



2013
GENCON
RPG



*Legend of the
Five Rings*

NAISHOU PROVINCE





SECRETS OF THE EMPIRE: NAISHOU PROVINCE

WRITTEN BY: *Maxime Lemaire & Robert Hobart*
EDITED BY: *Robert Hobart*
ART DIRECTOR: *Shawn Carman*
COVER DESIGN: *Robert Denton*
COVER ART: *Gong Studios*
LAYOUT: *Robert Denton*
ORIGINAL GRAPHIC DESIGN: *Edge Entertainment*
ARTISTS: *Hannah B, Drew Baker, Stefano Baldo, Noah Bradley, Sergio Camarena, Brent Chumley, Edwin David, Max Degen, John Donahue, Lino Drieghe, Shen Fei, Tony Foti, Felipe Gaona, Gong Studios, Ancor Hernandez, Hectro Herrera, Jeff Hill, Lynn Hunter, Aurelien Hubert, Jason Juta, Heather Kreiger, Greg Lambrakis, Asier Lopez, J. Matar, Patrick McEvoy, John Moriarty, Carlos NCT, Glen Osterberger, Mateusz Ozminski, Aaron Miller, Erich Schreiner, Jazz Siy, Alain Viesca, Wenjuinn, Imaginary Friends Studios, Robert Denton*
PRODUCTION MANAGER: *David Lepore*
SENIOR BRAND MANAGER: *Todd Rowland*
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER: *John Zinser*

HEAD PLAYTESTER: *Brian Bates*
PLAYTESTERS: *Team 1 (Dave Smith, Patrick Chen, Aien Elmi, Jason Kang, Ki Chang Kim, Roger Liang, Arthur Nguyen); Team 4 (Becca Hobart, Kevin Blake, Todd Stites, Daniel Briscoe); Team 6 (Timar Long, Erykah Fasset, Chad Kirby, Mike Brodu, Maxime Lemaire, Ray Rupp); Team 7 (Jason Shafer, Nathan Shafer, Matt Strout, Liza Strout, Joe White, Terry Moore, Eric Newlin); Team 8 (Edward Reynolds, Brebouillet Mathieu, David Whitney, Richard Whitney, Stuart Biggs, Robert Knight); Team 8b (Michael Hill, Shane Pheeny, Chaedy Ritherdon, Tarl Cowly); Team 8c (Thomas Atwood, Ryan Castilla, Henry Joiner, Brandon Woodmen); Team 17 (Tom Lewis, Jamie Kipp, Gavin O'Hearn, Shawn MacLean, John Taylor); Team 18 (Dave Laderoute, Mike Clark, Chris Talarico, Chris Masdea, Lee Vøllum, Richard Hewitt, Bill Hrenchuck); Team 19 (Charles Caswell, Vincent Stantion, Eddie Sweeden, Chuck Sweeden, Justin Cross, Fox Whitworth); Team 20 (Matt Tyler, Timothy Hill, Stephen Mumford, Matthew Linkswiler, Paul Casagrande, Robert Zapf); Team 21 (James Freeman-Harris, Sarah Koz, David Wright, James Mosingo); Team 22 (Scott Shepard, Dawn Dalton, Andrew Doud, Justin Davidson, Jon Huskey, Trista Lillis); Team 23 (James Wagner, Kevin Pason, Ryan Bataglia, Chris Foster, Jim Friedman, Jason Whiston, Phil Jenicek, Dan Sulin, Izzy Lombardi-Friedman); Team 24 (Tony Love, Cassandra Mullin, Brian Tieken, Kimberly Wajer-Scott, Phillip Scott, Nicholas Love, Jerry Fleenor, Patrick Williams)*

Secrets of the Empire: Naishou Province



CREDITS



WWW.L5R.COM

Table of Contents

Map of Naishou Province . . . 3



Introduction 4

New Mechanics 6



Chapter One:

Toshi No Naishou 9

The City 9

Important City Locations 13

Relations With the

Rest of the Province 19

The Governor's Court 20

Military Figures of

Naishou Province 27

Religious Figures of

Naishou Province 30

Other Prominent Figures

in Naishou Province 32



Chapter Two: Settlements of Naishou Province 35

Koso Mura, The Rival Village 35

Hitori Mura, the Solitary Village . . . 38

Shizu Mura, the Mysterious Village. 40

Minor Settlements 42



Chapter Three: Geography of Naishou Province 53

The Kawa Forest 55

Omikura Swamp 56

Tsunegawa Lake 56

The Itochu River 57

The Taru Mountains 58

The Nobu Valley 60

Wildlife of Naishou Province 62



Chapter Four: *A Plague of Crimes* 65

Introduction 65

Aian Village 66

Danshou Village 70

Houi Village 71

Jouzousho Village 71

Juujiro Village 74

Koujou Village 75

Mujitsu Village 77

Sencha Village 78

Tenraku Village 79

Yasuragi Monastery 80

Boubi, the Ronin Village 81

Resolving the Adventure 83

The Cultists 83

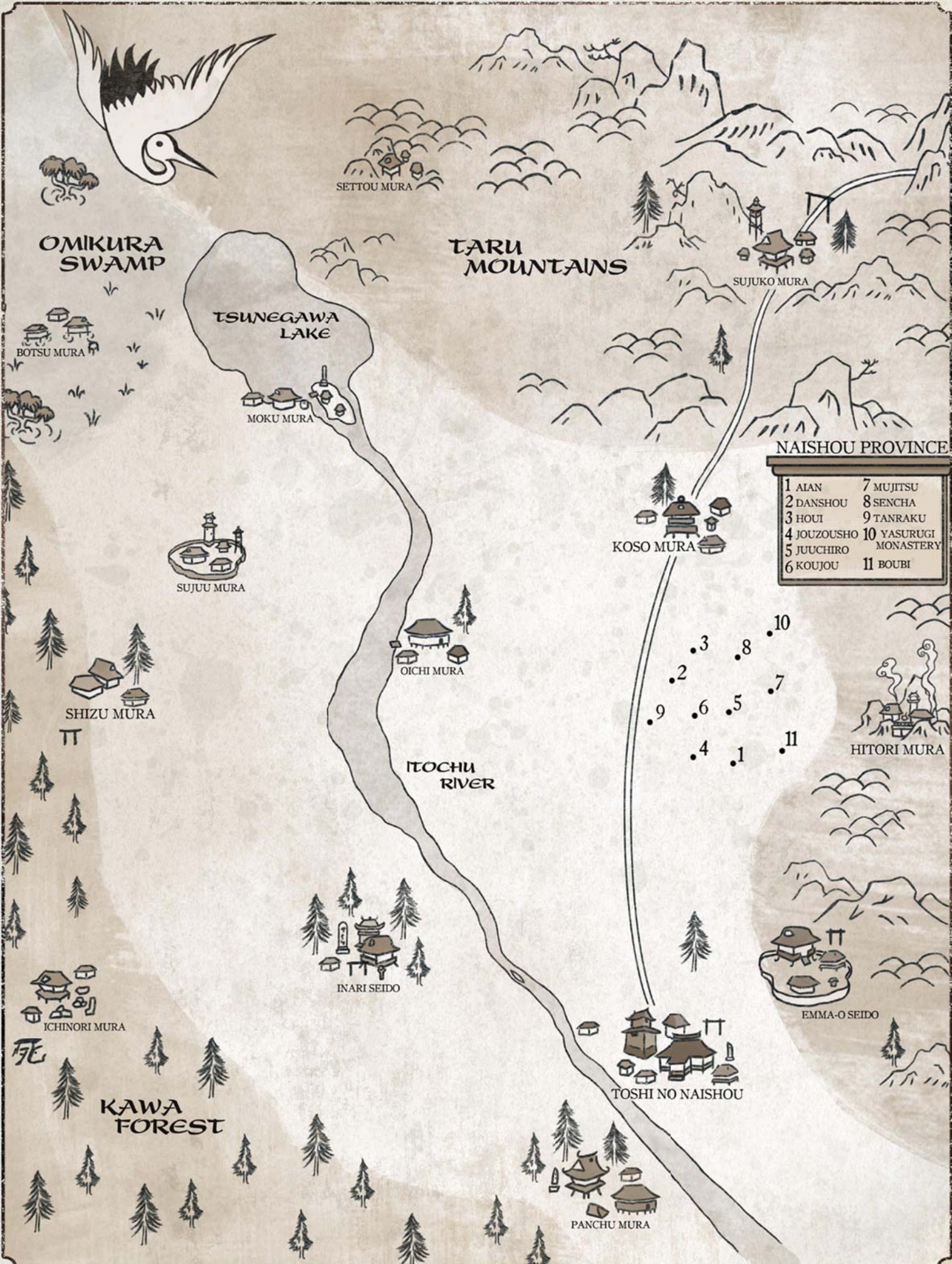
The Ronin Band 85

Pre-Generated Player Characters . . . 86



The Journal of Isawa Taeko . . 94





NAISHOU PROVINCE	
1 AIAN	7 MUJITSU
2 DANSHOU	8 SENCHA
3 HOUI	9 TANRAKU
4 JOUZOUSHO	10 YASURUGI MONASTERY
5 JUUCHIRO	11 BOUBI
6 KOUJOU	

OMIKURA SWAMP

SETTOU MURA

TARU MOUNTAINS

SUJUKO MURA

TSUNEGAWA LAKE

BOTSU MURA

MOKU MURA

NAISHOU PROVINCE

SUJU MURA

KOSO MURA

ITOCHU RIVER

OICHI MURA

SHIZU MURA

HITORI MURA

INARI SEIDO

EMMA-O SEIDO

ICHINORI MURA

TOSHI NO NAISHOU

KAWA FOREST

PANCHU MURA

Handwritten vertical text on the right margin.



SECRETS OF THE EMPIRE

NAISHOU PROVINCE



Bayushi Itaru slowly dismounted from his horse, handing the reins to one of his subordinates. He made sure his daisho was properly adjusted in his belt, his armor stainless, before walking slowly toward his adversary. After all, he mused, it would be unwise to face a Crane without looking his very best.

"Doji Ayumi-san," he said as he bowed low, offering his counterpart the respect she had earned on their battlefields. "What a glorious morning. I trust the Fortunes find you well today."

"Bayushi Itaru-san," she answered, bowing in the exact same way. Her loose-flowing white hair contrasted sharply with his single tightly-wound braid. "I am very well, thank you. Are we not fortunate to be in such esteemed company, and in some of the most beautiful lands in the Empire?"

"Indeed," Itaru answered with a small nod. Looking around himself, he realized he genuinely agreed with her polite small talk. From where he stood he could see much of the Nobu Valley, its rolling plains peppered with small villages, the dark green shadow of the Kawa Forest in the horizon, and the dimmer gray shadow of the Taru Mountains beyond. It would have been an idyllic scene... were it not for the troops massed behind him, and the Crane army opposite. Of course, even those were both glorious displays of the Empire's might.

A shame it would soon have to end.

"Are you ready?" Ayumi said, falling into her dueling stance. The soldiers gathered around her tensed, their eyes narrowing as she watched for any possible transgression of the dueling rules.

"Always," Itaru replied. But as he cleared his mind and prepared to take his own stance, something in the distance caught his gaze. A lone samurai, holding a gold-and-brown banner high above him, had appeared on the road coming down from the mountains.

Ayumi noticed his gaze, and relaxed just enough to follow it.

"Lion," she said. "It seems they too have come to claim Naishou Province for themselves."

"I am not so sure," Itaru answered. "Look at the mon at the bottom of the banner."

Ayumi squinted for a moment, then her eyes widened in surprise. "The Miya? What are they doing here... and with the Lion?"

Itaru turned back toward her. "Whatever the reason, I would say our duel to the death will have to be rescheduled. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes," she said curtly as she motioned for her troops to prepare a retreat. "A pity. I looked forward to this whole matter being over. One way or the other."

"The world dies every day," Itaru said, his smile concealed by his mempo. "Tomorrow, a new world will be born."

Lion troops begin to pour through the mountain pass, following their standard bearer. Itaru found himself imagining the whole province holding its breath, unsure what new changes the wind had brought to its coveted lands.



Introduction: How to Use This Product

Welcome to Naishou Province, our latest supplement for the Legend of the Five Rings RPG, 4th Edition. Our goal with this product is to provide GMs and players with a complete setting in which to set their adventures. Naishou Province is a single unaligned province of the Empire, described in as much detail as possible, from its august Imperial Governor to the smallest of its villages. The contents are also designed to tie in with our upcoming product *Secrets of the Empire*, which focuses on factions which have received only light treatment in L5R 4th Edition up until now: the Minor Clans, Imperial samurai, ronin, and the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Although a copy of that book is not required to make use of this product, the two complement each other very easily.

This introduction offers a short history of Naishou Province, together with a few mechanics of particular note to be used with it.

Chapter 1: Toshi no Naishou details the provincial capital of Naishou, including the city itself and its locations of note, the samurai attending the Governor's Court, and the prominent figures of the Province, from military leaders to humble artisans.

Chapter 2: Settlements of Naishou describes the numerous smaller settlements of Naishou Province, including many villages which can also be used as generic settings for adventures elsewhere in Rokugan.

Chapter 3: Geography of Naishou covers the physical features of the Province, including its mountains, forest, and rivers, as well as several other places of note and interest.

Chapter 4: A Plague of Crimes is a complete sample adventure set within one portion of Naishou Province, in which a group of PCs investigate a series of mysterious murders and disappearances in a cluster of remote villages.

Our intent here is to present you with a complete campaign setting, similar to those found in our Elemental series of books but on a larger scale and with more depth, detail, and options for adventure. A campaign set in Naishou could be a tale of courtly intrigue, trying to wrestle control of the Province away from the Governor, but it could also be a military saga protecting the Province from invasions or bandit attacks, or a mystical investigation into the legends and superstitions of the area.

We have kept the exact location of Naishou Province deliberately vague so it can be set in whatever location best suits your campaign. It can easily be placed in any area outside the classical borders of Great Clan territories, since it is somewhat isolated by its geographical features, and with a few changes in its history and NPCs it can also be set inside a clan's domain. You should feel free to modify the Province and change any details which do not fit your version of Rokugan, such as Great Clans or family names which do not exist in your story; the various elements of Naishou are designed to be independent of each other so that the whole

will not fall apart if you change some aspects. In fact, you can also pick out a single village, character, or location and drop it somewhere else in Rokugan! This product should be seen first and foremost as a source to be mined for ideas, not as a strict and confined depiction of things in only one way.

The History of Naishou Province

While Naishou Province is certainly not the most famous province in the Empire, it nonetheless has an ancient and celebrated history and is the site of numerous battles and political struggles to control its prosperous valleys. The Province's status is currently hanging in the balance while it is under the temporary governance of the Imperial families. Many clans have sent courtiers, soldiers, and priests to Naishou in hope of securing key advantages and bringing it into their sphere of influence, and as a result the Province is a hotbed of activity and interaction between many different factions.

The area that would eventually become known as Naishou Province was already inhabited when the Kami fell to the mortal realm at the Dawn of the Empire. Three major tribal groups occupied the area: the Yamataru tribe, which lived in the mountains and built numerous shrines to the Fortunes; the Morikawa tribe, which survived off the bounty of the forest and maintained odd rites to placate the strange spirits living there; and the Takanobu tribe, which grew rice and waged war in the valley comprising the rest of the Province. When the samurai of the nascent Empire first arrived in the region, they found it a prosperous place, for the Takanobu had slowly driven the other tribes out of the valley and dominated the area.





The samurai ended the conflicts between the tribes and brought the gifts of Hantei's civilization to them; most of the locals readily accepted their new leaders as a gift from the Fortunes. However, soon the First War against Fu Leng erupted and conflict swept through the region. Although they fought bravely, the warriors of the tribes were all but annihilated, and the samurai departed the empty area. After the Day of Thunder, the Naishou Province was judged too damaged to be worth rebuilding and the growing clans left it alone, an unaligned territory within the borders of the Empire.

It took many years for Naishou to really recover, but the surviving people of the Province were proud of their ancestry and persevered where others might have given up. Small villages grew larger and more numerous, and Toshi no Naishou became a center for commerce which helped strengthen and unify the whole Province. Imperial tax collectors visited the Province annually and brought back a slowly but steadily increasing bounty from the hard-working citizens. The Province's geography, surrounded by a small chain of mountains and a rather large forest, did not fully isolate it but kept it somewhat distant from the minds of the Great Clans.

All it took for this isolation to change was a single lost samurai who wandered into the Province seeking shelter from a storm. He realized that what had once been a backwater region of little interest was now a beautiful well-settled area able to support a significant population. Soon, petitions abounded in the Imperial Court for one clan or another to be granted custody of the Province, while the Lion gathered an army to seize it by force before anybody else could do so.

The Province changed hands many times during these years, and at times it seemed the clans might destroy their prize rather than allow anyone else to control its riches. Eventually, in what was seen as a rebuke to the more aggressive clans, the Province was assigned to the Phoenix Clan, officially due to its spiritual significance. Always one of the smallest of Great Clans, the Phoenix only sent as few samurai to control the Province, confident in the Emperor's edicts to protect what was now theirs. They made few changes in what was already in place, and the Province's local population was able to carry on as it had before, enjoying a renewed era of peace and quiet prosperity. Over time the Phoenix slowly withdrew their limited presence, since Naishou was seen as a safe and mostly self-administrating area. The few samurai who remained were often older men and women, close to retirement, assigned to simple duties such as overseeing a single village until old age claimed them. It even became common for samurai from other clans to retire in Naishou Province, since it had several monasteries and was in general a place of peace.

It took another coincidence for the Province to return to the Empire's attention. A traveler from the Crane Clan was visiting Naishou Province when he learned the Phoenix governor had just died, leaving no heir. The Phoenix had pulled away nearly all of their remaining samurai from the Province to attend to other problems, leaving no one to

step in and administer the lands. Claiming outrage at the lack of attention given to the Emperor's lands, the Crane samurai immediately claimed the Province in the name of the Crane Clan, and his clan's leadership readily supported him, sending troops to enforce their will. However, no sooner did the Crane arrive than an army from the Scorpion Clan appeared on the border, claiming the last Governor of the Phoenix Clan had fathered a son on one of their unmarried samurai-ko and this made the Province theirs to rule. The Crane of course rejected this claim, and war erupted once more (although this time both combatants were careful not to damage their prize overmuch). The war was coming to a climax, with the generals on both sides seeking to duel their counterpart, when a Lion Clan army arrived – not to join the war but to end it. The Lion were escorting a Miya samurai who the Emperor had appointed as the new Governor.

Naishou Province's fate now hangs in the balance. The Governor cannot call on much strength from the humble Miya family, but with the help of the Lion he is currently managing to keep the Province under control. Most Great Clans have sent delegates to the new Governor's court to plead for the right to oversee the Province, but it is clear the Miya family has no intention of making a hasty choice. A rumor claiming the Governor holds Minor Clans in high esteem has led to an unusually high number of representatives from Rokugan's most humble factions, each hoping to win recognition here. In the meantime, the surplus of samurai in the Province has boosted its economy. Many ronin have come to protect the interests of local merchants or offer their services to the many different factions vying for influence. But this also means there are many bold warriors present in a relatively small region, and the populace fears war could soon erupt anew. Only time will tell whether Naishou Province will fall into a clan's orbit or remain an Imperial holding.

New Game Mechanics

THE LION ELITE SPEARMEN

At the Dawn of the Empire, the spear was the most common melee weapon among the tribes who lived in what became Rokugan. The tribal warriors who followed Akodo and his chief lieutenant Matsu were particularly skilled in the ways of the spear, both as a hand-to-hand weapon and a short-range missile, and these spearmen formed the backbone of the Lion armies during the First War. In the era of peace that followed under Hantei Genji, the Lion as a whole shifted more toward the way of the sword, which all of Rokugan's leading figures (including Akodo and Matsu themselves) considered to be the first and most honorable weapon of the samurai. However, within the ranks of the Matsu family there were many traditionalists who continued to uphold the spear-fighting traditions of their ancestors. Matsu Shujo, one of Lady Matsu's grandsons, took it upon himself to organize their training and founded their first dojo, where he eventually developed their first Techniques.

In modern times, the Lion Clan's spearman units are relatively few in number and are considered by the other Great Clans to be something of a holdover from a simpler era (as discussed in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air*, page 35). Nonetheless, they maintain their dojo and continue to serve as useful components in the overall structure of the Lion armies. Although the school is still customarily referred to as the Lion Elite Spearman, it is maintained by the Matsu family and they form the bulk of its students.

Several spearman units were brought by the Lion to escort the new Miya Governor of Naishou Province, and have gained the admiration of the more tradition-minded inhabitants of the Province.

NEW BASIC SCHOOL: LION ELITE SPEARMEN [BUSHI]

- ☉ Benefit: +1 Reflexes
- ☉ Starting Honor: 5.5
- ☉ Skills: Battle, Defense, Kenjutsu, Lore: History, Polearms, Spears (Magari-Yari), any one Bugei or High Skill
- ☉ Outfit: Normal clothing, daisho, bundle of ten nage-yari, spear (magari-yari), any one other spear or polearm, light or ashigaru armor, traveling pack, 5 koku

TECHNIQUES

RANK 1: THE WAY OF MAGARI-YARITJUTSU

The basic lesson of the Elite Spearman School is to rely on one's spears for both offense and defense, eschewing heavy armor in favor of the more flexible options provided by a longer weapon. You gain a +1k0 bonus to Skill rolls with Spears and Polearms. When wielding a spear or polearm in the Center, Defense, or Full Defense stance, your skillful deflection of blows awards you Reduction equal to half of your Rank in the Skill.

RANK 2: STRIKE LIKE THE LION

The trained Elite Spearman infuses his honor and self-discipline into every blow he delivers. When wielding a spear or polearm (in melee or with ranged attacks), you may ignore an amount of enemy Reduction equal to half of your current Honor Rank (rounded up).

RANK 3: STRIKE THROUGH THE EAGLE

The Elite Spearman are trained to advance on the foe while hurling barrages of nage-yari to disrupt their defenses and open holes in their lines. You may ready/draw a nage-yari as a Free Action any number of times per Round, and your ranged (hand-hurled) attacks with nage-yari are considered Simple Actions.

RANK 4: STRIKE LIKE THE WIND

At this rank, the Elite Spearman learns to attack faster than a snake's flickering tongue. You may make melee attacks as a Simple Action when wielding a spear or a polearm.

THE MAGARI-YARI

The so-called magari-yari is an unusual type of spear used almost exclusively by the Lion Clan and particularly by the Matsu Elite Spearman. It is easily recognized by its triple-bladed head, which sets it apart from the standard single-headed Rokugani yari. Although the Matsu family as a whole favors the katana, a number of famous Matsu warriors have employed the magari-yari, such as the notorious Clan War hero Matsu "the Butcher" Gohei.

- ☉ Keywords: Large
- ☉ DR: 3k2
- ☉ Special Rules: The magari-yari may be thrown a maximum range of 30', and has a DR of 2k2 when thrown.
- ☉ Price: 7 koku.

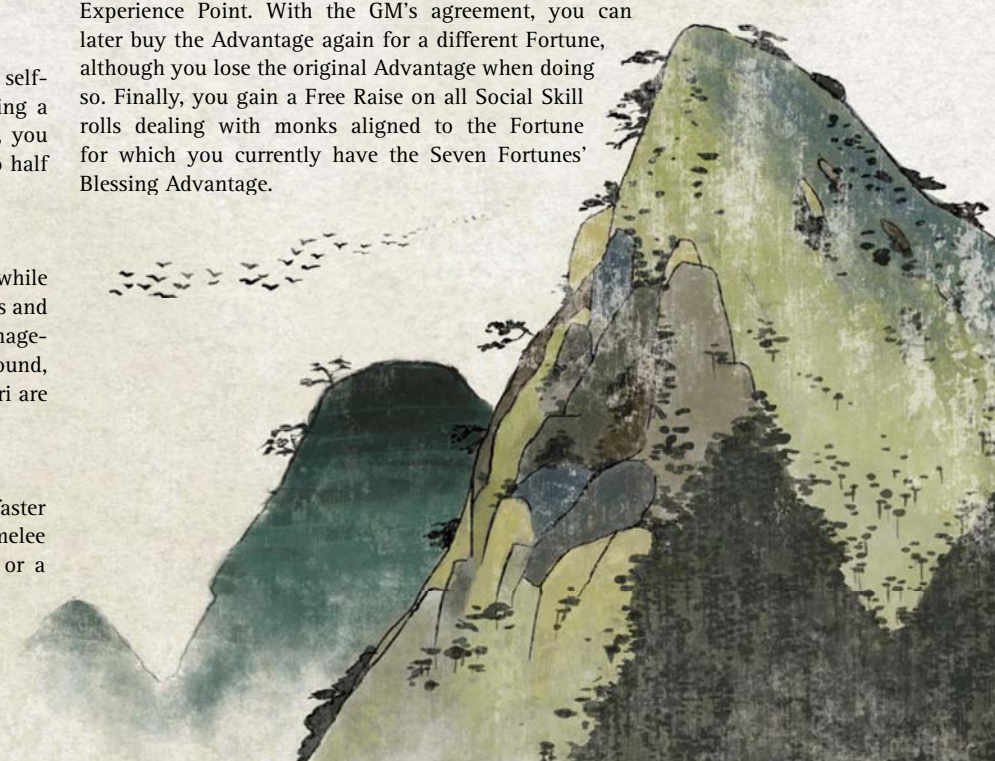


RANK 5: STRIKE WITH THE SOUL

The final lesson of the Elite Spearman School is to fight in complete harmony with one's spear, striking more swiftly than thought, bringing down the foe with a relentless barrage of attacks. When fighting in melee with a spear or polearm, you may perform the Extra Attack Maneuver for only three Raises. When hurling spears as missile weapons, you may make one attack as a Free Action.

NEW ADVANTAGE: NAISHOU CITIZEN (3 POINTS)

You are an inhabitant of Naishou Province, a proud and ancient area which has remained dedicated to the worship of the Fortunes through difficult times. You can buy a Seven Fortunes' Blessing Advantage for one less Experience Point. With the GM's agreement, you can later buy the Advantage again for a different Fortune, although you lose the original Advantage when doing so. Finally, you gain a Free Raise on all Social Skill rolls dealing with monks aligned to the Fortune for which you currently have the Seven Fortunes' Blessing Advantage.





HOU

TVSHI



Chapter One

8

TOSHI NO NAISHOU

The City

Toshi no Naishou is the economic and political center of Naishou Province, and in many ways it is what makes the region a unified political entity. Situated on the western bank of the Itochu River, it is by far the largest settlement in the Province, more than twice as big as the next one (Koso Mura), and has only increased in size since the arrival of the new Imperial Governor. It spreads in a semi-circle from the Governor's palace located on the riverbank. The eastern bank of the river is generally seen as inauspicious and has remained largely bare of any construction, housing only the city's *eta* community, left to admire the rest of the city from afar.

THE SAMURAI QUARTER

The area immediately around the Governor's Palace is the samurai quarter, and is delimited by a small stone wall which – although kept in good repair – is more symbolic than practical. The samurai quarter sits on a rocky promontory, placing it on stable ground above the level of any possible flooding, and also allowing the residents to overlook the rest of the city (which many samurai appreciate). Its houses vary in style and quality, having been built gradually over the course of many years, and as the samurai population has waxed and waned some parts of the district have fallen into disrepair while others enjoy renewal. In many ways the samurai quarter is

almost a city in itself – it has its own temples, inns, tea houses, restaurants, and other such conveniences, with the result that many samurai residents do not visit the rest of the city on a regular basis.

Typically only two guards keep watch over the single gate that leads through the wall surrounding the samurai quarter, but this is more than enough to mark it as a different world from that of the peasantry, who need explicit permission to visit this part of the city. Typically only servants visit the samurai quarter regularly, while the rest of the heimin population considers business “inside the wall” to be none of its concern.

Like many cities, Toshi no Naishou's development was never really planned, and the development of the samurai quarter has been somewhat haphazard. The district has a confusing and tangled network of streets and important homes and locations sometimes seem to be placed illogically. The only things keeping the area readily navigable are its relatively small size and the river which runs along one side of it; many samurai make use of the river for trips from one part of the quarter to another, and there are always several small ferry-boats trolling along the banks looking for samurai customers.

The whole samurai quarter is regularly patrolled by troops from the Lion garrison, so crime and other sorts of trouble are quite rare. Recently, the Imperial Governor has outlawed duels in the quarter except for sanctioned duels taking place within his own court; this measure was taken to make sure the district remains peaceful despite the presence of so many samurai from different rival clans and factions.



THE MERCHANT DISTRICT

Enveloping the samurai quarter is the merchant district, which also doubles as an entertainment district for samurai and peasants alike. Here the whole Province comes to sell and trade wares, and the area is always buzzing with activity. In contrast to the often-chaotic commercial areas of other cities, here business is always conducted in an orderly and polite manner, since the traditionally-minded population refuses to take too much pride in matters of money. Many families have been trading with one another for generations, and as such transactions are often a matter of personal informal arrangement rather than real negotiation. Trading interactions also frequently double as social calls where merchants exchange news and gossip, and many inns and tea houses host such meetings.

Patrolling of this district is generally left to peasant enforcers, and several families of *doshin* take pride in helping maintain the peace in this densely populated neighborhood. So much money inevitably attracts bad intentions, and some criminal organizations are known to operate in the area, some of them as old as the city itself. They control most of the seedier forms of entertainment, such as brothels and gambling houses, which keep a low profile lest they offend the eyes of

honorable persons. For the more refined tastes of proper samurai, the districts boasts a number of theaters and geisha houses, and although their quality is less than the handful of such establishments found of the samurai quarter they are also more affordable and approachable. The quarter is also famous for its many dancers and comedians, an offshoot of the city's passion for religious festivals. The evenings frequently see troupes of such performers working in the streets by lantern-light, and the competitions between different troupes is fierce and occasionally less than cordial.

The merchant district has access to less of the riverside than the samurai quarter, but makes more efficient use of it in the form of two actual ports. The north-side port usually takes care of all activities related to trade within the Province, and as such is usually quieter and somewhat friendlier; business here is often a personal matter, as in the rest of the district. The port south of the samurai quarter handles goods and trade from outside the Province, and is often seen as a harsher and riskier place but also one offering more opportunities. The workers in the two ports have a personal rivalry between them, although no one remembers how it started, and brawls between dockworkers are a frequent problem.



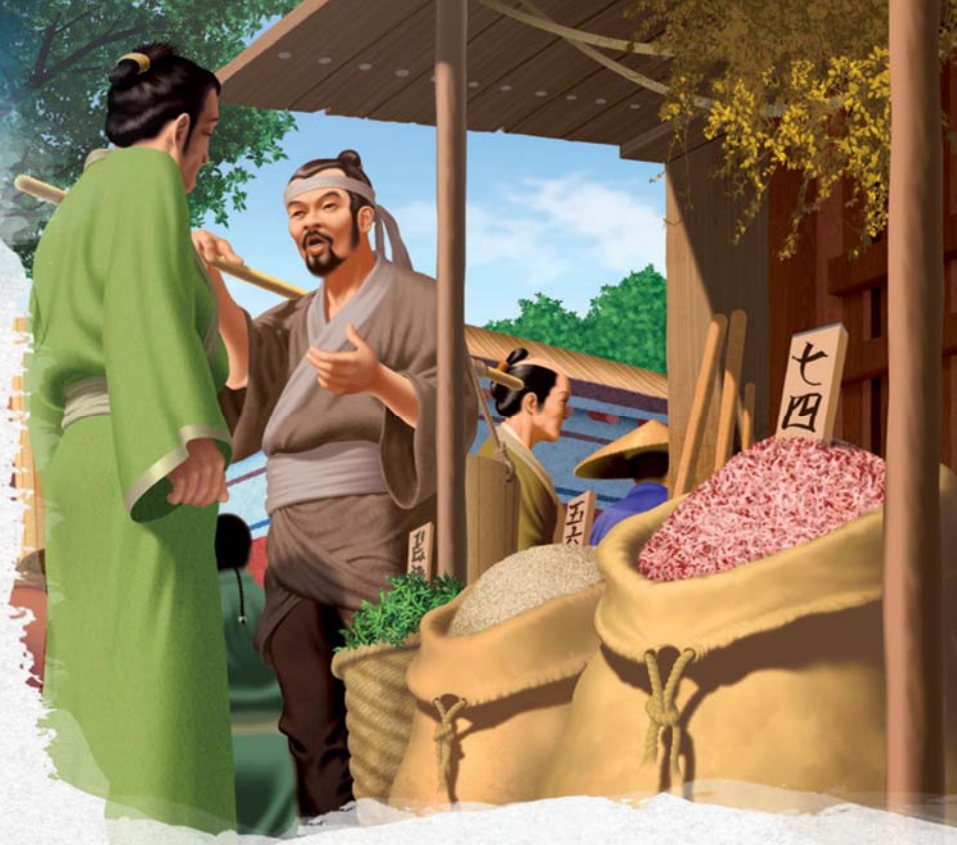
THE HEIMIN RESIDENCES

The city's third layer, less regular in shape and spreading for longer both inland and along the river, is home to bulk of the heimin population, including craftsmen, fishermen, and farmers. The craftsmen generally live close to the merchant district, since this is where their products are sold, and in fact the line between merchant district and craftsmen's neighborhoods is often rather blurred. A wide variety of craftsmen can be found here, since the Province is used to living in relative isolation from the rest of the Empire and the city, by default, became the place everyone went for unusual items. Carpenters are particularly respected due to the region's need for self-reliance, and the master carpenters of the city are often hired to help outlying towns with new construction or repairs. The quality of their work has helped ensure Naishou Province's continued prosperity and has given them an elevated status in the eyes of the *heimin* populace (and even of the few samurai who pay attention to such things).

The district also houses numerous blacksmiths, manufacturing everything from samurai weapons and armor to the innumerable tools and utensils needed by the common folk. The city's smiths are heavily dependent on the ore shipments from the mines in the Province's mountains, and their work is sometimes badly disrupted by the somewhat irregular deliveries from the miners. This has led to tensions between the two groups, occasionally requiring armed escorts to protect visiting miners lest they be attacked by angry mobs. Since the city's craftsmen area is usually a quiet and hard-working neighborhood, these rare incidents are even more noticeable and shocking.

The city's large population of fishermen live along both sides of the Itochu River, making them the only group other than the eta to have residences on the eastern bank. The fishermen are somewhat less organized than the other trades, and often work in small family units. It is not uncommon for unmarried fishermen to sleep in their own boats on the riverbank rather than live in huts. In contrast to the commercial ports, there is no rivalry between fishermen who live in different areas, and the river has so far provided plenty of work for all. Still, with the city growing the fishermen find themselves venturing a little farther along the river each year to catch enough. As with anywhere in Rokugan, sailors in Toshi no Naishou are a superstitious lot, and whatever room on the riverbank is not used for housing or docks is crowded with small shrines to a variety of fortunes, frequently decorated with images of the giant salamander for which the Province is famous.

Toshi no Naishou has a sizable population of farmers in its outer neighborhoods, closest to the fields and rice paddies which supply much of the city's food. The farmers tend to prefer their own company, and visiting the outskirts of the city can feel like entering an oversized peasant village: the streets are quiet, devoid of art or ornament, and the people all seem to know each other. The only change wrought by the size of the city is



that some farmers have to travel quite far to reach their fields, so in recent times the city has arranged for wagons to ferry the workers back and forth. Every morning and evening, the roads outside the city are crowded with wagons carrying farmers to and from their labors, an odd sight for those from elsewhere in the Empire.

The city's outskirts are also where many *doshin* have their homes, since they prefer to live in quiet areas away from the neighborhoods where they must pursue their duties. This also lets them look after their heimin neighbors when there is occasional trouble, and thereby keep the samurai from having to step in over trivial local problems.

The farmer neighborhoods are also home to the city's distilleries, conveniently close to the fields where rice and grain are produced. In contrast to the rest of the *heimin* districts, these are heavily guarded, by *doshin* and even the occasional ronin. The local brewers' techniques are quite unique, having been refined for generations separate from the rest of the Empire, and they guard their secrets as dearly as any samurai. Naishou sake is known as a light, sweet-tasting beverage which – while not particularly famous outside the Province – is popular with those who are connoisseurs of drink. The brewers usually offer a bottle of sake to each farmer's household at the end of the year in thanks for their hard work growing the vital rice crop. As a result, the new year's festival in these districts is often much livelier than elsewhere in Rokugan.

A notable feature of these neighborhoods is that Toshi no Naishou has no external walls, and as such the peasantry is the city's first line of defense should it ever be attacked. This is not quite so dangerous as might be thought, since the earlier wars over the Province resulted in many farmers gaining experience as *ashigaru*.





THE HININ VILLAGE

No city is complete without a large *eta* community, and Toshi no Naishou is no exception. Much as elsewhere in Rokugan, the *hinin* are kept out of sight and out of mind, given the worst lands available to build their homes. In Toshi no Naishou, this is the east bank of the river, which is muddy and unstable, prone to flooding, and widely considered to be cursed. The *eta* village is damp and dirty all year long, despite the best efforts of its inhabitants, and the occasional floods leave the neighborhood in constant need of repairs. Tanners, undertakers, and garbage collectors huddle together in this unpleasant place, seldom if ever visited by others. They do find solace in the occasional visits of monks to the area, but otherwise must endure on their own. A single family of torturers also lives in the district, providing its services to the local magistrates; the torturers are seen as a source of bad luck by the rest of the *hinin*, who shun them unless forced to do otherwise.

The *hinin* all live in fear of the supposed local curse, variously attributed to ghosts, a demon, or a wronged Fortune depending on who is being asked. The *eta* claim every few years one of them disappears without a trace, and blame the curse for these incidents. When night falls they stick close to one another, always fearful someone will be missing when the morning comes. The rest of the city pays little attention to such stories as long as the work gets done, and those who take the *eta* superstitions seriously are generally derided as foolish. A few pragmatic voices have occasionally called for the *eta* village to be moved, but no one wants the *hinin* living closer to them, and certainly no one wants to expend resources on such folk. So for now the *hinin* remain in their inauspicious home, prey to whatever stalks its night-time streets.

Customs and Culture

The commoners of Naishou Province have kept unusually careful records of their history, and still identify themselves based on the original tribes which dwelt in the area before the first Hantei Emperor. The vast majority of Toshi no Naishou's folk are descended from the Takanobu tribe, and tend to be slightly shorter and show broader facial features than the average Rokugani. The tribe was originally comprised of farmers and warriors in equal measure, and ruled most of the Nobu Valley around the river. Sadly, the majority of these ancient warriors died in the First War, and the modern descendants of the tribe are mostly farmers, merchants, and craftsmen. Still, they have not altogether forgotten their history, and on those rare occasions when it has been necessary for the province to supply ashigaru troops, samurai have been surprised at how eagerly the peasantry answered. The Takanobu also had a strong history of cooperation, a legacy of surviving in relative seclusion for generations, but this altruism does not extend to those descended from other tribes. Samurai are sometimes left to scratch their head at why a local

peasant might help one neighbor but disdain another. (Descendants of the Yamataru or Morikawa usually stay clear of the city due to these ancient rivalries.) The Takanobu peasants consider Toshi no Naishou to be the greatest achievement of their tribe, and hold a yearly festival to celebrate the founding of the city. A notable feature of this festival is the exchanging of gifts between families descended from the tribe, helping maintain their sense of identity and community.

Part of why the peasantry of Naishou Province have been able to cling so strongly to their history is because they have an unusually high rate of literacy for commoners. This is particularly true in Toshi no Naishou, where nearly half of the *heimin* can read and write. While most of them rarely have idle time to dedicate to reading and thus can never match the education of the average samurai, they still maintain their proficiency and pass their skill along to their children. This is partly due to the strong influence of Fortunist monks in the area, who believe the population benefits from being able to read religious texts to reinforce their piety. A side effect of this widespread literacy is that merchants and peasants alike tend to keep careful records of their work and trade, helping to ensure fairness and reduce arguments. Thus, while merchants in Toshi no Naishou like a profit as much as merchants anywhere else, they are far less likely to try to take advantage of an ignorant peasant – after all, they can never know when such a peasant might turn out to be not so very ignorant at all.

While the samurai population in Toshi no Naishou has varied over the generations, the city's continuous existence has given rise to a couple of customs unique to its local samurai. The first one is actually tied to the arrival of newcomers: when a new samurai enters the samurai quarter for the first time, he is expected to loudly announce his name and parentage as a kind of general introduction. This habit is believed to have arisen during the troubled period when the city changed hands several times in succession, so as to ensure everyone knew who was in the city and where their loyalties lay. The exact form of the declaration changes according to the samurai, with the Lion known to declaim several generations of their ancestors, while ronin limit themselves to nothing more than their own name more often than not. Whoever is on guard duty when such announcements are made is expected to report the new arrival to the Governor's court, ensuring the master of the city knows who is in his domain. Of course, a visitor can always stay in the city's outer districts and remain unannounced, but such behavior is considered disrespectful to the Governor.

The other custom is a result of the exceptional importance of religion in Toshi no Naishou. The tribes in the region were highly devoted to the Fortunes even before the province became part of Rokugan, and the population has remained exceptionally pious ever since, a tendency reinforced by the Phoenix Clan's tenure in control of the city. Indeed, Phoenix Clan samurai often suggest the idea that the original tribes of Naishou Province were offshoots of the Tribe of Isawa, although such claims have never been confirmed by other

historians. Regardless, Fortunism is strongly rooted in the whole region, with the Seven Fortunes especially revered. A tradition has developed among many local samurai to choose a patron Fortune from the Seven for the duration of their stay in Toshi no Naishou. Once a Fortune is selected, the samurai is expected to pray daily at one of the temples dedicated to that Fortune, as well as showing his choice through other means such as wearing netsuke trinkets in his obi, embroidering the name of the Fortune on his kimono, placing a representation of the Fortune on his personal banner, or creating works of art dedicated to the Fortune. Benten, Bishamon, and Furukurokujin are the most popular choices, but it is not considered odd to change patrons from time to time, so long as this is infrequent and accompanied by sufficient prayer and meditation. Most samurai who visit for only a short time abandon this custom once they leave Naishou, but those who live there for extended periods of time tend to keep up the practice life-long.

A tradition embraced by both samurai of peasants is one related to secrets. Naishou means "secret" in Rokugani, and while the normal interpretation of the name is to connect it to province's long periods of isolation from the rest of the Empire, the local inhabitants have taken the name very much to heart. Those who live in Naishou Province believe information loses some of its worth if it is known too widely, and as such carefully consider who they choose to share it with. A legend, the name of a friend, the way to a specific location... those in Naishou Province always consider carefully who they tell such things. Samurai at court eagerly embrace the tradition, and the trade in 'secrets' has become a secondary system of exchanges on top of the usual courtly favors. This tends to amuse the samurai of the Scorpion Clan, while irritating more straightforward clans such as the Crab. Of course, no samurai will refuse a superior's order to share information, but they will still say "himitsu" ("it's a secret") first to express the importance of what they are saying. Secrets are also considered acceptable offerings to the Fortunes, usually written on pieces of folded paper. These are usually burnt, but in some temples they are first displayed in front of the Fortune's statue for a day. Needless to say, it is seen as blasphemous to steal or read these, and the temple's monks will severely punish people who dare to do so. The offerings to Fortunes are often token secrets, such as the hidden name of a pet, the location of one's first kiss, or similar things, but some samurai take greater risks in hopes of pleasing the Fortunes. Because of the connection

between secrets and Fortune-worship, intense piety is sometimes seen as a sign of having something to hide, a dichotomy which can greatly confuse outsiders.

Important City Locations

THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE

Due to Naishou Province's confusing history, no one is certain when or by whom the Governor's Palace was first built, and what records do exist are often contradictory. However, every Governor the province has ever known has used the Palace as his place of residence, and unless Koso Mura ever has its way this will probably remain true in the future.

The Governor's Palace is impressive for a provincial location, although it falls short of the splendor of major Great Clan settlements. Located atop the rocky promontory that comprises the majority of the samurai quarter, it overlooks both the Itochu River and the rest of the city, an ideal location for both military defense and visual enjoyment. However, other than its location the Palace is not built for war, and changed hands many times during the eras when the Great Clans fought over the province. Its design is instead focused on court and governance, and many samurai appreciate its elegance.





RUMORS OF THE PALACE

The servants of the Governor's Palace and the samurai who stay there as guests tell many tales about the place, most of them doubtless pure fiction, but a few perhaps containing a grain of truth.

The most commonly heard story is that the Palace is built on top of ancient ruins, perhaps of inhuman origin. This story is perhaps supported by the fact that access to the basement is strictly controlled at all times, and no servant or guest has ever seen what lies behind the guarded stairs. More pragmatic voices believe the basement is simply a place to hide weapons and supplies in case of renewed warfare.

