



Legend of the Five Rings™

The Tomb of Tuchiiban™

by Rob Vaux



S-1
Shadowlands
Series

GM's Guide

Introduction to the Tomb of Iuchiban Boxed Set

Five hundred years ago, an evil *maho-tsukai* and his followers rose to strike against the Hantei Emperor. He was defeated only at great cost, and his sinister powers allowed him to cheat death itself. In order to contain his evil, the Empire's rulers decided to imprison him in a dungeon so fearsome that none who entered it could ever escape alive.

Welcome to the Tomb of Iuchiban.

This boxed set holds all the information on the background, history, and layout of Rokugan's most feared construction, including detailed descriptions of the traps awaiting therein and a complete adventure which will bring your characters face to face with its terrifying prisoner.

This box contains the following:

The History Book. The text of a scroll by the famed Witch Hunter Kuni Visten. It contains a complete background on the mad shugenja Iuchiban, his plots against Rokugan, and the heroic efforts made to keep him in check in the five hundred years since he arose. Read it first.

The GMs Guide. The book you're reading now; read it after perusing the history book. It includes the adventure "A Black and Beating Heart," detailed information on Iuchiban's Bloodspeaker cult, and prominent NPCs associated with both. It is intended for GMs only and should not be read by players.

The Tomb. This book holds a complete description of the Tomb's interior: all of the rooms, the traps which guard them, and the creatures which wander its halls. It also contains the conclusion to the "A Black and Beating Heart" adventure, and instructions on how to use the rooms at the Tomb's center.

Picture Guide. A collection of twenty-eight black and white pictures, each depicting a chamber in the Tomb. They are designed to be shown to the players one by one as they travel through the Bloodspeaker's prison.

Map of the Tomb. A complete map of the Tomb's outer ring, with numbers marking each of the encounters within.

Room Squares and Grid of the Hidden Heart. An interchangeable map to be used within the inner sanctum of Iuchiban's tomb – reflecting the mercurial nature of Iuchiban's Hidden Heart.

CHARACTER LEVELS

The *Tomb of Iuchiban* is not for rookies. We recommend a party of at least four characters, including at least one shugenja. Characters who are not at least 2nd Rank have no business in the Tomb, and even those of 3rd Rank are likely to have a busy time of it. You have been warned.

4



"A Black and Beating Heart" embroils the PCs in a centuries-old scheme to seize Iuchiban's power. It allows them to uncover the secrets of Iuchiban's Bloodspeaker cult, face the gravest threats their leaders can produce and (perhaps) send them into the Tomb itself to confront whatever lurks there. It contains plot threads set forward by earlier L5R products, notably *City of Lies* and the adventure *Night of a Thousand Screams*. You may want to consult them to achieve a closer continuity with this set. Possession of these products is not required to run the adventure, however. With a little adjustment, the GM can tailor it to fit into any campaign. Suggestions on how to do this can be found in the "Starting Things" section below.

What's Going On

Once the most trusted ally of Iuchiban, the immortal sorcerer Asahina Yajinden has decided to turn against his former master. Twice now, Iuchiban has had a chance to strike at Rokugan, and both times he managed to botch it. The last time, he was sentenced to a living death within his tomb – an imprisonment so powerful that not even his ability to swap souls could thwart it. He's remained entombed for three hundred years now, and as far as Yajinden is concerned, his time has finally passed.

Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on your point of view), Yajinden is just as power-hungry as his predecessor was, and wants even more before moving against the Emperor. And he knows just where an immense reservoir of untapped magical ability lies: the soul of his former master. Iuchiban's power never diminished; it was simply better contained by his jailers. Somewhere out there is the raving mad remnant of the first Bloodspeaker – all bottled up and waiting for someone to take it.

Yajinden has spent most of the last century researching ways to drink Iuchiban's soul. He's studied scores of magical scrolls and researched dozens of methods on how to do it, and he thinks he's ready. By forming a magical conduit between Iuchiban's current

essence and his original body, Yajinden can trap his former master, and draw his dark *chi* out of him. Iuchiban cannot truly die – not with his heart missing – but without his spiritual power, he will be as weak as a kitten and helpless within his prison.

His foul plan is ready, his Bloodspeakers are poised to help him. Now all Yajinden needs is access to the Tomb. Four great masks serve as keys to that dread construction, and he already has three of them. The fourth, however, has disappeared – stolen by a petty thief. In order to get it back, he needs to call upon the resources of a certain band of player characters...

In the form of the Witch Hunter Meishozo Nisei, Yajinden has contacted the characters and asked for their help in gaining the mask. If they can procure it for him, they will have gone a long way towards making the Bloodspeakers a major threat once again. If they wish to make amends, they're going to have to stop Yajinden before he reaches the tomb.

Plot Synopsis

Yajinden needs the fourth giant mask in order to open the doors to the tomb. It has disappeared in the hands of a thief, stolen from the *maho-tsukai* who previously held it. The thief is expecting trouble from the Bloodspeakers: he's ready for black magic. He's not, however, prepared for an ordinary threat – like the PCs, for example.

CHAPTER ONE

The characters are contacted and asked to help solve a brutal murder in the northern Crab provinces. A humble shugenja has been killed and his possessions stolen. The magistrate in charge of the investigation – actually Yajinden in disguise – is aware of the PCs' reputation and asked personally for their help.

The killer's trail leads the characters from the dead man's village to the great port of Sunda Mizu Mura. While searching, they come across a wizened old man who presents them with a strange gift – a large white pearl. The man says it will help them when they need it. They catch the "killer" (actually just a thief) and retrieve the mask. The suspected murderer – an *eta* with aspirations of becoming a *maho-tsukai* – kills himself rather than be brought into custody.

CHAPTER TWO

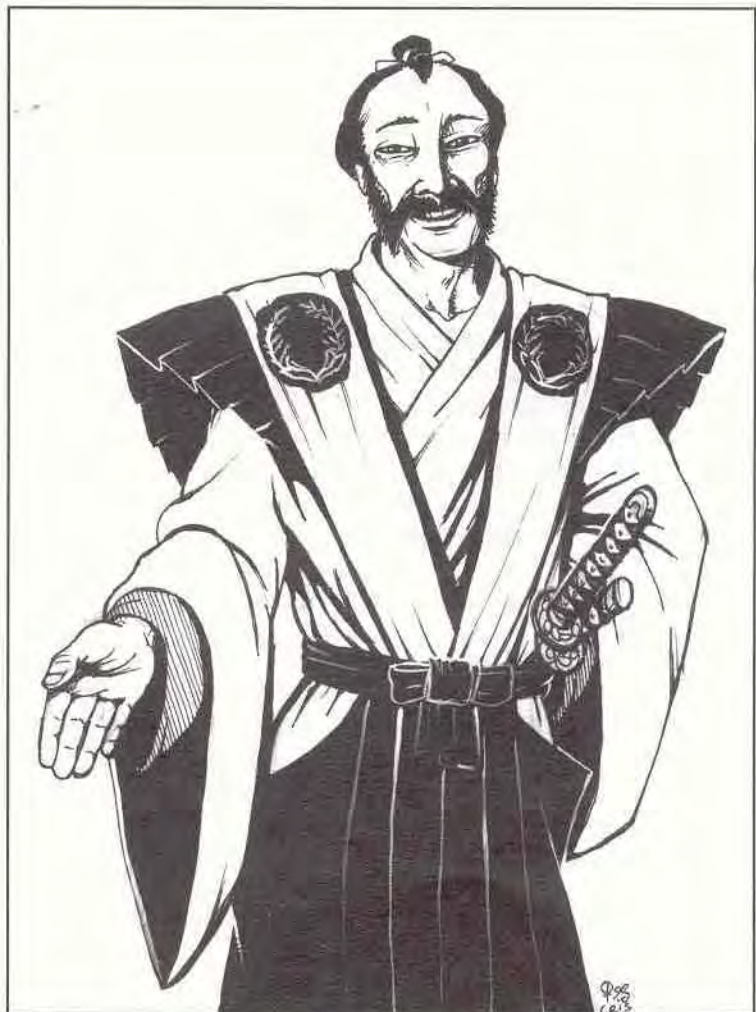
On the way back to the village, the characters begin experiencing horrifying nightmares and visions of blood. Quick observation will point to the mask, a tainted object that has begun to corrupt them (actually, it's both the mask and Iuchiban beginning to influence them from afar, but they shouldn't suspect that). They should feel a need to get rid of the mask as soon as possible – and Yajinden will be more than happy to take it off their

hands. As a reward for completion of their task, he sends them to a nearby monastery to have them purged of any Shadowlands taint they may have accrued.

Unfortunately, the monastery is a secret haven for Bloodspeakers, and the "benevolent" monks there are planning to imprison the PCs until Yajinden's plans are complete. They must thwart their captors and escape. Hell-bent on revenge, the characters return to the village – only to find it destroyed and all its inhabitants slaughtered. After a harrowing encounter with Yajinden's pennagolan bodyguard, the old man from Sunda Mizu Mura returns. He tells them that the Bloodspeakers are on their way to the Tomb, planning to infuse themselves with the power of its dreaded occupant.

CHAPTER THREE

The characters must now travel through the Crab lands in pursuit of the Bloodspeakers. To their horror, they find that their nightmares have not diminished; rather they have begun increasing in frequency, and will eventually drive them mad. They



Meishozo Nisei - Imperial Magistrate

must stop Yajinden for the sake of their own sanity. Along the way, they learn much of the cult's history, including the secret behind Iuchiban's first escape from the tomb. Arriving on the wild northern edge of the Crab lands, they reach a tea plantation that serves as a guard post to the Tomb. They have arrived too late to prevent the Bloodspeakers from entering the Tomb, but there may be enough time to stop them from completing their terrible purpose – by going into the Tomb after them.

CHAPTER FOUR

With their wits about them and Iuchiban egging them on, the characters enter the Tomb and thwart its deadly traps. Engulfed in the inner sepulcher of Iuchiban's mind, they try to stop Yajinden before he completes his terrible purpose. With the pearl given to them by the old man, they can escape the tomb and leave Iuchiban still imprisoned within.

Starting Things

The adventure begins as the characters are contacted by a disguised Asahina Yajinden to hunt down the fourth porcelain mask. The exact nature of his approach, however, depends on who the characters are, and whether or not they've participated in the earlier *Night of a Thousand Screams* adventure module. The GM should be prepared to fine tune the characters' involvement based on the particulars of his or her campaign.

In *Night of a Thousand Screams*, the characters were assisted by an Imperial magistrate/Witch Hunter named Meishozo Nisei, who probably took possession of a huge porcelain mask. Unbeknownst to the PCs, the mask is one of four which are needed to unlock the doors to the Tomb. Nisei, while appearing friendly and helpful, was actually using the characters to gain the mask for himself – for the magistrate was serving as the current host for Asahina Yajinden. The adventure as written assumes that the PCs (a) gave the first mask to Yajinden in Nisei's form and (b) still consider him a friend, or at least a trustworthy ally.

However, since the earlier adventure may have ended differently, and since many groups out there may not have been through it at all, the following alternate beginnings to the adventure have been included.

IF THE CHARACTERS HAVE THE PORCELAIN MASK FROM NIGHT OF A THOUSAND SCREAMS

This is unlikely, since prolonged exposure to the mask will infect the characters with the Shadowlands taint. If they have kept it, they have most likely maintained protections around it, or turned it over to someone better able to handle it. In any case, they will probably not have it with them on the road, which means it can be stolen while they're away...

If the characters have the mask, then Nisei is most likely dead. Even if he isn't, the characters will probably be unwilling to trust him, having thwarted his efforts to steal the mask from them. So

Yajinden will take the form of another magistrate – one Akodo Bakin – to approach the PCs. He says that he has heard of their exploits and seeks their expertise on a murder he is in the midst of investigating. It seems the killer stole a large porcelain mask very similar to the one which they retrieved; Bakin could use their expertise in tracking it down and determining whether this crime is connected in some way.

While they are occupied with the task, Yajinden will send a minion named Nishiki (see later reference) to steal the one they have and return it to him. When the characters bring him the stolen mask, he will direct them to the monastery to receive "healing," as outline in Chapter Two. The remainder of the adventure proceeds as normal.

IF THE PCs DID NOT RUN NIGHT OF A THOUSAND SCREAMS

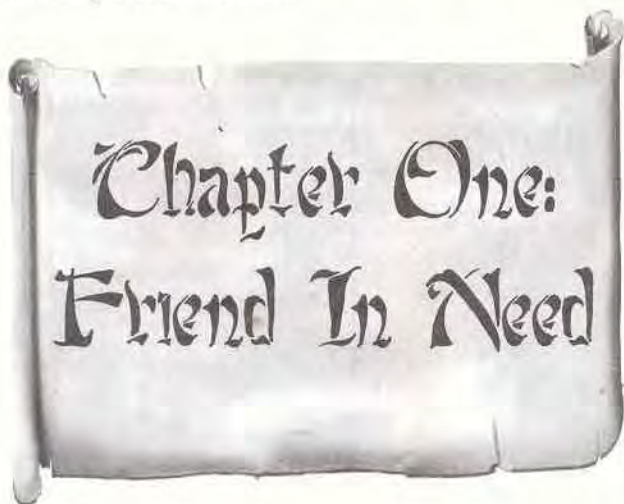
If the characters have not been through the previous adventure, then they have no reason to suspect Meishozo Nisei of any duplicity. One of them – preferably from the Crab or Phoenix clans – will be contacted by their daimyo, who asks them to attend upon a murder investigation taking place in the northern



Shinko Kamiko - Nisei's Bodyguard

Yasuki territory. A noted Phoenix shugenja, studying the spiritual harmonies in the far southern provinces, was brutally killed. The daimyo had some connections to the man and desires one of "his people" to be present: to ensure that justice is well and truly served. If there is a ronin character involved, he or she may be hired by a Yasuki daimyo (whose own samurai are otherwise engaged) to help solve the murder.

Arriving at the village, they will be introduced to Meishozo Nisei, who has taken charge of the case. He asks them to find the location of a porcelain mask which was among the items stolen from the dead man's home. From there, the remainder of the adventure proceeds as normal.



The characters should be situated somewhere in the lands south of Beiden Pass, among either the Crab, the Crane, or the Scorpion. A messenger arrives at their quarters (or wherever they happen to be) bearing an urgent communication for their eyes alone:

My friends.

Honored greetings and may our benevolent Emperor's protection find you well! I have found myself embroiled in a situation which bears some disturbing connections to the incidents surrounding the recent Bon Festival in Ryoko Owari. I need not remind you of the threat we encountered there, and I know you share my concern when I say that such a threat may be rising again.

I am currently stationed in the village of Kami no Okasan, on the eastern edge of the Crab provinces. A shugenja named Isawa Kinto has been brutally murdered, and I have been ordered to bring the killer to justice. Among the objects reported missing from his abode is a large porcelain mask: the description is identical to the one we discovered in the City of Lies. I studied that mask carefully, as did my Lion allies, and we destroyed it lest it fall into the wrong hands. I am certain it carried terrible maho powers within it: greater, perhaps than any artifact in Rokugan. If this new mask contains the same powers, it is a threat to the security of the Empire. I believe the murderer took it with him

when he fled the scene, and shudder to think what he may now be capable of. If this mask has fallen into a maho-tsukai's hands... the repercussions would be quite off-putting.

I know that I am asking much of you, but you are among the few samurai I trust in such a matter. If you could travel to Kami no Okasan to assist me in this investigation, my gratitude would be yours. Please come at the earliest opportunity, as time is of the essence. I remain,

*Your Humble Servant,
Meishozo Nisei*

The message includes signed traveling papers allowing the characters to proceed to the Crab provinces.

Kami no Okasan is located in the Yasuki territory, along the shores of Earthquake Fish Bay. They should have little trouble reaching it; it lies along Maple Leaf Road, in the midst of one of the most well-traveled areas of the Empire. If they are currently involved in another venture, or if they need permission from a superior to heed Nisei's request, they should be given leave without any fuss at all. The requests of an Imperial Magistrate are never treated lightly.

The journey to the village should be peaceful and uneventful, taking no more than a few days. Feel free to add any passing encounters with samurai or peasants as you wish.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

The murder victim, Isawa Kinto, was actually a minor *maho-tsukai*, a servant of Fu Leng. He procured the mask through unknown means, and planned on delivering it to his master's forces in the Shadowlands. Yajinden heard about the mask through his magistrate's identity, and with the other members of the Circle, tracked the rogue Phoenix down. They tortured the man for three days before learning that his apprentice – an honorless *eta* named Makato – had stolen it. In a fit of rage, Yajinden slaughtered Kinto, and the Bloodspeakers destroyed the entire village in search of Makato, killing every man, woman, and child they found. No one escaped to tell the authorities, and the destruction of the town has gone unreported. The Bloodspeakers' actions, however, cost them any leads they might have on Makato's location. When Yajinden calmed down, he realized what his unfortunate bout of temper had cost him. He had no idea where the mask might now be.

Fortunately, he has other resources – the player characters. He learned to appreciate their detective skills in *Night of a Thousand Screams* and knows they can be duped by his current identity. They are the perfect choice to hunt down the fourth mask for him.

Legacy of the Bloodswords - Judgment



Kami no Okasan - Mother's Blessing

The village where Isawa Kinto stayed has been wiped out, part of a murderous rampage by the Bloodspeakers. In order to proceed, they need to dupe the characters into believing nothing is amiss. Through the use of powerful illusion magics, Yajinden has restored Kami no Okasan to its former state. He's fooled several incidental travelers passing through and is confident that his power will hold until the characters have been sent on their way.

Arriving in Kami no Okasan should seem like a welcome relief after the travails of the road. Situated on the shores of Earthquake Bay, the small hamlet appears warm and inviting. Fishermen ply their trade out on the waters, while the wives and older men skin fish and repair nets. The sun twinkles merrily in the sky and children are playing in the streets as the PCs ride up. It's hard to believe a murder could have taken place here.

Nisei is waiting for the characters at the village inn, the Tea Petals of Dawn. He greets them warmly as they ride up, smiling and bowing before them. He asks if they had a pleasant journey and invites them into the inn to discuss the case over sake. He then introduces them to his two companions: his *yojimbo*, a ronin named Shinku Kamiko; and Isawa Kakusu-Sakana, a

representative of the Phoenix clan, who is waiting for them in the inn. Shinko, a tall woman, bows low before the characters, and refers to them with the *-sama* suffix, indicating their superior status. The pleasant-faced shugenja also bows low and congratulates them on their valor during Ryoko Owari's Bon Festival (in *Night of a Thousand Screams*). He says that Nisei has been regaling them with tales of the characters' exploits, and that he and his clan have every confidence that they will find his relative's killer.

Over rice and sake, Nisei explains the details of the case. "There is little in the way of evidence," he grumbles quietly. "Robbery seems to have been the motive." Sometime on or about the night of the new moon, someone broke through the wall to Kinto's hut and murdered him. The wood of the house's rear wall was battered down by someone

quite strong (actually the zombie Fushiki, but Nisei will not reveal that), and signs of a struggle suggest that the shugenja was taken by surprise.

Neighbors recalled seeing Kinto out and about in the early evening hours, and reported hearing nothing unusual during the night. This is difficult to believe, given the destruction in the shugenja's house, but the peasants know better than to lie to an Emerald magistrate, and they claim no noise emerged from the site. (Again, this is a lie on Nisei's part. He wants to hide who really killed Kinto, while pointing the characters towards Makato.)

The next morning, a fisherman on his way to work noticed that the door to Kinto's hut was open. He approached cautiously, calling out to Kinto and asking if he was all right. He found the shugenja lying dead in the main room, his neck broken. There were signs of a struggle, and a fair amount of blood had been spilt. They have not yet determined whether the blood belongs entirely to Kinto, or whether he managed to injure the murderer before succumbing. In any case, the killer had beaten him quite badly; several bones were broken and the body was covered with fresh bruises. Unfortunately, the PCs will have to take Nisei's word on that; the body was preserved with lime as long as possible, but had to be cremated once decay had progressed too far.

