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JADE REGENT

FOREST OF SPIRITS

By Richard Pett



LIVING LEGENDRY

In many of the nations and regions that collectively make up the land of Tian Xia, histories stretch back to points so ancient that the distinction between fact and myth blurs. From the legendary past rise monuments depicting fantastic heroes and strange beings, personages none now living can prove ever truly existed—yet who are believed in all the same. In some places, these figures are merely legends and fairy tales told to children. In others, evidence of wondrous deeds remains. And in still others, these ancient beings yet watch over their people, guarding those with the faith to see past the veils of time.



DESERVING OF HONOR

Not all the creatures spoken of in the tales of Minkai are as ferocious as the dreaded oni or as protective as the mysterious kami. Some exist merely to exist, taking delight in life and all the pleasures the world has to offer while simultaneously accepting it as it is. Among these are the raccoonlike tanuki, jolly and clever creatures equally as likely to wander the world in search of new experiences as they are to make someplace their home and enjoy its comforts. Yet many stories warn listeners to honor even such whimsical creatures, as their powers make them more than mortals, and those who rouse their ire suffer terrible fates.



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FOREST OF SPIRITS



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“Forest of Spirits” is a Pathfinder Adventure Path scenario designed for four 10th-level characters. By the end of this adventure, characters should reach 12th level.

This product makes use of the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*, *Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide*, *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*, *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2*, *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3*, *Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide*, and *Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Combat*. These rules can be found online as part of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Reference Document at paizo.com/pathfinderRPG/prd.

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EVERYWHERE IS DIFFERENT, EVERYONE IS THE SAME

At risk of drawing fire, I confess that I don't see a vast difference between the rogue and ninja, the cavalier and samurai, or the bastard sword and katana. Still, I find the superficial differences between each of these pairs to be super cool, and sometimes I want to be a samurai instead of a cavalier. So I was destined to be a fan of this Jade Regent Adventure Path.

When Fiction Editor James Sutter and I first discussed the novel that became *Master of Devils*, we agreed that showing Tian Xia through the eyes of Radovan and Count Jeggare was a good idea for a couple of reasons. Some readers don't already love Asian fantasy the way I do, so discovering it through the eyes of familiar characters might ease their passage to this land. But even to those of us who adore wuxia or samurai movies (which inspired *Master of Devils* and "Husks," respectively), showing the

collision of West and East is a good reminder that Tian Xia and Avistan are both part of the larger world of Golarion.

James and I weren't the first to come to this conclusion: the creators of the Jade Regent Adventure Path established a similar approach by bringing the heroes from Sandpoint, through the Lands of the Linnorm Kings, across the Crown of the World, and finally to Tian Xia. In this volume, after being harried by strange foes and enticed by foreign plots, the heroes reach the far side of Golarion at last.

They might be surprised by what they find there. So might you.

As those who read my blog already know, I love foreign-language films. At first they appealed to me because they look so different from Hollywood movies. The language, the clothes, the cars (or lack of cars), the architecture, the food, the landscape, the gestures, even the odd figures of

speech that take a second or two to understand—all of these only increase the sense of transportation I feel when watching a movie (or reading a novel, or playing an RPG).

After watching a few films from the same country, I can't help thinking that the people in the movies aren't so different from me after all. No change of language or culture disguises the fact that characters in Chinese movies have the same ambitions and desires as characters in French films. People fall in love in Vietnam pretty much the same way they do in Ireland. The Danes and Scots and Japanese and Moroccans all want revenge when hurt, and know that more retaliation will follow. We're all essentially alike.

Certain films underscore the superficial differences and deep similarities between people of different cultures. None make this point better than remakes of foreign films. Consider *Seven Samurai* (1954). If you've seen one samurai movie, this is probably the one—and that's great, since it's arguably the best ever made. For this masterpiece, Akira Kurosawa drew inspiration from, among other sources, the American Western. While the story of *Seven Samurai* comes from the historical conflict between peasant farmers and masterless samurai fallen to banditry, it could just as easily take place in Mexico—as John Sturges showed in his remake, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960).

Kurosawa also borrowed from Shakespeare, with *Throne of Blood* (1957) adapting *Macbeth* and *Ran* (1985) retelling *King Lear*. Apart from some minor changes to make the story more culturally plausible (Lear's daughters become Ichimonji's sons, for example), the stories remain the same tragedy of paternal foolishness and filial betrayal. Another Kurosawa classic, *Yojimbo* (1961), almost certainly borrowed from Dashiell Hammett's novel *Red Harvest*, although Kurosawa said he drew inspiration from a different Hammett story. Yet for every time Kurosawa borrowed a story from a western source, more films borrow from his *Rashômon* (1950), *Yojimbo*, or *The Hidden Fortress* (1958)—I'm looking at you, *Star Wars*. The style changes from East to West, but the motives of the characters remain the same.

When I meet someone who refuses to watch a subtitled film—"I don't want to read a film" is the usual argument—I usually realize it's pointless to argue. What only a few will admit is that they aren't interested in stories set in foreign lands. What can you say to that? Some simply prefer stories told in a familiar language, concerning folks who act like they do and live in a land that resembles theirs. If only I could tempt them into watching a few foreign movies, I like to think they'd change their minds. The same could be true of our gaming friends who hesitate to play in a "foreign" setting; now you have in your hands the perfect vehicle to tempt them over the Crown of the World. The places are different, but the people are really just the same.