Another popular tale claims the reason no records agree on when the Palace was first founded is because this is not the first Palace. Supposedly, the original was situated somewhere else in the city but was razed during war, all traces of its existence destroyed. If true, whichever clan built the original Palace could present a much stronger claim to control of Naishou Province.

Finally, many servants claim the Palace is riddled with secret passages. Supposedly some of these allow spying on guests, while others emerge far outside the castle in unmarked buildings of the city. The servants claim these were built by one of the most paranoid former Governors, and whether or not there is truth to the story, courtiers in the Palace often worry over the possibility of being spied on. Any discussions within the Palace walls tend to be especially cautious and indirect in wording, even by Rokugani standards.



The Palace has four stories, with bright red tile roofs and walls bleached white with lime (this is done annually during a religious ceremony dedicated to the Seven Fortunes). A small wall surrounds the palace complex on all sides save the river. The wall's gates are usually guarded by two soldiers, but during the day are open to visiting samurai unless there is an emergency. The Palace's small courtyard does not allow the presence of a real garden, although there are a few trees and statues.

The interior of the Palace has all the amenities one might expect for a place hosting a provincial court. The guest quarters are extensive, since the political wrangling over the province means the Governor's court has many visitors. Each guest room has a painting dedicating it to one of the Fortunes, Lesser or Greater, and jockeying for the "appropriate" room is a complex game of favors among visiting courtiers; the Benten rooms are always among the most popular. This jockeying also results in a haphazard distribution of guests regardless of clan affiliation. To avoid problems, the current Governor has the corridors regularly patrolled.

The main court chamber is quite large for a provincial palace, with a number of side chambers screened off by shoji for smaller meetings. The wall behind the Governor's chair is decorated with a beautiful painting of flowing waters inhabited by fantastical creatures such as naga, ningyo, kappa, and divine beings. This painting was a gift from a visiting Kakita artisan who claimed to have the gift of the spirits and to be able to see things in the Itochu River others could not. The court chamber is supplemented by many smaller meeting rooms on the first two floors of the Palace.

The Governor's rooms are situated on the highest floor of the Palace, as is usual in Rokugani architecture. Small balconies surround the floor, providing the most beautiful view in the city. The room themselves are spacious enough for a large extended family, since some past Governors have brought their relatives with them. There is a shrine to the memory of all previous Governors, regardless of clan affiliations, and it is considered wise for the current occupant to pray there for guidance. The Governor's own master bedroom is located at the center of the floor, separate from all other rooms and surrounded by guard posts and nightingale floors; this tight security, something of a contrast to the rest of the Palace and city, is a legacy of the era of war when many Governors faced assassination attempts. The Governor's room also contains an ancient map of the entirety of Naishou Province, believed to have been created by an Imperial cartographer in the second century. A popular rumor claims this map holds many forgotten secrets, such as the locations of ancient ruins and hidden treasures, but in fact no Governor has ever behaved in a manner to confirm such stories.

The Palace's servants live outside the samurai quarter, traveling to and from their place of work each day instead of living on the grounds as in many larger castles. Of course, some of them work overnight while the doors are closed, sleeping during the day.

THE SEVEN FORTUNES TEMPLE

The second largest building in Toshi no Naishou is considered by some locals to be more important than the Palace itself. This is partly due to the importance of Fortunism to the local populace and partly because Governors have come and gone while the monks of this temple have been a constant and influential presence in the city. While the monks rarely make any use of their influence, no Governor is foolish enough to ignore their guidance or opinions.

The Temple's foundations are said to have been laid in the days preceding the Fall of the Kami, and while it has been renovated and even completely rebuilt several times over the centuries the basic design has always been kept unchanged, offering a glimpse of the architecture from the dawn of the Empire. The main structure is a one-story building supported by a wooden platform, probably due to the floods which occasionally strike the city. A small wooden staircase, always exactly seven steps, leads up to the entrance of the temple, which is shaped like a small

torii arch. The entire structure is built mainly of wood, and the temple is known to creak softly as people move around it; some believe the whispers of the Fortunes can be heard in these faint noises. The wood-and-paper construction makes fire a constant risk, so the temple is usually closed to visitors at night rather than light too many candles. The resident monks move around at night with only the most minimal necessary light.

The main worship chamber, right beyond the entrance, is just large enough for a hundred persons to stand in it at the same time. The main attractions are the stone statues of the Seven Fortunes, which have supposedly been with the temple since its inception. The one facing the entrance is Benten, her arms open in a welcoming gesture, while the others are arranged around her in semicircle. Despite their antiquity the statues still show excellent detail and craftsmanship, and visitors have noticed the stone used to make them is not found in the Taru Mountains. The most pious believe the statues were originally a gift from Heavens, while other assume they originally came from somewhere outside the province. Regardless, these representations of the Seven Fortunes are the center of the temple's activity, and offerings are left at their feet every day.

The resident monks live in a set of back rooms in very ascetic conditions. The individual monk cells tend to be both suffocatingly warm in the summer and freezing cold in the winter, but the monks are accustomed to enduring such conditions as part of their lifestyle. Even the abbot of the temple, a respected and influential person within the city, sleeps in the same conditions.

Even if one never visits the Seven Fortunes Temple, it is impossible to ignore its presence in the city. Once each day when the Sun is at its highest, the monks bring a massive brass gong out to the entrance of the monastery and strike it three times, symbolically purifying all from the Three Sins of Fear, Envy, and Regret. The sound reverberates through the whole city, a source of both awe and comfort to the residents. Most citizens of Toshi no Naishou stand still and silent when the gong rings out, and this produces a striking effect as the entire vibrant city seems to stand still for an instant. The gong has been sounded every day in the history of the city, even in the midst of war or disaster, and the city craftsmen have several replacements ready should it be damaged or stolen. Many smaller replicas of this gong are found in lesser shrines and temples throughout the city, and these are struck by visitors who seek additional purification.

In addition to the gong and statues, the temple is also famous for its library, which has collected hundreds of legends and stories about both the province and Fortunist worship over the centuries. To be sure, sometimes it seems only the monks of Fukurokujin can locate a particular text in its crowded shelves. Access to the library is controlled by the monks, of course, who consider good character to be more important than status when considering any requests. On the rare occasion when a samurai tries to force the issue, the monks dedicated to Bishamon are quick to remind everyone of their presence.



THE THREE WINDS INN

This inn is well-known as the preferred residence of samurai who have not secured a room in the Palace but wish to remain in the city. When guests ask about the inn's unique name, the owner tells the story of how Tamon, the malevolent Fortune of the North Wind, once became infatuated with a young maiden of Naishou Province. She agreed to accompany him back to Heavens if he promised never to bother the province again. The Fortune accepted the deal, and it is certainly true that the northern winds are never strong in Naishou Province... so the residents pray instead to the other three Fortunes of the Winds, whose favor is less assured.

THE CLIFFSIDE SHRINE

A visitor who circles around the outer wall of the Palace complex will eventually reach the edge of the low cliff overlooking the Itochu River. There is no barrier to prevent falls, and many samurai find this overlook to be a thrilling place to visit, a site for moonlit romantic encounters or a place for daring athletes to dive into the river. The currents below are quite strong, so this is not as easy a feat as it might appear.

A small shrine rests on the edge to remind visitors of a past tragedy. A previous Governor's young daughter, chasing her lost pet, fell off the cliff into the river; her body was never recovered. The Governor's last act was to order the shrine built, after which he retired to a monastery in the Taru Mountains, the pain of his loss too much to bear. By his order the shrine always has a lit candle at night, a warning to visitors of the danger from the cliffside.





The inn is located in the merchant district just outside the samurai quarter, so close to it one can see the district gates from several of the rooms. This combined with the high quality of the establishment makes it an ideal stop for visiting samurai, whether they are attending court or just passing through. The inn has been in the same family line for centuries, and the current owner usually take the name of Onshu. The rest of the family either works at the inn or as servants in the samurai quarter, so they are surprisingly current on samurai politics and samurai gossip. Onshu also makes sure his daughters marry into positions that establish additional contacts throughout the city. As a result, Onshu is one of the best sources for rumors in all of Toshi no Naishou. He can frequently be found at the counter, cheerfully sharing the latest news with visiting samurai while he cleans the spotless wood.

Surprisingly, despite the diversity of individuals who pass through the place, Onshu keeps no security on site, trusting in his guests' honor and decorum to ensure the peace. Thus far his faith has always been vindicated, and there are no instances of violence at the Three Winds. Some ascribe this peace to Onshu's specialty beverage, a wonderfully relaxing tea known as Hotei's Favorite; Onshu claims it is grown only in a small village in the Taru Mountains, and always refuses to name which one. Others ascribe the inn's aura of peace to Onshu's knowledge of etiquette and the way he ensures every samurai knows how deeply they would shame themselves by bringing violence to such a peaceful place in full view of their peers. Regardless, the Three Winds Inn is always full of samurai and always maintains a genial atmosphere. Anyone foolish enough to threaten Onshu will likely find himself the enemy of all the inn's samurai guests, so the humble innkeeper is one the best-protected man in Toshi no Naishou.

THE SOUTHERN COMMERCIAL PORT

The Itochu River is the lifeline of Toshi no Naishou, bringing in rice from the many smaller villages in the province, providing the city with the daily catch of the fishermen, and connecting the province to trade with the rest of the Empire. The commercial port south of the samurai district is where the most wealth flows, since it is the one dealing with the world outside of Naishou Province. This wealth brings problems with it, of course.

During the early history of Naishou Province, this port did not see much activity. Trade with the rest of the Empire was limited, the city focused on affairs in the rest of the province, and there were few villages to the south, where the land becomes less fertile. However, as soon as Naishou was "re-discovered" by the Empire, the southern Itochu River became the primary route for trade and travel in and out of the province, and the southern port became suddenly prosperous. In modern times it sees abundant daily traffic, the dockworkers endlessly loading and unloading shipments of goods in and out of the city. Luxury goods such as silk, spice, and artwork come into Naishou at this port, paid for with hard coin, bales of rice, or the creations of the city's craftsmen.

The most traditional inhabitants of the city view the southern port as a "modern" development, by which they mean not that it is recent but that it is different than the traditions of Toshi no Naishou. The influx of goods, visitors, and influences from the outside chafes some local residents, and while those who work at the port are not all the impious rogues denounced by the traditionalists, it is true the area is rougher and more chaotic than the rest of the city. Sake houses such as the Drunken Carp, the Happy Frog, and the Three Drowned Men cater to visiting sailors and are universally known for both the cheap low-quality sake they serve and for the frequent brawls they host. Most samurai would not be caught dead within one of these lowly watering holes, although some Crab and Mantis Clans seem to appreciate the "lively atmosphere."

A man of great influence in the southern port is the harbor-master, Shuzou. Although he is a mere commoner, a minor functionary appointed by the Governor, he has complete authority over the southern port and controls which ships can dock, which can depart, and what fees and tariffs must be paid. That a heimin possesses this level of power surprises many samurai, but there is no question Shuzou is a truly brilliant man, able to track a dozen different tariffs and to keep the list of ships currently



in port in his mind at all times. Still, some wonder why sometimes his decisions seem biased for no apparent reason, suggesting the dutiful servant might have secret designs. As a result of the growing hostility to his position, Shuzou has taken to hiring two burly ronin to be at his side wherever he goes; this has done much to discourage potential aggressors, but has also raised further suspicions about his intentions.

THE LONELY PEARL GEISHA HOUSE

It is said that early in the history of the city, a fisherman fell overboard in the Itochu River and caught sight of the glimmer of a white pearl in the muddy bottom. After he sold the pearl for a hefty price, he decided to make a career of pearl-diving. He spent the rest of his life trying to find more pearls, but never had any success and eventually died impoverished. The Lonely Pearl Geisha House is supposedly built by the place in the river where the fisherman found his pearl, and the madam of the house likes to recount the story to all new customers as a lesson on being satisfied with one's luck and refraining from greed. Its location, very close to samurai residences, can be a surprising sight to new visitors, but it is one of several locations which allow the samurai quarter to function without depending on the city around it. Still, some samurai do object from time to time to the presence of such an establishment, and the geisha go to great efforts to keep their house outwardly unobtrusive. The building in itself is very unremarkable, with white walls and a black tile roof, and in fact is not marked in any way (not even the traditional red lanterns) – the geisha trust in their reputation and word-of-mouth to spread the knowledge of their establishment.

Inside, however, is another story. The small house is richly and intricately decorated, creating the sense of entering another world the moment one steps through the door. Aromatic incense wafts through the place, and every room is richly decorated with silk cushions, beautiful paintings and carvings, and many other wonders. The seven meeting rooms of the Lonely Pearl are themed respectively after the four seasons, the Sun, the Moon, and the stars.

There are always exactly seven active geisha at the Lonely Pearl, with a few apprentices in training. The number seven is of course considered auspicious, and by keeping the house small the madam is able to focus on a few highly desired performers, which drives up demand and prices. The most sought-after geisha at the moment is a girl named Suzuko, who while slightly taller than considered appropriate is gifted with a grace and elegance which more than make up for any such flaw. She is said to have made the Governor himself shed tears with one particularly inspired musical representation, a testimony to her skills. Privately, Suzuko is a capricious young woman, dissatisfied with her current life, and rumors are spreading that she has a samurai lover who is considering buying her contract. While the loss of Suzuko would certainly be a blow for the Lonely Pearl House, it would be favorable for the house's second-ranked geisha, Hichihiko, who desperately wants a chance to regain the limelight.

THE MAIN BARRACKS

Toshi no Naishou has never been a military stronghold, but its large population does need policing, and a basic defense is necessary to avoid drawing the attentions of bandits. The Barracks was first built in the days when Naishou Province came to the attention of the Empire, and its exact origins are uncertain. Samurai of the Crab Clan have often commented that the building's square and sturdy design is familiar to them, but they have not proven they built the structure.

The "Main" Barracks is referenced by this name because it is the only one of its kind in the samurai quarter, although there are some smaller buildings in the other districts of the city. It sits right outside the Palace, and in case of emergency the soldiers can quickly be deployed in the castle proper, or moved to defend the low wall of the samurai quarter. In the rare engagements which reached the center of the city, the Barracks was always a key point of contention, since its sturdy construction (with stone walls and arrow slits) allows it to act as a fortification. Most of the time, though, the Barrack is simply used to house soldiers when they are not on duty. There are enough beds for up to two hundred soldiers, although the place would be quite crowded with such a large garrison. The Barracks also has a small canteen, but sadly it has a reputation for bland and dreary food. The cook, an old commoner named Ichuzo, does not seem to care much about flavor as long as everybody is fed on time.

With the appointment of a new Governor, the Barracks have become a point of political contention rather than military conflict. The Governor's Lion troops initially occupied the structure, but the delegates from other clans began complaining of having no place near the Palace where their yojimbo could be housed. This eventually won a concession from the Governor, who allowed small numbers of bushi from other delegations to use the Barracks as well. Although over half of the soldiers there are still from the Lion Clan, more and more new samurai from other clans are showing up, and the place is becoming increasingly crowded and tense. The Scorpion and Crane in particular have arrived in large numbers, and considering those clans' past interest in the province the Lion are deeply suspicious of their expanding presence no matter what the official reason for it might be. The Lion commander, a man named Matsu Seiki, has thus far urged restraint and courtesy on his men, and their discipline has been sufficient to prevent any significant disputes... so far.

Seiki's priority is his duty to the Governor, not playing political games, and his own frustration comes not from the quarrel over the Barracks but from the lack of proper defensible structures in the area. He fully realizes neither the Palace nor the outer wall of the samurai district will stop any determined opponents. His requests for new funds to strengthen the quarter's defenses are thus far falling on deaf ears, and in the meantime he conducts surveys and drills in the area, trying to ensure his men are ready for any possible threat.





THE GOLDEN TROUT GAMBLING HOUSE

Tucked into a nondescript corner of the merchant district, the Golden Trout appears to be nothing more than a small restaurant, catering mostly to the population of local workers. However, if a visitor gives the correct password to the man behind the counter, he will be led into the back part of the building, down a flight of stairs... and into the largest gambling house in Toshi no Naishou. The basement room is usually packed every night, with up to fifty people – mostly heimin – playing at a time. Many gamblers also smoke pipes, so the room is always dim and hazy with smoke, stinging the eyes and lungs. Security is enforced by six burly heimin with clubs, and in case of real trouble the house can also call on the skills of a ronin named Itachi (who normally just sits in a corner, avoiding notice). Itachi is a duelist and swordsman of talent, but also a drunkard who has fallen on hard times, and his job here is the only thing keeping him fed. Many have underestimated this dirty ronin with the haggard face and three-day beard, but once his blade is in his hand all doubt leaves his eyes and he becomes a dangerous killer. Between the enforcers and the ronin, most people know better than to cause any trouble, and even the direst of losses are usually met only with a moan of despair.

The combination of secrecy and security has made the place a very profitable enterprise for its owner, a discrete man named Kuzeshige. He is effectively the head of organized crime in the city, and has survived for many years because he is both reasonable and subtle. He delegates the actual crimes to underlings and keeps them out of the public eye, maintaining the appearance of personal honesty and avoiding excessive provocation of the authorities. His fortune has also made him quite influential, and he usually has a few samurai in his debt, allowing him to pull in favors to protect himself when necessary. Kuzeshige does not hide from anyone, and his own residence is one of the most opulent abodes of the merchant district; however, no magistrate has ever been able to pin anything on him directly. To the more honorable inhabitants of the city, he is both a stain on Toshi no Naishou's reputation and a constant frustration. To more pragmatic folk, Kuzeshige is the lesser of many possible evils. After all, he keeps petty crime under control and prevents more ruthless criminals from laying claim to the city.

Kuzeshige maintains a close eye on the current Governor, of whose intentions he is uncertain. He is likely to apply his considerable influence to help select which clan will control the province next... once he decides where his best interest lies. With several rackets, gambling parlors, and smuggling operations funding his coffers, Kuzeshige is able to employ many ronin and peasant enforcers, so a head-to-head conflict with him could be very dangerous indeed.

THE DUTIFUL DAUGHTER

This popular Noh theater is named after one of the city's most popular ghost stories. It tells of an elderly farmer who lived with his only daughter; his wife had long passed away and all his other children had married and moved away, leaving his daughter to take care of him. When the old man finally died, his daughter felt she had no purpose left in this world, having no friends and no trade. Overcome by sadness and solitude, she eventually died herself, but her spirit lost the way to the afterlife, and her ghost haunts the city searching for her father. Depending on the interpretation of the story, the daughter is either commended for her dedication or scorned for her lack of purpose, while her father is sometimes seen as a kind but unfortunate man and sometimes as a selfish one. Many variants of the story exist, but everyone in Toshi no Naishou agrees the story has a basis in truth.

The theater is an old fixture of the city, having grown over the centuries from a modest establishment sponsored by a retired Crane master actor to a large respected theater which performs all year round. Noh plays are extremely popular in Naishou Province, due to both the locals' appreciation of traditional pastimes and their fondness for the stories of ghosts and spirits which Noh frequently employs. The theater has always been under the protection of the Crane Clan, regardless of ownership of the city, and nobody can imagine it being otherwise. The Dutiful Daughter is somewhat unique in that it allows both samurai and heimin to attend plays at the same time, although the two groups are carefully segregated, and due to the local tastes it often shows plays which have fallen out of popularity in the rest of the Empire. The entry fee is modest, enough so that even the occasional farmer will attend a play after saving up for the event.

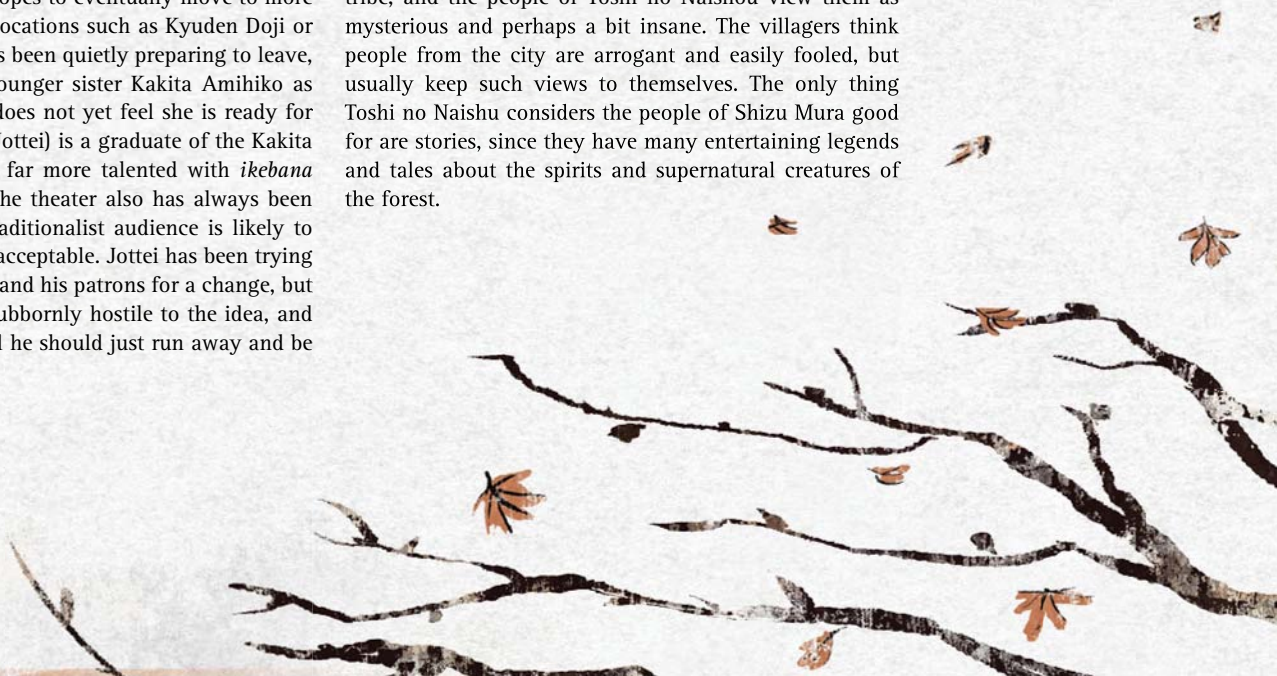
The current master of the theater is Kakita Jottei. The position is hereditary, and Jottei inherited it when his father passed away a year ago. He is a talented actor and director, and many looked forward to his tenure as master of the Dutiful Daughter, but so far he has simply followed the schedule planned by his late father and does not seem to take much interest in the proceedings. In truth, Jottei has bigger dreams, and hopes to eventually move to more prominent and glorious locations such as Kyuden Doji or Shiro Sano Kakita. He has been quietly preparing to leave, intending to leave his younger sister Kakita Amihiko as his replacement, but he does not yet feel she is ready for the role. While she (like Jottei) is a graduate of the Kakita Artisan Academy, she is far more talented with *ikebana* than with acting. Also, the theater also has always been led by a man, and its traditionalist audience is likely to find a female director unacceptable. Jottei has been trying to prepare both his sister and his patrons for a change, but so far everyone seems stubbornly hostile to the idea, and Jottei is beginning to feel he should just run away and be done with the place.

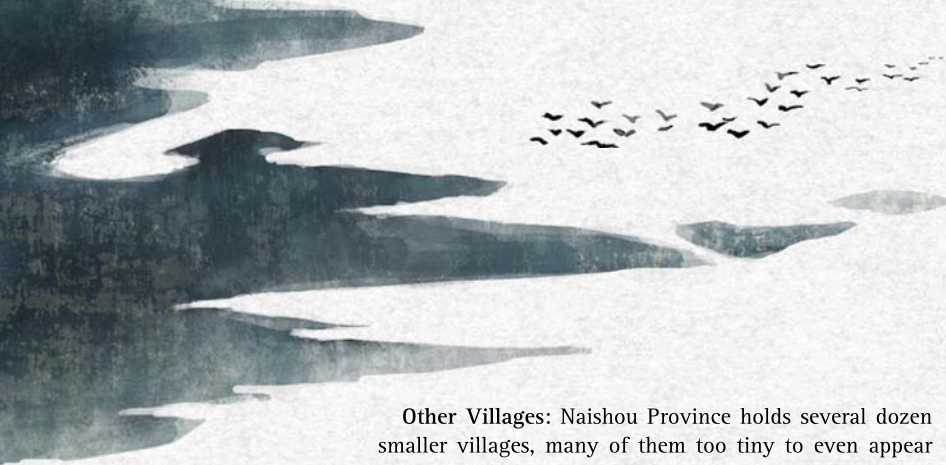
Relations With the Rest of the Province

Koso Mura: In the past Koso Mura was the city's main trading partner, but in recent times it has become clear the town wants to set itself up as a rival to Toshi no Naishou, and relations between the two settlements have soured. The inhabitants of the city view the people of Koso Mura as dangerous iconoclasts due to such habits as marrying between descendents of different original tribes and the establishment of a series of large Taoist temples. While the people of Toshi no Naishou give the Little Teacher respect, they have always seen the Fortunes as superior beings and feel the distant town is abandoning the proper path. Some have started seeing the town as a liability and are shifting their commercial interests to other places, damaging relations further.

Hitori Mura: The people of this village would prefer to avoid dealing with Toshi no Naishou at all, but since they have the only mines in the province, commerce between the two settlements is inevitable. The villagers insist on delivering their goods to the city rather than the reverse, keeping their own home quiet and free of commercial hassle. The inhabitants of Toshi no Naishou find this practice both sluggish and somewhat suspicious, and often grow frustrated at the irregularity of ore shipments. Hitori Mura is the ancient seat of the Yamataru tribe, and most folk in the city consider the village to be almost from another world. The villagers for their part frown on the many distractions and comforts of the city, and believe it has forgotten the true way of the Fortunes. Nonetheless, each community has need of the other, so disagreements are usually limited to bitter heckling and the occasional violent street-brawl.

Shizu Mura: Although Shizu Mura is likewise divergent in culture and customs, it is treated differently than Hitori Mura because it has little that Toshi no Naishou really wants. Apart from the occasional shipment of lumber or other forest goods, the two communities generally leave each other alone and are happy to do so. Shizu Mura is mainly inhabited by descendents of the Morikawa tribe, and the people of Toshi no Naishou view them as mysterious and perhaps a bit insane. The villagers think people from the city are arrogant and easily fooled, but usually keep such views to themselves. The only thing Toshi no Naishou considers the people of Shizu Mura good for are stories, since they have many entertaining legends and tales about the spirits and supernatural creatures of the forest.





MIYA ANSHO

GOVERNOR OF THE NAISHOU PROVINCE

Other Villages: Naishou Province holds several dozen smaller villages, many of them too tiny to even appear on Imperial maps. Most of these villages were originally founded by the Takanobu tribe and are thus distantly related to the people of Toshi no Naishou, so the city has a paternalistic attitude toward these smaller settlements. When residents of the city have difficulty finding a spouse, it is not uncommon for them to travel through the countryside until they can find a match, a practice known euphemistically as “picking rice.” This results in a network of connections between the city and the countryside. However, immigrants from the outlying villages are not always welcome in the city, since they lack the family connections necessary to succeed, and many young people who dream of success in the province’s largest settlement often return home in shame after a few months, or fall prey to the more dangerous and sordid aspects of city life.

For samurai, the province’s smaller villages often present an opportunity to honorably retire from more demanding duties, and many of these small settlements have a single samurai attached to them, providing governance and protection that is seldom more than symbolic. Young samurai are often encouraged to travel the countryside to meet these *gokennin* (land-holders) and request their tutelage. This is known as “Seeking the Way” and further strengthens relations between the city and the villages.

These patterns apply mainly to the villages of the Nobu Valley. Closer to the Taru Mountains or the Kawa Forest, these links become weaker, and when the city needs something from these far away hamlets it usually works through Hitori Mura or Shizu Mura. In these tiny outlying villages it is not uncommon to see marriages between descendants of different original tribes, something frowned on by the city’s inhabitants. These villages see Toshi no Naishou as a distant master, little more than a place where their taxes go, and while some may visit the city out of curiosity, most live out their entire lives without ever leaving their village’s borders.

The Governor’s Court

Toshi no Naishou’s political scene has been invigorated practically overnight by the arrival of its new Imperial Governor. However, it is generally assumed his arrival is only a temporary solution to the problem of control over the province, and the clans have poured in their influence to attempt and secure the Naishou Province for themselves. The result is a tense and complex political environment, with many different persons each pursuing their own schemes.

Nobody expected Miya Ansho to rise to his current heights, perhaps not even he himself. A quiet, bookish boy, he learned all his lessons well, and became a *shisha* like the majority of his family. However, he failed to show much enthusiasm for exploring and traveling the Empire, so he was given assignments in major, well-established cities of the Empire. This suited him well, since it meant attending some very important courts on occasion, and Ansho soon became noted for his mastery of etiquette and his ease at navigating the complex webs of intrigue often found in such locales. As he grew older, his mastery of the Miya techniques helped him become a strong voice for peace in the palaces of the Empire’s lords, often preventing wars before they could happen. His name became known to a select few and eventually reached the ears of the Emperor himself, who was considering how to solve the situation in Naishou Province. Ansho was appointed as Governor and assigned a force of troops from the Lion Clan to help him re-establish peace in the area.

While Miya Ansho is intimidated by the size of his task, he has thus far risen to it impressively. His diplomatic skills helped him to mollify the Crane and the Scorpion, who both considered the province theirs. He commended the Phoenix for their previous stewardship of the lands without confirming their future status, and used his Lion troops to strengthen the defenses of the valley while avoiding all bloodshed. Ansho is mildly uncomfortable having so many soldiers at his command, but understands their presence helps make his authority more credible. He has worked tirelessly to understand the workings of the province, researching its history and legends and adopting many of its customs. His decisions have made him popular with the *heimin*, especially since during the first months of his tenure he focused on making sure agriculture, commerce, and religion were all properly supported and protected. The Great Clans, however, have proved less positive, since they remain obsessed about when and to whom the province will ultimately be granted. Ansho has been given no timetable for this, however, and he refuses to appoint a new Governor until he is fully convinced of the rightness of his choice. The bickering of the Great Clans has disappointed him, and he is seriously considering appointing a Minor Clan samurai to rule the area as lesson to the arrogant Great Clan diplomats, despite the political backlash this might cause. In the meantime, Ansho takes an active hand in managing his court, frequently stepping in to quell arguments lest they threaten the harmony he is working so hard to create.

Ansho is a slender middle-aged man. Although he lacks an impressive physique, he is able to command respect even from aggressive warriors through his demeanor and words. He is widowed, having lost his wife to disease a few years ago, and this is the only topic which can break his outward self-control. While Ansho takes honor in his service to the Emperor, he only finds true joy in the presence of his teenage daughter Iaimiko, a *shisha* herself



and a young woman who is as fierce and energetic as he is measured and calm. While he sometimes worries for her, she has helped him tremendously in learning about the Naishou Province, and thus far he has not regretted bringing her with him.

MIYA ANSHO, GOVERNOR OF THE NAISHOU PROVINCE

AIR: 3 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 5
 AWARENESS: 4 WILLPOWER: 4 INTELLIGENCE: 4 PERCEPTION: 3
 Honor: 7.3 Status: 6.1 Glory: 6.4

School/Rank: Miya Herald 5
Skills: Artisan: Poetry 4, Calligraphy 5, Courtier (Rhetoric) 6, Defense 2, Etiquette (Courtesy) 7, Games: go 5, Horsemanship 3, Investigation 5, Lore: Heraldry 6, Lore: History (Naishou Province) 3, Lore: Theology 5, Meditation 3, Sincerity (Honesty) 6, Tea Ceremony 3
Advantages: Balance, Naishou Citizen, Seven Fortunes' Blessing (Fukurokujin - Lore: Heraldry), Social Position (Governor of Naishou Province)
Disadvantages: Lost Love (wife), Soft-Hearted

MIYA IAIMIKO

IMPERIAL HERALD

Miya Iaimiko's father Ansho sometimes tells her she reminds him of her late mother, although saying so always seems to pain him. Iaimiko believes him, for in many ways she is very unlike him. When she completed her *gempukku* from the Miya Herald School, she could not wait to get on a horse and roam the Empire, bringing the word of the Emperor to far away places. She is much more at ease in isolated villages or on the open road than at court, where her short temper and strong opinions often get her into trouble. In the past she has sometimes disappeared for months on one assignment or another, coming back dirty, exhausted, and hungry, but always satisfied with her accomplishments.

As a child, Iaimiko dreamed of joining the Seppun Guardsman, and although her father would not allow his only child to forsake family tradition, she nonetheless took to studying the art of the blade on her own. This has proven useful on more than one occasion when her boldly adventurous character landed her in dangerous situations. She bears a few scars now, but will readily boast her opponents ended worse off.

When her father ordered her to follow him to Naishou Province, Iaimiko was initially disappointed, since she did not relish the idea of being confined to a single place. However, she has changed her mind since then; she is constantly exploring the province, finding interesting people and places every day. She acts as a counterpart to her father, working on the ground while he works in the court, and has helped establish his reputation of understanding the specific needs of Naishou Province. The peasantry love her, for she treats their problems with



serious concern and always takes time to listen to them when she passes through their remote villages.

Recently, Iaimiko has found herself on the receiving end of several attempted courtships. While she is not without charm, despite her unconventional nature, it is clear to her that these would-be husbands are more interested in gaining her father's favor. She has not taken well to this unwanted attention, even to the point of insulting courtiers and threatening an insufferable Kakita poet with a duel. Her father is growing concerned over her behavior, but is reluctant to quash her free-spirited nature, and for now Iaimiko continues to live as she always has.

MIYA IAIMIKO, SHISHA

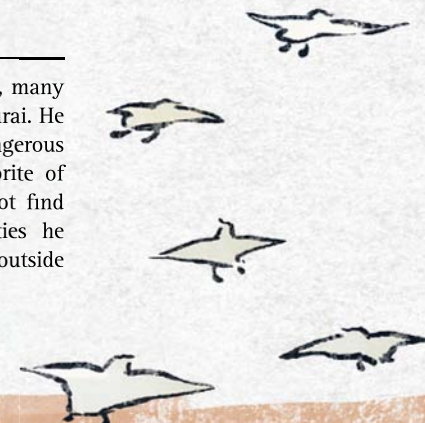
AIR: 4 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 3
 INTELLIGENCE: 4 PERCEPTION: 3
 Honor: 6.4 Status: 5.2 Glory: 3.9

School/Rank: Miya Herald 3
Skills: Animal Handling 3, Athletics 4, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Rhetoric) 3, Defense 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Horsemanship 5, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation 4, Jiujutsu 1, Kenjutsu 4, Lore: Heraldry 4, Sincerity 3
Advantages: Hero of the People, Inari's Blessing, Irreproachable, Luck (6), Social Position (Governor's Daughter)
Disadvantages: Brash, Contrary

BAYUSHI ITARU

SCORPION CLAN TAISA

If he did not wear the mon of the Scorpion Clan, many would consider Bayushi Itaru to be the perfect samurai. He is well educated, a veteran of several battles, a dangerous duelist, an excellent conversationalist, and a favorite of many young ladies at court. In fact, Itaru does not find any particular pleasure in the dishonorable duties he accomplishes for his clan, nor does he needlessly act outside





the bounds of Bushido. However, when his duties require it he will whatever he needs to obtain victory for his clan.

Itaru's earlier successes on and off the battlefield led his superiors to choose him to lead their campaign to claim Naishou Province based on an alleged Scorpion heir to the previous Governor. Itaru's troops would have secured the province quickly if not for the dogged resistance of Doji Ayumi's forces, and Ayumi is one of the few samurai Itaru truly respects, a woman as fearless as she is resourceful. He was preparing to face her in a duel when the new Governor arrived with his Lion troops, interrupting their feud.

Since then Itaru has abandoned the armor of the warrior and donned the kimono of the courtier, switching effortlessly between the two roles. He constantly lobbies for the Scorpion to be assigned the duty of overseeing the province, but also helps the Governor whenever he can, showing the potential of what the Scorpion could do for the province. So successful has he been that the Scorpion have moved away from supporting the previous Governor's heir – a young boy whose status was always contested anyway – and now hope for Itaru himself to be installed as the next Governor.

While many (including himself) regard Itaru as having no real weaknesses, in fact he has been hiding a severe opium addiction from the public eye. He tells himself he has the urge under control and it is no risk to his position. This same pride also sometimes leads him to put himself in needless danger (like the duel to the death he intended to fight with Doji Ayumi, a dangerous opponent). Only time will tell if these inner weaknesses will bring down the chosen scion of the Scorpion Clan.

BAYUSHI ITARU, SCORPION CLAN TAISA

AIR: 4 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 4 WATER: 3 VOID: 3

WILLPOWER: 4 AGILITY: 5

Honor: 2.9

Status: 5.8

Glory: 5.8

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 5

Skills: Artisan: Poetry 3, Athletics 3, Battle 5, Courtier (Manipulation) 6, Defense 5, Etiquette (Courtesy) 5, Games: go 5, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation 4, Jujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Temptation 3, Stealth 3

Kata: Breath of Wind Style, Strength of the Scorpion, Strike as Air, Veiled Menace Style

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Dangerous Beauty, Leadership

Disadvantages: Compulsion (Opium – 4 points), Overconfident, Sworn Enemy (Doji Ayumi)

KASUGA HITSUKO

TORTOISE CLAN COURTIER

When rumors started to spread that Miya Ansho was considering assigning Naishou Province to a Minor Clan, several Minor Clans sent representatives with orders to work in concert to secure the province, knowing that on their own they lacked enough influence to accomplish much. They chose a Tortoise to represent them in the Governor's court, mainly because of the clan's political influence with the Imperial families. Kasuga Hitsuko, a young woman with a glib tongue, volunteered for this duty as soon as she heard about the opportunity, and made sure all other candidates were quickly discarded.

Hitsuko was often described as "too clever for her own good" while she was growing up. She was the youngest child and the only girl in a group of five siblings who followed their parents into service as sailors. While she loved the sea, Hitsuko loved hiding, spying, and lying even more, tendencies which got her into trouble about as often as they got her out of it. Her parents concluded she was a better fit for the courts than for a ship's deck, and she agreed. To her, attending the court is more like playing a game than working. She had already experienced a few successes in lesser courts when she heard about the opportunity in Naishou Province and jumped on it.

Hitsuko has been an active force at court, surprisingly so for a Minor Clan samurai, making allies and enemies in equally large numbers. She has made no pretenses of hiding her goal for the province, and while some resent her temerity, others appreciate her honesty. Hitsuko has also made sure to befriend all the other samurai from Minor Clans, and is often accompanied by at least two of them in court. The first, Ichiro Oishi, is a mountain of a man who acts as her yojimbo; his gruff and thuggish exterior hides a talented swordsman. The second, Tonbo Denbe, is a young shugenja who is considered a bit of a lunatic, often seemingly lost in his own mind; however, his spells have helped Hitsuko several times in court. Together they

are a colorful and resourceful group, and are starting to be taken seriously by the Great Clan delegates.

While Hitsuko is enjoying her mission in Toshi no Naishou, she has recently received some anonymous letters of a worrying nature. Prior to coming to Naishou Province, Hitsuko secretly bore a child from a dalliance at court. She abandoned the newborn at the door of a monastery rather than let herself be ruined by the scandal, but the letters suggest someone knows about the child. So far the letters have made only mild demands, requiring her support on policies which are not important to the Minor Clans, but Hitsuko fears worse is to come. She first suspected Kuzeshige, the criminal mastermind of the city, but he seems to be unaware of the whole thing. Hitsuko is desperately searching for the blackmailer's identity, determined to root him (or her) out and show how dangerous it is to play games with her.

KASUGA HITSUKO, TORTOISE CLAN COURTIER

AIR: 3 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 3
 AWARENESS: 4 PERCEPTION: 4

Honor: 2.4 Status: 2.7 Glory: 3.3

School/Rank: Kasuga Smuggler 3

Skills: Commerce 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Defense 1, Etiquette 4, Games: Go 3, Investigation (Notice) 4, Knives 1, Lore: Underworld 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 6, Stealth 3, Temptation 3

Advantages: Ally (Ichiro Oishi), Ally (Tonbo Denbe), Read Lips, Touch of the Spirit

Realms (Sakkaku)

Disadvantages: Blackmailed, Dark Secret, Small

IKOMA SHIKEI

LION CLAN BARD

Although the Lion Clan's presence in Toshi no Naishou is mostly supplied by the troops who serve the Governor, the clan decided it also needed a liaison at court to make sure the Governor valued their input as much as any other clan's. As is often the case, this role fell on a member of the Ikoma family, a man named Shikei. Having served with the troops who accompanied the Governor, Shikei was an ideal choice who pleased everyone involved. Since taking up his new duties Shikei has been an extremely busy man, although he shows no signs of fatigue. At court he hears the petitions and grievances of the clans regarding the Lion troops, defending the honor of his clan at all turns. He tells tales of valor about the soldiers who came with him, ensuring no clan ever forgets the might of the Lion. He reports the deeds of the Lion troops to the Governor so that Miya Ansho will appreciate how quickly and well the soldiers follow his orders. Out of the courts, he constantly learns more about the province to better prepare himself for his duties. He goes to any place where the troops clash with other samurai, smoothing feathers



if necessary, guiding retribution if that is the honorable course. He always reminds the men of how glorious it is to serve one who was directly appointed by the Child of Heaven. Shikei does all this without tiring or complaining, earning much praise for his dedicated service.

However, in truth Shikei is disillusioned with his role. He knows that by using the Lion Clan to enforce his rule instead of the Imperial Legions, the Governor essentially removed the Lion from the list of contenders for administrating the province (yet without slighting them). The Lion are too busy policing the land to actually jockey for its control, and their fate is too closely tied to the Imperial Governor's own position. Shikei fully expects the Lion army to depart after the Governor chooses a successor – a successor who will no doubt be chosen based on politics rather than honor and glory. Although Shikei has no obsessive need for a Lion to become Governor, he is angry that the position will be filled without a proper and honorable battle for it. Consequently, he has started manipulating events in and out of court to foster heightened tensions between his clan and the others, trying to promote a military confrontation where the Lion can truly display their might and honor.

IKOMA SHIKEI, LION CLAN BARD

AIR: 3 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 2
 AWARENESS: 4 WILLPOWER: 4 PERCEPTION: 3

Honor: 6.3 Status: 3.8 Glory: 4.6

School/Rank: Ikoma Bard 3

Skills: Battle 1, Courtier (Manipulation) 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Games: go 5, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: History (Lion Clan) 5, Perform: Storytelling 5, Sincerity (Honesty) 6

Advantages: Higher Purpose (Create a Glorious War for the Lion), Precise Memory, Tough of the Spirit Realms (Yomi - Sincerity)

Disadvantages: Seven Fortunes' Curse (Hotei)





KAKITA SEISHO

CRANE CLAN DIPLOMAT

Kakita Seisho is not what one might usually picture when thinking of a Crane courtier. Although his hair is dyed the traditional white, it is also uncut and usually rather unkempt. Everything from his disarrayed kimono to the shadows of fatigue below his eyes show a man who has lost control of his own life. On several occasions Seisho has showed up drunk at court, and once he even brought two geisha to keep him company. Seisho only remains the head of the Crane delegation because of his father's tremendous wealth and influence; the man saw the assignment to Toshi no Naishou as an opportunity to get rid of his embarrassing son. Other lower-ranking Crane diplomats do most of the actual work of the courts, while Seisho only occasionally accomplishes anything, spending the rest of his time gambling, drinking, and visiting the theaters and geisha houses of the city. While he is popular with more festive and frivolous samurai, who see him as an enjoyable companion for evenings out on the town, many friends and allies of the Crane are forced to quietly ignore the shame Seisho brings on his clan.

There is more to Seisho's failings than may first appear. Ever since he was a child, he has always had a keen understanding of human emotions, able to sense what another was feeling just by glancing at them. As he grew older and undertook training as a Doji Courtier, his gift only grew stronger, to the point where Seisho could feel the emotions of those around him almost as if they were his own. His mind was hyper-sensitive, always exposed to the feelings of others, and while this granted him understanding it also wore him down emotionally and physically. Seisho continuously suffered headaches, depression, and sleepless nights. The only way for him to find release was to drown his emotions in other sensations, and he turned to drinking, gambling, and philandering as a way to escape his endless pain.

