

Taka's Quest

This is a mini-adventure which will run once (only) over the course of the evening, assuming Taka manages to accumulate at least four PCs willing to perform the task.

Glory and Honor Awards and Penalties

The end of this adventure lists suggested Glory and Honor awards (and penalties) for dealing with the challenges presented herein. However, at times the players may take extra actions which the GM judges worthy of additional reward – or punishment. The following may be considered as guidelines:

- Performing an act of selfless, sacrificial loyalty to one's daimyo or clan: +1 point of Honor.
- Abiding by the tenets of bushido when one could gain an obvious advantage from breaking them: +1 point of Honor.
- Betraying or disobeying your duty, Clan, or family: lose 1-10 points of Honor and Glory, depending on the severity of the failure.
- Crying out in pain when injured: lose one point each of Honor and Glory.
- Using sneaky, underhanded, or treacherous methods when at an Honor rank higher than zero: lose 1-5 points of Honor.
- Using poison: lose 1-10 points of Honor, depending on the circumstances (there is always an Honor loss for using poison).
- Performing a socially acceptable public act of extreme courage and skill: +1 point of Glory.
- Drunk, insulting, or otherwise ill-mannered in public: lose 1-5 points of Glory.
- Made ronin: Glory drops to zero.

Adjusting for Party Strength

This is a Low/Mid-Rank adventure, and thus can involve parties of widely varying capabilities. The encounters have been optimized for a party of average Rank Two.

Although most of the challenges here are role-play oriented and thus not terribly dependent on party strength, a few changes can be made to adjust the adventure difficulty for low-end and high-end parties, as follows:

Low End Party (most/all characters Rank One):

- Reduce the number of Tortoise bushi by two.
- It takes two rounds for an NPC to reach the pull-rope to summon reinforcements.

High End Party (most/all characters Rank Two and Three):

- Increase the number of Tortoise bushi by two.
- Tortoise bushi have 3 Earth.
- Reinforcements arrive in two rounds instead of four.

Introduction

After a difficult one-week journey on winter roads, you arrive at the capital city of Otsan Uchi. The city seems quiet and sleepy beneath a white layer of snow, and few people are out in the streets. The Yasuki Trading Grounds, however, are as busy and raucous as ever. Taka has instructed you to seek out one of his commoner servants, a man named Kiokure, who will guide you to the lair of these pirates.

The PCs can find Kiokure's stall easily enough by asking around. The bustle and noise of commerce surrounds them as the Yasuki haggle with other merchants, and the clink of koku changing hands is a constant backdrop.

Kiokure ("Nervous") is a thin middle-aged man with a wispy goatee. PCs who have played "Arrows From the Woods" have met Kiokure before, and he will remember and happily (but politely and humbly) greet these individuals. Once the PCs explain why they are here, Kiokure grows more serious. He leads them out of the forbidden city and down to the Higshikawa District, located on the northern bank of the River of the Sun.

If the PCs ask Kiokure about their mission, he pleads ignorance. "Lord Yasuki Taka-sama told me was having trouble with pirates, and said he would try to find some brave samurai who could deal with them." This is all true – Taka has not told Kiokure anything important.

The Higshikawa District presents a peculiar spectacle. It seems to be populated almost entirely by heimin, and is full of shops and merchant stalls, most of them idle now during the winter months. But most of the buildings are built up on thick wooden stilts, and the streets are paved in large flat stones rather than the usual packed earth or gravel. Closer to the riverbank, many huge warehouses

perch uneasily on the thick wooden stilts, and the riverbank itself is packed with boats large and small.

Kiokure will lead the PCs to a medium-sized kobune (sailing ship) with the kanji for “Prosperous Drinker” on its bow. He introduces them to the captain of the ship, a stubby commoner named Kanto, and explains “these samurai are here to resolve lord Yasuki Takasama’s business with the pirates.” He then departs, leaving the PCs in Kanto’s hands.

Kanto is a gruff, practical man who usually sucks on a small clay pipe. He will explain to the PCs that they will need to wait until nightfall to sail for the pirates’ lair. “During daylight, their Tortoise protectors might spot us.” He suggests that the PCs wait below-decks, where his crew is boiling rice and vegetables for dinner.

The crew are crude and boisterous, as one would expect from such men. They are restrained around stiff-necked samurai (and especially samurai-ko) but quickly grow loud and cheerful if the PCs are friendly. They enjoy gambling and will offer to cut the PCs in on the action.

Sailing

Once night falls, Kanto will out his crew into action. They become all-business, silently raising the square sail, lowering the oars, and steering the ship down the river and into the shadowed vastness of the Golden Sun Bay. The western horizon is still faintly orange with lingering sunset, but overhead the stars are flickering brightly.

Kanto regards the distant yellow light of the twin towers which stand on the headlands of the bay, then turns the “Prosperous Drinker” north, toward the black shoreline which lies between the tower and the edge of the city. “The pirates operate out of a tunnel there,” he explains. “Right underneath the Tortoise Clan village, where no one dares trouble them.”