So to any of you reluctant to travel to Tian Xia, welcome to the East! I hope you find it just as strange and familiar as I do.

ON THE COVER

The infamous Jade Regent reveals himself at last on the latest incredible cover by Wayne Reynolds. Although the PCs are not yet destined to face the tyrant who claimed Minkai's throne, they do get their first glimpse of his plans for Minkai in this month's adventure, "Forest of Spirits."

INSPIRATIONS

I've plenty of wuxia (kung fu) movies, books, and comics to recommend at frabjousdave.blogspot.com, but here's a short list of some of the Japanese films that left the strongest impression on me, all of them full of great ideas for running a campaign set in Minkai.

***The Hakkenden aka The Legend of the Dog Warriors*, directed by Takashi Anno and Michael Dobson**

Based on the epic novel by Kyukutei Bakin, himself originally of the samurai caste, this warring-states animated series follows the fated lives of eight warriors all linked to a tragic princess from a previous generation.

***13 Assassins* (2010), directed by Takashi Miike**

Gonzo director Miike recently turned his attentions to samurai, his first such treatment being a remake of the 1963 film of the same name. It's one hell of a film, featuring a sadistic villain and a large team of heroes willing to sacrifice their lives to stop him. The first half is all build-up, but the back half consists of one huge battle including dynamite and, possibly, a demon.

***Dora-Heita* (2000) and *The Sea Is Watching* (2002), co-written by Akira Kurosawa**

While he did not direct these films, these are two of the last screenplays on which Kurosawa worked. The former features a seemingly corrupt magistrate who is actually under cover to clean up a rotten town. The latter can help GMs depict brothels as more than just a result on a random harlot table.

***The Twilight Samurai* (2002), *The Hidden Blade* (2004), and *Love and Honor* (2006), directed by Yôji Yamada**

All three films of this thematically linked trilogy feature noble samurai facing crises of honor and duty. They operate primarily as dramas with convincing details of domestic life and political intrigue, but when the action comes, it will blow your mind. If you watch only one, make it *The Twilight Samurai*.



Dave Gross
Pathfinder Tales Author

JADE REGENT



JADE REGENT

FOREST OF SPIRITS

● PART ONE: ORDU-AGANHEI

Leaving the Crown of the World, the PCs enter the city of Ordu-Aganhei in the Tian nation of Hongal, where they must impress their royal host while fighting off attacks from the Five Storms.

PAGE 8

● PART TWO: THE FOREST OF SPIRITS

A mysterious new ally offers to guide the PCs to Minkai through the strange and haunted Forest of Spirits. There, the PCs meet the kami of the forest, who tell them of the House of Withered Blossoms, the ancient fortress of the Five Storms.

PAGE 15

● PART THREE: HOUSE OF WITHERED BLOSSOMS

The PCs find themselves caught in the middle of an ongoing war between the current inhabitants of the House of Withered Blossoms as they search the ancient palace for clues about the nature and weaknesses of their deadly foes, the Five Storms.

PAGE 21

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

“Forest of Spirits”
uses the medium XP track.

10 The PCs begin this adventure at 10th level.

11 By the time the PCs descend into Munasukaru’s Penance, they should be 11th level. If they are not 11th level by this point, consider placing a few random encounters in the Forest of Spirits or the House of Withered Blossoms.

The PCs should be 12th level by the adventure’s end.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Deep within the Forest of Spirits stands an ancient pagoda called the House of Withered Blossoms. The palace of the oni of the Five Storms, it also served as their prison. The kami, the spirits of the forest outside, kept endless watch over their enemies, but just as the oni were forbidden by the gods to leave the House of Withered Blossoms, the kami were not allowed to enter the pagoda. And so, for centuries, the pagoda and its occupants were held in balance, even stagnation. No mortal magic, no mere *teleportation* or *gate* spell, could enable the Five Storms to escape their prison, their sentence decreed by far more powerful beings.

Yet oni are not of mortal flesh; they are the heralds of disaster, and the leader of the Five Storms, a powerful wind yai oni named Anamurumon, vowed that he would not spend his days in torpor, locked in his prison palace, when outside, beyond the Forest of Spirits, there was flesh to flay and covet and command. And one day, Anamurumon came upon an ancient legend within his great library that brought a smile to his scowling face for the first time in centuries.

The legend told of a magical demon gate, or *kimon*, a way unbound by mortal magic through which spirits can pass and vanish like an echo. The creation of a *kimon* would require the sacrifice of many souls, but Anamurumon was not constrained by mortal timescales. The Five Storms began a harvest that spanned generations. They sent feelers out among the dark things of the Forest of Spirits, and the twisted, evil hobgoblins inhabiting the forest answered their call. Worshiping the oni almost as gods, these hobgoblins acted as the hands of the Five Storms, scouring the forest to gather souls for the *kimon*. While the kami were able to kill many of the hobgoblins, they could not kill them all, and slowly the harvest of souls continued until there were enough.

