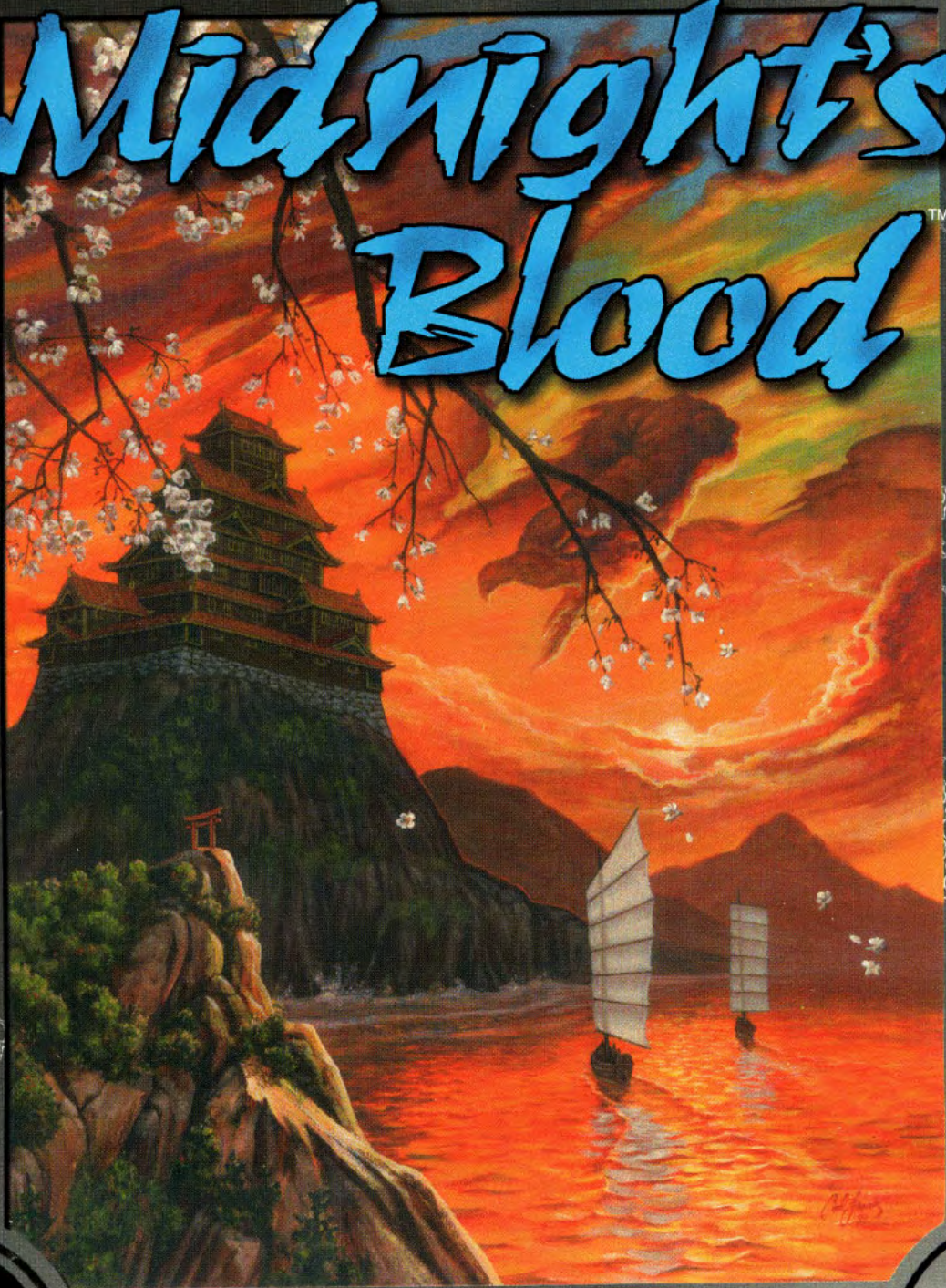




Legend of the Five Rings™

Midnight's Blood™



M-1
High Magic
Series

An Adventure of High Sorcery and Cold Steel

Written by
Jim Moore & John R. Phythyon, Jr.



Midnight's Blood

*"Do not be concerned by deals bound in ink, dried and withered.
Fear pacts made in the blood of a sorcerer, drawn at the hour of darkest night.
Those words, and those alone, shape the evil in men's souls.
They can never be undone."
– Isawa Hoju*

Midnight's Blood contains the combined tales of two adventures shrouded in dark pacts of blood-sorcery. The "M" series presents *Legend of the Five Rings* fans with adventures concerning curses, ghosts and dangerous magic, where a samurai's ability to understand the mystic nature of Rokugan may be more valuable than his steel.

First, in *Plague Upon Your Lands*, a strange sickness infests the lands of the Phoenix, killing *heimin* and samurai alike. The sun hides her face, fearful to look upon the sick and dying that pour through the gates of Kyuden Isawa. Tales of *maho* – blood magic – whisper in the air, even as bloody corpses stain Phoenix fields.

The Lost Sword of Doji Yasurugi is a story of vengeful *yorei*, ghosts of sea-lost sailors, whose honor has been destroyed by an unwelcome fate. With the appearance of walking dead in the Mantis seas, the legend of a cursed *nemuranai* has resurfaced. A ronin, dishonored and forsaken, may hold the secret to discovering the final fate of one of the Crane Clan's most valued artifacts.

- Suitable for 3-6 low to mid-level (ranks 1-3) player characters.
- Filled with sorcery and suspense, *Midnight's Blood* can be used independently or as part of an ongoing campaign.
- Requires a copy of the *Legend of the Five Rings* basic rules.



\$9.95



Alderac Entertainment Group



Legend of the Five Rings

Midnight's Blood



*"As surely as the Sun crosses the Celestial Heavens,
the ties of the spirit bind us.
Blood calls for blood..."*

- Isawa Kuzushi



Credits

"PLAGUE UPON YOUR LANDS" BY JIM MOORE

ADDITIONAL WRITING BY REE SOESBEE

"LOST SWORD OF DOJI YASURUGI" BY JOHN R. PHYTHON JR.

GAME SYSTEM BY DAVID WILLIAMS AND JOHN WICK

COVER ARTWORK: CARL FRANK

INTERIOR ARTWORK: CRIS DORNAUS, CARL FRANK, BEN PECK, ROB HINDS

ARTWORK PREPRESS: BRENDON GOODYEAR, DAVE AGUSTIN

LINE EDITOR: D.J. TRINDLE

EDITING: D.J. TRINDLE, REE SOESBEE, ROB VAUX

INTERIOR LAYOUT: BRENDON GOODYEAR, STEVE HOUGH

COVER DESIGN: BRENDON GOODYEAR, STEVE HOUGH

JOHN R. PHYTHON, JR.

John R. Python, Jr. is the author of *Swords of the Middle Kingdom* and *Heaven & Earth: A Role-Playing Game of Fate and Destiny* in addition to contributing to the *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* line for Event Horizon Productions. His passions include early 19th Century British Literature, existential philosophy, football, and wishing that he were richer. He resides in Lawrence, Kansas with his wife Jennifer and his dog Brittany, both of whom are still unsure what to make of him.

JIM MOORE

...is currently on a pilgrimage in Tibet, but we're sure we'll hear from him sooner or later.



Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Plague Upon Your Lands 6

Lost Sword of Doji Yasurugi 25

Dramatis Personae 46





Introduction

WHAT IS MIDNIGHT'S BLOOD?

The first adventure in the High Magic (M) series, *Midnight's Blood* is an adventure formed of two tales of ghosts, curses and vengeful spirits. Those who have played other episodes in the L5R adventure series should be informed that *Midnight's Blood* can be played as a stand-alone adventure, or woven into the tapestry of an already existing campaign. This adventure is designed to be played after *Twilight Honor*, a story of violence and the visible horror of the Shadowlands.

Midnight's Blood is not such a tale. It is, instead, two adventures set very firmly in the Empire – yet influenced by the spirits of the risen dead, and the legacy of a *maho* sorcerer and his deals with powerful Oni. Even in the most peaceful lands of the Empire, the tainted touch of the Shadowlands can still creep, unnoticed.

Defeating such enemies is the work of heroes.

THE THEME OF MIDNIGHT'S BLOOD

'Dark Secrets' is the theme of *Midnight's Blood*, the essence of pacts and hidden alliances, made secret by the darkness of night. Such oaths, signed in the blood of innocents and covered by the veil of midnight, threaten Rokugan's peace. Only the bravest samurai in the Emerald Empire can set things right again.

In the first adventure, *Plague Upon Your Lands*, the characters discover an ancient secret which has lain dormant for almost two hundred years. A sorcerer gave up his name in exchange for power, and his spirit has suffered the price. Now, he has found a way out of the bargain, and he will do anything to achieve his freedom. Anything, including the death of his own clan.

The second tale, *The Lost Sword of Doji Yasurugi*, takes place amid the Mantis islands. A lost *nemuranai* has been found beneath the ocean's rolling waves, and was to be taken in secret. However, the boat was attacked, and the crew's dishonorable death, prophesied by an ancient curse, has left the ocean channel haunted by vengeful *yorei*.

Beneath Rokugan's shining surface, darkness hides. It is not the evil of Fu Leng's Oni, nor the roaring of Bloodspeaker zombies that poses the greatest threat to the Empire – it is the black heart of men. Behind a smiling face, *maho* threatens. Within a peaceful village, a plague spreads, and in a calm ocean's waves, vengeance hides.

It is up to you to discover the truth that lies behind pacts made with *Midnight's Blood*.

– RS

Plague Upon Your Lands



Written By Jim Moore



**FROM THE
WRITINGS OF ISAWA
WATASAME,
SHUGENJA OF THE
PHOENIX CLAN,
REGARDING THE
DARKFEVER:**

The Plague seems to come from nowhere, and sweeps across the lands of the Phoenix Clan with a savage ferocity. Those affected by the disease soon began to suffer from fever-induced dreams, nightmares. Many of these dreams seem repetitive, even across many victims. In most cases, the dreams involve the image of a corpse rising from the ground, pulling the flesh from the dreamers' bodies to rebuild the rotting meat and sinew of its own form.

Many here would believe another Clan has sent men carrying the plague to us, but there is no evidence of this. No other clan has yet had its lands disturbed by the illness, nor have any in the Isawa territories been spared due to political ties or rank. Still, I cannot believe the illness is natural. There is nothing in all the writings of Kyuden Isawa to indicate that anything like this has occurred before.

(continued)



Introduction

"A Plague Upon Your Lands" is a story where swords and weapons are less effective than wits and the ability to solve puzzles. Something dark and sinister is happening in the northern mountain woodlands held by the Phoenix Clan. People are dying, and the illness is spreading rapidly. While this might seem like only a threat to the Phoenix Clan, the disease is very likely to spread beyond their borders if it remains unchecked. The mortality rate of this disease is close to one hundred percent, and those who do survive are usually crippled.

To make matters worse, a fierce and unnatural storm is gathering in power over the Isawa Woodlands. Dark, thunderous clouds continue to build, occasionally dropping torrential rains and volleys of lightning that bombard entire towns. The fact that the plague (and the storm) are supernatural in origin is a given; the patterns of devastation are not random enough to be natural. The characters must find the cause of the plague and, if possible, a cure for the ailments sweeping the countryside.

Whether the characters are of the Phoenix Clan or not is inconsequential. Should the plague remain unchecked, it could devastate the whole of the Emerald Empire.

Getting Started

If the PCs are from the Phoenix Clan, getting involved in finding the source of the mysterious plague is easy. Letters from family or friends can let them know what is happening. If the PCs are from different areas, their daimyo could well ask that they investigate the plague and find a way to

prevent it from spreading through the Empire before it is too late. If the players are magistrates, either beneath the Emerald Champion or within a separate clan, they may be sent to Kyuden Isawa in order to investigate the sickness and bring the Emperor word of the death totals among Phoenix territories.

Regardless of the characters' origins, they will soon enter the Phoenix lands. Once there, they may choose to speak to the *heimin* of the local villages, and will discover that the Phoenix Clan peasants have begun calling the illness 'the Darkfever,' because of the dreams that accompany the sickness. These horrible, vivid nightmares grow more intense and realistic as the illness spreads, eventually killing the plague-ridden individual in his or her sleep. The peasants are frightened, and fear that the sickness is a sign of doom. Among them, news of the Darkfever has spread very quickly, and the characters will hear many rumors about the nature of the disease – some real, and some imagined.

The stories of symptoms seem to grow more and more wild all the time, and the populace's fear is very genuine. Player characters will no doubt 'bump into' peasants on the road, attempting to leave the woodlands before the plague grows worse. Some samurai, notably of the Lion, Dragon and Crane families, will also be traveling the Phoenix roads, headed south to warn their own people that the illness may be coming. Borders are closing, and the Empire's delicate trade negotiations are grinding to a halt.

These travelers will happily share information with magistrates. Their tales are somewhat less wild, but no more hopeful than those of the *heimin*. In some towns in the Phoenix lands, strangers are not welcome because they might be carriers of the plague. On at least three separate occasions, small towns have killed strangers on sight, and burned their bodies in the hopes of stopping the dread disease's spread. True, such crimes are bound to result in angry ghosts haunting the lands, but there are less risks from a spirit or two than from a plague that kills everyone.

Kyuden Isawa is barricaded against travelers. Only Phoenix, highly ranked Magistrates or those under Imperial order may enter, and even then, they must show no signs at all of the plague. The shugenja within the walls of the castle are busily studying ancient manuscripts in the hopes of finding out what could have caused this great



illness. The bitter irony is that in order to stop the Darkfever, the PCs must enter Kyuden Isawa. The only source of information on the plague is likely within the walls of the fortified city.

The plague is spreading relentlessly throughout Isawa lands, though only two weeks ago, no one had ever heard of it. Most of the daimyo and samurai within Kyuden Isawa's sheltering walls are convinced the illness is not natural, that some agent or force is behind the rapidly changing and spreading disease that is killing many and leaving others driven mad.

The first sign that the Darkfever has struck an area is easy enough to see: it sickens birds before it affects humans. In the Phoenix Woodlands, the avian population has plummeted. There are no songs from the nightingales, nor raucous screams of the crows. Shiro Shiba has already suffered greatly, and even from a distance the burning bodies of victims light the evening skies.

There is only silence.

Part One: The Road North

The players either start together on the road to Kyuden Isawa, or will meet there as they all travel toward the Phoenix city. A perceptive player (Perception + Hunting or Investigation at a TN of 15) will notice that the land around them is not as it should be. The sun still shines, but there are no birds. No creatures fly in the air, nor are there any singing within the shade of the trees.

The road to Kyuden Isawa is known as the Road of the Golden Coast, and on its length lie

WRITINGS CONT.

My brother, the revered monk Rohito, feels that someone among us has offended the Fortunes. He noticed that no hint of the Darkfever made itself known before the eclipse seven days ago. I do not agree. If we had offended the Seven Fortunes, they would have told us in a different way. There would have been some warning, some omen or portent of doom. Many people, heimin, hinin and samurai, have died from this plague, and if it is not addressed with the greatest abilities at our disposal, it may destroy many more before it ends.



THE PACK

The wild dogs in the area are still in excellent health, and their strength is, surprising for their size.

The pack is hungry, and they have no fear of humans. They can and will do everything they can to kill at least one member of the group. Wild dogs tend to go for the throat and groin areas, preferring what they see as an easier kill area. There should be an equal number of dogs and PCs.

Wild Dog

Earth: 2

Fire: 2

Water: 2

Air: 2

Attacking: 2k2

Damage: 3k1 (Fangs)

TN to Hit: 15

Armor: None

Wounds: 5: -1; 12: Dead



several small, prosperous fishing villages. Roughly an hour away from Kyuden Isawa, the PCs encounter one of these small villages, and find it completely abandoned. The houses are deserted, though many of them still contain the treasures of the families who dwelled within them. In one case a meal still sits on the table, but flies and other vermin have already taken to feeding themselves. The village has been empty for at least three days.