If the PCs ask Kanto how he knows all this, he shrugs. “Everyone *knows*,” he says. “But no one does anything about it, because the Tortoise have the Emperor’s protection. Besides, lots of rich samurai like to buy the gaijin trinkets which the Tortoise bring into the Empire.”

Everything which Kanto says is true as far as it goes. However, anyone who tests his veracity can roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 15 to notice that Kanto doesn’t seem to draw any distinction between

“pirates” and “Tortoise” in his speech. As far as he is concerned, they are the same people.

The Assault

Kanto carefully guides the “Prosperous Drinker” closer to the black cliffs, navigating as much by feel as by sight. Finally, very close to the wave-smashed rocks, he gives a cry and points. Faint yellow light is visible, just barely peeking out of a gaping cave mouth.

Kanto warns the PCs to stay low until they reach the pirate’s dock, and guides the ship into the cave.

Within the cave, the waters are calm, and the oarsmen stroke the “Prosperous Drinker” forward smoothly. As the ship slowly rounds the corner in the tunnel, the light becomes brighter, and you see that it comes from a small wooden dock ahead of you. Torches and lanterns hang along the pier, which is stacked with bales and crates. Two kobunes and another ship – a strange, sleek, low-slung vessel – are tied up at the dock. Sailors and dock laborers look up questioningly as your ship moves closer, but they do not take immediate alarm. You can see that all of them carry peasant or sailors’ weapons at their belts.

The defenders of the dock will not act immediately – they think the approaching kobune is a trade ship, bringing goods or customers. If the PCs try to examine the scene before exposing themselves and taking action, they can roll **Battle** or **Hunting** (**Perception** trait) to spot the following details:

- TN 10 to get an estimate of numbers. There are seven dockworkers, three sailors on one of the kobunes (the other is empty), and six sailors on the strange ship.
- TN 15 to notice the dark tunnel, obviously hand-worked and reinforced with wooden beams, which leads farther into the complex.
- TN 20 to notice the pull-rope which dangles next to the tunnel mouth.
- TN 25 to notice that one of the crates on the dockside has been opened, and that a number of strange, long metal tubes (anquebuses) are stacked against the wall behind it.

As soon as the PCs show themselves, the defenders will draw their weapons and demand to know what is

going on. “Armed samurai ain’t supposed to come here!” they shout, obviously nervous about the break in the status quo. A couple of the dockworkers will go over to the arquebuses and begin prepping them.

It is up to the PCs how they handle this situation – Kanto and his crew will take no action beyond providing transport, and if the PCs seem to be “blowing it” or losing a combat, the “Prosperous Drinker” will quickly retreat back to the bay... whether or not the PCs are on board.

Clever PCs (or PCs who are suspicious of Yasuki Taka’s intentions in sending them on this mission) may try to bluff the defenders or ask them questions. The GM must adjudicate the response based on what the PCs say, what they do, and what skills they employ. Potentially, the PCs could learn a great deal of information:

- About half the people here are members of the Tortoise Clan, while the rest are commoners. There is no outward way to tell them apart, since they dress the same, use the same peasant weapons, and treat each other all exactly alike.
- If the PCs pretend to be customers, the Tortoise will invite them ashore and lead them to the market down the tunnel.
- If the PCs talk about pirates, the Tortoise dent any knowledge (“we’re Tortoise, not pirates”) and grow suspicious.

Fight!

Once the PCs take action (or once the Tortoise grow suspicious enough to force them into it), the Tortoise will spring into action. There are a total of eight Tortoise bushi (four on the dock, one on the kobune, and three on the raiding ship) and eight commoners (three on the docks, two on the kobune, and three on the raiding ship).

- Two of the Tortoise dockworkers will use the two arquebuses they have prepped on the opening round of combat. The guns roll 2k2 to hit, but ignore armor, and do 4k3 damage. After firing, they will drop the smoking weapons (which take half a minute to reload) and charge into melee.
- On the first round, one of the commoner dockworkers will run to pull the alarm rope

by the tunnel. If he is disabled before he can do so, others will try on subsequent rounds.

- The three people on the kobune will try to get onto the docks and join the fight.
- Four of the six people on the raiding ship will throw grappling hooks, trying to snag the “Prosperous Drinker,” while the other two will hurl Kusari Gama (kama with weighted chains) in an attempt to board the ship.

If the defenders manage to pull the alarm rope, reinforcements will arrive four rounds later: ten more Tortoise bushi, led by Keda (see below).

If the defenders are losing badly (before or after the reinforcements arrive), they will flee back up the tunnel, hoping to get help or to scatter into the maze of tunnels beneath Otosan Uchi.

Loot and Scandal

If the PCs get the chance to look around the area, they will be able to uncover quite a bit of loot and material wealth, much of it foreign – crates full of exotic jewelry, strange items like spyglasses and scissors, cotton cloth, and so forth. All of this is illegal in Rokugan, of course, by the direct order of the Emperor.

The two arquebuses come from an open crate which contains another forty of the weapons. All of the weapons are loaded and take only a moment to prime and ready for firing. Packed into the crate as well are bags of gunpowder (gaijin pepper), shot, wadding, and slowmatch fuses.