As Anamurumon worked to create the *kimon* and engineer the Five Storms' escape, he soon realized that they would still be pursued by the kami, for as soon as the Five Storms left the House of Withered Blossoms, the kami would be able to enter the pagoda and learn what they had done. So Anamurumon devised a plan. He would sacrifice one of his own, the least of his commanders in fact, to stay in the House of Withered Blossoms for all time. He chose a ja noi, or hobgoblin oni, named Munasukaru as his sacrifice. With Munasukaru still imprisoned within the pagoda, the kami would be powerless to cross its threshold and discover the oni's treachery.

At last the *kimon* was created, its surface writhing with spirits and souls. As the Five Storms began passing through the gate, Anamurumon stopped Munasukaru and commanded her to stay. Unable to resist the command, Munasukaru stayed behind with a few oni soldiers and the Five Storms' hobgoblin servants while the other oni escaped to Minkai and beyond.

Munasukaru's imprisonment in the House of Withered Blossoms soon drove her to madness. Believing that Anamurumon had punished her for failing the Five Storms somehow, she went into self-imposed exile in the dungeons beneath the palace, which her hobgoblin followers named Munasukaru's Penance. As Munasukaru spiraled into insanity, her warped will slowly but inevitably began twisting her dungeon as well as the pagoda and its surroundings, creating a blight in the middle of the Forest of Spirits.

Outside the House of Withered Blossoms, the kami grew more and more concerned about the Five Storms' harvest of souls and subsequent silence, and soon realized that the majority of the Five Storms had escaped their prison, though how they had accomplished this feat remained a mystery. Still unable to intervene directly, the kami had no choice but to continue their vigil over the now-silent pagoda.

When a tribe of araneas, under the leadership of a sorcerer named Akinosa, came to the House of Withered Blossoms 60 years ago, in search of great stores of wealth and knowledge that Akinosa believed lay in the dungeons beneath the palace, the kami allowed them to pass, hoping that the araneas would drive out the last of the oni. Once the kami were able to enter the pagoda, they could discover the exact whereabouts of the Five Storms and the method of their escape.

While the araneas' initial forays into the House of Withered Blossoms were successful, Akinosa—a notorious drunkard and opium addict—was unable to press his advantage, and Munasukaru and her hobgoblins were only driven into the dungeons beneath the pagoda. A long war for control of the House of Withered Blossoms began between Akinosa's araneas and Munasukaru's hobgoblin followers. This war has lasted 60 years and is still at a stalemate—Akinosa and Munasukaru always manage to stay one step ahead of the other, always thwarting each other's plans for dominance, and the hobgoblins' fecundity more than makes up for the araneas' sorcery. Currently, the araneas inhabit the aboveground portions of the palace, while the hobgoblins lurk in Munasukaru's Penance below, with the ground floor of the pagoda a no-man's-land between the two opposing forces.

Outside, in the Forest of Spirits, the kami continue to watch the House of Withered Blossoms, for as long as even one oni remains inside, they must maintain their guard. Meanwhile, the Five Storms grow in strength, and their ally, the Jade Regent, tightens his grip on the empire of Minkai.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Concluding their epic journey across the Crown of the World, the PCs finally reach the lands of Tian Xia and enter the city of Ordu-Aganhei. As the PCs begin to explore this strange city, they receive an invitation from Batsaikhar, prince of Ordu-Aganhei, who wants to meet these visitors

TIAN EQUIPMENT

Many of the characters and creatures encountered in this adventure, and in subsequent volumes of the Jade Regent Adventure Path, are equipped with armor and weapons common in Tian Xia, but which may be unfamiliar to players and GMs used to adventuring in the Inner Sea region. In most cases, all of the information you need to run such characters is already included in their stat blocks. To get full descriptions and statistics for the Eastern weapons and armor referenced here, check out *Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Combat*, available at fine gaming stores and at paizo.com.

from the far-off lands to the west. The prince hosts a variety of feasts for the PCs, giving them the opportunity to impress their host while learning more about the current situation in Minkai. If the PCs are successful, Batsaikhar rewards them with gifts that will be useful for their journey, but if they displease him, they soon find that trade without the prince's permission is impossible.

During the final festival, the PCs are attacked by agents of the Five Storms, who are now aware of the PCs' presence in Tian Xia. The PCs receive aid in the battle from an unexpected source—a kitsune named Miyaro, who has been sent by the kami, the spiritual protectors of the natural world. She tells the PCs that the road from Hongal to Minkai is guarded by the Five Storms, but that the kami will allow the PCs passage through the Forest of Spirits, the vast, haunted forest that grows between Minkai and the rest of Tian Xia, to bypass the heavily patrolled main road.

Meeting the kami in their forest home, the PCs learn of an ancient pagoda in the depths of the Forest of Spirits called the House of Withered Blossoms. This palace once served as a prison for the Five Storms, but the oni somehow managed to escape. Unable to investigate directly, the kami ask the PCs to search for clues as to how the oni escaped. At the same time, the kami know that the Jade Regent of Minkai is allied with the Five Storms, so any information the PCs discover about the Five Storms while exploring the pagoda and its dungeons can only help them in their fight against the Jade Regent.