If the players spend the time to search the village, they find a number of unusual things. The fisherman's boats are all docked, though a fire gutted one of them days ago. The shops in the area are deserted, though several still hold merchandise in open displays. Many of the perishables have already rotted or been partially eaten. Finally, at the far northern end of the town, a large pit is filled with thick, cloying ashes and faint smoke. A closer examination (being careful not to touch the ashes, of course) shows partial remains from several people who apparently died of the Darkfever. For some of the PCs, this might be a common sight. For those coming from other parts of the Emerald Empire, it should be an unsettling experience.

Further, there is a danger in the area. Despite the fact that only a week seems to have passed since the village was prospering, the local domestic animals have already gone feral. A large pack of wild dogs, far more than should be in this

village alone, roams the area. They have no fear of humans, and will attack if they are hungry enough. They've been well fed up until a few days ago; there were still a few bodies of villagers and some rotting food. Now, however, it is a different situation. If the players remain in town for long, or camp within a few miles of the area, the dogs will find an opportunity to attack. The dogs are clever animals, willing to risk themselves for hunger, but not ready to face a large group of armed humans. They will wait until one samurai is apart from the others, or until they are all sleeping, and then attack using pack tactics.

Aside from the dogs, there is nothing of use to the PCs in the town, save a few of the villagers' personal belongings. However, anyone taking these items is likely to find themselves haunted by the *goryo* (vengeful ghosts) which watch over the village. These ghosts will cause no harm unless someone attempts to steal their possessions.

Part Two: Kyuden Isawa, City of the Doomed

Kyuden Isawa is in turmoil. The walls are barricaded, and guards are posted along the walls. For half a mile around the area, villagers and commoners from all over the land are desperately trying to get inside to avoid the dreaded plague.

Several hundred of these poor souls surrounding the city walls are already suffering the disease's ill effects to one extent or another. For the PCs, this should be the first chance to see the illness in action; the sight is not pleasant.

The devastation of the small fishing village is mild in comparison to the sight outside Kyuden Isawa. Entire families waiting with all of their worldly possessions, and fighting off bandits and aggressive *heimin*, feel the opportunity has presented itself to steal from the weak and ill. Numerous fights have already erupted, sending more than one person to the fire pit before ever being touched by the plague. The makeshift fire pit crematoriums, watched and maintained by Phoenix monks from a nearby monastery, are filled to capacity. As the PCs approach, another body, that of a young girl, is thrown onto the fire.

The once beautiful gardens that lay outside the castle walls have been trampled, and whatever





fruit or nourishment that could be taken from the trees is already gone. The road has turned to mud, and ramshackle tents rest along the side of the road, housing packs of peasants. Their eyes, haunted and sunken, watch as the PCs pass. The people in the area are bitter, desperate and afraid. Those suffering from the plague are nestled near those still healthy, and the only thing stopping them from killing each other is the fear that they might lose their place in line for examination.

The gates of Kyuden Isawa are closed, but four Shiba samurai stand at the gates, examining each person who wishes entrance. Those who are healthy may be allowed in, if they can prove that they have business within the city. Those who are obviously ill are sent away, and anyone foolish enough to argue over the decision is killed outright.

The weapons of the samurai have tasted a great deal of blood recently.

Should the PCs decide to wait their turn with the *hinin*, they will have a long wait indeed. People who have already waited for a week are still expected to wait for several more days. On the other hand, samurai are not necessarily expected to be patient. Should the characters choose to 'pull rank,' they can head to the front of the line immediately, though they should expect begging voices pleading to join them from the commoners.

The gates to Kyuden Isawa rise prominently above a cliff-lined sea, and are covered in ancient runes and talismans. A long, sharp scar defaces the center of the ancient oak gates, witness to some mighty blow that once tore the city's defenses asunder (See *Code of Bushido*, the Way of the Mantis prelude).

Gaining Entry

Kyuden Isawa is, as already stated, a closed domain. Strangers are not welcomed with open arms, but formalities and tradition state that samurai must be treated with proper courtesy. For that reason, the player characters will most likely be able to enter the city. But there is a catch. Anyone suffering from the plague will not be permitted inside. It is safe to assume that most of the characters are not suffering from the Darkfever, though there might be exceptions. The PCs must have met certain conditions in order to avoid the plague. If the characters are 'clean', and if they have been sent by their lords or can swear by their Clan founders that they are present to aid the Phoenix Clan, they will be admitted. Although the samurai who guard the gate know little of the plague's origins, they have an elderly shugenja named Isawa Hujo among them who is prepared to ask the characters several probing questions about their exposure to the disease.

THE SECRET OF THE PLAGUE

The Isawa shugenja within the city know much of the plague, but not enough to trace its origin or discover its cure. They have determined that the Darkfever is mystical in origin. Almost everyone who stays in the area will come down with the plague eventually, but there are certain exceptions. The time it takes to contract the plague is long enough that none of the PCs should be showing signs, unless there is a shugenja among them.

Isawa Hujo knows that shugenja cannot contract the plague. Instead, they are carriers of the disease. If a shugenja with the PCs has performed any spells since the beginning of the adventure, there is a strong chance that at least one PC is now suffering the effects. Rather than leaving this as a random event, consider the following rules before deciding whom, if anyone, within the party is now infected:

1) How many spells did the Shugenja perform? If it was one minor spell (such as Commune or Summon), let them off the hook. If it was two or more minor spells, or one major spell, at least one person is now infected. It should be whoever was closest to the shugenja during the trip to Kyuden Isawa. If the shugenja has been going spell-happy and casting every time the wind blew the wrong way, then the entire group,

except any shugenja is now suffering. Remember, many of the spells include simple prayers for the dead, not just flashy combat attacks. Any of these prayers also count towards determining who is infected.

2) How long did the PCs take to get to Kyuden Isawa, and did they eat any of the local foods? If they took their time, there is a chance that someone has contracted the plague. If they ate the food in the fishing village, or took anything, then those who consumed the foods or stole the properties are now suffering from the plague. The only exception is, again, any shugenja, who is now a carrier.

Of course, none of the kami in the area know what is causing the disease. In fact, with the exception of the fire spirits, who are reveling in their new tasks, the kami do not understand what a plague is, or that one is occurring at all. Simply communing with the spirits of the area will gain the player characters no advantage at all.

Kyuden Isawa

Once a character has the plague, he or she will be forbidden to enter the Kyuden. Should the character protest, the samurai will be polite but firm. The first time a character becomes threatening, the samurai will do their best to remove the offender's head. This is a dangerous time at Kyuden Isawa, and the guardians of the area are very serious about stopping the infection. Should the characters decide to kill the four samurai and actually succeed, they will still find gaining entrance very difficult. Alarms will sound, and the well-trained archers on the walls will rectify the mistake of allowing the characters to breathe. This is the capital of the Phoenix Clan. While the city is not currently at its strongest, there are more than sufficient guards and warriors to ensure that any small group who tries using force to enter Kyuden Isawa will die for their foolishness.

Any attempts at apologizing and negotiation will prove futile, as one of four samurai is Isawa Rohiro, fourth son of Isawa Kujin, the governor of the city. Lack of proper discipline and etiquette will be met with deadly force. There are no exceptions.

ISAWA HUJO

Earth: 2

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Air: 3

Intelligence: 4

Void: 2

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja 2

Honor: 2.5

Glory: 1.9

Advantages: Clear Thinker

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, History 2, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu 1, Meditation 3, Shintao 2

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Heart of Nature, Amaterasu's Blessing, Blessing of Purity, Jade Strike, Sympathetic Energies.



On the other hand, if the characters accept that certain members must remain outside the gates, healthy party members will be allowed to enter Kyuden Isawa. Once inside, they will find that the people are hectic, but still willing to work with them to find a cure for the illness.

Part Three: Inside the Gate

The Kyuden is in a state of organized chaos. Shugenja throughout the area are doing everything they can to find the possible causes of the plague, and the Isawa family is almost impossible to find. However, once the authority of the characters has been announced (as magistrates of the Emerald Champion, or representatives of their respective clans), Isawa Minori (the daughter of Governor Isawa Kujin) sends a missive to the characters, asking her to meet at a public garden just outside the primary gates of the palace.

A mature, yet smiling woman, Minori looks up at the player characters from her four-foot-three-inch height. She informs them of her position and rank, and state that she is available to answer questions and lend whatever assistance she can to the PCs. What Minori will not say, but what can be gleaned by observant players (Awareness + Etiquette at a TN of 15), is that she and Rohiro are the only two members of the governor's family who have not yet contracted the plague. The Elemental Masters are not in the city, and the rest of the family is suffering through various stages of the illness.

Entry into the City

The city of Kyuden Isawa is somber and closed, many of the stores keeping shorter hours, or remaining altogether inoperable with the outbreak. Supplies and foodstuffs are limited, and even the finest inns are rationing their rice and tea. Minoru will provide a good inn for them, but unless the characters demand the rights of their rank or station, they will not be housed within the walls of the Kyuden itself.

The shugenja of the city are quiet, and many of yojimbo and bushi have taken up stations on the walls, desperate to protect the city from invaders (including the peasants who sit, fevered and dying, outside the city walls). The atmosphere is oppressively quiet, and a thin grey mist covers the city streets during the early morning hours. However, here and there, some heimin and samurai struggle to maintain a semblance of ordinary life, keeping their chins high and going about their daily business. If the characters wish to roam through the city, they will meet a few of these individuals, and may even gain some useful information.

Below is a list of the rumors PCs can learn when questioning individuals within the city:

RUMORS:

- Some of the plague victims are actually ogres and goblins in disguise; several extremely ill people have suddenly recovered, but not before transforming into monstrous shapes.
- The Darkfever came from the north, from the areas nearest the great norther mountains.
- The ogres and goblins who inhabit the mountains have grown progressively bolder and more hostile with every day. The passes leading to the Mountains of Regret have been taken by monsters, all of whom seem to be waiting for something.
- Strange sounds have been heard along the Great Wall of the North, and there is a great deal of fear that an invasion is coming.
- The plague appears to have started at the same time as a recent eclipse which covered all of the Phoenix lands, and is definitely getting worse all the time.
- No shugenja has suffered any ill effects from the plague, though many now guard the walls and do what they can to tend to the ill.



- Almost half the birds in the Phoenix Woodlands are believed dead, including several rare species that now seem to be extinct.

- The storms gathering around the entire region started near Mori Isawa, the famed Phoenix Woodlands, and remain strongest there.

- Many people feel the shugenja are responsible for this plague, and a few have made comments that burning them all alive would be a good way of appeasing the gods.

- The scene outside of Kyuden Isawa is rapidly becoming common place wherever there are protected cities. The food reserves of many cities are in danger, as the people outside the city walls are starving.

- Looting is taking place in some areas, especially where the samurai have taken ill.

The two most significant hints listed above are that the Darkfever started around the same time as the recent solar eclipse, and that the shugenja are not suffering from any ill effects. The plague did indeed start with the eclipse, and the shugenja are not suffering from the disease.

The Great Library

The shugenja and any samurai capable of reading would be wise to check the Great Library of Kyuden Isawa. Virtually every aspect of Rokugan history over the last 1,000 years is covered here. Ten centuries of careful notations made by Phoenix Clan shugenja chronicle the history of the Empire, and the history and mythology of the Phoenix Clan. If the players

wish to research the disease, the best place to do so will be here.

Unfortunately, getting into the library is quite a feat, and may take many favors and courtier tests to accomplish. Further, only the most well-mannered and respectful samurai will be allowed to enter, and even then, characters of 'disreputable families' (Scorpions and Crabs) will not be allowed inside. Anyone still dirty from their trip to the city will, of course, be completely banned, as this is a house of learning, and the scrolls are delicate. Such players may return once they have bathed, rested - and spoken to Isawa Minori.

Once the players have gained entrance (Minori cannot simply give them a free pass, as she is not a shugenja

TYPICAL SHIBA YOJIMBO

Rank 3 Shiba Bushi

Earth: 4

Fire: 2

Water: 3

Air: 3

Void: 3

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: 6k2

TN to hit: 20 (25 in armor)

Armor: Light

Wounds: 8: -1; 16: -1, etc.





herself), they may only research the disease – and they will be carefully watched as they do so. The library at Kyuden Isawa is one of the most extensive in all of Rokugan, and it won't do to have outsiders “poking where they don't belong”. Not even the threat of the plague is enough to keep the Phoenix from revealing all their secrets. Most of the shugenja in the Kyuden have been searching the histories for what may have caused the illness. None of them have yet discovered anything that comes close the devastating impact of the Darkfever.

The library is massive, with scrolls and documents covering almost every blank space along the walls. The older, more delicate scrolls are kept in great drawers to protect them from accidental disasters.

In most cases the library is a quiet place of meditation and tranquility. That is not the way it is during the plague. Literally hundreds of scrolls have been perused and hastily set aside by shugenja eager to find the cause or any hint of similar disasters in the past. In the desperate rush for clues, the scrolls have been left in the open. Several are already damaged.

Along parts of the floor, tatami mats have been set out for the shugenja to use as temporary beds. Many of the scholars have read themselves into exhaustion and either rest where they were reading or take advantage of the mats. Those still standing are often either carefully going over passages or arguing over the importance of past events. All pretenses of order and manners are gone. The people here are tired and frustrated.

The players will most likely meet with Isawa Hoju again, freed of his duties at the gate in order to continue his research. He will be willing to assist the characters, and will show them the many records and scrolls which bear trace of such a disease in the past. Hoju tells the characters that the Isawa shugenja have discovered certain things about the Darkfever, and can explain what little they know about the plague and its symptoms. He will also introduce them to his three research companions, Asako Ijun, Isawa Rohisei, and Isawa Buko.

If the players disrupt the library, or cause trouble for the shugenja researching here, they will be quickly dealt with by the ever-vigilant Shiba yojimbo.

THE PLAGUE'S PROGRESSION

The simplest information to discover (which can be picked up either by investigating the rumors in the city, or through study of the scrolls in the Isawa Library) is the physical nature and probable progression of the Darkfever.

The plague started in Shiro Shiba. It was initially spread there and elsewhere by a shugenja who had come into town for supplies. Unfortunately, no one knows that a shugenja passed the disease on. Many people come through Shiro Shiba on a day to day basis, stopping briefly and moving on. Unless someone was actively looking for the source of trouble, they'd never know the truth of the matter.

Within a day of the stranger's passing, the first symptoms began to show themselves. First came an aching in the joints and a slight fever. Shortly after many of the samurai in Shiro Shiba began to show signs of this 'flu', literally hundreds of birds in the nearby fields and forests fell dead from the trees. By the time these first signs had come, over fifty people had left the area to return to their homes or continue their travels. Each of these people carried the plague, but most did not have the ability to transmit it.

The Darkfever got worse when the afflicted people turned to their local shugenja for aid, asking for prayers in their names and even remedies in some cases. When the shugenja tried to help, they triggered the plague within themselves, and became carriers of the disease. Nearly everyone they came into contact with became infected.

When they moved on, or sought help from other shugenja, the plague came with them. There was no warning. It seemed as if the very air had suddenly gone bad in the entire area, and in truth, it had. (Those familiar with the Shadowlands might notice, with an Intelligence + Shadowlands Lore roll at TN 15 that the air in smells strangely foul, similar to the air near the Shadowlands.)

The Phoenix shugenja noticed that something was wrong, and did what they were trained to do: they tried to find the source of the trouble by consulting the spirits. All they got was a greater infection rate, and more people suffering from the plague. The worst spreading of the illness likely came as a result of the shugenja trying to warn other towns of the danger. Seemingly unaffected by the plague, the shugenja were the natural choice to travel to the next town or village and



warn the *heimin*. Many of them also went to temples and places of learning to see if they could find anything in the records of the past that would hint at the cause of the mysterious illness.