Obviously, this is a scandal of the first order – pirates and Tortoise Clan “samurai” are smuggling gaijin goods into Rokugan! What the PCs choose to do about it is another matter, since if they haven’t explored down the tunnel yet, Kedo and his squad will arrive shortly.

Confronting Kedo

If and when the reinforcements come, they will be led by a Tortoise bushi named Kedo. If the PCs go searching down the tunnel after defeating the first group of defenders, they will also encounter Kedo in the next cave area, which is the Tortoise Clan barracks. Either way, Kedo will attempt to negotiate before violence ensues.

Kedo is a thick-set, muscular man who usually does without a shirt, wearing only simple sailor's pants and carrying two kama thrust through his belt. His head is shaved and he wears long, flowing moustaches. Although he seems like a crude sailor, he is also a shrewd man who knows how the Empire works from the bottom up. He considers himself samurai and is capable of showing a fair degree of etiquette and style when he needs to.

Kedo realizes the moment he sees the PCs that they have been suckered into attacking his base, although he does not know by whom – the Tortoise have many enemies. He will try stop the fight and negotiate. ***“Hold, samurai! Why do you attack the Tortoise Clan, beloved of the Emperor?”***

Assuming the PCs do not simply cut him down (which the more Tortoise-hating types among them might do), Kedo will try to learn who has sent them, and why. If the PCs give the “pirate” story, Kedo laughs. ***“Someone has sold you a false tale, samurai. There are no pirates here, only the Tortoise and our heimin.”***

Kedo will explain that the Tortoise carry out this illicit trade with the gaijin at the behest of the Emperor, so that Rokugan is not caught unprepared if the gaijin ever attack again. ***“Each of our daimyo has offered his seppuku to the Emperor, and each time, the Emperor has forgiven them and ordered them to continue their work. No doubt there are many who hate us for it, or who dream of taking over our trade for themselves. Could this not be why you were sent here?”***

If the PCs describe Yasuki Taka's story, Kedo will deny sinking any ships, Crab or otherwise. However, he is not being completely truthful. The Tortoise *did* sink a ship which the Kolat sent here a few days ago. (If the PCs examine the raider ship closely, they will find evidence of a recent battle.) Kedo does not know whose ship it was, only that it tried to intercept his latest shipment – which contained the arquebuses.

If the PCs mention the arquebuses, Kedo will again remind them that the Emperor commands the Tortoise Clan to study the gaijin and be prepared for them. However, if the PCs press the matter, Kedo may be willing to dump the firearms in exchange for the PCs leaving him otherwise unmolested. He will try to arrange this or a similar compromise rather than stage a fight to the finish.

If the PCs are completely unwilling to compromise or negotiate, Kedo will reluctantly try to fight them. If

he is losing the fight, he will flee, abandoning the underground complex, to warn the rest of the Tortoise Clan.

On the other hand, if the PCs lose the fight, Kedo will be reluctant to execute any survivors. After all, they are samurai following orders, just like him. If the PCs are willing to swear never to reveal what they have found in the cave, he will let them go. Otherwise, he sighs and cuts their throats.

The Rest of the Complex

If the PCs take the time to explore elsewhere in the complex (after defeating Kedo, for example), they will find three other areas of worked/carved stone further down the tunnel. The first is a barracks area where the Tortoise and ship crews stay when not on duty, and includes furnishings and supplies. The second is a large storage area where great quantities of gaijin wealth (considerably more than at the docks, albeit without any firearms) are kept in large bales and crates. The third is an underground “marketplace” where these items are laid out for sale (currently dark and empty, since most customers are away for the winter). A staircase leads up from here to one of the houses in the Tortoise Clan's “shantytown” outside Otosan Uchi.

There are other tunnels leading away from this complex, spreading out across the capital city. Wise PCs will refrain from exploring this dangerous mixture of natural tunnels and worked passageways. The Kolat, the local yakuza, the Scorpion Clan, and the Living Darkness all control portions of these tunnels, along with random problems such as ancient haunted shrines and long-imprisoned Oni.

Aftermath

If the PCs did negotiate with Kedo, they may feel some doubts about Yasuki Taka. They are wise to do so. However, the fact remains that Kedo did sink a ship, and cannot prove that it was not a Yasuki vessel. Taka will use this, and the inherent “sliminess” of the Tortoise Clan, to defend himself from any accusations.

It is up to the PCs what to decide about this matter. Regardless, assuming they survived, they each earn 1 XP. Most PCs will lose 1 Honor for performing this mission – at the GM's discretion, PCs who feel “dirty” about the mission could lose extra Honor.

NPCs

Tortoise Clan bushi

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

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Tortoise Bushi 1

Rank 1: Fortune's Favor. When fighting with their chosen peasant weapon, the bushi have two extra ranks of skill in Nofujutsu.

Honor/Glory: 0.4/0.6

Skills: Athletics 3, Commerce 4, Defense 2, Jiujutsu (hand to hand) 3, Kenjutsu 1, Nofujutsu 4, Sailing 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Tortoise), Social Disadvantage (Minor Clan)

Equipment: Kama (0k2) or Kusari-Gama (0k2, can entangle opponents), clothing.