Seisho realizes he is set on a spiral of self-destruction, but he simply cannot bear to feel the way he does when his mind is clear. Still, beneath all his misery is a clever and intelligent man, and it is unwise to underestimate him. The last man who openly confronted him in court was shamed so thoroughly by Seisho's highly insightful rebuke that he chose exile rather than show his face to any Rokugani again. If Seisho could use his abilities more reliably, he would be one of the Crane Clan's most capable and dangerous men... but to do so, he would need to resume exposing himself to the unfiltered emotions of others, and this might very well drive him mad

KAKITA SEISHO, CRANE CLAN DIPLOMAT

AIR: 2	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2	VOID: 4
AWARENESS: 6		INTELLIGENCE: 5 PERCEPTION: 5		
Honor: 5.3		Status: 2.4		Glory: 3.0

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 3

Skills: Artisan: Poetry 3, Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 7, Etiquette (Courtesy) 6, Games: Fortunes and Winds 3, Investigation 5, Perform: Storytelling 3, Sincerity 3, Tea Ceremony 3

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Inner Gift (Empathy), Precise Memory, Wealthy (5 points)

Disadvantages: Compulsion (Alcohol - 4 points), Compulsion (Gambling - 2 points), Lechery

ISAWA SUZUHIHO

PHOENIX CLAN MAGISTRATE

Isawa Suzuhiko is a dashing and popular figure at court, impossible to miss with her brightly-dyed red hair and natural green eyes. Although she is a shugenja, it is clear to all she prefers the life of court to the serenity of the temple. Frequently courted herself, she is always aware of the latest romantic scandals and marital schemes of the samurai around her. When she is not busy with the latest social intrigue, Suzuhiko is a naturally talented singer, and her occasional performances have only further cemented her strong position in Toshi no Naishou's court. While she does not seem very focused on regaining the province to Phoenix control, she has been successful in making sure the Phoenix are respected and appreciated by all. Her clan is satisfied with her service, and under her guidance the Phoenix have acquired several key allies.

Few realize there is a more important concern on Suzuhiko's mind. While she might have once been just a light-hearted court shugenja, several years ago she sought a position as a magistrate after a series of strange murders plagued her home province in the Phoenix lands. By her account, the murderer is a shugenja who used



his considerable skill at magic to cover his tracks. There seemed to be no particular motive for the murders except the act of killing itself, a true perversion of the shugenja's gift. Suzuhiko was both fascinated and appalled by the crimes, and accumulated much information on the cases. Because many of the killings first appeared to be deaths by natural consequences, she dubbed the killer the Hand of Fate. Recently, she has become convinced the Hand of Fate has come to Naishou Province to continue his grisly work. Thus, while she continues to live the life of a popular young woman at court, in her free time she is trying to look into possible suspects, determined to solve the enigma of the Hand of Fate.

ISAWA SUZUHIHO, PHOENIX CLAN MAGISTRATE

AIR: 4 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 3
PERCEPTION: 3

Honor: 4.2 Status: 4.3 Glory: 3.6

School/Rank: *Isawa Shugenja (Air) 3*

Skills: *Calligraphy (cipher) 3, Courtier (Gossip) 5, Etiquette (Conversation) 3, Investigation (Interrogation, Search) 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Theology 3, Medicine 3, Meditation 3, Perform: Singing 5, Sincerity 3, Spellcraft (Importune) 5*

Spells: *Sense, Summon, Commune, Benten's Touch, Call Upon the Wind, By the Light of the Moon, Essence of Air, Know the Mind, Elemental Ward, Jurojin's Balm, Force of Will, Earth's Protection, Extinguish, Mental Quickness, Ravenous Swarms Path to Inner Peace, and any other the GM feels appropriate.*

Kiho: *Soul of the Four Winds, Cleansing Spirit*

Advantages: *Seven Fortunes' Blessing (Benten), Voice*

Disadvantages: *Driven (Find the Hand of Fate), Rumormonger*

MIRUMOTO HAJITSU

DRAGON CLAN, FORMER GOVERNOR

Mirumoto Hajitsu was not supposed to become a ruler. The second son of a provincial governor, he was interested from his youth in religion and theology, but at his father's behest he joined the armies of his clan to earn glory and repute. He survived several battles, enough to rise to the post of gunso at the head of his own unit, when he learned his father and brother had both died of illness. Reluctantly, Hajitsu went back to his home province and governed it as well as he could for many years. More than once he was forced to take the field of battle once again when war threatened his lands.

As he approached his fortieth year, Hajitsu found himself deeply weary of his duties, and although his province was as successful as could be hoped in the poor lands of the Dragon Clan, he felt it was past time for someone else to take the reins of power. With the agreement of his lord Hajitsu retired from his position, shaving his



head and preparing for a new life. After imparting all the knowledge he could to his successor, Hajitsu left his home and undertook a pilgrimage to Naishou Province, which temples he had always been curious to visit.

Since his arrival, Hajitsu has split his time between the temples of the city and the court, where he enjoys the occasional game of go or conversation with those samurai willing to indulge his interest in theology. However, many both in and out of the Dragon Clan have voiced their interest in seeing Hajitsu become the next Governor, pointing to his prior experience as both a political leader and a military commander. While Hajitsu will not refuse a direct order from his superiors, he does not wish to rejoin the political world he finally escaped, nor does he seek a return to the battlefield. His sleep is often wracked by terrible nightmares in which he remembers his countless battles, watching friends and foes fall dead under blades and arrows. He hopes to find peace for himself in retirement, and would far rather join a monastic order than have to rule again. However, he also sees the potential for conflict rising in Naishou Province, and wonders if there is not more he could do to secure peace for others before he can finally secure peace for himself.

MIRUMOTO HAJITSU, DRAGON CLAN FORMER GOVERNOR

AIR: 3 EARTH: 4 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 3
AGILITY: 4

Honor: 5.8 Status: 4.9 Glory: 6.2

School/Rank: *Mirumoto Bushi 4*

Skills: *Athletics 3, Battle 3, Courtier (Rhetoric) 3, Defense 4, Etiquette (Bureaucracy) 4, Games: Go 4, Iaijutsu 4, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Lore: Shugenja 3, Lore: Theology 4, Meditation 4, Sincerity 3*

Kata: *Strength of the Dragon, Striking as Earth*

Advantages: *Quick Healer, Sacred Weapon (Twin Sister Blades), Tactician*

Disadvantages: *Ascetic, Cursed by the Realm (Yume-do)*



SUSUMU OIJI, SPIDER CLAN SCRIBE

Most campaigns using Naishou Province will probably take place in an era in which the Spider Clan does not exist, but if the GM is using a setting with the Spider, this NPC may optionally be added to the Governor's court.

When the Imperial Governor opened his court, one of his first acts was to announce his successor would not be from the Spider Clan under any circumstances whatever. This came as a surprise to no one, not even the Spider. While nominally a Great Clan, they still inspire deep enmity and distrust, and no other clan would tolerate letting them take control of a prosperous province.

When Susumu Oiji overheard the news, however, he was quick to parlay his clan's normal rejection into a personal opportunity. He declared that since he had no concern over the affiliation of the next Governor, he was ideally positioned to serve the current one. He presented his point quite eloquently, and Miya Ansho accepted his service, making him an official scribe.

Like many other members of the Susumu family, Oiji serves his master dutifully, taking careful note of every proclamation and offering advice when appropriate. Due to his affiliation, the other clans do not like to deal with the Governor's scribe, yet have little choice but to do so. His unimpressive physical appearance – Oiji is a gaunt, sickly-looking young man – does little to inspire fear or respect, and no one trusts him. Although many have sought to undermine his position, thus far they have not found a valid reason to complain about his loyalty or service.

Of course, Oiji does indeed have ulterior motives, but not necessarily the ones others ascribe him. He genuinely respects Miya Ansho, who he sees as a true statesman. The fact that he refused to give the Spider a chance at controlling the province just proves his strength of will in Oiji's mind. Therefore, he has resolved to make the Governor's tenure last as long as possible. He schemes, lies, and plots at every turn to make all the other clans appear unfit to rule, or at least to create enough doubt so as to make a clear choice impossible. His position allows him tremendous insight into the Governor's mind, as well as access to a great deal of information, and as a result his campaign has thus far been quite successful. Oiji hopes if he keeps the options muddled for long enough, the Governor will realize the only true choice is to remain in his position indefinitely.



SUSUMU OIJI, SPIDER CLAN SCRIBE

SUSUMU OIJI, SPIDER CLAN SCRIBE

AIR: 2	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2	VOID: 2
AWARENESS: 3		WILLPOWER: 3		PERCEPTION: 3
Honor: 1.2		Status: 3.1		Glory: 2.0

School/Rank: Daigotsu Courtier 2

Skills: Acting 3, Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Etiquette (Conversation) 4, Games: Sadane 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 4, Knives 1, Meditation 3, Sincerity (Deceit) 4, Temptation 3

Advantages: Dark Paragon (Control), Social Position, Wary

Disadvantages: Bad Health, Failure of Bushido (Honesty)



KUNI SHIYODA

CRAB CLAN WITCH-HUNTER

Kuni Shiyoda was once considered a hero of the Crab Clan. Trained as a witch-hunter, she scoured the Empire in search of maho-tsukai, shapeshifters, and other such threats. She was tireless and fearless, displaying a strength in combat which belied her slender appearance. She also showed little of the harsh gruffness normally associated with her family and profession, and her pleasant demeanor helped her carry out her duties with a minimum of political damage. Her ongoing training only made her more dangerous to the enemies of the Empire, and the Crab had great hopes for the rest of her career. Then she was sent on what should have been a simple assignment for someone of her caliber: tracking down an ogre in the Seikitsu Mountains. But Shiyoda did not return from the task. Eventually a search party was sent to recover her (or locate her body), but it found neither her nor the ogre. The Crab were forced to assume the worst, and Shiyoda was declared dead and mourned as another clan hero, fallen against the forces of darkness.

None were more surprised than the Crab when Shiyoda reappeared in Naishou Province. She arrived at the Governor's Palace completely delirious, speaking wildly of an ancient evil hidden in the province, an evil older than the Shadowlands itself and infinitely more dangerous. Shiyoda pleaded with everyone, peasant and samurai alike, to leave the province and never return lest they awake something too terrible for any of them to fight. Needless to say, most samurai were less than impressed, and the general assumption was that Shiyoda had gone mad. Despite this, she has stayed on in Toshi no Naishou, begging the Governor to reconsider his position whenever he lets her speak.

Many remember the tales of Shiyoda's former valor and see her now as a broken woman whose mind snapped in the face of Shadowlands horrors. Some, however, still catch glimpses of her old brilliance among her ramblings, and wonder if there is not a grain of truth in her warnings.

KUNI SHIYODA, CRAB CLAN WITCH-HUNTER

AIR: 3 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 2

INTELLIGENCE: 4

Honor: 5.2 Status: 1.0 Glory: 3.1

School/Rank: Kuni Witch-Hunter 3
(*The Great Clans*, p.40)

Skills: Athletics 2, Courtier 1, Defense 3, Divination 2, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Jujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 4, Lore: Shadowlands 5, Lore: maho 4, Medicine 3, Meditation 1

Advantages: Seven Fortunes' Blessing (Bishamon), Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Dark Fate, Touch of the Void

Military Figures of Naishou Province

While for centuries Naishou was a quiet and mostly forgotten province, it has endured its share of battles since the samurai of the Empire became aware of it. After the recent extinction of the Phoenix line of Governors, battles erupted once again, mainly between the Crane and the Scorpion, but also with other factions on the periphery. The arrival of the new Imperial Governor has brought peace to the region, but he also brought hundreds of soldiers from the Lion Clan, only further reinforcing the military presence in the province. The Governor has allowed the Crane and Scorpion troops to remain to avoid further insulting the two clans. As of now, the armies are restricted to peaceful maneuvering, gauging each other's strength and trying to make sure they are ready when conflict erupts again. Should politics fail, the valley, forest, and mountains of Naishou Province will see samurai fighting by the hundreds, their blood drowning the Governor's efforts to maintain the peace.

MATSU TADANOBU, LION CLAN SHIREIKAN

Matsu Tadanobu is a legend among his men. He leads them from the front lines, running toward the enemy faster than any other, hurling spears with deadly strength and precision before closing in for the kill. They see him as a reborn hero from times past, a man capable of larger-than-life feats. Away from the battlefield Tadanobu keeps mostly to himself, and this behavior only further enhances his reputation. In his current position he commands the loyalty of hundreds of soldiers, many of whom emulate his attitude as well as his fighting style. The company under Tadanobu's orders is famous for its dedication to duty, and this was at least part of the reason it was chosen by the

WHY IS KUNI SHIYODA MAD?

The section on the Taru Mountains in Chapter Three (Geography) contains a suggestion on what Shiyoda might have encountered to drive her to such madness and frantic desperation. However, the GM can also explore other possibilities for Shiyoda.

Perhaps Shiyoda really is mad, driven insane by her last battle with the ogre.

Perhaps she is actually Tainted, her madness a by-product of Jigoku's influence.

If the GM's campaign is set prior to the Hidden Emperor era, perhaps Shiyoda has encountered the Lying Darkness and been driven mad by its terrors. In this case, she probably has at least one Shadow Rank.

Perhaps she is not Kuni Shiyoda at all, but some shapeshifting creature which does not properly understand humanity.



Emperor to accompany the new Governor to the Naishou Province. (Some courtiers have suggested the real reason was a political favor to the Lion Clan, or because the Imperial Legions would not or could not answer the Miya's call.) Regardless, Tadanobu obeyed without question.

Since his arrival, Tadanobu has stayed busy even though there are few enemies to fight. His men patrol the crowded streets of Toshi no Naishou, helping the doshin maintain order, and have also been deployed all through the province. They protect its borders against potentially aggressive clans, protect the forest villages against the occasional bandits, and keep tabs on the movements of the Crane and Scorpion armies in case war erupts anew. These duties require Tadanobu to be in contact with other samurai more than he usually favors, and although he has learned to temper his harsh speech somewhat, others are still often taken aback by his stern demeanor.

For all his formidable reputation, Matsu Tadanobu has no particular desire to fight as long as his duties are accomplished. When on his own, he likes to read and study the legends of ancient Lion Clan heroes, searching for a way to emulate them. Tadanobu is a descendant of Matsu Tadaka, the Lion Clan Champion who nearly doomed himself after entering the Shadowlands in quest for a worthy foe. The spirit of Tadaka speaks constantly in Tadanobu's ear, pushing him to even greater heights, never satisfied. Tadanobu does not protest his ancestor's demands, doing his best to obey in this as in all else. In truth, his real hope is for a glorious death so he may join the heroes of the past in Yomi.



MATSU TADANOBU, LION CLAN SHIREIKAN

AIR: 3	EARTH: 4	FIRE: 3	WATER: 4	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 4	AGILITY: 5			
Honor: 7.8		Status: 6.1	Glory: 6.7	

School/Rank: Lion Elite Spearman 5

Skills: Athletics (Running) 7, Battle (Mass Combat) 6, Defense 5, Etiquette 1, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: History (Lion Clan) 7, Polearms 7, Spears (Magari-Yari) 8

Kata: Strength of the Lion, Striking as Fire, Striking as Water

Advantages: Daredevil, Paragon (Duty)

Disadvantages: Antisocial (2 points), Haunted

DOJI AYUMI

CRANE CLAN TAISA

Some say Doji Ayumi's passion for war comes from her mother, who was a Lion before she married into the Crane. Even as a child she cared little for her lessons of etiquette, preferring to train with bows, wooden swords, sticks, or anything else weapon-like she could lay her hands upon. She was the only child of her parents, and they could refuse her little. They initially hoped to have her attend the Kakita

Dueling Academy, but the sensei there took one look and declared her ferocity meant she was best suited for training with the Daidoji. They were right: Ayumi flourished under the tutelage of the Daidoji, learning to wield many weapons and becoming a keen student of military strategy. After her gempukku she became one of the few members of the Doji family fighting in the clan's Daidoji army. On the battlefield she was a dangerous opponent, able to adapt to many different situations, and always striking with precision and speed. She also became popular with her troops, who appreciated that she treated them all as equals, united in their duties to the Crane Clan. She advanced quickly through the ranks, and already had her own legion under her command when she was dispatched to Naishou Province.

Although she expected a quick victory, Ayumi found herself facing an enemy even cleverer and more capable than herself: Bayushi Itaru. Their troops clashed several times, and while Ayumi resented the Scorpion for his continued opposition, she also came to bear the man a grudging respect, having seen him fight and lead his men with great skill and insight. Rather than continue to slaughter each others' men for no result, they decided to fight a duel to the death to resolve the fate of the province. Ayumi was not a superlative duelist, but she was more than ready to face Itaru for the honor of the Crane. She was disappointed when the arrival of the new Governor and his Lion army brought an end to the conflict.



Since then Ayumi has been biding her time, her mood increasingly dour as she waits for a chance to fight again. Politics does not suit her and she has kept well away from court, preferring to leave that responsibility in others' hands. She maintains her troops on constant alert, ready to fight the Scorpion, the Lion, or anyone else who might attempt to seize Naishou Province by strength of arms. But as the days have passed she has become increasingly desperate for a fight... particularly since she received a letter from her parents. They have arranged a marriage for her to a rich Crane courtier, exactly the kind of superficial man she dislikes. She will not actually disobey her parents, of course, but the longer she can delay the wedding, the better – and there is little room for a marriage during a military campaign.

DOJI AYUMI, CRANE CLAN TAISA

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 3	WATER: 3	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 4	AGILITY: 4			
Honor: 7.2		Status: 5.4		Glory: 5.4

School/Rank: Daidoji Iron Warrior 3

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Combat) 5, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu 4, Jujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 5, Spears (Yari) 6

Kata: Dance of the Winds, Strength of the Crane, Striking as Air, Striking as Earth

Advantages: Crab Hands, Quick

Disadvantages: Bitter Betrothal, Can't Lie

TSURUCHI JUNKO

MANTIS CLAN GUNSO

The Mantis were late in the competition to seize Naishou Province, and have not sent a significant number of troops to the place. Instead, they have offered their services to a number of different factions, providing military assistance in exchange for coin or political favor. One of the most popular units is colloquially known as “Junko’s arrows” after its gunso, Tsuruchi Junko. A short, cheerful ronin archer who was allowed to swear fealty to the Tsuruchi based on his skill alone, he and his men have been in the province since the war between the Crane and the Scorpion began, and they know its terrain like few others. The precision of the archers and their ability to inflict deadly ambushes has made them a valuable military commodity, and Junko is happy to exploit this. Although war has abated for now, many believe it will soon return to the province, and when that happens everyone will want Junko’s Arrows on their side.

When he is not leading his men for one side or another, Junko is happy setting up trade deals for his clan in Naishou Province. After all, trade will go on no matter which clan gains the Governor’s office. Mantis ships are already traveling up and down the Itochu River regularly, ferrying passengers and goods alike. Junko is pleased with this development, since he gets a share of every deal he arranges. He keenly remembers the discomforts of his old

life as a wave-man, and now wishes to be as comfortable as possible. While he is not afraid to get his hands dirty when the mission demands it, on his own time Junko likes to buy himself the finest food, drink, and clothing, all of which requires large sums of money.

Few know that before he joined the Tsuruchi, Junko was an assassin for hire, committing several high-profile murders for patrons he never met. Although he has never heard from his old employers since he joined the Mantis, Junko worries what could happen if his old crimes were ever revealed. He believes he was never actually suspected, since he used both stealth and long-range archery to dispatch his victims, but he knows his fate would be sealed if even one of the killings were ever attributed to him. Junko genuinely enjoys the company of his fellow Mantis, but should his life ever be in danger he would abandon them without hesitation.

TSURUCHI JUNKO, MANTIS CLAN GUNSO

AIR: 3	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2	VOID: 3
WILLPOWER: 3		AGILITY: 4	PERCEPTION: 4	
Honor: 3.1		Status: 3.2		Glory: 3.8

School/Rank: Tsuruchi Archer 3

Skills: Athletics 5, Battle 3, Commerce 4, Courtier 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Hunting 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Knives 3, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 6, Sincerity 2, Stealth (Ambush) 5

Kata: Strength of the Mantis, Striking as Air, Veiled Menace Style

Advantages: Seven Fortunes’ Blessing (Daikoku), Way of the Land (Naishou Province), Silent

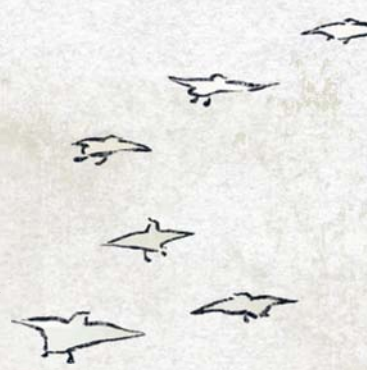
Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Insensitive

KAGEMORI

RONIN TACTICIAN

Many ronin have tragic, complex stories behind their shameful place in the Celestial Order. Not so Kagemori. Born a member of the Hida family, he simply fell asleep one night while standing watch. Nobody was injured as a result, no Shadowlands creature slipped through, but it was still an inexcusable failure of duty in the eyes of his superiors, and they cast him out of the clan as an example. Kagemori shrugged, took his weapons and armor (before anybody thought of asking him to give them back), and walked north, never to return. He did not feel particularly ashamed – after all, nobody died. But he also did not feel angry, for he understood his superior’s actions. He simply knew he would have to seek a new life somewhere else, and considering the duties of the Crab, perhaps this was a blessing in disguise.

As a ronin, Kagemori fought willingly for whoever hired him. He preferred to work for Great Clan samurai, but only because they usually paid better. Kagemori survived many battles and acquired a flair for battlefield tactics, based more on instinct than any learned strategy. His insights saved the lives of many men fighting alongside him,





and eventually Kagemori found himself being hired by military commanders, nominally as a yojimbo but actually to provide tactical advice during battle. He performed well in both roles, ensuring he remained employed more often than not. Recently Kagemori traveled to Naishou Province, where he thought his services might soon be in demand. Although the province is nominally at peace, he can feel the winds of war blowing in the air, and when the battles come he will be there to provide his assistance to anyone who can pay.

Kagemori is an impressive warrior and an intimidating presence. His arrival has drawn much notice from those who know about military matters, and he spends his time in the various inns and taverns of Toshi no Naishou while he considers various offers of employment. There are no enemies Kagemori will refuse to fight, although he remembers enough of the Shadowlands that he usually avoids the Crab lands. Unlike many ronin, Kagemori does not dream of joining a clan – he likes his current existence, where he earns a living and gains respect through his strength and skill alone. Few people bother him, partly because he does not seek needless trouble... and partly because he is a mountain of a man with a particularly large tetsubo strapped across his back.

KAGEMORI, RONIN TACTICIAN

AIR: 2	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 2	WATER: 3	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 4	AGILITY: 4		PERCEPTION: 4	
Honor: 2.8		Status: 0.0		Glory: 3.5

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 2 (Insight Rank 3)

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 5, Commerce 3, Defense 5, Iaijutsu 3, Jiujutsu 5, Heavy Weapons (Tetsubo) 5, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Shadowlands 2, Medicine 3, Polearms 3, Stealth 2

Kata: Striking as Earth

Advantages: Dark Paragon (Strength), Large, Tactician

Disadvantages: Social Disadvantage, Failure of Bushido (Duty)

Religious Figures of Naishou Province

Naishou Province is one of the Empire's oldest centers of Fortunist religion, and its many temples and monasteries attract a significant number of both pilgrims and retired samurai, eager to share in the peace and wisdom of such ancient devotion. Furthermore, the area is replete with stories and legends of mischievous spirits, wandering Fortunes, and other such supernatural events, enough for any religious scholar to be at least somewhat interested in the province. It is quite common to see both monks and shugenja on the roads of Naishou Province and in the streets of Toshi no Naishou itself.

ISAWA DAICHI, PHOENIX CLAN SCHOLAR

When the old Phoenix Governor passed away without an heir, Isawa Daichi did not notice. In fact, it was only some weeks later when he came to the court (asking help locating the texts he needed to further his research) that Daichi realized a political change had happened in the city.

Daichi is one of the Empire's foremost scholars on what some refer to as the Five Ancient Races: the Zokujin who live in the earth, the Ningyo deep under the waters, the mysterious raven-men called Kenku, the fallen race of Trolls, and the long-gone Kitsu lion-men who walked the Spirit Realms. Ever since he heard the legends as a child, Daichi wanted to know more. He sees the Five Races as incarnations of the Elements themselves, and thus as a source of wisdom and enlightenment for any shugenja. When Daichi passed his gempukku, his teachers granted him leave to travel the Empire and search for signs of the Five Races' ancient civilizations.

Unfortunately, while Daichi has a brilliant mind and memory, he knows the human soul – and the human capacity for deception – far less well than his research topics. Very often he found himself on fools' errands because he believed stories others would have recognized as fables or simple lies. Once, a Mantis sailor sold him several small exotic fish for a ridiculous price, claiming they were baby Ningyo. A whole mountain village once spent the winter season tricking him into believing Zokujin were in the area, mainly by disguising their children and having them run around the village at night. Still, for all the false leads Daichi followed, occasionally he stumbled across a fragment of real knowledge. Despite his experiences, he retained a surprising amount of naïve faith in others.

Daichi came to Naishou Province after hearing rumors of its many legends and of the strange ruins sometimes glimpsed in the outer parts of its territory, such as the Omikura Swamp. He has been in the province for months, cataloguing every piece of information he can find, splitting his time between digging through the city's libraries and exploring the remote corners of the countryside. He has heard the stories of Ningyo in the river, of Zokujin in the mountains, of Kenku in the forest. There do not seem to be any traces of Kitsu in the province, although Daichi is convinced they once had a great city here which has since been somehow hidden. However, his greatest interest has always been in the Trolls, since they share his connection with the Element of Fire. Despite many reports to the contrary, Daichi hopes some members of the fallen race escaped the Taint and the decadence which struck their culture, and he thinks Naishou Province might be the place for him to find them. While most samurai dismiss his ideas as the ravings of a lunatic, they seldom do so to his face, for his magical power has grown quite strong over the years. And of course if one of his ideas should prove close to the truth, it would transform the province's future.

ISAWA DAICHI, PHOENIX CLAN SCHOLAR

AIR: 2 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 5 WATER: 2 VOID: 3

PERCEPTION: 3

Honor: 4.4 Status: 1.1 Glory: 3.1

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Fire) 3/Isawa Archeologist (Second City, The People – pg.100)

Skills: Calligraphy (cipher) 3, Etiquette 1, Investigation 4, Lore: Theology 5, Lore: Five Ancient Races 7, Medicine 3, Meditation 3, Spellcraft 3

Spells: Sense, Summon, Commune, Extinguish, Mental Quickness, Ward of Purity, Breath of the Fire Dragon, Fiery Wrath, Death of Flame, Symbol of Fire, By the Light of the Moon, Path to Inner Peace, Jurojin's Balm, Embrace of Kenro-Ji-Jin, Earth's Protection, and any other spells the GM feels appropriate.

Advantages: Friend of the Elements (Fire), Sage, Seven Fortunes' Blessing (Fukurokujin – Lore: Five Ancient Races),

Disadvantages: Fascination (Five Ancient Races), Gullible

OKIMOTO

ABBOT OF THE SEVEN FORTUNES' ORDER

The abbot of the Seven Fortunes' Temple in Toshi no Naishou holds one of the most important and influential stations in the province. Indeed, during times when the Governor is weak or nonexistent, it can be the single most influential station. The people of Naishou Province always look to the Fortunes for guidance, and they consider the monks of the Seven Fortunes Order to be the Fortunes' voice.

After the previous abbot died of old age, many were surprised that he left instructions to make Okimoto his successor rather than the usual custom of the temple elders electing a new abbot. At the time Okimoto was still a simple and humble young monk, raised from a baby abandoned at birth by a poor farmer. Although he accepted the old abbot's command, he insisted he could not take up the mantle of leadership until he was truly ready. He spent the next thirty-five years of his life serving each of the Seven Fortunes with the utmost dedication, preparing himself for his role. He trained with the monks of Bishamon and fought bandits at their side. He worked the village fields with the monks of Ebisu. He poured over old scrolls in the monastery libraries with the monks of Fukurokujin, treated the sick and infirm alongside those who served Jurojin, and managed the finances of several monasteries under the auspices of Daikoku. He guided and advised young lovers in the name of Benten, and spent five years in peaceful isolation to get closer to Hotei's ideal of contentment. When he finally returned to the city's temple, Okimoto had transformed into a wise and knowledgeable man, gifted with equal wisdom about the world and about himself. Only then did he assume leadership of the temple, and he has continued in that office ever since.

Okimoto is now a very old man, still surprisingly fit and able, although his eyesight is in decline. He venerates all seven Fortunes equally in his prayers and services, and tries to foster ideals of balance and peace in everyone he encounters. Okimoto is highly popular with the peasant masses, even more so than prior abbots, due to the many compassionate works he and his brothers perform.

The recent influx of samurai from outside the province worries Okimoto, who sees the potential for renewed conflict growing day by day. Violence can stain the soul, but if the common people should be endangered Okimoto will order his monks to do whatever they can to protect them. With the resources of numerous temples and monasteries at his command, he could actually represent a significant threat to any Great Clan's forces, particularly since he would also have the backing of a large share of the province's commoner population. Of course, this would be a last resort – Okimoto has no desire for conflict, and keeps trying to foster prosperity and peace for all. He prays day and night this will be enough.

OKIMOTO, ABBOT OF THE SEVEN FORTUNES' ORDER

AIR: 4 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 4 WATER: 3 VOID: 4

WILLPOWER: 4

PERCEPTION: 4

Honor: 4.9 Status: 0.5 Glory: 4.0

School/Rank: Temple of the Thousand Fortunes 5

Skills: Athletics 4, Commerce 5, Courtier 4, Craft: Farming 5, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 5, Jiu-jitsu 5, Lore: History 5, Lore: Theology (Fortunes) 7, Lore: Omens 5, Medicine 5, Meditation 5, Sincerity 3

Kiho: Air Fist, Harmony of the Mind, Soul of the Four Winds, Cleansing Spirit, Earth Needs No Eyes, Breaking Blow, Channel the Fire Dragon, Buoyed by the Kami, Chi Protection, Touch the Void Dragon, To the Last Breath, and any other Kiho the GM feels appropriate.

Advantages: Hero of the People, Naishou Citizen, Seven Fortunes' Blessing (Jurojin)

Disadvantages: Bad Eyesight, Soft-Hearted



Other Prominent Figures in Naishou Province

Politics, religion, and war are not the only preoccupations of the Naishou Province. Trade has always been important to the locals, allowing the area to prosper through internal exchanges, and the recent interest of the Empire has also brought a surge in external trade. The arts have always received attention in the city, and due to the higher level of literacy it is not uncommon even in the smaller villages to find storytellers, musicians, or puppeteers. Ultimately, though, for most people in Naishou work and family are their only preoccupations, with little time for anything else.

IDE OJONG, UNICORN CLAN MERCHANT PATRON

Ide Ojong grew up on the plains of the Unicorn Clan, and like many children he always watched when the warriors of the clan rode by, glorious in their full armor atop their formidable steeds. But unlike his brethren, Ojong had only scorn for what he saw. Perhaps due to his own frailty – Ojong was a small and often sickly boy, and remained a slender and short-statured man even after he reached adulthood – he always believed the physical might of a samurai was little in comparison to the strength of a man's mind. He studied hard even before he enrolled in the Ide Emissary school. It was while studying in that school that

Ojong came to realize he could accomplish far more in life if he ignored the tiresome and restrictive rules of Bushido.

After his gempukku, Ojong set out to make himself into a merchant patron, seeing wealth as a key to power and success. From small beginnings, such as selling second-rate steeds to other clans, Ojong's businesses developed until he became the master of a large merchant caravan, shipping all manner of wares to every corner of the Empire. One of his greatest feats was to secure a personal alliance with the Yasuki family, establishing an even larger network of commerce. With their assistance Ojong has become not only a rich man but also an influential one, able to exert control across vast distances through his subordinates.

Now Ojong's gaze has fallen upon Naishou Province. The province offers tremendous opportunity because so much of its economy is unsupervised by any of the strong mercantile groups from the rest of the Empire, and he sees it as an opportunity to establish an unassailable stronghold. Ojong has brought the majority of his merchants to the province with the intention of settling here on a semi-permanent basis. Through a combination of business flair and less reputable techniques the men under Ojong's patronage have started taking over several key trades within the province, thus far with no one the wiser. Because Ojong keeps reinvesting his wealth into the province, to an untrained eye he does not appear to be particularly wealthy... but this means he is constantly growing more powerful and influential. When the time



is right, Ojong plans to reveal the extent to which he has entrenched himself in the province and either obtain the office of Governor for himself or impose a puppet Governor who will do whatever he wishes.

Ojong has a few ronin hirelings and Unicorn warriors at his disposal, but his true strength is the way he wields his money like a weapon. He will only make his move once it has become impossible to remove him without crippling the entire economy of Naishou Province. Then he will look back at the warriors of his childhood homeland... and smile at their weakness.

IDE OJONG, UNICORN CLAN MERCHANT PATRON

AIR: 2 EARTH: 2 FIRE: 2 WATER: 2 VOID: 3
AWARENESS: 4 WILLPOWER: 4 INTELLIGENCE: 4 PERCEPTION: 3
Honor: 2.3 Status: 2.2 Glory: 3.8

School/Rank: Ide Emissary 3

(Ide Trader – the Great Clans p.259)

Skills: Animal Handling 3, Calligraphy 3, Commerce (Appraisal) 7, Courtier (Manipulation) 6, Defense 3, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Games: Shogi 5, Horsemanship 3, Intimidation (Control) 5, Investigation (Interrogation, Notice) 5, Lore: Underworld 5, Sincerity (Deceit, Honesty) 6, Temptation (Bribery) 6

Advantages: Crafty, Dark Paragon (Insight), Perceived Honor (4 points), Servant (Merchants, numerous), Wealthy (4 points)

Disadvantages: Failure of Bushido (Honor), Gaijin Name, Insensitive, Jealousy

SUZUME HIDEYO

SPARROW CLAN POET

Suzume Hideyo was only a young man when a visiting Crane diplomat overheard one of his poems. Before he even knew what was happening, favors were exchanged and Hideyo found himself a pupil in the Kakita Artisan Academy, the most prestigious establishment of its kind in the Empire. For one whose hands were covered with calluses from plowing the fields, transitioning to the luxury and elegance of the Academy was not easy. He often faced mockery for his lowly birth and “countryside” mannerisms, but the sheer joy of studying with such magnificent teachers ultimately overcame all else. Moreover, once one got past his rustic mannerisms Hideyo was an honorable and charming young man, and by the time he left the Academy he had made several loyal friends. His sensei fully expected him to sharpen his skills in one of Rokugan’s many courts, winning favors for himself, the Sparrow Clan, and of course his teachers in the Crane Clan.

But instead, Hideyo departed the Academy, leaving behind only a beautiful poem of thanks to his teachers. He began traveling the roads of Rokugan. Despite his special education, Hideyo had not forgotten the ideals of the Sparrow, and he wanted to uphold the principle of

Honorable Poverty by serving the lower classes through his art. He searched across the Empire for inspiring moments to record in his work, and those who have read Hideyo’s poems are often impressed by the simple sincerity they hold. His choice of humble topics divides the critics, not that their opinions matter to Hideyo. Moreover, his output is erratic, for he will often drop everything to help small villages in any way he can, whether in the fields or with his blade. He never stays long in one place, always searching for his next source of inspiration.

Hideyo’s wanderings have recently brought him to Naishou Province, and he has fallen in love with this land. He admires the piety and dedication of the inhabitants, and keeps finding new moments to capture and new stories to tell. The influx of new samurai to the province worries him, since he fears it will destroy Naishou’s unique culture and put peaceful men and women in harm’s way. Although he will fight if need be, Hideyo knows his true weapon is his art, and he has begun using his poems and stories to bring the plight of the common people to the attention of the Governor and other prominent samurai. Reactions have been mixed, from shock at his mundane topics to admiration for the beauty of his compositions, but few pause to actually consider the hardships he describes. Perhaps, Hideyo hopes, a sufficiently moving poem will finally break through and convince the samurai to leave Naishou Province to itself, lest they destroy what they had come to claim.

SUZUME HIDEYO, SPARROW CLAN POET

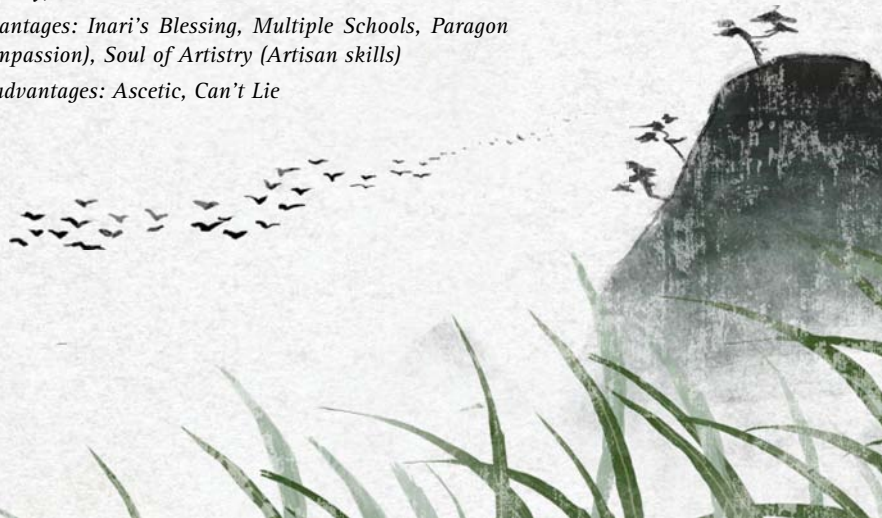
AIR: 3 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 4
AWARENESS: 5 WILLPOWER: 4 PERCEPTION: 3
Honor: 8.2 Status: 1.0 Glory: 3.2

School/Rank: Sparrow Bushi 1/Kakita Artisan 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Artisan: Poetry 7, Courtier 2, Craft: Farming 3, Defense 3, Games: Sadane 2, Etiquette (Conversation) 3, Iaijutsu 4, Kenjutsu 3, Medicine 3, Perform: Flute 5, Perform: Storytelling 5, Sincerity (Honesty) 3

Advantages: Inari’s Blessing, Multiple Schools, Paragon (Compassion), Soul of Artistry (Artisan skills)

Disadvantages: Ascetic, Can’t Lie





SETTLEMENTS OF NAISHOU PROVINCE

While Toshi no Naishou is the crown jewel of Naishou Province, it is far from being the only settlement of note. In fact, without the many other towns and villages around it the city could not survive more than a few days. The long and complex history of Naishou Province has given rise to many idiosyncrasies in its settlements, and a traveler can sometimes feel like he is entering a completely different region simply by visiting another settlement. This chapter describes the other settlements that are important to the province, whether for political, economic, military, or cultural reasons.

Koso Mura, the Rival Village

Several hours of walk to the north of Toshi no Naishou is the town of Koso Mura, the second biggest holding in the province after the city itself, far ahead in size of any other town elsewhere. Originally, Koso Mura was place very similar place to the city, if smaller, but it has grown increasingly different over the years and emerged as a rival to the province's capital. Koso Mura is a focus point for trade and agriculture in the northern part of the province, and holds many smaller villages around it under its influence. While still very much second to Toshi no Naishou in wealth and influence, Koso Mura has several

factors which could eventually give it the edge against the traditional seat of the province's government.

Koso Mura is located close to the Taru Mountains but still well within the limits of the Nobu Valley and the traditional territory of the Takanobu tribe and its descendants. The town is built on lands which are somewhat more rocky and elevated than the rest of the valley, making construction more difficult but also protecting it from flooding. There is no major river running through Koso Mura, and the inhabitants get water from an array of wells instead. Outside the town, numerous small streams provide water for the rice paddies, and the harvest here has always been plentiful.

The physical and political center of the town is Jimichi Keep, the only military castle of note in the province. In the past, bandits and Great Clan armies alike would often attempt to attack by marching down from the mountains, and Koso Mura was ideally situated to bar their way to the rest of Naishou Province. The Keep was built to deter such attacks by one of the earliest Phoenix Governors and has fulfilled this role ever since. A three-story castle, it is far too small to house the population of the whole town, but its position allows even a small force of soldiers to defend the town effectively. Anyone approaching the Keep must move through narrow streets exposed to arrow fire from the Keep's walls, making any assault difficult and costly. There has been no attack for quite some time, and the Keep more commonly serves as a court for the local samurai lord.





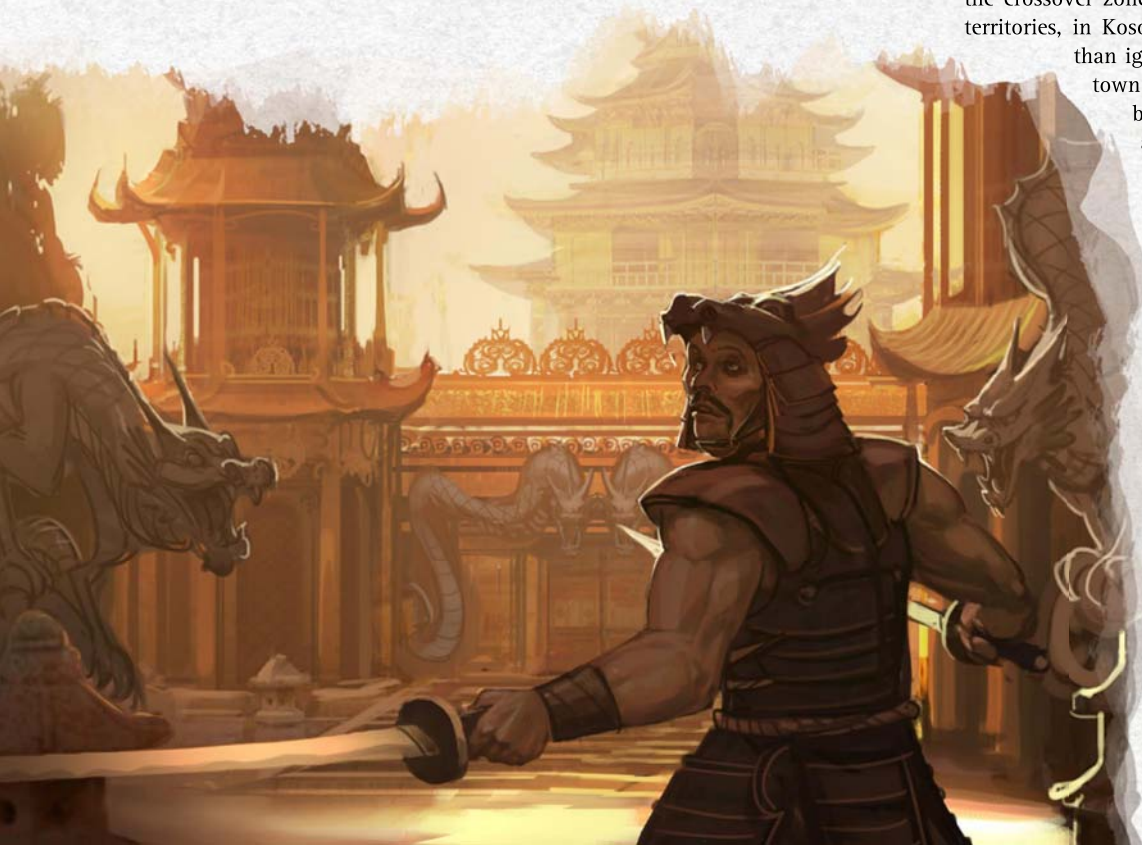
Koso Mura is also famous for its Taoist temples. It boasts no less than five, one for each of the Elements. While Naishou Province as a whole is traditionally very attached to the Fortunes, in Koso Mura the Tao has found increased popularity, perhaps in part as a way of distinguishing itself from Toshi no Naishou. The temples are spread across the town, ensuring the residents are never far from spiritual guidance, and each temple is decorated with colorful representations of the Element it represents. The temples are manned by a local monastic sect which is an offshoot of the Four Temples Order, but any monk belonging to a Taoist order is welcome in them. The monks take a very active role in the village, constantly providing help, advice, and guidance. As a result the population is generally peaceful and surprisingly well-educated, eager to achieve a better place for their souls in their next lives. The monks are also present at the Keep's court, where they lead religious ceremonies and advise the samurai lord. Once a year, the five temples are re-consecrated in a solemn ceremony which involves the entire population. This is a quiet event in which the otherwise lively town comes to a standstill, as everyone reflects on their sins and their progress on the Way of the Tao.