THE SYMPTOMS OF DARKFEVER

- The first stage of the plague is felt as stiffness in the joints, with a slight fever.
- The second stage is a very definite fever, leading to dehydration and mild delirium. Many people claim to see a strange corpse-like figure clawing its way toward them, laughing and reveling. In the dream, the flesh of the dreamers pulls from their bodies and weaves itself onto the corpse, which looks healthier in later dreams.

- In the third incarnation, the plague attacks its host with a terrible weakness. Strong and hearty men were suddenly reduced to kitten's strength, unable to lift even the lightest objects. A persistent cough and scratchiness in the throat follow the weakness. To make matters worse, the skin of the plague victims develops red markings. These welts form randomly, and look like the trails left by snakes as they move across sand or loose soil.

- Fourth, victims of the plague are subject to painful cramps, vomiting and diarrhea. Additionally, the eyes are forced closed by swelling of the membranes around the tear ducts. The tongue also swells painfully, making it almost impossible for a person to eat, drink or speak.



NIMATSU MACHI (TWO PINES TOWN)

It is important to note that one of the truths about the Oni no Kuzushi is well-hidden. The scroll the players find says the Oni destroyed the entire region where he was first released, and that is true. The dead trees around Mori Kuroi stand in silent truth to that fact. However, the greatest devastations he is known for did not, in fact, occur at the ancient castle. They happened in a town that no longer exists even as a memory. The atrocities committed there were so extensive that the written records have been banned and most have been destroyed.

The most elderly Phoenix Clan historians (mostly Asako) have heard rumors of a town in the woods that suffered from Oni no Kuzushi's assault, but only a very few could remember that the name of the abandoned place was Nimatsu Machi. The Phoenix accept that there are certain places in the massive forest that are best avoided. The *goryo* which haunt the area are well known for their hatred of the living, and for their ravenous taste for blood.

Many of the younger or frailer people die during this stage. Most of the strong and well fed survive.

- The fifth stage of the plague is often fatal, as people are consumed by a terrible fever. Most have lost consciousness by this time, and whatever their fevered minds are showing them is too terrifying for them to handle. Many moan

and scream in their sleep; others have their hair turn white, even as they are boiled alive by the fever. Skin cracks and blisters, leaving the person covered in open sores. Those who do not die during the Fifth Stage are considered blessed; though many remain in a heavy slumber, they seem to get a little better each day.

- The sixth stage of the plague is perhaps the worst both physically and emotionally. It normally happens just as a person is starting to actually look and feel as if the worst is over. The skin on the victim grows very thin, and the body loses most of its natural fats and oily secretions. Harsh, scabrous areas cover the eyes, mouth and sores, and many of the victims writhe in pain, even when they are asleep. The fever that has consumed the body fades, leaving the person constantly chilled and often as much as thirty pounds lighter than when the fever first struck. Only the heartiest victims (Willpower or Stamina of 3 or greater) survive this stage.

- The seventh stage of the plague has not yet been seen when the adventure begins. However, by the end of the PCs' mission, it will have begun for many victims. With their bodies wracked by pain and a feverish delirium, the victims of the seventh stage simply go berserk. They are no longer capable of rational thought, and whatever they see in their dreams has placed the need to escape their presumed fate at any cost. Their eyes bulge in their sockets and their teeth are bared in feral screams of fear. Most show unnatural strength; their skin, already blistered and torn, peels away from their muscles like parchment paper. Though they are most certainly in agony, they will do anything they can to be away from where they are. If restrained, they will chew through their bonds or their own limbs. If held back by a person they will attack. If left alone, they will run blindly, tripping over anything in their way until they either break their bones or simply expire from exhaustion. The rumors that some of the victims have become goblins and ogres are brought on by this last stage, which has already



begun to occur in some of the farthest areas to the north.

After the seventh stage has erupted, several people claim they have seen the victims of the disease rise from their deathbeds, to feed on anyone who remains healthy. There is no proof of this, but few people are willing to take the risk. Many cry out against this improper treatment of the dead, but there is simply too much death and too many corpses for anyone to handle the matter differently. In some places, when a shugenja can be spared, they are still performing the proper funeral rites before throwing the bodies of the dead into the pyres.

THE HIDDEN SCROLL

Among the thousands of scrolls recorded in the Great Library is a clue to the secret of the plague. The problem is simply that the three primary shugenja who have been studying the texts are no longer capable of making the connection. They have absorbed so much information that the facts are no longer clear.

Any character may attempt to discover the truth by reading the scrolls (Intelligence + Calligraphy at a TN of 15) and by knowing what to look for. If the PCs specifically say they're going to look into the eclipses of the past, then there is no roll required. After several hours of studying the scrolls, they will find the most probable answer to the dilemma.

If, on the other hand, the characters simply wish to look over the history of diseases in the area, they will spend fruitless hours only to locate nothing. If, while looking through the history of the region, they succeed in an Intelligence + History roll, at a TN 25, the same documents can be found. A character with knowledge of the Shadowlands will also have an easier time (TN 20), and can substitute an Intelligence + Shadowlands Lore roll instead.

The secret documentation is well hidden, but by working with the knowledge they have already gained, and using that knowledge in conjunction with the library, the characters can find the truth. What to do about the situation is an entirely different story.

A successful player will find a single scroll, on a dusty and secluded shelf far in the back of the library, describing what happened in the past, during a similar eclipse. It is possible, even probable that a similar cause is responsible for the disease currently devastating the Phoenix

Lands. The key factors are there, but no one has put them together yet. The document is dated some two hundred years in the past, and is a simple enough case to follow if one knows where to look.


THE LEGEND

Two hundred years ago, the histories say, a shugenja named Isawa Kuzushi traveled from his family's home and disappeared from the face of the Emerald Empire. A brief time later, a terrible Oni escaped from the Shadowlands and brought havoc to the Phoenix Clan. The Oni first manifested at Mori Isawa. That legend, passed down for so long, is only partially true. In fact, Kuzushi himself summoned the Oni in a quest for revenge. The scroll found by the characters reveals the true details of the summoning and the terrible repercussions which followed.

Isawa Kuzushi is remembered with hatred and shame in Isawa history. He was a powerful shugenja and considered wise beyond his years. The scandals that surrounded him in the distant past insure that speaking of him to the Isawa family invites disaster. Kuzushi had a reputation for decadence in his time, and many believed he was dealing with Oni and other foul creatures on a regular basis. His reputation eventually became well-known, and though the allegations could not be proven, he was very quietly ordered from the family home: banished in order to avoid scandal.

Angry at the perceived betrayal, he vowed revenge upon the Phoenix Clan. In a hidden manor house named Mori Kuroi, deep within the Isawa woodlands, he began a terrible ceremony to summon an Oni from the deepest pits of Jigoku – one who could help him exact revenge upon his former family. The summoning ceremony coincided with an eclipse – identical in nature to the one which marked the beginning of the current plague. The oni agreed to help him and taught him all manner of black magic: power he never imagined possible.

From there, he eventually made his way to the lands south of Mori Isawa, where he lied about his past and coerced his way into the Shiba family's trust. He was to preside over the wedding of Shiba Tsatsura and his betrothed, Asako Reiha. The wedding never came to pass. Kuzushi felt a passion for Reiha that was powerful enough to make him work his subtle magics against Shiba Tsatsuro. Using the tricks he'd learned from the Oni, he convinced Tsatsuro that his bride to be



IN THE ISAWA WOODLANDS

In the Isawa Woodlands few things are as they seem. It is a mythical place, filled with spirited *kami*, shadowy *mujina* and *hengoyokai* (shape-shifters). There is a specific side-adventure that waits for the players in the Woodlands.

To the side of the road, off near a clearing where the characters may camp for the evening, a large, bulbous tree grows. Its trunk is deformed, with three large lumps the size of children. Any shugenja who communes with the spirits here will find none.

Deep within the twisted branches of the tree, above the characters' normal viewpoint, a jade katana has been buried into the tree, splitting the trunk. It has been there for many years, and the tree branches have grown around it.

If the sword is freed, (Strength at TN 15) the tree will groan, the bulbous areas bursting open as captive Earth kami within the tree are released. The kami will tell a tale of a *mujina* who tricked them into the tree and then sealed it with the sword (their most prized possession). In gratitude, they give the sword to the character who freed them.

The sword's name is *Urusai*, 'noisy', for its unusual property of whistling in the air as it is swung. It is 4k2, with the additional properties of jade.



TROUBLES AND TRIBULATIONS

Shugenja entering the area within five miles of Mori Kuroi will soon discover a serious problem: their magic does not work the way it is supposed to. The

TN to use any spells increases by +5 for each mile they get closer to the castle, and an additional +5 when they reach their destination. Metaphysically, there are simply no kami in the

area to call. They're all scared out of their wits, and unwilling to come any closer. That means that by the time the shugenja is at the manor house, the TN has increased by +30. There is a very real reason that the area was abandoned 200 years ago, and the accidental release of Oni no

Kuzushi is only part of the blight that now dwells there. The curse laid on the castle remains even today, and the current supernatural storm is making the use of any spells even more difficult.

was unfaithful, and even convinced the man to make the claim in public, which led to the Asako family losing face as the wedding vows were broken on the very night before the marriage.

The shame was great, and Reiha committed seppuku in order to save face for her family. It was only later that the duplicity was discovered and made public by Reiha's oldest brother. Kuzushi was banished from the holdings of the Shiba family. Were it not for the lack of solid evidence, he would surely have been killed.

Despite his long association with the Oni, Kuzushi was not completely corrupted. He had not intended for Reiha to die; in fact, he had hoped to ask for her hand once the wedding was called off. Kuzushi had, at last, realized that his Oni 'advisor' was only destroying his life. The scrolls covering the incident are very clear on this matter, and some were even written by Kuzushi himself.

Realizing what he had lost and what his misplaced ambition had cost him, Kuzushi tried to purge the darkness in his soul. On a dark night, in the midst of a howling thunderstorm, he tried to force his supernatural advisor back into the Shadowlands. Instead, in his pride and naivete, he set the creature loose. The now-free oni tore his body to shreds, and sent his wretched soul deep into Jigoku. The beast, now known as the Oni no Kuzushi, launched upon an orgy of destruction. In its fury, it destroyed several Shiba outposts and a town within Mori Isawa (see sidebar, p. 16) before finally being banished. Mori Kuroi, the lodge where it was first summoned, became blackened and salted with blood as the monster was dragged back into the Shadowlands. It remains abandoned to this day.

THE TRUTH

All of this is detailed in the scroll the players find. Strangely enough, the more recent eclipse was centered over Mori Kuroi, just as the earlier one was. All of the information is there, but no one has yet looked at the papers and come close to drawing the proper conclusion. With the characters' discovery, that may change.

If the PCs fail to make the connection, they may have to speak again to Isawa Hoiju, the shugenja who helped them once before. If he is informed of what they have found, he can help them with one more piece of information. Three weeks before the most recent eclipse, a young, ambitious shugenja named Isawa Aruka headed

toward Mori Kuroi, seeking knowledge from the ruins. Aruka claimed that the building held a hidden library, still intact after all these decades, was revealed to him in dreams. He used the library at Kyuden Isawa to verify the tale, but finding nothing, he decided to directly investigate. He went seeking knowledge at the cursed lodge, only three weeks before the eclipse. He has not been seen since.

The storms that continue to build are very plainly centered over Mori Isawa. There shouldn't be a need for a roll, but if the PCs don't catch on, an Intelligence + Shadowlands Lore roll, with a TN of 10, or an Intelligence + Investigation roll, with a TN of 15 should aid them in comprehending the facts. The TN should be reduced by -5 for any members of the Isawa or Asako family.

In order to get to the bottom of the Darkfever and possibly to find a cure, the PCs must travel to Mori Kuroi.



As much as the Isawa family would love to send extra people to help the party, they simply cannot. There are too many victims of the plague, and far too few samurai capable of defending Kyuden Isawa. However, it is safe to assume that any bushi or shugenja who make the journey to the haunted lodge will be well thought of by the Phoenix, especially if they can bring an end to the Darkfever. Ronin, in particular, should take note – there is a very good chance that success might prove their worth enough to be offered a permanent position within the Clan.

Though Mori Isawa is an enchanted forest, filled with exuberant spirits and kami of all shapes and sizes, the way to the lodge is still easy to discover. The trek should take no more than two days with strong steeds, at least in theory. The



two days with strong steeds, at least in theory. The truth looks much grimmer. The blackened land which begins at the northern edge of Mori Isawa is a stark contrast to the greenery and abundant life which is the norm within the forest. Twisted trees, foul odors and dead grasses span a five-mile section of earth, and from the center, near a yellow and thickened river, stands a decaying manor house.

As the players enter the area, the road quickly becomes rotted, filled with holes and rocks, and their horses must slow to a walk, or break their legs on the uneven earth. Further, the ghosts of all who have died there over the centuries haunt the road to the abandoned castle, moving in the mist that rises from pockets of gas beneath the ground. Though the ghosts are frightening, they can actually cause no harm. The Game Master is encouraged to use them for atmosphere, and to tell the story of the wasted land.

The true danger comes from the storms which rage over Mori Kuroi (the northern forest's true name). The closer one gets to the manor house,

the more severe the storms become. Hideously powerful winds sway the barren trees along the way, and the rains are hard enough to make even the rare parts of the road that are still level treacherous. By the time they reach the building, the winds are close to hurricane force. Were the trees around Mori Kuroi not already denuded and dead, they would be stripped bare by the time the PCs arrive. Characters who continue to ride their mounts must successfully roll Agility + Horsemanship three times during the trip, or risk serious injury. The TN for the needed roll increases in difficulty each time: The first roll is only a TN of 10, the second is against a TN of 15, and the third is against a TN of 25.