Tortoise Clan heimin

FIRE 1	AIR 2
Agility 2	
EARTH 2	WATER 1
	Strength 2
VOID 1	

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None (heimin)

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Athletics 2, Commerce 2, Defense 1, Jiujutsu (hand to hand) 2, Nofujutsu 3, Sailing 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Equipment: Kama (0k2) or Kusari-Gama (0k2, can entangle opponents), clothing.

Kedo, senior Tortoise bushi

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

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Tortoise Bushi 3

Rank 1: Fortune's Favor. When fighting with their chosen peasant weapon, the bushi have two extra ranks of skill in Nofujutsu.

Rank 2: Path of One. The bushi may sacrifice a number of Honor Points equal to School Rank, adding that many unkept dice to any non-High skill. Dice must be used immediately.

Rank 3: Shell of the Tortoise. Any opponent with Honor Rank 2 or higher must add twice their own Honor to the Tortoise's TN to be Hit.

Honor/Glory: 1.2/0.9

Skills: Athletics 5, Commerce 6, Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Heraldry 3, Jiujutsu (hand to hand) 3, Kenjutsu 2, Nofujutsu 5, Sailing 4, Sincerity 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Luck (rank 1), Strength of the Earth (rank 1)/Bad Reputation (Tortoise), Social Disadvantage (Minor Clan)

Equipment: Clothing, pair of fine quality kama (1k2 damage).

A Winter Haunting

This is a mini-adventure triggered by Tsume Takashi, the daimyo of Shiro Kyotei, and if possible he should be the one to run the party through it. A report of a ghost in one of his villages requires investigation.

Glory and Honor Awards and Penalties

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- Abiding by the tenets of bushido when one could gain an obvious advantage from breaking them: +1 point of Honor.
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- Performing a socially acceptable public act of extreme courage and skill: +1 point of Glory.
- Drunk, insulting, or otherwise ill-mannered in public: lose 1-5 points of Glory.
- Made ronin: Glory drops to zero.

Adjusting for Party Strength

This is a Low/Mid-Rank adventure, and thus can involve parties of widely varying capabilities. The encounters have been optimized for a party of average Rank Two.

Although most of the challenges here are role-play oriented and thus not terribly dependent on party strength, a few changes can be made to adjust the adventure difficulty for low-end and high-end parties, as follows:

Low End Party (most/all characters Rank One):

- Reduce Tsubume's Wounds to 50.
- The necklace is TN 20 to hit.

High End Party (most/all characters Rank Two and Three):

- Tsubume has 100 Wounds.
- The necklace is TN 30 to hit and takes 30 points of damage to destroy.
- Tsubume's Air is 5.

Introduction

One of Shiro Kyotei's outlying villages, San no Mura, has been stricken with a haunting. Vague rumors of this problem have reached Tsume Takashi, and he has dispatched a samurai from the castle to look into the matter. The samurai, Doji Ikari, has not returned, and now Takashi is looking for a larger group of samurai who will look into the matter and resolve it quietly (if word gets out about this haunting, it could embarrass him greatly, and he secretly fears that there may be a connection with his father's shameful death).

What Takashi tells the PCs:

Takashi has heard vague reports from San no Mura (from the doshin – armed peasant – of the village) of an evil female spirit or ghost which stalks the forest, kidnapping children and leaving their frozen, bloodless corpses in the snow. He dispatched Doji Ikari to investigate these matters. A week has passed with no word from Ikari or the village.

The ghost itself has been variously described as a "demon woman" or simply a "ghost" or "gaki" (hungry ghost) in female shape. Takashi knows no more, and suggests the PCs speak with the village headman (Kuwabara) or the village doshin (Tokan).

The Truth

The village is actually being plagued by two different problems: a Yuki-Onna (snow maiden) and a rather unusual Gaki (hungry ghost).

The Gaki is the spirit of Tsubume, a little girl who was drowned to death by her angry playmates. Unfortunately, Tsubume died while

in possession of a minor artifact of the extinct Snake Clan, and the malign power of that item has brought her back as a Gaki. Now she is taking revenge on all the village children for her own death.

The Yuki-Onna has appeared here spontaneously, following her own enigmatic ways, and the poor visiting samurai, Doji Ikari, fell hopelessly in love with her and froze to death (hence his failure to return).

Getting to San no Mura (Village of Two)

A difficult half-day of travel through thick, wet snow has brought you to San no Mura, a tiny village tucked into a narrow side-valley. The dozen or so huts which make up the village are all huddled in under the steep forested slopes of the valley, while a narrow band of cultivated ground snakes down the valley floor, following the near-frozen track of a shallow stream. A thick coat of snow covers everything in sparkling white, although you can see muddy tracks breaking up the pure white mantlet within the village.

There is no inn or teahouse here – San no Mura is much too small for such a thing. Besides the huts where the villagers dwell, the only other structures here are the village well and a pen for the oxen. (There is a carpenter’s shop attached to the back of one hut, a silk-weaver’s shop behind another, and a small crematorium behind the eta hut.)

The tracks which criss-cross the village are the normal signs of winter activities – trips to the well for water, to the oxen pen, to the woods to get fuel for fires, and so forth.