Traveling through the wood, the PCs encounter several of the spirits that give the forest its name. With the help of Miyaro and the kami, the journey is swift, but still dangerous. Entering the House of Withered Blossoms, the PCs face both a tribe of araneas who have taken over the aboveground levels of the pagoda and the hobgoblins who still serve the last of the oni left behind to guard the palace by the Five Storms. In the process, the PCs can learn much about their enemies, as well as gain new weapons to aid in them in their eventual showdown with the Jade Regent.

PART ONE: ORDU-AGANHEI

The adventure begins as the PCs complete their journey over the Crown of the World and arrive at the city of Ordu-Aganhei—the gateway to the mysterious Dragon Empires of Tian Xia, or, as Tians prefer to view it, the last outpost of civilization before the wilds of the Crown of the World and beyond. Named after the Tian explorer who first charted the route over the Crown of the World, Ordu-Aganhei is the primary trade hub on the Tian side of the Path of Aganhei, and represents the first major outpost of civilization the PCs have likely encountered since leaving Kalsgard. The PCs can relax and recover from the rigors of their journey in the city, as well seek out information on the current situation in Minkai.

The PCs enter the city through its north gate, a decorated tower with a single 30-foot-high reinforced iron door and some 30 guards inside. A caravan coming out of the Crown of the World in the off-season is an almost unheard of occurrence, and the gate guards examine the PCs with barely hidden suspicion. The guards' examination is strict and thorough, dust swirling around them as they work. Just as it looks like the guards won't allow the PCs into the city, however, a well-dressed man appears at the gate from within the city, prostrates himself (quite literally) before the PCs, and makes a speech.

Honored guests! Welcome, welcome, and three welcomes more! Please ignore these slithering worms beneath your feet—I assure you they shall be punished for their insolence. Prince Batsaikhar, golden orb of sunlight at the black portal of barbarism, bids you welcome to Ordu-Aganhei, the City at the Edge of the World. My most munificent lord invites his honored guests to his humble palace to rest, dine, partake in polite conversation, and perhaps indulge in some pleasure. The Golden One says he hopes you will honor him with your clever speech from strange lands, a speech that he of all men in Hongal has mastered. He is eager to hear of your journey across the Crown of the World in this most difficult time of travel.

The man is Chua, the royal advisor to Prince Batsaikhar of Ordu-Aganhei, and he has been ordered to bring the PCs and their allies to the prince's palace. To any women in the party, Chua offers a special gift—a black rose—and these words: "There is no fire like the fire in the souls of the women of far lands. Beauty is the wisdom of women, and wisdom is the beauty of men."

If the PCs accept the invitation, go to Meeting the Prince on page 10. If the PC want to refuse the invitation, Ameiko warns them that it would likely be unwise to turn down the friendship of the prince. His palace might offer an excellent place to rest and make ready for the next part of their journey, and by talking with him, they could perhaps learn something of Minkai and the road ahead. Nevertheless, Ameiko defers

to the PCs, and if they turn down the invitation, the caravan can camp in one of the caravansaries outside the city. If the PCs choose not to meet Batsaikhar, the offended prince effectively closes the city's shops to them. The PCs will have to bribe their way into shops to buy or sell equipment, paying exorbitant prices for new items and receiving offers far below market value for items they wish to sell. In this case, run the Attack at the Steaming Lake Market encounter (see page 13) as an ambush at a point of your choosing. The kitsune Miyaro still joins the battle, and afterward offers to lead the PCs through the Forest of Spirits.

ORDU-AGANHEI

LN small city

Corruption +3; **Crime** -1; **Economy** +4; **Law** +4; **Lore** +3;
Society -2

Qualities prosperous, rumormongering citizens, strategic location, tourist attraction

Danger +5

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government overlord

Population 8,227 (5,753 humans; 1,895 tengus; 202 elves; 187 dwarves; 103 samsarans; 57 kitsune; 17 gnomes; 13 halflings)

Notable NPCs

Prince Batsaikhar (LN male human aristocrat 8/fighter 5)

Royal Advisor Chua (N male human expert 8)

Royal Bodyguard Okimoto Izume (LN female human samurai 11)

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 6,400 gp; **Purchase Limit** 37,500 gp; **Spellcasting** 6th
Minor Items 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 1d6

ORDU-AGANHEI FEATURES

The capital of the nation of Hongal, Ordu-Aganhei is also the northernmost city in Tian Xia. It lies on the edge of the Arctic Circle and is an oasis of luxury and hospitality in an icy desert of despair. The city is famed for its thermal hot springs, which have formed a sulfur-rimed lake in the center of the city, frequented by residents and visitors alike. Prince Batsaikhar, younger brother of the khan of Hongal, rules Ordu-Aganhei. Called the Golden One by his subjects, who live in both awe and terror of him, Batsaikhar is a man known to smile and sing as he has those who have angered him torn apart.

Ordu-Aganhei is crammed between stout timber walls 40 feet high, topped with spikes replete with the severed heads of bandits who preyed upon the Path of Aganhei. The city's layout is confusing, with narrow, winding streets. Buildings are timber framed and have high, gabled roofs and ornate, decorated eaves. A large, parklike garden surrounds Ordu-Aganhei's central lake, which lies more or less in the middle of the city. The park is flanked on one side by the Palace of the Prince, a forbidden place guarded by hundreds of

soldiers, and on the other by the temple of Abadar, known in Tian Xia as the God of Walls and Ditches.