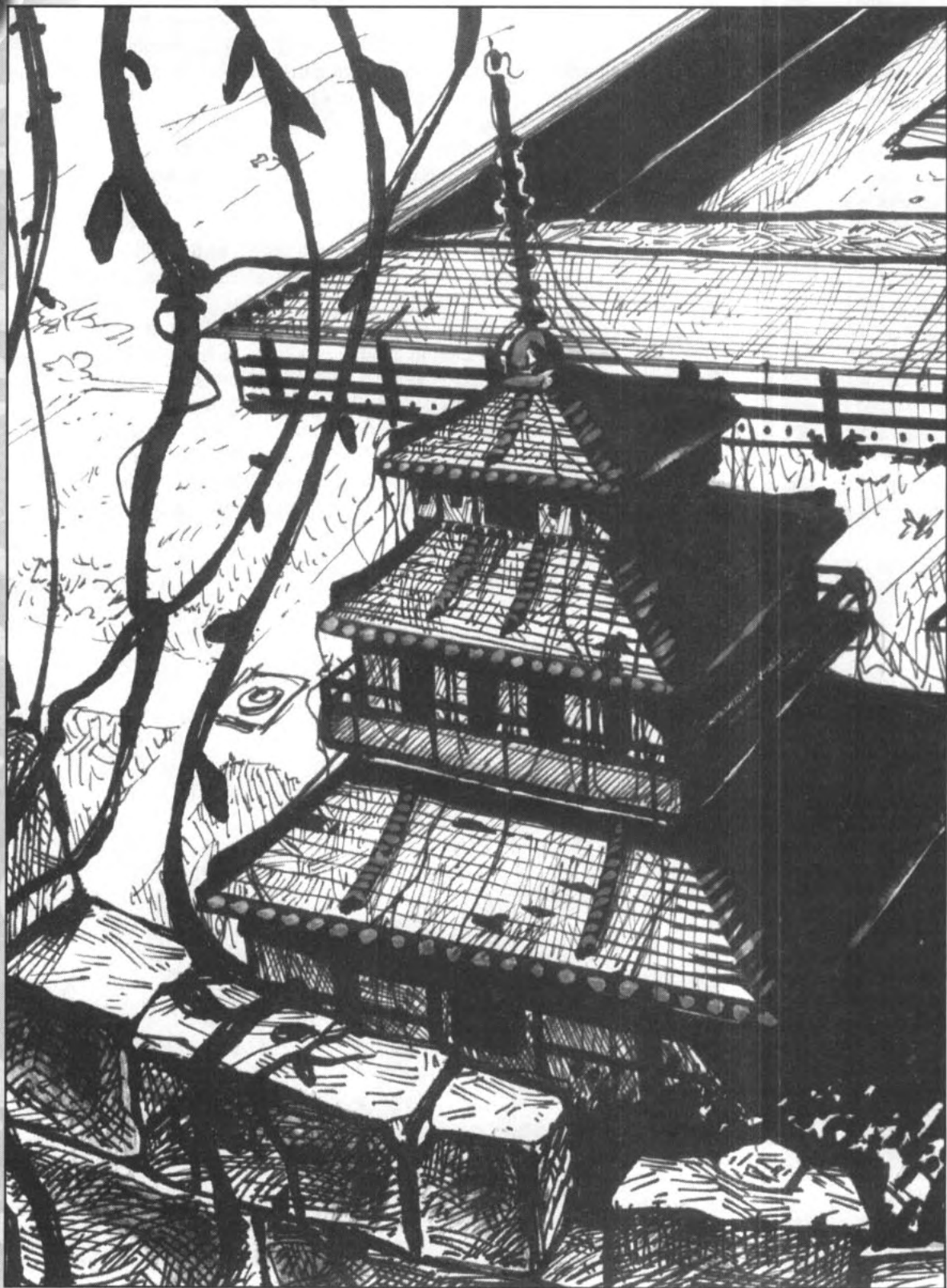
Failure means the winds get the better of the rider and his mount, knocking the horse down and likely breaking one of the animal's limbs. It's important to note that a rider may be the most skilled in the land and still have serious difficulties under these conditions. The winds rush randomly from different directions, and the horses all grow more skittish and harder to

TROUBLES AND TRIBULATIONS (CONT.)

Lastly, each time a shugenja attempts to cast a spell in the area, the symptoms of the Darkfever grow worse. Areas in the Phoenix lands where the second stage of the plague was beginning to manifest will suddenly find that the third stage is now prevalent. In the areas where the sixth stage was beginning to show itself, the seventh stage begins to manifest for the first time. Any PCs suffering from the plague will immediately move to the next stage of the disease, and for the first time the connection between the shugenja and the plague is clearly noticeable. Further, energies will erupt from the castle, crackling like lightning and engulfing the casting shugenja. Leaping from one to the next, it will divide itself among the nearby plague victims, and vanish. Any PCs who were free of the plague will immediately begin suffering the first stages.

If any of the characters are watching, (Perception + Investigation at TN 10) they can see the lightning spread across the entire region, fading as it travels. The spread of the plague is only visible in close proximity to Mori Kuroi. The casting shugenja remains unaffected by the plague, though it should be painfully obvious that casting any more spells is a bad idea.





control as they get closer to the castle. The best thing to do is simply dismount and carefully walk the horses along the final length of track.

Something evil is growing within Mori Kuroi.



Part Five: The Heart of Mori Kuroi

The manor is in remarkable shape, especially considering that it has been abandoned for 200 years. The stone is black from years of neglect, but aside from a few small areas, the structure remains mostly intact. That, however, is not what the characters are likely to notice first. They'll probably notice the light that spills from the windows, a sickly green pulsing with the regularity of a beating heart.

Once within the courtyard (the wooden gates have long since fallen to age), the PCs can see that the energies flow not out from the castle, but into it from the surrounding areas. The sounds of screaming voices can be heard faintly within the greenish energies that move like mist toward Mori Kuroi. The spirits of the plague victims are being drawn to the house; once they reach the accursed location, they are visible and audible. All of these suffering ghosts are being dragged from their recently dead corpses, pulled into the heart of Mori Kuroi.

There are no guards around the building, nor are there any traps prepared to stop interlopers from interfering. Whatever is happening within the castle was unexpected. But the source of the Darkfever has been waiting for a very long time...

ISAWA KUZUSHI

For 200 years, the twisted soul of Isawa Kuzushi has been held in torture by the Oni, altered and warped in ways far beyond human

comprehension. His eternal punishment was assured when he foolishly attempted to kill the beast after the disaster at Mori Kuroi. While his intentions may have been the best, his failure cost him his name, his body and his soul. For two centuries Kuzushi has been the plaything of the Beast, but now he has gained his chance at freedom.

After Oni no Kuzushi grew bored with its plaything, it agreed to allow him his freedom in exchange for one hundred souls for each year of his imprisonment. The catch was that he would have to gather the souls and deliver them before he would be freed. Despite the torture inflicted on him, Kuzushi continued to learn, and to weave his *maho* spells. Despite the fact that he has been a prisoner, he has managed to grow in power. Finally, only a few weeks before the second (most recent) eclipse, Kuzushi managed to reach out with his consciousness and make contact with one of his descendants: a young man named Isawa Aruka.

Aruka, much like his ancestor, became interested in the powers of Oni and *maho*, especially after several occasions where he felt slighted by his uncle, Isawa Tadaka, and by the other Elemental Masters of the Phoenix Clan. He never went as far as Kuzushi, because he lacked the guts to carry through his ambitions. But when Kuzushi sent him dreams of a hidden library and the dark lore there, the young shugenja fell into his ancestor's trap.

Aruka traveled to Mori Kuroi and found what he believed to be the answer to his dreams of power. Among the broken walls and crumbling scrollcases, he found a copy of a single *maho* spell. Eager to enslave an Oni, and far too naive to know the price, the shugenja left the castle long enough to travel back to Shiro Shiba and steal a child for the required sacrifice. Then, he returned to the castle to perform the rite. Akura was the first carrier of the Darkfever disease.

What he did not know about the Oni far exceeded what he did possess, and his ancestor used that ignorance to advantage. Knowing that the defeated kami around Mori Kuroi would warp the spell's intent, Kuzushi used his growing powers to change the spell effects. Rather than summoning an Oni with the ritual, Aruka opened a gateway to Jigoku long enough for the altered spirit of Isawa Kuzushi to forge a link between their minds. That link has grown stronger with each passing day.



ISAWA AUKA

Earth: 4

Fire: 3

Water: 2

Air: 4

Void: 2

Attacking: None

Damage: None

TN to hit: None

Armor: None, but any weapons used must be either magical or composed of jade.

Wounds: 8: -1; 40: Dead

Aruka is effectively 'dead'. All of his knowledge of the occult is useless. He cannot cast spells, but he can use his powers and abilities within the palace. He is essentially a multiple-personality Oni, and he alternately screams for help, and howls his rage and frustration to the world. When he is 'Akura', his eyes turn blue, but when he is 'Kuzushi', they are as green and glowing as the energy around Mori Kuroi.



Kuzushi now uses that link to “infect” the shugenja with a connection to himself in his otherworldly prison. Each shugenja who came into contact with his descendant became infected with the Darkfever, a link in a growing spider’s web. Those shugenja, in turn, spread subtle filaments of the web to everyone around them with every spell they cast. The Darkfever has not actually been causing the illness. The plague has no ability to spread itself. Instead, the illness is merely the visible effects of a spell that is draining the life from every person who has come in contact with any of the ‘carrier’ shugenja.

Those who have died by the Darkfever are but the first of the 200,000 souls that Isawa Kuzushi must deliver in order to gain his freedom. The worst part is this: every spell cast in the region makes the connection between Kuzushi, his descendant Aruka, and all of the infected shugenja stronger. The more shugenja who attempt to cure the ill, the worse the situation becomes. It is only a matter of days before Kuzushi gains his freedom. His long imprisonment has warped and corrupted him, so much that he no longer resembles anything human. Kuzushi is very powerful, almost a match for the Oni he once summoned. Should the PCs fail to accomplish their goal, a new Oni will gain entry to the Emerald Empire, bringing with him a powerful, if unjust, desire for revenge against the entire Phoenix Clan.

Should Kuzushi be released, the air above the manorhouse will change, growing to match the tainted atmosphere of the Shadowlands. In fact, it’s very likely that the entire region will suffer the same sort of permanent blight that has long since ruined the Shadowlands for human and animals alike. A second gathering place for the Oni would suit Fu Leng nicely, and the characters are all that stands between the creation of another tainted realm and the security of the Emerald Empire.

Part Six: Greetings from Jigoku

Should the characters, for whatever reason, decide to look throughout the entire castle, all they will find is dust and the occasional bit of debris. The only area of importance is the library where Isawa Aruka’s body now lies. The trails of energy flowing into the castle are a perfect guideline to the place, and the party should have no trouble following them.

At the center of the castle is a concealed door that now stands open. The small room would normally only be noticeable only to someone with knowledge of the castle’s layout, but now it simply can’t be missed. The floor in the area is blackened and partially glazed with heat and strange stone. A circle of salt on the ground has been broken, and the body of Isawa Aruka floats above the center of the circle. The form twitches and moves constantly as the energies pouring into the room are drawn to its open mouth and eyes. As the PCs come close, its head turns to face them. Should they continue, the form shifts until it is standing in the air and facing them completely.

A young boy’s body, no older than twelve, lies crumpled on the side of the room, his blood creeping out in a pool around the circle as if to complete its circumference.

Isawa Aruka no longer looks human, though his form is still vaguely anthropomorphic. His body has changed, bloating with the power it now holds, and resembles a storm cloud given human form. In fact, tendrils of the body’s mass can be seen stretching away from it, feeding the raging storm outside the castle itself.

The creature is extremely impressive, but utterly powerless for the time being. The best laid plans can go awry, and in this case the last thing Isawa Kuzushi anticipated was anyone coming to



REWARDS

Should the PCs succeed in their mission, they will gain great Honor with the Phoenix Clan. The end results of their success are left entirely in the hands of the Game Master.

the cursed remains of Mori Kuroi. That's the good news. The bad news is that only a powerful spell, an enchanted weapon, or a jade weapon can hurt the Oni Lord forcing its way into Rokugan. Powerful spells won't work unless the shugenja attempting them rolls very well indeed. The TN for any spell cast here is the normal difficulty + 30. Also, any spell cast here immediately increases the dangers of the Darkfever haunting the land. If none of the characters brought a weapon capable of managing the feat of killing the Oni-to-be, then the character with *Urusai* (the sword from the Isawa Woodlands, see the sidebar on page 17) should be encouraged to attack *Urusai*. A jade weapon does normal damage against *Kuzushi/Aruka*.

Sealing Kuzushi's Gate

Shugenja in the party are not completely powerless. While any spell attempted suffers an extreme penalty (and horrible after-effects), there is the possibility of an attempted exorcism. A successful Intelligence + Shadowlands Lore roll with a TN of 20 should allow the character to guess that the connection the shugenja have with Isawa Aruka is a strong one. The Oni-thing in the broken circle will gibber and babble as they approach, calling itself alternately *Kuzushi*, and *Aruka*. If the character's roll succeeds, he understands the



nature of the possession, and can make assumptions based on that lore.

The only way to free Aruka is to destroy the soul within him without destroying the body. Destroying the link will also remove any semblance of the Darkfever that the remaining PCs are suffering from, and allow the rest of the Phoenix lands to slowly heal themselves. Only individuals suffering under the effects of stage five or worse will die. No new outbreaks of the Darkfever will occur, and those who were able to remain alive (and are at stage four or better) through its horrible ravages will regain their health over a matter of weeks.

Should the PCs successfully attack Kuzushi/Aruka and kill him, the effects are immediate. Destroying the body before the sacrifice is completed ruins Kuzushi's one chance at freedom. With his destruction, the plague, the storm and the threat of a second Shadowlands forming end immediately. While the people of the Phoenix Lands will remain weakened for some time, the danger ends with the death of the foolish shugenja.

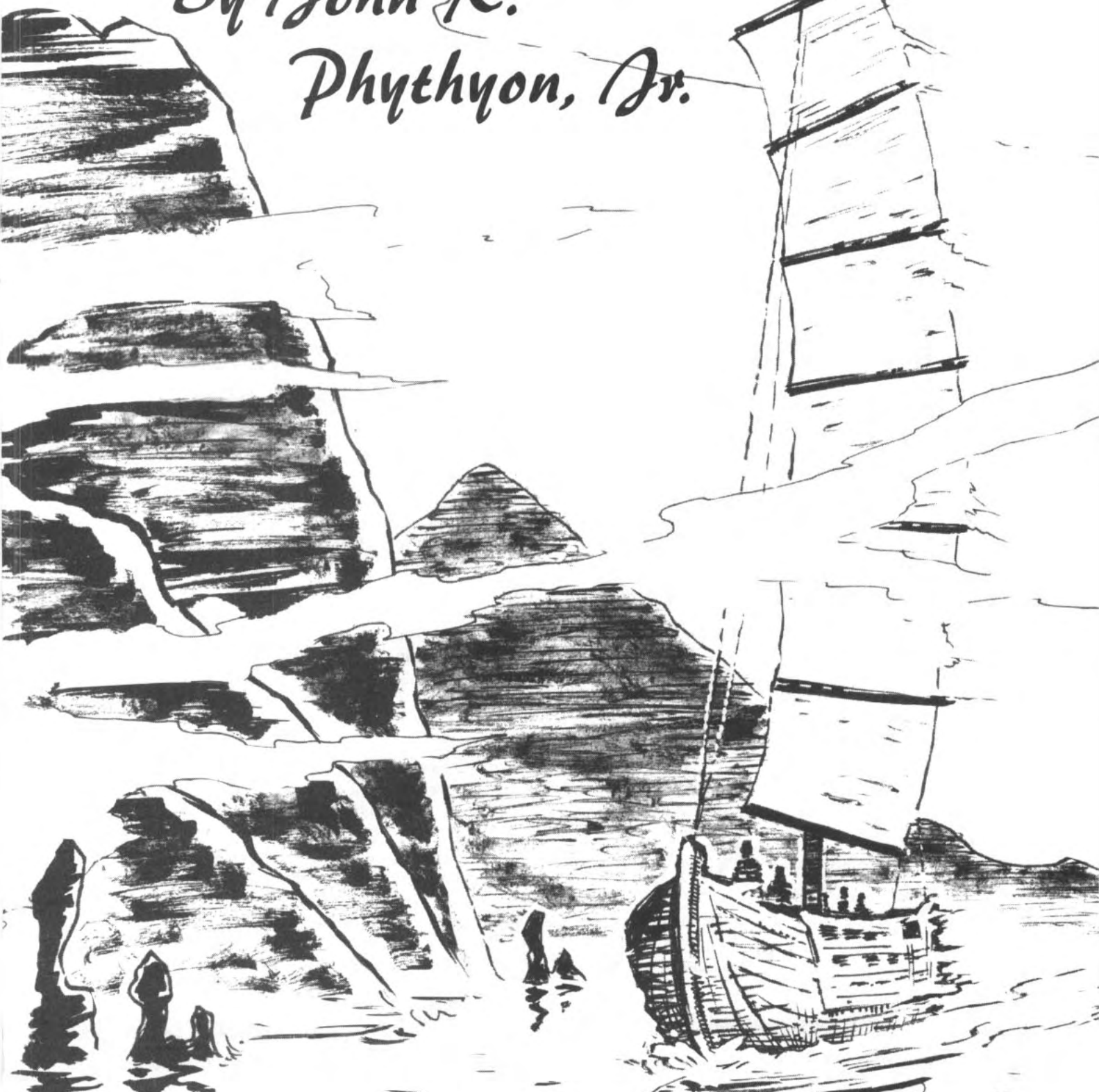
Failing to eliminate Aruka means that the death of thousands will occur, and the entire region will fall to darkness.