If anyone asks, the most recent snow was two days ago.

Investigating in the Village

The PCs can speak with the headman, Kuwabara (a tall, thin man in his forties, with a narrow face, sharp eyes, and a thick head of hair), or with the doshin, Tokan, a shorter, wider man who seems more comfortable using his bo staff as a walking

stick than as a weapon. Both men can share the following information:

- Many villagers have glimpsed a strange, beautiful woman wandering through the forest, and sometimes they have heard her singing (“an unearthly voice, Lord, I know no other word for it”) in the mornings and evenings. She dresses like a “great lady of the court” in garments of white.
- These sightings first began around the start of winter. The first disappearance happened around that time as well (the villagers are vague about the exact time).
- A total of five village children, all between the ages of five and ten, have disappeared. All of them vanished out of their rooms, without warning or noise, through closed doors. All were later found dead in the snow, frozen solid, their blood drained through cuts in their wrists.
- The villagers will mention that their children are especially terrified, and speak of a “demon woman” who comes into their rooms at night.
- One village mother reports seeing the strange woman walking hand-in-hand with her son (a boy of about seven). The boy vanished a week later.
- The samurai Doji Ikari came to the village last week. He asked some questions and then, when he heard the singing on the evening breeze, went into the forest. He never came back. The villagers have not dared to search for him.
- If the PCs ask about strange events in the village, the peasants say nothing has ever happened here. If the PCs ask about deaths or murders, the villagers recount several people who died of old age, sickness, and accident. In the latter category is a girl, nine-year-old Tsubume, who drowned in the stream last autumn. “It was a simple accident, when the children were playing.” The

GM might require an **Intelligence** roll for the PCs to pick out this particular death from the list of eight or so.

- If the PCs ask, Tsubume's body was cremated as usual by the village *eta* family.

The Children

The big clue in the village is the children. The PCs will glimpse them constantly, hiding behind their parents, watching everything with wide and frightened eyes. None of them are noisy or excited, the way one would expect children to be.

If the PCs speak with the children directly, they will have to be cautious and gentle in order to get a response (otherwise the children just run and hide in terror). This may require a **Sincerity** roll, at the GM's option. Once the children open up, they can share the following information:

- The "cold lady" in the forest is an enigma to the children. Some of them are frightened of her. Others claim to have spoken with her, and say that "She's kind, but very sad."
- The children say that a "bad girl" or "demon woman" comes into their rooms at night, no matter what their parents do to protect them. "She tells us she's going to kill us, all of us, no matter what we do," the children whimper.
- If the PCs ask if the "demon woman" resembles anyone, the children will say no. An **Awareness** roll (TN 10) shows they are lying. Pressured, they quickly break down and confess that she looks like Tsubume, who drowned in the stream last autumn.
- If the PCs ask about Tsubume's death, the children claim she slipped and fell in the stream while they were playing. This, again, is a lie. Pressured, the children finally confess that they threw her in the stream because she made them angry. "She was acting all high-and-mighty, like she wasn't even a peasant! She looked at us like we were dirt, the way a samurai looks at an *eta*!"

If the PCs seem completely clueless about speaking with the children, introduce Haruka (see below) to give them a hint.

Researching Tsubume

Once the PCs have Tsubume's name and basic story, they may decide to learn more about her. Her family claims she was a "kind, sweet girl" who would never hurt anyone. They will confess, however, that she was a curious child who was always poking her nose into things and sometimes had to be scolded for it.

The children who knew her, if they are questioned carefully and systematically, will agree that Tsubume was "always exploring" but was usually a nice girl. She didn't start acting mean until the last few days before she drowned. If the PCs specifically ask about events at that time (was there anything unusual that happened, did anything strange happen, etc), the children mention that she went off exploring one day with the *eta* child, Haruka. (None of the other children ever spend time with poor Haruka.)

Haruka the Eta Child

The PCs will normally find Haruka by asking the other children about what Tsubume was doing before she drowned. However, if the PCs seem to have no idea that they should be speaking with the children, you can introduce Haruka as a clue-bus:

You notice a lone little girl, dressed in tattered clothing and smudged with dirt, standing in the snow watching you. Although she can't be more than seven years old, her expression is quiet and serious.

Haruka is an *eta* (although the PCs may not realize this at first) and therefore barely above an animal in the eyes of samurai. She possesses a quiet wisdom beyond her years, the result of her unpleasant upbringing, and also feels guilt that she may be in some way responsible for Tsubume's fate. If the PCs speak with her at all, she will say the following:

- She has no friends in the village, but Tsubume was nice to her sometimes. She told Tsubume about her "secret," and took her there, but then Tsubume

stole from her and turned mean and angry.

- She knows Tsubume is the ghost, since she has seen her in the night, stealing other children away. She fears that Tsubume is saving her for last, after all the other children are dead.
- If the PCs ask about her “secret,” Haruka will at first be cagey (“I found it, and no one else knows”) but can be persuaded to show it to the PCs. She will lead them to the Snake Ruins (see below).
- If the PCs ask what Tsubume “stole,” Haruka will say it was a “pretty” from the “secret place.” She also mentions that Tsubume didn’t have the “pretty” with her when she was brought to be cremated (this may be the PCs’ first hint that Haruka is an *eta*).
- If the PCs ask Haruka to describe her missing “pretty,” she will describe something which the PCs recognize as a necklace of gold and jade.