The shugenja had an errand boy, an *eta* orphan named Makato whom he had taken under his wing for some reason. The boy chopped wood, laid fishing lines, and conducted all the other

household necessities, leaving Kinto free to pursue his studies. Makato has not been seen since the night of the murder, and many have come to suspect the *eta* of complicity at the very least.

A search of the house revealed that many of the shugenja's personal items had been taken. His cache of scrolls, a pair of jade statues, and other items which visitors recall seeing are no longer there. Most prominent of all was a porcelain mask, much larger than most, which hung inside the entryway. Those who saw it always took notice of it, for its eyes seemed to follow them as they moved about in the hut. Most were unsettled by the experience, but knew that the shugenja held truck with strange spirits and dismissed it as a peculiarity of his vocation.

Other discoveries were made, more chilling than the mere loss of property. Beneath the building, Kinto had constructed a small basement, where it seems he had taken up the practice of black magic. Several broken clay tablets containing unholy symbols were discovered on the floor, along with a ceremonial bowl which had apparently been stained with human blood and a stained brush used to paint sigils during *maho* ceremonies. Upon seeing the chamber, the village magistrate decided to call in higher authorities. Nisei, who was in the nearby Crane lands at the time, heard the details of the case and petitioned his superiors to take charge of it.

After relating this information to the characters, Nisei urges them to take whatever steps they need to catch the murderer. Obviously, the first step is to find Makato, but even that may not be enough. Are there more sinister forces at work here? Nisei needs to find out, and quickly. The PCs have access to Kinto's house and all the evidence found there, and are free to question as many of the villagers as they like. Nisei stresses, though, that speed is of the essence, for the longer they take, the further away the killer can get. He insists on accompanying them on interviews, as does Isawa Kakusu-Sakana. The Phoenix monk claims that Kinto was innocent of any crimes, and that the killer must have planted such evidence to smear the man's good name. (This, of course, is a ruse by the two Bloodspeakers. If they appear at odds at almost all times – Kakusu criticizing Nisei's methods, Nisei cursing Kakusu as a meddler – the players shouldn't suspect their connection to each other.)

The "villagers" that the characters question are illusions conjured by Nisei to appear like ordinary peasants. They roughly match the real inhabitants of Kami no Okasan (at least as closely as he can recall) and provide all of the answers that they did before the Bloodspeakers slaughtered them. His skill at the Mists of Illusion spell is unparalleled (he's had five centuries of practice, and the *kansen* who perform it for him have taken particular glee in this particular ruse), and the characters should detect nothing unusual about the "people" they are talking to.

At the same time, Nisei must be very careful. He wants to present enough concrete evidence to the characters as he can, to help them hunt down his mask, but he also must disguise the fact that the town has been murdered – at least until the PCs have a solid lead on Makato. The simulacrum peasantry the characters

meet reveal the same information their real-life counterparts told the Bloodspeakers before their untimely deaths – plus a few well-placed insinuations that Mikato might be at the root of it all.

The following witnesses are most likely to be interrogated by the PCs in the course of their investigation. If the characters do not think to inquire after them, Nisei will gently suggest that they may be worth speaking to:

- Emon, the fisherman who discovered the body is (was) a nervous-looking fellow who appears overly eager to help the PCs. He's terrified that he might be implicated somehow in the killing, and will go to any lengths to prove his innocence. He sticks to the story that Nisei related, and reiterates loudly and often that he wished to help the "harmless old man." He praises the shugenja loudly as often as he can, and scoffs at any suggestions that he may have been *maho-tsukai*. He knows of no one who associated with Kinto regularly, and is convinced that if he was involved in any dark business, he kept it hidden from the rest of the town.

- Yasuki Togai, the magistrate in charge of the village, is (was) an eternally smiling potbellied man with a pair of teeth missing. He says that Kinto was a reflective man who enjoyed watching the sunset at night. He never bothered anybody, and the other villagers generally left him alone. Togai is quite disturbed by the notion that the Phoenix may have been in league with dark forces, and is anxious to keep a scandal from ruining his "happy little village." He attempts to paint Kinto as an outsider who kept to himself most of the time. The Phoenix would occasionally make journeys to Sunda Mizu Mira, "to meet with his superiors," he said. During one such trip, he brought Makato back to serve as an apprentice. Togai disapproved of the boy (an obvious *eta* who had no business interacting with a honored shugenja), but respected Kinto's wishes on the matter and left the pair alone.

- Kyoretsu, the old woman who lived across the from shugenja, saw more of his activities than any of the other villagers. She made her living repairing nets, and would often sit out in front of her house to work – giving her a constant view of Kinto's dwelling. Like most of the other peasants, she never gave much thought to Kinto's "odd behavior"; as a shugenja, he was unlike anyone else she had ever met, and therefore prone to strange habits. She saw the boy Makato quite a bit, studying scrolls or meditating after his chores were all done. She couldn't stand the little *eta*, but Kinto seemed to dote on the boy, treating him like he would a son. She wouldn't have thought him capable of murder, but with *eta*, you never know.

The two rarely had visitors, but occasionally a traveler or someone passing through would be invited to the shugenja's hut. They would always leave within a day or so. During these periods, Kinto would close his home up tight, even shuttering the windows which he never did at any other time. The old lady never had the courage to ask about them.

- Yasuki Shozu, the innkeeper (only distantly related to Togai). The operator of the Tea Petals of the Dawn was occasionally asked to procure supplies for the shugenja, which he did without question. (Shozu was one of only a few villagers who had regular

business with the outside world). The supplies were always unremarkable (rice, incense burners, writing paper and ink), and always paid for in advance. Often, the *eta* would pick up the materials once they arrived. He remembers Mikato explaining that he had never been beyond Sunda Mizu Mura's walls, and that his new life in Kami no Okasan was "quite exciting." The innkeeper thought the boy was addled – not right in the head somehow. He doted on his Phoenix master all the time, but Shozu wouldn't be surprised to learn that Mikato had killed him. "Something in his eyes" made murder possible, the innkeeper shudders.

The GM should be prepared to create more village inhabitants on the fly if the PCs wish to seek them out. None know any more than these four do; all of them remember Kinto as a kind and quiet man who kept to himself and never made trouble. Any mention of black magic will cause them to shudder and mutter prayers to their ancestors. They will rush to assure the characters that they were in no way involved in such heinous activity and were horrified to discover such a reprehensible man hidden among their ranks.

THE HOUSE

On the surface, Kinto's house appears no different from any other shugenja dwelling. Use the map on page 226 of the *L5R RPG* for the layout. With the exception of Kinto's corpse (which had to be removed once it started to decay), nothing has been touched since the night of the murder. The furnishings are spartan and utilitarian, used for basic meals and rest. Nisei points out where he believes the objects were taken from – the jade statues from a shrine in one corner of the room, the mask from a hanging on the wall above the door, etc. Indentations in the walls, a lack of dust in certain locations, and other subtle evidence suggests where these items had been.

Two locations in particular should interest the PCs. The secret cellar where the Kinto supposedly conducted his *maho* rituals is accessible through a trapdoor in the main bedroom. Kinto lay his sleeping mat over it to help disguise it better. The small area beneath contains enough room for two men to stand comfortably. A white chalk circle has been etched into the dark earth, surrounded by candle stubs and a trio of bronze bowls. All of the bowls are stained with blood; an Intelligence + Investigation test (TN 15) can determine that the last was used less than two days before the shugenja died. The broken remains of several clay scroll tablets have been scattered about. Careful examination (Perception + Maho Lore or Shadowlands Lore, TN 20) will confirm that they are indeed *maho* spells. Their crude nature and the fragile medium used suggest, however, that Kinto was not a very skilled black magician, that his links to other *maho-tsukai* were shaky and that his connection with the dark powers was tenuous at best. How such a man could have obtained an artifact as powerful as the porcelain mask is a mystery. Isawa Kakusu-Sakana attempts to convince the characters that the questionable nature of the evidence suggests that Kinto was framed. No true

maho-tsukai could toy so casually with the powers of Fu Leng and retain his sanity.

A small room to one side of the house (second from the upper left on the map) served as Mikato's sleeping quarters while he was here. It is even more sparsely furnished than the rest of the house, with only a bed mat and a low table for studying on. Scraps of torn scroll paper lie scattered on the floor, decorated with elementary writing scrawled in a shaky hand. Nisei says he has examined the papers and found nothing noteworthy about any of them. Apparently Kinto was teaching his assistant to write, and the notes are simply the result of those lessons.

If the PCs look closely at the scraps of paper, however, they will gain a vital clue as to Mikato's current whereabouts. A Perception + Investigation test at TN 25 (or a player specifically stating that he or she is examining the paper) will reveal part of a note from an early writing lesson that Kinto gave Makato. In it, he wrote down the only words he knew by heart – from the sign outside the slaughterhouse in Sunda Mizu Mura where he used to work. The paper lists the street address and name of the establishment, but not the name of the town it is located at. It shouldn't be too difficult for the characters to ascertain that however; testimony from the locals hints that Mikato came from Sunda Mizu Mura – the only large city within a week's ride of the village. It seems the most likely place he would flee to if he were carrying stolen merchandise.

Armed with this knowledge, the PCs presumably wish to leave for Sunda Mizu Mura with all deliberate speed. Nisei offers to accompany them, but will remain behind if they insist upon it. Meantime, he sends his *yojimbo* to deliver a progress report to his superiors (actually to gather the remaining three masks); Isawa Kakusu-Sakana also departs, telling them that Mikato's capture will doubtless clear Kinto's good name (he meets up with the pennagolan soon after the characters leave). After settling who goes and who stays, the PCs should be allowed to leave. The villagers take only passing notice, and seem relieved that life can now get back to normal.

IF THE PLAYERS REMAIN . . .

If for any reason, one or more of the players decide to remain in Kami no Okasan, they will be in for quite a shock. The village will revert to its actual state once Nisei and the others leave (see Chapter Two for details), and the PCs are quickly set upon by Bloodspeakers: first ordinary cultists (5 for every PC), then Fushiki and a group of ten zombies, then Shinku Kamiko. If the characters aren't killed, they'll probably be convinced that Mother's Blessing isn't the safest place to be. They should be allowed to find their companions and warn them about the plot they are entangled in. The GM should be prepared to juggle or change events as appropriate.

It will take the characters two days to reach Clear Water Village. The road is paved and well-maintained by the Yasuki family, who take pride in their "civilized" infrastructure. Samurai are rare on the road, but enough Hida guardsmen are present to ensure a modicum of security. The travel time should pass quickly and uneventfully.

Sunda Mizu Mura: Clear Water Village

This community, at the mouth of the River of Gold, has a deceptive name. The "village" is actually a huge trading port, one of the wealthiest and busiest in the entire empire. It serves as the cornerstone of Yasuki economic power and the gateway to the lands of the Scorpion, Unicorn and Sparrow Clans. Finding one man in a hive like this isn't going to be easy.

The city has been run by the Yasuki since its founding during the Age of Myth, when it served as a marketplace for fishermen along the bay. As trade grew and thrived, it expanded to meet new demands: merchants began to hawk their wares here, sailors began to hire out their ships in service, and farmers sought a place to sell their goods. When the Yasuki broke from the Crane, they took the city with them, and it became a pivotal link in their business empire. Today, it is one of the oldest cities in Rokugan; home to some ten thousand merchants, smugglers, farmers and craftsmen plying their trade up and down the southern half of the Empire. Anyone wishing to travel up the River of Gold must pay a toll to the city, and those who depend on Earthquake Fish Bay for a living use it to conduct commerce with the outside world.

Sunda Mizu Mura forms a delicate balance between the virtuous and the sinful. As the largest Yasuki port, it attracts the usual sort of criminal scum you might expect. While it lacks the deadly vices and infamous reputation of Ryoko Owari, it is nowhere near as squeaky clean as the genteel and proper Crane ports. A huge amount of illicit business goes on here - smuggling, gambling, geisha houses, opium dens, you name it. Yet legitimate business takes place as well: traders moving up and down the river, fishermen selling their goods, and travelers who wish to enter the lands of the Crab. With legitimate business comes legitimate economic interests, and the Yasuki have no wish to alienate such a lucrative source of income.

The result is a strangely peaceful mix of legalized crime and regulated merchant trade. Buildings dedicated to the "harmless vices" - gambling, opium, and alcoholic consumption - exist in the open, advertise themselves publicly, and receive the same benefits that other businesses do. The city's rulers tax them as they do other operations, and require them to meet certain levels of

safety and cleanliness. They are relegated to a series of "red light" districts, cut off from the rest of the city by a wall constructed of tightly-woven thorn hedges. Those that operate outside these established zones are shut down, and their owners arrested. Thus, the open air trading markets, fish processing and other legitimate businesses can operate in peace without being reminded that more sordid commerce is taking place nearby.

The balance has worked quite well, and all associated parties have come to see the benefits of maintaining the status quo. The Yasuki run the city with an iron fist, backed by the considerable might of the Hida family and the blessing of the local merchants. The city's governing council consists of family members at the head of the most prominent businesses - including illegal ones. Men who might be considered crime lords elsewhere openly serve as governing officials here, making policies that benefit their own stock in trade. Corrupt? Certainly, but also effective and free from the deadly jockeying that such endeavors produce



Legacy of the Bloodswords - Revenge

elsewhere. The natives and those who work here regularly just shrug at the suggestion of impropriety – better a devil you can see than one you can't.

Even this highly tolerant atmosphere has limits. Racketeering, overt extortion, and other impediments to commerce are frowned upon, and violent crime of any sort is dealt with harshly. Violence is bad for business, and those who perpetuate violence are coming between the Yasuki and their profit margin. The results are brutal. Armed robbers are hanged without exception; hijackers are weighted with stones and drowned in the bay. Those who attempt to move against established businesses, or act too aggressively against their competitors, are stripped of their credentials and exiled from the city. If one's livelihood depends on either the river or the bay, this is an economic death sentence. The Yasuki are backed by several intimidating units of Hida bushi, who have no compunctions about dealing with "troublemakers." (Most of the Hida stationed here are considered unfit for duties against the Shadowlands, and tend to take out the perceived dishonor on any available targets). Amorality may be welcome here, but only as long as it respects the bottom line.

It's a thin distinction. In Sunda Mizu Mura, as elsewhere in Rokugan, one must always be aware of how far the limits can be tested. Those who aren't discover first-hand how much like other Crabs the Yasuki can be. The PCs should be on their guard.

INSIDE THE GATES

As the characters pass through the main gates, they are stopped and questioned by a burly pair of Hida bushi. Nisei's presence, the presence of a Crab within the party, or the traveling papers the characters started the adventure with should be sufficient to get them in with a minimum of monkey business. Crane characters will be eyed menacingly and bluntly reminded that their kind is less than welcome within the city walls. "You don't go putting on airs around here, Bird Boy (Girl)," one of them growls. "We got no patience for it."

Beyond the gates lies a vast network of streets and alleyways, crowded with vendors, merchants and shops of all varieties. Traffic moves slowly along the thoroughfare, broken by shoppers stopping at stalls and cart, or ducking in and out of the numerous buildings. In addition to the standard wares (fish, cooking utensils, silks and spice, etc.) a few oddities stand out. One stall sells live snapping turtles ("Food or Pets!"), sticking their wrinkled reptilian necks from between the slats of stacked wooden cages. Another shop offers "books," strange bound sheets of written parchment brought to Rokugan by the Unicorn clan. And a beggar in a darkened alleyway offers his own severed hand for the amusement of onlookers – along with the knife he cut it off with.

As they push their way through the vast crowd, they are approached by an old man dressed in grey robes. He offers to read the fortune of one of the party members, using yarrow sticks and shugenja magic to contact the spirits of their future. If Nisei is with the party, he will angrily shove the old man away, shouting that they have no time for such games. The fortune teller will bow before the magistrate and apologize; before vanishing, however, he will press a mah-jong piece on the chosen character, and gesture back at a tiny building behind them. "When you are alone," he says. The character should sense a quiet power in his words and a need to speak to him again away from the prying eyes of others.

If the character allows him- or herself to be dragged into the shop, or returns at some later point, the old man will be waiting.



Kuni Visten

He sits them down in front of a long table, cluttered with prayer bowls, hastily written notes, and all manner of fortune-telling paraphernalia. A shugenja will be able to tell that these implements are not used in the proper summoning of spirits; rather, they are the purveyance of hedge magic, the superstitions of peasants. If interrogated about it, he will smile and ask for patience. "Few things are ever what they seem," he says.

In any case, he will go through the rigmarole of entreating the fortunes, throwing down mah-jong tiles and waving his hands quite impressively. When he is done, he will stare intently at the character with a seriousness that belies his comic embellishments.

"Dark times are coming for you and your companions," he speaks. "Ancient evils swirl about you and threaten to swallow you whole. In your death lies the death of the Emerald Empire, but through your sacrifice, it may be saved."

He then reaches out and places a small sphere in the character's hand. It is a pearl, larger than any the PC has ever seen, and inscribed with tiny, almost indecipherable runes. (The pearl is a magical Naga artifact, whose use is described in greater detail in Chapter 2).

"For your trouble," he says quietly. "Keep it hidden and tell no one of it. We will speak more on this in the future." With that he admonishes the character to rejoin his or her compatriots.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

The old man is actually a retired Witch Hunter named Kuni Visten. He has been tracking Asahina Yajinden for almost forty years now, and he knows that the ancient Bloodspeaker plans to feed on Iuchiban's power. Despite numerous efforts in the past, he has been unable to stop the Asahina's retrieval of the masks and is close to despair at the nearness of his adversary's success. With the arrival of the player characters on the scene, however, the equation has changed, and he has hit upon a bold plan. He will allow Yajinden to gain the final mask and open the tomb. Then, using the PCs as his instruments, he will undo the Bloodspeaker's magic at the last moment, trapping him in the tomb with his former master.

It's a gamble, one which places the characters in great danger. It also allows Yajinden to come perilously close to his goal of releasing the power of Iuchiban back onto an unsuspecting Rokugan. But Visten feels it is the best and only chance of stopping Yajinden. The spirit will be able to outwait him any other way.

In order to do this, he needs to keep the PCs in the dark until Yajinden has secured the masks. He will then fill them in on all he knows, and beg them to help destroy this evil. By giving one of them the pearl at this stage, he hopes to convince them of his good intentions and persuade them to help. He will continue to watch the characters' progress during their stay in Sunda Mizu Mura, and follow them to the monastery and the shattered village of Kami no Okasan. If the GM wishes, Visten can provide subtle help to the PCs before then – ensuring that the monastery's front

door remains unlocked, for example, or driving off Shinku before she devours one of them. See Chapter Two for more information.

THE THIEF AND THE MASK

The address left in Mikato's room is located in the *eta* district in the northwestern corner of the city. The Yasuki wish to keep the *eta* as far from the river as possible, where they will not interfere with the regular flow of commerce. The buildings in this district are constructed of cheap materials, and none rises higher than one or two stories. The dirt roads are unpaved and the traffic consists mostly of leatherworkers, grave diggers, and other *eta* going about some errand or another. Most of them work at night, out of sight of the rest of the city, and conduct other business by day, which is the most likely time the PCs will come to call. Characters who move through the quarter will draw a great deal of attention. Passersby will part to let them by, and everyone will keep their eyes down and their head bowed. As members of the samurai caste, the PCs are within their rights to kill any *eta* with impunity, and the locals are well aware of this. They will stay far away from the characters unless directly questioned, at which point they will deliver everything they know in as polite and reverent a tone as they can.

The address is a long low building built of rough wood and open in several locations. The sign at the street reads "Tanners," and the smell of burning animal flesh surrounds it. Inside, the smell is even worse. The owner, Kemuri ("Smoke"), spends his days skinning and tanning animal hides for use among the *eta* and the occasional Unicorn trader. He's a bulky man, although his natural obesity has been tempered by the hard, sweaty work he performs. When he hears there are samurai outside, he rushes out to greet them, then falls to his knees in supplication. Before the characters can even speak, he appears to know why they have come.

"You friends of the Phoenix man, sirs? I told him when he came that Mikato was no good. He's a thief, gentle lords, always a thief. He came back, asked me to buy some things, but I told him no. He don't work for me no more, and I want nothing to do with him robbing his betters. Please tell the Phoenix man that I am sorry he stole from him."