The Lost Sword of Doji Yasurugi

By John R.

Phythyon, Jr.





THE LOST SWORD OF DOJI YASURUGI

The legend of the lost sword which was forged by

Lady Doji's first son, Yasurugi, is an ancient one. It is covered in detail in *The*

Way of the Crane, on page

25. Simply put, only five of

these great blades exist –

the Emperor's personal

blade, the Doji Ancestral

blade, and two others, kept

as prized treasures of the

Doji house. The fifth blade,

in the legend is named

'*Chukandomo*' (middle-

child), and was the third

sword forged. It was

whispered that the sword

was to be presented by Doji

Yasurugi to the Lion, in

order to seal the hatred that

had already begun between

the two clans.

However, as it was being

taken up the coast to the

Emperor's palace, a great

storm arose, sinking the

ship and all who sailed with

it.

Chukandomo was

forever lost; or so the

Emerald Empire thought.

Recently, a Mantis pearl

diver found a strange coral

formation which appeared

to be an ancient, sunken

ship. If this is true, than

perhaps the sword could be

recovered from its watery

grave. Crane samurai may

begin the adventure with a

single Awareness roll at a

TN of 20 to have heard this

rumor among the sea-faring

villagers of his land.



For the past two years, the shipping lanes between the Crane and the Mantis have been harassed by pirates. It's always been a problem, but the pirates never attacked too frequently, and they were mainly a thorn in the side of the two clans.

Things have changed.

For the past two months, the attacks have increased to an alarming rate. Nearly every ship that passes between Shima no Kinu (the Island of Silk) and Shima no Koshinryo (the Island of Spice) – areas 151 and 152 on the map of Rokugan – is attacked and sunk, its cargo of spices, silks, pearls, gold, and other valuables lost to the sea and the pirates who sail it.

This has proved a major inconvenience for the Crane, as their trade with the Mantis is a valuable source of silk and spices. However, it is far worse for the Mantis. They are losing large quantities of their chief exports, and the Crane are their primary trade partner. The lost shipments and the koku with which they are bought is threatening to cause an economic crisis for the minor clan. The Crane and Mantis both have beefed up security, but to virtually no effect. The attacks and the sinkings continue unabated.

Faced with financial ruin, the Mantis daimyo, Yoritomo, has formally requested that the Empire look into the matter. The Emperor has agreed, assigning the PCs to investigate the matter and put a stop to the piracy.

Synopsis

This adventure assumes that the characters are Magistrates working for the Emperor. If they are not, have them hired, instead, by Yoritomo to

investigate the matter on his personal authority (thereby making them temporary Magistrates for the Mantis Clan). The adventure begins with the characters arriving at Kyuden Mantis (*L5R RPG*, page 245), the Mantis Clan stronghold. There they meet with Yoritomo, getting the facts of the case. From there they are free to investigate the piracy in any manner they see fit.

Once it is learned that the Emperor has sent Magistrates to investigate the matter, Matsu Shindoku (see below) marshals his forces and to impede the investigation. He first attempts to pin the piracy on the Crane, and failing that, attacks the Magistrates outright, hoping to kill them and pin that on the Crane.

The PCs must survive Shindoku's machinations and learn the truth about what is really happening. Once they discover that the recent attacks are not the work of pirates but of *yorei* (see "What's Really Going On" below), they must attempt to set the matter to rights by appeasing the ghosts. If they can catch Shindoku in his seditious acts, they can also solve a great problem for the Crane Clan and win themselves some Honor and Glory.

What's Really Going On

Matsu Shindoku is responsible for the pirates harassing the shipping lanes between the Crane and Mantis. He hired them a few years ago as part of a long term scheme to bring down the Crane. However, he is not responsible for the more recent escalation in these attacks, at least not directly.

The Mantis discovered the fabled Sword of Doji Yasurugi, lost in the ocean hundreds of years ago. It was found by a pearl diver off the Island of Spice. The village headman reported the incident to his local *yoriki* who turned the blade over to his daimyo. After doing some research, Yoritomo realized that this was indeed one of the five blades of Yasurugi, the one which had been lost to the ocean.

Yoritomo decided to present it to Doji Hoturi, the Doji Family daimyo, as a gift which he hoped would increase his Clan's Glory by both recovering the blade and returning it to its rightful owner, the Doji family. He assigned a



detachment of his best samurai to deliver the sword to Doji Hoturi.

However, the ship was attacked and sunk by Shindoku's pirates, who killed the samurai and stole the sword. The Mantis samurai, shamed by their failure to protect such a valuable gift and to execute important orders from their daimyo, have become *yorei* (ghosts). The ghosts of these samurai are attacking and sinking anything that comes through the passage, and will not rest until things are set right and their souls are at peace.

Running the Adventure

The Lost Sword of Doji Yasurugi contains two mysteries in one scenario. The mundane problem is discovering who is behind the original piracy plaguing the shipping lanes, and putting a stop to it. However, there is also a supernatural mystery to the adventure; figuring out that the *yorei* (ghosts) of the Mantis sailors are responsible for many of the most recent attacks, and discovering how to bring the *yoriki* to rest. Giving the players the impression that they are here to solve a more or less routine mystery, and then having it make a sharp left turn into a supernatural thriller is what will make the adventure work.

The adventure is designed to allow you to lead the players down a garden path of intrigue before scaring them with darker threats. After all, any player with Shadowlands Lore should know that a man killed by a *yorei* becomes a *yorei*, his spirit forever wandering. Over the course of the adventure, things should start to get creepier until the characters are embroiled in a full-scale horror film.

The theme of *Lost Sword* is an study into the darkness of dishonor. The character of Ikuko, the ronin, should present the characters with a vision of what happens to dishonored samurai. Her dishonored status makes her a perfect fall guy for Shindoku's machinations. Shindoku himself is engaging in extremely dishonorable behavior motivated by his hatred of the Crane. It is his scheming that is responsible for the creation of the ghosts which wreak greater havoc than he could have imagined and threaten to upset his plans. Were it not for the *yorei*, the PCs would not be here investigating the matter which could uncover his secrets.

HORROR vs. TERROR

There are two schools for scaring an audience in a film or novel: horror and terror. Terror is a method of confronting the audience with something frightening. You get in their face and show them something really scary. You may even use graphic depictions of violence or the supernatural. The idea is to shock them into a good scare. With horror, the idea is to *disturb* the audience. You give them the creeps by building tension, suggesting that something is wrong, and giving them an overwhelming sense of dread. When running this adventure, you want to use the latter method.

The idea is to make the characters fear what may be out there. You want them to be afraid of the dark, of the monster that could be lurking in the closet. You don't want to show them the monster, at least not until the end. You want them to fear that at any moment, they could turn around and it will be there. Give your characters, and hopefully the players, a case of the 'willies.'

One of the best examples of this technique is the movie *Jaws*. The scariest moments in that film are when you think the shark might be coming. You hear the evil music. You get the underwater camera showing you the dangling legs of the swimmers. You fear that at any moment, the attack will come. And when it does, you don't see the shark leap up out of the water and graphically tear some hapless swimmer in half. There's a struggle, the person is pulled under the water, and blood comes bubbling up. That is much more frightening than the final battle at the end when you can see the shark attacking because then you know where the attack is coming from.

Throughout the adventure, you can build this tension by emphasizing a few of the facts about the case. First and foremost, nobody survives one of these pirate attacks. Every single person onboard is killed. That's pretty scary to begin with – a force that can take out a whole boatload of sailors and well-armed samurai must be pretty tough. Second, every night there are horrible, unexplained wailings coming from the bay. As the investigation proceeds, it becomes obvious that some supernatural force is behind the attacks. Coupled with the disturbing wailings, the characters should be afraid to take on the ghosts by the end of the adventure, even if they think they can defeat them. And even if they defeat the *yorei*, one or more PCs may join them... forever.



YORITOMO

Yoritomo is the Champion of the proud Mantis Clan, the second-oldest minor clan in the Empire. He certainly outranks the players, and as the Son of Storms, is feared for his military and personal combat prowess throughout the Empire. Though his clan is small, it has been growing, and Yoritomo's name is as well-known as his ambition. He is of average height, but seems taller. His voice is rough and scratchy, and a scar runs along the length of his hairline, from some long-ago wound. He speaks like a Crab, but fights like a Lion - a dangerous combination.

He is not a man to argue with. He certainly outranks the Player Characters (Glory 6.9) and is definitely able to destroy them in personal combat (Kenjutsu 5, Battle 5, and Iaijutsu 4, with appropriately high rings). Although we won't be giving his statistics here, his personal story will be released in the upcoming *Way of the Minor Clans*.

If your players do tangle with him, feel free to use whatever is necessary to reprimand them. Yoritomo knows better than to kill arrogant Magistrates - but sometimes he forgets.

He is extremely aware of the Mantis's status as a Minor Clan.

That's something he intends to change.

Scene I: Meeting with the Daimyo

In this scene, the characters may question Yoritomo about the pirate attacks. When they are brought into his courtroom, he thanks them for their swift arrival, and thank the Emperor for his wisdom in sending someone to investigate, especially a group as talented as those who were able to deal with the Phoenix plague. He then introduces them to An'naigako, a small and beautiful samurai-ko, and tells them she is his chief advisor. An'naigako gives the characters a proud and defiant stare, but is accommodating to their requests.

Yoritomo is cooperative and grateful for the characters' presence. He is keenly aware of the potential ramifications of continued attacks, and he would not have asked for the Emperor's help if he wasn't confounded by the mystery. However, he is also suspicious. He believes that this may be a Crane plot to rob him of his valuable trade items, and he has a severe chip on his shoulder regarding the minor status of his clan. Yoritomo has the following information which he will gladly share:

- Piracy has been a problem for the last two years, but it has never been more than harassment. He has lost a few samurai and some ships to the pirates, but so have the Crane. While he is angry about the problem, until recently, the losses

hadn't been that substantial, and he felt he could handle the problem himself. He has sent *kobune* (ships) to search for the pirates in the past, but they have never found them.

- In the last three months, the attacks have become much, much worse. Very few *kobune* have been able to travel safely through the passage between the islands. Those ships that are attacked always disappear - never to be heard from again.

- Both he and the Crane have increased the number of samurai onboard the trade ships to help with the problem, but it has only resulted in the loss of more samurai to the marauders. Twice, escort frigates have gone out with trade ships. In both cases, the escort vessels were lost as well.

If the players ask if Yoritomo thinks it is possible that the Crane are sinking the ships and keeping the treasure, Yoritomo raises an eyebrow and regards them with extreme surprise. The impression they will receive is that he asked the Emperor for help, but he didn't really expect that the Magistrates would seriously consider the



Crane as suspects. This pleases him immensely. He allows that anything is possible, but expresses mild surprise that the Empire's most honorable clan would engage in such an act of terrorism. However, it is obvious from his attitude and his actions that this is exactly what he thinks.

If they ask is it possible that one of his own samurai could be masterminding the plot, the characters asking the question should make an Awareness + Etiquette roll at a TN of 25. If this roll is made, Yoritomo grows very cold, and assures the Magistrates that the loyalty of his samurai is beyond question. He then ends the meeting. If the roll is not made, Yoritomo becomes very angry. He tells the characters, "I asked the Emperor for assistance, not the Crane. If you do not feel you can carry out your purpose without mindlessly assaulting my family's honor, then I will have you returned to the Emperor immediately." It should be obvious that he greatly resents the insult to his honor. This also ends the meeting.

Characters who ask Yoritomo if he can think of anything else unusual in his lands may discover some additional information. If they specifically use the phrase "anything unusual," or they make an Awareness + Investigation roll at a TN of 20, the Mantis daimyo admits that there have been some strange goings on at the nearby fishing village of Kashi. The local heimin have mentioned hearing strange wailing sounds coming from Wan no Asaguroi Mizu (The Bay of Dark Waters [area 154]) at night. The bay is widely regarded to be the home of an undersea city of unholy monsters, and no one ventures across it if they can avoid doing so. The bay is to the south of the afflicted passageway, though, so it seems unlikely that the two events are connected. Yoritomo doesn't know when this began.

When they have finished their interview, any character can make an Awareness + Investigation Roll against Yoritomo's Awareness + Sincerity to learn that the Mantis daimyo is hiding something. If he has told them about the strange wailings, the character gets a free raise. What he is hiding (and he will not reveal it) is his knowledge of the Lost Sword. Because he did not tell the Crane about the sword (he wanted it to be a surprise) and because his samurai lost it to the pirates, he does not want anyone to learn that he found it in the first place, knowing that this will cause him a loss of face.



The characters are now free to pursue the investigation in any manner they see fit. Yoritomo happily provides them with guest quarters in the castle (less happily if they managed to insult him in the opening scene), and gives them full access to whatever they need to proceed with their investigation. The characters can question any Mantis personnel they wish to, but no one knows anything more about the problems than Yoritomo, and no one will reveal a thing about the sword as they have been strictly forbidden by their lord to do so.

If the characters have gleaned the information about the village of Kashi, they can proceed directly to Scene 4 below. If not, allow them some time to confer with each other about what to do, question a few Mantis samurai and discover the strange events in the village, and then take them into Scene 4.



In the palace less than a day later, a messenger asks the PCs to please come to the courtroom as some new evidence has been uncovered. In the



THE MANTIS LANDS

The Mantis lands are comprised of an archipelago of islands known as the islands of Silk and Spice running the length of the southern Crane coast. They are extremely dependent on the Crane for portage, and for their active market places.

The Mantis may not like their need for the Crane, but it is inevitable. Though the Mantis have the greatest silk production in the Emerald Empire, they have no way to access Rokugani markets for sale.

It has been the main reason for peace between the two clans for centuries – the Mantis have the resources, the Crane have the markets. Together, both clans profit.

Until now.



AN'NAIGAKO

Earth: 3

Water: 2

Strength 3

Fire: 2

Air: 3

Void: 2

Mantis Bushi 2

Skills: Archery 2, Bard 1, Battle 4, Courtier 1, Defense 1, History (Mantis Clan) 2, Kenjutsu 3, Poetry 3, Tea Ceremony 2,

Honor: 2.5

Glory: 3.1

Notes: Social Position (karo); Driven (bring brother's killer to justice)

An'naigako is a young but accomplished Mantis samurai. She attained the position of *karo* when her brother, Gemasu, was killed during one of the recent pirate attacks. She is proud, and like her master, Yoritomo, she bears a great deal of resentment for the treatment the Mantis receive at the hands of the Great Clans.

She is driven to find Gemasu's killer and bring him to justice - preferably hers. She suspects that the Crane have something to do with all this piracy (it's just a little too convenient, after all), but she doesn't really care who the culprit is, so long as she can have her revenge.

main audience chamber, Yoritomo and his chief advisor, the Mantis samurai-ko An'naigako await with a small entourage.

Three sailors have just arrived at Kyuden Mantis, and kneel humbly before Yoritomo as the characters arrive. They are bedraggled, hurt, and terrified. They claim to have been on a Mantis ship, *Captain's Honor*, which was headed for Crane lands with a shipment of spice. They were attacked by pirates and routed. The pirates stole the shipment, butchered the crew, and sank the ship. These three survived by jumping overboard and swimming to safety. While they admit it was not the most honorable of actions, they decided that it was more important to inform their lord of what they had seen. One of them presents a wakizashi, 'taken from the body of a dead comrade,' he says.

It is decorated with the mon of the Daidoji family.

Yoritomo turns red with anger. This is the evidence he was looking for, and it certainly seems to implicate the Crane in the attacks. Nearby, An'naigako also looks angry. Her eyes burn with hatred, and she is incensed that their alleged Crane 'allies' have betrayed them. Yoritomo invites the PCs to question the Mantis sailors. If they do, they easily discover the following information:

- *Captain's Honor* was indeed a Mantis trade vessel headed for Crane lands with a spice shipment. It left the day before the characters arrived and was headed through the fateful pass.