Exploring the Woods

If the PCs decide to explore the woods (in search of ghosts or of the elusive Doji Ikari), they find a mysterious winter wonderland:

The trees are bare of leaves, and every branch and twig wears a layer of snow. Not even animal tracks disturb the smooth coating of white on the ground, and all is silent except for the occasional wail of an icy breeze, wafting snow particles through the air.

If the PCs come in the early morning or evening (especially after hearing the song of Yuki-Onna), they can roll **Simple Void**. On a TN of 15 or more, they catch a glimpse of the Snow Maiden (see “Yuki-Onna” below).

If the PCs are searching specifically for Doji Ikari, have them roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 15 or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20. With a success, they find his frozen body (see “Ikari’s Body” below).

If the PCs are specifically searching for strange ruins or oddities, they can roll **Hunting** or

Investigation (TNs 20 and 25) to locate the Snake Ruins. Otherwise, these can only be located with the help of Haruka the *eta* girl.

If the PCs are searching the woods after the next disappearance, they can roll (same skills, or **Lore: Ghosts** or similar can be substituted) at TN 15 to find the frozen, bloodless body of the next victim. If the PCs search in the immediate aftermath of the next disappearance, they can roll at TN 20 to find Tsubume before she devours her next victim (see “Tsubume the Gaki”).

Yuki-Onna

Every morning and evening, Yuki-Onna’s haunting, beautiful, wordless song can be heard on the breeze. It is the most beautiful sound the PCs have ever heard. Any PC who suffers from Lost Love (or any similar disadvantage) falls under the effects of that disadvantage after hearing the song.

In order to find Yuki-Onna, the PCs will have to search the forest for her (as listed above). However, at the GM’s option, a male PC with very high Honor (or Dangerous Beauty) might attract her attention, causing her to come to the forest edge and speak with him voluntarily. Yuki-Onna can appear at any time of the day or night, but prefers dawn and dusk. Regardless, her appearance is always the same:

Suddenly, you are aware of a woman walking – no, dancing, whirling gently like a snowflake – between the trees. Her long black hair wafts around her lovely, perfect face like a cloud. She is dressed in a long, flowing kimono of white, with highlights of pale blue and gray. She stops suddenly and looks at you, and you are struck by the expression of deep, quiet sorrow on her face.

Any male PC who sees Yuki-Onna must roll **Simple Willpower** at TN 10 or be hopelessly smitten with her. Such PCs will desire nothing except to look upon her, and will forget about food, sleep, and everything else. They can only be broken out of this trance by being physically dragged away, or by making an **Honor Test** at TN 15 (this should not be free – other PCs will have to remind the entranced victim of his duty and honor before he can make the test). Yuki-Onna does not cause this effect voluntarily, and if the PCs demand that she “release her spell” or similar, she will either leave (if they are crude or

violent) or explain sorrowfully that she cannot (if they are polite).

Talking with Yuki-Onna

The Snow Maiden will speak with any PCs who are polite, soft-spoken, and honorable (at least Honor Rank 2). She will also speak with male PCs who are kind-hearted or pleasing to look upon (Dangerous Beauty), and may even become enamored of such PCs, at the GM's option.

Yuki-Onna's voice is soft and musical, like the chiming of icicles. The air around her is desperately cold, and PCs who spend more than a few minutes in her presence must roll **Simple Stamina** or take 1k1 Wounds from frostbite. If she is questioned politely and humbly, she will share what she knows:

- She has come here for reasons of her own, which she will not share. "I mean no harm, although harm often follows me." She will not explain her presence any further.
 - She is not responsible for the lost children. "There is an angry spirit in this land, a thing of malice, born out of water and hate. It wears a child's body, but the power within it is the power of Jigoku."
 - The evil spirit dwells in the "place where it was born," but also haunts a "cursed place" within the forest, where it kills. If the PCs ask (politely), Yuki-Onna can guide them to the "cursed place" (the Snake ruins).
 - Yuki-Onna has tried to protect the children from the evil spirit, but she has had little luck. "I know what it is to lose a child," she says, and a single tear runs down her face, turning to ice. She catches the tear and tucks it under her obi belt.
 - If the PCs ask about Doji Ikari, Yuki-Onna grows even more sorrowful. "I did not wish him harm," she says softly. "But he would not leave, whatever I wished." Again, if the PCs ask politely, she will guide them to Ikari's body (see below).
- If the PCs express the idea that Yuki-Onna's presence is harmful, and couch their words in the most compassionate possible terms, they may be able to persuade her to depart and leave the village of San no Mura in peace. (Invoking both the fear and misery of the villagers, and the fate of poor Doji Ikari, will be the most successful argument.) In this case, Yuki-Onna will voluntarily lead the PCs to Ikari's body before departing.