As part of a recent effort to attract more samurai, the town recently built a large inn called "Water Upon the Stones." It is designed to cater to visiting samurai and can house up to thirty guests at one time. The establishment is particularly famous for its rice cakes, whose reputation has extended beyond the town and may soon be heard outside the province. The chef, a commoner named Otsu, is considered one of the town's greatest treasures, and there have been rumors other towns would like to kidnap him or even see him dead. Many visitors are surprised to see this portly, middle-aged man flanked by two samurai wherever he goes, and while Otsu does not believe anybody would kill him over rice cakes, he is not about to refuse the

protection of the local lord. The rest of his menu is also of high quality, and while the inn's prices are a bit high it is popular with many samurai. Its odd name comes from the chef's method of steaming food by dashing water over very hot stones, which the locals believe preserves flavors. The inn has become a landmark, and only the villagers' piety prevents them from feeling envy of the samurai who eat such delicacies.

Koso Mura is the major center of trade and population for the northern part of Naishou Province, so it sees a great deal of trade with the surrounding smaller villages. This is primarily farmers and miners coming to sell their wares or exchange them against things they cannot get in their smaller villages. Koso Mura has a large public marketplace which is fully covered, an unusual design that allows it to operate at full capacity even during rainy days. The locals say the only time the market closes is when an Emperor dies – but of course, by the time the news reaches Naishou Province a new Emperor is on the throne already, so it is too late to mourn. The market is packed almost every day, and visitors must shoulder through bustling crowds to get anywhere. This unfortunately does make opportunities for pickpockets to thrive, particularly children, although the local guards do their best to suppress such criminality. Still, for the most part the market is a wonderful experience, suffused with the smells of a hundred different foodstuffs (many of them cooked on the spot by vendors). At night the market is lit by many colorful lanterns and plays host to improvised sake houses and low-ante gambling games. It is not uncommon for the market to stay lively into the early hours of the morning.

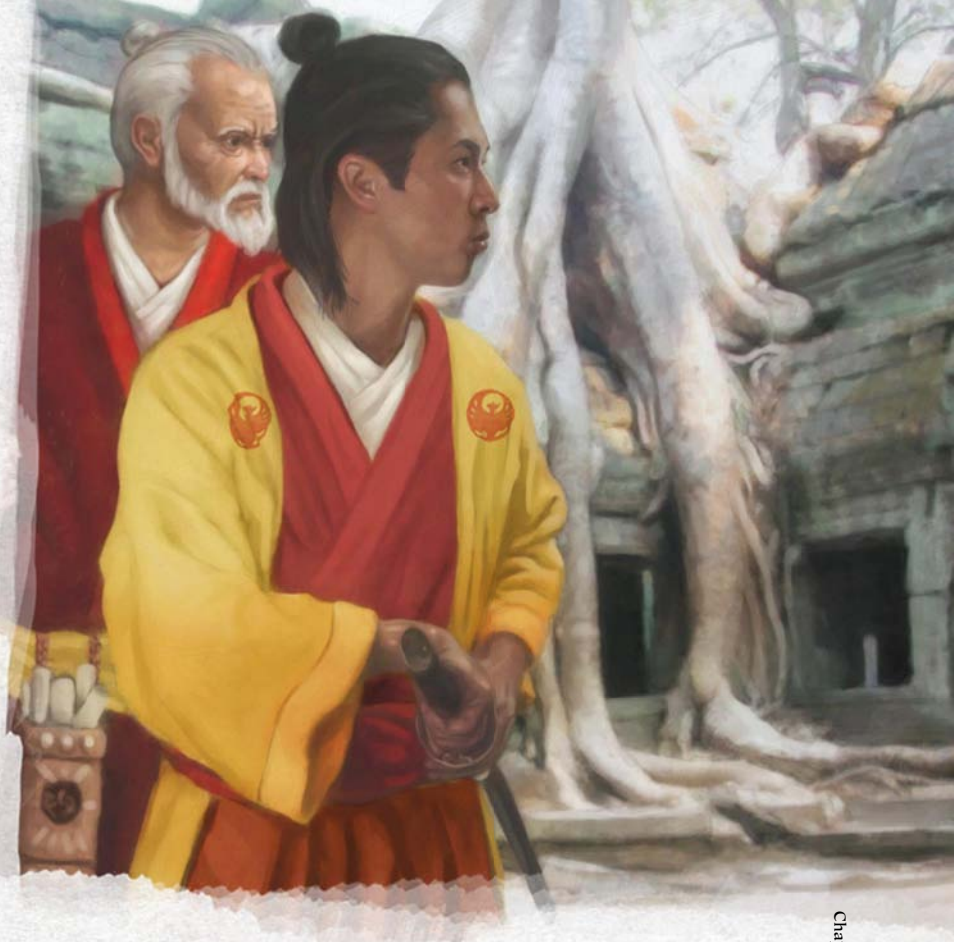
One of the facts that clearly separates the inhabitants of Koso Mura from those of Toshi no Naishou is that in Koso Mura people marry between different tribal groups freely. While this is not entirely unheard-of elsewhere in Naishou Province, particularly in small villages located in the crossover zones between the different ancient tribal territories, in Koso Mura it is outright embraced rather than ignored or kept hidden. Residents of the town still keep careful track of their ancestry, but they do not believe there should be any taboo against marrying between the groups. Foreigners to the province are often bewildered by the cultural nuances at play here, with farmers discussing at length the implications of being nine-sixteenths Takanobu, five-sixteenths Morikawa, and two-sixteenths Yamatoru. This intermarriage has also led the town to develop much stronger relationships with the descendants of the Yamataru and Morikawa in other parts of the province, producing some interesting effects and benefits. Visitors from Toshi no Naishou often notice how the cost of lumber and metals seems to be lower in Koso Mura, but if they mention it the traders just mutter something about "transport costs."



This also affects the village's customs and superstitions, which often seem to be a melting pot of the whole province. For example, the town is peppered with the small shrines more usually found in the Taru Mountains, and one can also find small talismans hung in front of houses to ward off evil spirits in the same manner as in the Kawa Forest. However, the area remains most strongly aligned with the Takanobu cultural heritage, sharing its passion for agriculture and for vigorous defense of the community by ashigaru soldiers.

By virtue of distance and its status as the province's second largest settlement, Koso Mura has increasingly become a rival to Toshi no Naishou for the seat of the province's rulers. The local merchants are particularly interested in this since it would switch the province's main external trade route from the Itochu River to a pass through the mountains. With the help of the villages in the Taru Mountains they have worked hard to make that route safer and easier to use, and a few merchants from outside the province have started conducting their business through Koso Mura rather than taking the much longer route to the south. The influx of wealth from this expansion is causing more people to move into Koso Mura, and there is a flurry of ongoing construction underway, including a new defensive wall, a large new stables, and even some expansion of the Keep itself. Once this work is complete Koso Mura will be more defensible than Toshi no Naishou itself, a strong argument for housing the Governor and his court. Of course, the inhabitants of Toshi no Naishou are not unaware of all this activity, and have undertaken measures to hinder its progress. Some merchants from the city have rerouted their trade away from Koso Mura into other smaller villages, lessening its revenues and access to certain types of goods. Other have also started to make more of Koso Mura's religious practices, suggesting the town is abandoning the Fortunes. So far these rivalries have not led to any sort of violence, but tensions are definitely ramping up.

Like the rest of Naishou Province, the people of Koso Mura love stories and legends, and a particular one is very popular in the town. It tells of two monks, one dedicated to Inari (the Fortune of Rice) and the other belonging to the Taoist order of the Seven Thunders. The two monks were traveling near the village when they found a wounded fox. They took it under their care, for the monk of Inari insisted foxes were the servants of the Fortune and should be respected. While they rested in a small local monastery, a violent storm hit the area, imperiling the next harvest. The monk of Inari prayed to the Fortune day and night, while the Taoist monk went down in the fields to help the peasants save the harvest. In the end disaster was averted. They both nursed the fox during their free time, and the animal ran away as soon as it could walk. The monk of Inari followed it, declaring it would show him where the Fortune wished him to be next, while the Taoist monk stayed behind to help the village. The first monk and the fox were never seen or heard of again, while the second monk spent the rest of his life in the village, teaching and helping the people. The people of Koso Mura



believe this story shows the importance of paying attention to the here and now rather than obsessing over abstract concerns, and they like to tell the tale to their children.

THE RULER: SHIBA GAJITSU

The current ruling samurai in Koso Mura is a Phoenix named Shiba Gajitsu. Unlike many current local officials, Gajitsu was already in place when the last Phoenix Governor died. During the brief period of fighting during the Scorpion and the Crane, Gajitsu wisely kept his modest garrison troops on the defensive inside the town, keeping out of trouble while making it clear they would put up a tough fight should anyone attempt to conquer the town. His strategy proved sound, and when the new Imperial Governor arrived he chose to leave Gajitsu in control of Koso Mura. This gives him an edge on many of his rivals, since he has a strong knowledge of the area based on years of experience. His limited number of Phoenix troops have recently been supplemented by Lion soldiers, but thus far the Lion have respected his authority and their presence keeps the other clan forces away from Koso Mura, so Gajitsu fully cooperates with them. While he is a reasonably qualified military leader, Gajitsu is quite fine with peace since it makes his town more likely to prosper. He sees it as his duty to make the place he was assigned to protect as successful as possible... even if that means overtaking Toshi no Naishou as the seat of the province's government. Indeed, as a strong adherent of the Tao Gajitsu hopes to turn Koso Mura into a center of Enlightenment for the whole Empire. He frequently invites monks from Taoist orders to come and teach in the town. It should be noted, however, that Gajitsu has nothing against the inhabitants of Toshi no Naishou, and





actually respects the Imperial Governor quite a bit. He really does not care who rules the province so long as he gets to keep developing Koso Mura. The villagers have noticed how invested he is in their well-being and support him strongly.

THE CRANE FORCES

A recent development close to Koso Mura is the presence of the Crane army. After the brief war between the Crane and the Scorpion, the two armies were allowed to stay within Naishou Province to avoid offending either of the two Great Clans. The majority of the Crane troops have made camp in the valley close to Koso Mura. Shiba Gaijitsu refuses to allow the army too close, although he allows small groups to visit the town (never more than twenty at a time). Although the villagers are uneasy about having a samurai army stationed within hours of their homes, they have no qualms about accepting Crane koku in exchange for food and other supplies. On the other hand, this situation has made Koso Mura's diplomacy with the Scorpion more difficult, and a few recent unexplained incidents have been attributed to the Clan of Secrets' enmity with the Crane. The Crane commander, Doji Ayumi, has been careful to cultivate a good relationship with the town, since she knows if war erupts again she cannot to have an enemy in her back the moment it starts.

When Crane soldiers are not visiting the village or staying in their camp, they can frequently be found in the countryside conducting training maneuvers or scouting the area. On the rare occasions they cross paths with travelers, they are polite but remain carefully discreet about their own activities.

Hitori Mura, the Solitary Village

Deep within the Taru Mountains, away from the main passes where most people travel, lies an ancient and isolated village called Hitori Mura. Visiting it is quite difficult, for it lies in an especially treacherous part of the mountains where only a few steep narrow paths can reach. The village lies on a mountain's flank where the slope is less pronounced but still enough to make hiking from the bottom of the village to the top a tiring process. Many of the streets have stairs built into them.

Hitori Mura is a mining village, far too high in the mountains to grow anything of value. Food supplies come from elsewhere in the province, and nearly everyone in the town is committed to the functioning of the mines. There are two mines, one digging for copper and the other for iron ore; their entrances are located above the village, even farther up the mountain's flank. The village itself is almost wholly unadorned, lacking the color and liveliness of settlements in the Nobu Valley, but shows many signs

of clever architecture. The houses are all made of strong wood and stone, and make great use of pillars and sturdy foundations to maintain stability on the mountainside. This is not merely due to the slopes; strong winds are very common in the area, and during the winter heavy snows are the norm, making even a visit to a neighbor into a dangerous trek. All of the buildings have stood for many decades despite the ferocious conditions of the area. Also, while most families have their own residences, the poorest villagers live together in a few large communal houses, an especially useful thing in the winter cold.

Hitori Mura was once the seat of the Yamataru tribe, and the residents has remained more or less homogenous ever since. The descendants of the Yamataru tend to show a strong musculature and have slightly darker skin than other Rokugani. They are a product of their environment, a tough and stern people with little time for frivolities. A Yamataru considers idle chat to be wasting precious air in the mountains, and outsiders often feel ill at ease with how quiet the locals can be. This is further compounded by an innate distrust for any outsiders. The villagers know all of their kin living within the mountains, and are instantly suspicious of anyone they do not know. They are an especially secretive people, even by the standards of Naishou Province, and never share information with outsiders if it can be avoided. They are also quite pious, praying to a variety of greater and lesser Fortunes to aid in their survival. Although some monasteries can be found scattered through the Taru Mountains, there are none of these near Hitori Mura, and the villagers have long since become accustomed to taking care of their own spiritual needs. They have built small stone shrines all through Hitori Mura (and indeed all through the mountain paths and the other villages nearby). These are usually very simple stone pillars with a small altar at the bottom for offerings. There are no markers on the pillars, since most villagers in the mountains cannot read (unlike the lowland peasants), and in any case everyone knows which spirit or Fortune each shrine venerates. This can be confusing to visitors, but the people of the Taru Mountains – and especially the people of Hitori Mura – do not care what outsiders think.

The mines are the heart of the village, the only reason why it exists and even (after a manner of speaking) thrives in such a harsh environment. The copper mine, called the "red mine" by the locals, is the older of the two. It goes deep into the heart of the mountain, twisting and turning as it follows the veins of ore. Several veins have run out over the centuries, but new ones have always been discovered. Although the tunnels are mostly stable, the depth of the mine still make it dangerous, and its twisting passages and deep shafts can be confusing for those who are not familiar with it. A small underground river runs through the lowest parts of it; the waters are too dirty to drink, but present an obstacle to new exploration. Small shrines can be found within the mine, much as in the village, but here they usually mark the sites of accidents to appease the spirits of deceased miners.

The iron mine's entrance is close to the copper mine but the tunnels go in an entirely different direction. It is known

as the “gray mine” to the village. While the red mine is a maze of many different sections, the gray mine is mostly a single vertical shaft with extensive tunnels at its bottom. The main shaft is over a hundred feet deep, and only the most experienced minors do not feel apprehension when they are lowered down in wooden baskets to begin their work for the day. The gray mine is notoriously more prone to accidents than the red one, and only the bravest minors work there. They are a superstitious lot and believe most accidents are caused by curses or strange creatures rather than mundane reasons. In particular, the miners absolutely refuse to work in the gray mine at night, claiming this is when it is at its most dangerous – despite the fact the sun never shines on the deep tunnels.

Although the villagers of Hitori Mura would rather be left alone than have to deal with the outside world at all, one cannot eat metal, so the town sells or trades its production to get food and other things it needs to survive. Most of this trade, unavoidably, is with Toshi no Naishou, the only settlement which has need of metals in bulk. Since the locals prefer not to receive visitors, they bring their ore down to the city themselves, a trek that can take several days at the best of times. Due to their dislike for the city, the miners prefer to wait until they have a large shipment ready before undertaking the journey, and of course they never travel during the winter, making the supply of metals somewhat irregular. This irks the citizens of the provincial capital, but the miners would rather have it this way than let merchants show up on their doorstep every other day. When stubborn merchants come all the way up to Hitori Mura, they meet with a cold reception, for the locals see the descendants of the Takanobu tribe as lazy, decadent, and worst of all talkative. Recently, representatives of Koso Mura have started visiting to negotiate better deals for themselves, much to the miners’ irritation, and on at least one occasion this has led to a fierce argument between the merchants of the two rival settlements; it only ended when the miners threatened to throw them all down the mountain.

If a visitor can actually earn enough trust to get the locals to talk more freely, they may tell the story of “the Zokujin boy.” Supposedly, once long ago a curious little boy wandered into the mines. Unsurprisingly, he got lost and fell down a natural shaft, ending up deeper in the mountain than anybody had ever been. The villagers searched the mine thoroughly and never found the boy... but twenty years later, a man appeared in the mines, with no memory of how he had gotten there. He was blind but otherwise healthy, and claimed to be the boy from many years before. According to his story, a group of Zokujin had found him and taken care of him, rearing him as one of their own. While stories of Zokujin were not unheard-of in the mountains, nobody had ever heard of one talking to a human, much less taking care of one, so the villagers were dubious. They feared the man might be crazy, especially when he started talking about a great beast trapped under the mountain which had woken up and would devour the miners

if they kept venturing down their tunnels. Soon after, however, several lethal collapses took place in the mines. The villagers began to fear for their future livelihood, but one morning the blind man walked back down the mine, carrying a simple pickaxe. He was never seen again, but after his departure the collapses ceased. Many believe he went to fight off whatever evil had been unleashed below, and some say he still lives deep in the earth to this day, gifted by the supernatural longevity of the Zokujin.

AUTHORITY AND ADMINISTRATION

While Hitori Mura is mostly self-administered, it is not uncommon for one or more samurai to be stationed there. Of course, the village has never come under any kind of attack, isolated as it is, so this is usually a symbolic appointment – a reward for a samurai who wants peace and quiet, or a punishment of internal exile. The latest arrival to the village is someone quite different, however: Kaiu Yukito is an engineer from the Crab Clan who has worked in mining for the better part of his life. In fact, Yukito’s ancestors were closely related to the fabled miners of the Boar Clan, and he is passionate about improving mining techniques and carrying on their legacy.

For the first few weeks of his stay, Yukito seemed content to observe and take notes on the villagers’ ways, but now he has started offering suggestions on they can improve their output. Not surprisingly, this has met with strong disapproval; not only are the inhabitants of Hitori Mura distrustful of outsiders, but they are also deeply traditional and very reluctant to change their time-proven ways. Yukito is growing tired of the miners’ stubborn opposition to his ideas and their many baseless superstitions, and he believes they are only exploiting a fraction of their mountain’s true potential. The villagers have started shunning the pushy samurai, hoping he will leave before he draws bad fortune – or violence – down on his shoulders. Thus far, however, Yukito is so engrossed in his future plans for the mines that he has not noticed the villagers’ ominous behavior.





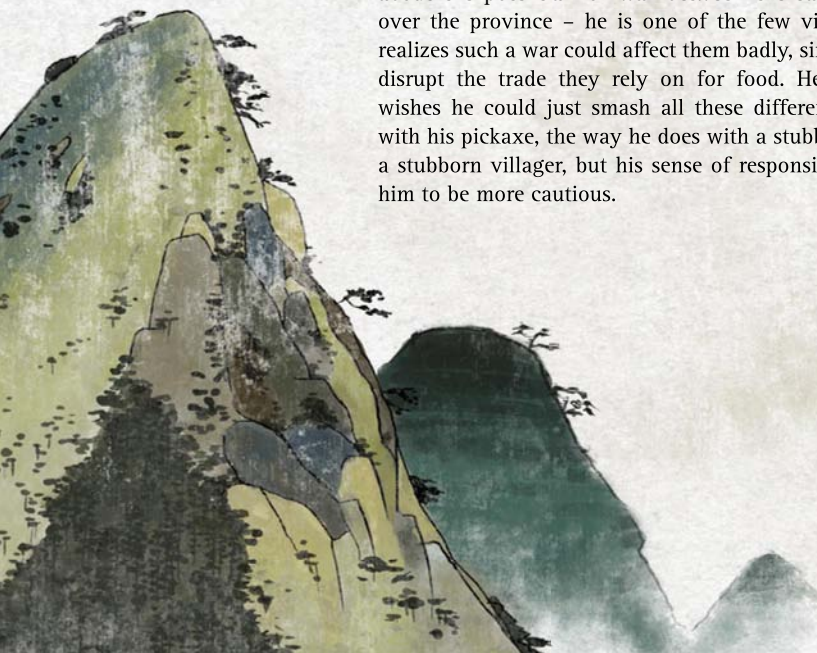
Shizu Mura, the Mysterious Village

While there are several villages located at the edge of the Kawa Forest, the town of Shizu Mura is actually located well inside it, and without entering the forest proper no one would ever notice it. The forest around the village is a mix of oak, ash, and cedar, along with several dense clusters of bamboo trees – some of which even grow in patches between the houses. Thanks to this abundance of natural materials, the villagers are usually well-lodged in sturdy wooden buildings. A small stream, no more than a few feet wide and seldom more than a foot deep, runs through the middle of the village, providing both fresh water and protection against fires. The inhabitants of

Shizu Mura pursue a variety of occupations, and aside from the necessary rice-farming almost all of them are related to the forest and its bounty: lumbering, carpentry, paper-making, and even a limited amount of hunting. While the villagers are not all that reluctant to deal with the outside world, the village is largely self-sufficient and the locals are used to relying on themselves. There is very little activity in Shizu Mura at night, and visitors from more metropolitan areas can be quite unsettled by how the town turns pitch-black and eerily quiet after sundown, with everyone retreating to their own houses. This is not just due to provincial isolation – it is also because the inhabitants of Shizu Mura fear the evil spirits of the Kawa Forest, who they believe roam the night.

Shizu Mura is the largest settlement of descendants from the Morikawa tribe. That group was less structured than the other two ancient tribes, so it is sometimes harder to track its legacy, but the heirs of the Morikawa generally tend to be slightly taller than the average Rokugani and often have green eyes, a striking feature which would attract much more attention if they were a more numerous people. The Morikawa are generally friendly and outgoing people, in contrast to the Yamataru, and although they mostly keep to their forest homes they welcome anyone who visits their villages. They are famous for never turning away guests, always providing them with at least a minimum of hospitality. They tend to be overly fond of jokes and harmless pranks, and show an odd tendency to laugh for no particular reason – although they are more careful of their behavior around strangers, particularly samurai. Many of them also have odd compulsive habits, varying from one individual to another. For example, a farmer might walk around his house twice before leaving it, while a lumberjack might greet birds as if they were beloved friends. These habits appear to be minor ritual superstitions, the outgrowth of the villagers living in such close proximity to the Kawa Forest. While the forest may appear mostly peaceful to outsiders, the villagers know it is full of spirits and strange creatures which all must be appeased in various ways.

Notwithstanding the occasional samurai resident, the real authority in Hitori Mura is the local headman's family, which has run the village for centuries. The current scion of the line is a middle-aged former miner named Gakuto, who not only runs the village but wields considerable influence in the other mountain towns as well. Some say his ancestors were the leaders of the Yamataru tribe, and whether this is true or not he certainly commands great respect in all the settlements of the Taru Mountains. Having spent the better part of his life in the mines, Gakuto inspires obedience through both his experience and his physical presence, and with his pickaxe in hand even some samurai might be reluctant to face him in combat. Gakuto has seven children, an unusually large family for Hitori Mura, and he fully understands and appreciates his town's harsh but rewarding lifestyle, joining his people in rejecting any increased dealings with the rest of the province. He notices uneasily that the younger folk in the village are sometimes attracted to the easier lifestyle of the valley towns, and worries this will weaken his community. Most recently and disturbingly, after his eldest son led a trip to deliver ore to Toshi no Naishou, the boy came back with a taste for sake and gambling. Gakuto also worries about the potential for war between the samurai clans over the province – he is one of the few villagers who realizes such a war could affect them badly, since it would disrupt the trade they rely on for food. He frequently wishes he could just smash all these different problems with his pickaxe, the way he does with a stubborn rock or a stubborn villager, but his sense of responsibility forces him to be more cautious.



One universal protection in Shizu Mura is the use of talismans. These are usually small bundles of leaves, branches, and rocks from the forest, tied together with a scroll bearing a kanji for “protection” or “safety.” The choice of materials is made by each house’s inhabitants, and the idea is to make the talisman smell like both the house and the forest, to confuse spirits into believing there is nothing there and they should continue on their way. (Visitors often claim the talismans smell like nothing at all, but the locals are adamant about their efficacy.) Typically the talismans are blessed by a local monk, or by a shugenja if one is present, and they are then tied to the roof-beams of the house just outside the doors. They are left hanging until they naturally fall off, at which point they are promptly replaced; needless to say, it is considered quite unlucky for a house to be without a talisman, and villagers will often refuse to even enter a house which lacks one. Indeed, damaging or cutting off a talisman is seen as almost like a murder attempt, and punitive crowds can take justice into their own hands when such a thing happens. Strangers are accorded some leeway on such matters, but not very much, for this is one matter the light-hearted heirs of the Morikawa take quite seriously. They also avoid talking about it whenever possible, since they believe the spirits are always listening and it would defeat the whole purpose to let them know what the talismans do.

This focus on the forest spirits applies to the villagers’ spirituality more generally as well. Although they pray to the Fortunes in the same manner as the valley residents, they also have a variety of festivals and rituals

to specifically appease the spirits which inhabit the Kawa Forest. Sometimes the line blurs between protection and veneration, and it could be argued the villagers – and even the local monks – treat the spirits of the Kawa Forest as gods, behavior which can be worrying to pious visitors. For example, once a month on a moonless night the villagers will tie a goat to a tree-trunk outside the boundaries of Shizu Mura, and nobody speaks of its fate – it will simply be gone in the morning. There is also a local rumor of a monk kept prisoner in his own shrine deep within the forest, since the creature which lives there will go on a rampage less it is prayed to almost constantly.

The inhabitants of Shizu Mura love to tell stories about the forest – indeed it sometimes seems as though they have a different one for every single tree. One of the most common tales is the legend of the “frog king.” Supposedly, if one follows the small unnamed stream which flows through the village, one can eventually find its source where the frog king lives. This is actually much harder to do than it might seem, for the shallow stream often disappears underground or turns into small marshes along its course, and no one is really sure where its origin lies. Supposedly, a young girl and her brother once found it, and she later claimed the frog king was a huge bloated amphibian the size of a bear, who talked like a man and wore a peaked hat like an Imperial courtier. He was attended by a court of frogs, small and large, all looking very clever and important as they sat together atop a vast treasure of golden coins. At first he berated the two children for interrupting his court, but the girl remembered her manners and apologized profusely and





sincerely, which pleased him. He offered to give her part of his treasure if she exchanged it for a treasure of her own. The girl readily agreed, for her family was very poor and she thought she had little to lose. The frog king smiled and shot out his sticky tongue, gulping down her little brother. Horrified, the girl fled, clutching the golden coins which filled her hands. Although her family was no longer poor, she was never happy again. Outsiders often find this story rather disturbing, especially since the inhabitants of Shizu Mura seem to think it is funny and recount it with a smile.

SAMURAI INHABITANTS

Shizu Mura has almost no strategic or economic value when compared with the Nobu Valley settlements or even the villages in the Taru Mountains. However, it does receive occasional samurai visitors, who are always greeted politely, given suitable accommodation, and warned not to venture too far into the forest. One such visitor is Kitsune Sezar, a Mantis Clan shugenja who has been staying in Shizu Mura for several weeks. Initially he did not plan to visit for more than a few days; he was on his way to Toshi no Naishou to represent his clan in court, and merely wished to spend a short time in the Kawa Forest to enjoy a landscape reminiscent of his own family's lands. However, Sezar has gradually become more and more interested in the Kawa Forest and its strange inhabitants. The Kitsune family are not strangers to forest spirits, particularly animal ones such as their namesake, but there is a specific quality to this which is quite unique and fascinating to the young shugenja. The Kawa seems very quiet and safe in outward appearance, yet the villagers have so many strange legends, so many rituals to keep the spirits at bay, so many stories of people simply disappearing in the forest. Sezar has become fascinated by the whole thing, and despite the increasingly urgent warnings of the villagers he is determined to stay until he solves the forest's mysteries and learns whether they are merely superstition or real spiritual danger.

THE SCORPION ARMY

A recent change for Shizu Mura and the other villages in the area is the presence of the Scorpion army, whose encampment is located near the edge of the forest. Since there has never been much military presence in this region, the new Governor has appointed the Scorpion to oversee the villages, although in truth the locals continue their daily activities the same as they always have. The Scorpion have for the most part maintained a polite distance from the villages, only interacting with it when it is absolutely needed. While the locals appreciate this courtesy, in truth the Scorpion simply want to make sure their troops are kept in a concentrated location where they can redeploy in a moment should war erupt once more.

Still, the sight of samurai in crimson and black armor is now a not uncommon occurrence in Shizu Mura and its neighbors, and the area is perceived as a "Scorpion zone" in the minds of other samurai. Since the commander of the Scorpion army is currently at court, his direct subordinate

is in charge, a man named Shosuro Kanetsuru. He is a samurai of few words who avoids social appointments if possible. However, he has occasionally been seen leading some of his men deep into the forest in defiance of warnings from the locals. Kanetsuru does not wish to leave evil spirits free to harass his soldiers, but it remains to be seen whether his actions are brave or foolish.

Minor Settlements

Toshi no Naishou and the three major villages described in the preceding sections are the most important cultural and economic centers of Naishou Province, in truth they only represent a fraction of the population. Dozens and dozens of smaller villages are scattered all though the Taru Mountains, the Nobu Valley, and the Kawa Forest. Although most of them somewhat align with the customs of one or another of the three original tribes, they all have their own local particularities.

In addition, the province's strong dedication to the Fortunes has led to the construction of an unusually large number of shrines and monasteries, some of them close to the population centers, others as isolated as possible. There are thus many local variations in the population's faith and spirituality.

BOTSU MURA, THE SWAMP VILLAGE

The Omikura Swamp in the northwestern part of Naishou Province has never attracted many visitors or settlers; however, a small and ancient village can be found within its boundaries. The people of Botsu Mura are primarily fishermen who live on the produce of the swamp waters, using short wooden spears rather than nets, and hunting fish and amphibians with equal enthusiasm. They supplement their diet with wild swamp-growing rice and fungus. The swamp also boasts a number of unique plants which are not found elsewhere in the province; some of these have value for herbalists, providing the villagers with a modest source of trade.

The village structures are all built on stilted platforms, including the paths between houses, allowing one to travel throughout the settlement without stepping in the stinking mud below. The stench and dampness cannot be helped, of course, and although the locals have grown used to it they dislike being reminded of such things by visitors. Most villagers here are descended from the Takanobu tribe and have cousins elsewhere in the valley, although a few families claim heritage from the Morikawa; regardless, the villagers tend to think of themselves as a distinct group due to their unique environment. Due to their isolation, the people Botsu Mura are accustomed to protecting themselves, and the village has a reputation for ferocity in the face of external threats. Although fishing spears are not considered 'weapons' under Imperial law, the villagers

are quite skilled at using them against human opponents. Most of the time, however, they are a peaceful people, and in addition to fishing they are also skilled at crafting useful items from the swamp's notoriously tall reeds – tatami mats, protective clothing (especially leggings to ward off swamp leeches), and even their shallow fishing boats are all made from these reeds.

While the villagers warn outsiders against exploring the swamp, this is not out of spiritual concern as in the Kawa Forest but simply because it is dangerous in itself. Rarely does a year go by without someone falling prey to the swamp's dangers, and the villagers can only hone their skills and pray to the Fortunes against the next time. This means much of the area remains unexplored, and this has attracted the village's latest and oddest visitor: Togashi Shizuko, a tattooed monk from the Dragon Clan, whose wanderings have led her to this isolated locale. She spent her first few days here helping refurbish the local shrine, but has shown no sign of leaving since then, and the villagers have come to accept her presence. She can often be found meditating while standing one-legged on one of the old, broken stilts at the edges of the village. She also likes talking to the village children, telling them stories of the Tao and the Fortunes, or singing folk songs from all across Rokugan. She often disappears for days into the swamp, but thus far she has always come back safe and sound, and the villagers have given up on discouraging her. Some think she has found something of mystical interest in the swamp, while others think she is just crazy enough to enjoy the smell.

MOKU MURA, THE LAKE VILLAGE

In contrast to the Omikura Swamp, Tsunegawa Lake in the north of Naishou Province has many villages nearby, for it is both beautiful and easy to navigate. Moku Mura is one of the largest of these villages, a fishing town built along the shore. The landscape is quite idyllic, and although the village makes its living with fishing, it also gets frequent samurai visitors attracted to the beauty of the lake and the large flocks of birds which pass through each year. The villagers are descended from the Takanobu tribe and have an eye for opportunities, so they long ago realized the beauty of the area could attract wealthy visitors, and they do their best to make their town as aesthetically pleasant as possible. The houses are painted in vivid colors and the village paths are swept clean every day. Cherry trees have been planted along the shore, and the birds are treated carefully to encourage them to stay close to the village. Multiple inns cater to samurai visitors, all of them sticking close to the lakeshore so it can be admired without leaving one's room. Unsurprisingly, the village is quite popular with the Crane Clan, and those



Crane who visit Naishou Province usually make a point of stopping here. Only the distance from Toshi no Naishou prevents Moku Mura from being really popular, but even the modest amount of samurai traffic is enough to make it prosperous.

Due to the predominance of Crane samurai here, it is those guests from other clans who attract attention. The most recent case is Moshi Masako, a young shugenja-ko and amateur painter. While Masako has been very quiet and polite to all her fellow samurai, she is actually here with vengeance in her mind. Her father and husband both died in a border skirmish with the Crane a few years ago, and although the Crane later made reparations for what was agreed to be a misunderstanding, she has never made peace with them in her own soul. However, as a priestess of the kami she is supposed to be devoted to peace and enlightenment, so she has decided to attack the Crane Clan on a different kind of battlefield: the arts. Already a skilled painter, Masako has poured all her grief and passion into her new works, which have reached astonishing levels of artistry. Moku Mura is the perfect place for her to maintain her grudge and perfect her art, since it has many Crane visitors but is not part of their territory. Her artworks feature the wrath of the kami and the Fortunes, set against the beauty of the natural world yet suffused with spiritual fury, and all agree she has captured the anger of the divine world in a way rarely seen before. Ironically, her works have become quite popular with the Crane, who seem oblivious to her tragic history. Masako spends all of her time either painting (in her room or on the shore) or at the local shrine dedicated to the spirit of the Tsunegawa Lake, praying for the souls of her departed family and for the strength to defeat the ones she consider her enemies.





SUJUKO MURA, VILLAGE OF THE PASS

The Taru Mountains are not easy to traverse, making the few passes crucial to the good functioning of Naishou Province. The Sujuko Pass is the largest one, one of the few ways to enter and leave the province without using the Itochu River. The village of Sujuko Mura is set halfway through this pass, and its presence helps make the mountain trek feasible. Although the village is a somewhat dull and dreary place, inhabited mainly by descendents of the grim Yamataru tribe, a few families of Takanobu descent long ago settled in the town and opened various small inns and shops to cater to travelers. The rest of the inhabitants focused on their traditional occupations of farming (the village carefully maintains terraced rice paddies on the lower slopes of the pass) and working a small stone quarry nearby. For many years this was successful and the village thrived, but this careful balance is at risk of being upset by the new influx of resources from Koso Mura. The town sees Sujuko Pass as the way to extend its influence and pursue its rivalry with Toshi no Naishou, and has begun renovating Sujuko Mura and expanding and improving the pass itself. Several merchant families have recently moved from Koso Mura to set up business here, and they have become a third social group distinct from the “old” Takanobu families and the Yamataru majority.

This influx of wealth, visitors, and travelers has brought a lot of money into the village but has also brought social tension. The “old” Takanobu do not see any problem with the new expansion, but the Yamataru dislike the chaotic new situation and the perceived sinful habits of the new arrivals (whose businesses often feature drinking and gambling). Violence almost erupted when a new family attempted to get a small stone shrine removed so they could build a new inn on the location. This incident was smoothed over before any harm could be done, but new families keep coming, new businesses keep opening, and the Yamataru farmers and miners grow more and more restless.

In times of doubt, the villagers frequently turn to a local monastery for advice, and the abbot Suguru is trying to offer answers. A native of the village himself and a member of the Order of Stone, he preaches patience and resilience in face of adversity, and thus far his guidance has helped prevent any outright violence. Sadly, Suguru has different interests than the village’s in mind; he has been a member of the Kolat conspiracy for many years. Disillusioned with the distant and elusive patronage of an inhuman Fortune, Suguru long ago decided to throw in his lot with the Kolat’s philosophy of the Rule of Man. Ironically, he is not happy with the new situation in the village, since he fears it draws too much attention to the village and may disrupt the Kolat’s operations here – particularly the use of the monastery to house spies and assassins for the conspiracy. However, influential members of the Kolat’s Coin Sect have interests in the expansion of the village and the pass, so Suguru is obediently trying to guide Sujuko Mura toward a more mercantile path.

OICHI MURA, THE RIVER VILLAGE

Many villages in Naishou Province exploit the bounty of the Itochu River. These are most often fishing villages, since the river always yields a bountiful catch, but it is also a route for trade and travel, and for many farmers it is the easiest way to reach the city and pay taxes, sell their excess production, or acquire new tools and materials not found in the countryside. Thus the villages along the river are often communication hubs between the more remote parts of the province and its capital city. Oichi Mura is a perfect example, situated along the river’s northern branch near a large number of farming settlements. The village has a balanced economy, with the majority of its inhabitants working as fishermen or farmers but with a fair number of merchants and sailors who move goods and people up and down the river. All the locals are descended from the Takanobu tribe and have a reputation for friendly hospitality, further strengthened by the family ties they maintain with neighboring settlements. This tradition is also represented by the local temple to Jizo, the Fortune of Mercy, maintained by monks who were almost all born in the village. The monks frequently visit neighboring towns to tend to the poor and sick, further improving the reputation of Oichi Mura.

The town has seen a recent surge of activity due to some of the merchants from Toshi no Naishou cutting off trade with Koso Mura. This has forced some villages to start using Oichi Mura to trade with the city instead. Work is underway to expand the village’s infrastructure to accommodate this development, although there is some worry that these investments could backfire if Koso Mura regains the capital’s good graces.

Oichi Mura is under the administration of Otomo Jitsuto, who was directly appointed by the new Governor and given a small escort of Lion troops. The Governor

knows this village is important to maintaining influence in the north of the province, and felt he could only entrust it to a samurai with no secondary loyalties. Jitsuto was never considered a successful courtier by his family, who felt he lacked the intimidating edge the Otomo are known for. Jitsuto is generally a rather pleasant young man, known for being friendly and open-minded, traits rarely associated with the rest of his family. He has dedicated himself to his work since he arrived, refining the village's organization wherever possible but avoiding needless meddling. While he is too distant from the peasantry to be truly loved, the commoners respect him for making their work easier without upsetting their traditions. He has taken to praying regularly and sincerely in the temple of Jizo, earning the respect of the monks. Jitsuto can often be found somewhere in the village during the day, observing and making plans for the future. During the evening he pores over reports until the late hours, although he will always make time to properly greet and entertain any visiting samurai.

THE WOLVES' DEN, RONIN ENCAMPMENT

The Kawa Forest hosts many perils, but some of them are more mundane than angry spirits or tricky shapeshifters. One such is the Wolves' Den, a ronin encampment usually found in the northern part of the forest. The ronin of the Den come from many backgrounds and have worked in a variety of duties, both honorable and criminal; their only unifying trait is their solidarity to each other, for they share the pay and benefits of their employment to make sure they always survive. At the moment the group numbers about a dozen. The Wolves are well-versed in survival techniques and can usually keep themselves at least minimally fed with hunting and scrounging when they are not working elsewhere in the province. They collectively own two horses, which are among their most valuable possessions, so when they relocate one of the first things they do is construct a simple stable. The Kawa Forest allows them to remain out of sight (and thus out of the authorities' minds) most of the time, but they make sure their base is always defensible and place sentries to ensure they are not caught by surprise. If they do attract attention, they quickly pack up and relocate, destroying their previous base.

The current leader of the group is a man named Sonosuke, although his authority is not always absolute given the band's somewhat egalitarian nature. Sonosuke was once a Lion samurai of the Akodo family, and lost his entire unit due to a poorly-conceived maneuver by his commander. He was considered shamed for having survived the deaths of his brothers-in-arms, but refused to commit seppuku. Although Sonosuke retains some echoes of the stern and honorable nature of the Lion Clan, his life as a ronin has imparted him with a great deal of pragmatism and he has even sometimes resorted to banditry to survive. He has no grand ideal or goal for his men beyond survival, and this may be why they have managed to endure for so long.

Sonosuke brought his men to Naishou Province a few years ago, seeing the loosely-governed region as a good opportunity for them. The few samurai troops here are scattered throughout the province, but the possibility of renewed conflict looms on the horizon, creating plenty of opportunities for employment. Thus far his idea has paid off, and the Den has only been forced to move twice since its arrival. The two other ronin Sonosuke trusts most are a samurai-ko named Hiroko and an archer called Shigekazu. Hiroko is young, cheerful, and a skilled rider who does most of the caring for the two horses the Wolves own. Most assume she was once a Unicorn, but bringing up her past is the only way to ruin her normal good mood, so the Wolves have stopped asking about it. Shigekazu is a dour man, the son of a ronin samurai and a geisha, and is embittered toward the clan samurai who lord it over wave-men; however, he is a skilled marksman and knows a great deal about survival in the wild. Both Hiroko and Shigekazu are strongly loyal to Sonosuke, and he knows they will stay by his side even if the other Wolves scatter.

INARI SEIDO

The western part of the Nobu Valley is primarily an open rolling plain, perfect for cultivating both rice and grain thanks to many smaller rivers and streams which cross it and eventually feed into the Itochu River. Dozens of small and unmemorable villages can be found in the area, but one large structure breaks the region's monotony: Inari Seido is a temple of considerable size, and its presence and success is even more notable given the almost complete absence of samurai influence in its history. Local legend claims the commoners of the area built the temple themselves, stone by stone, and when the work was complete some of the workers shaved their heads and devoted their lives to the Fortune of Rice. Whether this is true or not, the temple does appear rather unadorned to a samurai's eye, although it is of very solid construction and is kept immaculately clean despite a steady flow of visitors. Indeed, not a day passes without a farmer coming to pay his respect to the Fortune upon which his life depends, and seven different paths lead to the temple from the surrounding lands, their routes worn into the soil by the endless procession of supplicants, each passing beneath a torii arch as it reaches the temple. The only striking feature of the temple's interior is the ten-foot-tall statue of the Fortune, depicted as giving out rice to the people. The wooden sculpture is not particularly refined in design, and is believed to have been crafted by the farmers themselves. There are also small crude carvings of foxes, the animals revered as servants of Inari, set by the temple's main doors. Dozens of monks dwell in this place of worship, and almost all of them are from the heimin families of the region, sharing a bond of kinship with their visiting devotees.

The abbot of the Temple is currently a venerable monk named Goichi. He has lost all sight and can barely move from his quarters, but retains a sharp wit and an unequalled knowledge of the Fortune and its traditions. Goichi has lived his whole life in the temple, having come to it as a





child after his parents died from illness. He embraced the life of simple labor and spiritual fulfillment the temple offered, and rose through the ranks entirely through hard work and patience, learning at the feet of his elders. Well over eighty years of age by now, he is seen by the peasantry as proof of the Fortune's favor to the temple. The recent influx of samurai in the province is not to Goichi's taste, especially after the brief but savage conflict between the Crane and Scorpion, which threatened the livelihood of many villagers. This has turned the old abbot's mood dark, and he frequently meditates in a small back room of the temple dedicated to Inari's wrathful aspect, also known as the Frost Dragon. He is carefully considering whether he should take action, for with thousands of villagers following his lead he could easily unleash a major revolt against these bellicose and foolish samurai.

EMMA-O SEIDO

The relative isolation of Naishou Province has always made it ideal for samurai or monks who were looking for seclusion, whatever their reason. Many samurai who wish to leave their old lives behind move to one of the province's small villages, living out their days as its protector; others retire to one of the many monasteries in the region.

Those who retire to Seido Emma-O are united by one feeling: grief. The small temple is a favored destination for samurai woman who have lost a relative and whose grief leaves them unable to find peace in their lives. The nature of life in Rokugan means there are women of all ages in this temple, all seeking surcease from sorrow by living out their lives in devotion to the enigmatic Fortune of Death. The temple is located high in the Taru Mountains and is quite small, tucked into the side of a peak constantly battered by cold winds. The sisters of Emma-O say they can sometimes hear the lamentations of the dead in

the sound of the wind. A few nearby villages provide the temple with food and a few other simple amenities in exchange for the sisters' assistance with funeral rites throughout the region. Few ever go to the temple itself, for it is a chilly, unwelcoming, forlorn place, with little room to accommodate visitors. In lieu of a statue for worship, the temple contains an old suit of samurai armor said to have once belonged to a sister's deceased husband; the lacquer has worn away and it is impossible to make out its clan of origin. Since Emma-O himself is often depicted as an empty set of armor, the sisters find this a fitting point of focus for their devotion.