- Neither Yoritomo nor An'naigako recognizes any of the sailors, but this isn't unusual. They are *heimin*, hired by the captain of the vessel from the town of Kashi. There's no reason why the feudal lords would know them.

If the characters want to question the sailors further, they may do so. An Awareness +





Investigation roll at TN 15 will tell the characters that there is something odd about the story. It seems strange that three *heimin* would have the presence of mind to escape and tell their lord what happened. It also seems unlikely that one of them would think to take evidence to support his story. Finally, the Crane is known to be the most honorable clan in the Empire. This type of vicious subterfuge seems beyond them.

However, it also seems unlikely that a lowly sailor would lie to his lord. The penalties for this type of slander are severe, and no *heimin* would dare to risk such punishment if the story wasn't true. This might also explain why one of them thought to grab the wakizashi. To accuse a noble family without proof would surely result in instant death.

An odd tale, indeed.

Regardless, both Yoritomo and An'naigako are convinced that the Crane are behind the attacks and they demand justice, as is their right. This puts the PCs in a very difficult position. The testimony is fairly damning, but if they accuse the Crane in court and the evidence is found to be false, they will lose a great deal of honor and may even lose their positions as Magistrates. What they need is more testimony, especially since the source of their current lead is dubious.

If they suggest this to the Mantis, the representatives will become angry. An'naigako tells them that her brother, Gesamu, was recently killed by the pirates, and that his blood cries out for retribution. Yoritomo gets even angrier. He tells them that the wakizashi and the testimony of the sailors should be enough to publicly accuse the Crane of treachery. If the characters had insulted him previously, he goes so far as to say he knew that Imperial Magistrates would never willfully implicate the Crane as they have too much influence in the Emperor's Court. This is a serious breach of etiquette - he has just insulted not only the honor of the characters but of the Emperor himself.

Hopefully, the characters will see the wisdom of not challenging the affront, and let it pass. Yoritomo is speaking from anger, and has embarrassed himself by saying it, as much as he has insulted the Crane Clan. If not, then there's bound to be blood - and it won't be Yoritomo's.

What the characters should be encouraged to do is to convince the Mantis that they Magistrates believe them. The best way to do this is to tell

An'naigako or Yoritomo that more evidence will help make sure that the Crane can't escape the Emperor's justice. The Crane are loaded with wily courtiers, and the more evidence that can be brought to bear against them, the harder it will be will to wheedle their way out of the charges. This will be difficult if there is a Crane in the party, of course. Good luck.

If none of the characters thinks of this, have them make an Intelligence + Etiquette or Courtier at a TN of 15 to present a fair solution that Yoritomo will allow. When this is explained to the Mantis, they will see the wisdom of it and allow the characters to proceed.



This scene's timing depends upon the characters' actions. If they came straight here from the palace, they can question the village samurai, Riku, and his headman Fuji right away. If they didn't, you'll need to get them here another way. They might decide to follow the three sailors if they were interviewed at the palace. The three men will return to Kashi to report to Shindoku (see sidebar), and if the characters have followed them, they can also question the locals. If they don't question or follow the three men, then the Mantis will have taken a statement from the sailors before they were presented to the Magistrates. In it, the sailors claim to have come ashore near Kashi. They also claim to be from the village, so the characters could go there to check out their story.

The objective of this scene is to allow the characters another chance to find out key information. The order of the events doesn't matter, so long as the characters come away from the scene with the clues they need. Run the events below as the actions of the characters dictate. If

THE THREE SAILORS

The truth behind the story which the three sailors tell is more sinister. In fact, the three men are not sailors at all but agents of Matsu Shindoku, a Lion with a bloodlust for revenge against the Crane (see sidebar, page 34). The men are posing as sailors and presenting the evidence under orders from their master, in order to implicate the Crane in the piracy.

The three stick to their story, and insist that the attack came from a Crane kobune which overpowered them. They are samurai, serving their lord - they will die before they fail and reveal their true nature.

However, the *heimin* of the village of Kashi have never seen the three men before, and if the characters investigate, the truth will certainly come out. But by the time the players get to the village, they will most likely have other problems on their hands...

(DAIDOJI) IKUKO

Earth 3

Water: 2

Strength 3

Fire: 2

Agility 3

Air: 2

Void: 3

Daidoji Bodyguard 1

Skills: Archery 1, Battle
1, Defense 2, History
(Daidoji Family) 4, Iaijutsu
1, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu
3, Meditation 2

Honor: 1.0

Glory: 1.1

Notes: Quick; Black
Sheep: Social Disadvantage
(Ronin): 2

Ikuko is a victim of misfortune. She fell asleep on one of her first assignments, causing the death and injury of her comrades. Despite begging to be allowed to commit seppuku, she was denied and dishonored.

She now wanders the Empire searching for an opportunity to redeem herself in the eyes of her clan and her family.

they haven't gotten the clue from Scene 3 yet, have the events of that scene occur when you feel it is appropriate.

THE WAILINGS FROM THE BAY

If the characters have learned about the strange wailings, they can question the village headman, Fuji, and the local Mantis *yoriki*. Either individual will take the PCs to see the other, upon request, so it doesn't matter which one the characters seek out first.

Fuji is an older man who takes his position of headman very seriously. He is proud of being the village's top non-samurai, and he thinks of the villagers as part of his extended family for whom he must care. When the pearl diver found the sword, Fuji recognized it as a finely crafted katana, and immediately turned it over to Riku. He understands his place in Rokugani social structure very well and apologized to the *yoriki* for even touching the blade, but he thought it important enough to bring straight to the samurai.

When the characters question him, he bows very low and politely refuses to look at them. He has the utmost respect for their position and answers all of their questions as truthfully and swiftly as possible, especially if Riku is present.

When asked about the wailings, he tells the characters that they are strange and haunting. They can only be heard after dark, and they seem to come from the Bay of Dark Water. If asked how long this has been going on, Fuji tells the





characters that it has only been happening for the past three months (which the characters should recognize as coinciding with the increase of the shipping attacks).

If the characters ask about the sailors, Fuji knows of no one 'washing ashore' in the past few days, but he does recognize the men if they are described to them. They are not sailors, but bushi in the employ of someone else. Fuji does not know who employs the men, but he does know that they have meetings with their lord on the hill above town which overlooks the sea. Fuji has seen them there after dark, but he has never ventured close enough to hear what they are talking about as he knows they are samurai, and it is therefore none of his business.

The characters must to specifically ask about any other strange goings-on if they wish him to talk about the sword. Fuji does not want to anger the the visiting samurai with such off-topic discussion, so he will only answer the questions they ask and doesn't waste their time with extraneous chatter. However, if they inquire, he

will tell them that one of the pearl divers found a katana which he turned over to Riku. This happened a little over three months ago.

The yoriki Riku also answers the characters' questions truthfully. He is cooperative, but only to the letter of the characters' authority. He is a proud samurai, very loyal to the clan, and will only be outgoing among other Mantis or minor clan samurai. He knows that he doesn't have the best assignment, but he is content.

Riku, too, has heard the wailing in the night, and while he doesn't like to admit it, they disturb him. Like Fuji, he can tell the characters the screams began about three months ago.

He doesn't know the three men personally, but he doesn't think they are sailors. He doesn't know about their meetings with another man. He suspects they are ronin, but he doesn't have any proof.

If asked about the sword, he tells the characters that Fuji brought it to him and he in turn brought it to his lord. He knows he should probably have punished Fuji for touching the

RIKU

- Earth: 2
- Stamina 3
- Water: 2
- Fire: 2
- Intelligence 3
- Air: 2
- Void: 3
- Mantis Bushi 1
- Skills: Archery 2, Battle 1, Defense 2, Kenjutsu 2, Shadowlands Lore 1, Tetsubo 1
- Honor: 1.5

Riku is the Mantis *yoriki* for the village of Kashi. He is young and not very ambitious. He will mumble about his fate, hoping that one day the Fortunes will send him the wealth and land he 'deserves'.





weapon, but he saw no use in harming an efficient headman who had the wisdom to report the matter immediately, and he tells the characters that if they ask. He only talks about the sword if the characters specifically ask. He was told to mention the incident to no one, and he is obeying his lord.

SOMEONE IS FOLLOWING US

At some point during the village scenes, (preferably as the characters are heading toward the hill where the 'secret meetings' are held), have the characters make a Perception check at TN 15. Anyone who makes it realizes the party is being followed - and not proficiently. What the

characters do is up to them, but it will probably lead to a confrontation with their 'shadow'.

They are being followed by Ikuko, once a Daidoji. If the characters attack her, Ikuko defends herself as best as she is able, but seeks to bring a non-violent end to the encounter. She wants to talk, not fight. Given a chance, she will tell her story.

Ikuko, a young Daidoji bushi, was on assignment, escorting a Crane caravan to the Crab lands. One night, she fell asleep while she was supposed to be on watch. The caravan was attacked, and though the Crane drove off the bandits, one of her comrades was killed and others were wounded. Her captain berated her





severely for the incident. She begged him for the opportunity to commit *seppuku* to erase the shame from her family's name, but he refused, telling her that she must live with the dishonor she had brought to herself and to her family. She was thrown out of the clan until she can once again prove her worth.

Since then, she has wandered the Crane lands searching for an opportunity to atone for her sins, and restore honor to her family. When she heard of the recent trouble with pirates, she came to the Mantis islands to attempt to solve the mystery and restore her honor. She has been following the Magistrates in the hope that they will uncover something that will give her the chance to atone.

What the characters do with her is at their discretion. As she is dishonored, they have no obligation to accept her help, and can even punish her for interfering in their investigation. If they are feeling charitable, they can allow her to assist them.

Ikuko is missing her wakizashi. Any character making an Awareness + Investigation roll at a TN of 10 will notice this fact. If they asked to keep the wakizashi brought to the Mantis by the sailors, they can ask if it is hers. She will mournfully reply that it is. If they don't have it, she recognizes it when it is presented by An'naigako.

If An'naigako is there when it is discovered that the wakizashi is Ikuko's, she immediately bellows a challenge, draws her katana, and attacks the samurai-ko. Ikuko is dishonored, so a formal duel is not necessary. As a ronin, she can be attacked, defeated, or killed without anyone noticing or even caring. If asked, that is firmly An'naigako's stance on the matter – and it is the law of the Empire.

Ikuko defends herself, but tries not to kill the Mantis. She is smart enough to realize that to do so would ruin any chance she has of getting the Magistrates' help. An'naigako will stop if commanded to do so, but she will be irate, claiming that she has a right to justice.

If asked for an explanation, Ikuko tells the PCs that she was attacked by three men last night. They knocked her unconscious, and when she awoke, her wakizashi was gone. During the fight, she tore a piece of golden cloth from the sash of one of them. Any character can make a Perception + Courtier or Lore: Lion Clan at a TN of 25 to recognize it. The TN is 15 for any Lion character. If none of them make the roll, and

An'naigako is present, she will recognize it as a specific kind of silk made only by the Lion Clan.

By now, the characters should have a good idea that something is wrong with the story they've been told. Someone is setting up the Crane to take the fall for the piracy, and it looks like that someone is a Lion.

SECRET MEETING

If the characters followed the sailors, this scene will happen before any other, as the ronin 'sailors' report back to their master. If they didn't, the encounters with Ikuko and Fuji should encourage them to check out the spot where Fuji has seen the men meeting in the past.

The characters can easily walk (samurai wouldn't sneak!) up the hill through a wooded path to the clearing. There is a convenient bush behind which they can hide and observe (but, samurai wouldn't 'hide,' either, would they?). The three 'sailors' meet with and talk with another man, whom the characters do not recognize. He nods and smiles as they talk to him. He is wearing the *mon* of the Lion Clan.

If Ikuko is with them, she identifies out the ronin as the men who attacked her. If anyone talks or tries to get closer to hear better, have them make an Awareness + Acting or an Agility + Stealth (whichever is appropriate) at a TN of 20. If it is missed, the conspirators hear the noise. Shindoku orders the ronin to attack and makes a break for it. If the characters reveal themselves in some other way, he does the same.

The ronin draw their swords and rush the characters. Shindoku jumps off the hill and vanishes into a labyrinth of caves below. Once he gets inside, he's hidden from the characters. Stopping him requires either shooting him with a bow or intercepting him before he can get off the hill. Either requires a TN of 30 because he is far away, and has the advantage of knowing where is going.

The ronin do not fight to the death. They were hired by the Lion and are only willing to fight if they think they can win. As soon as it looks bad (and being outnumbered by well-armed samurai looks bad), they surrender.

The ronin admit that they were hired by Shindoku. He hired them and a bunch of other pirates to attack Crane and Mantis shipping vessels over two years ago. The pay is good, and they get to keep seventy percent of the treasure – they have a good-sized store on one of the barren

PIRATES/RONIN

Earth: 2

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Air: 2

Void: 2

Skills: Battle 2, Hunting 3, Jujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 2, Sailing 4, Stealth 3

Honor: 0.1

Notes: Social Disadvantage: Ronin

Use these stats for the ronin in Scene 4 as well as the pirates in Scene 6.

If you need statistics for the crew of the *Mantis Blossom*, you can use these as well.

MATSU SHINDOKU

Earth: 4

Water: 4

Fire: 3

Intelligence 4

Air: 2

Awareness 3

Void: 2

Akodo Bushi 4

Skills: Athletics 4, Archery 3, Bard 2, Battle 3, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Forgery 1, Heraldry 4, History (Lion Clan) 5, Horsemanship 3, Hunting 3, Jaijutsu 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 5, Law 3, Lion Clan Lore 4, Poetry 2, Sincerity 5, Stealth 5

Honor: 1.5

Glory: 2.1

Notes: Clear Thinker; Dark Secret (Piracy Plot); Driven (Hatred of the Crane)

Matsu Shindoku is a talented but dishonorable Lion bushi. He has one over-riding goal in his life, and that is to destroy the Crane Clan at any cost. He feels the pain of his ancestors over Kakita being chosen the first Emerald Champion to the shame of Matsu, and he observes Matsu's words that there will be enmity between her and Kakita as though he had heard them himself.

When he was young, he trained in the Akodo school opposite a Crane named Doji Ayo. Ayo was a much better bushi, and he consistently bested the young Lion.

(continued)

islands off the coast. When the Magistrates came to town, Shindoku instructed them to mug Ikuko and steal her wakizashi.

Because Shindoku knew that she was a dishonored Crane, she became a perfect scapegoat, and he intended to use her to pin the whole affair on the Crane (his plan all along). If the PCs have not yet met Ikuko, the ronin will certainly not volunteer any information about attacking her. They are in enough trouble as it is.

If they are asked why the attacks have increased, the men go pale. They haven't attacked a vessel for two months. They blame the incident on the ghosts. Recently, they explain, a ghost ship has begun attacking all of the vessels in the passage. Most of their band has been in hiding out of fear. If asked where they are, the pirates reply that they are hiding on an island on the other side of the Bay of Dark Waters, but they

don't tell the characters which island threatened. The ronin believe (correctly) that the wailing screams in the night are the ghosts, and that they are responsible for the attacks which the true ronin 'pirates' did not make.

If the characters ask them about the sword which the pearl diver found, the ronin know that it is the lost sword forged by Doji Yasurugi. Any character that can make an Intelligence + (History or Lore: Crane Clan) at a TN of 10 will know what the sword is. If Ikuko is with them, she tells the characters about the ancient sword (and it is evident from the gleam in her eye that she sees a means to restore her honor). Shindoku wants it, but their captain, Anjin, is too smart to just give it to him. He has instructed these men to bargain with Shindoku for it, and thus far, they have been unable to agree on a price.



What the characters do with the pirates is their choice. It is likely that turning them over to Yoritomo will go a long way towards appeasing him (especially if he is angry with the PCs, or if they insulted him).