If the PCs are rude or cruel to Yuki-Onna, she will vanish in a cloud of snowflakes. If they are actually violent or threatening, her lovely face is suddenly contorted in anger. A ferocious blast of cold air, like the worst blizzard imaginable, blasts the PCs and knocks them sprawling. Yuki-Onna departs, never to be seen again, and the howling, bitter wind pursues the PCs all the way back to the village – all PCs take 4k4 damage from the bitter cold.

Ikari's Body

If the PCs find Doji Ikari (as a result of searching, or being led there by Yuki Onna), they see the following:

The frozen body of a samurai is sitting against a tree, coated with a light layer of snow. From his posture, he seems almost to be resting or relaxing for a moment, and the expression on his ice-encrusted face is one of wonder and delight.

The PCs will need *eta* to return Ikari's body. If Yuki Onna showed the PCs to his body, she looks sorrowfully on his body, then bows her head and weeps softly. Two icy tears fall on the ground at his frozen feet. Then she rises and vanishes in a whirl of wind and snowflakes.

The PCs can keep her tears, if they wish.

The Snake Ruins

The PCs can find the Snake Ruins by searching the forest (as listed above), by having Haruka the eta girl lead them there, or by having Yuki-Onna guide them there. (Yuki-Onna will only lead the PCs to the general area and then point toward the ruins before vanishing. Haruka will lead them right up to the ruins.)

Beneath the rounding-off layer of snow, you can just make out the outlines of an ancient stone foundation, the base of some building long-fallen. In the middle of the ruins, the snow turns crimson, stained with frozen blood. In the center of the stain is the rectangular shape of a dark hole in the ground.

If Haruka is here, she will be frightened by what has become of her “secret place.” The blood was never here before. (Of course, she hasn’t been here since winter began.) If the PCs question her further, she will explain that she would come here and hide in the hole in the ground, pretending she was in a great castle fortress. Her “pretties” are down there, but Tsubume took the “best one.”

If the PCs examine the ruins, they can roll **Intelligence** (or a suitable **Lore** skill, or a Kaiu skill such as **Siege** or **Engineering**) at TN 15 to surmise that they are the remains of a shrine or small temple. Careful examination (and a **Heraldry/Perception** roll at TN 20) will detect the very faint remains of the Snake mon on some of the stones. The PCs will need to roll **History** at TN 20, **Lore: Phoenix** at TN 15, **Lore: Shadowlands** at TN 20, or something similar to recall that the minor Clan of the Snake was wiped out by the Phoenix hundreds of years ago, supposedly after the entire clan was possessed by an evil Shadowlands spirit.

Within the Pit

If the PCs explore the hole, they find the floor about four feet below is a solid mass of frozen blood. PCs of delicate sensibilities will probably lose Honor for touching this blood, frozen or not, and even the stoniest Crab may find it an unsettling experience.

The chamber whose floor is so horribly stained is the collapsed basement of the shrine. It is mostly choked with old stone rubble and fossilized remnants of wooden beams. Lined up on a flat place are Haruka’s “pretties,” items which she found in the ruins: a lacquered wooden comb (brittle with age but intact), a pair of tarnished silver hair-pins, an ink-stone with the Snake Clan mon, and a broken wood-and-ivory puzzle-box (again brittle with age but intact).

None of these items are cursed or malign, although a faint aura of the Shadowlands Taint hangs about this entire place. Phoenix PCs will

probably feel duty-bound to destroy these items as remnants of the hated Snake Clan.

If the PCs come here at night, they may encounter the Gaki. They will certainly encounter it if they come here on the night that the Gaki takes another victim.

Tsubume the Gaki

The PCs are most likely to encounter Tsubume if they learn of either her place of death (the stream) or of the Snake Ruins where she was cursed. They may also encounter her if they lie in wait for her to take another victim (see below) or pursue her after she takes such a victim.

If the PCs visit the stream in or around where Tsubume died, they will be able to detect a faint Shadowlands Taint there. Tsubume rises from the frozen stream each night at midnight. If the PCs camp out in the freezing cold to watch for her, they will see the following:

Suddenly you hear a soft girlish laugh. A short slim shape, wrapped in a child’s kimono, rises from the stream, seemingly coming straight up through the ice. It floats above the ground and turns toward you, and you have a momentary impression of red glowing eyes.

If the PCs camp out at the Snake Ruins, Tsubume will appear there both before and after taking her next victim from the village.

Tsubume appears as a pretty girl of nine years, dressed in a bright yellow kimono (the garment she drowned in). Her innocent face, however, twists with malice, and a red light flickers in her eyes. Her fingernails are long and sharp, stained with dried blood, and the smell of rotten blood and death follows her everywhere. She speaks in a clear, sweet voice, and laughs delightedly while kidnapping and murdering her old playmates.

If the PCs make an **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 10 (or if they specifically look for Haruka’s “pretty”) they will notice a small necklace of gold and jade, engraved with the Snake mon, around Tsubume’s neck. The necklace glows with a faint, ghastly light whenever she kills or uses one of her magical powers.

The Next Victim

If the PCs spend the night in the village before dealing with Tsubume, she will kidnap and murder another child. The PCs may be able to intercept her if they are staying awake and alert. Otherwise, they may be able to pursue her afterward and save the child from being drained of blood at the Snake Ruins.