This is the first clue that things may not be as they seem. Mikato, while freely admitting to Kemuri that he stole from the shugenja's house, made no mention of murder or death. In fact, Kemuri believes that Isawa Kinto is still alive and that the characters are his friends come to reclaim his lost belongings.

If informed that Kinto has been murdered, Kemuri's eyes widen.

"Mikato's not a killer, gentle lords. Even the beasts, when we have to cut their throats, he looks away. But he must be found, yes, I understand that he must be found. He tells me he'll stay at Friendly Grasshopper and look for buyers of marvelous objects stolen from Phoenix man. Is he really dead? That is a great tragedy, lords, a great tragedy. May the fortunes curse his murderer for a thousand years."



He will go on like this until the characters ask more questions or take their leave. If asked, he can give a detailed description of Mikato's appearance (found in the character section).

The Friendly Grasshopper is a sort of makeshift bar and flophouse where the city's *eta* spend what little money they have. The flies outnumber the patrons by at least five to one and a pair of thin dogs nose for scraps among the tables. The main room consists mostly of sullen laborers, sipping cheap sake and muttering quietly amongst themselves. A sallow-faced woman serves drinks with the enthusiasm of a corpse.

All activity ceases at the arrival of the characters. Sake cups crash to the floor and a few questionable business transactions near the back are hurriedly pushed beneath the tables. The woman stammers something about being honored by such a noble presence and asks how she or her patrons might be of assistance. Any inquiries as to new patrons, or a description of Mikato will elicit a chorus of fingers pointing to a form sitting in the back corner.

Mikato has taken a room in the second floor, hidden his stash beneath the eaves of the roof, and now sits in the main room, trying to decide what to do next. He knows several fences in the city who would be willing to purchase the stolen items, and hopes to contact them within the next day or so. Mikato never truly believed in the power of *maho* or felt the need to worship Fu Leng (at least, that's what he told himself). But he noted Kinto's desire to pass his knowledge on, and felt he could exploit the weakness. Since Kinto was *maho-tsukai* anyway, there would be

no dishonor in stealing his possessions, he rationalizes. Deep down, however, he is expecting some sort of retaliation from Kinto. If there is even a hint that the characters might be looking for him, Mikato will bolt out the nearest window.

Mikato is skinny and out of shape; it shouldn't be too much trouble to run him down. If you like, you can make the chase long and epic, winding through the alleys and trash heaps of the *eta* quarter to the mouth of the River of Gold (where Mikato vainly attempts to swim to freedom). The conclusion should be inevitable, however; the PCs catch up to the wayward thief, and inflict whatever punishment they feel is just.

When caught, Mikato begs and pleads with the characters, saying anything he thinks will help him stay alive. He fears that they are *maho-tsukai*, come to take him back to Kinto or perform some other horrid deed upon him. He has no idea that Kinto is dead, and looks surprised and confused at mention of his murder. A Perception + Sincerity test (TN 10) reveals genuine confusion; it seems Mikato truly has no idea that Kinto has been killed. At first he is greatly relieved; the characters are obviously not *maho-tsukai* and he needs not fear some unholy destruction at their hands. When he realizes that he is going to be charged with the crime, however, his pleadings return with a vengeance. He is terrified at the prospect of torture, and even more frightened by the thought that Kinto's murder will be pinned on him. He makes quite a spectacle of himself, begging on his knees in front of the party. He swears up and down that he never laid a finger on the old man, and in fact has never harmed anyone in his life. Kinto

had some nice things and he took them, hoping to become rich by their sale. That's all. He will gladly reveal where he hid the mask, if he feels it will grant him leniency.

The characters have the option of killing him outright, of course, although if Nisei is with them, he will insist that Mikato be taken into custody and made to sign a confession before he dies. It makes little difference. If the PCs turn Mikato over to the authorities, he kills himself in his cell that night rather than face torture. If they take him with them out of the city, he is found dead the next morning, having swallowed his own tongue. Even if strict measures are taken to prevent suicide, Nisei will find some way to poison, strangle, or otherwise do away with the hapless would-be *maho-tsukai* (it won't do to have people start believing him innocent of the murder). In any case, Mikato will be dead, with Kinto's murder placed firmly on his head. The authorities consider the case closed after that.

While the characters are dealing with Mikato, Nisei takes the opportunity to go up to the *eta's* room and ransack it. He finds the stolen items in short order, including the mask. If he chases the *eta* with the other characters, he rushes back to the Friendly Grasshopper the instant Mikato reveals where the mask is. If the characters accompany him, one of them can easily find the item hidden under the eaves, and he compliments them on their ingenuity.

The mask looks almost identical to the one in *Night of a Thousand Screams*. It is large, about twice as large as a human face, and fairly heavy. Its features are blank and emotionless – on the outside, at least. Inside, the mask bears an indented visage of a hideous face contorted by rage. The image gives onlookers an unsettling feeling of being watched. The artifact radiates magic and Shadowlands taint to anyone who checks; it is indestructible and cannot be harmed by any methods available to the PCs. Not even jade will mark its surface (although it will keep the Taint from corrupting anything else nearby).

Nisei will be ecstatic at the retrieval of the mask, and breathe a public sigh of relief that they found it before any evil-doers could. He now wishes to “return to his superiors” in the Crane lands and deposit the mask in the proper hands for destruction. Following that, he will return to Kami no Okasan and pursue the victim's possible *maho* connections. He asks the characters to accompany him on the journey, to better protect the mask. If they refuse for some reason, he admonishes them to fulfill this last part of their duty, and gently reminds them that as an Imperial Magistrate, he can order them to accompany him. He has no wish for bruised feelings, he says, but without his *yojimbo*, he may be vulnerable while on the road. If they insist on abandoning Nisei, dock an appropriate amount of honor and allow them to continue. (If this is the case, they will begin suffering nightmares as detailed in Chapter Two. Shinku, Fushiki, and/or some other appropriate Bloodspeaker minion attacks them on the road, and Kuni Visten steps in to assist them. He directs them towards the Tomb and the tragic duty they must fulfill there, again described in Chapter Two).

At this point, Nisei no longer needs the PCs. They've served their purpose and helped him get the mask back; their usefulness to him is now at an end. However, they remain loose ends to be dealt with; should they learn of his duplicity, they will surely attempt to hunt him down or disrupt his plan to enter the Tomb. Now that he is so close to achieving his goal, he has no wish to simply leave them to their own devices. So as they leave Clear Water Village and begin their journey south, he quietly maneuvers them towards a dire fate...



Chapter Two: Troubled Footsteps

The characters probably spend the night in Sunda Mizu Mura and leave in the morning. There are an endless number of inns to stay at, and Nisei can recommend a few good ones (all well-appointed and reasonably priced). If they turn Mikato in, they are asked a few routine questions by the city guard and then released. Unless they inquire before leaving, they hear nothing about the boy's suicide.

The first night after retrieving the mask, the characters are plagued by a series of horrific nightmares. They dream of being chased through corridors that transform into screams, of being encased in stone and frozen for all eternity, of being devoured by grubs and maggots within the prison of the grave. Some dream of an oracle, rising from a pool of blood and uttering predictions of doom. All awaken in a dank sweat, feeling unclean – as if they have embraced a rotting corpse. The only party member unaffected by these nighttime terrors is the one in possession of the old man's pearl. Its magic kept him or her safe from the Bloodspeaker's corruption.

The nightmares continue each evening, growing steadily worse as time goes on. They strongly suggest an exposure to the Shadowlands Taint; anyone making an Awareness + Shadowlands Lore roll at TN 10 can ascertain that. If it continues, it will almost certainly lead to further signs of Shadowlands sickness – perhaps even permanent damage.

(Note: Exposure to the mask for a period of one week gives a character two points of the Shadowlands Taint. The characters are also being affected by Nisei/Yajinden's magic, which will give

them an additional 2 points for the same amount of time. Jade stops the accumulation of Taint points, but grows soft and black as it does so. The nightmares continue whether or not the characters are protected, and they should be made to feel that the jade they are carrying is not enough to hold back the corruption. See the *L5R GM's Screen* or *Book of the Shadowlands* for more information on the Taint.)

Nisei looks quite concerned at any mention of bad dreams, and suggests that the mask might be the cause of it. "Forgive my lack of foresight, my friends. I myself was plagued by similar nightmares when I had possession of the other mask," he reveals. "It took weeks of meditation and rest before I could be free of them. Before undertaking this mission, I had several wards and bindings placed on me for protection." He holds up a protective amulet carved apparently from jade. (It's not jade, merely green stone, but the PCs don't need to know that.) "Alas, I forgot to even consider that you, my companions, might be afflicted by the same condition."

A discussion about what to do will invariably follow, and the GM should allow the players to suggest whatever course of action they please. Most of them are likely to be quite disturbed at the thought of exposure to the Taint, and will wish to rectify it before the malady gets any worse. During the conversation, Nisei will recommend the following solution.

"The monastery I stayed at following my earlier ordeal is not far from our path: just over the border in the Crane lands. It is a cheerless place, but its monks are well-versed in the arts of purification and healing. We should stop and have them treat you before proceeding."

If the characters agree to the proposal, he continues.

"I hesitate to ride on without you, since I feel desperately vulnerable without protection. But time is of the essence, and my superiors are waiting for me to deliver this accursed thing. Perhaps those of us unafflicted can journey to our destination without you, and return when you are well."

If they suggest that Nisei stay at the monastery with them, he demurs:

"The burden we carry is quite heavy, and I would not seek to defile any holy place unprepared for it. Also, its presence has obviously had some effect on you. I fear you will not be able to heal the damage it has caused until it is far away from you. I will give this to the proper personages and return to Kami no Okasan. When you are feeling better, you may join me there, and we can reflect on what we have seen."

If they insist, Nisei relents, and agrees to stay with them at the monastery. However, he will refuse to bring the artifact inside the walls, and instead will camp outside until they are healed and ready to go. Once the characters are trapped inside, of course, he takes off, killing or incapacitating any unaffected characters before he goes. By the time the PCs get free of the monastery, he will be long gone.

If for some reason the PCs do not wish to go to the monastery, the nightmares continue, growing worse and worse each evening.

The GM may assign penalties to skill rolls to reflect the fatigue and exhaustion the dreams are imposing. Nisei looks increasingly concerned over his friends' dilemma, and continues to urge them to go to the monastery. If they refuse, they will find him missing one morning, the mask gone with him. He leaves a note explaining his action:

Forgive me, my friends, but I could not stand to see you suffer so. I have taken the mask onward in hopes of sparing you the continued effects of its corruption. I urge you to go to the Monastery of the Quiet Earth to replenish your strength [these directions to the monastery are included]. I will seek you there when my mission is complete. May the spirits calm your troubled minds, my friends.

Nisei has, in fact, gone back to Kami no Okasan to meet with his companions. A careful Perception + Hunting test (TN 25) will reveal his horsetrack leading back the way they came. If the characters wish to pursue him, go to "the Charnel House," below. If they do not notice the horsetracks, or acquiesce to his request to go to the monastery, continue the adventure below.

The Monastery of the Quiet Earth

The monastery lies at the foot of the Wall above the Ocean Mountains, in the unclaimed land north of the Yasuki and Asahina holdings. Ostensibly, it serves as a retreat for a small circle of Shintao monks. In reality, however, it houses a large contingent of Bloodspeakers and the monstrosities which serve them. The lack of military presence in the Asahina fields, combined with the uninviting terrain, keep it conveniently secret from the outside world. Nisei/Yajinden felt it was the perfect place for the characters to disappear, which is why he has arranged to lure them here. With them out of the way, he can proceed with his plan without fear of interference.

The monastery is a low, nondescript compound in a small vale between two hillocks. It is surrounded by high walls to protect its inhabitants from raids by ratlings and the occasional goblin tribe which frequents the mountains. A heavy bank of grey clouds rolls in as the characters approach, casting a gloomy pall over the landscape. In the fog bank, the monastery should seem warm and inviting, like a friendly port in a coming storm.

(Note: the players should not suspect the monastery of any sinister underpinnings. It should be neither too inviting or too foreboding to their senses. It should look like a monastery, no different from any other they may have seen.)

Ringling the bell at the front gate produces an irascible cursing and fumbling of latches. The doorway cracks open and a craggy bald head pops out. The old monk looks the characters up and down suspiciously before speaking.

"And what brings samurai here in the dead of night to disturb our humble order? Is there a war on?"

At mention of the Shadowlands Taint, the characters' need for a cure, or Nisei's "previous stay" here, the monk loses some of his gruffness.

"True, we do have ways of curing the black sickness, and we have given sanctuary for those afflicted from time to time. How did you come upon Fu Leng's foul touch?"

If the PCs give some reasonable explanation (like the truth), he nods sagely and pops back inside to confer with his superiors. Eventually, he returns with a decision: the characters are permitted to heal here, but they must leave the mask behind. No object so tainted can breach the sanctity of the walls. Nisei will gladly camp outside the walls with the mask, or continue on, depending on the characters' wishes. (If alone, he leaves for Kami no Okasan as soon as the doors close. If one or more of the PCs are with him, he waits until they are asleep and then attacks them with a contingent of Bloodspeaker monks).

As the characters enter the monastery, they are greeted by a trio of elderly monks who show them to quarters where they can rest for the night. They are led through a series of corridors and courtyards, passing shugenja of the order engaged in various activities. The zombies and other supernatural denizens have been rushed out of sight, giving the temple every appearance of normalcy. Groundskeepers tend the tiny rock gardens, bowls of incense smoke in the corners, and the sound of pious chanting comes from somewhere in the complex. Though dim, the torches and lanterns glow merrily, and the entire scene radiates peacefulness. Even the storm brewing outside does not disturb the atmosphere.

BLOODSPEAKER MONKS AND ASSASSINS (30)

EARTH 2

WATER 2

Perception 3

FIRE 2

Agility 3

AIR 1

VOID 1

Honor: 0

Roll For Attack: 4k3

Roll for Damage: 3k2 (knives, machetes, and other implements)

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: none

Wounds: 9: -1; 18: Dead

These are Bloodspeaker monks, with shaved heads and simple robes. All of them carry sharp edged weapons, and attack without mercy. The "assassins" sent to dispatch the PCs are clothed in black robes.

The characters will be led into a large chamber, lined with simple wooden cots and a washing basin in the corner of one wall. The monks apologize for the spartan nature of the quarters, saying that they were not prepared for such guests. They wish the characters a pleasant evening, and urge them to get some sleep. "The cleansing process is quite arduous," they are told. "Conserve your strength for what is to come." They then leave the characters to arrange themselves for the night. The door locks behind them, and the monks wait until their charges fall asleep before acting.

In the middle of the night, a group of assassins (two for each character) sneak into the room to slit the characters' throats while they sleep. The Bloodspeakers are very good at moving silently, and should be able to enter the room without detection. If the PCs did not post guards, or failed to realize earlier that the "benevolent" monks had locked them in, things can get quite nasty for them. If, on the other hand, they are suspicious of the monks, remain in their armor, check the door, or do anything else that paranoid players engage in as a matter of course, they should be prepared for their unwelcome visitors. The door can be knocked down with a Strength + Athletics roll of TN 50 if they don't want to wait around to be slaughtered. Even if they remain, the assassins wear no armor and carry only crude butchering tools to attack with. A suitably riled group of PCs should make short work of them.

Should the characters realize they are locked in and attempt to escape, or if they dispatch their assassins and come to see what has happened to the rest of the monastery, they will be for a rude surprise. With the PCs safely locked away, the Quiet Earth's masters removed the illusory cloak around the grounds. It has now become a carnival of horrors – a twisted reflection of what they saw coming in. Frightening symbols are etched on the wall, or drawn in human blood on the floor. The rock gardens have become mounds of skulls, or open graves reeking of desecration. The monks are grinning madmen, or worse – abominations brought from Shinsei knows where to serve their dark masters.

Once the characters are out of their rooms, a general alarm goes up, and the monastery's denizens attempt to capture or destroy the PCs. (They are hoping to transform their corpses into zombies, so they try to keep bodily trauma to a minimum, but they also know that the characters are dangerous, and take no chances). The characters find themselves in a running battle, as the Bloodspeaker monks and their monstrosities attack them without mercy. There are a total of thirty Bloodspeakers, twenty zombies, four malevolent kansen, and the unfortunate result of an attempt to graft undead flesh upon a living body (see stats and descriptions below) lurking within the Quiet Earth. Don't throw all of them at the PCs at once, but during the journey through the monastery, groups of them (mixed however the GM pleases) attempt to cut off the party's escape.

The Bloodspeakers know the monastery well, and plan their attacks accordingly: taking advantage of ambush sites, hidden corners, and dead ends to keep the PCs off guard. Above all, they want to keep the characters inside the compound; it won't do to

OTHER DENIZENS OF THE QUIET EARTH

Zombies (20)

EARTH 0

Stamina 3

WATER 1

Strength 3

FIRE 1

AIR 0

Rolls For Attack: 1k1

Rolls for Damage: 5k2 (claws and improvised weapons)

TN to be Hit: 5

Armor: 7

Wounds: 60: Dead

Special Abilities: Immune to Pain, Invulnerable.

See *L5R RPG*, pg. 198.

Four Kansen

Kansen have no physical stats, as they cannot be harmed by normal weapons. They mostly seek to harass and irritate the characters, drawing their attention away from the monastery's other denizens. An "attack" from them likely consists of hurled objects (2k1 to hit, 1k1 damage), an effort to hold a player character in place (all rolls must be made at 5 TN higher), or an attempt to keep a door or gateway shut (+5 TN on all efforts to open it). There will never be more than one kansen attacking the players at a time; they don't like each other much and tend to stay solitary.

Mugusu, the Thing That Should Not Be

EARTH 3

WATER 2

Perception 3

FIRE 3

AIR 1

Rolls For Attack: 4k2 (three attacks per round)

Rolls for Damage: 5k2

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 4

Wounds: 10: -1; 25: -2; 40: Dead

Abilities: Fear 1

Mugusu is the unfortunate result of an experiment to create a "superior" form of life. It consists of several undead bodies stitched upon a living one, emerging as a mangled ball of limbs and faces. It moves on six combined legs and attacks with four arms (one left, three right) scattered across a bloated center torso. There are three complete heads and a fourth face attached to stumpy, neck-like extensions. Their teeth have been sharpened, and their bulging, rolling eyes can see in all directions at once. It attacks by grasping opponents in its limbs and drawing them towards one of the mouths to be bitten. The creature's arms and mouths are supernaturally strong and can rip out chunks of flesh with ease. The Bloodspeakers keep it fed, so it rarely attacks one of them, but the PCs are not so lucky...

have their charges escape and reveal their existence to the outside world. A quartet of zombies and one of the kansen are posted at the front gate with specific orders to keep the doors shut. The characters should be in for the fight of their lives if they wish to escape their would-be captors.

If they manage to get away, either by opening the great doors or by scaling the walls, the Bloodspeakers do not pursue them. In the monastery, they have the advantage, but none of them wishes to engage a band of irate samurai in the middle of the night on unfamiliar ground. Outside the monastery walls, the characters are fairly safe. The rain pours down making the roads a mess of slush and mud, but their pursuers decline to follow them. The monks do send one of the *kansen* after them to observe them and report their movements to Yajinden if need be.

The PCs will most likely be anxious to speak to their good friend Nisei about the Shadowlands-laden death trap he sent them to. The rain makes him difficult to track, and the middle of the night is not the time to chase after anyone. But if they wait until daylight (the storm quiets shortly before dawn), the lack of traffic and viscous nature of the local mud may enable a decent tracker (Perception + Hunting, TN 10) to locate Nisei's path. It travels due east, retracing their steps back to the Crab lands... and Kami no Okasan.

The nightmares the PCs have been experiencing will not diminish following their escape from the monastery. They continue to have them as long as they are pursuing their quarry. (See Chapter Three for more details.)

The Charnel House

Depending on when they escaped the monastery, the characters should be anywhere from six to twelve hours behind Nisei/Yajinden. Informed by the *kansen* of their escape, Yajinden presses on with all deliberate speed, hoping to outdistance them until he can join up with the rest of the Five. Once the characters reach the main road, they should have no trouble following him. Peasants and guardsmen along the road clearly recall the magistrate traveling alone, and can point the characters in his direction. He was marked by his haste and the way in which he mercilessly drove his horse onward, they say. "Riding as if the Nameless One himself were on his heels," reports one Daidoji patrolman.