HUNTING CRIMINALS

This incident only occurs if the characters do not end up fighting the ronin during the 'Secret Meeting' episode, above. Run it if, after meeting Ikuko, they want to arrest the three criminals.

The ronin are carousing at the Spring Blossom Inn, a small inn for travelers and a sake works for the locals. When the PCs attempt to arrest them, or if they see Ikuko with them, the pirates try to make a run for it. The inn is not especially crowded, but it is small, and restrict movement. All attack TNs are raised by five. The ronin surrender if there is no chance for escape. They then offer up all the information contained in the 'Secret Meeting' scene.



The characters should realize they need to find the other pirates. They may also realize that they need to stop the ghosts if they want to stop the attacks on the shipping lanes. Yoritomo will lend them a ship and a crew to get across the Bay of Dark Water, but he scoffs at the idea of a ghost ship attacking his fleet. He does, however, seem nervous about crossing the bay; the characters get the distinct impression that he is glad it them and not him.

If asked about the sword, Yoritomo comes clean. Over three months ago, one of his samurai, Riku, brought him a katana that had been found by one of the pearl divers in Kashi. It was a very old and elegant looking blade, and after

researching it, he discovered that it was the famed 'Lost Sword of Doji Yasurugi', which vanished into the ocean hundreds of years ago. He saw an opportunity to gain great favor and prestige for his clan by returning it, so he commanded ten of his best samurai to deliver the sword to Doji Hoturi, the Doji family daimyo. An'naigako mentions that her brother, Gesamu, was in charge of the mission. Yoritomo wanted the mission to be secret in order to take maximum advantage by presenting it to the Doji without warning.

The ship sent to deliver it was attacked and sunk by pirates three months ago. Yoritomo didn't mention anything about it because he was ashamed at having lost such a great artifact, and he didn't want to suffer any public loss of face for having been unable to deliver something so valuable to the Crane.

By now, the characters should have a pretty fair idea of who is attacking the shipping lanes. The question is now, how can the attacks be stopped? Characters with Lore: Shadowlands, or Lore: Ghosts, or some other applicable skill, can roll make an Intelligence + Skill roll added to the skill at a TN of 20 to know that the ghosts must somehow be appeased for them to find rest. The TN for shugenja is 15.

Once this is revealed, any character can make an Intelligence roll at TN 15 to realize that the murdered samurai want the sword back. It was the mission with which they were charged, and its theft is what is keeping them from rest.

Regardless, the characters still have to seek out the pirates (whether they know they need the sword or not) which entails crossing the Bay of Dark Water.

CROSSING THE BAY

The captain of the vessel loaned to the characters, the *Mantis Blossom*, insists on throwing rice over the sides of the ship while crossing the bay. "This is the only way to appease the dark trolls beneath the bay," he explains. A great store of rice is kept below decks for just this purpose. It takes almost a day to cross the bay to the island in question, and through the trip, the entire crew is nervous, jumpy, and scared. Use the crew's mood to help heighten the sense of dread that should be creeping over the characters. Everyone should be uncomfortable during the time it takes to get to the island. In addition to this level of dread, the following events occur on the voyage:

MATSU SHINDOKU (CONTINUED)

One night, after Ayo had frustrated him again, Shindoku sought to take his revenge. He waited for the Crane in his quarters, and surprised him. He beat him severely before the staff arrived and put a stop to the incident. Shindoku was expelled from the school as a result.

He has laid low ever since, but two years ago, one of his agents, a geisha whom Doji Hoturi, the Doji daimyo-to-be, had been seeing, was able to steal secrets of Crane shipping schedules to the Mantis. Shindoku put the information to work by hiring pirates to harass the shipping lanes, hoping to exact his revenge on the Crane for his fall. He has thus been able to sow distrust between the Mantis and the Crane, and hopes to bring his plan to fruition by pinning the incident on the Crane, thereby destroying their credibility in the Imperial Court.

Recently, he has learned that Anjin, his pirate captain, stole the fabled Lost Sword of Doji Yasurugi from the Mantis. Shindoku wants the blade so that he can further shame the Crane Clan. However, Anjin has hidden the sword, thus frustrating Shindoku's plans.



ANJIN, THE PIRATE CAPTAIN

Earth: 2

Willpower 3

Water: 2

Perception 3

Fire: 3

Air: 3

Void: 2

Skills: Battle 3, Heraldry
2, Hunting 3, Jujutsu 3,
Kenjutsu 3, Sailing 5,
Stealth 3

Honor: 0.4

Notes: Social

Disadvantage: Ronin

Anjin is the captain of the pirates. He is terrified of the ghosts that have been making the most recent attacks and has led his band to a secluded island to hide from them.

He also has *Chukandomo*, the lost sword. He is smart enough to know what it is, and smarter still not just give it to Shindoku. He has not told the Lion where he is hiding and is using some of his agents to negotiate a fair price. Only then will he turn it over to Shindoku.

• Several times during the journey, a crewman lading rice overboard jumps back in terror, swearing he saw something beneath the surface. When anyone investigates, there is nothing to be seen, but the crewman is believed by the entire crew, and the captain sees it as a “bad sign.”

• At some point, have one of the characters observing the deck or a wall below decks. Suddenly, the character sees the mon of the Lion Clan appear on the wood as though it had been wood-burned there. The mon begins to smoke, and then it bursts into flame in a sudden explosion, causing great alarm among the crew. Everyone hastens to put the fire out. When it is extinguished, the mon is gone.

• Notice when another character reaches down to touch his or her katana at some point. The character feels something wet and sticky, and when he or she looks down, the sword is bleeding. Blood slowly seeps out of the scabbard. If the character draws the blade, he or she can see the blood flowing out it. As soon as the character drops the katana or casts it away, the effect stops and the blood is gone.

• One of the characters observes a sailor drop a knife. The knife hits the deck and sticks in. The deck begins bleeding sea water, slowly at first, but then it comes bubbling up at an incredible rate, threatening to sink the ship. When the knife is withdrawn, the water dries up and disappears.

• The lookout sees a ship off to port, some distance away. When he or she blinks, it is gone. A few minutes later, it reappears, and then disappears again. This happens three times. Every time, the ship is the same distance from the *Mantis Blossom*. Then, without warning, it suddenly appears right in front of the characters’ ship, forcing the captain to swing the vessel hard to starboard to avoid a collision. Any character near the deck must make an Agility + Athletics roll at TN 15 or be pitched overboard by the sudden change in course. The characters can board the ship and have a look around, but there is no one on board.

With each incident, have the characters should make a Willpower check. The TN for the first two is 5. After that, each successive incident raises the TN by 5, so the third check is TN 10, and the fourth is TN 15, and so forth. Any character who misses it becomes terrified. He or she will not want to leave his or her cabin, and all actions have their target numbers increased by 5 until the character is safely on shore again.

REACHING THE ISLAND

The entire crew will be relieved to get to the island and get off the dark bay, and the crew feels the same. They seem thrilled to be out of such a terrible place, and they will go out of their way to express their gratitude to the captain for his foresight in giving the rice to the spirits, confident that it was this act which brought them through the channel safely.

The characters will be among the body of the island chain of the Mantis Clan, and unless they have been told precisely where the island is by the three sailors (above), they will have to search for the pirates. This isn’t easily accomplished, and without proper talent and skill, the island may take days to discover.

At last, however, the characters will search one small, cave-riddled island that appears to be like all the rest, and they will discover what they have been seeking. Anjin and his crew are hiding out in a cave deep within the bay of the island, and their kobune is docked in a sheltered cove nearby.

The ronin know the ghosts are after them (and the sword), and they don’t want to be anywhere near the shore. Characters have to make a Perception + Hunting roll at TN 15 to pick up the trail of the sailors and follow it to the cave. Once the characters have found the correct location, proceed to Scene 6, below.



Anjin and his men are holed up in a small cave overlooking the shore. The approach is fairly easy, but it gives them a view of the ocean since they greatly fear the *yorei* will be coming for them. They have seen the characters’ ship, but don’t know what to make of it. It doesn’t look like a ghost ship, but it is flying the Mantis mon, so it

probably isn't Shindoku. They have posted a single guard at the entrance as a precaution.

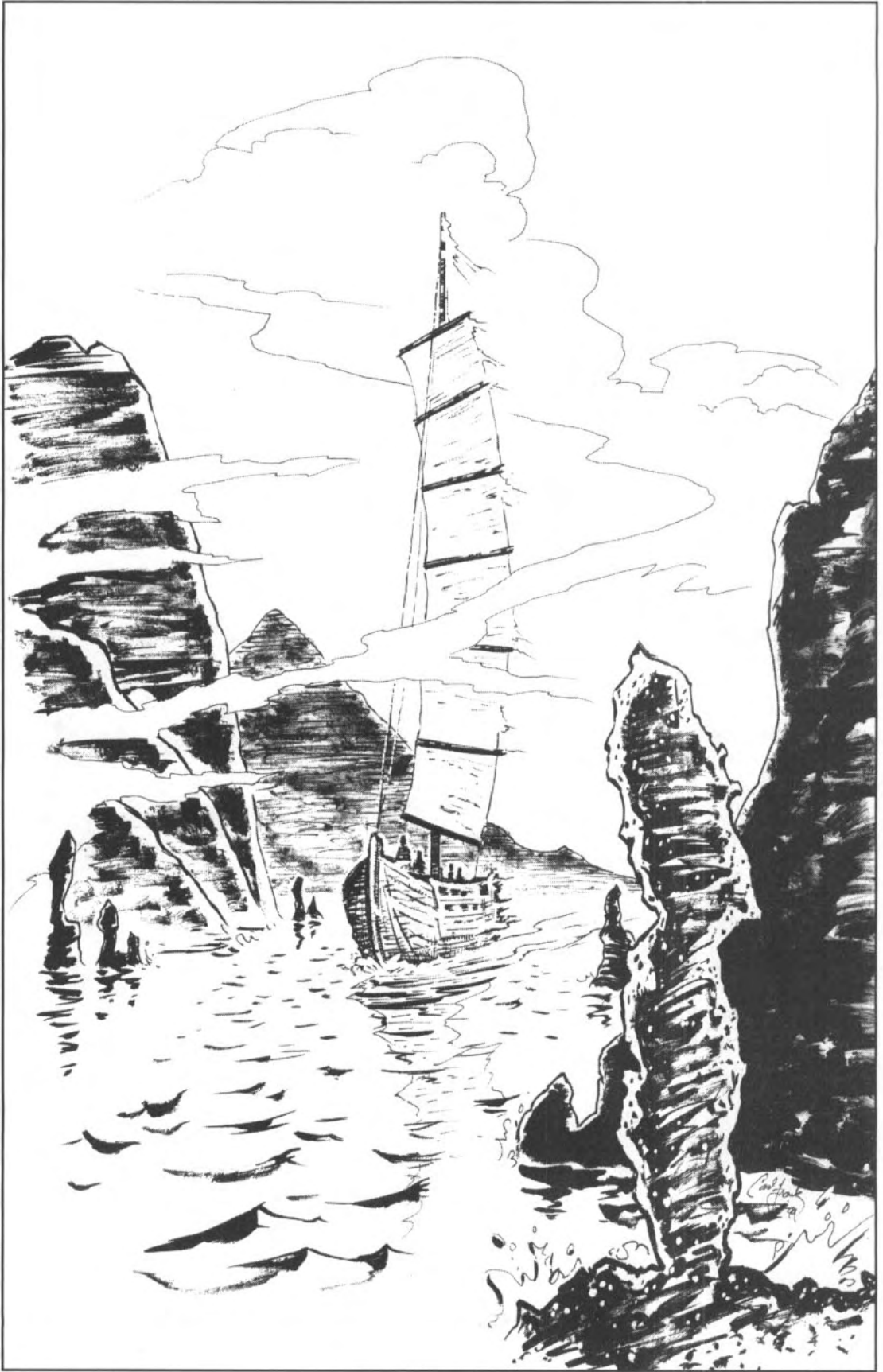
Allow the characters to come up with whatever plan they wish to defeat the pirates. To do it stealthily, they will need to take out the guard. If they've brought Ikuko or An'naigako with them, they will be pretty well-armed, and they can ask the crew of the *Mantis Blossom* for assistance, as the three samurai who lead the *heimin* crew would be happy to help them vanquish the pirates.

There are 14 ronin in the cave, including Anjin. They will fight, but not to the death. Once it becomes obvious that they are overmatched, they will surrender. The fact is, they are all scared and would just as well be done with the matter.

At some point during the fight, Shindoku appears in the rear of the cave and shouts orders to Anjin to help him. Shindoku has been hiding among the *heimin* on the characters' ship, hoping that they would bring him to Anjin. He intends to get the pirates' help to cut down the Magistrates, steal the sword, and escape. He can use Anjin's ship to get away.

Shindoku attacks the closest character to him, or Ikuko if possible. The pirates renew the attack long as there are at least 8 of them left, or Anjin is still alive. Shindoku will also yell to Anjin to grab the *nemuranai* katana and make a break for it. If any of the characters block him, Anjin draws the blade from its *saya* and prepares to attack. As soon as he does so, he screams in pain, and his hands burst into flames. He drops the sword, but the fires move up his





arms and consume him. Within seconds, he disappears in a flash of ashes.

All of the pirates stop fighting when this happens. Shindoku shouts at them to continue fighting, but it is no use. They surrender immediately, terrified. Given the opportunity to do so, Shindoku also surrenders, seeking a chance to escape later. Inside the cave is the treasure (mostly spice) from the last attack the pirates made. And, of course, the sword.

The characters will have to spend the night on the island, because the captain refuses to sail on the bay after dark. The ghosts wail all night, causing the characters to have to deal with the effects (see "Hearing the Wailing" above). Any character who missed a Willpower roll on the way to the island has the TN for the roll raised by 5.

If the characters haven't figured out by now that the ghosts want the sword back, they have disturbing dreams through the evening, probably inspired by the wailing. In these dreams, they will see themselves drowning, as hands covered in seaweed clutch at them, whispering, "Return to us our honor..."

If the characters refuse, they will continue to be haunted, every night, by the ghosts. Anyone who touches the sword (even if given as a gift) will receive the same nightmares, and no one will be free of them while the ghostly yorei still roam the ocean.

After one week of these nightmares, anyone who has come in contact with the sword will be permanently down one Void Point, as if they had spent it to awaken. After two weeks, they will be down a second Void Point, and so on, until the character is so consumed by the spirits' grief that they are unable to awaken from their sleep at all, and lapse into a coma. They will eventually die if the sword is not returned.

Such Void Points cannot be regained by use of the meditation skill, or by any other means. They are lost, although the individual's personal Void is not reduced, and the character does not have them to spend under any circumstances. Keeping the sword nearby will bring headaches, dark visions of a watery grave, and uncomfortable chills. Truly, the yorei intend to haunt the sword for eternity – and they have the time to do so.

If the sword is at last taken to Gemasu and the spirits and put to rest, all the sleepers will be revived, the individual's Void points will return to normal.



Scene 7: Returning the Sword

The next day, the characters can set sail. As all of the attacks have been occurring in the passage between the Islands of Silk and Spice, it is logical for them to go there to seek out the ghosts.

The captain does not wish to go to the channel, as it is the location where he knows the ghosts will come. He politely begs the samurai not to make his crew sail there, and warns them humbly that all who travel the channel will certainly die from ghostly attack. When this fails, he offers to take his own life if the samurai will allow his men to return to their homes instead of risking the dangerous channel. In the end, his begging will come to naught – the player characters simply don't have the 20 men to sail the boat without the captain and his crew, and they are forced to make the men continue. It is intended to be a difficult decision for the player characters, so be sure to really turn the screws hard – they have a responsibility, as samurai to *heimin*, and they should feel the weight of that decision in this dangerous situation. Many of these men will die when the yorei attack, and yet it is their duty to do so.

It does not take much time to get from the island to the passage. The captain takes great care to circumnavigate the Bay of Dark Water, and avoid the incidents from the day before. He follows the shore line as much as possible until he is well clear of the dread waters.