Paper lanterns light the streets of Ordu-Aganhei at night. The streets are immaculately clean (Prince Batsaikhar hates dirt) and regularly patrolled. Prayer flags of all colors dance in the wind from every gable and roof. Everywhere one turns a shop is selling something, and the heady scent of incense mingles with the smell of unfamiliar cooked foods. On the city's outskirts, huge corrals contain herds of prized Hongali horses, and numerous caravansaries cater to the caravans coming down from the Crown of the World.

CULTURE SHOCK

Ordu-Aganhei should feel like a totally alien place to the PCs—signs, faces, language, and culture are all totally new. You can give your players a memorable experience not only by emphasizing this strangeness, but by playing it up. The food, the smells, the talk, and the architecture each play a part in the dizzying new world the PCs have entered. A few suggestions on how to subject your players to culture shock are given below.

Language: Tien, the “common tongue” of Tian Xia, is not at all similar to Taldane, Avistan's Common, nor are its letters remotely related. Allow your players to have fun making mistakes, but don't let a session turn into endless rounds of Linguistics checks to allow the PCs to be understood. Simply have the locals smile when the PCs make their first Diplomacy check to gather information, have them point out a tea house when asked for an armor shop, or have them smile and take what is proffered by the PCs when asked for a similar object.

One easy way for the PCs to make themselves understood is through pantomime. While overly complex conversations are not possible, a DC 10 Linguistics check should allow simple communication (such as buying something). More complex communication (such as getting directions) requires a DC 20 Linguistics check.

Chopsticks: Everyone eats with chopsticks, and using them incorrectly is a great insult to one's host, adding +2 to the DC of any check made to impress that character or gain her confidence that day. The PCs can attempt to use chopsticks to eat with a DC 15 Dexterity check. After properly using chopsticks at each meal for 1 week, a character has mastered their use and no longer needs to make checks.

Entertainment: Street performances are common in Ordu-Aganhei, with dangerous acts being the most popular—walking a tightrope over barrels of scorpions, dodging arrows and other missiles, wrestling, and martial arts displays (such as chopping through boards with hands or feet, breaking stones with head butts, punching walls, and balancing for hours over hot coals).

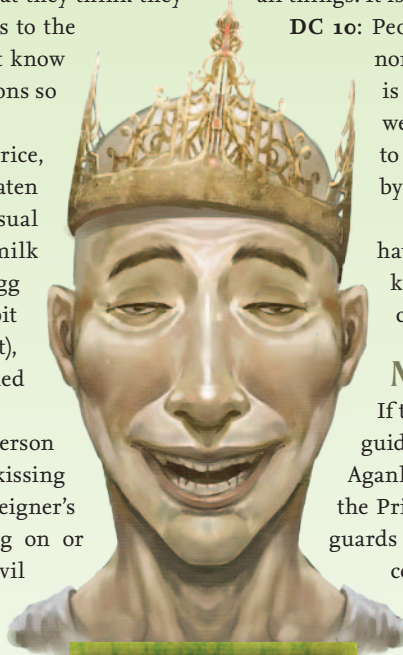
Shopping: Ordu-Aganhei teems with pushy traders. These merchants sell everything from porcelain to silk to

tea to even stranger wares. Trade only takes place with the prince's permission, and if he is displeased, the PCs soon find that shops are closed when they visit.

Smiling Faces: Everywhere the PCs go, they pass smiling locals, all of whom are so anxious to please the prince's new guests that they tell the PCs exactly what they think they wish to hear. If the PCs want directions to the nearest magic shop, and a local doesn't know the way, she is likely to make up directions so as not to seem impolite.

Street Food: As well as the standard rice, noodles, and spicy soups commonly eaten here, the PCs may come upon more unusual feasts, such as horse sausages, fried milk (stir-fried chicken liver and ham in egg whites and curdled milk), fried rabbit ears, tanghulu (skewers of candied fruit), and wood ear (a type of local fungus dried and eaten as a snack).

Local Superstitions: Touching a person with blond hair brings luck for a day; kissing one brings luck for a year. Never let a foreigner's shadow fall across your own. Stepping on or standing astride a threshold invites evil spirits inside. He who smiles wins smiles. A stranger does not wear a sword indoors as decoration. All strangers are relations to each other.



PRINCE BATSAIKHAR

GATHERING INFORMATION

Once in Ordu-Aganhei, the PCs will likely wish to find out more information about the current situation in Minkai and the road ahead. The PCs can make Diplomacy checks to gather information or Knowledge (local) checks to hear the following gossip about Minkai.

DC 10: An ancient place called the Forest of Spirits lies between Hongal and Minkai. The forest is known to be haunted, so the main road to Minkai, called the Spirit Road, skirts the forest to the south and west. Loyal samurai of Minkai's Jade Regent patrol the Spirit Road in great numbers to keep it open and safe.

DC 20: The Jade Regent's samurai patrols are far more likely to rob you than protect you, and many caravans have disappeared on the Spirit Road. Although many people blame the haunted Forest of Spirits for the disappearances, others claim the Jade Regent's troops, a small army of whom patrol along the road, are responsible.

DC 25: Whispers of rebellion or outright civil war are coming out of Minkai. The emperor is in hiding and has not been seen in public in years, and his appointed viceroy, the Jade Regent, is far from a popular ruler. Many groups oppose the Jade Regent, and they could topple him if they ever joined together.