Unless the characters are all mounted and wish to drive their steeds to exhaustion, they cannot keep pace with their quarry. Each passerby stopped and questioned reveals the Bloodspeaker getting farther and farther away from them: now he is twelve hours away, now fifteen, now twenty-four. His direction, however, never wavers; he moves towards Kami no Okasan straight as an arrow. In addition to the frustration they must be feeling at falling farther and farther behind, the PCs should now be thinking of the people of the village – and whether their turncoat friend has some harm intended for them.

Thankfully, Yajinden's haste will not come without a price, and the characters finally earn a sign of progress in their relentless pursuit. Three days after leaving the monastery, they find Nisei's horse, dead, in the middle of the road. The beast has cooled in the early evening air, but the flies and carrion birds have not had a chance to really dig in to the carcass yet. Experienced trackers ascertain that the beast was alive a day ago; Yajinden's progress since then cannot have amounted to much.

Spurred on by the discovery, the characters will doubtless hasten towards the village with renewed vigor. By the time they reach the outskirts, they are some twelve hours behind Nisei. The clouds threaten rain for the whole of their journey, but it stays dry until just before they reach Kami no Okasan. Then, as at the monastery before, the floodgates will open and the rains come pouring down – soaking possessions and reducing visibility to a few hundred feet. With all of the wet around them, they cannot see the changes in Kami no Okasan until they are almost upon it.

The warm and friendly place they stayed at just a few days ago is gone – in its place is an abomination. The village is an abattoir – a maze of rotting bodies, broken buildings and slaughtered farm animals commingling in the rain. Corpses of the children they once saw playing in the streets are now broken like twigs in a hundred different places. Maggots squirm in the mud beside the putrefying hands of fishermen who had sewn their nets with the same fingers just a few days ago. The characters should recognize many of the faces they see – now bloated with gas and betraying the first hints of ivory bone. The rain cannot hide the smell of decay, which rises in waves from the carpet of the dead. Several of the buildings have burned to the ground; the rest lie shattered. Great holes gape in the walls; roofs sag into rubble where load-bearing pillars have come tumbling down. The fishermen's boats squat half-sunk in the swampy shoreline, torn apart by the same brutal force which sundered the houses. The bodies of a few hapless peasants are strewn across the ships, decomposing with the piles of fish surrounding them.

The corpses themselves, however, are not the most unsettling aspect of the doomed village. If the characters study the remains, they will come to the realization that something is terribly wrong here. There is no way this sort of destruction could have been caused by one man. Nor could it have taken place in so short a time. A cursory examination of the bodies reveals an unsettling fact. The peasants of the village have been dead for longer than a mere twelve hours. A great deal longer. The extent of the decay

and the position of the corpses in relation to the mud around them indicates that they died well over a month ago – *before the characters ever came to Kami no Okasan*. The people they talked to during their initial investigation, the buildings they stayed in and the activities they witnessed... all of it was an illusion, a ruse caused some powerful magic or worse. If Nisei knew about it, he was able to hide all evidence of the monstrous crime from them, for a period of days. The thunder rumbles ominously in the distance as the implications slowly sink in.

At an appropriately dramatic time, a lone figure becomes visible in the distance. As it grows closer, the PCs will recognize it – Shinku Kamiko, Nisei's *yojimbo*. She smiles as she approaches the PCs, drawing her katana.

"Welcome back, noble samurai," she purrs icily. "My employer sends his regards. I'm sure you have many questions, and unfortunately, I have no answers for you. But by the time we conclude our business here, I guarantee you will never ask any questions again."

While she speaks, the muck around her boils to life, as a group of undead villagers rises up from the ground. They have porcelain masks fitted over their faces and crude weapons in their hands. The horrified characters recognize several of the zombies marching towards them, including Yasuki Shozu, the innkeeper of the Tea Petals of the Dawn, and Kyoretsu, the old woman who lived across the from shugenja. Contrast their glazed, rotting visages with the warm faces that greeted the characters earlier.

Yajinden is furious at the PCs' escape and has sent Kamiko to finish the job. Because they were so close on his heels, however, he was not able to prepare the welcome he would have liked. There is one zombie for each character, plus one extra zombie. Kamiko waits to enter the melee, focusing on targets of opportunity distracted by the zombies or shugenja preparing to cast a spell. She fights as a samurai-ko, using her *daisho* as any bushi would. Under no circumstances will she reveal her true nature; she wants an ace in the hole in case things go badly. Astute characters, however, may notice that she shrugs off even the mightiest blows without apparent injury. If struck with jade, she hisses and recoils; the blow leaves a smoking burn on her skin – evidence that all is not as it seems. She flees if seriously threatened (*i.e.* her life is at stake), but if her ruse holds, she plays the part of a human to the hilt – even feigning death if the battle turns against her (and she is struck with an appropriate blow, of course).

If the characters are having a particularly difficult time at it, they will be joined at an opportune moment by Kuni Visten – the old man from Sunda Mizu Mura. He attacks with a vigor that belies his age, striking down zombies left and right with mighty blows from his staff. The zombies crumple at its touch, dropping back into the mud with a plop. If she has not done so already, Kamiko flees at his appearance, and he will let her go (or allow her "corpse" to rest unmolested on the ground). He does not know her true nature and believes her far less threatening than she actually is – a mistake that will cost him dearly...

Legacy of the Bloodswords - Passion



If the characters dispatch the zombies on their own, Visten will appear following the combat, applauding politely at their show of valor. In any case, he will introduce himself to the characters, claiming to have been waiting here for them. They need his help, he asserts. "You have entangled yourselves in a foul conspiracy, and I wish to help free you before things get worse."

Leading the PCs away from the carnage of the village, Visten explains his purpose. He has watched the characters from a distance since they arrived in Sunda Mizu Mura, but has been unable to act for fear of arousing Nisei. He has followed the magistrate, or "the thing he has become," for many long years, and now feels that he can be stopped, once and for all. The mask he has taken, and three others just like it, serve as keys to a set of doors – doors which were never meant to be opened. Nisei plans to unleash a great evil upon Rokugan – unless the PCs can capture him.

The characters will doubtless wish to continue the chase against Nisei, especially after the attack. The rogue magistrate's

tracks continue north into Crab country, leading them straight to the tomb. With Visten to guide them, they should set out from the ruins of Mother's Gift in search of their prey. The time has come to fill them in on Yajinden's plan.

The GM should allow the characters to question Visten all they want. He will be happy to provide them with answers, as well as filling them in on the background of their adversaries. The GM should play out the session as a role-playing encounter, using Visten's character description to play out the old witch hunter. The italicized passages below are intended as dialogue from him, which should be inserted where it is appropriate in the interaction between the characters and himself. (Keep in mind, however, that Visten does not know everything, and should not provide instant answers to all of the characters' question. He knows enough to enlighten them on Yajinden's plot, and has an extensive working background on the Bloodspeakers' history, but that is all. He has never been to the Tomb, much less been inside it, and has no idea what the conditions might be like.)

"What do you know of the Bloodspeakers? Or of the name Iuchiban? Children's stories, no doubt, told to misbehaving boys and girls. I assure you, however, that Iuchiban is more than just a name. He is perhaps the gravest threat the empire has ever seen, and he lives even now: trapped within the walls of his Tomb. I believe that Nisei is trying to reach Iuchiban – to free him or steal his power for himself. We must go there as well, to stop him. We must be prepared, if we cannot get to him before he reaches the Tomb, to go in after him. The terrors there are real and the dangers great, but far worse will befall the Empire if do not have the courage to pursue him. Can you do this? Will you take up this burden with me if called upon to do so?"

"You should be aware that the thing which we are chasing is not the magistrate you believe him to be. By all accounts, Meishozo Nisei was a wise and honorable man. He may have even been so when you met him in Ryoko Owari, although I doubt it. Whoever that man was, he exists no longer. The creature that rides his flesh has possessed and destroyed him, and now uses his body for its own foul ends. It duped you into tracking down the porcelain mask, and now that you have given it what it wants, it seeks to destroy you."

"What is it? That's a story worth telling. It was a man once, long ago, and had a name as other men do: Asahina Yajinden. A maho-tsukai of frightening power and black reputation, he was the chief advisor to Iuchiban himself. That was five hundred years ago; he helped his master move close to the emperor, and created the Bloodswords, which destroyed three Clan daimyos before they were stopped. Through some dark spell, he has made himself ephemeral, like the kansen of the Shadowlands. He can possess others, destroying their souls and inhabiting their bodies for years, even decades. He is a malevolent spirit now, flitting from body to body like a bandit fleeing the law. He has taken a thousand different forms, hidden under a thousand stolen names. And now, he wears the face of Nisei, pursuing his goals under the guise of an Emerald magistrate. Do not be ashamed that you did

not spot him, my friends. He has fooled countless millions for longer than any can know..."

"The porcelain mask he claimed is one of four such artifacts. They were once believed destroyed, but I now know that they were merely hidden – and that the Bloodspeakers have found them. They are keys, fitted into the great doors at the entrance to the Tomb. When turned in sequence, they open the doors, allowing access to Iuchiban's resting place. Over the centuries, Iuchiban's foulness has seeped into them, until they radiate the corruption of his soul. Anyone who spends time in their presence will feel the taint from them in their own hearts, as I fear you have already discovered. Yajinden gained two of the masks from his Bloodspeaker minions. The third, he acquired in Ryoko Owari during the last Bon Festival. And now, with the last mask in hand, I fear his master's power may be within his grasp."

"The Bloodspeakers as a whole feel cheated by the great cosmic cycle. Through their magic, they hope to snatch what fate has denied them. They claim to be free of the Shadowlands taint of Fu Leng, but I believe the Dark One pulls at their souls just the same. The Taint can take subtler forms than they can possibly imagine..."

"I have chased Yajinden all my life. I am one of the few who know what he is and understand how he has survived all this time. I have been close to him many times, close enough to destroy him. But every time, he has slipped away. The years of my folly are plain in my wrinkled hands, and I fear I must join my ancestors before he can truly be defeated. Unless you can help me to stop him. Here. Now, and in the future if he slips our grasp again. I need young arms to take up the burden, to follow this through to the end. I hope and pray to my ancestors that you have the strength we need."

"There are strange stories about Iuchiban – and about the Tomb which imprisons him. From what little I know, the mad sorcerer can literally eat interlopers alive. He lives in the walls,

shaping them as he pleases. Those whom he kills are there forever, playthings for his fevered imaginings. I cannot imagine what horrors and evil spirits have been attracted to his insane ravings. Yajinden would not risk entering the Tomb unless he had some protection against his master's magic. Believe me when I say he has no intention of becoming imprisoned too."

"The pearl is magical, a sign of the trust I have placed in you. I found it in the lands of the Naga, far to the west, and I believe it to be a reservoir of their strange magic. You crush it between your hands, you see, which releases its pent-up power. If my translation of the inscriptions on its surface is correct, it allows the user to instantly return to his place of birth. When the time is right, I believe it can transport us away from the Tomb and Iuchiban's wrath. If we succeed in destroying Yajinden, I have no wish to remain there any longer than I necessary. Somehow, I don't believe its resident will be hospitable."

In addition to this information, Visten has a scroll in his satchel containing knowledge cobbled together from a hundred sources. It holds the history of the Bloodspeakers as he has come to understand it, as well as secrets that few are aware even exist. He wishes the characters to read it, in order to have some idea of what they are up against. Before he will do so, however, he gives them the following warning:

"Know before you read of the dangers that lie herein. There are those who would kill you for learning the secrets held in this scroll, and not all of them are Bloodspeakers. Are you prepared to accept that burden, to face those who would wipe such knowledge from the face of Rokugan?"

If the characters agree, he gives them the scroll and allows them to study it during their journey to the tomb. It records Iuchiban's history and the circumstances surrounding his dual banishments; the GM should give the players the "History of Iuchiban" booklet, which covers all the information contained in the scroll.

THE MAP

If the players have the map from the "Yemon's Legacy" adventure in the *City of Lies* set, they may have an edge that neither Visten nor Yajinden anticipated. The map depicts a rough layout of the "outer ring" of the Tomb, detailing the various rooms and the traps therein. The words "Hidden Heart," scrawled on the top of the parchment, betray the map's origin, for the phrase has been used to describe Iuchiban in certain historical texts. Visten will recognize the reference instantly upon seeing the map, and become very excited.

The other words, tattooed across the map in what appears to be human blood, may provide vital clues to bypassing the traps and pitfalls that await them. Wise characters will study the map thoroughly on the journey.

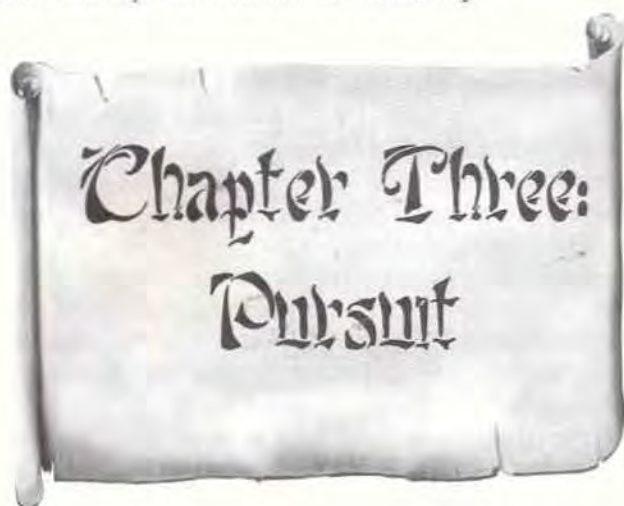
THE PEARL

The pearl is a piece of magic which Visten discovered long ago in the lands of the slumbering Naga. He was traveling through the mysterious lands to the far west when he came across a series of great stone ruins. Superstition had it that the ruins were haunted, but as a Kuni Witch Hunter, he did not fear such things, and decided to investigate further. The search revealed nothing but a series of strange carvings, large statues of snake-like people... and the pearl. It was tucked within a tiny crevice, impossible to spot to all but the most discerning eye. Fascinated, Visten took the pearl with him. In the Phoenix lands, he had its magic analyzed; it could be used to transport people great distances in the blink of an eye. It could only be used once, however, before its power was spent forever. Visten wisely decided to hold onto it until such time as it was truly needed. Now that time has come. He gives it to the party for use within the

Tomb, for he suspects that its magic is all that will allow them to escape Iuchiban's evil clutches.

In game effects, crushing the pearl will allow the user and up to eight companions to travel anywhere in the world they wish. No mastery level or knowledge of magic is required; the necessary spirit has already been willingly bound within the pearl. The only condition is that the user must have physically traveled to the place they wish to teleport to at some point in the past, and must be able to visualize the location in his or her mind. It cannot be used to teleport into an unknown point, or a point they have not seen with their own eyes. It cannot, for example, be used to get the characters to the tomb ahead of Yajinden, because none of them (not even Visten) knows exactly where the tomb is.

The pearl takes one turn to activate and another turn before taking effect. Once used, it is crushed into powder and cannot be reused. The trip – however distant – is one-way.



Chapter Three: Pursuit

Following Kamiko's attack on them at the village, the characters (with Kuni Visten in tow) must resume their pursuit of Yajinden. The chase leads them up through the Crab lands into the barren northern wastes of the Twilight Mountains, there, they reach the secret location of the tomb, only to learn that Yajinden has already entered; if they wish to stop him, they must go in after him...

It is approximately one hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies from Kami no Okasan to the tomb. The terrain is rough and the roads are not always well-paved, slowing both the PCs and their prey. It should take the characters approximately ten days to traverse that distance on foot, a little less on horseback, although the GM may spend as much or as little time as he or she wishes on the journey. The only thing that remains constant is the track Yajinden leaves; the PCs grow slowly closer to him as the journey continues. If they were a day away from him at the start, the distance will soon shrink to eighteen hours, then sixteen, then twelve, etc. By the time they reach the end of their journey, they are no more than two or three hours behind him. Yajinden is also joined by his compatriots – Isawa Kakusu-Sakana and Fushiki

(and Kamiko, if the GM wishes) – soon after fleeing Mother's Blessing. With three to follow instead of just one, the trail is much easier to detect.

Yajinden is anxious to avoid military patrols (although he has papers permitting him to cross Crab lands), so he stays away from the main roads. The Crab do not spend much money maintaining roads that do not serve a vital military purpose. As a result, much of their infrastructure consists of pot-holed tracks, swollen with mud and bereft of travelers. This suits Yajinden just fine; the fewer who see him, the better. For the characters, however, the journey is dour, depressing and unpleasant. The landscape is grey and foreboding, marked by outgrowths of rock and dark, earthy fields. The few farms in the area produce anemic crops; other areas contain iron mines or primitive foundries which blacken the sky with greasy smoke. Villages dot the road, but they appear sullen and cheerless, and their inhabitants do not welcome visitors. There are few inns along these roads; in their place appear stone army barracks used to house reserve troops. The characters are not permitted to stay at any of the barracks (although exceptions may be made if one of the PCs is a Hida or Hiruma). The characters should be prepared to spend many of their nights outdoors.

As if this weren't bad enough, the dark dreams the characters have been having will continue on the road, and while Visten may be able to counter the worst effects, they should still feel the reach of the Bloodspeakers curling around their souls. Now, however, it's not the mask causing the nightmares – it's Iuchiban himself, reaching out from his prison. Like Visten, he needs the PCs to stop Yajinden, and is using the threat of the Taint to entice them onward. As long as they believe that their corruption will end only when Yajinden is stopped, they will follow him to the ends of the earth. Iuchiban makes the nightmares particularly horrifying to hammer the point home.

Luckily, it's not as bad as it could be. The dreams Iuchiban is sending them may be more horrifying than those they suffered from earlier, but they are far less harmful. The Tomb's great distance and the lack of direct exposure to the Shadowlands prevents the PCs from gaining any Taint points. The PCs, however, do not know this. The dreams' increasing frequency and intensity strongly suggests that the PCs are slipping further into the sickness, which ends only in madness and a dishonorable death. They should be led to believe that Yajinden is somehow at the root of the problem, and must be destroyed before their terrible slide into Shadowlands corruption is complete.

In the midst of all of this, Visten will provide a few welcome moments of relief. While concerned about Yajinden, and anxious to give the PCs as much information as he can, he has ways of making the time pass more quickly. Forty years of life on the road have taught him numerous diversionary skills, such as singing, storytelling, and sleight of hand tricks; he will not hesitate to share these predilections with his new companions. He sprinkles warnings of their foe with tales of great heroes in the past, and stories in which brave samurai defeated or outwitted

supernatural adversaries. Amid the pall of their surroundings, his counsel will do much to keep their spirits up. The GM can ad lib this situation as he or she desires: embellishing stories from the "History of Iuchiban" book, answering questions as Visten would, or even including tales of his or her own design. The only important element is that the players should begin to trust Visten, or least feel some sympathy towards him.

Encounters on the Road

As bleak as the landscape is, it is not totally deserted, and the characters will have a few run-ins with other beings – some harmful, some not. Feel free to modify any of these encounters as you see fit, and add new ones that enhance the mood.

MESSAGE FROM A MERCHANT

(This occurs nears Peddler's Row, near the halfway point of their journey)

Midway through the day, the characters will come across a peddler – one Bayushi Jingoro – struggling to pull his laden cart from the mud. He thought to take a short-cut to get to a prominent spot along Peddler's Row, and instead found himself lost on this backwoods trail. He has papers to travel the main Crab thoroughfares, but not the smaller roads, and is terrified that some "Hida psychopath" will come across him out here. The oxen pulling the cart has been quite uncooperative in helping him move, and it appears as if the beast's strength would do little good regardless; the mud here is quite viscous. The top of his face is hidden by the Scorpion's trademark mask, and his high-quality kimono has been streaked with dirt. He can be heard shouting curses at the Crab civil engineers from some distance away.