There are no creepy incidents, but the entire crew is slowly overcome with a sense of dread. They leap at shadows, speak no louder than a whisper, and have difficulty keeping their minds on their work. After all, they are going to confront a marauding band of avenging spirits.



YOREI

An ancient tale told about ghosts in Rokugan is that they are wandering souls, condemned from Jigoku because they have no place in the Celestial Heavens. In this way, they are the ronin of the spirit world, eternally seeking an honor which they cannot gain.

It is said that yorei come to other ronin and offer them a chance to join their misty band, to seek the heavens together. Many ronin say they would never accept such an offer, but if they die alone, it is probable that they will join the ranks of the yorei anyway, unable to enter Jigoku on their own merit.

These yorei have been created because they failed in their duty to protect the sword. Their sense of duty, propelled by Gemasu's courage, keeps them 'honorless' and bound to this world. Once they have taken the sword with them to their watery grave, they will be satisfied – but the sword will be lost forever.

Any PC who is killed by the yorei will join them in their ghostly search, and will be forbidden Jigoku's peace until Gemasu's quest is accomplished. His spirit will rise from his body, wraith-like, and turn to fight his companions, whispering the truth about the yorei's quest.

Once Gemasu has been given the sword, the PC's soul will vanish with the rest, finally started on its journey to Jigoku.



The characters reach the passage by mid-afternoon. However, there are no ghosts in sight. They have to wait.

During this time, several ships move through the passage. Build the tension of these encounters by having the ships move on a straight course for the characters' ship, but veer off when they get close. Let this part of the adventure take up some real time in your session. If the players are forced to wait for the final confrontation, they will grow antsy. That's what you want. They will feel the same way as their characters.

Finally, as the sun begins to set, a fog begins to roll in off the bay. It doesn't move unnaturally fast, but it isn't slow either. The captain curses his luck silently as it moves in and envelops the ship.

Once the characters are enshrouded in fog, things begin to change. They hear another ship in the water with them, but they can see nothing. A low moaning sound can be heard coming from all directions. It bears a resemblance to the wailing the characters have heard earlier, but it is much more malevolent. After a few moments, the characters can see dark forms moving through the mist. No amount of calling out to them or brandishing the sword will gain a response. The misty sailors are silent as the grave, and not a whisper passes their dark, drowned lips.

By this time, the crew is totally spooked. They can't see, and they are pretty obviously surrounded by malevolent ghosts. One of the men begins weeping, and the captain smacks him hard across the face for such a shameful display of fear. Another cries out, "We're doomed!" and runs across the deck and jumps overboard.

The ghosts slowly surround the ship, standing on the mist and water as if it were *tatami* mats. Their hands are not empty - they carry weapons as they did in life, both as samurai and *heimin* sailors (who carry oars, jitte and other makeshift weapons). Their sunken eyes seem to take in everything, and their clawed, greenish hands drip with seawater, their legs enshrouded in seaweed. They have no feet - a classic Rokugani sign that these are, in fact, ghosts from beyond death's gate.

When you've built the tension of the ghosts' presence to a satisfactory level of spookiness, they will attack. One of the sailors aboard the PC's kobune screams as he is run through from behind with a shadowy katana. His scream echoes through the mist, his small tanto falling, twisting, to the deck.

Then, as the scream gains in volume, echoing in the fog, the *yorei* seem to be everywhere. They attack without reason, mercilessly killing the sailors. Fighting them is impossible. The characters' weapons pass through them without harm, but the ghosts' blades damage them quite sufficiently. They cannot be reasoned with or stopped. If a *heimin* sailor on board dies, his ghost rises from its corpse, weeping, its bloodstained hands reaching for any weapon it can salvage.

Once the situation looks hopeless (but before you've managed to kill any but the most reckless of the PCs), the ghost of Gemasu, brother of An'naigako, appears on deck. He is terrifying to behold, standing in full Mantis armor, and looking every bit like a drowned man. His eyes glow a fierce red, and his greenish hands clench in anger and pain. If An'naigako is onboard, she calls out to him in a strained voice: "Gemasu!" The *yorei* will turn toward her as if some faint memory stirred in his thoughts, but he makes no sound. For a long moment, he will regard her quizzically, as though he should know her but doesn't remember. Then he moves forward, toward her, his spiritual katana cleaving the air with a mournful howl.

"No, Gemasu!" she pleads, her katana cutting through him as if he did not exist. "Don't do this! No!" An'naigako will scream loudly as he first touches her, reaching to identify her sword before he continues.

At this point, it should be obvious to the players that Gemasu and his men are looking for something, and that they can not - will not - stop or be stopped until they regain what has been lost. This is the moment for the characters to turn over the sword. Whoever hands it to Gemasu takes 2 Wounds as the icy cold 'wrongness' of his existence is temporarily transferred up the blade into the character's arm.

If Shindoku is onboard at this point, he will have conveniently escaped from his confines and appear on deck. As he sees the sword being handed to the ghostly Gemasu, he will call out, "No!" when the sword is handed over. "It will be lost back to the sea!" Shindoku screams.

He rushes forward to attempt to take the blade from Gemasu. Any character who wishes to may try to stop him, or they may allow Gemasu to have his way with the man who engineered his death at sea. Since Shindoku is making a full attack, the TN to hit him is only 5. If he isn't



killed, he lunges forward towards the sword. With one vicious stroke, Gemasu turns his own blade upon the Matsu and cuts him down. When Shindoku's spirit rises, terrified, the sailors around Gemasu will close on him as he screams a long, ghostly wail. They will turn to mist, the wail will echo, and then fade away, and they will be gone.

Gemasu then holds the bloody (or unbloody if the characters killed Shindoku) katana aloft, raising the sword of Doji Yasurugi in the other hand. The fog recedes, and all the yorei at last disappear, never to be seen again.

GEMASU AND THE YOREI

Since it is impossible for the characters to hit the ghosts or do any damage to them, full stats are not included. A good Gamemaster will not use the yorei to slaughter his player characters (although, without supervision, or if a player is particularly silly, the yorei could certainly do so.) Instead, they should be used to frighten, and to encourage the players to realize the dark fate that

awaits ronin and those bushi who do not find their place in the afterlife.

The ghosts are wielding katanas (damage of 3k2) and they have an Agility of 2 and a Fire of 2. While these aren't outstanding stats for powerful ghosts, keep in mind that these yorei cannot be hit, so it is easy for them to wade through their opponents on board the kobune and cut them to pieces.

If you need other stats for the yorei, assume that they have a 2 in all Rings, and give them a rating of 3 in any Trait you think might be just a little bit better. In the end, it's up to you, since the puzzle of the ghosts is solved through returning the sword to them, and not through direct combat.

Remember: frighten, not destroy, and threaten, don't slaughter. The story of the game is integral to the players' enjoyment. Make them feel the fear of the 'unstoppable' ghosts, and allow them to realize that honor is their shield in this adventure, not their family katana.





Scene 8: Denouement

At the end of the adventure, the characters return to Kyuden Mantis in order to report their findings and their discoveries, as well as the final fate of the ancient Crane sword. For his part, Yoritomo, the Mantis Champion, will officially apologize to the characters for doubting their sincerity in the investigation, and honestly thanks both them and the Emperor for solving this matter. He does not apologize to Daidoji Ikuko, if she is still alive, for doubting the honor of the Crane, but he will offer that their ambassador come to the Mantis islands during the trade seasons so that “appropriate reparation can be made” for his willingness to believe that the Crane could act so dishonorably.

An emissary will be sent to the Lion, telling them of Matsu Shindoku’s fate, as well as his

dishonorable plans to shame both the Mantis and the Crane. The Lion will most likely ensure that Shindoku’s spirit is not honored in death.

An’naigako humbly takes the time to thank the characters for helping her brother to find peace. She is pleased that the taint on his soul has been lifted, and offers each player character some small token of her gratitude, in the form of new kimonos made of Mantis silk.

The characters can also restore Ikuko to honored status, possibly by sending a letter to her daimyo, or visiting him on their way back to the Imperial Palace to that they can tell him that she is again worthy of honorable status.

As for the characters themselves, they will likely be anxious to leave and put the whole business behind them. However, there are some questions still hanging that you can use as springboards for other adventures.

Are there any more of Matsu Shindoku’s minions lurking about that may cause trouble in the future? Was Shindoku acting alone, driven purely by his mad hatred of the Crane, or was he acting on the orders of a superior? How will the Crane react to this attack on their honor by a member of the Lion Clan? And finally, what of the sword itself? Has it truly been lost back to the sea, or will it rise again at some later date, this time to be permanently recovered into the service of the Crane – or of the Lion, to finally heal the breach between the two clans, the destiny that it was forged to ensure?

The tragedy is that Matsu Shindoku's plans at least partially succeeded. He was well on his way to driving a wedge between the Crane and the Mantis, he cost both clans considerable resources and was responsible for many of their samurai being killed, and he caused an ancient Crane *nemuranai* to be lost. It should serve as a lesson to the characters that the price of honor is never too high. It is always less expensive than the path of dishonor.



Chukandomo, the lost sword, is a katana crafted hundreds of years ago by famed Crane artisan Doji Yasurugi. It is exquisitely crafted with an ivory tsuba carved in the shape of a crane's head.

A Crane emissary, Doji Hasan, was carrying the sword to the Emperor's court aboard a Crane vessel. The *kobune* sank, destroyed in a tsunami several hundred years ago. Over time, the currents of the ocean and the earthquakes which afflict Rokugan have slowly moved the sword across the ocean floor until it came to rest in a pearl bed near the village of Kashi, where it was found by a pearl diver.

The katana is of such fine craftsmanship that it allows the wielder to directly add his Strength x 2 to the attack roll total, and to the resulting total when determining damage. However, because the Mantis samurai who were transporting it became Yorei in their shame at its loss, the weapon has become cursed. If any character other than a Crane unsheaths the blade, his hands burst into flame, and he takes Wounds equal to his rating in Fire every turn as the flames move up his arms and consume him. When the character is out of Wounds, he vanishes in a puff

of ashes. The only way to stop this is to resheath the blade in its *saya* before the individual is totally consumed. Simply dropping the blade will not help - in fact, it will dishonor the spirit of the blade, and the flames will burn twice as fiercely.

Hopefully, Anjin's example will dissuade any non-Crane characters from trying it.



Give the characters one experience point for each of the following things that they accomplish:

- Returning the Lost Sword to Gemasu and the *yorei*
- Killing Shindoku during the final encounter, or allowing him to be killed by Gemasu.
- Giving Daidoji Ikuko the opportunity to atone for her lost honor, or aiding her to recover her place in the Crane Clan.
- Role-playing the horror element well.

You might wish give an extra experience point to any character who figured out the solution to the problem on his or her own without having to roll dice.

If the characters hang Ikuko out to dry and support the "the Crane are doing it" theory, give them a total of one experience point, and let them take their chances in court, based on the flimsy testimony. All they have is the testimony of three *heimin* sailors (who can't even be found), and Yoritomo's angry backing.





ISAWA HOJU
OLD PHOENIX
SHUGENJA



ISAWA MINORI
DAUGHTER OF THE
GOVERNOR OF THE
CITY OF KYUDEN ISAWA



ISAWA KUZUSHI
PHOENIX SHUGENJA



ISAWA ROHIRO
PHOENIX BUSHI,
BROTHER OF ISAWA
MINORI

Dramatis Personae — Plague Upon Your Lands



RIKU:
THE MANTIS YORIKI OF
KASHI VILLAGE



DAIDOJI IKUKO
A DISHONORED CRANE
BUSHI



MATSU SHINDOKU
A LION BUSHI



FUJI
THE VILLAGE
HEADMAN OF KASHI
VILLAGE



GESAMU
A MANTIS GHOST,
BROTHER OF
AN'NAIGAKO



AN'NAIGAKO
MANTIS CLAN
MAGISTRATE

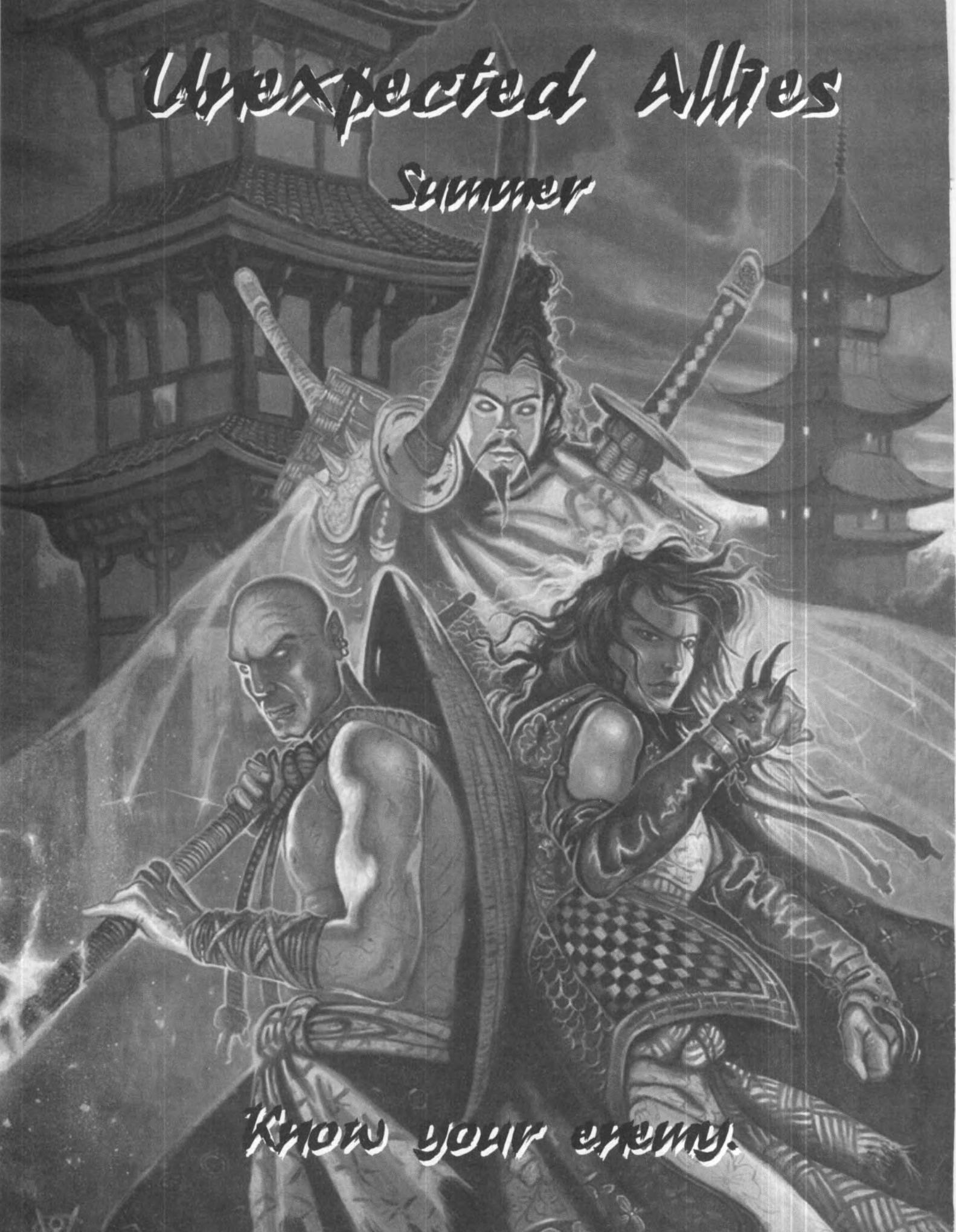


YORITOMO
THE MANTIS CLAN
DAIMYO

Dramatis Personae - The Lost Sword of Doji Yasuyuki

Unexpected Allies

Summer



Know your enemy.