If the PCs wish to know more about the Forest of Spirits, they can learn the following information with Diplomacy checks to gather information, Knowledge (geography) checks, or Knowledge (local) checks.

DC 5: The Forest of Spirits has existed since the dawn of all things. It is not a place for people.

DC 10: People do not live in the Forest of Spirits, nor do they cross through it, as the place is well known to be haunted. Only one well-patrolled route leads from Hongal to Minkai, called the Spirit Road, which bypasses the forest rather than entering it.

DC 20: The Forest of Spirits is not really haunted. In fact, it is the birthplace of the kami, spirits who protect the objects and creatures of the natural world.

MEETING THE PRINCE

If the PCs accept the prince's invitation, Chua guides them through the streets of Ordu-Aganhei to the enormous wooden Palace of the Prince. Chua hurries the PCs past countless guards and groveling slaves to the palace's central courtyard, a vast chamber nearly 100 yards across built around a steaming lake. Orchids grow in gardens overlooking the lake, while colorful herons swoop through the air, all beneath a ceiling hidden by prayer flags.

On a huge bed surrounded by colorful silks, painted screens, and beautiful white-painted women sits an enormous, smiling man barely dressed in voluminous robes—Prince Batsaikhar. Immediately behind him stands his bodyguard Izume, a tall figure in full samurai armor, carrying an enormous drawn sword.

Batsaikhar is known for his perpetual smile: he smiles as he eats, he smiles as he engages in polite conversation, and he smiles as he amuses himself by personally beheading seven people piled one on top of the other with one blow of his katana, just to see if he can do so. Batsaikhar sees himself as a very firm ruler, but fair, and he is renowned for his etiquette, delicate words, and insatiable lusts. The prince particularly loves foreign women, and is certain to fixate on any such female character present.

During the PCs' stay in Ordu-Aganhei, Prince Batsaikhar is an ever-smiling figure to fear. Although he needs great provocation to kill strangers, he might behead a hundred of his followers instead if the strangers insult him. He would not dream of mentioning anything about the beheadings, as criticizing guests would be the height of rudeness.

When the PCs are brought into his presence, the prince is almost unbearably polite, plying them with extravagant food and drink. He is anxious to hear about their travels

(which frankly bore him quickly, though he is good at hiding his feelings) and their reasons for crossing the Crown of the World at this time of the year. If the PCs are hesitant to discuss such matters, the prince doesn't press them, but he does develop a fixation on one of the characters or one of their possessions (see sidebar). As a result, Batsaikhar announces that the PCs shall be afforded the status of royal guests. He instructs his staff to provide them the best rooms and begin preparations for the Five Feasts of Hongal in their honor. The first feast will take place that very night; the last will take place in 5 days' time across the whole city.

The prince then dismisses the PCs to brood upon the object of his desire. The Palace of the Prince is a large and rambling structure, and as guests, the PCs have free rein. However, there are so many guards, retainers, and advisors in the palace that guests are hard pressed to do anything without at least half a dozen people appearing around them to help. The PCs' rooms are luxurious, with goose feather beds, warm fireplaces, access to steaming lakes to bathe in, and endless assistants to pamper them.

The PCs may also wish to visit the city, and may do so at their leisure, though the prince will likely assign several guards and servants to accompany and guide them through the city.

THE FIVE FEASTS OF HONGAL

Over the next 5 days, Prince Batsaikhar hosts five feasts in honor of the PCs. The feasts are lavish affairs, and take place in the prince's throne room courtyard with over 300 guests, including Batsaikhar's wives, courtiers, concubines, subjects, and slaves, who all react in exactly the same way that he does. Desperate to impress the PCs and thus obtain the object of his fixation, the prince orders his chefs to create the finest meals from only the rarest and most luxurious foods imaginable, and the chefs take him quite literally.

Each of the feasts is briefly detailed below, with a list of food served and the entertainment for the feast. After the entertainment, the prince challenges the PCs to show him similar performances or skills from their own lands. The PCs (or their NPC allies) must make a series of skill checks or other checks to complete the challenges and impress the prince. They cannot take 20 on these checks, but may take 10 if they wish.

If the PCs succeed at challenges, the prince is pleased and presents them with gifts in appreciation of their performance. However, the prince angrily chastises his own performers in Tien for their lack of talent, and once his guests leave, he broods over suitable punishments to inflict upon his staff. The PCs also receive XP awards for successfully completing each challenge.

If the PCs fail at the required checks (or refuse to perform), the prince politely ignores this, but the next day the PCs find the shops in the city closed as the notoriously

FIXATIONS OF A BORED RULER

Prince Batsaikhar is used to getting what he wants, and once he meets the PCs, he wants something from them. At their initial meeting, Batsaikhar develops a fixation on the PCs' party—most likely a non-Tian female PC (or a significant NPC such as Shalelu), or one of the PCs' most valuable magic items or possessions. During the PCs' stay, the prince arranges for the object of his fixation to be brought to him often, by frequently summoning the PC he is fixated on or the PC who possesses the object. Batsaikhar makes no secret of his wonder and desire regarding the object of his fixation, but he never takes his heart's desire (that would be impolite). He simply wishes the PC to give him what he wants. He would never force the PCs to comply, though you should make the players think he might. The prince is never threatening or aggressive, but his desire is open and plain.