The cart is mired quite deeply, and requires a Strength roll at TN 35 to get free. Multiple people working together should be able to succeed, and the task will be made easier if someone can get the ox to help. Jingoro will be most grateful to any assistance the characters can render, and even more grateful if they forgive his "careless trespass" on Crab lands. In return he will offer them each a gift from his wares: polished wooden boxes, packs for long distance travels, and a variety of fine inks and scroll papers. All of them are high quality, a rarity among the among the price gougers of the Row, and Jingoro is quite proud of them. He plans to make a killing if he can ever get out of this mud patch.

If asked, he has no recollection of seeing an Emerald magistrate along the road, or indeed of anyone matching Nisei's descriptions. The only person he's seen since leaving the main path was a beggar wrapped in bandages and cloaked in a tattered shugenja hood. The man came upon his campsite early this past morning, seemingly to talk or share information. He never consorts with *eta* normally, he is quick to add, but this individual had something unsettling about him, and the peddler did not wish to cause trouble. The beggar had a raspy, jangling voice that

set his nerves on end, and kept his face completely covered at all times.

He asked if Jingoro had seen anyone, and warned of "bandits posing as samurai." When the merchant had answers his questions, he bowed and shuffled his feet back down the path.

"The odd thing is," Jingoro concludes "is that he headed southeast – in the direction you came from. You should have run into him long before you reached me." In any case, he was glad to be rid of the odious creature and be on his way.

The beggar was Fushiki, attempting to ascertain the characters' location and perhaps cause them to doubt their tracking skills. He considered killing the Scorpion, but decided against it, simply because another corpse would be an irrefutable sign to the PCs that they are on the right track. He doubled back soon after leaving the merchant and passed him unseen while his cart was stuck in the road.

A short while after the characters pass Jingoro, the road will improve a great deal until it finally joins with the mighty Kaiu Road, *aka* Peddler's Row. As the main artery of Crab defenses, it is wide, well-paved and frequented by all number of bushi and tradesmen. Yajinden and his companions got off the road as quickly as they could, but still had to spend a few hours traveling its length. A number of people saw them, however, and can easily point the characters in the direction they took... GMs wishing to role-play the denizens of Kaiu Road further should consult pp. 95-96 of *Way of the Crab*.

The road which the Bloodspeakers traveled away from Peddler's Row is similar to the road joining it, and returns to the barren environment marking the entire journey.

SHE'S BAAAACK...

(This occurs anytime after Visten has revealed all the secrets you want him to, or whenever the players are feeling too confident for their own good)

The characters are getting closer, and Yajinden has decided it's time to take direct action again. He dispatches Kamiko to finish the job she started in Kami no Okasan. This time, she intends to strike while the characters are asleep, strangling them before they have a chance to defend themselves. She will also drop all pretense of humanity; her speed and the shock of her ghastly appearance can help her here where her samurai skills failed her earlier. Her body has been carefully hidden, while her head and organs rise of their own accord to take a terrifying life of their own.

She follows the party discreetly for several hours before the attack, singling out those who pose the greatest threat. She pays particular attention to Visten, and to any other Kuni witch hunters who may be in the group. (Alternately, a cruel GM can have her focus on one of the PCs, but considering what she's about to do to Visten, it's probably best that the NPC take it.) When they bed down for the night, she makes her move. Visten is the key threat, so she waits until he is on guard duty (or goes straight for him if the characters do not set guards) before striking. She expects the

other characters to remain asleep while she strangles them one by one.

Visten is taken before he can react. Kamiko moves quite swiftly and wraps her fleshy guts around his throat. With immense strength, she grasps the old man's arms and legs crushing the breath from him before he can move. There's nothing the characters can do to save their new-found friend; even if another PC is on duty with Visten, Kamiko moves too fast and knows the night too well. However, he gives them one last gift before death: he manages to utter a single gurgling scream, which should be enough to wake any sleeping characters in the vicinity (simple Awareness test, TN 10).

Now facing conscious prey, Kamiko rises above the characters in all her horrifying glory. Her eyes shine with an unholy light and her grinning mouth reveals row upon row of shark-like teeth. The body of Kuni Visten flops awkwardly amid the tightening coils of her entrails, the last breath of life bubbling from his mouth. His blood cakes the pennaggolan's face and chin, running in rivulets from his torn throat. With a twist and a crack, she snaps the hapless witch hunter's spine in two, then drops the body to the ground with a sickening thud.

"Miss me?" she whispers like a razor.

She attacks with blinding speed, using her increased mobility and the shadows of the night to weave between the characters. Should she wrap one of the characters in her coils, she will use the hapless PC as a shield against his or her compatriots. The TN to hit her increases by five, and a failed roll has a 50% chance of striking the entangled character instead. Only jade, and the prospect of serious harm therefrom, will get her to retreat. (If the PCs have no jade with them, someone may well have the presence of mind to pick up Visten's staff and use that against her. If so, the staff causes 2k2 damage, and one blow convinces Kamiko to flee.) Kamiko will attempt to cause as much damage as possible before breaking off the engagement. She wants all of them dead, but satisfies herself with killing Visten if things get too ugly. Without his guidance, they will be at a distinct disadvantage when



and if they ever confront the Bloodspeakers. Yajinden will not be happy with anything less than the characters' destruction, but is too concerned with getting to the tomb that to argue the point with his yojimbo. If Kamiko couldn't take them, there is little more he can do to halt their pursuit.

MAYHEM IN THE MOUNTAINS

(Three days from the Tomb)

As the road edges out of the Crab's ancestral lands, it begins to wind its way up into the Twilight Mountains. The ground here is rocky and inhospitable, as the meager topsoil of the valley below gives way to the inflexible iron and granite of the mountains. The road sticks mainly to the hillocks, so there are no serious climbs to contend with, but the high-capped peaks at the top of the range can always be seen on the southern horizon. The dubious comforts of the Crab lands will gradually disappear, until even the dark holes of the Kaiu iron mines become memories. The land becomes truly wild here on the very edge of the Emperor's kingdom. And still, Yajinden's tracks continue, and the distance between hunter and hunted grows ever shorter.

A few days into the mountains, the characters detect an odd series of sounds. A low, rumbling boom resounds in the distance, along with what sounds like high-pitched laughter. The rumbles grow gradually louder as the characters approach, until they shake the ground with their intensity. Then, just as they should be within sight of the disturbance, all noise suddenly stops.

Just around the bend, several hundred yards off the trail, is a reinforced opening in the hillside. It looks like an iron mine, although what one would be doing this far from civilization is a mystery. A thin plume of smoke rises from the mine's entrance, and the smell of sulfur is everywhere.

Suddenly, the ground before them blows upward with a colossal bang. Smoke and gravel flies into the air, shocking the unwary and startling any horses the party has with them. In flash, a series of similar explosions occur to the left, right, and behind the party. Each one follows on the echoes of the last, and all take place with disorienting speed. Despite the apparent force of the explosions, no one is injured.

As the smoke clears, the air becomes filled with maniacal snickering, coming from the direction of the opening. Standing, squatting and floating around the mine's entrance

FIGHT OR FLIGHT IN THE MODERN PENNAGGOLAN

Kamiko's task is to prevent the PCs from reaching the tomb, but there are limits to how far she will go. Under no circumstances will Shinku Kamiko enter the tomb – not to pursue the characters and not to aid Yajinden. She hasn't survived by taking risks, and while she fully supports Yajinden's plans, she has no wish to gamble her life on them. Instead, she lurks quietly near the entrance – well-hidden from prying eyes – until one party or the other emerges again. Where she goes from there depends entirely on the circumstances. If the players have stopped Yajinden earlier or proven themselves too dangerous to tackle again, she creeps away, leaving them to their victory... for now. She has a long memory, however, and will not forget the PCs. Ever.

With the possible exception of the Oracle, Kamiko is the member of the Five most likely to survive the adventure. She can make an excellent recurring villain, capable of returning multiple times to torment the characters. And naturally, the best way to defeat your enemies is to outlive them...

are a large number of diminutive orange creatures. They giggle hysterically through tiny, sharp teeth, and their bulging eyes roll with amusement at the characters' reactions. Flimsy vestigial wings sprout from their backs, which – amazingly seem to be enough to keep the floating creatures airborne. The entire scene suggests a group of hyperactive, undisciplined children – with the exception of the bags of black powder many of them carry.

The creatures are mujina, mischievous spirit beings who live to vex and annoy. (See *The Book of the Shadowlands*, pp. 121–126, or the boxed text “A Crash Course In Mujina Studies” for more information.) The mine is the site of a Crab experiment gone wrong – an effort to yoke these beings into useful service. They are normally incorporeal and move with lightning speed. A pair of Kuni shugenja had succeeded in binding a mujina's shadow, rendering it solid and capable of being coerced. With some prodding and threats of violence, they were able to get the creature to follow their orders.

Encouraged by their success, they captured a number of the mischievous beasts (about ten or so) and put them to work mining iron in the hills. The mujina weren't happy about the situation, but there was little they could do in the face of the Kunis' magic. So they did what they were told, chiseling the black material out of the earth, and loading it into carts to be processed and organized. The Kuni were amazed at the tirelessness of their newfound slaves: they worked at breathtaking speeds, requiring neither rest nor food. The ten mujina were bringing out as much iron as a mining crew of one hundred could, and in a fraction of the time. The potential of such recruits for the Crab's military machine was incalculable. Smug and pleased with themselves,

the Kuni set about preparing their findings to present to the daimyo.

Then they got sloppy. They were confident their that slaves presented no harm, and stopped guarding the bindings that held the spirits in bondage. One night, while they slept, a single mujina crept into their workshop and succeeded in unstopping the wards holding its companions' shadows. The result was a sort of “spiritual explosion” which ripped through the confines of the lab and reduced the hapless creature to a blue ash outline on the floor. The damage had been done, however, and the shadows of the other workers had been set free. What happened next was nightmarish.

The shugenja are now hiding somewhere in the hills, afraid to show themselves. The mujinas' retaliatory pranking was as spectacular as it was vicious, and the two count themselves lucky to still be alive. The mujina, for their part, feel that they have enacted a suitable revenge and consider the matter closed – at least until they can find them again. (The shugenja made such funny noises when they were running away!) The trouble is, the loss of the shugenja has left them without any suitable victims in the area, and they have become quite bored. They considered harassing Yajinden when he passed, but the dark energies surrounding him made them think better of it (some things, it seems, can frighten even mujina). The discovery of the mine's cache of explosives alleviated the situation somewhat, leading to a gleeful free-for-all of thrown bags, loud noises, and sections of the mine collapsing on their heads. The characters' arrival interrupted the festivities, and gave the anarchic spirits a new target to focus on. Their antics fell silent (they didn't want to alarm their potential playmates) while they waited for the party to come around the bend.

The explosions around them started things; now, with the characters disoriented from the smoke and noise, some close-range antics are called for. First, they begin pelting the party with small stones and gravel; these objects reach the party quite easily despite being hurled by tiny beings from four hundred yards away. A Reflexes + Defense roll (TN 10) will be enough to dodge the missiles, but the characters look quite comic and undignified in the process.

After the barrage of rocks, several mujina appear in front of the characters, and throw handfuls of black dust into their faces. The dust stings the eyes, and renders the skin dark and soot-like, but causes no permanent damage. The mujina cackle madly and scamper away before the characters can react, easily dodging any weapons that might be unleashed. After mocking them from a discreet distance, they streak back to the PCs to start again. This time, they will steal small, easily carried items such as a sword, helmet, scroll case, etc., and engage in a madcap game of keep-away – tossing the object to and fro, dangling it in front of the PC's nose, snatching it from their hapless grasp. When the target is suitably enraged, they casually toss the item away, as if no longer interested in it. They make sure it lands off the path, in an

area difficult and frustrating to reach, and giggle maddeningly at any efforts made to retrieve it.

Should any character be foolish enough to enter the mine, either out of curiosity or to chase their tormentors, the mujina react as only mujina can. With a victim in such close surroundings, the potential for mayhem is enough to set them ashiver. As soon as the PC crosses the threshold, a wooden pail full of water – big enough to cover a helmet – is dropped on his or her head. The prankster responsible for the missile rapidly follows, wrapping its spindly legs around the shoulders and pounding on the bottom of the bucket like a drum. Meanwhile, another mujina lays down behind the character's feet, while a trio

of its cohorts run up to him or her and give a mighty push. The hapless samurai must make a Reflexes + Defense roll at TN 30 or fall flat on his or her back to the wild cheers of the mujina.

Once on the ground, the really ugly stuff begins. One of the sprites clambers onto the character's chest, then jumps up and down repeatedly, screaming "Ride the ponies! Ride the ponies!" at the top of its voice. The others hurl nearby objects at their compatriot in an effort to knock it off their new playmate, resulting in a hail of garbage, small rocks and broken mining helmets. An unarmored character takes 1k1 die of bruising damage from the assault; those suitably protected only have to endure the humiliation of being stuck in such a position.

When the GM feels that the PCs have had enough, fortune has mercy on them. One of the mujina spots the shugenja hiding in a crevasse about half a mile away, and the entire gang rushes off after them. They move with amazing speed, gathering up the explosives and other equipment before taking to the air in a flock. Their peals of laughter and constant jabbering can be heard as they slowly float away in the distance.

The characters would best be served by moving on and counting themselves lucky that no one else saw them suffer so.

A CRASH COURSE IN MUJINA STUDIES

Mujina are spirit beings possessing tremendous speeds, a warped sense of humor, and a profound need to irritate other beings. They devote themselves to elaborate pranks, ranging from the merely annoying to the actively harmful. They never seek to injure or permanently harm anyone, however, making them more of a nuisance than an actual threat.

EARTH 1

FIRE 2

Agility 6

WATER 2

Strength 3

AIR 2

Reflexes 5

Skills: Defense 5, Athletics 5

Rolls when Attacking: 3k2

Rolls for Damage: 1k1 (rocks or other hurled objects)

TN to be Hit: –

Armor: –

Wounds: –

Since they are essentially spirits, mujina suffer no damage from physical blows and cannot be harmed by most spells. Elemental Ward keeps them at bay, which is usually enough to get them to move on. They lack the patience to wait out a warding spell.

Conversely, the only way they can inflict damage is by throwing something at an opponent; their claws and teeth pass right through flesh. They can heft small objects with relative ease, and can hurl them great distances with blinding speed. (Some have speculated that they must use magic to facilitate this, but nothing is known for sure.) Like their pranks, however, these impromptu missiles are rarely lethal – thrown more to produce a reaction in the target than to kill or incapacitate him.

THE GARRISON

(Two hours from the Tomb)

For all their weary bones and travel-worn feet, the characters have been making progress. The signs of Yajinden's passing have been getting fresher and fresher each day they travel. So close to his goal, he has abandoned even the pretense of covering his tracks. This morning, the party comes upon the ashes of a cooking fire that had been set the night before. Low heat still emanates from the embers and a few coals continue to smoke. The Bloodspeaker cannot be far now.

The trail leads to the opening of a narrow valley, flanked on all sides by imposing peaks. The topsoil returns here, and the ground becomes a little less foreboding than it has over the last few days. The location for the tomb was well chosen; the walls of the valley rise steeply on either side, forming a natural barricade that even the hardest mountain climber would think twice about. There is only one way in or out of the valley, and that, it appears, has been covered. As the characters make their way to the vale opening, they are greeted by an unexpected sight: a cluster of buildings, flanked by a wall, nestles amid a modest canopy of tea leaves. Someone is running a plantation here on the edge of nowhere. Particularly observant characters (Perception + Hunting TN 20) quickly notice a few unsettling details about the structures. Hazy smoke rises from one of the buildings, and it appears as if one of the walls has been breached. A scorched line runs through one of the tea fields directly up to the building – as if a great fiery ball had tumbled straight through it. As the party gets closer, they can see tiny figures scurrying to and fro, trying to put the flames out or forming defensive lines against a potential attack. The Bloodspeakers' trail ends at the plantation. Beyond it, the rest of the valley is untouched wilderness.

The "tea plantation" actually serves as a garrison for the Tomb's only mortal guards: a unit of Imperial elite selected for their fanatic loyalty, their finely honed skills, and their disinclination to ask compromising questions. Most of them believe they are guarding Rokugan's borders – an outpost on the frontier to watch for foreign invaders or encroachments from the Shadowlands. Only the unit commander, Daidoji Mochiko, knows the full truth, and she has sworn an oath to die rather than reveal the secret. Under her watchful eye, the Tomb remains undiscovered by Iuchiban's minions, as it has for three hundred years.

That is, it remained undiscovered until a few hours ago. Before he entered the valley, Yajinden called up a diversion to keep the guards occupied – a monstrous oni from the depths of the Shadowlands. Enraged by its captivity, the Oni charged headlong into the garrison, rupturing the walls and igniting the nearest building with its fiery breath. The Imperial Guards put down the creature, but not before it killed over twenty men, including the resident shugenja. In the midst of the chaos and hidden by illusionary magic, Yajinden and his cohorts were able to slip through the perimeter without being detected.

The garrison is struggling to ascertain what happened and ensure that more attacks are not following. There were originally one hundred men stationed at the tea plantation; there are now fewer than eighty, many of whom have been injured. Mochiko

IMPERIAL GUARDS (80)

EARTH 3

WATER 2

Perception 3

FIRE 2

Agility 3

AIR 2

VOID 2

Skills: Archery 1, Etiquette 2, Iaijitsu 2, Kenjutsu 2, Defense 3, Battle 1, Naginata 2, Shadowlands Lore 2

Honor: 3

Glory: 4

Equipment: daisho, various weapons, heavy armor

has sent out scouting patrols to search for other potential threats while rest of the guards treat the wounded and put out the fires before they can spread. There's no evidence of Yajinden's passing (see Chapter Four), so she is unconcerned about the Tomb; her command is what worries her now.

The party will be spotted as soon as they enter the valley and quietly shadowed by a pair of scouts. Guards stop and challenge them as they enter the tea fields surrounding the site. The bushi are in no mood to talk or bargain; they ask the characters to



sheath their weapons and follow them to the plantation. If the characters refuse, they are forcefully subdued, and if they attack, they are cut down without mercy.

If the party complies like civilized Rokugani, they are taken into the plantation, past a bucket brigade attempting to stop the fire, and past the butchered remains of Oni no Kakusu-Sakana. At the front of the plantation's main building, a samurai-ko in blue steel armor (Mochiko) appears to be coordinating the other troops. She speaks swiftly and decisively, and none of those she speaks to hesitate for an instant. Beside her sits a thin young man in shugenja's robes (the apprentice of the deceased). The hair has been singed from one side of his face, and his arm is in a makeshift sling.

The samurai-ko looks up at the characters approach; she is obviously not pleased to see a new set of variables in the equation, and harshly demands to know what they are doing out here in the back of beyond. She listens intently to any explanation which is given, but at any mention of the Tomb, her eyes will narrow suspiciously.

"You've been taking bedtime stories too seriously, my friends. There's no Tomb here – and to save time I should tell you that there's no Monkey King, River of Golden Sunshine, or enchanted shipwrecks here, either."

The response earns a deep chuckle from the guards around them. The shugenja takes the opportunity to whisper something into Mochiko's ear, and she nods curtly. With a wave of her hand, she dismisses the guards, then checks to see that no one within earshot is listening.

"You have ten seconds to explain why I shouldn't have you slaughtered where you stand as threats to the Empire," she whispers harshly.

The time has come for some role-playing finesse. The PCs have to convince Mochiko that they mean no harm, and in fact have come here hoping to stop a threat to the Empire. Use the description of Mochiko (Appendix 2) to role-play the encounter; she is suspicious, but not immune to reason. If the PCs make a good argument – or better, present her with tangible evidence that they are who they say they are (Visten's jade staff, for example, or the lack of any of the porcelain masks needed to open the Tomb) – then she will ease off enough to let them be. Mochiko suspected that the oni had friends, but hasn't located any trace of them and has focused her attention on more pressing matters. If there are Bloodspeakers loose in the valley, she can't afford to ignore them.