Tsubume's next target will be the six-year-old son of the village doshin, Tokan. She will float in through the wall of the house, mesmerize the boy, then pick him up and carry him out through the wall and into the forest. Tokan and his family will be held in magical slumber during this time, except for his other two children, who are awake and watch in helpless terror. If the PCs are staying with Tokan, Tsubume will try to put them to sleep as well. (See her statistics for how this ability works.)

Afterward, the other frantic children will awaken Tokan (and the PCs, if they were asleep), and the hue and cry will be raised. None of the peasants will dare pursue the ghost into the forest, however, not even the grief-stricken Tokan.

Fighting Tsubume

The Gaki is a fearsome opponent. Her body is selectively immaterial – normal weapons and blows pass right through it, but her filthy claws rip and rend the PCs quite easily. Her sweet voice and childish, playful laughter only add to the horror.

Tsubume cannot fly more than five feet off the ground, and normally moves at the pace of a walking man, but can move much faster (up to Water x 10) for a short time. She is fearsomely strong and will not release her victim without a struggle.

Jade, crystal, obsidian, and nemuranai can harm Tsubume, as can spells. Otherwise, she takes no damage from any physical attack. If she is badly wounded, she flies to the Snake Ruin, where she absorbs the blood of her kills, healing 6 Wounds per round until fully healed (at which point she goes out seeking vengeance on those who injured her).

If the PCs do not have weapons which can hurt Tsubume, the only way to defeat her is to destroy her necklace, which glows faintly each time she uses one of her powers (**Perception** at TN 10 to

notice this). The necklace is TN 25 to hit and takes a total of 20 points of damage to destroy. If it is destroyed, it shatters in a cloud of stinking dust, and Tsubume suddenly stops moving:

Suddenly the thing before you goes still. The malice vanishes from its face, replaced by sorrow. It opens its mouth as though to say something, but then breaks apart into a cloud, like dust in a breeze. You can no longer smell the stench of blood.

If the PCs are in or near the woods when this happens, and if they have not offended Yuki-Onna, they see the following additional sight:

The Snow Maiden stands amid the trees, but now there is a child next to her, a little girl. The Maiden takes the girl's hand gently and speaks to her in a soft voice. You catch the words, "time to go on now... the realm of Waiting." The girl nods, turns, and waves goodbye to you. A moment later she is gone, as though she never was. The Snow Maiden bows gravely to you and vanishes back into the forest.

If the PCs manage to destroy Tsubume without destroying the necklace, she vanishes with a despairing, bloodcurdling wail into a cloud of foul smoke and ash. The necklace falls to the ground with a faint clatter. Foolish PCs can keep it...

Conclusion

If the PCs destroyed Tsubume the Gaki, they have succeeded in their mission and earn 1 XP. At the GM's option, PCs who place a high value on Compassion might also earn a point of Honor for protecting the peasants. And of course the PCs might have the necklace...

If the PCs convinced Yuki-Onna to guide them to the body of Doji Ikari, she shed two tears there. A PC who takes those tears (they cannot be shared) will receive the appropriate cert.

Tsubume the Gaki

FIRE 1 Agility 2	AIR 4
EARTH 3	WATER 3 Strength 4

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 2.3

TN to be Hit: 15

Attacks: 5k2 (two per round, one if she is carrying a victim)

Damage: 4k2 (sharp claws)

Wounds: 70: Dead.

Special Abilities: Blood Claws, Blood Regeneration, Dark Wind of Sleep, Fear (rank 2), Flight, Ghostly Invulnerability, Insubstantial, Mesmerism.

Blood Claws: Tsubume can shoot spines of dried, frozen blood out of her claws. These ghastly missiles have a range of ten yards, roll 3k2 to attack, ignore armor and School Techniques, and inflict 3k2 damage. The victim must roll Simple Earth at TN 10 or gain a point of Taint.

Blood Regeneration: If Tsubume stands in the blood of her previous victims, she heals 6 wounds per round.

Dark Wind of Sleep: Tsubume can put adults to sleep by making a Contested roll of her Air against their Stamina. She can target one victim (within fifty yards) per round. Once asleep, the targets can only be wakened by being physically shaken or damaged (noise will not work).

Fear (rank 2): PCs must roll Willpower at TN 10 or be unable to spend Void against Tsubume.

Flight: Tsubume floats above the ground. She normally moves at standard Water x 3 speed (15 feet per round) but can put on a burst of speed (Water x 10, 150 feet per round) for up to six total rounds per day.

Ghostly Invulnerability: Tsubume is completely immune to normal attacks (they simply pass through her body). Jade, crystal, obsidian, and nemuranai affect her normally, as do spells.

Insubstantial: Tsubume can pass through physical objects (walls, trees, etc) at will.

Mesmerism: By staring directly into someone's eyes, Tsubume can mesmerize them, causing them to stand helpless, silent, and unmoving. This requires her to make a Contested Willpower roll. A mesmerized victim can break free by making a Willpower roll at TN 25 or an Honor Test at TN 20. Otherwise, the effect lasts until dawn.