The temple is currently led by a woman called Akari. She once belonged to the Dragonfly Clan, but retired here after her husband passed away. She now oversees many women who were once part of more prestigious families than hers, an irony she fully appreciates. While she came here already prepared to dedicate herself to the Fortune, many other new sisters come simply to grieve, too burdened with Regret to go on with their lives or cope with their pain. Akari is a patient and respectful abbess, and most of the sisters are grateful to her for helping them find some measure of peace in their new lives. Akari tries to make sure political entanglements do not accompany new sisters into the temple, since having so many former samurai in one place can easily become troublesome. The difficult is made worse by the fact many new arrivals wait months before actually taking their vows, and remain technically samurai until that time. Akari sternly bars access to her temple to those who might disturb these grieving samurai-ko, lest they be drawn back into the connections of their former lives. She has thus far stayed aloof from the recent conflicts between the clans over Naishou Province; she is sure these clashes will soon bring more deaths, more departed souls to pray for, and more grieving women to console.

SUJUU MURA, THE GRANARY

Situated in the northwestern part of Naishou Province, a few hours away from both the Kawa Forest and the Itochu River, Sujuu Mura is not visibly different from the many other villages around it. However, it lies in the middle of particularly fertile lands and produces one of the largest food surpluses in the region – which is exactly why the Lion have chosen it as the base for their army. While a sizable portion of their troops remain in Toshi no Naishou to serve the Governor's needs, the city is too cramped to house their main strength and too far from the outer regions of the province to be their main headquarters. They chose Sujuu Mura based on both its location and its generous harvest, ensuring their soldiers would not need to worry about food.

Sujuu Mura has been transformed since the Governor's arrival, with hundreds of Lion soldiers now using it as their base of operations. They have



built several barracks around the village and a simple wooden wall to reinforce its defenses, and are currently working on two towers to let them watch for distant enemies. Of course, no one has actually dared to attack the Lion, but they believe in full preparation for potential threats. They have mostly left the village inhabitants alone, aside from levying food supplies and enrolling a few younger peasants as ashigaru soldiers. Since the village is descended from the Takanobu tribe, volunteers have not been lacking.

While the Lion commander has visited Sujuu Mura several times, he is usually overseeing operations elsewhere in the province or in the capital. In his absence, leadership of the troops falls to Matsu Kazuyo, a young samurai-ko who has only recently obtained her current rank. She is eager to prove herself, but is finding command more difficult than she thought, particularly logistics. On many days she feels like little more than a glorified merchant, endlessly reviewing reports about shipping food here or there. She longs for a glorious confrontation with the Crane or Scorpion (or both), but the decision is not hers to make, and she sits fuming while politicians bicker in Toshi no Naishou. All she can do is try to make sure the Lion are ready when the time comes, and she drills her troops relentlessly, sometimes driving them to exhaustion in countless exercises. Samurai visitors are a welcome break to the frustration and monotony, and she will certainly offer them her hospitality; however, enemies of the Lion Clan should be wary, for she has a short temper even for a Matsu and her days in idleness at Sujuu Mura have not improved her disposition.

ICHINORI MURA, THE CURSED VILLAGE

Those who live by or in the Kawa Forest are used to all sorts of tales and legends, but even they give a wide berth to Ichinori Mura. The village is considered cursed, both by its inhabitants and by outsiders, although the exact nature of the curse remains obscure. One of the most common stories speaks of an old man, perhaps a shugenja, who came to the village during a particularly harsh winter and asked for hospitality. The village was already poor at the time, and food and firewood were running low, so nobody opened their door – each household hoped the next one would take the old man in. He died of cold right in the middle of the village, but not before cursing it with his final words: “Since you value your village too much to help a stranger, you will never leave it again.”

Whether or not this story is true, there is no denying the village suffers under great and enduring misfortune and its inhabitants seem unable to leave. Anyone who visits finds a miserable series of habitations, inhabited by sickly and downcast folk. After many generations of not having their home, the villagers are an extremely peculiar lot. Although they still remember basic etiquette, they are very



much unaware of developments in the rest of the province (and indeed the Empire as a whole). They survive on the produce of a few rice paddies within the town's borders, along with what fruits and vegetables they can grow near their homes. Any visitor will be heartily welcomed and beseeched for things the village lacks, such as seeds, clothes, and tools. However, as soon as night comes, these same visitors will be vehemently asked to leave, since the locals believe sleeping in the village for even one night is enough to trigger the curse. They say anyone who has ever tried to leave after that has died. Some suffered a heart attack as soon as they stepped beyond the poles which mark the limits of the village. Other perished in the forest, crushed by falling trees, attacked by wild animals, or in any number of other ways. One story claims a man actually made it as far as Toshi no Naishou itself, only to be found dead the next morning with a terrified expression on his face. As far as the villagers know, anyone who is born in the village or who sleeps a single night within its bounds cannot leave alive.

Surprisingly, a samurai lives in Ichinori Mura. Usagi Yoshihiko purposely searched for the village and willingly stayed despite the curse, which he believes was inflicted by a maho-tsukai. He has lived in the village for several years, and although he has not yet unraveled the curse he has not abandoned his determination to overcome it. There is also a lot to explore, for while the village has not expanded at all on the surface, many villagers have dug tunnels underneath in search of living space, and some of these tunnels have since been forgotten. Yoshihiko often explores these tunnels, searching for a clue which might help him lift the curse. Sadly, no villagers here know how to read or write, and there are few scrolls left from the town's past; they maintain their history through stories. Much of Yoshihiko's work consists of interviewing villagers, particularly the oldest among them, trying to piece together the truth. The Hare samurai's presence has allowed some normalcy to return to the village, since his blade is sharp and he has no qualms using it to deliver justice when needed, quelling the unruly elements of Ichinori Mura's decayed society. Many villagers see him as a symbol of hope, and they would be devastated if anything happened to him.





THE CURSE OF ICHINORI MURA

Is the curse which plagues the village of Ichinori Mura real? If so, how did it happen? And if not, why do the villagers believe it to be real?

We have deliberately not given an “official” answer to these questions. Ichinori Mura is presented as an “adventure hook,” an interesting location which the GM can then expand into whatever he wants it to be. Perhaps the old man was a spirit or Fortune who cursed the village for its selfishness, and the affliction can only be lifted by appeasing that same spirit or Fortune. Perhaps a maho-tsukai once lived in the town, and his lair is hidden in the tunnels beneath. Perhaps there is no real curse, but some local madman or crazed cult murders every villager who leaves. The possibilities are endless.



SETTOU MURA, THE HIDDEN PRIZE

On the surface, the village of Settou Mura is indistinguishable from any of the other many small pious farming villages which are scattered through the Taru Mountains. The peasants are curt but polite, hard working, and venerate the Fortunes in their own simple ways, with a few stone shrines marking their devotion.

For a long time, this was indeed all there was to Settou Mura. However, a few months ago one of the villagers found a vein of silver in the nearby mountains. He quickly advised the village headman, who decided not to reveal the existence of the ore to the Governor – not so much out of greed but rather mainly from a desire to be left alone by meddlesome samurai. He had seen what happened to settlements in the province which attracted too much attention, and had no wish to see his peaceful little village overwhelmed by soldiers, merchants, gamblers, and worse. However, someone must have ignored his orders, for soon bandits began snooping around the edges of the village. The villagers were able to fend off the first group of bandits with improvised weapons and stubborn courage, but they fear more will come soon. The village is defensible – it is located in the bottom of a valley only accessible through a single narrow pass – but a strong or determined force can probably overwhelm the farmers.

Luckily for Settou Mura, the Governor has recently decided to test his theory that the Minor Clans might be suitable to rule after his departure. Samurai from various Minor Clans have been appointed as protectors of a few villages in Naishou Province, and by chance Settou Mura is one of those villages selected – precisely due to its perceived lack of importance. Thus, much to the surprise of the villagers, soon after they drove off the bandits a trio of burly warriors from the Badger Clan arrived, claiming the village was now under their protection. Since then no new bandits have approached the area, so the three Badger samurai know nothing of the attacks, much less of the silver vein.

Ichiro Hidetsugu is the leader of the small group, together with his younger brothers Ichiro Kunihiro and Ichiro Akira. The three are a close-knit group, used to working on their own. Hidetsugu is the most experienced in the art of war, but Kunihiro is a finer warrior and Akira an excellent scout, adept at navigating in mountains. They see the village as a test, and in many ways they admire the local residents for their toughness and self-reliance. Should the bandits return, they will face three dangerous warriors, but if the Badger learn about the silver there is no telling what their reaction might be. Thus, so far the villagers are keeping their distance.

SEIDO MUZAKA, THE HIDDEN MONASTERY

Deep inside the Kawa Forest there is a temple tended by only a handful of monks, a temple few other living souls have ever laid eyes on. It is extremely difficult to find, for it hides in a densely forested region without a single path to reach it. In fact, magic is almost certainly part of what hides the temple; trickster spirits and shapeshifters have been known to actively discourage visitors to the place. On rare occasions, explorers persevere through all the tricks and obstacles to reach Seido Muzaka, quite possibly the only temple dedicated to the Fortune of Enigmas in the whole of Rokugan.

Naishou Province has many temples, dedicated to Fortunes great and small, but this is easily the most obscure. The temple, located in a natural clearing of the forest, is as simple a structure as can be made, built entirely using the local wood. In lieu of a statue to the Fortune, the temple displays a large scroll with Muzaka’s name and title; the monks say it would be foolish for anyone to pretend to know the mysterious Fortune’s appearance. The few monks who live here, tending to the temple and maintaining records of all visits, are mostly former visitors to the temple who, having arrived there by chance or intent, chose to stay and spend the rest of their lives contemplating one of the most mysterious beings in Rokugan’s cosmology. They meditate on riddles and koans, living in a frugal way off the bounty of the forest.

Mosuke is the latest monk to join the small temple. His scarred body points at a previous life as a samurai, but in Seido Muzuka as in most monasteries it is improper to question a monk about his past life. The man who would one day become Mosuke stumbled upon the temple after fleeing a harassing pack of Saru shapeshifters. At that time he was – by his own admission – a braggart and a fool, and his pride was shattered by being humiliated by a pack of animals. He realized there was much about the world and about himself he did not know, and it was just as this realization dawned that he found the temple of the Fortune of Enigmas. At first he just intended to stay for a short time, to rest and recover himself, but he quickly found the fire of his curiosity could not be appeased. He shaved his head and joined the other monks. Praying to Muzuka and meditating on riddles is quite fulfilling to him, but Mosuke is also deeply interested in other visitors to the temple. Few such become monks themselves, but all have a reason for finding their way there, whether it is known to them or not. Mosuke attempts to guide them toward their own answers, for he knows the value of knowledge gained from personal insight. He also finds other people's enigmas can teach him in return, and he praises the Fortune for each and every chance to thus understand more of the world.

PANCHU MURA, THE FALLEN VILLAGE

When traditional citizens of Naishou Province want to show what they mean by the dangers of further opening their province to the outside world, they point at Panchu Mura. One of the few villages south of Toshi no Naishou yet still within the border of the province, Panchu Mura used to be a simple farming town, its inhabitants hard-working folk who labored to grow food on lands less fertile than those found in the northern part of the Nobu Valley. A lot of them also trained as doshin, peasant enforcers of the law, to defend their remote village against unlawful elements. Sadly, those days of simple labor are long gone. The change did not happen overnight, but gradually – as more and more samurai traveled to Naishou Province from all directions.

Many in Panchu Mura saw the influx of samurai as their chance to improve the fortunes of their village, but they had little to offer to visitors other than poor-quality rice. A few of the more opportunistic heimin set up a brewery, turning cheap rice into cheap sake. This indeed attracted customers, but only the poor and dishonorable sort of samurai rather than the refined elite they had hoped to bring in. Still, more coin was more coin, and



the village continued on this path. Now there are two rival (but equally cheap) sake breweries with inns to sell their products, two gambling houses, and a brothel thinly disguised as a geisha house. Panchu Mura has acquired a reputation as a cheap getaway, and continues to attract a seedy clientele. Despite its border location the Lion garrison gives it a wide berth, finding it disgusting and unworthy of their protection. There is some pressure in the Governor's court to redraw the borders of the province to exclude the village from Naishou altogether, allowing it to be forgotten once and for all. All of this deeply saddens the remaining lawful and traditional inhabitants of the village, but they are now in a small minority, continuing to work the fields while everyone else looks for easier ways to earn a living. Even the local temple to the Fortune of Soil has fallen into disrepair, few people feeling the call to serve as monks or donate money.

Some people do enjoy the new state of things. A ronin named Takenori can usually be found in the village, often enjoying a drink from either the Dry Lotus or the Blessed Waters sake house. His lack of manners (and of swords) has led many to suspect he might not actually be a samurai, but his colossal size and his aptitude at swinging his dai tsuchi are enough to silence most critics. Takenori is dirty, unkempt, rude, and violent. He tremendously

enjoys Panchu Mura, since he can pay for his cheap entertainments by extorting money from the locals every few days or so... when he bothers to pay at all, since few in the village will dare ask him to. On the other hand, Takenori will happily beat up anyone else who fails to pay or who troubles the villagers, since he knows if they all die or starve he will not be able to get any more drinks. Takenori is also careful never to kill a clan samurai, since he knows murder would attract unwanted attention from magistrates.

THE EASTERN VILLAGES

The majority of villages in Naishou Province harbor few samurai and are quiet places where little happens out of the ordinary. They tend to support each other, creating small networks which report to the provincial capital as little as necessary. The villages listed here, located in the eastern part of the province, are all part of the Takanobu tribal group and are a representative example of these small groups. They serve as the setting for the adventure presented in Chapter Four, and the GM can also use them as inspiration to create his towns, possibly centering them around one of the more important settlements described earlier in this chapter.



Aian is a large village, with a few modest samurai residences on its outskirts, and boasts a smithy, a tea house, and a merchant's shop. Many residents of other villages visit it for various supplies.

Danshou is a small and simple farming village whose inhabitants seem to enjoy an endless cheerfulness. A legend claims the hamlet was blessed in the past, possibly by an incarnation of Hotei, and good fortune has never left them since.

Houi is set in a geographically uneven area where the ground is shaped in large ridges and trees grow widely. The village has made most of its situation, cultivating whatever space is left between the rocky ridges.

Jouzousho is a large, prosperous village, boasting not only a geisha house but also a sake brewery. Many in the area see it as a recreational destination. At least one samurai from the Otomo family currently lives in the village.

Juujiro is the smallest village of the area, and would not exist if not for the crossroads it surrounds. Many who travel between the villages stop at its inn, if only for a short time.

Koujou is a modest-sized village, situated where a stream crosses the road, and controlling a small bridge and a waterwheel-powered mill. The mill produces flour from local rice and grain, and fresh noodles are sold at the local inn. A samurai of the Miya family currently lives here.

Mujitsu is a small backwater, but set against a beautiful landscape which makes its tea house a pleasant place to rest. A Doji painter has been enjoying the serenity of the village to further his art.

Sencha is a small settlement in a narrow valley between two rocky hills. From it, a small path leads to a nearby monastery, going through simple but well-maintained torii arch.

Tenraku is a medium-sized village whose location on the road to Toshi no Naishou causes it to see a lot of traffic. An inn and a carpenter's shop make it an important element of the local area.

Boubi is a small and isolated village which has few dealings with the others listed here. It has, however, recently hired a small group of ronin who are staying in the village's single small inn.

Yasurugi Monastery is set upon a forested hilltop, reached by a shallow staircase passing under seven torii arches dedicated to the Seven Fortunes, the largest of which honors Fukurokujin. It provides spiritual guidance to all the villages in this region.





GEOGRAPHY OF NAISHOU PROVINCE

"So, are there really Ningyo in the Itochu River?" Shiba Heisuke knelt by the large yet peaceful body of water, freshening his face and scooping up a small drink. The effects were appreciated after hours of walking.

"It's a secret," Isawa Daichi answered. Heisuke repressed a sigh. His charge had adopted the annoying habit of treating almost every single piece of information as a valuable secret, the same as many who lived in the Naishou Province for long. The custom was at the least disconcerting, and often quite frustrating.

"I swear on my Honor that I shall share this precious secret with no one else," Heisuke said sincerely. He had no intention of ridiculing himself, after all.

"I trust your word then, Shiba-san," the scholar said with a smile he could only describe as naïve. Daichi came closer to the river, contemplating its waters with undisguised admiration. "I have found several legends and references mentioning the Ningyo in this province, from the paintings of the courtrooms of Toshi no Naishou to the tales of Moku Mura by Tsunegawa Lake. All seem to point at the former existence of some of the ancient Race of Water here, and I believe they might still live here. It is just a matter of finding where exactly."

"And how do you propose we do this?" Heisuke stood up, wiping water from his face as he put his helmet back on. The spring in Naishou was warmer than in his home province, which had made the long walk more wearing. Not that he was one to complain; he had been taught a samurai endured discomfort without protest.

"Well, we simply keep asking the river!" Daichi replied with a smile so broad it was almost a grin. Before Heisuke could say anything else, the shugenja started chanting in the language of the kami, his eyes turning bright white as he communed with the spirits of the river.

Heisuke waited, long accustomed to the sight of magic. A few moments later, aichi returned to normal, a puzzled expression on his face.

"What is it?" Heisuke asked.

"I'm not sure," Daichi frowned. "The spirits showed me a creature, but I couldn't see it clearly as it was partly covered in mud. It had a long tail, but also arms... yes, yes, it could be one of the Ningyo!" His eyes glittered with excitement. "Shiba-san, would you be so kind as to go down into the river to verify this?"

"I'm sorry, Isawa-san, I must have misheard," Heisuke answered, incredulous. "I thought I heard you ask me to go down into the river to look for this creature."

"That is indeed what I asked," Daichi nodded, seemingly oblivious to his yojimbo's sarcasm.

"Can't you just summon the kami again to locate it?"

"I apologize, Shiba-san. My understanding of the water kami is limited. Would you please...?"

Heisuke stood still for a moment, considered heaving a sigh, finally decided against it. He started removing his armor and the padding underneath. Daichi smiled and all but clapped his hands in anticipation. "Remember, if you see a Ningyo, do not be alarmed. They are an intelligent





people, but sometimes primitive, and might react aggressively if frightened.”

Trying not to think about what would happen if he actually encountered an aggressive Ningyo, Heisuke entered the water, walking for only a few paces before he had to swim. He hesitated a final moment, then drew a deep breath and dived under, keeping his eyes open for anything interesting. Apart from a few fish – which did not look too pleased at his presence – all he could see was the muddy bottom. But as he swam a little deeper, Heisuke noticed a pair of black, beady eyes, quickly followed by a flurry of movement. Mud swirled up and turned the waters dark. He backtracked quickly, trying to get back to the bank before the creature attacked.

As he splashed into the shallow, he saw Daichi ashore, laughing. The man was pointing at the waters in front of

Heisuke. The yojimbo stared down and felt himself flushing with embarrassment. A large amphibian, almost five feet long, was hurriedly swimming away from him.

“Ah yes,” Daichi said when he stopped laughing. “A giant salamander. I was told the Naishou province was one of the few places in Rokugan which shelter them. Fascinating animal, but completely mundane in nature. A pity.”

“How could you mistake that for a Ningyo?” Heisuke demanded, almost shouting with mingled embarrassment and anger.

“Well, I did say my understanding of the water kami was limited, didn’t I? Now let’s get you dried out, Shiba-san, there are still many spots we need to check.”

Heisuke sighed. This was going to be a very long trip.



Naishou Province has a considerable diversity of landscapes for its small size, and its landscape has shaped its people over the ages, giving rise to its unique culture and folklore. Geographically, it is delineated by the Taru Mountains in the north and east, the Omikura Swamp in the northwest, and the Kawa Forest in the west and south. These three elements are all difficult for travelers to pass through, and this is why the province has remained more or less isolated for major parts of its history. The primary way in and out of the province is the Itochu River, which originates in Tsunegawa Lake and flows southeast out of the province, eventually joining one of Rokugan’s main navigable waterways. The only other major way out of the province is through the Taru Mountains, primarily through the Sujuko Pass in the northeast.

Easily two-thirds of the province’s population lives in the Nobu Valley which surrounds the river. Sheltered between the mountains and the forest, the valley is well irrigated by many smaller rivers and ponds, and the land is fertile enough to support widespread cultivation of both rice and grain. (It should be noted that “the Nobu Valley” is a very general term which encompasses many local terrain variations, from extended plains to rocky hills with scrub forestation.) Dozens of villages exploit the land and

the rivers, although their numbers are much fewer in the south past the city of Toshi no Naishou, where the land is less conducive to farming.

Much of the travel and commerce in the province’s core happens by boat, and there is only one major road, linking Toshi no Naishou to Koso Mura. Smaller roads link many other villages to each other, the river, or the main road, but they are not always reliable in bad weather. In the Taru Mountains and the Kawa Forest little more than paths exist, and a local guide is recommended to find one’s way.

The climate of Naishou Province is broadly similar to the rest of Rokugan, albeit milder in many ways. The Taru Mountains protect the rest of the province from the northern winds, and although the valley does see snowfall during the winter these are rarely accompanied by much wind, making the cold season much more bearable. On rare occasions, Tsunegawa Lake will freeze over during the winter, but when that does happen the locals advise against trying to walk on it. The Itochu River has never frozen over in known history or memory.

Spring, as elsewhere in Rokugan, is the season of planting new crops, and the commoners hold several festivals celebrating the Fortunes of rice and soil. Snows melting in the Taru Mountains occasionally cause flooding, although only occasionally is this severe. Summer is warm but kept tolerable by the combination of winds and access to water; it is also the season when the locals travel the most, since all roads are clear and dry and the planting is done. The people of Naishou come together strongly during that time, with many festivals to celebrate the Fortunes and enjoy their blessings. Seriousness returns in fall when the harvest takes priority over most other activities. Heavy rains can sometimes set in during autumn, making the harvest labor even more arduous, but the fertile lands of the valley usually ensure it is worth the effort.



The Kawa Forest

Comprising most of the east and south of Naishou Province, the Kawa Forest is of modest size compared to the major Rokugani forests like the Shinomen or the Isawa Mori, but is certainly impressive enough to the local people. What is called the 'Kawa Forest' actually encompasses several different types of forest, from bamboo groves to tall hills covered in evergreens, but it is all a continuous geographical area, stretching from the Omikura Swamp in the north down to the province's borders in the south. For the most part the forest is not difficult to navigate, since the trees grow in patches rather than one dense mass, but the landscape and terrain are uneven and can be confusing. No major road has ever been cut through the forest, making it a natural barrier preventing easy travel into the province. This has not prevented the inhabitants of Naishou Province from trying to exploit it, however, and many villages are located at the edge of the forest, with a few even inside its borders. They harvest lumber from the forest and sell it to the ever-demanding city and villages of the valley.

The forest is for the most part a very quiet and safe place, and one can easily travel through it without encountering even a hint of danger. Few large animals are present, having long since been hunted into obscurity by the locals. However, occasionally an unlucky traveler will encounter something more otherworldly and dangerous. The exact nature of the presence in the forest is open to debate, and has never been investigated thoroughly. Some believe it contains one or more passages to the Spirit Realms, perhaps to Chikushudo or even to Gaki-do or Meido, for there are certainly many ghost stories associated with it. Others blame the presence of shapeshifters with a taste for trickery, such as saru (monkey), kitsune (fox), and tanuki (badger), who are prone to playing dangerous pranks on mortals. A few descriptions in the legends of the Morikawa tribe seem to point at the ancient presence of ogres, and some peasants still believe an entire tribe of ogres lives somewhere in the forest, perhaps using a network of underground caves to hide. All of these stories may be true... or perhaps none of them. What is certain is that every year there are a few strange or grisly incidents in the forest, just enough to keep the population scared and the legends fueled. Most often, people simply disappear, sometimes without a trace, sometimes leaving blood behind them. More rarely the trouble will be something more eerie, like trees changing place, or every stream in the forest turning blood-red for one day. The peasants who live close to the forest try to protect themselves through various rites and talismans, pointing to their continued survival as proof of their wisdom.

Certain shugenja who have investigated the forest believe it is one of the few places in Rokugan to be home to some of the kenku, the crow-men of legend. One shugenja actually claimed to have identified five different kenku living in the forest on a permanent basis, and posited that a ruin of one of their ancient cities lay somewhere within the forest's bounds. While other scholars have raised questions about these claims, the local legends include many tales



of the kenku observing mortals or even masquerading as wave-men. Since the new Governor arrived with many so many samurai in tow, some of the new arrivals have explored the forests in hope of winning the patronage of a kenku sensei, but to date most have returned unsuccessful, while a few have not returned at all. The local commoners blame this on Keiichi, supposedly a powerful kenku with a notoriously bad temper and lack of patience for arrogant fools. The other kenku often depicted in local stories are Kazuto (who takes the guise of a ronin duelist to seek out challengers), Koiko (a female Kenku and supposedly a smith of great talent), and Tsuji and his son Tsujiken (who are said to pose as a pair of traveling monks).

GM'S OPTIONS: WHAT HIDES IN THE KAWA FOREST?

We have deliberately left the true nature of the Kawa Forest vague to allow GMs to adapt it to their campaign and surprise their players. Herewith are a few options for GMs to consider when deciding what lies behind all the legends.

Nothing at all: It is entirely possible there is nothing actually wrong with the Kawa Forest, and its reputation is simply due to persistent superstition and stories among the villagers. The rare disappearances are caused by accidents, such as people getting lost in the forest, falling into caves or sinkholes, or being mauled by wild animals. The presence of the Kenku could just be another story, perhaps used by ronin to cover their tracks, or it might be true but wholly unrelated to the forest itself.

A sinister cult: The sinister reputation of the forest might be due to human evil rather than the activities of the spirit realm. Perhaps the superstitious Morikawa people, a tribe older than the Empire itself, hide a heretical cult in their midst, dedicated to incomprehensible gods of the forest. Abduction, human sacrifice, and torture would be their ways to placate the beings they believe in, while spreading legends to cover their unholy activities. Whether any of these "gods" actually answers the cult is up to the GM.





The ogre kingdom: Perhaps hidden deep within the forest is a tribe of Free Ogres (see the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, page 229) which has dwelt within there for generations, hiding in caves during the day. They have cowed the locals into offerings of food and reverence, thinking then akin to spirits or gods. The Ogres sometimes prey upon unsuspecting visitors, although they are always careful to remain hidden from better-armed parties.

Truly Nothing: The eerie nature of the forest's darkest might be due to the activities of the Nothing, also known as the Lying Darkness. Perhaps the Goju dwell there, or perhaps the influence is more subtle. Maybe deep within the forest is a small unremarkable rock under which the Nothing hid during the creation of the world, and its influence has affected the area ever since.

The shapeshifters: The forest might be a favored place for the shapeshifters of Chikushudo, who meet there in their animal guises, avoiding the prying eyes of humans. The disappearances would be due to their refusal to let humans know their secrets, or simple cruelty on their part, since some of them are less than appreciative of the dominion of men over the mortal world.

A spirit passage: As mentioned above, the forest could hide a passage to Gaki-Do, Meido, or even Toshigoku. For a twist, the passage might be to a Spirit Realm unknown to Rokugan, home to things alien and mad which obey seemingly senseless laws. This would explain the oddity of the rites and superstitions used by the villagers to protect themselves.

Most of these options could also explain the presence of Kenku in the area, since they could be keeping a vigil over whatever evil lurks in the forest. Alternatively, they might simply live there because the place used to be their ancient home (see the GM's Option section on the Five Ancient Races later in this chapter).

The Omikura Swamp

The Kawa Forest has many small rivers and lakes hidden within it, many of which eventually feed into the Itochu River. In the northeastern part of the province, these streams are so numerous they have turned the area around them into a swamp in which light forest gradually gives way to dense reeds. This is the Omikura Swamp, another barrier to entering and leaving Naishou Province. The swamp is a breeding ground for insects and other more serious nuisances such as leeches and venomous snakes, and most inhabitants of the province see it as little more than a liability. The stink from accumulated rot and gasses also makes the place very unappealing to most. However, the swamp also has plenty of fish to offer, including some species not seen anywhere else in the province. The few villagers who have settled in or near the swamp exploit this bounty, selling the exotic fish to Toshi no Naishou, where they have become popular as delicacies. The swamp also does grow some herbs and roots which can be used for both cooking and medicine. However, the foul conditions make disease a constant risk, and entire hamlets have been

wiped out by "swamp fever" on more than one occasion. Those who explore the marshlands may occasionally come across the rotting remnants of such places, a grim reminder of the swamp's nature.

Some stone ruins can be found here and there in the swamp, pointing at some ancient civilization, although given their state it is impossible to tell if they are of human origin or something else entirely. Some local legends do claim the Omikura Swamp is inhabited by trolls, which if true would make it the only known instance of Shadowlands creatures in Naishou Province. This has attracted little attention from the authorities, however, since there have been no actual casualties, no signs of Taint, and no credible sightings. The peasantry insist the trolls are simply clever enough to away when spotted, and a few scholars have speculated the swamps might be home to a small population of "pure" (un-Tainted) trolls, which would be a first in Rokugan. More cynical samurai suggest the rumor is simply a ploy from villagers to draw more attention to the area. Certainly the commoners are happy to sell items they claim are artifacts belonging to the trolls, or even supposed troll bones or hides. This kind of practice does little to ingratiate them with their neighbors, and may eventually attract the attention of hostile Crab samurai.

Tsunegawa Lake

Bordering both the Omikura Swamp and the Taru Mountains, Tsunegawa Lake receives water from both and gives birth to the Itochu River, the lifeblood of Naishou Province. This means Tsunegawa Lake is of prime importance to all, and unsurprisingly it inspires many local legends. The lake is quite deep in places but since the Taru Mountains act as a buffer against the northern winds, the water is usually quite placid, the lake's surface often as smooth as a mirror. Only a few small and scattered rocks and islands breach its surface. Some say the lake was originally created by an earthquake which led to a subsidence in the ground, quickly filling with water. However, since earthquakes are almost unheard-of in Naishou Province, this seems improbable.

The waters of the lake teem with fish, while the shallows also have many shellfish, so dozens of villages send their boats out on the waters every day. The lake is the primary source of fish for the whole province. Moreover, the beauty of the lake and its surrounding trees – many of them willows or cherry trees – has made it a popular destination for samurai, especially poets and painters. The peaceful nature of the area has also encouraged the construction of several monasteries nearby, usually dedicated to the most peaceful and contemplative monastic orders. Only the northern edge of the lake is left bare of human activity, since the steep mountains isolate it completely.

Some of the more popular legends about the lake concern the strange beaked turtle-creatures known as Kappa, spirits known across the Empire as a malevolent bloodthirsty trickster. Perhaps fitting the lake's peaceful nature, kappa in Naishou Province are seen as mostly benign, prone to warning children against swimming too far away in the lake or staying out too long at night. All



children here know that bowing politely to Kappa is the best way to behave, since when they bow in return it will make the water spill from the depression in their head, disorienting them. Some stories claim the Kappa can be mollified through the gift of cucumbers, which they love even more than blood, and even today many villagers will throw a cucumber into the lake before bathing in it to appease the Kappa. There are also stories of a Kappa king, an especially large specimen who lives in a cave at the feet of the Taru Mountains. He rarely takes to the waters anymore, too old and large to move easily, and his subordinates bring him food. The Kappa king is said to have great knowledge of medicine, and many have searched for him when facing fatal illnesses or other dire medical situations. However, no one has ever claimed to actually find him, and the Kappa king may be nothing more than a local superstition – especially given the nature of Kappa elsewhere in Rokugan.

The Itochu River

The main artery of transport, fishing, and commerce through Naishou Province is the Itochu River, in many ways the defining feature of the region. The river flows through the Nobu Valley at a leisurely pace, and is wide and deep enough to allow large kobune to sail its entire length. The river originates in Tsunegawa Lake, but many smaller rivers and streams from the mountains and the forest also feed directly into it. The people of Naishou Province have long since learned to harness the rivers for their use, using the smaller waterways to flood rice paddies wherever cultivation is possible, and combined

with the fish from both the lake and the river this makes the province more or less self-sufficient. Everybody knows they are blessed by the river, which rarely floods and is for the most part easy to navigate. Many shrines along its banks offer thanks to the spirit of the river, which the locals pray to as fervently as to any other Fortune. Shugenja confirm that the kami of the river are particularly powerful and responsive, suggesting Itochu no Kami is a powerful spirit indeed. He is usually represented as a benevolent bearded man with blue skin, a basket full of fish by his side. Itochu no Kami is a popular character in local legends, usually teaching kindly lessons to the young and the foolish, sharing the values of patience, peace, and hard work. The large salamanders found in the Itochu River are believed to be his servants, and are treated with corresponding respect.

The Itochu River is the main route in and out of Naishou Province. However, the waters become faster and more dangerous south of Toshi no Naishou, which helped discourage the expansion of farming communities in that direction. This has not overly dissuaded merchants, whose larger vessels can better handle the current, and most of the province's trade with the Empire takes this route. The riverbanks immediately beyond the valley are rugged and mostly infertile, making for a long trip before signs of civilization return, but eventually the Itochu feeds into a larger river within the Empire. Since the arrival of the new Governor, the volume of travel on the southern part of the river has increased tremendously. Projects are underway to make the river safer and more secure, such as dredging the bottom for debris and using stone walls to strengthen the banks where necessary. Progress





is ongoing, but already sailors are finding the southern part of the river easier to navigate, even if it is still not as placid as it is in the Nobu Valley proper. Some voices at the Governor's court, probably eager to reap the prize for their own clan in the future, have called for an extension of the province's borders to the south, perhaps creating a new port town as a waypoint for ships on their way to Toshi no Naishou. While the idea is commercially sound, any extension of borders moves Naishou Province closer to other better established provinces, who might not look kindly on a new neighbor whose allegiance still hangs in the balance.

The central role of the Itochu River in the province's life also puts it in the center of many stories, from the mundane to the downright extravagant. A favorite topic of riverside folk is the legendary race of Ningyo. Many versions of the Ningyo feature in stories from outside Naishou Province, some of which are contradictory. Here, the Ningyo are believed to be a benevolent if secretive people who will supposedly save the unfortunate from drowning but will also punish the greedy by luring them to their doom with false promises of pearls. Oddly enough, stories of Ningyo are unknown around Tsunegawa Lake, and some believe this proves people around the lake are from a ancestry than those along the river, while other suggest a rivalry between the Ningyo and the Kappa themselves. Of course, no samurai has ever seen either of these mysterious water-dwelling people. Some areas of the Itochu River, particularly bends in its course, are supposed to be where the Ningyo hide their homes, but nobody has ever been able to actually corroborate the existence of the creatures in the province. Still, they are a popular topic for art, and many temples and shrines built by the river feature statues of them near their entrances. In Toshi no Naishou they are frequently represented in paintings, and many riverside restaurants will have a name associated with the Ningyo.

The Taru Mountains

While the Taru Mountains are nowhere near as tall or majestic as the more well-known mountain ranges of the Empire, they are still a formidable obstacle and a key component of Naishou Province. The mountains form a dense barrier with only has a few reliable passes, and many of their peaks remain unexplored by man, although others have been inhabited for as long as the rest of the province. In some places, cultivation of rice on the lower slopes is possible, and terraced rice paddies can be maintained with only modest difficulty. A few tea plantations also exist, and while the taste of the leaves is usually considered disappointingly mild by Rokugani standards, the locals are quite fond of it. Most higher slopes are completely bare of any life, little more than rock and ice. During the winter, all of the mountains are fully covered in snow, making them even less accessible than usual, and many villages in the Taru range must survive the winter season completely isolated. Some mining does happen in the mountains, mostly the copper and iron deposits centered around Hitori Mura, but compared to other mountain ranges the Taru's mineral wealth is sparse. A few villages do maintain stone quarries, selling construction materials to temples and the city. Such stone is also used in the small shrines scattered throughout the mountains, which usually take the appearance of squat pillars. Caves may be found throughout the mountains, although they are usually small and good for little more than sheltering from the weather while traveling.

The Taru Mountains are the main reason why Naishou Province has been mostly cut from the rest of Rokugan throughout its history, and this still holds true to some measure in the present. The only reliable pass goes near the village of Sujuko Mura, and still take days to traverse. Still, work is underway to make it easier and more reliable, and a new trade route is starting to develop from it. Notwithstanding this development, most villages within the mountains remain isolated, often with barely any dealings with the rest of the province, much less the rest of Rokugan. These towns form a sort of internal community, connected by narrow paths and sometimes even rope bridges, helping each other in time of need.

The Taru Mountains are the least populated part of Naishou Province, and one can explore them for days at a time without encountering a human soul. This has led to the creation of a number of monasteries within the mountains, home to monks of a more ascetic nature. These monasteries will open their doors to shelter travelers, and allow anyone to pray in their shrines, but otherwise close themselves off from outside contact, surviving through donations from nearby villages or simply eking out their own living on a few rice paddies. As with the rest of Naishou Province, the majority of these are Fortunist monasteries, although a few Shintaoist ones do exist and there is no discrimination between the groups – after all, they all agree on the value of isolation.

Of course, no region of the Naishou Province would be complete without some tales and legends of supernatural creatures roaming the countryside. The difference here, possibly due to the laconic nature of the inhabitants, is that those tales are infrequent enough that some of them might be true. The most typical stories are sightings of the Zokujin, the so-called “copper goblins” with a deep affinity for the Element of Earth. Reports of them are found in every mountainous area of Rokugan, and their existence is generally considered fact, leading credence to Naishou Province’s stories. Sadly, the Zokujin tribes in the Taru Mountains seem to have little interest in communicating with mankind, invariably vanishing before any contact can be established. Some foolhardy men and women, both peasant and samurai, have attempted to track down and meet with the Zokujin, but all such efforts have failed. Some villagers in the Taru Mountains believe the Zokujin have a great city, maybe even a kingdom, hidden deep beneath the mountain peaks. The entrance to such a hypothetical kingdom is usually suggested as the place known as the Oyukushi Pit, a deep chasm in the mountains which has never been explored, its bottom in permanent darkness hundreds of feet below. Shugenja who have been near it say the kami there are dormant, almost unresponsive, making exploration by magic difficult at best. So the chasm remains a mystery, and the zokujin city – if it exists – remains undisturbed. Which might be best for all parties involved.

GM’S OPTIONS: THE FIVE ANCIENT RACES

The extent to which the Five Ancient Races (the Zokujin, Kenku, Ningyo, Trolls, and Kitsu) are actually present in Naishou Province is left to the GM’s taste. Although the region is suffused with legends about these creatures, there is no guarantee any of these stories are true. The following options present the more obvious choices for GMs who wish to explore the possibilities.

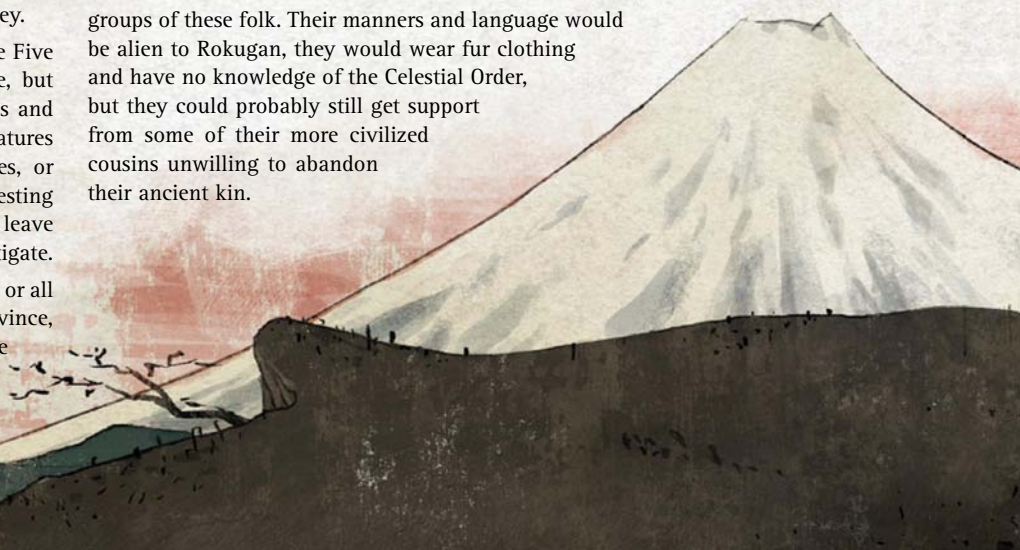
More nothing: The legends might just be legends. Depending on the tone the GM wants to give to his campaign, the peasantry could genuinely believe in them, or they could know there is nothing to lend them credence but keep retelling the stories anyway as moral lessons or to add color to their lives. Alternatively, perhaps the crafty inhabitants of Naishou Province have built fake ruins and periodically disguise themselves as the creatures to create interest in their lands and bring in visitors and money.

Remnants of the past: Perhaps some or all of the Five Ancient Races once lived in the Naishou Province, but are now all long dead and gone, leaving only ruins and memories behind. The occasional sighting of the creatures could be due to peasants interpreting coincidences, or the result of spiritual echoes from the past manifesting themselves as ghosts or illusions. This would still leave plenty of old ruins and artifacts for scholars to investigate.

Alive and active: In this option, remnants of some or all of the Five Races can still be found in Naishou Province, and most of the stories are true. Naishou could be

one of the last places where pure trolls survive, and Tsunegawa Lake could have been caused by an ancient cataclysm which destroyed a Ningyo city, forcing them into the river and leaving room for the Kappa to settle in their stead. The fabled ruins lying under the Governor’s Palace could be real and belong to the Kitsu, who might still be able to visit there from the Spirit Realms. Perhaps some of these creatures have remained behind to watch over some kind of great evil, an otherworldly threat or a primeval oni from the time before mankind walked the earth. (This might be what Kuni Shiyoda, from Chapter One, encountered during her wanderings.) Perhaps some unimaginably terrible being sleeps at the bottom of the Oyukushi Pit, watched carefully lest it awaken.

The last of the lost tribes: Perhaps something mysterious does dwell within Naishou Province... something not Rokugani, but still human. The three tribes of Naishou were once all fiercely independent people, and perhaps some of their elements refused to bow to the Kami and hid in the remote corners of the province, continuing to live as they always have. The Taru Mountains, Omikura Swamp, and Kawa Forest could all be suitable hideouts for small groups of these folk. Their manners and language would be alien to Rokugan, they would wear fur clothing and have no knowledge of the Celestial Order, but they could probably still get support from some of their more civilized cousins unwilling to abandon their ancient kin.





Something different entirely: Maybe there is a supernatural presence in Naishou Province, but not the kind its inhabitants believe. After all, simple villagers cannot really tell the difference between a Zokujin and a goblin, a Troll and an Ogre, a Kenku and a Tsuru, or a Ningyo and a Naga. The locals may have tried to make sense of things based on their own legends rather than fully investigate elusive and frightening creatures. Some of these options might mean a stronger presence for the Shadowlands in Naishou Province, which would mean Jigoku also has an interest in the secluded province. Depending on where in the Empire you locate the province, this could be highly appropriate.

The Nobu Valley

The inhabitants of the Naishou Province call any area between the Taru Mountains and the Kawa Forest “the Nobu valley,” but strictly speaking it is not a single geographical area. What unifies it is human settlement, for the Nobu Valley has always been at the heart of the province. The valley is essentially the drainage basin of the Itochu River, and since irrigation is crucial for growing rice, the valley has always been the focus of human civilization here. The Nobu Valley’s actual landscape varies from gently rolling hills in the north, to an actual river valley closer to the Itochu River, to broad plains in the south and west of the province. A few small lakes break the monotony of the landscape, while the occasional offshoot of the Kawa Forest can sometimes be found in the western parts of the valley. Most important is the presence of streams and rivers, of all shapes and sizes, which crisscross the whole area and eventually feed into the Itochu. Very few of these are deep enough for navigation, but many still require bridges to cross them. They supply the water for the valley’s innumerable rice paddies, which define the landscape across most of the province. While the land is not so fertile as the provinces of the Crane Clan, careful management over the years combined with easy access to water has allowed food production to be impressively high nonetheless, high enough to feed the population of Naishou Province and still have plenty left for taxes and exports. This, more than anything, might be the reason why so many clans desire Naishou Province. Even the mightiest armies need rice to fill soldiers’ bellies.

Toshi no Naishou is the only real city in the province, and only a few other settlements deserve the name of town; the majority of the population lives in the dozens upon dozens of villages scattered

across the Nobu Valley. They often form small inter-dependent clusters, anywhere from three to twenty villages who support each other by exchanging goods and services, forming a closed economic cycle unless otherwise necessary. Thus, most villages try to have some sort of unique resource to offer to their neighbors, such as a mill, an inn, a sake house, a merchant’s shop, a smithy, a carpenter’s shop, a stable, a geisha house, or even just a skilled entertainer such as a puppeteer. This way, villagers only need to go to the distant provincial capital when absolutely needed (such as to deliver their taxes). The roads reflect this reality, with networks of paths that tie small groups of villages together, with far fewer routes connecting them to the rest of the province. Bridges are also of prime importance, and frequently a village will exist simply to make sure a bridge is kept in good repair lest a section of the province become isolated from its neighbors.