Mochiko is now in a delicate situation. She doesn't wish to let any more people than necessary know about the Tomb, which means she can't use any of her command to search for Yajinden. The characters are the obvious choice, but allowing them to reach the Tomb requires a huge amount of trust – trust she is unwilling to place in the hands of strangers. She finally decides to accompany them to the Tomb, allowing her to keep an eye on their actions and ascertain once and for all that their story is true. (As the only one who knows exactly where it is, she'll have to go

with them anyway, she reasons.) She realizes that she won't be a match for the entire party if they turn on her, but also knows that they can't escape the valley without passing the plantation again. Calling the apprentice shugenja (and the current second in command) to her, she issues the following order.

"I have an errand to run with these samurai. If I do not return within three hours, seal off the valley and hunt these people down

ONI NO KAKUSU-SAKANA

If the GM prefers, he or she can have the players reach the plantation just as the Oni attacks. Oni no Kakusu-Sakana, a gigantic beast with tearing claws and fiery breath, has torn open the walls and commenced shredding guardsmen as the players come on the scene. With magic or jade weapons, they can join in the attack and possibly save the lives of the guardsmen.

The creature was summoned by Isawa Kakusu-Sakana specifically for the purpose of attacking the compound. It is still flush with the experience of having a physical form and strikes enthusiastically at those it has been commanded to destroy. Physically, the oni appears similar to a hermit crab. Its body is protected by a dome-like shell, which covers most of its body and all its vital internal organs. It scuttles forward on a million tube-like legs hidden underneath its great bulk. A pair of sharp chitinous claws extend from either side on thick, sinewy arms; each is capable of rending a man in half and bringing the strongest fortifications crashing down. Seven glowing eyes cluster above a gaping fanged maw, all hooded by the protective hood of the shell. Gouts of flame streak from the monster's mouth, igniting everything in its path. The beast seems unaffected by either fire or heat.

EARTH 5

WATER 3

FIRE 4

AIR 4

Rolls when Attacking: 4k2, twice a turn (claw attacks)

Rolls for damage: 5k3

TN to be hit: 25

Armor: 8

Wounds Per Level: 20: -1; 40: -5; 80: Dead

Abilities: Fear 1, Invulnerability, breath attack once every two turns (equivalent to the shugenja spell *The Fires That Cleanse*; the oni takes no damage from this attack)

Players who arrive during the fighting cannot spot Yajinden & Co. as they sneak past the plantation – not even if they are looking for them. The Bloodspeaker's magic, coupled with the sight of an enraged oni setting samurai alight, is enough to distract the sharpest eye.

as threats to the Empire. Am I clear?" The last question is directed both at the shugenja and at the characters.

If the PCs are amenable to being escorted to the Tomb, Mochiko wishes to leave immediately. She'll check to make sure her command is on top of the situation, and offers the characters some "protection" if they wish. The storeroom has a large supply of jade, both powder and carved bars. PCs who wish will be allowed to take small amounts with them, in order to counter any detrimental effects the Tomb might have (it will also help assure Mochiko they are not deceptive cohorts of the oni). When all is ready, they can take leave of the plantation and begin the final leg of their long journey.

Chapter Four: The Tomb

The path the characters have been following ends at the plantation, and Yajinden's trail ends with it. The tangle of briar plants, bushes and stunted trees beyond is unblemished by signs of his passing; not so much as a bent leaf stands out. The lack of evidence convinced the Imperial scouts that no one had come this way, leaving the Bloodspeakers free to enter the Tomb. The PCs can no longer count on their adversary to show them the way. Mochiko takes the lack of evidence to mean she is being snookered, and watches the party like a hawk once they enter the brush.

The bushes take a while to thrash through, but thin out after a hundred yards or so. The going should be relatively easy from there on in. As twilight falls and the last rays of sun are disappearing from the sky, the characters at last reach their goal. Shrouded with shadows, chiseled into the living rock of a craggy hillside, a pair of great stone doors regard them ominously. They mark the final resting place of the most evil man in the history of Rokugan.

The tomb is built into the hillside, and only the great double doors are accessible. The rest is buried beneath tons of earth and rubble. The doors stand some fifteen feet tall, and are adorned with warnings and protective prayers of all varieties. The locking mechanisms are contained in a quartet of faces protruding from the doors – two on one and two on the other. The four great

porcelain masks must be placed in the correct order on the faces, locked into place, and turned slightly to unlock the doors. Even then it takes a contested Strength roll at TN 20 to crack the doors enough for someone to enter.

That won't be a concern now, however. Any suspicions Mochiko may have been harboring about the characters will vanish at site of the tomb. The four porcelain masks are indeed fitted in their places in the doors, as if they had always been there. The masks are crying blood, and the crimson tears roll across the stone and porcelain to mingle with the dust below. The ground where they strike steams and hisses like water on a hot plate. As the party approaches, they can see a smoky mist rising from behind the masks. The doors are open, and their worst fears have been realized – Yajinden has entered the tomb.

The only viable option is to go in after him: something Visten hoped to prepare the characters for before he was killed. Mochiko will not accompany them, however, and makes it clear that she does not intend to leave the doors open for anyone or anything to wander out. After the characters enter, she will close them and remove the masks, sealing them in. For the good of Rokugan, the characters have to be trapped inside – with Yajinden, and with something much worse...

From here on in, the PCs are on their own. Use the maps and the "Tomb of Iuchiban" booklet to run them through the final phase of the adventure.



Legacy of the Bloodswords - Ambition

Appendix I: The GM's Guide to the Bloodspeakers

Bloodspeakers and Their Beliefs

Who are the Bloodspeakers and what are their aims? The simple answer is that they are the followers of Iuchiban, dedicated to putting their master – or any sufficiently powerful member of their organization – on the Emerald Throne. They meet in secret, they practice black magic, and they engage in all the unwholesome habits we've come to expect from an evil underground cult. Human sacrifice is not uncommon during their dark rituals, and the terrifying powers they wield are visible in every porcelain-masked zombie they have brought to supernatural life. Beyond that, however, lies a deep-set series of beliefs which have endured over five hundred years of active persecution.

A society as bound by tradition, and as rooted in the belief of karma and destiny as Rokugan is, invariably produces dissatisfaction among certain members of the populace. A peasant may dream of becoming a great hero, only to be told to mind his fields. The younger son of a noble family might yearn for to daimyo's throne, only to be dismissed by an accident of birth. Such rejection often leads to questions – why must I remain where I am? How can destiny be so cruel? Who is to say what I am capable of? For most of these issues, Rokugan society has but one answer: honor to your ancestors, respect for the Celestial Pattern, obedience to your betters. And that answer does not always settle a restless soul. Driven by feelings of injustice, unfairness, and a social system binding them to life of drudgery, they search for other roads to fulfillment – or for ways to get even. Iuchiban's path of bloodshed and madness can be very tempting to those who feel that life has treated them unfairly, and who are on the lookout to exact their vengeance upon the world.

The majority of Iuchiban's followers come from the lower classes – poor merchants, disgruntled peasants and *eta* or other

hinin. The few members of the samurai caste who join the Bloodspeakers tend to be in rough straits, either by birth, political circumstance or bad luck, and wish to do something about it. All of them, however, are motivated by a desire for power – to seize for themselves what fate would deny them.

To this wide variety of people, Iuchiban offers a means to free them from their suffocating existence. Unfettered either by the rigid apparatus of the Empire or the overt taint of Fu Leng, they can participate in their own form of power without regard for the consequences. Joining the Bloodspeakers expresses a twisted sort of rebellion against everything the Emerald Empire holds sacred – the majesty of destiny, the power of one's ancestors, the supreme authority of the Son of Heaven.

This feeling is particularly strong among the *eta* – the lowest of the low in Rokugani society. Some *eta* see great value in what they do. After all, were it not for them, the dead would rot in the streets, the condemned would receive no justice, and battlefields would be rendered unusable for generations. And in return for these vital services, they receive scorn, rejection, even arbitrary execution at the hands of their rulers. Iuchiban's teachings take root here more easily than anywhere else, for none store up resentment like social outcasts, and the handling of dead flesh is something the *eta* know all about.

At the heart of Bloodspeaker philosophy lies the teachings of its founder. Iuchiban's research contains a great deal of philosophy, and justification of his unholy rituals. To the cult, the human body contains the greatest resources of all, for no other medium so perfectly combines the five elements of nature into one cohesive unit. Unlike bushido or other philosophies, however, the Bloodspeakers believe that only drastic measures can bring out the body's true potential. By properly sacrificing a part of the body – through bloodletting, murder, or the raising of the dead – they can convert it into tangible energy to use as they see fit. Each display of *maho*, each abomination they commit in the name of their art, produces magical effects to rival the greatest shugenja. For those who have lived all their lives below the samurai caste – or worse, for those who do not wish to yield to the whim of

AVERAGE BLOODSPEAKER CULTIST

EARTH 2

WATER 2

Perception 3

FIRE 2

AIR 1

VOID 1

Skills: Athletics 1, Knife 2, Stealth 2, Torture 2, Commerce 1

Honor: 0

Glory: 0

Advantages: Allies

Disadvantages: Dark Secret

spirits – such practices hold great allure. Their promise of power has been enough to keep the cult alive through five hundred years of active persecution.

With power comes the ability to wield it, and Bloodspeakers are further dedicated to making the most of their dark magic. For now, they try to spread their membership, explain their philosophy to those who might sympathize and occasionally strike against the instruments of Imperial authority. In the long term, however, they seek nothing less than the destruction of the Hantei dynasty. By overthrowing the current system, and replacing it with one based on their own philosophies, they will gain revenge for centuries of persecution while simultaneously proving the superiority of their beliefs. This overriding goal keeps the Bloodspeakers' individuality from overwhelming their effectiveness, and lets them focus on something "more important" than self-aggrandizement.

The Bloodspeakers' relationship with their founder reflects the individualist bent of their philosophy. They do not worship Iuchiban as a god, or revere him like some ancestral spirit. Rather, Iuchiban represents the pinnacle of what their philosophy can achieve. He commanded power to shake the very foundations of the Empire, and the bravest samurai still shiver at mention of his name. Deep within their secret hearts, every Bloodspeaker aspires to such heights. In addition, persisting rumors of his immortality, as well as the simple fact that he himself created the cult and his teachings, grant his name a certain awe among his followers. Certainly, if he were to appear again, as he did three hundred years ago, they would obey his commands with reverent devotion. But admiration of their founder is not the same as worship, and should not be confused as such.

Nor do the Bloodspeakers serve Fu Leng – at least, that's what they tell themselves. Iuchiban's teachings emphasize the power of the self, and the need for the individual to determine his or her own fate. Such does not include eternal servitude to a mad god. While their methods may be similar to Fu Leng's and their rituals reek with unholy implications, most Bloodspeakers remain secure in the knowledge that their ways are not his ways and never will be.

Or so they believe.

What they do not realize, however, is the inherent corruption present in the rituals they cast. The "energy" they believe they are unleashing is actually a variant of the Shadowlands Taint – the "sixth element" which Fu Leng uses to corrupt those who intrude upon his realm. Accordingly, Bloodspeakers who practice *maho* gain Shadowlands points as outlined in the *Game Master's Pack* and *The Book of the Shadowlands*. But unlike corruption gained in Fu Leng's realm, the price of Bloodspeaker *maho* rarely manifests in physical form. There are no sores, no abnormal growths, no transformation into hideous and unspeakable shapes. Thus, members of the cult

can convince themselves that they do not serve the Dark Lord, but rather shape their own destiny.

This does not mean that they are immune to the Taint. Far from it; the Bloodspeakers' nefarious practices make them more susceptible to Fu Leng's influence than any other Rokugani. It simply does not manifest itself in obvious ways. Mental instability is quite common among Bloodspeakers, ranging from simple bad dreams to paranoia, increased aggressiveness, and lunatic ravings. The secretive nature of the cult permits many of its members to hide these instabilities from others, but they rage uncontrollably when in private or during Bloodspeaker gatherings. Reports sometimes circulate of cultists attacking each other in a wild frenzy, or throwing themselves onto sacrificial altars in the midst of the proceedings. But their leaders explain such incidents away as over-enthusiasm, the revelations of "newly freed" minds. Thus does Fu Leng disguise his influence within Rokugan; not even his tools realize whom they serve.

Insanity and mental instability are not the only signs of Shadowlands influence in the cult. While a member may appear normal on the surface, their muscles and other internal organs often become overrun with corruption in the latter stages of the Taint. A pleasant demeanor without can hide a hideous monstrosity within. This gruesome tendency became apparent at the Battle of Sleeping River; when cult members were cut down by the assembled Clan forces, they revealed grotesque mutations just beneath the surface of their skin. One Bloodspeaker had a series of suckered tendrils wrapped around his heart and lungs. Another's internal organs had been replaced with black tumorous



growths, which filled his body to bursting like a sack full of onions. Such abominations are not universal, or even particularly common among low-ranking Bloodspeakers. But the higher one advances in their ranks – the more *maho* one practices – the greater the chances of succumbing to unwholesome degradation.

So long as they remain within Rokugan, these instabilities stay unseen, hidden behind the cult's secrecy. Should a tainted Bloodspeaker ever enter the Shadowlands, however, the equation changes drastically. Growths and tumors sprout within minutes, limbs wither or drop off altogether, and the cultist is quickly reduced to crazed screaming as the madness destroys whatever remains of his or her sanity. Few tainted Bloodspeakers have ever traveled to the Shadowlands, so the phenomenon is rarely seen, but it offers conclusive proof that Fu Leng's power lies at the cult's black heart.

Organization and Rituals

The Bloodspeakers presently number some three hundred members, mostly scattered about the Lion, Crane and Scorpion lands. They usually appear in extremely isolated locations, where they are not likely to be bothered, or in large cities where they can hide amid the multitudes. They have no set calendar and do not meet on any regular basis. Tradition holds that Bloodspeakers may only meet during the new moon, but few rigorously adhere to it. Meetings are held when necessity dictates.



LOCATION AND NUMBER OF BLOODSPEAKER CULTS NATIONWIDE

Crab lands: 32 members in 3 cells
Crane lands: 75 members in 6 cells
Dragon lands: 4 members in 1 cell
Lion lands: 68 members in 6 cells
Phoenix lands: 50 members in 4 cells
Scorpion lands: 47 members in 5 cells
Unicorn lands: 40 members in 4 cells

The cult bases itself around single cells, each one designed to be self-sufficient. Most Bloodspeakers know very little about cells other than their own. A few senior members know the location of more than one cell, and serve as intermediaries when the cult must act in unison. This ensures that the discovery of one cell will not lead to the destruction of the entire cult. A given cell will have anywhere between five and twenty-five members, most of whom hold ordinary occupations in a nearby community. Every cell has one acknowledged leader – usually the most powerful *maho-tsukai* among them – and two or more assistants.

Meetings consist mainly of readings from Luchiban's text, *maho* rituals to increase participants' power, and planning strikes against threats or enemies. They are held in empty places – abandoned farms, secret basements, woodland clearings far from any path – usually under the cover of night. Most contain at least one blood sacrifice, as members entreat the advice of dark spirits or demonstrate the developing extent of their powers. Occasionally, a strong display of magic necessitates a greater sacrifice – usually an unwilling victim who will not be overly missed. Lone travelers, local troublemakers or fellow *eta* make the best choices; few notice when they vanish and fewer still ask questions when they do. Such sacrifices go toward creating zombies, summoning powerful creatures, or laying curses upon distant enemies; they are invariably attended by every member of the cell. *Eta* members dispose of any remains (or procure them, if zombies are the order of business) while others will plant rumors suggesting that their unfortunate victim may have business elsewhere – a girl in another province, perhaps, or the death of a distant relative.

Initiation into the cult takes place only after careful observation of the prospective member; survival lies in secrecy, and the Bloodspeakers have suffered too many setbacks to trust outsiders. Many join on the recommendation of family members, and fathers often teach the ways of the cult to their children in order to ensure its existence for another generation. (This may be another reason why the Bloodspeakers thrive among the *eta*, whose duties are inherited from generation to generation.) Others are allowed to join only after careful study, and the local cell leader must give his approval. During the initiation ceremony, a prospective member must cut his or her arm open and drain a

certain amount of blood into a ceremonial bowl. The lead Bloodspeaker will then work a minor maho spell with it – usually summoning an evil spirit to witness the proceedings – while the initiate pledges his or her life to following the cult's creed.

The Bloodspeakers are patient; like the mysterious Kolat, they have learned to wait and move only when circumstances permit it. Their ultimate aim of dethroning the Hantei cannot be achieved overnight; the cult's leaders realized this after Iuchiban's aborted coup attempts. Therefore, the Bloodspeakers must think

in the long term, and refuse to gamble on all-or-nothing ventures. Instead, they act quietly, moving in secrecy and directing attention away from the cult itself. Assassination will point towards an innocent scapegoat, arson blamed on bandits or local Nezumi. While they have not reached the Kolat's mastery of stealth and control, they know how to cover their tracks well. They also encourage new membership in younger generations, ensuring that the cult will continue after they have passed on. Many *eta* families have belonged to the Bloodspeakers for hundreds of years, and pass its rites on from father to son like any other tradition.


Leadership

Leadership in the cult varies from cell to cell. As small as it is, it can afford a certain flexibility, and allows individual cells to decide for themselves who speaks for them. Most cells tend to gravitate towards a particularly charismatic or ruthless head; those who prove unworthy are often upended by ambitious underlings. Care must be taken not to become too autocratic, for a cult of "improving the self" rarely responds well to blatant authority. Those who remain in charge for any length of time successfully balance their personal power with enough charm and subtlety to assuage those beneath them.

Conflict between cult cells almost never occurs. Rokugan is too large, and the cells too spread out for such incidents. Internal cell struggles, while uncommon, occur with more frequency. So long as they remain undetected to the outside world, such displays are tolerated by the cult's upper echelons.

While the Bloodspeaker's "middle management" fluctuates from time to time, the head of the cult is quite a different story. A being of inhuman cunning and inexhaustible power coordinates the various cells. And he has remained in his overarching position for well over three hundred years.





Appendix II: Prominent NPCs

The Circle of Five

The Bloodspeakers are currently led by a council of five beings, who serve to unify the cult behind common goals and objectives. Calling themselves “the Circle of Five,” they rule through agents and mouthpieces – spreading information, issuing orders, and shaping Iuchiban’s followers to match their own twisted schemes. Each of them fulfills a specific role within the group and all of them swear fealty to the Bloodspeakers’ cause. They are also the primary antagonists in the adventure you are planning to send your hapless PCs on. GMs should be familiar with them, their quirks and their abilities before running the adventure. A description of each is provided below, along with statistics and notes on how to roleplay them.

ASAHINA YAJINDEN

Few who knew Asahina Yajinden before he joined the Bloodspeakers would suspect him capable of the depravity he later became infamous for. Born and raised in the Asahina temples, he grew up a quiet boy with his eyes on the horizon. He was curious, adventurous, and daring, never satisfied with what he read or was told. He expressed a constant need to experiment, to observe phenomena himself rather than take a superior’s word for it. The unbridled joy he expressed at each new discovery quickly endeared him to his peers and teachers, and those close to him described him as friendly, inquisitive and altogether disarming. Following his *gempukku* ceremony, he took up the craft of artimancy, which he used to create wondrous gifts for the daimyos and Crane courtiers. Teachers credited his natural curiosity for the novelty of his creations, and many predicted great things from the young man.

Ironically, the very curiosity which fueled his studies led him down the road to damnation. He grew bored with the confines of the Asahina provinces, and after several years announced his intention to see the remainder of the Empire. His superiors were

disappointed by his interest in worldly matters, but dismissed it as the inevitable yearnings of a young man and allowed him to leave. He traveled to Otosan Uchi, where he planned to present himself to the Emperor’s court.

Iuchiban found him before he had a chance.

Yajinden was fascinated by the Bloodspeaker’s words of power and glory, and soon fell under their spell. After reading Kuni Nakanu’s text, he saw how much his earlier studies had limited him, and what he could accomplish if he freed himself from mere ethics. With Iuchiban whispering encouragement in his ear, his curiosity became obsession, and he soon joined his master in a desire to overthrow the established order. Knowledge could not hide behind the skirts of morality.