If the fixation is a woman, Batsaikhar makes a proposal of marriage immediately before the Feast of the Honored Visitors (see page 12) with a suitably flowery speech. He promises the stars to the object of his desire, and a place by his side forever. If he is fixated on an item, he suggests the object of his desire would make a suitable gift for his hospitality.

Refusal angers the prince, and he retires to his chambers and sulks for the remainder of the time the PCs are here. If the PCs agree to his request, the overjoyed prince presents them with a gift to match his happiness: the Ruby of Hongal, a fabulously large, flawless gemstone worth at least 10,000 gp. Needless to say, any woman who accepts Batsaikhar's offer of marriage soon discovers her new husband's incredibly short attention span and fiery temper.

mercurial prince does not wish his subjects to be corrupted by the PCs' lack of grace or talent. In this case, the DCs for Diplomacy checks in the city increase by +10 as well, as locals refuse to talk to them, under the prince's orders.

THE FEAST OF THREE

The Feast of Three takes place on the PCs' first night in Ordu-Aganhei as guests of Prince Batsaikhar.

Feast: Spicy duck heads; ox forehead; turtle casserole; pigeon brains; fried chicken feet; and tiger, dragon, and phoenix soup (made with cat, snake, and chicken meat).

Entertainment: The prince's royal guards perform an exhibition of the Three Games of Hongal: mounted archery, bareback horse racing, and wrestling.

Challenge: Prince Batsaikhar asks the PCs to show him something similar from the magnificently verdant lands of the west. Only one PC can attempt each challenge, and other characters cannot use aid another to assist.

For mounted archery, a PC must make a DC 5 Ride check to guide his mount with his knees, a DC 10 Ride check to fight from his mount, and then shoot at a target with a ranged weapon while the mount is running (making a bull's-eye is AC 25, and the attack roll takes a –8 penalty due to the mount's speed).

For horse racing, a PC must make a DC 20 Ride check to fast mount her horse, a DC 15 Ride check to spur her mount to greater speed, and a third DC 15 Ride check to leap over obstacles. Each of these checks takes a –5 penalty from riding bareback.

For wrestling, a PC must grapple the prince's champion **Huk** (N male human fighter 8 with the Greater Grapple feat; **CMB** +12 [+5 grapple]; **CMD** 25 [27 vs. grapple]). The first one to pin his opponent wins the challenge.

Story Award: For each challenge the PCs successfully perform, award them 800 XP.

Gift: If the PCs successfully complete at least two out of the three challenges, the prince presents them with a masterwork composite shortbow, an *efficient quiver*, and 10 +1 arrows.

THE FEAST OF THE ANCIENTS

The Feast of the Ancients takes place on the second night.

Feast: Steamed Hongali stone frogs, goose stomach, goat's feet tendons in wheat noodles, fish lips with celery, solidified duck blood, and drunken shrimp (a delicacy in which one dips live shrimp in alcohol before pinching off their heads and eating their flesh).

Entertainment: "Why the Marmot Doesn't Have Thumbs," an ancient Hongali folk tale performed with *pi ying xi* (shadow puppet theater using leather puppets) accompanied by throat singing and music on the *morin khuur*, or horsehead fiddle, a traditional Hongali stringed instrument.

Challenge: Prince Batsaikhar asks to see something similar from the young lands of beautiful women. The PCs must make skill checks to impress the prince, from the following performance types: a DC 35 Perform (act) or Sleight of Hand check to perform using the *pi ying xi*, a DC 25 Perform (act) or Perform (oratory) check, a DC 30 Perform (sing) check, or a DC 30 Perform (string instruments) check. Only one PC can attempt each check, but other characters can use aid another to assist their companions.

Story Award: For each successful skill check made by the PCs, award them 800 XP.

Gift: If the PCs successfully perform using the *pi ying xi*, or succeed at two out of three other performances, the prince gives them a finely carved and decorated masterwork *morin khuur* worth 500 gp.

THE FEAST OF FIRE

Prince Batsaikhar hosts the Feast of Fire on the third night.

Feast: Thousand-year-old eggs (duck eggs coated with lime, ashes, and mud and soaked in horse urine for 100

days), cow's lung soaked in chili sauce, pig face (made by pouring hot tar on a pig's head to remove the hair but leave the skin intact), snake venom soup, deep fried bee larvae, and duck's feet marinated in blood.

Entertainment: "The Taming of the Kirin," a dazzlingly dangerous display of fire breathing and swordplay while dancing on hot coals.

Challenge: Prince Batsaikhar asks the PCs if they can amuse him with similar feats from the bountiful lands of enlightenment to the west. The PCs must make a DC 30 Perform (dance) check, a DC 30 Acrobatics check, and a DC 25 Intimidate check. Only one PC can attempt each check, but other characters can use aid another to assist their companions.

Story Award: For each successful skill check made by the PCs, award them 800 XP.

Gift: The prince rewards the PCs with a case of *elixir of fire breath* (two flasks of elixir for each successful skill check).

