as an Ally will gain him as a **Major Ally** if he survives this adventure.

If the PCs interrogated Isawa Kakusu-Sakana, it is possible that they have learned that Iuchiban is of the Hantei line. How they react to this information is up to them, but any PC who learned this now has the disadvantage **Dark Secret: Iuchiban's Heritage**.

NPCs

Genzou (“Vision”), captain of the Lotus Blossom

FIRE 2 Intelligence 3	AIR 2
EARTH 2	WATER 2 Perception 3
VOID 1	

TN to be Hit: 10
 School/Rank: None
 Honor/Glory: 0.8/0.5
 Skills: Athletics 3, Club 3, Commerce 4, Knife 2, Shiphandling 5, Sincerity 3
 Advantages/Disadvantages: Allies (crew of the Lotus Blossom), Patron (Daidoji Konsetsu)/Social Disadvantage (Heimin)
 Equipment: Club, knife

Hikui (“Short”), ship’s mate of the Lotus Blossom

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 2
EARTH 3	WATER 2
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 10
 School/Rank: None
 Honor/Glory: 0.5/0.4
 Skills: Athletics 4, Commerce 2, Knife 4, Shiphandling 4, Sincerity 2
 Advantages/Disadvantages: Crafty/Dark Secret (former Crab), Social Disadvantage (Heimin)
 Equipment: Knife

Kuni Vistan, obsessed witch-hunter

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 1 Willpower 4	WATER 1 Perception 4
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15
 School/Rank: Kuni Witch-Hunter 4.
 Rank One: Two attacks per round against Tainted foes.

Rank Two: Sense Taint by rolling Shadowlands Lore/Awareness.

Rank Three: When rolling to hit against Tainted foes, keep additional dice equal to their Taint Rank (3 for the Oni).

Rank Four: Immune to maho spells.

Honor/Glory: 2/4

Skills: Athletics 5, Bojutsu 6, Defense 4, Herbalism 3, History 4, Hunting 3, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Bloodspeaker Cult) 7, Lore (Shadowlands) 3, Medicine 5, Stealth 3

Advantages/Disadvantages: Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose (to destroy Bloodspeaker Cult, especially Yajinden)/Brash, Gaijin Name

Equipment: Kimono, Jade-Tipped Bo Staff (This staff is enchanted with the spirit of a helpful *kami*, and will cause 3k3 wounds, rather than the normal 2k2, to opponents with the Shadowlands Taint. If Vistan is killed, the *kami* is released, and the staff becomes a normal – albeit jade-tipped – weapon.)

Umibozu (sea-trolls)

FIRE 3	AIR 2
EARTH 4	WATER 2 Strength 6

TN to be Hit: 15
 Attacks: 5k3
 Damage: Teeth 4k3, Shock 4k2
 Carapace Armor: 4
 Wounds: 10: +5; 20: +10; 40: +15; 60: Dead
 Special Abilities: When touching a character, or sharing a conductive surface with them, the Umibozu may make a simple Fire roll at TN 20. If successful, this delivers 4k2 electrical damage. In the water, this has a range of five yards.

Zombies (reanimated ship’s crew)

FIRE 1	AIR 0
EARTH 0 Stamina 3	WATER 1 Strength 3

TN to be Hit: 5
 Attacks: 1k1
 Damage: 4k1
 Carapace Armor: 7
 Wounds: 60: Dead
 Special Abilities: Zombies take half damage from slashing and piercing weapons, and quarter damage

from crushing weapons. A zombie which takes more than 15 points of damage in a single blow loses a random limb or extremity. Severed parts will continue to crawl after and attack the enemy. If a zombie is decapitated, it dies instantly.

Swamp Goblins

FIRE 1	AIR 2
EARTH 2	WATER 1

TN to be Hit: 15
 Attacks: 3k2
 Damage: 4k2 (club)
 Wounds: 6: +5; 12: Dead

Oni no Shuryou (Hunting Oni)

FIRE 6	AIR 6
EARTH 6	WATER 6

TN to be Hit: 25
 Attacks: 6k4 (bite), 6k3 (wind blasts)
 Damage: 6k3 (bite), 6k2 (wind blasts)
 Carapace Armor: 6
 Wounds: 30: +10; 60: +15; 90: Dead
 Special Abilities: Fear 3, Invulnerability, Wind Blast, Tainted Fangs.
Wind Blast: Each round, the Oni no Shuryou can send forth two narrow, powerful blasts of air, striking with such force that they slice through armor and flesh like blades of wind. These wind blasts attacks are in addition to the Oni's normal bite attack.
Tainted Fangs: any bite from the Oni no Shuryou requires the victim to make a Simple Earth roll with a TN equal to the amount of damage inflicted. If the roll fails, the victim gains a point of Taint.

"Hida Keihaku" (Oni no Pekk), infiltrator

FIRE 2	AIR 6
EARTH 2 Willpower 8	WATER 1

TN to be Hit: 30

Attacks: 2k2
 Damage: 0k1 fists (plus Blackened Claws, see below)
 Wounds: 30: Dead
 Skills: Acting 5, Courtier 6, Etiquette 7, Hand-to-Hand 5, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 2, Seduction 6, Sincerity 6
 Special Abilities: Blackened Claws, Blood Domination, Book of Souls, Retribution.

Blackened Claws: the Pekk can instantly extend claws of pure obsidian from its fingers. The claws do 3k3 wounds and gain a +5 initiative bonus on the round they are extended. They use the Hand-to-Hand skill.

Blood Domination: any creature who drinks so much as a thimbleful of the Pekk's blood will be subject to its commands (with a Contested Willpower roll).

Book of Souls: By staring intently into a target's eyes and making a Contested Willpower roll, the Pekk can learn the target's Disadvantages (if any). However, if the target wins the Contested roll, they feel a chill run over them.

Retribution: if the Pekk is killed, it releases a cloud of intense Taint. All creatures within 30 feet must roll Simple Earth against TN 25 or immediately gain 1-10 points of Taint.

Ratlings of the Odd-Eye Clan

FIRE 3	AIR 1
EARTH 2	WATER 2

TN to be Hit: 15
 Attacks: 4k3
 Damage: 4k2 (spear)
 Carapace Armor: 3
 Wounds: 9: +10; 18: Dead.

Critical Event Summary

Fill out for all playings of this event at Winter Fantasy 2002.

Did Kuni Vistan survive?

Did the PCs slay the Oni no Shuryou?

Did the PCs bring the Bloodsword back with them?

Did Hida Keihaku (the Oni no Pekkle) return with them undetected?