His participation in the early Bloodspeaker cult has been well-documented. He turned his skills towards constructing artifacts they would need to destroy the Emperor – the four Bloodswords, the zombies’ porcelain masks and other dark objects. With his help, Iuchiban’s schemes advanced rapidly, and the theoretical possibility of usurping the Hantei approached reality. Yajinden’s potential bloomed under the guidance of his new master, and as Iuchiban’s chief lieutenant, he moved the cult to within striking distance of the Emperor.

Soshi Takasho and Akodo Minobe discovered the Bloodspeakers’ plot before it could reach fruition, and Yajinden was captured along with his master at the Battle of Stolen Graves. In light of the terrible crimes he had helped perpetrate, he expected a speedy execution. To his surprise, his captors had another idea – they would wipe his mind, erasing all aspects of his memories and personality. He was to spend the remainder of his days as a feeble gardener, unaware of the atrocities he had committed or of the terrible punishment he had received for them.

But Yajinden was not ready to admit defeat, and did not intend to spend the rest of his life as a shell. In the final days before the battle, he had begun experimenting with the body’s spiritual harmonies and ways to imbue one’s essence in the form of another. Artifacts, whether good or evil, required spirits to be imbued or awakened within them. Theoretically, the same could be done with the essence of a human being. On the eve of his punishment, he put the theory to the test, and swapped bodies with one of his jailers. He watched the unfortunate man receive the terrible sentence meant for him, then slipped away from Otosan Uchi as quickly as he could.

Since then, Yajinden has worked to restore the Bloodspeaker cult and free his master. With Iuchiban imprisoned, it has fallen upon his foremost follower to ensure the cult’s survival. Over the course of centuries, in the bodies of multiple hapless hosts, he has guided the Bloodspeakers towards the future. He took steps to ensure their secrecy and stressed the need for survival amongst its leaders. He has watched the Bloodspeaker tradition pass to new generations, and encouraged the study of *maho-tsukai* among its members. Few in the cult know who he is exactly; most look at him and see five centuries of inner circle leadership. None,

however, have questioned his position, for in the powers of black magic, he has no peer among them.

For two centuries after the Battle of Stolen Graves, Yajinden plotted ways to free Iuchiban from his imprisonment. That changed after the Bloodspeaker's initial escape, however. Iuchiban was more powerful than ever, and did not seem to care for his protégé the same way that he used to. Yajinden was an errand boy for him now: a means to an end and nothing more. The renegade Crane at first dismissed Iuchiban's coldness; two hundred years in constant agony would doubtless have some impact on his social skills. As time passed and he was sent on one retrieval mission after another, it dawned on him that the Bloodspeaker was not the man he once knew. It grew worse when Iuchiban ordered him to create more masks – to sit in a workshop and tinker while others planned his revenge for him. He passed the duty on to another underling, but the damage was done, and a new coldness dawned between teacher and student.

The last straw came after Iuchiban's discovery at the hands of Togashi Yamatsu. Not only had he acted with undue rashness – Yajinden would never conceive of entering the body of such an enemy – but the alarm the *ise zumi* raised threatened to bring all their plans crashing down around them. In the desperate scrambling which followed, Iuchiban tried to rally his forces and

make some sort of a stand. Disgusted at the crude destruction of two hundred years of secrecy, Yajinden took leave of his master, transferring his essence to a new body and fleeing just before the Battle of Sleeping River. If Iuchiban noticed his absence, he did not seem to care; no one came after the wayward Crane.

In the time since then, Yajinden has done much thinking about the relation between himself and his master. He was tired of constantly living in the sorcerer's shadow, of making plans only to have them dashed to pieces by Iuchiban's clumsiness. He has watched while Iuchiban squandered his chance for revenge and all but doomed himself in the bargain. Yajinden feels that the time is right to seize control of the Bloodspeakers for himself, and achieve the destiny that Iuchiban seemed unable to. The course of action, then, was simple: Yajinden must ensure that Iuchiban never returns.

Destroying Iuchiban permanently, however, is tricky. The greatest minds in the Empire could not fathom a way to snuff him out. None of them know what Yajinden knows, though; none of them have studied the texts he has. He now believes he has a way to destroy his former master. Using magics similar to his soul-swapping abilities, he plans to steal Iuchiban's life-force and requisition the mad mage's power for himself. With the increased strength his former master will provide him, Yajinden feels he will be able to breach Otosan Uchi's defenses and strike down the Hantei family. If Iuchiban could not do it, then it falls to him to take up the gauntlet; and he could not make such an attempt without every resource Iuchiban could provide him...

Yajinden has long since left whatever humanity he once had behind. The process of leaping from body to body – and of maintaining an ephemeral form, which he occasionally must do while between suitable hosts – has whittled away his sense of self and identity. What is left now is the drive, the desire to increase his own power and wreak vengeance upon Rokugan. Add five hundred years of knowledge and memories to that drive, and the result is a being whose power rivals that of the mightiest *kami*. Fortunately for the Empire, soul swapping for Yajinden is nowhere near as easy as it was for Iuchiban. For all his power, he never mastered *maho* the way Iuchiban did, and finds the transition between one body and the next exceedingly difficult. Where Iuchiban could move at will from form to form, it often takes Yajinden several hours, and usually leaves him weak and exhausted. He hopes to correct the problem once he swallows Iuchiban's essence.

Yajinden has no set form; his spirit is invisible and cannot be seen by normal means. A shugenja using Sense, a Kitsu *sodan-senzo*, or an *ise zumi* with the Cloud tattoo will detect a nebulous, shimmering presence around whatever body he has possessed, but that is all. He has learned the art of patience and knows how to hide his presence. He can masquerade as the person he has possessed by watching them for a time beforehand. In "The Hidden Heart," he has taken the form of Meishozo Nisei, a Witch Hunter and Imperial magistrate who is ostensibly hunting down the locations of four great porcelain masks. Nisei is a tall man



with a neatly trimmed beard and the simple robes of a samurai. He has a dry wit and a gift for understatement, which he uses to lessen the impact of his presence. He acts concerned and understanding, as any good magistrate should, and "helps" the characters to the best of his ability. He is very dedicated to his duties, however, and Yajinden has been able to hide his desire to find the masks behind Nisei's fervent professionalism.

EARTH 3

WATER 3

Perception 4

FIRE 3

Intelligence 5

AIR 3

VOID 3

Skills: Athletics 1, Defense 2, Herbalism 2, Hunting 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 3, Law 2, Shadowlands Lore 5, Bloodspeaker Lore 5

Spells: any *maho* spells the GM sees fit.

Honor: 2.5

Glory: 4.5

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (to say the least)

Note: Stats here are for Nisei's form only. Physical abilities and skills vary according to host.

SHINKU KAMIKO

Yajinden has not acted alone in his quest. He has been aided by many parties: some unknowingly, some willingly. The creature calling itself Shinku Kamiko falls firmly into the latter category. No one knows how old she is, or when exactly she joined Yajinden; the two never speak of it, and no one who knows the truth about them has had the courage to ask.

Kamiko is a pennagolan, a race of undead who prey upon the living like vampires. In her natural form, she appears as a gruesome concoction of organs and viscera, floating beneath her detached head. She can appear as a normal human should she wish, however, shedding the "shell" of her body when she rises to feed. She subsists on the blood of human victims, which she must take periodically to stay alive. Among the ranks of the Bloodspeakers, she has found a plentiful source of food.

Most pennagolan prefer their natural form, which allows them greater mobility and the ability to attack with their lashing organs. They keep their human shells hidden, and only use them when they need to move unnoticed. Not so Kamiko. She spends as much as possible in her "limited" mortal form, and seems to relish the deception it causes. Nothing gives her greater pleasure than to disarm a potential victim with sweet words and coy expressions, only to reveal herself once they are helplessly in her grasp. "The greatest monsters," she once told Yajinden, "are those who appear as anything but."

In human form, she masquerades as a ronin samurai-ko in search of work. She has even taught herself a number of bugei skills, to better maintain the illusion. Peasants and other heimin treat her with respect, and other samurai tend to ignore her as

just another soldier. In any case, no one looks twice at her, and no one raises an eyebrow when she suddenly disappears. In this guise, she has served as Yajinden's bodyguard and chief advisor, using her combat skills and demonic powers to complement his magic. She changes "employers" whenever Yajinden changes form, and takes special care to locate him if he has to possess a new host suddenly. Again, such activities appear perfectly normal for a ronin, who must change masters as fortunes rise and fall. Thus, she has always traveled at Yajinden's side while appearing to serve a hundred different lords.

What she sees in Yajinden is a mystery to all save herself. Certainly, she and the renegade Crane have benefited from their mutual acquaintance. She defends him from potential threats, and he makes the resources of his cult readily available to her. But there must be a connection between them that goes beyond self-serving benefits, else one would have killed the other long ago. They consult each other in all matters, forming the heart of the Bloodspeaker leadership. They look out for each other, even protecting each other at risk to themselves. Perhaps they have found a form of companionship in each other – as much as creatures such as they can have companions, anyway. In light of Yajinden's recent plot against Iuchiban, it is not implausible to believe that Kamiko has had some effect on his thinking.

Her relationship with the cult as a whole is similar. Few of her kind associate with any being for long, and yet she has remained a part of the cult's inner circle. Certainly, she finds the Bloodspeakers a source of easy food and ready shelter. She can feed at leisure during Bloodspeaker ceremonies, and often drinks from the cult's victims before a given sacrifice (taking care not to drink too much, of course). Rank and file Bloodspeakers who witness her true form are often overwhelmed, and treat her with awestruck reverence; nowhere else do the powers of the body manifest so horrifically. She sometimes persuades cult members to hide her, in the corner of their cellar or the eaves of their roof. None have denied her, and she has come to depend on local Bloodspeakers to shelter her and provide vinegar to shrink her bloated organs after feeding.

While she seems inseparable from Yajinden, her loyalty to the Bloodspeakers as a whole is questionable. As a predatory creature, she sees value in their philosophy, and practices the "strength of the individual" more often than the most devout cult member. On the other hand, she has few long-term goals beyond survival, and does not care at all for human politics. The eternal Bloodspeaker cries of revenge against the Hantei and deposition of the Emperor ring hollow in her ears, for what could they gain her that she does not already have? She sees the cult as a useful resource, providing for her needs and allowing to move unmolested through Rokugan. But that does not mean she will blindly follow them, and she has more than enough foresight to abandon them if the need arises. Like all of her race, she ultimately serves only herself.

Unlike the mindless attacks of other undead, Kamiko operates with both cunning and patience. She hunts only those who will

not be missed, and never attacks groups of more than two. Recently, she has taken to killing her prey with conventional weapons and dragging the body to a secluded site nearby. There she can detach her head from her body and feed at leisure without concern for discovery. While the process wastes more blood than the traditional tactic of strangulation, it also disguises the pennaggolan's presence far better. Those who find the bodies of her victims usually attribute their demise to bandits or other mundane human evils, rather than the work of the undead. The practice has kept her alive and undetected for hundreds of years.

Kamiko credits her continued existence to one other important factor: she never underestimates her opposition. Having been pursued by Witch Hunters, *ise zumi*, superstitious peasants, and insane *maho-tsukai*, she has learned the value of respecting the opposition. In the past fifty years, she has killed no less than three Kuni Witch Hunters – an unheard-of number. (The Witch Hunters never suspected that their comrades were killed by the same being; they occurred in distant provinces, and appeared as unrelated phenomena. If they ever learned otherwise, they would use every resource to hunt Kamiko down.) She strikes cautiously, but overwhelmingly, and has never left a victim alive to identify her. She never enters a situation without sizing up the opposition, and if she feels she is in over her head, she gets out while drawing as little attention as she possibly can. With her preternatural senses, she can travel at night as easily as day, and can go without sleep for weeks at a time. And she has a long memory, ensuring that those who hunt her will one day find the roles reversed.

Kamiko appears as a pretty samurai-ko, dressed in a nondescript kimono and carrying a short spear over her shoulder. She dons armor when it suits her purposes, and on rare occasions has taken to wearing a helmet while flying about in her natural form. She is quite tall, and her angular face can disarm even the most suspicious magistrate. A few drunken bushi have even made romantic overtures to her (the results of which were as predictable as they were gruesome), and she has learned how to appear aloof without rebuking potential prey. She has a deep understanding of the ways of the samurai, and can quote the *Tao of Shinsei* chapter and verse, despite the fact that she believes none of it. After centuries of practice, she has become deceptive enough to fool the canniest Scorpion.

When traveling, she carries three or four water bottles full of vinegar with her, and she smells of the stuff almost constantly. She claims it "keeps her skin soft," and those who discern the stench often dismiss it as the bad hygiene of another ronin. Kamiko is more than happy to let them believe that.

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

PENNAGGOLAN PROCREATION

Pennaggolan are solitary creatures, uncomfortable with the presence of other undead. Another pennaggolan in the area means competition for food and hunting space, and a greater possibility that local humans will detect their presence. Accordingly, they procreate very rarely – usually out of a malicious desire to incite mayhem or as a red herring to divert attention.

Pennaggolan almost always kill their victims before drinking their blood, by strangling them with their entrails or some other means. If however, they drain a human dry before killing him or her, and the body goes unburied for three days, it will rise again as a new pennaggolan. It retains all the skills and memories of its former life (including the way it died – which may earn the "parent" pennaggolan a new enemy), and can maintain the facade of their human personality for quite some time. Many begin their new lives by returning to their old, preying on friends and relatives before moving on to other hunting grounds. Any former sense of ethics or morality has been wiped clean by the change; pennaggolans feel nothing for their old lives, save perhaps hateful envy at what they have lost.

Skills: Etiquette 2, Hunting 4, Bushido Lore 2, Sincerity 5, Kenjutsu 3, Defense 2, Yarijutsu 3, Seduction 1, Stealth 5

Rolls when Attacking: 2k2 (entrails) or as weapon

Rolls for Damage: Bite: 2k1; Constricting: 3k1 + Immobility (see L5R Rulebook, pp. 201); as weapon

TN to Hit: 20

Armor: None/Helmet (TN to hit +5)

Wounds per Level: 6: -1; 18: -3; 30: Dead

Special Abilities: Fear 4 (undead form only), Invulnerability

FUSHIKI — THE FACE OF THE GRAVE

As the bearer of Asahina Yajinden's original porcelain mask, the peasant boy Fushiki has achieved both great power and unfathomable suffering. He is the only "intelligent" zombie in the whole of Rokugan, retaining his memories and sense of self in a slowly decaying body.

Fushiki joined the Bloodspeaker cult after running away from his native village at the age of seventeen. The magistrate overseeing his home town had been a cruel, self-serving man, and inflicted great injuries on the hinin under his care. Fushiki departed one night without warning, aching for vengeance and swearing to fight the Emerald Empire's caste system with all his might. After escaping the bushi dispatched to hunt him down, he was discovered by the local Bloodspeakers, and soon became a devout member of their order.

He learned the ways of *maho* quickly, and showed an aptitude for craftsmanship that impressed the cell leader. He mentioned

the boy's talent to his superior, suggesting that he could one day be employed in the manufacture of dread artifacts for their cause. Little did the cell leader know that he was speaking to the spirit of Yajinden, who had a more immediate use for Fushiki's skills.

In a darkened ceremony, held under a new moon, Yajinden declared his intention to make Fushiki his apprentice. The boy was thrilled at the prospect of working under Iuchiban's lieutenant, and gleefully accepted the strange bone-white mask he was offered. He had no inkling of the horror he was about to embrace.

As Yajinden placed the mask on Fushiki's face, he noticed the strange runes that had been carved inside. When they touched his flesh, he felt them tingle, then burn as strange magic began to work its way into his skin. The smell of charred flesh filled the air; the porcelain mask drove down through the muscle and sinew of his face. He screamed aloud, and the Bloodspeakers around him enthusiastically echoed his cries. The front of his skull wrenched forward, and bonded with the invading artifact in inseparable connection. Yajinden uttered a guttural chant, and the

kansen within the mask began to fuse with his personality, opening new venues of power and knowledge even as the agony washed over him. The dark spirit flooded into his being and filled his pulsing flesh with its eternal essence. The pain of it seemed to grow, even as his body stopped struggling against the change. His howls fell to a whisper, his body shuddered and lay still. The ceremony had concluded; Fushiki and the porcelain mask were one.

When the shock had subsided, the transformed peasant had time to take stock of his new abilities. The mask, meant for a dead body, had granted him a zombie's strength and invulnerability. While the pain was a constant companion now, physical injuries did not add to it, and he could take excruciating amounts of damage without slowing. Moreover, the *kansen* bound to the mask had revealed the secrets of black magic to him, granting in a single instant what would have taken years of study. With the knowledge he now had, Fushiki could create more of the porcelain masks the bloodspeakers needed to raise their undead army.

There was a price for such power, however, one which Fushiki has yet to pay off. While his intelligence and personality were intact, his body was unable to handle the strain. His heart ceased beating several weeks after the ceremony, and while he continued to function as if nothing had happened, he had officially joined the ranks of the undead. His flesh began to rot soon thereafter – a terrifying process drawn out by his subsequent efforts to slow the degradation. Coupled with the constant pain of the mask's binding, it quickly severed the young peasant from whatever remained of his humanity.

Fushiki is horrified at what he has become, and privately regrets having become involved with the Bloodspeakers. The strength he has gained has been outweighed by the cost to his soul and the agony coursing through his bones. He has come to hate Yajinden, who brought him to this state, but can do nothing against him. He lacks the power or the will to make a break with the soul-swapping Asahina. The *kansen* within his mask has been bound to Iuchiban's service for five centuries, making thoughts of rebellion against it all but impossible.

In the centuries since his turning, Fushiki has served a dual role of Yajinden's assistant and cult assassin. His *maho-tsukai* powers have blossomed and his skill at artimancy has exceeded the merely human. He has manufactured all manner of frightening devices for the cult's use, as well as a great number of porcelain masks still in existence. When not at work, he can usually be found stalking some victim or another. He kills with chilling efficiency, and has personally dispatched many enemies of the Circle of Five: a number of the Bloodspeakers' foes have disappeared under suitably horrible circumstances. He took special care to visit his old province soon after his turning, and delivered suitable payment for the magistrate's years of oppression. The joy he takes in these duties reflects the joy he has lost as a monster – he lashes out at beauty of life he has been



forever stripped of. He takes his frustration out on the enemies of the cult, making them pay for the pain he suffers.

Fushiki is a horror to behold – his rotting corpse held together only by the power of the mask. His flesh crawls with maggots, and naked bones show where sinew and muscle have begun to fail. He reeks of the grave, and on warm days, his smell can be detected for leagues; he will often douse himself in perfume to hide the stench. He wraps himself from head to foot in bandages, which he changes compulsively. He shrouds his disfigurement behind a hooded monk's robe, always pulled low over the mask of his face. Those who see him dismiss him as a leper or some other unfortunate *eta*, and usually allow him to pass unmolested. (After all, whatever horrid disease he has may be contagious!) He speaks through what is left of his throat in a liquid rasp, and limits conversations to as few words as possible. The mask covering his face is a stark contrast to the rest of him: cold and delicate in its beauty, hiding his visage behind a facade of unchanging white.

He maintains several hideouts at which he stays and constructs his artifacts. When he has to move, he skulks in the shadows, traveling only by night and slaying those who come too close. When constructing artifacts for the cult, he demands absolute solitude, which none save Yajinden has the courage to break. When he must dispatch someone, he uses all the advantages he can: attacking at night and by ambush if possible. He always strikes for the throat, wrapping his skeletal fingers around the victim's windpipe or attempting to gash open the carotid artery. His kills are as unpleasant as they are drawn out.

Fushiki's condition has left him highly resistant to injury. He has a zombie's invulnerability to pain combined with the intelligence to use it wisely. He can reattach lost limbs at will, and despite the degradation of his condition, has survived for almost three hundred years. Presumably, removing the mask will finally destroy him – a task easier said than done. The porcelain of the mask has fused to his skull, effectively becoming part of his bonework. It would require the destruction of the entire skull to remove the mask, and no one has ever gotten close enough to him to try. While he would gladly end his existence if he could, he has found it impossible to destroy the mask himself; each time he has tried, the *kansen* has responded with even, greater flares of pain. Ironically, anyone strong enough to slay him and end his torment will earn his eternal gratitude and a loyal (if sinister) ally beyond the grave.