The provincial villages themselves are of the classic Rokugani style, unchanging over the centuries, with most folk dwelling in small two-room wooden huts with thatch roofs. Wealthier folk such as merchants or innkeepers may be able to afford the more refined wood-and-paper construction, or tile roofs. Every village will also have some way of maintaining its spiritual activities, perhaps only a small shrine the peasants maintain themselves, or more often a monastery which tends to the needs of a cluster of villages together. The inhabitants of the valley are as pious as anywhere else in Naishou Province, and always make sure the local shrines are in good repair. Each generation a few villagers will hear the call of the Fortunes and join the Brotherhood to dedicate their life to them. A few Shintoist monasteries also exist, but are generally much less popular (though still treated with respect) – the exception being the area in the northern valley around Koso Mura, where they are starting to find more acceptance.

Many villages also have one or more samurai residences. These are of obviously better quality and usually have gardens and other amenities, and while they are still part of the settlement they are usually a small distance from the rest of the village to maintain propriety. With so many villages scattered across the Nobu Valley, for many generations it has been considered more efficient to have individual samurai or samurai families live in different villages to provide protection and direction, rather than gathering all samurai into a single city or town. Since the arrival of the new Governor, the troops of the Lion Clan have begun patrolling the roads of the province in large groups, but there are far too few of them to cover the whole Nobu Valley, so the individual samurai in the villages are still important. In most times and places, these positions are somewhat honorific since the province seldom sees genuine dangers. Thus, many of these “village samurai” are those who wish for a quiet existence, such as artists, scholars, and semi- or fully-retired samurai. Because of the province’s history, even during the time the Phoenix controlled the region it was not uncommon for samurai of other clans to occupy such positions; the Phoenix had few samurai of their own to send to the province and no objection to sharing the duty of protecting the villages so



long as it was accomplished peacefully and honorably. However, with the new Governor in place these positions have become favors which he can bestow upon those he finds worthy, as a sign of confidence from him and the Imperial authorities. He has begun placing Imperial samurai in key villages, ensuring those settlements retain their neutrality and remain loyal only to him. Other appointments go to samurai he finds to be skilled and honorable, or to people he owes favors. The court keeps careful watch on the clan balance of village samurai, and any appointment is analyzed as a sign of which clan might eventually win control of Naishou Province. This has created some interesting local politics, with samurai sometimes working to promote their village over others in order to be recognized as better administrators and gain greater favor with the Governor. Sadly, sometimes this causes them to push the villagers too hard, and this has created some resentment among the common folk.

People of the Nobu Valley are as fond of stories and legends as those in the rest of the province, but since they live in an environment heavily modified by the hand of man, they have few stories regarding supernatural creatures. Indeed, it would be hard for them to even pretend to have seen anything inhuman when all there is for miles around is other villages. However, ghost stories are another matter, and the Nobu Valley has many of those. The vast majority seem to imply yorei, ghosts with tragic histories offering a morals lesson. Parents are fond of telling these to their children to teach them good manners, or simply to scare them away from dangerous behavior such as sneaking out at night or venturing too far from home. Still, some of these stories do seem to have a basis in truth, and exorcists have sometimes passed through the area to banish errant souls. According to the people of Naishou Province, moonless nights are particularly conducive to otherworldly apparitions, although this does not seem to be the only factor. On most nights, moonless or not, a traveler could easily feel safe anywhere in the entire valley... but once in a while, something else happens.

GM'S OPTIONS: THE GHOSTS OF NOBU VALLEY

Again, the actual level of supernatural activity present in Nobu Valley is left to the GM to adapt to the tone of his campaign. While the Nobu Valley can be used perfectly well without any supernatural presence at all, GMs who like to introduce supernatural creatures in their stories can find ghosts to be an ideal choice, as both one of the more "human" creatures of Rokugan and one of the more mysterious. The following paragraphs offer different options for exploring the Nobu Valley ghosts.

One again, nothing: Maybe there is nothing more to the legends of ghosts in the Nobu Valley than peasant superstitions and folktales. If this option is taken in concert with the similar mundane options in the other parts of the



province, Naishou becomes a place steeped in legend but with little actual basis for its mysticism. This may be a better fit for GM who wish to focus their campaigns on military or political themes.

Just a few ghosts: While some occurrences of haunting may actually be true, they may be only a fraction of the reported stories. A few real ghosts prompt the local population to make up more stories and to attribute any unusual phenomena to some kind of ghost or spirit. This is ideal for lulling characters into a false sense of security, since after many false legends they will be more surprised when they actually encounter a genuine undead spirit.

Passage to another world: If the Nobu Valley is indeed the site of many cases of haunting, it might be due to a passage existing between it and one of the Spirit Realms, most probably Meido. This passage might only open intermittently, explaining the irregular appearances of ghosts. If the GM is using the Five Races from the earlier discussion, the passage might be the result of a Kitsue presence in the province, or even the reason why they live here, watching over it lest it fully open.

Far from the Empire: For a more extreme but interesting option, especially if the GM places Naishou Province at the fringes of Rokugan's territory, the large numbers of ghosts might be explained by the fact that the Celestial Order has never fully recognized Naishou as a part of the Empire. Consequently, the province is somewhat disconnected from the Spirit Realms, explaining why so many souls get lost and are unable to reach Meido. This discovery would probably come as a blow to the pious inhabitants, but could also be explained by the presence of the remnants of the original tribes if that option is also used.





Wildlife of Naishou Province



With its great diversity of landscapes and environments, Naishou Province teems with wildlife from the bottom of the Itochu River to the peaks of the Taru Mountains. Like elsewhere in Rokugan, many animals are attributed with some form of spiritual significance, although the locals have sometimes developed different opinions on these than the rest of the Empire.

Most of the wild animals in Naishou are small innocuous animals. Few large predators trouble the province, and those who are present rarely bother getting close to humans. In the Taru Mountains, the largest animal is the black bear, which usually keeps far away from human settlements and – while ferocious if provoked – generally avoids confrontation. In the Kawa Forest, small packs of wolves have occasionally shown up, but they are usually transient with territory extending outside the province. During the winter, hungry wolves will sometimes try their chances outside the forest, and when that happens the villagers are quick to dig wolf-pits, covered in branches and with bait at the bottom, to trap the wolves and then kill them with spears. The rest of the time, wolves are little more than shadows in the forest, scampering away at the sight of humans. A smaller species of wolf can occasionally be found in the mountains, but has never been known to pose a danger to humans.

In the Nobu Valley, the only predator of note is the fox, which preys equally on vermin and on farmers' poultry. While this can be a mild annoyance, foxes are rarely hunted due to their association with Inari, the Fortune of rice. A fox in a rice field is considered a very good omen, usually a sign of an excellent harvest.

Mice and other such small nuisance animals are common through the province, and can be a plague on farmers. Rats are found mainly in Toshi no Naishou, but thrive there. Cats are often used to hunt these the vermin, and although the Rokugani rarely keep them as pets they will still take care of them for the sake of their help

against the scavengers. Dogs are sometimes kept as pets as well, mostly by samurai, although they also find use by hunters among the mountain and forest villages. Hares run all throughout the Nobu valley, frequently preyed on by foxes, and the forest is home to squirrels and a diminutive species of monkey.

Hedgehogs are common through most of the valley, and peasant children sometimes take them in as pets. They are seen as a benevolent animal due to their tendency to prey on snakes and insects, and as such are the topic of many stories. Indeed, the common people of Naishou Province sometimes use the image of a hedgehog to represent themselves: peaceful and hard-working, but prickly if threatened.

Emma-O Seido is surrounded by several caves which shelter hundreds of bats, reinforcing their image as protectors of the living and guides for the spirits of the dead. Bats are also found elsewhere in the province, albeit in smaller numbers.

In parts of the mountains where bamboo grows, elusive red pandas have been spotted. Stags are also occasionally sighted in the Kawa Forest, but never with regularity, to the disappointment of samurai hunters. Boars are similarly uncommon, and their temperamental nature makes most folk glad of their rarity.

The Itochu River and its many tributaries are home to carp, trout, and many other species of fish. Humans are not the only ones preying on these, since groups of otters live in the river, and fishermen are fond of throwing discarded offal back to the otters or even teaching them to assist in the work of fishing, although this requires both effort and patience. The largest animal in the Itochu River, however, is the giant salamander, an impressive amphibian

which can grow up to six feet long. Although it can bite if irritated, and excretes a milky substance smelling like pepper when threatened, the giant salamander is mostly a placid animal with no known predators in the region. The creatures' striking appearance and long lifespan have made them a common topic for art in the province. Naturally, there are a variety of other smaller amphibians in the waterways of the province and especially the marshes. A species of tree-frog in the Kawa Forest is mildly toxic if touched, but nevertheless still regarded with respect due to the legend of the "frog king" living somewhere in the forest.

Probably the most dangerous animal in the province is a species of gray and yellow striped viper whose bite can lead to weeks of fever and pain, claiming a few lives every year. These snakes are found mainly in the Kawa Forest, and seeing a snake in the forest is considered a dire omen, usually a sign one is about to be punished for impiety.

Finally, a variety of birds call Naishou Province home. Crows are widespread in all areas, although they are viewed in different lights depending on where they are found. They are mostly ignored in the Taru Mountains, while in the Nobu Valley they are considered a nuisance since they often attempt to eat the harvest. Many villages put up scarecrows with fearsome faces in an attempt to drive off the birds, although the scarecrows themselves often become the source of legends about possession by ghosts. Due to the general lack of enthusiasm for Shinseism in the region, the crow's traditional association with the Little Prophet has done little to improve its reputation here. In the Kawa Forest, however, crows are seen as a wise and noble animal, not due to Shinsei but to the rumors of the Kenku. Villagers there will often keep crow feathers as lucky charms, and feed wild berries to crows when they encounter them.

Cranes often migrate through the province, usually stopping at Tsunegawa Lake and contributing to its visual beauty. Ducks of all kinds are also found along the Itochu River. In the mountains, wild hawks reign supreme, preying on both smaller birds and mammals, while in the forest owls are the largest and most common predatory birds. Many unique birds also live in the Omikura Swamp, including a variety of heron which preys on the local frogs.





A PLAQUE OF CRIMES

Introduction

This adventure takes place in the sample cluster of ten small villages located in the eastern part of Naishou Province near Yasurugi Monastery. Unfortunately, this region is facing a rash of mysterious crimes due to the presence of a group of Bloodspeaker cultists headquartered in the village of Koujou. The original seed for the cult was a corrupted monk named Asai who joined Yasurugi Monastery a decade ago. He spent the years after his arrival slowly recruiting more cultists; they, in turn, have recruited more new members on their own. Unfortunately, in the last year the most powerful maho-tsukai in the cult, an old woman named Chio, has seized control from Asai. She has stolen his corrupted nemuranai, an obsidian amulet, and has embarked on a parade of blood sacrifices intended to enhance the power of the amulet and thus of herself. Unfortunately, this is also creating a sudden wave of unsolved crimes that is drawing the attention of local authorities – and will draw in the PCs as well. Meanwhile, Asai is still part of the cult but is hoping to either overthrow Chio or leave the area before her activities expose him.

The crime wave has already drawn the attention of one samurai authority: a Phoenix Inquisitor and her yojimbo. Unfortunately, the cult detected them, and the two samurai were killed and their bodies hidden while they were investigating in Sencha Village. Even more recently, one of the cult members kidnapped a samurai child from Mujitsu Village. These are both serious miscalculations on the part of the cult, since crimes against samurai draw more attention. In particular, the child's parents have petitioned Governor Miya Ansho for help, and the default assumption of the adventure is that the Governor in turn dispatches the PCs to investigate. (The missing Phoenix will take longer to attract attention from her clan and family, since it will be some time before word of her disappearance gets to Phoenix lands.)

Alternative Motives: For GMs running this adventure at GenCon 2013, the default assumption is that Governor Ansho sends the PCs to investigate the crime wave in his territories. However, if the GM is running this adventure for a home campaign, there are more options for getting the PCs involved. They may hear about the trouble while passing through the area, as rumors and gossip in an inn or a tea-house. A PC who has a friendship with a *heimin* servant or vassal may hear gossip about the crimes from that source. The GM may arrange for the PCs to visit one of these locations for some other reason – for example, they may visit





SKILLS AND DIE ROLLS

Every GM has a different approach to handling Skill Rolls and TNs. Some GMs prefer to call for frequent die rolls and to enforce mechanical requirements such as calling Raises for better results; other GMs prefer a looser, more free-form approach in which Skill Rolls are only occasionally needed. Likewise, some GMs try to be generous on which Skills are applicable to a given situation, while others prefer to be more strict in order to encourage the players to develop a full selection of Skills.

Accordingly, we have not listed specific TNs for this adventure. Instead we have offered suggestions of which Skills would be applicable, and occasional modest guidance as to how difficult the TNs should be. This way, each GM can tailor the adventure to his or her specific style.



Yasurugi Monastery for some religious purpose – and then hear about the disappearances and crimes. Finally, a GM could get the PCs directly involved by having one of the crimes take place while they are visiting one of the villages.

Regardless of how they learn about the crimes, the known incidents (by location) are as follows:

Aian Village: Recently the headman, his wife, and his daughter all disappeared together. On the same night, a blacksmithy worker was murdered. Also, two months ago a young peasant man disappeared.

Danshou Village: A peasant child and an old man have disappeared.

Houi Village: Three residents of this village have disappeared.

Jouzousho Village: A peasant, a child, and a geisha have disappeared over the last few months, and a worker at the local sake brewery has been murdered.

Juuchiro Village: A woodcutter was recently murdered.

Koujou Village: A teenage peasant boy who worked at the local mill has disappeared.

Mujitsu Village: A farmer (a notorious drunk) went missing some time ago. Two weeks ago, far more shockingly, a samurai child vanished.

Sencha Village: A peasant woman and her daughter have vanished. Also, this village was the last known location of a Phoenix Inquisitor and her yojimbo, who have not been seen since.

Tenraku Village: An entire peasant family was victimized – all of them killed except for two who went missing. On the same night, one of the local *doshin* was also killed.

Boubi Village: No reported crimes, but there are rumors of an armed gang inhabiting the village.

Yasurugi Monastery: One monk has disappeared.

The only village in the region which has not suffered any crimes is the outlying settlement of Boubi Village, which has hired a group of ronin to protect itself from the perceived danger. Of course, this is itself a source of concern to Governor Ansho, since a group of wave-men openly setting up shop in his province has the potential to create all manner of problems.

Structurally, most of this adventure consists of a series of sections, one for each village. Each of these sections contains a description of the village and its notable features and inhabitants, a description any crimes that have occurred there, a description of the clues the PCs can potentially find, and a description of the cultists (if any) who live there.

The final section of the adventure provides guidelines to the GM of how the cultists will behave once the PCs start investigating, and contains both the game statistics for the various cultist NPCs and a set of pre-generated characters for GMs running this scenario as a one-time event.

Aian Village

This is a large village, probably over 300 people, with a modest but well-maintained samurai residence on its outskirts. The center of the town boasts a blacksmithy, a tea house, and a merchant's shop, all advertised with crude but vigorous signs. However, despite the appearance of prosperity, an aura of fear and unease seems to hang over this place, with tense peasant faces peering from shuttered windows. The village has two *doshin*, Kozo and Mukitsu, who will approach any samurai visitors with anxious expressions and prostrate themselves while clutching their jo staffs and jitte.

Aian Village lives in a state of fear – there has been one murder here and four disappearances, among which were the local headman and his family. The *doshin* are the only local authority (the resident samurai, Matsu Sukio, is too involved with her own concerns and has largely ignored the events in the village). Kozo and Mukitsu are



obviously frightened by the situation, and practically fall all over themselves in their haste to hand the problem over to “brave, noble samurai.” Neither of them has ever had to deal with anything worse than the occasional peasant family quarrel or drunken samurai.

The *doshin* can provide the following information:

- The headman Shidou, his wife, and their young daughter all vanished on the same night fifteen days ago. There were obvious signs of struggle in their house. The *doshin* will show the PCs to the house if they wish.
- The murder took place on the same night as the assault on the headman’s house. The victim was a worker at the blacksmithy, a tough young man named Kou who was coming home late from the teahouse. His body was found in a ditch on the outskirts of the village, covered in strange burn marks. The *doshin* describe them as “unnatural, great samurai, as though his whole body was bathed in flame at once. It must have been magic.”
- Strangely, no one heard or saw anything strange that night. (The cultists used *maho* to cloak themselves.)
- If the PCs ask what Kou was doing earlier in the evening, the *doshin* say he was drinking at the teahouse, probably trying to sweet-talk the serving maids (a frequent activity).
- There has been one other disappearance in the village. It happened two months ago, and was a young man returning from a visit to a neighboring farm where he was courting a maiden. He never made it home. When the *doshin* searched the route between the two huts, they found a place torn up by a struggle, and some scraps of cloth. (They still have the cloth.)

CLUES AND INFORMATION

If the PCs explore the village in search of additional clues, there are a number of pieces of information they can uncover.

The headman’s hut contains tumbled-over furniture, scuff-marks, and other signs of struggle. No one has visited the hut since the abductions (the villagers regard it as cursed). If the PCs search the ground around the hut, they can roll Hunting or Investigation to notice footprints in the mud. Most of the prints are barefoot, but two sets are in sandals. If the PCs call a Raise or hit a higher TN, they can notice one of the bare prints came from a man who was missing his left big toe.

If the PCs interrogate the Elemental spirits in and around the headman’s hut, they can learn the headman’s family was attacked by six people. The attackers were Miya Kuboti, Nigai the laborer, Bondo the *doshin*, Asai the monk, Yuri from the sake works, and Chu the carpenter. (See later sections for physical descriptions of these NPCs.) The Air spirits can report there were “nasty Air spirits” that night which dampened the sounds around the hut – these were *kansen* invoked by the cultists. Water spirits in the



muddy ground can be invoked with two Raises, and will provide a dark, blurry image of the assault, potentially allowing the PCs to catch recognizable glimpses of Nigai and Miya Kuboti.

If the PCs visit the tea house, it is run by a portly middle-aged commoner named Chiji; his plump wife runs the kitchen and he employs three serving maids for the common room. If the PCs ask the maids about Kou’s final night, they quickly turn tearful as they explain he usually did not stay so late, but he had come alone instead of with his friend Nigai, who usually could talk him into going home at a more reasonable hour. Chiji himself will be delighted to have a group of samurai as his guests, and will interrupt the maids to personally bustle around with trays of tea, sake, and rice. (This may make the PCs suspicious of him, but in fact he is merely excited by getting wealthy visitors.) He will be apologetic for the tea-house’s lack of sophisticated resources. “Not many stop here, you see... we’re a small village and travelers usually just go right through. And lady Matsu-sama seldom has guests.” If the PCs inquire further about “Matsu-sama,” Chiji puts on a long-suffering face. “Oh, it’s really quite tragic,” he says. “Her husband and sons all died in one of those wars a few years ago, fighting the Crane I believe.” (If there are any Crane in the party, he bows apologetically to them.) “She was too old to remarry, so she just stays in her house, waiting for her life to be over.”

If the PCs examine the place where Kou’s body was found, they discover the ground is scorched. If it is winter, snow will melt on the site; regardless, there is some residual Taint which the PCs can potentially sense if they have the ability. If the PCs invoke the Air or Earth spirits here (no Water spirits are available), they can learn Kou stopped, shouted in the direction of the headman’s hut, and then was struck down by “dirty fire.” There are residual Fire spirits on the site, but they are Tainted *kansen* and will not willingly cooperate with the PCs; a shugenja who can





manage a Commune spell with four Raises will be able to force them to admit they were invoked by “the shaven-headed man.”

Kou’s body was cremated by the village’s *eta* family and the ashes were placed in an urn in his house. There is nothing obviously strange about the ashes (if the PCs examine them) but they do carry some residual Taint from the spell used to kill Kou; if any of the PCs can detect Taint (e.g. Witch Hunters, for example), they may be able to sense a very faint residue of it in the ashes.

The cloth which was found in Kou’s hand was torn from a good quality kimono, dyed in a flower pattern. This suggests a woman’s kimono, either a samurai or a well-off commoner (it is from one of Yuri’s kimono). The spirits in the cloth can identify their owner as “a woman” who lives in the “place of rotting rice.”

THE CULTIST

There is a cultist in Aian Village, a bristly-haired, slightly-stupid man named Nigai who works days at the tea-house as a handy-man and general laborer. Nigai has always envied the samurai who visit the tea-house, and was recruited by the Bloodspeaker Cult with promises of power and glory. Since joining, however, he has developed doubts and fears about the cult, doubts made worse by the crimes he has committed. The slaughter of the family in Tenraku Village last month, followed by the abduction of the headman’s family in his own village and the murder of his friend Kou, has shaken Nigai’s dedication to the Bloodspeaker cause. He is now seriously considering trying to leave the cult, but fears he will be found out and killed if he does so.

PCs who have seen Nigai in Water-kami visions (here, at Danshou village, etc.) can recognize him with an Intelligence roll. This might also be possible based on verbal descriptions from other (non-Water) spirits, although this should require a substantially higher TN.

If the PCs speak to Nigai about the death of his friend Kou, ask why he wasn’t with Kou that night, or ask about the disappearance of the headman’s family, he will become very anxious and nervous, loudly declaring his innocence, insisting he was home sleeping that night (he lives alone, in a small hut near the teahouse), and so forth. If the PCs press him closely he will try to bolt, or failing that, break down and confess. Nigai knows the following:

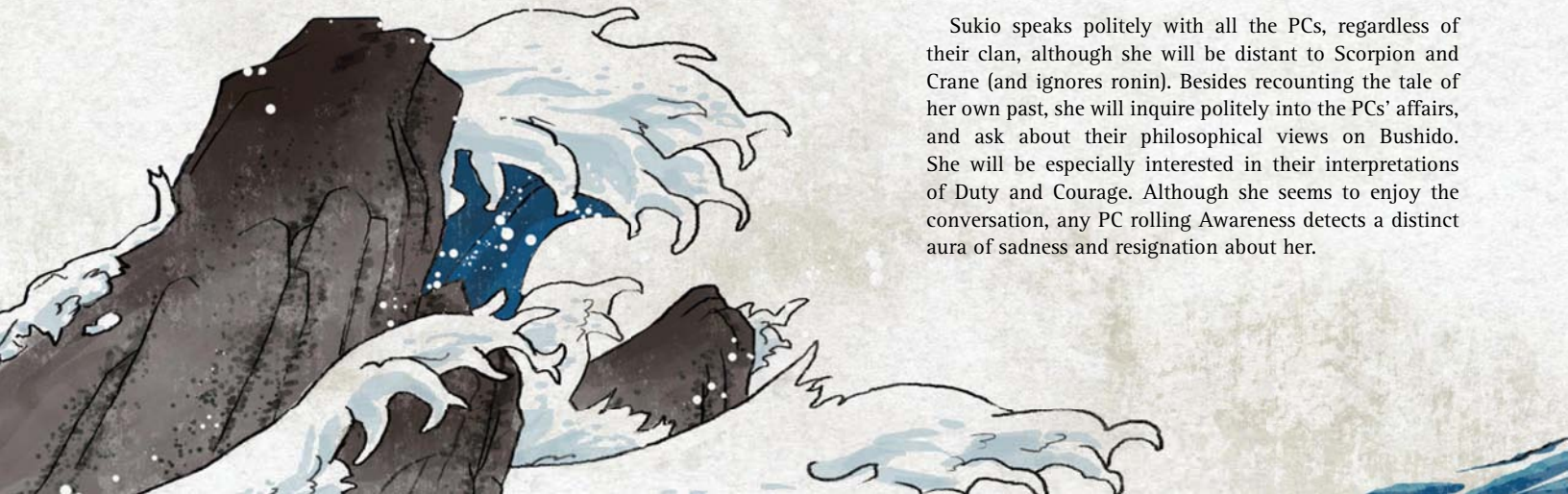
- ☉ Aside from himself, there are cultists in Jouzousho Village, Koujou Village, and Tenraku Village. He thinks there is also a cultist in the monastery, because when they abducted the headman’s family a man helped them who looked like a monk.
- ☉ He knows only a few names: Bondo, Yuri, and Chu. He thinks Bondo must be a doshin, because he carried jitte.
- ☉ There is a samurai in the cult, a young man from one of the other villages – he is not sure which one. Nigai has worked with the samurai twice (to abduct Jakunen and to assault the headman’s hut). He does not know the samurai’s name.
- ☉ The cult meets periodically in the mill in Koujou Village. Nigai has never been allowed to attend the meetings – they don’t trust him that much. Nigai resents this – he thinks (rightly) that the rest of the cult regards him as stupid and unreliable.
- ☉ Last year the cult only made two sacrifices, but this winter they’ve suddenly been making many, many more. He doesn’t know why.

THE SAMURAI RESIDENCE: MATSU SUKIO

The PCs may decide to pay their respects at the local samurai residence. Also, if they stay in Aian Village for more than a single night, Matsu Sukio will send them an invitation to share dinner with her. If the PCs do visit her residence, an aging servant will usher them in to a modestly appointed room where Sukio has arranged for a dinner.

Matsu Sukio is a stern, thin woman in her late fifties, well-kept for her age but clearly showing its effects (gray hair, sunken cheeks, tired and wrinkled skin). She welcomes the PCs to her house and asks them to share her dinner and hospitality. “I get few visitors, and I have no one to speak with here in my house,” she says quietly. (Players who are fans of horror movies may be alarmed, but there is nothing sinister about Matsu Sukio: she is a tired, lonely old woman, her spirit bowed by the weight of a lifetime of service to Bushido.) Over the course of the evening, if the PCs seem friendly or sympathetic, she will recount the tale of her life: her husband, Matsu Kojita, and both their sons died in battle against the Crane. Too old to remarry, Sukio retired to this village, living out her life without purpose. When she dies, her family line will be at an end. There is no heir to inherit her sword.

Sukio speaks politely with all the PCs, regardless of their clan, although she will be distant to Scorpion and Crane (and ignores ronin). Besides recounting the tale of her own past, she will inquire politely into the PCs’ affairs, and ask about their philosophical views on Bushido. She will be especially interested in their interpretations of Duty and Courage. Although she seems to enjoy the conversation, any PC rolling Awareness detects a distinct aura of sadness and resignation about her.





If the PCs ask about the recent murders and disappearances, Sukio will be only vaguely aware of some sort of trouble in the village, and wholly ignorant of any issues in neighboring villages. She assumes such problems are the responsibility of Governor Ansho.

A POTENTIAL SCENE: A STRANGE SAD MORNING

Matsu Sukio is tired of her life, and ready to move on to the next one – where, she quietly hopes, she might be reunited with her lost family. Her warrior’s spirit, however, rebels at the thought of merely living out an empty existence while waiting for the death of old age. The arrival of the PCs sparks an idea which has been lurking in her mind for some months, and if they impress her favorably (particularly with their attitudes on courage and Bushido), she will put her plan into action. At some point, she will dress for battle and meet with the PCs at a suitable open place – perhaps the road in front of her house – and bow deeply to them. “Fellow samurai. Will you honor me with a duel?”

Sukio wants to die as a samurai, in combat, not as a doddering old woman. She will challenge a PC who struck her as an honorable warrior who can understand her wishes. Although such a duel will be technically illegal, Sukio insists there is nothing dishonorable about her actions. “I am a samurai as you are, and I seek an honorable end to my life. My lord has no further use for me, and thus I am not failing in any duty.”

It is up to the PCs whether or not to accept Sukio’s request for a duel. If they all refuse, she quietly murmurs,

“Cowards,” sheaths her katana and returns to her house. If a PC tries to accept the duel, but did not impress her previously, she scowls slightly. “I wish to fight an opponent who understands Bushido as I do,” she says coldly.

If an acceptable PC takes up her challenge, Sukio smiles and assumes a dueling stance; her eyes are clear, her face serene, and a slight smile curves her lips as her opponent steps up to face her. Mechanically, this should be run as a standard iaijutsu duel, but if Sukio strikes first, she will keep low damage dice. Any strike which reduces her to the “Down” or lower Wound Rank should be assumed to be fatal – she will bleed to death within a short time. The old Lion dies with a smile on her face. Depending on how the PCs view this incident (as an honorable death or a pointless waste of life), they might either gain Honor or lose Honor for participating.

MATSU SUKIO, AGING WARRIOR

AIR: 3	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 4		STRENGTH: 3		
Honor: 7.2		Status: 1.0		Glory: 3.7

- School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 3*
- Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 4, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu 3, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Bushido 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 3, Sincerity 4, Spears 3*
- Advantages: Seven Fortunes’ Blessing (Bishamon)*
- Disadvantages: Idealistic, Lost Love (her family)*





peasant said. “Why should we not be happy? None can desire more than that their loved ones be safe and well. All else is distraction.” The monk was deeply impressed by their good spirits, and when he departed the next morning, he placed a blessing upon the village: “So long as you face all the trials the Fortunes present you with good cheer, the blessing of Unari will be upon this place, and your harvest will never falter.” And it never has, great samurai, not from that day to this.

As one might expect, in this happy place the Bloodspeaker Cult has made no inroads, and none of the locals are even aware a cult exists. So peaceful is the village that there is not even a single doshin here; the peasants maintain order themselves, without the need for armed authority. However, there have been two disappearances in Danshou Village, and discussing them is just about the only thing that can bring the locals down from their cheerful nature.

The first victim was a child, a five-year-old named Chiisai who vanished when he ran off in the fields during the rice harvest last autumn. At the time, the villagers searched for the child but could find no sign of him, and assumed he had either gotten lost or been taken by a wild animal. If the PCs speak with Chiisai’s (large) family, they will mention he always carried a small statuette of Inari which was given to him last year by a monk passing through the village (probably a monk visiting the local monastery).

The other disappearance, much more recent (less than three weeks ago) was Jakunen, a kindly old man who lived alone in a small hut on the village’s edge. Jakunen’s wife died long ago, and his children were all daughters who married into other families – rather than be a burden on them, he chose to stay in his own hut alone. His absence was noticed when he failed to show up for the village’s most recent festival (the GM can choose an appropriate festival based on the time of year). Investigation of his hut showed signs of a struggle, so the villagers sent a messenger to report the crime to Governor Ansho.

CLUES AND EVIDENCE

If the PCs search Jakunen’s hut, they do indeed find evidence of a struggle, including overturned furnishings and broken pottery – Jakunen did not go quietly, despite his age. Tracks have been obliterated by time, but if the PCs search carefully (and make an Investigation roll) they notice a broken jitte lying half-covered by an overturned basket. This weapon belonged to the cult member Bondo, who lost it during the struggle. The jitte is habitually used by both magistrates and *doshin* as a way of non-lethally disarming samurai. If a PC interrogates the spirits in the jitte (it contains only Earth spirits), it belongs to an “older man” with no hair on his head, a man who lives in a village to the east of here. In any case, discovering the jitte will give the PCs a reason to interrogate all the local *doshin*.

Danshou Village

Danshou is a village of about 150 residents, and is generally a cheerful and prosperous place full of friendly peasants and open conversation. Even the recent crime wave has done little to suppress the light-hearted spirits of the peasants here, who welcome samurai visitors with smiles and offers in any way needed.

Danshou’s upbeat nature stems in part from a local legend. Any of the villagers will be eager to recount the tale:

Once, great samurai, a strange monk came to our humble village. He had traveled long, and the stains of the road covered his robes. He had stopped at many other villages, but everywhere he was turned away as an untrustworthy vagabond. Finally, when he reached our village – which had a different name then, great samurai, although no one recalls it now – he was so weary and cold that all he desired was a place to shelter from the rain while he slept. As it happened, our village had just finished the rice harvest, and it had been a poor one. He knocked on the door of a hut, and the family there admitted him. They had little food, for the tax collectors had taken much of the modest crop, but they shared what they had with him nonetheless, heated water for him to bathe, and gave him a warm place to sleep by the fire. The monk was amazed to see how happy the family was, despite their poor harvest, and asked why they kept such good cheer. The husband explained his wife and children were all alive and healthy, despite many illnesses and injuries which had plagued them through the year, and while the harvest was poor there was enough food to see them all through the winter, even if only just. “What more can we ask for?” the wise

If the PCs question the Elemental spirits in and around the hut, they can get descriptions (and visuals, if they question the Water spirits in the damp earth) of three cultists (Bondo from Jouzousho Village, Miya Kuboti from Koujou Village, and Nigai from Aian Village) abducting poor old Jakunen. It will be clear that two of the abductors were peasants while the third was a samurai, or at least looked like one. If the PCs ask where Jakunen was taken, it was to the southeast (toward Koujou Village).

Houi Village

This small village of about 100 people huddles amid squat trees between low ridges, carefully terraced for rice paddies and with trees along the peaks. There is no inn or teahouse, although there are a few craftsmen's shops. Houi is remote and not well-visited, but has suffered a total of three disappearances – consequently, the villagers are frightened and will hide inside their dwellings until the PCs approach them.

The local headman is a short, slightly pudgy fellow in his fifties named Taro. He is nervous and clearly unhappy speaking with samurai, and keeps asking whether the PCs are from Governor Ansho-sama, and if not, why they are here. "Those other samurai weren't from the Governor-sama," he complains, "but they demanded we cooperate with them anyway." From speaking with headman Taro the PCs can learn the following:

- The first disappearance here was a boy who vanished around sunset while out fetching firewood. The villagers thought maybe a wolf or other beast had taken him.
- The second disappearance was an older man, returning from an evening trip to his outhouse; the third and most recent victim was a teenage girl, Natsuko, who went to visit her fiancée's family and vanished on the way home later that evening.
- After Natsuko's disappearance, two samurai, a man and a woman, came to the village asking questions. Taro does not know their clan but can describe them as wearing garments of red and orange (Phoenix colors) and says the woman wore robes and did not carry a sword. He recalls their saying they intended to go to Sencha Village next.
- A little while after the samurai came, a kindly monk came to the village from Yasurugi Monastery and offered comfort and counsel. Taro is grateful for this effort, especially since the village has not received any visit yet from a magistrate. If the PCs ask for the monk's name, Taro identifies him as "Asai."

If the PCs ask around the village about the two samurai, they can find a boy who remembers seeing the samurai walk into the woods, as though following something, and then return later.

THE FAMILIES

If the PCs speak with the families of the three victims, they will mostly hear only a longer and more tearful version of the tales offered by Headman Taro. However, if they speak with the family of Natsuko, something interesting may happen: as the mother says the visiting monk was "very comforting," her youngest son (about eight years old) suddenly screams, "He was bad!" He flees as his parents scold him for his bad manners.

If the PCs chase down the little boy (whose name is Gako), he is extremely uncooperative and bratty, but can be intimidated or bribed into confessing that the monk "looked at us like we were bugs!" He can offer no concrete words or evidence to back this angry claim – it is an instinctive perception. "I just know! I could tell! He hated us!"

SEARCHING THE AREA

If the PCs explore the woods around the village (acting on their own initiative, or based on the report of the two Phoenix doing the same) they can roll Hunting to find a few tracks and some spatters of dried blood on a couple of trees and on the ground. If any of the PCs can detect Taint, there is a very faint residual of it here. Unfortunately, there is not a solid trail away from the village.

If a shugenja PCs interrogates the spirits here, the Earth and Air spirits can provide the following information:

- If the PCs ask about what made the blood, the spirits describe "a man" who dragged a girl here, made lots of noise, and then cut her and "let out her water." If the PCs question Air spirits, they can describe the man as wearing saffron robes and with a bald head – it was Asai. (He performed a sacrifice to try to gain power for a potential struggle against Chio.) Both types of spirits will mention that "bad spirits" came when the girl died, although they mostly left afterwards.
- If the PCs ask where the man went, the spirits direct them toward Yasurugi Monastery.

Jouzousho Village

This large and prosperous-looking village has over 400 inhabitants and is located on one of the main roads through this part of the province. Visitors can easily spot both an inn and a geisha house, catering to the needs of samurai traveling through the area. There is also another large structure, clearly a business of some sort – the sake brewery. A large samurai dwelling is located on the far side of the town.





INVESTIGATING THE FOUR CRIMES

The first disappearance: The victim was Noroi, a somewhat clueless young peasant who left his house to go for a walk one night several months ago and never came back. Bondo was on duty that night, and searched for the man, but found nothing. (A lie; he actually helped abduct him.)

- If the PCs speak with Noroi's family, his younger sister will tell them she thinks Noroi's "walk" was actually supposed to be a visit to a woman. Questioned further on this, she remarks angrily that Noroi was "mooning over that little minx at the sake brewery," then remembers she is speaking to samurai and cringes in terrified embarrassment.

- Noroi was, in fact, trying to court Yuri at the sake works. If the PCs question Yuri about this, she admits Noroi was pursuing her, but claims she wasn't encouraging him. She has no idea where he was going that night, and says she never saw him. This is all lies, of course. Also, if the PCs question Yuri about Noroi, they can roll Investigation to notice the fifteen-year-old boy Ota listening in with an angry expression on his face. Spotted, he will try to run away, then denies everything if caught.

The second disappearance: The victim was a geisha, Hana, who disappeared from the local geisha house seven weeks ago. Bondo and Matsui investigated the report, but could learn nothing conclusive. The madam of the house, Sui, believes Hana ran away, probably to live with some samurai lover. Bondo supports this theory. Matsui is inclined to as well, but isn't quite so certain; he will mention Hana was friends with Ota, the boy who delivers sake to the house from the brewery, and the boy said she told him nothing about her intentions.

- If the PCs question Ota, he claims to know nothing about Hana's disappearance. (A lie, of course.)

- The madam, Sui, is a sour old woman who distrusts her girls and is always expecting them to betray her or run away. She will reluctantly admit Hana took nothing with her, not even treasured personal belongings, which seems to contradict her theory of running away.

- If the PCs ask to search Hana's room, Sui will grumble but eventually show them to the small chamber (she has not yet purchased a replacement for Hana). The PCs can roll Investigation to find a letter folded and hidden away beneath Hana's spare garments. It is an anonymous love-letter asking her to meet the author at midnight. It purports to be from a samurai, but any PC who rolls Calligraphy at a suitable TN can tell the writing is too plain and direct for any samurai (save perhaps a Crab). If the PCs interrogate the spirits in the letter (Earth spirits only), they can learn it was written by "a woman" (Yuri) and was brought to the geisha house by "a boy" (Ota).

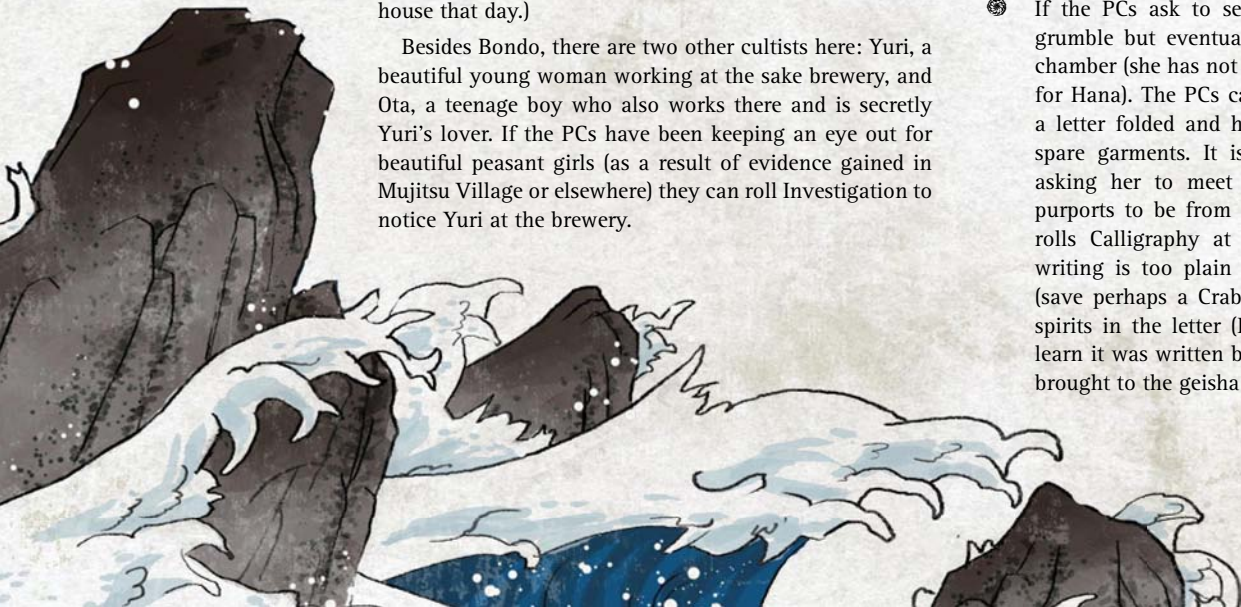
Law is enforced by a trio of *doshin* who report to Otomo Zusan, the samurai who lives here. Zusan is a dissolute man who spends his time drinking, reading poetry, and indulging himself with his geisha concubine. His wife, Otomo Sakura, is a cold aloof woman trapped in a classic loveless political marriage (actually close to the norm for Rokugan). Zusan generally ignores the village's affairs and allows the three *doshin* to handle any problems that arise.

The *doshin* are named Shin, Matsui, and Bondo. Shin is a young man, barely old enough to be considered an adult. Matsui and Bondo are both older, Bondo balding as well, and they have a world-weary air about them of men who have "seen it all" – the Rokugani equivalent of career beat cops. In the case of Matsui, this is genuine; Bondo, however, is actually a clever Bloodspeaker cultist.

Jouzousho Village has suffered almost as badly as Aian Village: there have been three disappearances and a murder here. The *doshin* can give details; see the next section for what they know and what else can be learned.

If the PCs ask about jitte (perhaps due to finding one in Danshou Village), Shin and Matsui each carry a pair of the disarming weapons, while Bondo carries only one and a tonfa. If the PCs ask about this, Bondo lies and claims his other jitte was stolen and lost by a neighbor child. (If the PCs actually think to ask the child, he denies it, and his mother defends him, insisting he was playing in the house that day.)

Besides Bondo, there are two other cultists here: Yuri, a beautiful young woman working at the sake brewery, and Ota, a teenage boy who also works there and is secretly Yuri's lover. If the PCs have been keeping an eye out for beautiful peasant girls (as a result of evidence gained in Mujitsu Village or elsewhere) they can roll Investigation to notice Yuri at the brewery.





- ☉ If the PCs go to the rendezvous site mentioned in the letter (under a tree at the edge of the village), they will find no physical evidence. However, if they interrogate the spirits there (Air, Earth, and Water spirits are available) with at least two Raises, they can gain a description of Hana being ambushed and carried off by two men (Chu and Asai). If they get visual images from the Water spirits, they can make a Perception roll to be able to see the two attackers clearly enough to recognize them later.

The murder: A sake brewery employee, Joufu, was found in the brewery building stabbed to death thirty-three days ago. The manager of the brewery, a pudgy merchant named Akogi, speaks in distressed tones about the expense of having his business cleansed and purified after the incident.

The *doshin* Shin investigated this crime. He found the murder weapon, a cooking knife, tossed in a corner of the sake works, and still has it if the PCs ask. A shugenja who Communes with the spirits in the knife (Earth only) can learn it belonged to “a woman” who used it to cut vegetables. Then “a boy” took it and used it to kill “the man.”

- ☉ If the PCs question the locals about the knife, they will eventually be able to track it to Ota’s mother, an ordinary peasant woman. She confesses the knife disappeared at around the same time as the murder, but she didn’t make the connection. Ota will angrily deny any involvement in the murder, but the PCs can easily see through his panicked lies with a Contested roll of Perception against his Awareness.
- ☉ If the PCs question Ota’s family, they admit that their son has changed, become sullen and strange, since he started working at the sake works last year.
- ☉ If the PCs question other employees at the brewery, they will mention Joufu often spoke with Yuri, telling her she should marry him rather than continuing to work there. He was quite aggressive in his actions; one worker shakes his head and remarks, “Joufu never did have any tact with women.” If the PCs have not already questioned Ota, they can again roll Investigation to notice him listening to their conversation with an angry expression.

The third disappearance: The most recent crime took place just 20 days ago. A peasant boy named Mattou vanished one evening while carrying a meal from his family’s hut to that of another family (relatives to his own) who were sick. The boy never arrived. Bondo searched for him, but found only the meal, spilled in the street.

- ☉ Bondo can point out where he found the spilled meal, but he is lying. In fact, Bondo himself seized the boy, twenty feet away from the false location he shows the PCs. Indeed, if the PCs interrogate the spirits in the false location, they learn no struggle or incident took place there.

- ☉ If the PCs look all along the route between the two huts, they will find no physical clues. However, exceptionally stubborn PCs who interrogate spirits all along the route (and ask the right questions) can eventually find Air and Earth spirits who report “a man” matching Bondo’s description stopped “a boy,” then picked him up and carried him away.

INVESTIGATING YURI, OTA, AND BONDO

Yuri is the deputy of Chio, the current leader of the cult, and is a capable *maho-tsukai*. She lives with her aged mother (too old to labor in the fields anymore), supporting her with the job at the sake brewery. Yuri hates samurai – she is the bastard child of a samurai who forced his attentions on her mother, who was once very pretty. This story is common knowledge in the village. Her mother has no idea of her true Bloodspeaker nature.

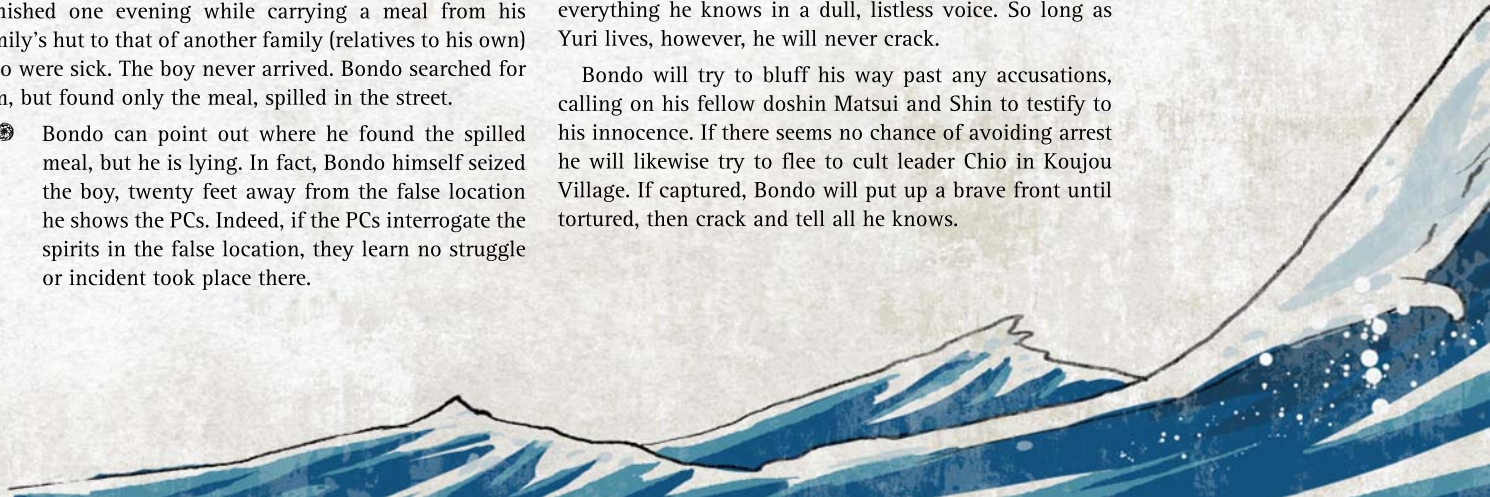
If the PCs question Yuri, she will stonewall them to the best of her ability. She denies any involvement with any of the crimes, claims complete innocence, and insists she was home with her mother on each and every night a crime took place. If the PCs question her mother, the old peasant woman speaks well of her daughter, who has foregone marriage in order to stay and care for her; however, the PCs may be able to sense (perhaps with an Awareness roll) that she has reservations. If the PCs persuade her to speak more candidly, she confesses that in recent years her daughter has become worryingly cold and remote. She has also noticed her daughter seems to spend a lot of time with the teenage boy Ota, which strikes her as odd and unhealthy.

Yuri’s room comprises one half of the modest hut she shares with her mother. If the PCs search the room they find three good-quality flower-woven kimonos, one of them a torn and damaged garment which matches the shreds of cloth taken from Kou in Aian Village. With an Investigation roll they can also find a small statuette of Inari (the Fortune of Rice); it matches the one carried by the child Doji Urashii at Mujitsu Village.

Yuri is a fanatic; if the PCs accuse her or attempt to arrest her, she will try to flee to Chio in Koujou Village. If that is not possible, she will fight to the death. If she is somehow taken alive, she will bite off her own tongue to kill herself.

Ota will fight to defend Yuri, but lacks her fanaticism. If she is killed, his will breaks and he stops fighting, telling everything he knows in a dull, listless voice. So long as Yuri lives, however, he will never crack.

Bondo will try to bluff his way past any accusations, calling on his fellow *doshin* Matsui and Shin to testify to his innocence. If there seems no chance of avoiding arrest he will likewise try to flee to cult leader Chio in Koujou Village. If captured, Bondo will put up a brave front until tortured, then crack and tell all he knows.





Bondo and Ota have the following information:

- Besides themselves and Yuri, there are Bloodspeaker cultists in Aian Village (Nigai), Tenraku Village (the carpenter Chu), Koujou Village (the leader Chio, her granddaughter Amiko, and Miya Kuboti), and Yasuragi Monestary (the monk Asai).
- They know Chio is their leader, and she has a magic amulet made of some shiny black stone. She has been making sacrifices to it regularly, claiming it grants her visions and power. They do not know where Chio got the amulet – she never told them.
- Yuri is Chio's deputy. The other important members of the cult are Chio's grand-daughter Amiko and the monk Asai, who gives all of them advice and leadership.

Juujiro Village

This is the smallest village in the area, with less than 50 people in residence. A half-dozen huts cluster around a crossroads between two secondary roads, surrounded by a few fields and rice paddies. A small inn perches next to the crossroads, displaying a sign with the kanji for "Meeting."

This village was the scene of a violent murder of a woodcutter just two weeks ago. There is no doshin in this

village, nor are there any samurai – in fact, without the crossroads it probably would not exist at all. The PCs can learn about the crime by speaking with the headman (a short, squat little fellow named Toba) or by visiting the "Meeting Inn" and speaking with the innkeeper and the locals. The woodcutter was named Eijiro, and he failed to return from a trip into the forest to collect firewood. His family eventually went in search of him that evening and found his mangled corpse deep within the woods.

THE MURDER SITE

If the PCs ask to be guided to the murder site, they are led a little less than half a mile into the woods to reach it. The ground is covered with bloodstains and deep gouges in the soil. Any peasant who guides the PCs here will be fearful and anxious to leave. PCs investigating the scene can find the following clues:

- A Hunting roll or a suitable Lore Skill roll can ascertain the marks in the soil do not match the claws of a natural animal. A roll of Lore: Shadowlands can suggest they are the marks of an oni or similar creature.
- If the PCs search the surrounding area for other tracks or evidence, they can make another Hunting roll or an Investigation roll to discover a small blood-spatter and some sandaled footprints a few yards away. The prints are the size for a woman or child, and their trail heads in the direction of Koujou Village before fading.
- A PC shugenja can Commune with the spirits in the area. Earth and Air spirits can both describe seeing the woodcutter encounter a "young woman" who was carrying "a boy" through the forest. (This was Yuri, carrying Doji Urashii to his fate.) She cut herself and then a "bad thing" arrived and tore the woodcutter apart. The woman came from the direction of Mujitsu Village and departed in the direction of Koujou Village, taking the boy with her. If the PCs take Raises for clarity, the Air spirits can describe the boy as wearing clothing "the color of the sky" and the Earth spirits can describe the girl as "unclean" (due to her Taint).



Koujou Village

Koujou is a modestly-sized village, probably at most 200 people, perched on the banks of a small stream which cuts across the main road here. An elegant arched bridge crosses the stream, and to one side of the bridge is a large wooden building mounting a waterwheel. As it slowly turns, passerby can hear the heavy, laborious “thump, thump” of a giant mortar and pestle within – it is a mill, grinding grain not only for this village but all the surrounding ones. Besides the mill (which grinds rice, millet, wheat, and buckwheat), the town also boasts a single inn/teahouse to serve the needs of passing samurai. A medium-large samurai house is located on the edge of the village, with a large garden that overlaps the stream.

The law here is enforced by a single *doshin*, Koto, a humble gray-haired man who speaks slowly and defers carefully to his betters. Koto was appointed fifteen years ago by the village’s resident samurai, Miya Kishin, and does his best to carry out his duties.

Koujou Village is the current headquarters of the Bloodspeaker Cult cell, and the home of its nominal leader, Chio. For this reason, it has been spared the worst of the current crime wave, with only one disappearance.

THE SAMURAI RESIDENCE

The pleasant samurai house in this village is the home of Miya Kishin, an aging, semi-retired, and widowed samurai. Due to his age and growing infirmity, most of his actual duties have fallen to his sons, Takura and Kuboti. Takura, the eldest, is usually away paying court in Toshi no Naishou, so local authority mostly falls on Kuboti. The house is maintained by a devoted family of servants, most of whom have worked for Kishin for many years.

The PCs may occasionally see Miya Kuboti striding through the village, a dark-browed young man with burning, feverish eyes and sallow skin. He is only in the house at night, and not always then, since he often sneaks away to visit his lover Amiko.

If they pay a visit to the family’s residence, they can share tea with Kishin in his garden. He often spends his afternoons there, especially in warm weather, dozing in the sunshine and wallowing in memories of his youth and his late wife. He is a man deeply consumed with Regret, and is largely oblivious to current events or the troubled soul of his younger son. Thus, he will not be able to offer the PCs any useful information.

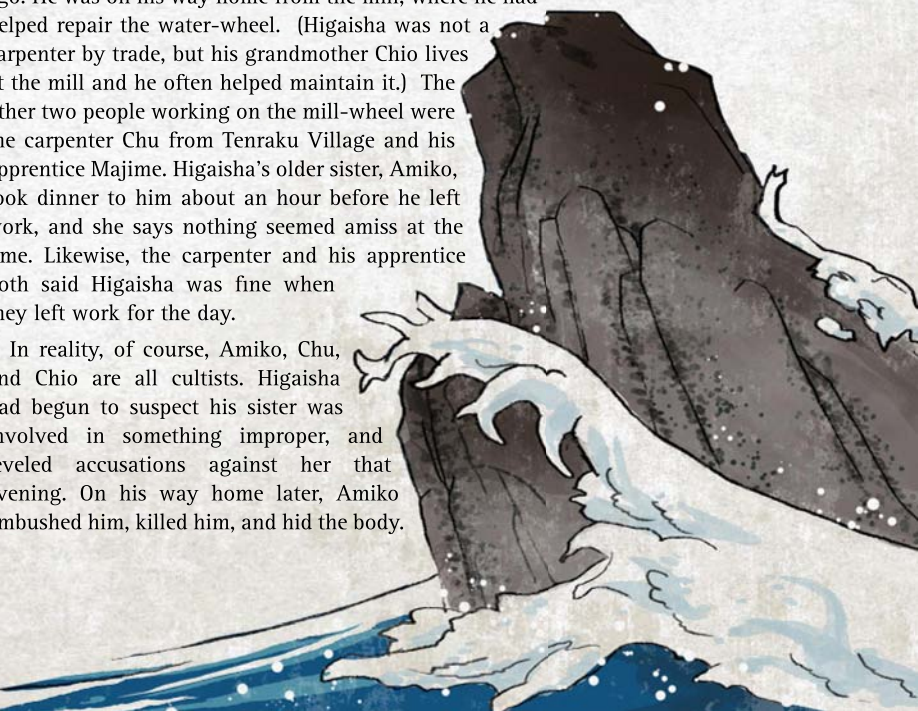
However, PCs who are clever enough (or open-minded enough) to speak with Kishin’s household servants can potentially gain more information. The servants are loyal to Kishin, but they know something is wrong in the area and that Kuboti may be involved. PCs who make an effective appeal can get the servants to report the following:

- ☉ Kuboti has been a troubled young man for some time. He is bitter toward his distant father and jealous of his older brother. In recent months he has become arrogant and cruel, and the servants fear the worst for his future.
- ☉ Kuboti has been conducting a secret romance with a local peasant girl named Amiko, the granddaughter of the old woman who runs the town’s mill. The servants disapprove of this relationship, both on general principles and because Kuboti seems to have developed an obsessive and submissive attitude toward the girl.
- ☉ Kuboti often sneaks away at night, presumably to visit his lover. After one of these night-time trips, he came back without his wakizashi. He was very angry and frantic when he realized it was gone. A couple of days later he made an excuse to travel to Toshi no Naishou and came back with a new one.

CRIMES

If the PCs ask Koto the *doshin* about the one disappearance here, he will explain the victim was Higaisha, a peasant boy of about fifteen who sometimes worked at the mill. He vanished one evening six weeks ago. He was on his way home from the mill, where he had helped repair the water-wheel. (Higaisha was not a carpenter by trade, but his grandmother Chio lives at the mill and he often helped maintain it.) The other two people working on the mill-wheel were the carpenter Chu from Tenraku Village and his apprentice Majime. Higaisha’s older sister, Amiko, took dinner to him about an hour before he left work, and she says nothing seemed amiss at the time. Likewise, the carpenter and his apprentice both said Higaisha was fine when they left work for the day.

In reality, of course, Amiko, Chu, and Chio are all cultists. Higaisha had begun to suspect his sister was involved in something improper, and leveled accusations against her that evening. On his way home later, Amiko ambushed him, killed him, and hid the body.





If the PCs try to retrace Higaisha's steps from the mill to his hut, they can roll Investigation to discover a patch of ground discolored with old blood and to trace some drag marks from there to a ditch behind one of the village huts. Higaisha's body has been concealed in the ditch with heaped stones and earth. The corpse has decayed somewhat but anyone who looks at it (perhaps with the help of eta) can see his throat was cut.

If the PCs interrogate the spirits in this area, they can learn Higaisha was ambushed by "a girl" who ran up behind him, cut his throat, and dragged his body into the ditch. If they speak with Water spirits (there are some in the damp earth, although getting their attention will require two Raises), they can show a visual image of Amiko killing Higaisha with a small knife.

CULTISTS

The main cultist here is Chio, an old blind peasant woman who looks after the mill and lives in a small hut attached to the building. Chio measures out the grain and flour by hand for each person who uses the mill, and her measurements are never wrong. The whole village respects her and will tolerate no ill to be spoken of her without strong evidence. Chio is the effective leader of the cult, having surpassed the monk Asai in that role, and she is a maho-tsukai of some skill. She will try to put on the front of a kindly old woman, burdened with age and blindness but still carrying out her role in the Celestial Order. However, any PC who speaks to her for some time can attempt an Investigation roll to sense the hatred and envy that boil beneath the surface. Chio will never tell the PCs anything, and will fight to the death rather than be taken prisoner. She always wears her obsidian amulet on a woven thong under her shapeless peasant garb.

If the PCs search Chio's hut, they will find a large, very sharp knife hidden under some baskets (unless she is currently using it for a ceremony). There are no other obvious clues. However, any PC who can sense Taint will pick up a very faint residual of it both in Chio's hut and within the mill itself.

The other cultists here are Chio's pretty granddaughter Amiko and the samurai Miya Kuboti, who Amiko seduced into the cult. If the PCs watch Amiko or Kuboti, they may be able to witness one of their clandestine meetings. Affairs between samurai and peasants are shocking enough, of course, but what is even more shocking is that Kuboti is clearly the weaker of the two, deferring to Amiko and referring to her as "Ojo-sama" ("mistress").

Miya Kuboti will try to stonewall any questions or investigations, relying on his status as a samurai and a Miya to protect himself. However, if the PCs saw the visions at the crime scenes in Aian Village or Danshou Village, they can identify Kuboti with an Intelligence roll. Nigai can also identify him, visually, as the "samurai cultist." Kuboti lost his wakizashi during the battle at Tenraku Village; he still wears a daisho set, but the PCs can easily see the weapons do not match, the new wakizashi being of cheaper quality. If the PCs found the lost wakizashi at the Tenraku crime scene, it matches Kuboti's katana. He gets quite agitated if the PCs mention his swords (for any reason) and will rush off afterwards to meet with Amiko.

Amiko is a sadistic and bloodthirsty girl who revels in the power she has over Miya Kuboti. She will do her best to rebuff any PC questions, perhaps flirting with them as a distraction, and professes shock and horror if the PCs name her as the murderer of her brother. If they mention her relationship with Miya Kuboti, she tries to claim he seduced her. "What was I to do, samurai-sama? I am only a poor peasant girl." If the PCs try to arrest her, she will attempt to flee to her grandmother for help. If the PCs capture Amiko, however, her willpower proves more brittle than her grandmothers', and she will quickly confess. She knows the following:

- Her grandmother Chio is the leader of the cult. Chio was recruited into the Bloodspeakers by the monk Asai, who gave her the obsidian amulet and taught her the ways of maho.
- Besides Chio, Miya Kuboti, and Asai, the other members of the cult are the laborer Nigai (Aian Village), the sake-brewery workers Yuri and Ota (Jouzousho Village), the doshin Bondo (also from Jouzousho), and the carpenter Chu (Tenraku village).
- Yuri claims to be Chio's chief deputy in the cult.
- Chio has been making many sacrifices to her amulet, feeding its power. This is why she is the leader now instead of Asai. Soon she will be strong enough to subjugate all the samurai!

THE MILL

The mill is where the cultists hold their meetings and make sacrifices. The endless "thump, thump" of the huge waterwheel-driven mortar-and-pestle is a constant backdrop any time the PCs are inside, and all surfaces are dusted with old flour.

Chio and her granddaughter are always careful to clean up any evidence of their crimes, but some residual Taint still remains, and can be detected by PCs with that ability.



Also, if the PCs have access to the alchemical substance known as Kitsuki Powder, they can detect the stains of blood that has been cleaned up from the floor.

If the PCs interrogate the spirits inside the mill (there are plenty of Air and Earth spirits), they can learn that “many people” gather in the mill, and sometimes they bring other people and kill them with sharp knives. The spirits don’t like talking about these incidents, for whenever they happen “bad spirits” (*kansen*) come, often staying for days afterward. If the PCs ask, the spirits can say that there are usually eight people at these gatherings (three women and five men) and can describe all the cultists except Nigai (who has never been allowed to attend).

Mujitsu Village

Mujitsu Village is a small place with barely 80 residents, and is something of a backwater, although the scenery around it is quite splendid. The village rice fields are sculpted artistically into the hills and the steeper slopes are covered in dense forest, giving the place an isolated but serene atmosphere. The town has a single tea-house where the farmers often gather for a few cups of sake after a day’s work. Order in the village is maintained by a single *doshin*, a thick-headed but well-meaning young man named Gobo. Gobo and the headman, Toku, will cooperate unctuously with any samurai visitors, and are rather alarmed that their humble village has attracted such attention. They are aware of the disappearance of Doji Takozawa’s son but know nothing about the details, and humbly urge the PCs to visit Takozawa’s house at the edge of the village if they wish to know more.

The sole mystery in Mujitsu Village itself concerns the disappearance three months ago of an old farmer named Yopparai. He was a notorious souse and simply did not come home one night; but his family (which includes his son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren) assumed he was sleeping off a binge in a ditch somewhere. The village chalked it up to fate (an old drunkard couldn’t expect to cheat the Fortunes forever) until they heard rumors of disappearances in other, larger villages. More recently, the news of Doji Takozawa’s son going missing two weeks ago has caused the villagers to begin wondering about Yopparai’s disappearance as well.

Yopparai’s family can offer the same story in a longer, more roundabout version, complete with many tales of Yopparai’s drunken habits and his irresponsible behavior. “We can barely pay our taxes as it is, great samurai, and then he would waste all our money on cheap shochu.”

(No one in the village really misses Yopparai – if all the cult’s victims were these sorts of people, they might never have been discovered.)

If anyone searches the area for signs of Yopparai or his abduction, they find nothing – it was three months ago, after all. However, if a shugenja interrogates the Air spirits of the area with two successful Raises, the kami offer a brief account of a “smelly man” who was set upon, beaten, and dragged away by “two men.” The direction he was taken (if the shugenja thinks to ask) was toward Koujou Village.

THE HOUSE OF DOJI TAKOZAWA

Doji Takozawa is a young artisan who resides on the edge of Mujitsu Village. He is a successful painter and with the permission of his lord he has moved here to seek solitude for artistic inspiration from nature, bringing along his family and servants. His house is a typical samurai dwelling, a large one-story building comprising a half-dozen rooms, a garden, servants’ quarters, and a small stable. A low wall with two gates (a front “public” gate and a smaller side gate for servants) surrounds the entire complex.

A polite middle-aged servant named Goshu meets visitors at the front door and takes their names and business; after a wait of a few minutes, they will be admitted to the house. Doji Takozawa is a pleasant-faced and gentle young man, clearly still shaken by the loss of his child, and answers questions in a soft voice while his even younger wife sits red-eyed and silent behind him. He will rely on Goshu, his major-domo and head servant, to answer many questions. (This may encourage investigators to suspect Goshu is involved in the crime, but in fact he isn’t; none of the servants here are part of the cult, and the actual kidnapper was the samurai-hating Yuri of Jouzousho Village.) The following information is available from Takozawa, Goshu, and the other servants:



Sencha Village

- The child is named Urashii, and is three years old.
- He was last seen playing in the house garden. When his mother went to fetch him for dinner, he was gone. No one heard him cry out.
- If the PCs ask whether anything was happening that day, or whether there were any visitors, Goshu recalls that a delivery of foodstuffs came from the village earlier that day, and later in the afternoon a small shipment of silk came in from Jouzousho Village (which has the region's silk works).
- If the PCs specifically ask the regular servants or the local peasants (not the samurai or Goshu) whether they noticed anyone lurking around or behaving suspiciously, a few of them will recall seeing a strange peasant maiden ("a real pretty one, that she was, the sort as usually gets sold to a geisha house") in the area a couple of times prior to the abduction. If a PC mentions the silk deliveries on the day of the abduction, one of the house servants blinks in remembrance. "That's right, she was here that day too. She must work for the silk weavery."
- If the PCs ask Goshu about the specifics of the deliveries that day, and mention a pretty young maiden, he vaguely recalls seeing one when the silk shipment arrived. "Mm, yes, there was a young woman with them. I'm past the age where I notice such things, noble samurai. No, I don't think she'd been here before."

Interrogating the Elements: If a shugenja questions the Elements in the garden about the boy's disappearance, there are Earth, Air, and Water kami present in abundance. All the kami can report that a boy was playing in the garden, and a woman gave the boy something and then led him out the servant's gate. If the shugenja specifically interrogates the Water spirits, this will produce a visual image of a pretty young woman in a good-quality peasant's kimono (the garment of a successful commoner) offering the boy a piece of candy and then leading him out by the hand. If they have seen Yuri before, they can roll Intelligence to remember and recognize her, and likewise can try to remember and recognize her if they see her after this.

Sencha Village is home to about 130 people and is located in a narrow valley between two rocky hills. Most of the huts perch on the slopes, sheltering under overhanging trees, while the bottom of the valley holds the rice paddies and grain fields which feed the village. There is a large inn alongside the road at the edge of the fields, and across the valley a torii arch guards a cleared stone path which winds into the hills – a road that eventually leads to Yasurugi Monastery.

The village inn is where the Phoenix Inquisitor and her yojimbo, Isawa Taeko and Shiba Otembo, last stayed before they vanished fifteen days ago. The village has also suffered a pair of disappearances about a month ago. As a result the villagers are quite anxious and fearful, readily cooperating with the PCs in hope of getting some kind of help.

THE DISAPPEARANCES

The peasant victims were Kozue, a widowed mother, and her six-year-old daughter. Kozue's husband died of illness ("the flux") last year. Her child was ill, and she was afraid it might be the flux again; she decided to take the child to Yasurugi Monastery to seek help and medicine. She never came back, and when the headman went to the monastery to inquire about her, the monks told him she never arrived.

If the PCs question the villagers about the Phoenix visitors, they will say the two samurai stayed at the inn for several days, and suggest the PCs speak to the innkeeper Mako. However, if the PCs specifically ask about the last evening the two samurai were in town, they can roll Investigation to discover a peasant who remembers seeing the pair heading up the road toward Yasurugi Monastery.

If the PCs search the road for evidence of what happened to either pair, they can roll Investigation or Hunting at a high TN to notice a trail (broken branches, footprints, etc) leading off the path into the trees – this is where Taeko and Otembo went into the woods, pursuing one of the cultists. Following the trail should require additional Hunting rolls (or creative use of magic) and eventually leads to a remote dell in the forest where the two samurai died, slain by an oni. There will be clear signs of a battle, with gouges and scorch-marks in the tree-trunks and the ground, as well as a great deal of dried blood soaked into the ground and a few scraps of cloth in Phoenix orange. Interrogating the spirits here (Earth and Air will work) can reveal that a "man and woman" fought an "evil spirit" that flew through the air and spat fire. It eventually killed them, devoured the man, and carried the woman's body away.



THE INN OF THE CLEVER FROG

The signboard of this inn shows a frog smiling at a Scorpion; below the frog are the kanji for “No, please, after you.” PCs rolling a suitable Lore Skill can recognize this as a humorous reference to the famous tale of the scorpion and the frog. The innkeeper Mako (who is literate) will be happy to recount the tale to any guests. He explains his signboard thusly: “A wise and clever frog will always recognize the scorpion’s nature, and his own, yes? Just as a wise and clever innkeeper will never aspire to be anything but what he is.” He smiles engagingly.

If the PCs ask about the vanished Phoenix, they can learn the following:

- Isawa Taeko and her yojimbo both stayed at the inn for several days. They had clearly done much traveling before coming here.
- They asked questions about the disappearances in neighboring villages as well as the local incident involving Kozue. They were often gone for hours at a time, sometimes not returning until the evening.
- Taeko often went for a walk alone in the evening, much to the distress of her yojimbo. The young Shiba was very earnest about his duties, and seemed frustrated with Taeko’s willfulness.
- The night before they vanished, Taeko returned from her walk and ordered Otembo to “fetch your swords and follow.” She seemed very serious, maybe even angry. They both went out and never returned.

The inn still has the remaining belongings of the two Phoenix. The innkeeper would much rather be rid of these things, given their association with mystery, and if any of the PCs are Phoenix or magistrates he eagerly hands them over. Isawa Taeko’s traveling pack contains her journal (see the end of the adventure for the text of its contents), a personal chop identifying her as an Inquisitor, spare clothing, and 11 koku in coins. Shiba Otembo’s traveling pack contains spare clothing, a small ivory plaque inscribed with the kanji for “Duty,” a piece of paper with an incomplete love-poem, a personal chop, and a jade-edged tanto. (GMs should note that PCs who keep any of these items rather than returning them to the Phoenix Clan are being dishonorable. However, using them during the investigation might be acceptable, since that would be fulfilling the incomplete mission of the poor Inquisitor.)

Tenraku Village

This medium-sized village sits just to one side of the main road to Toshi no Naishou, and a large inn is positioned right on the roadside. Visitors can also see a sprawling building which is clearly a carpenter’s shop, with partially finished furniture, barrels, and wagons scattered about outside. The whole town seems strangely still, however, and some of the huts look abandoned. Tenraku has about

170 people, but used to have more; the villagers here live in fear, for this was the scene of a violent massacre last month. Several families have fled the area in defiance of the Empire’s laws against unauthorized travel.

This village was the scene of the cult’s greatest mistake. In answer to Chio’s demands for more and more sacrifices, the cult attempted to abduct an entire family. Unfortunately, the family resisted fiercely, and the ensuing violence attracted one of the local doshin, who rushed in to attempt a rescue. The cultists wound up murdering the doshin and most of the family, securing only two sacrifices for Chio. (When they struck in Aian two weeks later, they were better prepared, and took the entire family.)

The village’s one remaining *doshin*, Toshu, is an older man, balding and weary-looking. Unlike most doshin, he has some actual experience with investigating serious crimes – he was involved in the investigation of a murdered samurai many years ago. He has kept the hut of the crime scene untouched (except for removing and cremating the bodies) in the hope that magistrates or shugenja might come and learn something from it; he explains this decision to the PCs while he leads them there.

If the PCs ask about jitte, Toshu still has both of his. He will be quietly offended if the PCs suggest he might have been involved in any crimes.

If the PCs ask how the victims died, Toshu explains the peasants were stabbed and hacked to death, as though with knives and blades, while his fellow *doshin* (whose name was Yujin) was burned to death. He did not look closer than that, fearing the uncleanness of the dead.

PCs may think of questioning the local *eta* family about the conditions of the bodies they cremated. The eta, with much anxious furtive behavior, explain that all the bodies were horribly killed, stabbed and hacked apart with great violence. Only one body was intact, and that one was terribly burned, the flesh blackened and flaking away, the hair coming out in great clumps when the body was moved. PCs may potentially be able to roll a suitable Lore skill to realize that Fire spells do not have that severe an effect unless they are cast by a true master, or to recognize that the spell was probably maho.

If the PCs check the ashes (kept in urns at the local graveyard), those with the ability to detect Shadowlands Taint will be able to sense a faint residual Taint in the ashes of the burned *doshin*.

The crime scene itself is covered in dried blood; the scale of the violence is obvious. PCs may who roll the Battle Skill to surmise there were at least four attackers, and that they fought with near-bestial ferocity. If the PCs search the scene, they can roll Investigation to find a good-quality wakizashi, hilt wrapped in the colors of the Miya, buried under the wrecked furniture. The blade is still stained with dried blood. This weapon belongs to Miya Kuboti. If a PC Communes with the spirits in the sword, it contains a strong Earth spirit as well as residual Fire and Water spirits from its forging, but these are harder to invoke (two Raises). All the spirits can loosely describe the blade’s owner (Kuboti), and the Water spirits can picture him.



If the PCs Commune with the Elements in the hut itself, they can speak with Air, Earth, or Water spirits (there are Water spirits in a kettle which was scheduled to be boiled for soup). The spirits can report that “three men and a woman” attacked the house, and the woman called up “bad fire” to kill the *doshin*. If the PCs invoke the Water spirits, they can get a visual of Nigai, Miya Kuboti, Chu, and Yuri attacking the house. Yuri slashes her arm to cast forth a bolt of black fire which incinerates the *doshin*.

CULTISTS

There is one cultist in Tenraku Village: Chu, one of the carpenters who works at the village shop. A muscular heavy-set man with a drum-like belly, Chu’s deep-set eyes burn with a life-long resentment against the samurai caste – his childhood sweetheart was sold off to a geisha house because her family could not afford to pay their Imperial taxes. He speaks to samurai in a low, growling voice, offering the minimum politeness required; his apprentice Majime hovers nervously in the background.

Chu is missing his left big toe. He does not know he left tracks in Asai Village and if he is asked about his foot he will admit he lost the toe many years ago while cutting lumber.

If the PCs search Chu’s room at the carpentry shop, they can roll Investigation to discover the simple saffron clothing of Etoku, the monk who vanished from Yasuragi Monastery. The garments are stained with both blood and (oddly) buckwheat flour (from the mill).

If the PCs make accusations against Chu, he stolidly denies them while fingering his carpentry hammer. Faced with arrest, he fights or flees as seems appropriate. Captured, Chu will refuse to say anything; even under torture, he simply glares hatred at everyone.

The apprentice Majime is a fearful, anxious young fellow. He realizes his master is up to no good, although he does not realize just how bad the situation is. If the PCs speak to him away from Chu, he can provide the following information:

- Chu often goes out late at night, not returning until the wee hours of the morning. He doesn’t know where these nocturnal expeditions lead and is too scared to follow.
- He’s seen Chu speaking with the monk Asai, and with Yuri and Ota from Jouzousho Village.
- If the PCs have investigated the disappearance of the boy Higaisha in Koujou Village, they may be aware that Chu and Majime worked with Higaisha that day. If they ask Majime about what happened in Koujou Village, he recalls that Higaisha had a strange confrontation with his older sister Amiko. “Higaisha accused her of lechery, said he’d seen her go to the house of the local samurai,” Majime says. “She just laughed at him and told him he couldn’t possibly understand what was happening. My master just watched, didn’t say a word.”

Yasuragi Monastery

The local monastery perches atop a low hill surrounded by trees. A shallow stone staircase climbs the slope, passing beneath seven torii arches representing the seven Great Fortunes; the last and largest torii is dedicated to Fukurokujin, the Fortune of Wisdom. The place houses about 100 monks, a mixture of true Brotherhood monks and retired samurai from many different clans. It is also home to Asai, the founder of the local Bloodspeaker cell.

If the PCs visit, they are taken to meet the abbot, Fukai, a heavy-set man with bushy eyebrows and a vague, distracted air about him. Fukai speaks sadly and with some embarrassment of the one incident here: the disappearance of a recently-retired Miya who had taken the new name Etoku (“Perception”). Etoku arrived here last autumn and disappeared one afternoon less than a month later, while working alone in the garden. There was no sign of a struggle. His absence was noted that evening when he failed to appear for meditation.

If the PCs ask whether anyone visited the monastery that day, Fukai recalls a carpenter from Tenraku village made a delivery of some furnishings that afternoon. He does not recall the name, but if the PCs ask for a description, he describes Chu.

Etoku had no visitors that day – in fact no one had visited him since his arrival the month before. If the PCs ask whether any monks in particular shared his company, Fukai thinks for a moment, then nods. “Asai was his friend. I suppose two retired samurai have some things in common.”

If the PCs ask the abbot about Asai, he seems vague. “Oh, no trouble from him, no trouble at all,” he says. PCs may suspect (accurately) that his mind has been magically clouded. If they question other monks, they learn Asai sometimes goes out to visit the villages, perhaps to educate the villagers or teach the ways of Shinsei. He favors Koujou Village, and says there are people there “of great wisdom for their lowly station.”

If the PCs search Etoku’s room (it has not yet been assigned to a new monk), they can roll Investigation to find a piece of paper with a strange unfinished poem. A suitable Skill roll will perceive the meaning of the poem: Etoku was deeply suspicious of Asai, who he suspected of being someone other than who he claimed.

THE CULTIST

Asai appears to be a normal monk, a shaven-headed man in saffron robes. He is a retired Scorpion, and will readily admit this, but will not reveal his old samurai name, claiming he left that life behind when he retired. If pressed hard, he identifies himself falsely as Bayushi Uso (“Lie”).





Asai will smoothly deny any involvement with crimes, and will suggest the PCs have been deceived by the Bloodspeakers. “There are many magics which can change appearances or create false clues. Perhaps you were meant to suspect me, rather than pursue the true criminals.” He will never crack, and the PCs are unlikely to see through his façade (although a generous GM can allow a Contested roll of Investigation against his Sincerity). If the PCs seem to be about to arrest him, or if they have already shut down the rest of the cult, he will try to escape as best he can, using his magic if necessary.

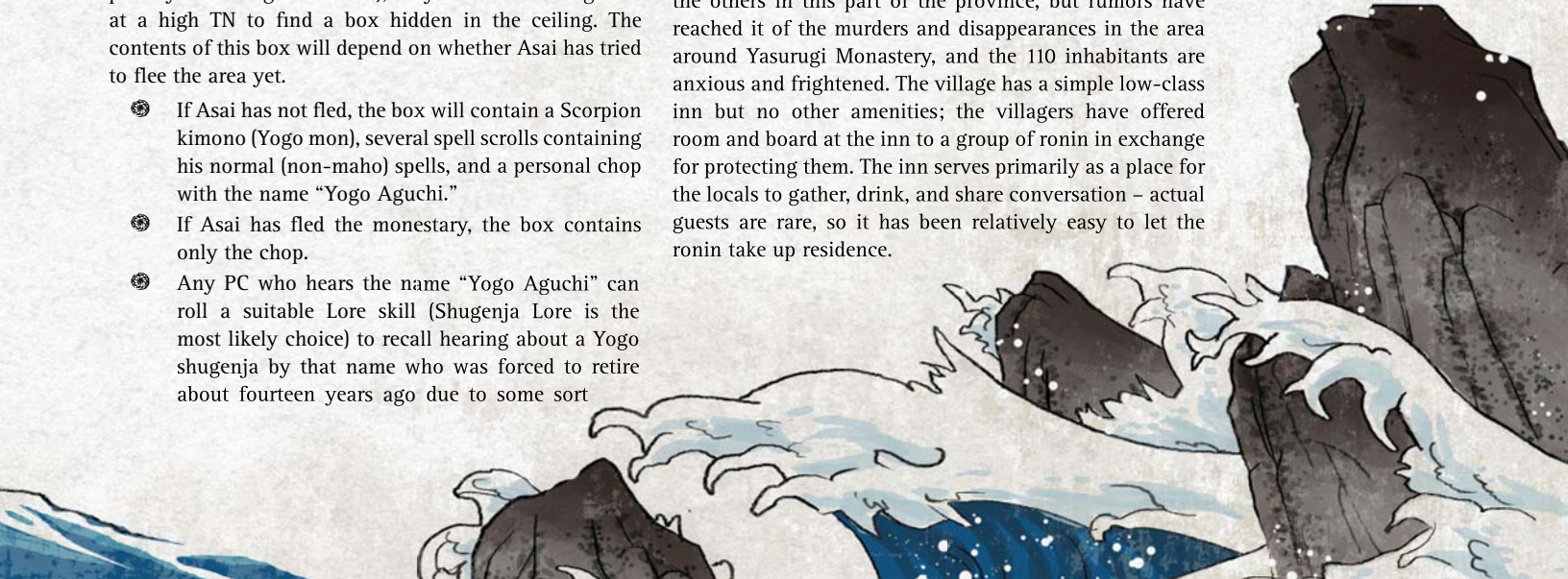
If the PCs get permission to search Asai’s room (this will require approval from the abbot, who won’t violate Asai’s privacy without good reason), they can roll Investigation at a high TN to find a box hidden in the ceiling. The contents of this box will depend on whether Asai has tried to flee the area yet.

- If Asai has not fled, the box will contain a Scorpion kimono (Yogo mon), several spell scrolls containing his normal (non-maho) spells, and a personal chop with the name “Yogo Aguchi.”
- If Asai has fled the monastery, the box contains only the chop.
- Any PC who hears the name “Yogo Aguchi” can roll a suitable Lore skill (Shugenja Lore is the most likely choice) to recall hearing about a Yogo shugenja by that name who was forced to retire about fourteen years ago due to some sort

of hushed-up scandal. A Yogo or Soshi PC will also know that the “scandal” involved an obscure obsidian nemuranai which disappeared while under Aguchi’s protection.

Boubi, the Ronin Village

This is a small village that is somewhat isolated from the others in this part of the province, but rumors have reached it of the murders and disappearances in the area around Yasurugi Monastery, and the 110 inhabitants are anxious and frightened. The village has a simple low-class inn but no other amenities; the villagers have offered room and board at the inn to a group of ronin in exchange for protecting them. The inn serves primarily as a place for the locals to gather, drink, and share conversation – actual guests are rare, so it has been relatively easy to let the ronin take up residence.





THE RONIN

These six individuals have been brought together here by chance, but for the moment they have managed to form a small self-sufficient military unit. They patrol the woods and hills around the village throughout the day; at night, a single ronin walks around the perimeter of the town, watching for danger. Even during bad weather they perform their duties, albeit with much good-natured grumbling and complaining as they trade off their shifts.

Maeda, the oldest of the ronin and their effective leader, is a stoic, weary-looking man who speaks quietly, his eyes shadowed by the memory of a dishonor he will not discuss. Maeda is a former Crane, although he will never admit this to anyone. He is polite to samurai PCs and defers to them whenever possible.

Takuhito, a much younger man than Maeda, is a former Phoenix yojimbo who lost the shugenja he was protecting. He now serves as Maeda's deputy, a sort of "gunso" who keeps the other ronin in line. Normally friendly and cheerful, he turns sullen and mean around Scorpions (he believes a Scorpion poisoned the Isawa shugenja he guarded in his Phoenix days). He will not actually provoke a fight with a Scorpion PC (Maeda will restrain him anytime he is provoked) but he will treat them as rudely as he can short of that.

Oyami is a pudgy, shaggy-haired, jovial woman. She is a former Mirumoto, although that will be impossible to tell unless she is in a fight. She jokes and wise-cracks frequently, and is an outrageous cheat at dice. Oyami lives life from day to day, seizing whatever opportunities she finds. She respects Maeda, but is completely irreverent to everyone and everything else. She and Izumi often get into drinking contests, with the gloomy Izumi usually managing to come out victorious.

Izumi is a small thin woman with a gloomy, mournful air about her. She derives a dark amusement from making mordant comments on the pain and injustice which fills the universe. Having lost all faith in Bushido, the Empire, the Fortunes, and the Celestial Order, she is merely trying to get through life as best she can with the skills available to her. Her original clan is unguessable, and she treats all clan samurai with the same gloomy disdain. Fundamentally, Izumi is a coward, and feels no particular shame at running away to save her life. If a PC actually gets angry enough with her manners to challenge her, she agrees to a fight the next morning, then disappears that night.

Satoru is a thin, dirty, rather ill-mannered man.

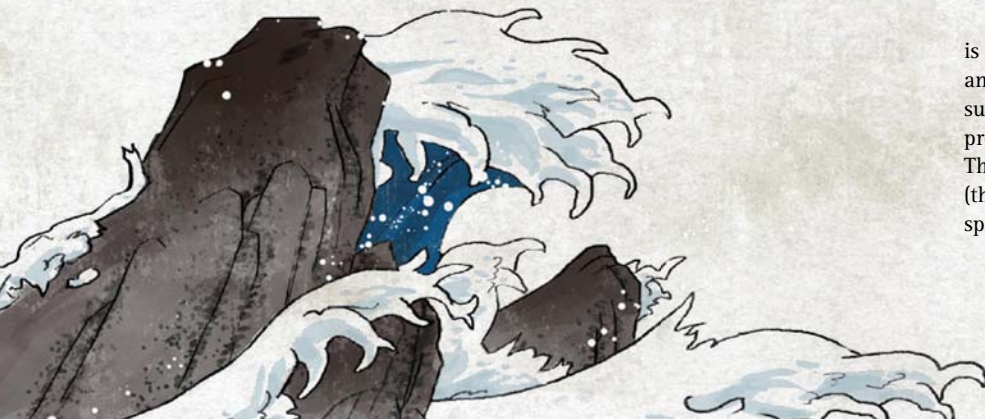
He is actually a former Lion who has fallen very far indeed. Bitter and glum, speaking seldom and drinking often, he holds a deep grudge against his former clan, and will not be afraid of a duel with a Lion PC – indeed, he may try to provoke one, preferably a lethal one. He obeys Maeda out of practicality; he knows someone has to command, and Maeda is best suited to the task. However, he does not particularly respect the older man. He and Takuhito frequently get into quarrels about his attitude.

Tsuruaka is the dirtiest and most poorly-mannered of the ronin. This fellow is actually a peasant who stole his swords from a battlefield; the light armor he wears is a conglomerate of bits and pieces salvaged from a dozen battles. He tends to be rude to all members of the samurai caste (including other ronin), up to the limit of what he can get away with without getting cut down out of hand. On the other hand, he gets along well with peasants, and often helps them with work around the village. If any PCs challenge him to a formal duel, he simply runs away – he has no sense of shame and no loyalty to Bushido, and is perfectly willing to make a fool of himself in order to survive. However, if anyone threatens the peasants Tsuruaka will suddenly become fierce and angry, defending them against all comers.

Resolving the Adventure

Once the PCs begin uncovering cultists, the Bloodspeakers will react. Exactly how they react will depend on how much the PCs have found and whether they seem to be on the trail of Chio and Asai.

If the PCs do not seem to be figuring out where the cult is based, the cultists will ignore these "foolish samurai" and attempt to continue their sacrifices, kidnapping some suitable victim (probably from Jouzousho Village) and preparing another ceremony in the Koujou Village mill. This will give the PCs another chance to track them down (the Hunting Skill could be very useful here, along with spells).



If the PCs do begin to expose the cult, and show signs of tracking down its leadership, Chio will take alarm and try to summon all her minions for an all-out fight. It is up to the GM how many she manages to assemble, and whether they stand and fight or try to scatter and flee. Given Chio and Yuri's toughness and magical abilities, this could be a rougher fight than the PCs expect.

Asai, unlike Chio, will try to escape as soon as he realizes the jig is up, using his magic to best effect. He will try to steal the Obsidian Amulet from Chio before he flees, which may provoke a conflict with her.

ARRESTING MIYA KUBOTI

If the PCs try to have Miya Kuboti arrested and questioned, they will have to apply to Governor Miya Ansho for an Order of Appearance. Ansho will listen carefully to their reasons. Whether he acts on them depends on how much (and what sort of) evidence the PCs have accumulated. The claims of peasants are meaningless – the PCs must have personal or physical evidence, such as the missing wakizashi, or their own reports of tailing Kuboti to a rendezvous with other cultists (like Amiko).

If the PCs confront Kuboti himself with his crimes, he denies them heatedly. His soft-hearted old father will back him up; his older brother Takeru, however, is only too ready to believe such things, having long suspected his sibling of being a dishonorable, jealous, deceitful dog.