EARTH 5

WATER 3

Strength 4

FIRE 2

AIR 2

Rolls when Attacking: 3k3

Rolls for Damage: 5k2

TN to Hit: 10

Armor: 7

Wounds per Level: 60: Dead

Special Abilities: Immune to Pain, Invulnerable

ISAWA KAKUSU-SAKANA: "HIDING FISH"

The only two clans the Bloodspeakers truly fear are the Dragon and the Phoenix. Both possess the proper powers to counteract their *maho*, and both are dedicated to wiping black magic from the face of the Emerald Empire. While Scorpion lies can be avoided, Lion diligence foiled and Crab might misdirected, the deep spiritual strength of the Phoenix and Dragon can undo the most potent Bloodspeaker schemes. The cult has tried for hundreds of years to infiltrate the two Clans, with only mixed success. The barriers to the Dragon mountains, in particular, are hard to penetrate. Those few cult members who have gotten past Mirumoto castle have never been heard from again, and effectively ended any serious Bloodspeaker attempts to infiltrate the enigmatic clan.

The pacifistic Phoenix, on the other hand, have been more accessible to the cult, and over the centuries a tiny yet significant branch of the Isawa family has been seduced by the Bloodspeakers' promises. They hide on the fringes of Phoenix society, studying, reading, and spying on the movements of their shugenja brethren. Through their efforts, the cult has obtained rare copies of forbidden *maho* scrolls and kept tabs on Phoenix attempts to uncover their secrets. In reward for their diligence and almost 350 years of service to the cult, family members have often served on the Circle of Five – in the only position open to a mere mortal.

Isawa Kakusu-Sakana is the current Phoenix in the circle. He learned the Bloodspeaker creed from his father, a harsh and imposing man who held his clan's pacifism in contempt. Through secret meetings and midnight lessons, Kakusu-Sakana saw through the petty lies and empty philosophies of his fellow Rokugani, while being taught to rely on himself as the ultimate arbiter of his soul. He had an eidetic memory and an eye for important details, which allowed him to glean vital information from his fellow Phoenix. His skills at *maho* were surpassed only by how effectively he kept them hidden, and he had become the leader of the local Bloodspeaker cell even before his *gempukku* ceremony. When his father passed on (through some bizarre and unsettling circumstances which those who witnessed are unable to discuss) he took the vacated seat on the Circle and has served there ever since.

He has remained secluded in a monastery ever since his *gempukku* ceremony, engaged in "esoteric studies" with his fellow shugenja. From there, he works as librarian and deep cover agent for the inner council, searching for lost excerpts of Iuchiban's writing as well as other interdicted documents which may be useful to the cult. The monks he lives with have no inkling as to his true nature; they believe him to be a deeply thoughtful man with a keen interest in ancient texts, nothing more. He has taken steps to ensure his secrets remain hidden, even going so far as to murder those who come too close (several monks have died of

mysterious ailments since he came among them). He guards his privacy fiercely, far more than most monks do. He claims the presence of others disrupts his meditations, a plausible explanation which his fellow monks have accepted without question. In truth he wishes to practice his *maho* without any distractions, and copy forbidden texts for transferral to the cult.

He occasionally leaves the monastery for "pilgrimages" into the wilderness, to "purify his body and soul." In reality, he uses the opportunity to meet with other Bloodspeakers, report Phoenix clan developments, and pass on any forbidden documents he has managed to copy. (He has even sired a trio of bastard children while away from the monastery – leaving them in the care of a younger sister to carry on his family's tradition. Those few who know speculate that she may be much more than the children's ward...) He also receives reports on other spying operations as well as the movements of the cult's enemies, and directs them, if necessary, to new targets. In so doing, he keeps tabs on most of the Bloodspeakers' covert activities and can report on them to the Circle of Five if asked to. He has begun to learn how to project his soul, and can use it to communicate long-distance with his colleagues or underlings if he has to. His remarkable memory skills have served him well; he remembers every fact he has been told, and can repeat an entire text verbatim after reading it just once.

Kakusu-Sakana is a thin, pleasant-faced man of approximately thirty years of age. He always wears the simple orange robes of



the Isawa monks, even when he participates in the cult's rituals (he find the clothing draws attention away from his face). He has carefully cultivated his image to display benevolence and nonaggression: he appears every bit the bookish shugenja, and can put the most paranoid Scorpion at ease with a single open smile. He can be shy around women – those few who appear at the monastery – and seems quaintly innocent of the goings-on of the outside world. In the years since his *gempukku* ceremony, he has carefully lulled everyone around him to sleep.

His role as Bloodspeaker is anything but passive, however. He lacks the raw power of the other Circle members, but makes up for the deficit with force of personality and will. He is given to bullying lesser cultists, and interrogates victims with a skill rivaling the most sadistic *eta*. As the cult's chief librarian and information broker, he plays his cards close to the chest, and will verbally challenge those who infringe upon his authority. While he and his family have delivered most of the cult's knowledge of *maho*, there are other secrets which he chooses not to reveal. Inquiring after them earns a snarl and a veiled threat; it is rumored among the Bloodspeaker rank-and-file that he once defied Yajinden himself and lived to tell of it. In any case, no one crosses the Phoenix without good reason. Knowledge is everything to Kakusu-Sakana; he is the only Bloodspeaker who knows the way to the true tomb, making him invaluable to the cult's overarching goals.

At the beginning of the storyline, he remains secluded in his monastery, probably inaccessible to the PCs. Upon hearing that the mask to the Tomb has been found, however, he slaughters the monks in his monastery and journeys south to meet up with his companions. Kakusu has been trained for ruthlessness at an early age, and will not hesitate to destroy those who get in his way.

EARTH 3

FIRE 3

WATER 3

AIR 4

VOID 2

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja School rank 3

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Investigation 3, Meditation 2, Shintao 2, Theology 3, Bloodspeaker Lore 4, Knife 3, Stealth 4

Spells: any *maho* spells the GM sees fit.

Honor: 3

Glory: 5

Disadvantages: Dark Secret

THE ORACLE

Asahina Yajinden has effectively ruled the Bloodspeaker cult for the last three hundred years. His decision to usurp Iuchiban stems from his belief that Iuchiban no longer matters to the cult – that he has no effect on its growth and has not contributed to its ultimate aims since being imprisoned. Nothing could be further from the truth. Iuchiban has always maintained a link to

the cult and continues to make his wishes known to the Circle of Five – just not in the form they have come to expect.

The fifth member of the circle does Iuchiban's bidding, subtly manipulating the other Bloodspeakers according to his wishes. None of them realize it, however, for this fifth member only appears when it wishes to be heard. The others call it "The Oracle" and believe it to be a malevolent spirit. In truth, it is a manifestation of Iuchiban's pure will, dedicated solely to his objectives.

The Oracle first appeared to Yajinden in the chaotic days following the Battle of Sleeping River. As Iuchiban was being placed in the walls of the tomb, the artimancer had gone to ground and become all but invisible to the eyes of the world. Then one night, as Yajinden slept, he had a dream of a beautiful, terrible woman who appeared to him out of a pool of blood. The woman claimed that she was a spirit who had watched the Bloodspeakers from since the day they were founded. She could predict the future and had seen the day when the cult would rise triumphant from Rokugan's ashes. Now, she wished to share her powers with the Bloodspeaker's inner circle, and guide them towards that glorious future.

Yajinden began rebuilding the cult the next day.

Since then, the Oracle has served as a member of the Circle of Five, advising its leaders and guiding its rebirth after Iuchiban's reimprisonment. It appears to individual members through visions and dreams, sometimes shared by multiple members of

USING THE ORACLE

It is entirely possible that Iuchiban will wish to contact the player characters in order to deliver information or guide them towards a specific goal. The Oracle can push the characters in a specific direction, using them as Iuchiban's tools in the physical world. If the PCs are wandering too far afield in the adventure and need a rubber hammer to get them back on track, the Oracle is the perfect instrument.

The Oracle will appear to characters much the way it does to the Circle of Five – in a vivid dream or a vision of terrifying intensity. It will speak cryptically, alluding to dire fates if the characters do not pursue one path or another. It will never name anything directly, but will refer to beings or events the characters have already encountered. For example, if Iuchiban wishes them to make contact with a Daidoji manhunter, the Oracle will speak of "the searching bird." Or, if he needs them to be at a particular fishing village, the Oracle will mention "the workers of land and sea." The clues should be vague enough to be open to interpretation, but specific enough to at least point them in the right direction. Keep in mind also that what Iuchiban wants isn't necessarily what the PCs want, and following the Oracle's dictates to the letter may be a good way to get killed...

the circle. It initially takes the form of a large pool of blood within a great stone cavern somewhere. As the vision continues, the pool rises up in the form of a human figure, a snake, or sometimes a giant demonic face, depending upon its whim. It then speaks to the Bloodspeaker in a foreboding voice, revealing knowledge of the spirit world, portents of things to come, and occasionally tangible information such as the location of a particular enemy. When it departs, it leaves the Bloodspeaker visibly shaken, and aware of the power its words convey.

Through this specter, the cult has received a wealth of information on the path the Bloodspeakers are taking, the obstacles that lie in their way and the steps they will need to take in order to prosper. They have learned to trust the Oracle's words, and have found its presence, while cryptic, a great asset to their operations. It always appears before the circle meets, and voices opinions (of a sort) based on the agenda they are currently pursuing. During the meeting, the others will discuss the Oracle's opinions, giving them equal weight to their own. Should the circle disregard its words without due process, it will invariably appear again and demand restitution. The experience is unpleasant enough to make the entire circle think twice before crossing it.

This isn't to say the Circle is the Oracle's puppets. As tangible beings, they have the strength and power to act instead of advise, while the Oracle can do nothing besides appearing in a vision. It is therefore dependent upon the other members of the Circle to enact its will, and must acquiesce to their demands if it wishes to get anything done. The relationship has served to maintain the balance of power within the Bloodspeaker's inner circle.

Wherever the Oracle is, whether a cave as it appears or some other distant location, it is apparently stuck there. It cannot move from the spot of its own volition, nor can it project its consciousness beyond its confines without great strain. Instead it uses the minds it touches to extract the information it needs, and draws upon Iuchiban's great power to aid its augury. It has the ability to scan the memories of others and affect the dreams of those it contacts. Through concentrated effort, it can even drive someone mad, filling their head with unspeakable visions of the future. Very little can be hidden from it, and it can reach the consciousness of almost every being in Rokugan. Through it, Iuchiban has been aware of Rokugan's progressing history, and of the movements of his innumerable enemies.

Needless to say, it is aware of Yajinden's treachery. Iuchiban knows his former lieutenant plans to destroy him and is using the Oracle to keep track of the rogue Asahina. It will continue to observe Yajinden, noting his progress and waiting until his schemes are all but realized. Then, with Iuchiban behind it, it will destroy him. For now, however, it continues to watch and observe, and guide the Bloodspeakers towards a bleak and uncertain future.

Below the Five are the usual gaggle of human *maho-tsukai*, zombies, and spies. Stats for these beings can be found in the sidebars, near the appropriate encounters in the adventure above.

Other Characters

KUNI VISTEN

The son of a Crab magician and a Unicorn samurai-ko, Visten grew up oscillating between two worlds. His *gaijin* name – given to him by his mother from a tongue beyond the Burning Sands – rode strangely on his playmate's tongues, and his Kuni ancestry marked him different from most other children. His father wished him to become a shugenja like other Kuni, while his mother hoped he would become a powerful bushi with her sword at his side. Other children may have been torn apart by such disparate expectations, but Visten thrived – drawing equally from both sides of his nature to gain the advantages of both. Formally, he studied under his father, learning the arts of Kuni shugenja. At the same time, however, his mother instructed him in the code of bushido and the mastery of various weapons. He excelled at both, and soon drew the attention of the Kuni Witch Hunters, who needed such abilities as his. He was granted membership on his twelfth birthday, and eagerly embraced the Witch Hunter's creed as the true calling of his divided heart.

Visten excelled at his new duties, and for five years hunted down some of the most fearsome Shadowlands creatures in existence. Then one night, all that changed. In the provinces of the Dragonfly, he cornered a vicious serial killer responsible for over twenty deaths – only to watch the man crumple, dead, before his eyes. As he did so, Visten sensed the mercurial form of an evil spirit pass from the body, back into the whole of Rokugan. The killer was dead, but the being who controlled his actions lived on. The identity and location of this spirit became an all-encompassing obsession for Visten, and he soon abandoned all other efforts in search of it. He tracked down elusive knowledge written in scrolls, and followed rumors of possession throughout the Empire. He traveled far and wide in search of information on the being, even to the mysterious ruins of the Naga civilization to the west. Eventually, he discovered the creature's name – Asahina Yajinden – and learned of its past as a founder of the Bloodspeakers. For thirty years, he chased after it, hoping to destroy it once and for all. But each time, Yajinden escaped; no artifact, spirit magic, or supernatural binding seemed able to hold the malevolent being. Whenever Visten came close, Yajinden simply switched bodies and sent him back to square one. It was a frustrating, grueling process, and his fanatical adherence to it cost him a great deal of respect among his fellow Witch Hunters.

Now well beyond the age of retirement, Visten has continued to pursue the spirit past the point of reason. A few months ago he heard that one of the four porcelain masks had resurfaced in Ryoko Owari, and immediately suspected his old foe at work. Through some arduous detective work and the death of several Bloodspeakers, he learned the identity Yajinden was hiding under, and was able to surmise its terrible purpose. This time, however, he could not afford to chance a confrontation; if Yajinden escaped now, Visten might not be alive when it appeared again. So he has

followed from a distance, watching and waiting for the right time to strike. With the arrival of the PCs on the scene, he has found some unexpected allies who perhaps can help him destroy this being once and for all.

Visten is an old man of sixty now. His hair has gone grey and his face is creased with wrinkles. His eyes are still sharp, though and he can notice details that others often miss. He wears faded grey and pale lavender traveling clothes, and carries his mother's *daisho* to honor her. He also has a traveling stick, infused with the spirit of a helpful *kami*. Its jade tip causes 3k3 damage to Shadowlands creatures (2k2 damage otherwise) and protects whoever carries it from the becoming infected with the Taint. If Visten dies, the spirit must be rebound within the staff; its agreement was with him and no other. The stick will become normal for all intents and purposes (although the jade will still absorb the Shadowlands Taint for another three days until it becomes corrupt and useless).

EARTH 1

Willpower 3

FIRE 3

WATER 1

Perception 4

AIR 3

VOID 3

School/Rank: Kuni Witch Hunter 4 (See *Way of the Crab*)

Skills: History 3, Investigation 3, Shadowlands Lore 4, Defense 3, Hunting 3, Herbalism 2, Kenjutsu 2, Bo Stick 4, Athletics 4, Stealth 2

Honor: 2

Glory: 4

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose

MIKATO THE ETA

People said Mikato would get into trouble; he was too rambunctious, too scornful of his place in the universe for his own good. When he was five, his father was killed when he failed to clear the road for a samurai quickly enough. He claims he doesn't remember the incident, but the truth is, he can never forget it. The look in his father's eyes, the pleading terror that marked his final moments, burned with shame in Mikato's memory. Somehow, some way, he would get even.

He had to work at an early age, to support himself and stay alive. He landed a job at the slaughterhouse/tanners where his father worked, cleaning floors and clearing the building of detritus. After hours, he would augment his meager pay with petty theft. He would steal whatever he could get his hands on, and pawn it to any of a dozen corrupt fences in the city. His life was squalid, bitter and empty, but he was alive and his thirst for revenge burned bright within him.

That's where he was when the Phoenix *maho-tsukai* found him. He was searching for "material components" for his spells (actually blood and other *maho* items) and he came across the

boy sweeping in the corner. Something about him caught the shugenja's eye and he asked to speak with him if he could. Two hours of conversation and some hasty lies later, Mikato was on his way to Kami no Okasan as an apprentice black magician.

Mikato was impressed with the man's secret life, but didn't believe in the *maho* of which he spoke. He went with him to see more of the world, and perhaps steal some valuable items from the old man's quarters. His beliefs changed, however, when he saw what the shugenja could do with a little blood and the right words. What had been an easy mark became a real threat, and he vowed to flee as soon as he could. A few weeks later, he made his escape, taking everything of value from the house. Now, he is trying to pawn off the objects and flee before his would-be master can find him.

Mikato is a skinny boy of about twelve, lanky and dressed in tattered rags. His eyes dart about like a cornered rat's, and his face always looks panicky. His body twitches nervously when he speaks, and has a difficult time staying still. Although he has survived well on the streets of the eta quarter, he is not particularly bright, and often acts without thinking things through. His current trouble with the Bloodspeakers is a direct result of his lack of foresight.

EARTH 2

FIRE 2

Agility 3

WATER 1

AIR 1

Reflexes 2

VOID 1

Skills: Knife 2, Commerce 1, Stealth 1

Honor: 0

Glory: 0

Disadvantages: Small, Brash

DAIDOJI MOCHIKO, GARRISON COMMANDER

The Daidoji are by and large dedicated to their duty, but the young Mochiko set a new standard. The daughter of a Crane *yojimbo* stationed at Otsan Uchi, she was entranced at an early age by the wonders of the palace and the benevolence of the Emperor. When she heard stories of the Hanteis' enemies – and of their audacious efforts to unseat the dynasty – she shook with rage. Her father wanted her to attend Kakita fencing school, or perhaps become a diplomat, but she insisted on attending the Doji school – where she could learn the best ways to protect the Hantei from harm.

She went through training with a fanaticism that surprised her teachers. She excelled both mentally and physically because it was what she had to do – anything else would be a failure of duty. She underwent her *gempukku* ceremony as one of the most promising samurai the school had produced in many years. Her father's connections landed her a place on the Emperor's Imperial Guard, where she served with honor and distinction. Even the Matsu members of the guard noticed, calling her performance

"adequate and dependable" – unheard-of compliments for them to give a Crane.

Five years after she came of age, she was given her first command, a small outpost along the Empire's western frontier. At first, she was horrified to be exiled at such a position – until the Emperor himself called her to explain her duties to her. She had been hand-picked for her loyalty, her duty, and unswerving devotion; chosen to serve in one of the most important positions in the Empire. Her eyes widened as she listened intently to the Hantei – the Tomb of Iuchiban would be her responsibility, and she was charged with ensuring that no man, beast, or oni ever reached it alive. When he had finished speaking, she nodded curtly. "It will be done, my lord."

Since then, she has turned her every waking thought to fulfilling her duties. The "tea plantation" housing her command is stout and easily-defended, perched in the north of the Twilight Mountains. Bandit activity and the occasional roaming Shadowlands creature have kept her men sharp and prevented them from becoming lax in their duties. Her unit has been kept ignorant of their true purpose, which she feels is wise; the fewer people who know about the Tomb, the better. Mochiko herself knows a fair amount about the Tomb, but not as much as Visten or others. Most of her knowledge is based on practical realities which will allow her to do her job (e.g. "The Tomb doors can only be opened with four big masks. Here's what they look like"). More than that, she doesn't want to know.

Mochiko is an average-sized woman whose features have been hardened by a soldier's lifestyle. She has refused to dye her hair white, as many other Crane do; her first duty, she says, is to the Emperor, and she will not have it blunted by Clan loyalties. Her daisho, yari, and armor are in pristine condition, and she spends most of her spare time maintaining her equipment. She has become an effective leader in the years since her assignment to the Tomb, and issues orders with curt decisiveness. She is distraught at her failure to stop Yajinden from reaching the Tomb, and will do whatever it takes to keep him from leaving again. If that means sacrificing the player characters, so be it.

EARTH 2

FIRE 3

Agility 4

WATER 3

AIR 3

Reflexes 4

VOID 2

School/Rank: Daidoji 3 (Kakita 3 if you do not own *Way of the Crane*)

Skills: Kenjutsu 3, Defense 4, Iaijutsu 4, Battle 2, Archery 1, Etiquette 2, Courtier 2, Athletics 3

Honor: 4

Glory: 5

Advantages: Higher Purpose, Perfect Balance



The Tomb of Luchiban



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