If Kuboti is arrested, his weak spirit betrays him, and he confesses without being tortured. He can identify almost all of the cultists: Chio, Amiko, Yuri, Ota, Bondo, Nigai, and Chu. He knows a monk at the monastery is a cultist, one of considerable importance and magical skill, but does not know his name (he can identify him by sight). He also knows about the Obsidian Amulet that Chio is empowering with the sacrifices.

ASSAULT ON BOUBI VILLAGE

If the PCs ultimately become stalled in their investigations, unable to progress toward unearthing and defeating the cult, the GM can escalate things by having the cult mount an all-out midnight assault on Boubi Village. Chio is angry that the Boubi villagers had the nerve to hire ronin to defend themselves, and she assembles the entire cult to wipe them out and strike terror in the rest of the region. The GM can potentially time this to take place whenever the PCs are at Boubi, but it may be more interesting to have the assault take place after the PCs have visited the village and then moved on elsewhere. In this case, Maeda will dispatch one of his fellow ronin – most likely Izumi, since she can be counted on to protect her own

life – to seek out the PCs and plead with them for help. The PCs will have to race through the night to reach the village, arriving to find many of the ronin and peasants dead and the rest under siege in the inn. (Izumi will pretend to accompany the PCs back to the village but will break off and hide once the battle gets underway.) It should be noted that the cultists will certainly have summoned at least one oni, perhaps two, before the PCs arrive.

The Cultists

NIGAI, OTA, AMIKO (MECHANICALLY INTERCHANGEABLE)

AIR: 1	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 1	WATER: 1	VOID: 1
REFLEXES: 2	AGILITY: 2			
Honor: N/A		Status: 0.0		Glory: 0.0

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.3

School/Rank: Commoner (Insight Rank 1)

Skills: Athletics 1, Craft (as appropriate) 1-2, Knives 1, Sincerity 1, Temptation 2 (Amiko only)

Advantages: Allies (cultists)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Outfit: Clothing, knife



**CHU THE CARPENTER**

AIR: 2	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 1
AGILITY: 3		STRENGTH: 3		
Honor: N/A	Status: 0.0	Glory: 0.1		

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.8

School/Rank: Commoner (Insight Rank 1)

Skills: Athletics 2, Craft (Carpentry) 3, Defense 1, Staves 2, Stealth 1

Advantages: Allies (cultists), Large

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (Heimin)

Outfit: Clothing, carpenter's hammer (treat as tonfa, 0k3)

BONDO, CORRUPT DOSHIN

AIR: 2	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 1
REFLEXES: 3				
Honor: N/A	Status: 0.0	Glory: 0.5		

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.7

School/Rank: Commoner (Insight Rank 1)

Skills: Athletics 2, Defense 2, Investigation 2, Law 1, Nofujutsu 3, Sincerity 1, Stealth 2

Advantages: Allies (cultists), Crafty, Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Outfit: Clothing, jitte, tonfa

YURI, CULT DEPUTY

AIR: 2	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 1	WATER: 1	VOID: 1
AWARENESS: 3		INTELLIGENCE: 2 PERCEPTION: 2		
Honor: N/A	Status: 0.0	Glory: 0.2		

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.9

School/Rank: Bloodspeaker Technique (Insight Rank 1)

Skills: Acting 2, Craft (sake brewing) 2, Knife 2, Lore: Bloodspeakers 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 3, Temptation (Seduction) 3

Spells (all Maho): Summon Oni, Sinful Dreams, Fires of Corruption (treat as a maho version of the normal spell Fires From Within)

Advantages: Dangerous Beauty

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Equipment: Kimono, sharp knife (1k2)

CHIO, CULT LEADER

AIR: 1	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 1	WATER: 1	VOID: 2
AWARENESS: 3 WILLPOWER: 5 INTELLIGENCE: 3				
Honor: N/A	Status: 0.0	Glory: 2.1		

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 1.4

School/Rank: Bloodspeaker Technique (Insight Rank 2)

Skills: Acting 2, Craft (tending the mill) 6, Defense 1, Etiquette 1, Knife 4, Lore: Bloodspeakers 3, Lore: Maho 3, Meditation 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 4

Spells (all Maho): Summon Oni, No Pure Breaths, Pain, Sinful Dreams, Fires of Corruption (treat as a maho version of the normal spell Fires From Within)

Advantages: Allies (cultists), Precise Memory, Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Blind, Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Outfit: Clothing, large knife (1k2), obsidian amulet

Special Item: Obsidian Amulet – this cursed nemuranai has the ability to store power extracted from the blood of ritual sacrifices. Currently it contains 13 points of power. It bestows Reduction on its wearer equal to its current number of points (bypassed by Jade or Crystal). The points may be spent to gain Free Raises on maho spells, up to three points on each spell

MIYA KUBOTI, CORRUPTED SAMURAI

AIR: 3	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 1
STAMINA: 3		AGILITY: 3		
Honor: 1.1	Status: 1.0	Glory: 1.5		

School/Rank: Miya Herald 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Courtier (Rhetoric) 1, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 2, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Heraldry 1, Lore: Law 1, Sincerity 2, Stealth 2

Advantages: Allies (cultists), Quick

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Weakness (Void)

Outfit: Kimono, daisho set

ASAI, BLOODSPEAKER MONK (FORMERLY YOGO AGUCHI)

AIR: 4	EARTH: 4	FIRE: 3	WATER: 3	VOID: 3
WILLPOWER: 5		PERCEPTION: 4		
Honor: 0.2	Status: 1.0	Glory: 0.3	Infamy: 1.5	

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 1.7

School/Rank: Yogo Shugenja 2/Bloodspeaker Technique

Skills: Acting 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, Craft (gardening) 2, Defense 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 2, Knife 4, Lore: Bloodspeakers 3, Lore: Maho 4, Lore: Shugenja 4, Lore: Theology 3, Meditation 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 4, Staves 5, Stealth 4



Spells: Asai's Maho spells are *Summon Oni*, *No Pure Breaths*, *Pain*, *Sinful Dreams*, *Written in Blood*, *Inspire Fear*, and *Fires of Corruption* (treat as a maho version of the normal spell *Fires From Within*). Asai does not normally carry his shugenja scrolls, but has memorized *Sense*, *Commune*, *Summon*, *Way of Deception*, and *Cloak of Night*.

Advantages: *Allies (cultists)*

Disadvantages: *Infamy (lost a nemuranai)*, *Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker)*

Outfit: *Monk's robes, bo staff, knife*

The Ronin Band

MAEDA, THE COMMANDER

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 3	WATER: 3	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 4	AGILITY: 4			
Honor: 5.3		Status: 0.0	Glory: 0.8	

School/Rank: *Kakita Bushi 2/Ronin (Insight Rank 3)*

Skills: *Athletics 3, Battle 3, Courtesy 2, Defense 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 2, Iaijutsu (Assessment) 4, Intimidation 2, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 3, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: History 2, Lore: Law 1, Perform: Storytelling 2, Sincerity (Honesty) 2, Tea Ceremony 1*

Advantages: *Allies (his band), Balance, Higher Purpose (Restore his Honor)*

Disadvantages: *Social Disadvantage (ronin)*

Outfit: *Clothing, Light Armor, Daisho, Bow (Yumi) and Arrows, 2 koku*

TAKUHITO, THE DEPUTY

AIR: 3	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2	VOID: 3
INTELLIGENCE: 4				
Honor: 4.3		Status: 0.0	Glory: 0.6	

School/Rank: *Shiba Bushi 1/Ronin (Insight Rank 2)*

Skills: *Athletics 2, Battle 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu 2, Hunting 2, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Shugenja 2, Lore: Theology (Shintao) 2, Medicine 2, Meditation 2, Polearms (Naginata) 4, Sincerity 2, Spears 3*

Advantages: *Allies (the band), Quick*

Disadvantages: *Social Disadvantage (ronin)*

Outfit: *Clothing, Daisho, Light Armor, Naginata, 1 koku*

OYAMI, THE JOVIAL

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 3
		AGILITY: 3	STRENGTH: 3	
Honor: 3.4		Status: 0.0	Glory: 0.5	

School/Rank: *Mirumoto Bushi 1/Ronin (Insight Rank 2)*

Skills: *Athletics 2, Artisan: Poetry 1, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Games: Gambling 2, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 2, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Shugenja 2, Perform: Storytelling 1, Meditation 3, Spears 4*

Advantages: *Allies (the band), Ambidextrous, Large, Strength of the Earth*

Disadvantages: *Social Disadvantage (ronin), Compulsion (gambling, sake)*

Outfit: *Clothing, Daisho, Light Armor, Yari, two sets of dice (one loaded), 3 bu*

IZUMI, THE COWARD

AIR: 2	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 3	WATER: 3	VOID: 2
REFLEXES: 4	STAMINA: 3			
Honor: 1.3		Status: 0.0	Glory: 0.2	Infamy: 1.0

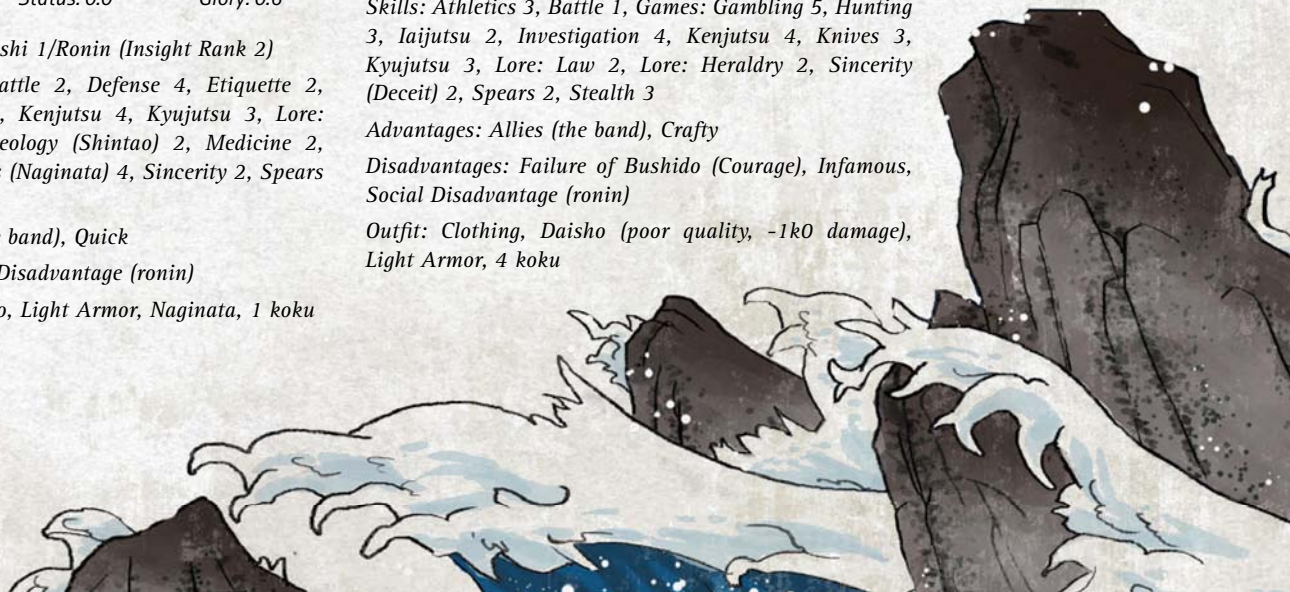
School/Rank: *True Ronin (Insight Rank 2)*

Skills: *Athletics 3, Battle 1, Games: Gambling 5, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 2, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 4, Knives 3, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Law 2, Lore: Heraldry 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 2, Spears 2, Stealth 3*

Advantages: *Allies (the band), Crafty*

Disadvantages: *Failure of Bushido (Courage), Infamous, Social Disadvantage (ronin)*

Outfit: *Clothing, Daisho (poor quality, -1k0 damage), Light Armor, 4 koku*





SATOURU, THE BITTER

AIR: 2	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 2
REFLEXES: 4		AGILITY: 3	STRENGTH: 3	
Honor: 2.6		Status: 0.0		Glory: 0.4

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 1/Ronin (Insight Rank 2)

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Games: Gambling 3, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 2, Intimidation 3, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Bushido 2, Lore: History 2, Lore: Theology (Ancestor Worship) 2, Sincerity (Honesty, Deceit) 4, Stealth 3, War Fan 2

Advantages: Allies (the band), Dark Paragon (Strength)

Disadvantages: Driven (hates his former clan), Failure of Bushido (Courtesy), Social Disadvantage (ronin)

Outfit: Clothing, Daisho, Light Armor, Bow (Yumi) and Arrows, 3 bu

TSURUAKA, THE PEASANT

AIR: 2	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 1
REFLEXES: 3		AGILITY: 3	STRENGTH: 3	
Honor: 0.8		Status: 0.0		Glory: 0.2

School/Rank: True Ronin (Insight Rank 1)

Skills: Athletics 3, Craft (Farming) 5, Defense 2, Games: Gambling 2, Hunting 3, Intimidation (Bullying) 4, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Heimin 3, Lore: Herbalism 1, Lore: Law 1, Sincerity 1, Stealth (Sneaking) 4, Yarijutsu 4

Advantages: Allies (the band, the villagers), Higher Purpose (protect fellow peasants), Luck (rank 1)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (really a peasant), Social Disadvantage (ronin)

Outfit: Clothing, Daisho (poor quality, -1k0 damage), Yari, 8 zeni

Summoned Oni

Several of the Bloodspeakers have the ability to summon an oni, and if they are facing a major confrontation and have a chance to prepare they will do so. However, in the interest of keeping the adventure exciting rather than a hopelessly overmatched slaughter, it is recommended the GM not allow the cultists to summon more than one demon.

ONI NO KOCHU

This demon resembles an oversized bipedal beetle, with razor-edged claws on its forearms and bulbous yellow-green eyes in its small head.

ONI NO KOCHU

AIR: 1	EARTH: 5	FIRE: 2	WATER: 3
REFLEXES: 4		AGILITY: 4	STRENGTH: 6
SHADOWLANDS TAINT: 7.0		ARMOR TN: 30	
INITIATIVE: 5K4			
ATTACK: CLAW STRIKE 8K4 (SIMPLE)		DAMAGE: CLAW 7K3	
REDUCTION: 10 (REDUCED TO 5 BY JADE OR CRYSTAL)		WOUNDS: 32: +5; 64: +10; 96: DEAD	

Special Abilities:

Fear 3

Magic Resistance (one Rank)

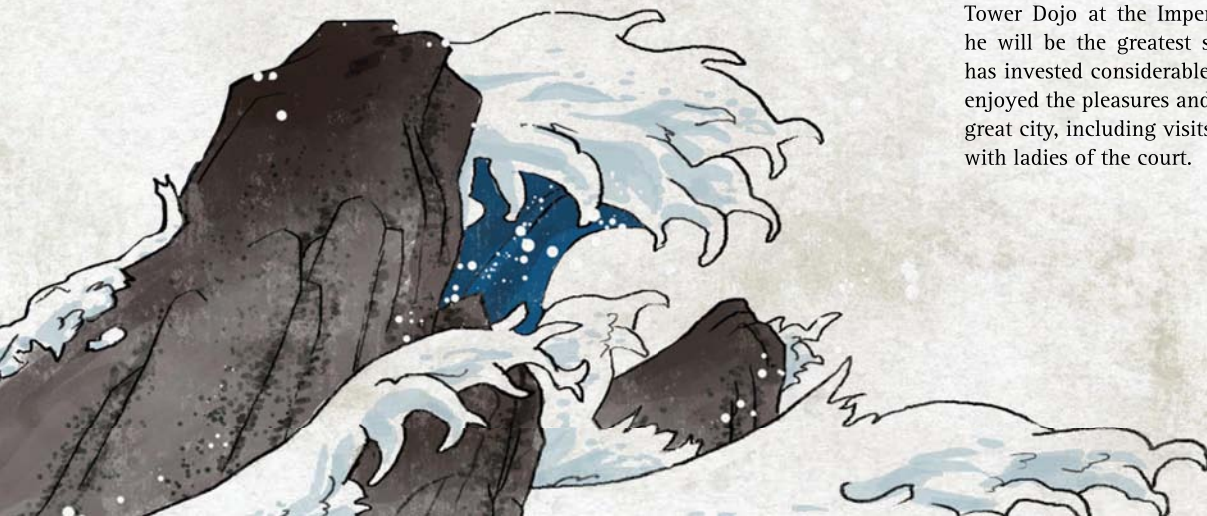
Partial Invulnerability: This oni takes half damage (rounded down) from mundane damage and is immune to the effects of all Illusion spells.

Pre-Generated Player Characters

The following section offers a selection of twelve pre-generated characters which players can select from to play through this adventure. These characters are intended primarily for use in the premier of this event at GenCon 2013, but may also be used by any GM who wishes to run this adventure as a "one-shot" event.

HIDA JINNEI, SUMAI WRESTLER

From his childhood, Hida Jinnei was a large boy, prone to gain weight as well as muscle. His parents recognized his potential and gave everything they had to ensure he could be trained in the Grip of Earth Dojo, where the Crab study the ways of sumai wrestling. His gifts impressed his sensei and delighted Jinnei himself, and soon the Crab concluded he was worthy of training in the famed Stone Tower Dojo at the Imperial capital. Jinnei is convinced he will be the greatest sumai of all time, and the clan has invested considerable effort in his career. He has also enjoyed the pleasures and privileges of being a samurai in a great city, including visits to geisha houses and flirtations with ladies of the court.



With the clans escalating their involvement in Naishou Province, Jinnei has been sent there to showcase the Crab Clan's strength and talent. Unfortunately, thus far the Governor has shown little interest in hosting sumai events, and Jinnei is growing increasingly frustrated. There are still geisha to visit and ladies to romance, but they are hardly sufficient outlet for passion and strength. He needs an opportunity for him to demonstrate his greatness, either in the sumai ring or on the field of battle. Perhaps this mission will be such an opportunity.

HIDA JINNEI, SUMAI WRESTLER

AIR: 2	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 3	WATER: 3	VOID: 2
REFLEXES: 3		STRENGTH: 4		
Honor: 3.5		Status: 1.0	Glory: 2.4	

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 2 (Sumai Wrestler Path)

Skills: Athletics 2, Courtier 2, Defense 2, Etiquette (Courtesy) 2, Heavy Weapons (Tetsubo) 3, Intimidation 4, Jiujutsu (Sumai) 5, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Shadowlands 2, Sincerity 2, Temptation (Seduction) 2

Advantages: Great Potential: Jiujustu, Large

Disadvantages: Driven (to become the best Sumai wrestler), Lechery, Overconfident

DOJI MIRO, CRANE CLAN MAGISTRATE

Miro is the son of the cousin of Miya Ansho, the current governor of Naishou Province. Ever since his childhood, he suffered from an inability to focus his attention, his mind always darting from one event to another. Although this made him a talented poet, it impinged on his studies, and his sensei found him a frustrating student. He barely managed to pass his gempukku. Soon after he came of age, his parents arranged for him to be betrothed to a maiden of the Kakita family. One afternoon a few weeks after they were introduced, they went on a boating trip on Tsunegawa Lake. Just when a wave struck the boat, Miro was distracted by a passing bird – and his fiancée fell overboard. By the time he was able to reach her, she had drowned. To this day Miro holds himself responsible, struggling to overcome the distractable nature that caused him to fail his duty.

Some months after this incident, Miro was summoned to serve in Toshi no Naisho by Governor Miya Ansho, who is distantly related to Miro through his mother's line. Ansho sees potential in the boy and has always enjoyed his poetry; he hopes a new environment and new duties will help Miro shake off his unseemly grief and resume his proper duties as a samurai.





In truth, Retsuka felt little personal interest in advancing herself, finding all the fulfillment she needed in her low-ranking duties, and she did not begrudge her superiors' tendency to overlook her skills. She found her grandfather's assistance more annoying than helpful, but she was not one to reject an assignment. She has served her new lord as faithfully as the previous one. Recently he was ordered to dispatch one of his assistants to Naishou Province to serve the new Imperial Governor there. He chose Retsuko, apparently because she was the least memorable of his deputies and therefore the one he would miss the least. Retsuka accepted this with equanimity as she has every

other change, although privately she is a bit weary of serving new masters every couple of years.

DOJI MIRO, CRANE CLAN MAGISTRATE

AIR: 3 EARTH: 2 FIRE: 2 WATER: 3 VOID: 2

AGILITY: 3

Honor: 4.8 Status: 2.0 Glory: 1.2

School/Rank: Doji Magistrate 2

Skills: Artisan: Poetry (Crane Style) 2, Athletics 2, Courtier 1, Defense 2, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 3, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 3, Knives (Jitte) 3, Lore: Law 2, Lore: History 1, Lore: Heraldry 1, Polearms 2, Sincerity 1, Tea Ceremony 2

Advantages: Ally (Governor Miya Ansho). Strength of Earth

Disadvantages: Lost Love (Fiancé), Phobia (large bodies of water)

TAMORI RETSUKA, JADE LEGIONNAIRE

Retsuka has always been at home in the mountaintops of the Dragon lands, and she has served mainly in the lower ranks of the clan's armies since her gempukku. Like many Tamori, she found service as a soldier more fulfilling than scholarly study or meditation. However, her grandfather was unhappy with her lack of advancement in rank, seeing it as a blight on the family's reputation. He arranged for Retsuka to be assigned to the service of an Imperial Jade Magistrate, thinking this might give her career the push it needed.

TAMORI RETSUKA, JADE LEGIONNAIRE

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

REFLEXES: 3

Honor: 5.8 Status: 1.0 Glory: 1.8

School/Rank: Tamori Shugenja 2 (Jade Legionnaire Path)

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 2, Calligraphy 2, Defense 2, Divination 1, Hunting 1, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Maho 2, Lore: Theology 2, Medicine 2, Meditation 2, Spellcraft 2

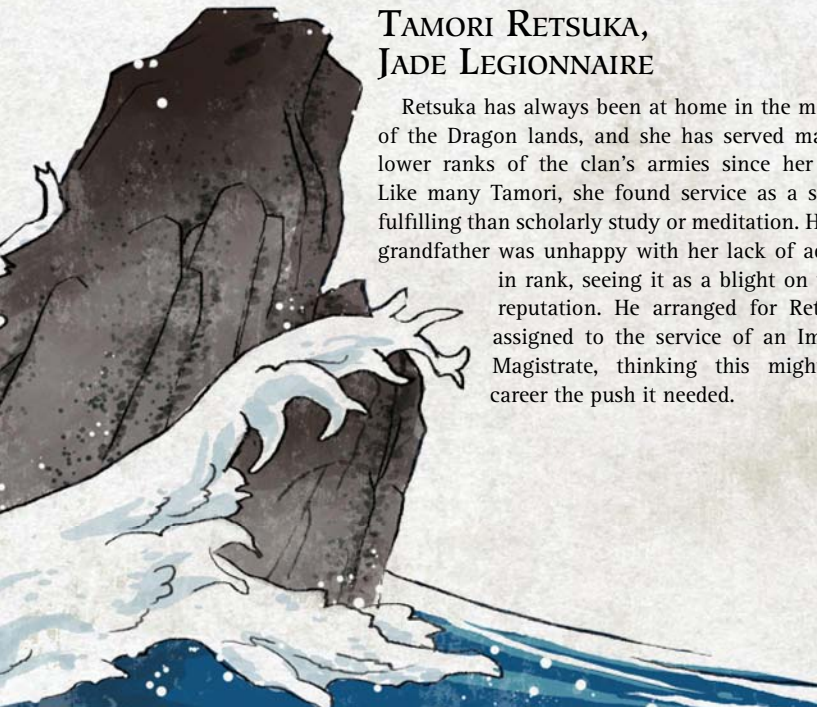
Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Armor of Earth (Earth 1), Elemental Ward (Earth 1), Jade Strike (Earth 1), Earth Becomes Sky (Earth 2), Grasp of Earth (Earth 2), Sharing the Strength of Many (Earth 3) Katana of Fire (Fire 1), Extinguish (Fire 1), Path to Inner Peace (Water 1)

Advantages: Bland, Hotei's Blessing

Disadvantages: Unlucky (1)

IKOMA KOTONE, LADY OF WATER

Since her childhood, Ikoma Kotone has shown a unique affinity to water. Her movements flow to and fro with the grace and ease of water flowing between the stones of a river bed. As a child she grew up in the confined streets of Ryoko Owari, a place that wore on her spirit, and she begged her parents to let her train back in the Lion lands. There she enrolled in the less-presitigious Lion Spearman School, for its techniques matched the freedom of movement she always loved, and in her off hours she loved to run for hours across the wide plains



that surrounded her dojo. Her natural talent made it easy for her to learn the school's techniques, and after her gempukku she was assigned as yojimbo to an officer in one of the Imperial Legions. It is a great honor to defend a samurai who directly serves the Throne, but Kotone cannot help but long for the freedom she enjoyed as a student.

A year after her gempukku, Kotone met a former childhood friend, Bayushi Kenzo. Their rekindled friendship soon became a love affair, and both harbor the desire to marry one another. Although Kotone remains a loyal and obedient samurai, she cannot help dreaming that her dedicated service will someday grant her the opportunity to arrange a betrothal to Kenzo.

By the workings of chance, both Kotone and Kenzo have wound up in Naishou Province – Kotone as part of the Lion force serving the Imperial Governor, Kenzo as part of the Scorpion army in the province. She is happy for the chance to be around him, but also worried that their duties may somehow wind up putting them on opposite sides of a future conflict. In the meantime, however, she does not let her concerns overwhelm her charming nature; in contrast to many Lion, she has an outgoing personality, a ready laugh, and a friendly smile.

IKOMA KOTONE, LADY OF WATER

AIR: 2	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 2	WATER: 3	VOID: 2
REFLEXES: 3	AGILITY: 3			
Honor: 5.0		Status: 1.0		Glory: 2.0

School/Rank: Lion Elite Spearman 2

Skills: Athletics (Running) 3, Battle 2, Calligraphy 2, Defense 4, Horesmanship 3, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 2, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 4, Lore: History 2, Polearms 3, Perform: Dance 2, Spears (Magari-Yari) 5

Advantages: Friend of the Elements (Water, 4), Kharmic Tie: Bayushi Kenzo (3)

Disadvantages: True Love (Bayushi Kenzo)

TSURUCHI CHOUKO, BOUNTY HUNTER

This beautiful one-eyed woman from the Mantis Clan is the subject of many rumors, though only a select few know the truth behind her most notable physical feature. Her otherwise flawless face is marred by a single prominent scar that clefts her left eye and runs down to her chin; she takes no pains to hide the wound, instead proudly displaying it and wearing a prominent gold-embroidered green eyepatch over her missing left eye. The wound was the gift of a Scorpion from several years ago, and she bears a deep grudge against the Clan of Secrets, although she seldom speaks of such things to others. Her demeanor is usually quite serious, and she has a reputation for never giving up once she has the scent of her prey. She would probably have attained a magistrate's post by now if not for her tendency to seek Scorpion plots where none usually exist.

When Chouko heard the Scorpion had involved themselves in Naishou Province, she pulled strings to arrange her own transfer to the region. No naïve Miya Governor can be trusted to keep the machinations of the children of Bayushi in check, after all.

TSURUCHI CHOUKO, BOUNTY HUNTER

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 3	WATER: 3	VOID: 2
PERCEPTION: 4				
Honor: 3.0		Status: 2.0		Glory: 2.5

School/Rank: Tsuruchi Bounty Hunter 2

Skills: Athletics 1, Courtier 2, Hunting (Tracking) 3, Iaijutsu 2, Intimidation (Bullying) 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Kenjutsu 2, Kyujutsu 1, Lore: Underworld 2, Polearms (Sasumata) 3

Advantages: Heart of Vengeance (Scorpion), Social Position (Magistrate's Yoriki)

Disadvantages: Bad Eyesight (missing left eye)

ISAWA NIMURO, MISCHIEVOUS ILLUSIONIST

Isawa Nimuro is very much like the Air kami he communes with to perform his spells. Fascinated by the antics of these mischievous spirits, Nimuro goes out of his way to entertain them with tricks and illusions, sometimes even going so far as to play active pranks such as hiding items belonging to other samurai, waiting to see how long until they are missed and then producing them with a flourish. This runs the constant risk of backfiring terribly for the young man, but in his mind the risk only makes things that much more entertaining. No matter how questionable his behavior appears to be, however, Nimuro never actually seeks to use the Air kami in a dishonorable way – merely to find new ways to make jokes. And he never loses the items he hides, always remembering the specifics of each item, who it belongs to, where it was, and what position it was in. This has also proven a useful skill when investigating crimes or courtly mysteries, and the young Isawa had actually earned something of a reputation for resolving such problems – leading a few to speculate his mischievous behavior is just a cover for his true purpose. His yojimbo Tsuko, however, takes a dimmer view.





ISAWA NIMURO, MISCHIEVOUS ILLUSIONIST

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

Honor: 4.5 Status: 1.0 Glory: 1.0

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Air) 2 (Shiba Illusionist Path)

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 1, Investigation 3, Lore: Theology 1, Lore: Elements 3, Medicine 1, Meditation 1, Sleight of Hand (Pick Pocket) 3, Spellcraft 3

Spells: Sense, Summon, Commune, Mists of Illusion, Gathering Swirl, Token of Memory, By the Light of the Moon, Cloak of Night, The Eye Shall Not See, Extinguish, The Raging Forge, Reflections of Pan Ku

Advantages: Elemental Blessing (Air), Perceived Honor (2 ranks), Precise Memory

Disadvantages: Compulsion (Thievery, 2 Ranks), Fascination (Illusions and Sleight of Hand), Low Pain Threshold

SHIBA TSUKO, LONG-SUFFERING YOJIMBO

Shiba Tsuko grew up listening to the stories of the great heroes of Rokugan; tales of the Black Lion Toturi during the Clan Wars, the bravery of Yoritomo at the Battle of Voltturnum, and many others fascinated her during her youth. When it came time to take a name at her gempukku, she chose the name of one of the most honorable and courageous women of Rokugan, Matsu Tsuko. During her first assignment – as a yojimbo to a diplomat in the Minor Clan courts – she sought to exemplify the virtues of Bushido. She impressed her ward and gained some prestige, especially after she won two sanctioned duels against superior opponents, and this resulted in her being assigned a guard a shugenja in the Phoenix Clan's delegation to Naishou Province, a remote but valuable region the clan had previously governed.

Unfortunately, her new assignment is an irreverent young man named Isawa Nimuro, a man who seems more interested in playing tricks and hiding other samurai's belongings than in fulfilling his duties. Her service as his yojimbo has been one long trial of her patience and honor. She is a fierce warrior and finds it almost intolerable to be chained to such a man. She feels all samurai should strive to uphold the ideals of Bushido, and Nimuro perfectly expresses her disappointment in those who lack the proper convictions. Tsuko longs for a more honorable assignment, one in which she can put her life in the service of Honor and Empire. She knows all samurai live only three feet away from death, and mortality holds no fear for her. Only the prospect of dishonor intimidates her.

SHIBA TSUKO, LONG-SUFFERING YOJIMBO

AIR: 2 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 3

REFLEXES: 3

Honor: 6.5 Status: 1.0 Glory: 2.6

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 2

Skills: Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu 4, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Kyujutsu 1, Lore: History 1, Lore: Bushido 3, Meditation (Void Recovery) 2, Polearms (Naginata) 3, Spears 1

Kata: Striking as Void

Advantages: Crab Hands, Paragon: Courage, Virtuous

Disadvantages: Can't Lie, Idealistic



BAYUSHI KENZO, SCORPION GUNSO

Bayushi Kenzo is a talented bushi who has risen swiftly through the ranks of the Scorpion armies, and many feel it is only a matter of time before he is given command of his own legion. He grew up in Ryoko Owari, from a long line of Scorpion magistrates, but as a youth he instead focused on swordsmanship and especially the art of iaijutsu dueling. Within a year of his gempukku he had gained a reputation for engaging in illegal duels.

As a gunso in the Scorpion army, Kenzo has proven himself a capable leader with a preference for unorthodox tactics. He accompanied the Scorpion army into Naishou Province and won praise for his service against the Crane forces. When the arrival of the new Imperial Governor forced the Scorpion to switch their battlefield from the field to politics, Kenzo was assigned to accompany his commander into the Governor's court. He has a knack for investigations which has already won him praise.

However, a complication has arisen: Kenzo's childhood friend Ikoma Kotone is also here in the court of Toshi no Naishou. Shortly after his gempukku, Kenzo became reacquainted with Kotone and their friendship swiftly developed into love. Although Kenzo knows love is a terrible threat to a Scorpion's proper clan loyalty, he cannot control the urges of his heart. He has promised Kotone he will do everything in his power to gain enough prestige to arrange for their marriage.

BAYUSHI KENZO, SCORPION GUNSO

AIR: 3 EARTH: 2 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 4
STRENGTH: 3

Honor: 2.1 Status: 4.0 Glory: 2.6 Infamy: 3.0
(Gunso)

School/Rank: Soshi Magistrate 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 2, Calligraphy (Scorpion Cipher) 1, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Games: Go 1, Iaijutsu (Focus) 4, Intimidation (Control) 3, Investigation (Notice) 3, Jiu-jutsu 3, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 1, Sincerity 2

Advantages: Kharmic Tie: Ikoma Kotone (3), Luck (1 rank), Social Position (gunso)

Disadvantages: Infamous (illegal duels), True Love (Ikoma Kotone)

HAKURI, ENIGMATIC MONK

In some ways Hakuri seems almost a stereotype of a Spider monk, caring little for those who cannot protect themselves, and making no effort to hide that attitude. Strength must be maintained, Will and Determination are necessary to achieve what one wants in life. Concepts like Sincerity and Compassion are little more than distractions from what truly needs to be done. Having little interest in the pretty words of court, Hakuri spends most days in the local dojo, training in physical combat, or roaming the

countryside in search of challenges. The local monks look askance at their strange visitor, but since Naishou Province is a place practically overrun with monks of every sect and order, a Spider sohei draws less controversy here than might be the case elsewhere in Rokugan.

The true nature of Hakuri's gender is a matter of some debate. Like most Spider monks, Hakuri wears wrappings which obscure both the face and the body, making it difficult for outsiders to tell whether the form beneath is that of a man or a woman. Hakuri finds this confusion amusing and deliberately makes things for difficult, speaking in a low voice that could be male or female and taking joy in others' evident confusion over such an unimportant matter. After all, the more time they spend trying to figure out Hakuri's gender, the less time they spend trying to figure out Hakuri's true motives. Only the Governor seems to have realized Hakuri's behavior is a distraction tactic; perhaps that is why he has assigned the monk to this mission, thereby removing the distraction from his city.

HAKURI, ENIGMATIC MONK

AIR: 2 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 3

REFLEXES: 3

Honor: 1.5 Status: 1.0 Glory: 1.0 Infamy: 2.7

School/Rank: Order of the Spider 2

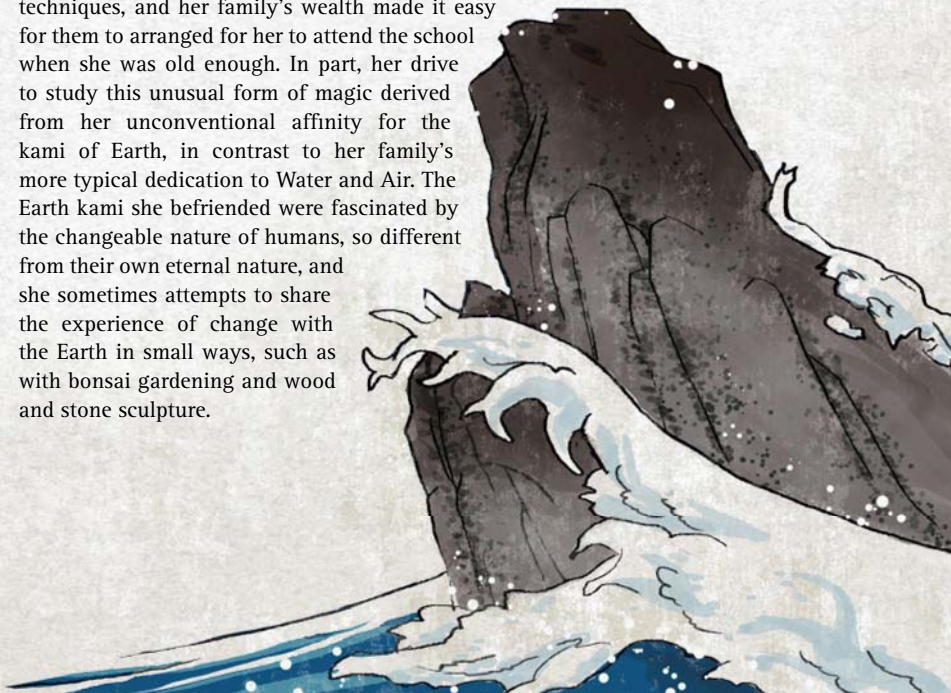
Skills: Acting 3, Athletics 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Jiu-jutsu 5, Lore: Theology 2, Meditation 2, Polearms 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 2, Stealth 3

Advantages: Bland, Dark Paragon: Will, Touch of Gakido

Disadvantages: Antisocial (rank 2), Infamous (Spider monk, unknown gender), Insensitive

IUCHI LASSAT, OBSESSIVE ARTIST

Iuchi Lassat is a young and cheerful Iuchi shugenja. She is focused on the study of Meishodo, the foreign magic her clan studied during its time in the Burning Sands; from her childhood she was fascinated by the Meishodo techniques, and her family's wealth made it easy for them to arranged for her to attend the school when she was old enough. In part, her drive to study this unusual form of magic derived from her unconventional affinity for the kami of Earth, in contrast to her family's more typical dedication to Water and Air. The Earth kami she befriended were fascinated by the changeable nature of humans, so different from their own eternal nature, and she sometimes attempts to share the experience of change with the Earth in small ways, such as with bonsai gardening and wood and stone sculpture.



Lassat is obsessed with perfecting her arts, and the topic is the only thing which can take the edge off her cheery nature. It is an honor to shape the kami of Earth, she says, and she must learn to do so without flaw. She has come to Naishou Province in search of more unusual stone and wood for her artwork; surely, in this place so filled with legends of spirits and magic, the kami will be especially potent and her artwork can attain the greatest perfection. The Governor's assignment is a tiresome distraction from this goal, and she hopes to finish it as quickly as possible before resuming her real work.

IUCHI LASSAT, OBSESSIVE ARTIST

AIR: 3 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 2 WATER: 3 VOID: 3

INTELLIGENCE: 3

Honor: 5.2

Status: 1.0

Glory: 2.3

School/Rank: Horiuchi Shugenja 2

Skills: Artisan: Bonsai 3, Artisan: Sculpture 3, Calligraphy 1, Craft: Meishodo 4, Courtier 1, Defense 1, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 2, Investigation 2, Lore: Heraldry 1, Lore: Theology 2, Medicine 2, Meditation 2, Spellcraft (Spell Research) 1

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Token of Memory, Armor of Earth, Jurojin's Balm, Earth Becomes Sky, Hands of Clay, Biting Steel, Extinguish, Path to Inner Peace, Inari's Blessing.

Advantages: Soul of Artistry (Sculpture), Wealthy (2 points)

Disadvantages: Consumed (Perfection), Gaijin Name

UJINA SHOUTA, THE BLACK HARE

Even at a young age, barely two years past his gempukku, Ujina Shouta seems like a man who should be a hero to the Empire. He is a skilled and deadly warrior, a potent tracker and hunter, and on one occasion he recovered a Miya Herald's stolen personal journals from a gang of thieves hiding in the depths of the Shinomen Forest. He uncovered a plot to kidnap a minor Dragon daimyo's children. He defeated the bandit king Takimon the Cruel in single combat. He would be famed as a hero of the age if not for one thing: he is known for getting things done at any cost... even his honor. And since Shouta could care less what others think of him, this repute has only grown worse each year. Some now call him the Black Hare, and despite his long list of extraordinary feats his reputation dogs him wherever he goes. Even here in Naishou Province, rumors circle around him, and when others call on his aid it is usually because they need something done which can't be allowed to sully their hands.

Maybe this mission for the Governor will be different. Maybe Shouta can finally accomplish something so amazing that everyone will stop worrying how he did it.



UJINA SHOUTA, THE BLACK HARE

AIR: 3 EARTH: 2 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 2

REFLEXES: 4

Honor: 4.0 Status: 1.0 Glory: 3.6 Infamy: 1.5

School/Rank: Hare Bushi 2

Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Defense 1, Hunting (Tracking) 3, Investigation (Search) 2, Jujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Knives (Tanto) 3, Lore: Law 1, Lore: Maho 1, Lore: Underworld 2, Sincerity 1, Stealth 2

Advantages: Crafty, Daredevil, Luck (1 rank)

Disadvantages: Infamous (the Black Hare), Overconfident



HAIKYOHIME, IDEALISTIC RONIN

The ronin who calls herself “Princess of Ruins” grew up in the remnants of a town destroyed by war. Her father had been a wave-man, and had died defending the town against the unknown army that destroyed it. Her mother was a peasant, and raised her daughter Miko alone in the ruins, never telling her what had happened. Finally, when Miko turned 16, her mother dug a hole in the ground behind their hut and brought out a daisho set, carefully wrapped in a woven tatami. “These are your father’s swords,” she said, and told the tale of his death. On that day Miko chose a new name, and left her home to uphold her father’s legacy.

Haikyohime is in some ways a naïve young woman, believing in Bushido in a simple and innocent way. She thinks of wave-men as heroes, free men and women who follow the path of honor without the need for a lord to tell them what to do. She does not know which clan was responsible for the destruction of her village, and thus has a judgmental attitude toward all clans, Great and Minor; however, since leaving home she has learned it is best to keep such opinions to herself if she wants to find work and earn enough to eat. She seeks always to prove to others that wave-men are heroes, and the one thing which can always arouse her anger is a ronin who behaves disgracefully or criminally. The Princess of Ruins will not allow anyone to sully the honor her father exemplified.

HAIKYOHIME, IDEALISTIC RONIN

AIR: 3 EARTH: 2 FIRE: 2 WATER: 2 VOID: 3

STAMINA: 3 AGILITY: 3

Honor: 5.5 Status: 0.0 Glory: 1.3

School/Rank: Ronin (Insight Rank 2)

Skills: Athletics 2, Commerce 1, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Bushido 1, Sincerity 3, Stealth 2

Advantages: Irreproachable

Disadvantages: Idealistic, Social Disadvantage (ronin)



The Journal of Isawa Taeko

This document can be shown to PCs who discover the Inquisitor's journal.

28TH DAY OF SHINJO

My investigations here have finally born fruit. The cult cell was small, only four members, but they fought fiercely and we only took one alive. Otembo-san apologized at length for not managing to disable more of them non-lethally. From his contrition one would think he had allowed me to be hurt!

In any case his concern was unneeded. The prisoner quickly broke when put to the question, but it seems this cell knew little. The cult believes some great victory or triumph is at hand, as usual, though they know not what.

29TH DAY OF SHINJO

Execution at dawn. It seemed to make the proper impression on the villagers. Otembo-san would have preferred that I stay inside and spare myself from that "awful spectacle." I tried not to laugh at his words, for it would have mortified him. A good man, but too sensitive. He would have done better guarding some gentle Acolyte of Air.

4TH DAY OF HIDA

Based on the prisoner's confession I am traveling southwest to Scorpion territories. There may be a connection with the old rumors about the Yogo losing some mysterious artifact.

6TH DAY OF HIDA

The border guard at Beiden Pass was most impolite, and seemed to imply I was here to accuse the Scorpion Clan of Maho. Arrogant fool. Otembo-san was most angry, and was perhaps on the verge of drawing his blade when the guard relented and let me pass. I scolded Otembo-san later for letting his temper nearly get the better of him, and he was so sincerely contrite that I ended up feeling compassion and forgiving him. Such a troublesome man!

17TH DAY OF HIDA

First chance to write in many days. No further signs of the Bloodspeakers until I came to this remote region called "Naishou." Some sort of Imperial province, it would seem. There are rumors of disappearances in outlying villages here. This may be worth examining.

The other matter - no, I should not write about that.

25TH DAY OF HIDA

When I returned from my evening walk last night I noticed a fire in the woods, north of the village. Perhaps it is merely the monks performing some religious ritual. One never knows with them.

Later. I learned today of a third disappearance yesterday, a young woman. Could there be a connection with that fire? If I see it again I will collect Otembo-chan and investigate.



2013
GENCON
RPG

MAISHOU
PROVINCE



WWW.L5R.COM

LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS and all related marks are TM
and © Alderac Entertainment Group, Inc., All rights reserved