THE FEAST OF THE HONORED VISITORS

On the fourth night, the Feast of the Honored Visitors is held. For this feast, the guests must advise the royal chefs what to cook, and must provide the entertainment for the feast. The prince's advisor Chua wakes the PCs at dawn and asks for instructions for the feast—the royal household is ready to act under their direction.

Feast: The PCs have to feed the prince's 300 guests, but all dishes must be made from what is locally available—camel, horse, mutton, and pork being the most obvious options.

Challenge: The prince's chefs are totally unfamiliar with Avistani cuisine, and unless the PCs personally intervene, the cooks produce something that looks disgusting and tastes vile, which displeases the prince. The PCs can supervise the cooks and create a pleasing meal with a DC 25 Profession (butcher), Profession (cook), or similar skill check, or by using magic.

The PCs must also entertain the guests at the feast. They must make two skill checks, one at DC 30 and one at DC 35, using Perform or other skills (such as Acrobatics, Escape Artist, or the like) to provide suitable entertainment. Only one PC can attempt each check, but other characters can use aid another to assist their companions.

XP: For each successful skill check (for cooking and entertainment) made by the PCs, award them 800 XP.

Gift: If the PCs make all of their skill checks and the food and entertainment are both good, the prince gives them a beautiful +1 *scimitar* in a ceremonial scabbard decorated with opals worth 1,000 gp.

THE FEAST OF THE DRAGON

The prince's final feast, the Feast of the Dragon, is an evening of celebration that takes place across the city on the fifth night. Prince Batsaikhar does not leave the palace, but

FOREST OF SPIRITS

he encourages and expects the PCs to do so. He has issued instructions for his merchants to open up their warehouses and show the finest wares of Tian Xia at a special market held on the shores of the steaming lake in the middle of the city.

Feast: In addition to the normal street food found in Ordu-Aganhei, horse-hoof gruel, “household deer” (fried rats), smells like fish pork (pork cooked with wood ear mushrooms and green hot peppers), skewered roasted sparrows, snakehead soup, and live scorpions doused in potent liquor are all available during the Feast of the Dragon.

Entertainment: The prince has instructed his subjects to be happy for the evening, and to arrange a dragon parade in honor of the visitors. Hundreds of brightly colored dragon costumes are paraded through the streets, accompanied by the staccato explosions of paper candles. The festivities conclude at midnight with an incredible fireworks display over the palace walls, with hundreds of Desnan candles, skyrocketers, and starfountains turning night into day.

Challenge: There is no challenge for the PCs to perform during the Feast of the Dragon, but their presence in the city has not gone unnoticed by the Five Storms, who quickly send agents racing to the city to attack the PCs.

ATTACK AT THE LAKE MARKET (CR 12)

The vast market on the lakeshore forms a central part of the evening. Market stalls stand close together, hawking every sort of ware imaginable. Almost anything the PCs might want to purchase can likely be found at the market, up to the city’s base value.

Creatures: A group of eight Five Storms ninja has been dispatched to assassinate the PCs and Ameiko, the first of potentially many to come. Six of the ninja approach the PCs under a large golden dragon costume (a paper object held aloft on bamboo struts) while the other two stand behind beating heavy drums. As they pass the PCs, the ninja throw off their dragon costume and attack. The ninja are completely silent and do not speak, even if captured. All of the ninja cut out their own tongues when they took their oaths to the Five Storms to prevent them from speaking truths, even after death.

On the third round of combat, the PCs gain an unexpected ally in their battle against the ninja, as a woman runs out of the crowd and begins attacking the ninja as well. This is Miyaro, one of the race of foxlike shapechangers called kitsune, sent here by the kami of the Forest of Spirits to assist and guide the PCs. Here in Ordu-Aganhei, Miyaro stays in her human form, that of a simple peasant woman, and therefore loses her bite attack, but she wields her kukri to devastating effect, flanking with the PCs to make sneak attacks against the ninja.

FIVE STORMS NINJA (8) CR 6
XP 2,400 each

Human ninja (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Combat* 13)

CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +8; **Senses** Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 15, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +4 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 56 each (7d8+21)

Fort +6, **Ref** +9, **Will** +3

Defensive Abilities uncanny dodge

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk katana* +11 (1d8+1 plus poison/18–20)

Ranged shuriken +9 (1d2+1 plus poison)

Special Attacks sneak attack +4d6

TACTICS

Before Combat The ninja poison their katanas and shuriken with shadow essence before combat, and drink their *potions of displacement*.

During Combat The ninja pair up against opponents, flanking to make sneak attacks.

Morale If reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, the ninja drink their *potions of cure serious wounds*. If reduced to 8 hit points or fewer after this point, the ninja commit seppuku (ritual suicide by performing a self-inflicted coup de grace with their katanas) rather than submit to capture.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 18, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +5; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 21

Feats Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (katana*)

Skills Acrobatics +13, Bluff +11, Climb +10, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +13, Intimidate +8, Perception +9, Sleight of Hand +14, Stealth +13, Swim +6

Languages Tien (cannot speak)

SQ *ki* pool (4), light steps, ninja tricks (fast stealth, finesse rogue, smoke bomb), no trace +2, poison use

Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds*, *potion of displacement*, shadow essence (6 doses); **Other Gear** masterwork chain shirt, masterwork katana*, shuriken (12)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Fast Stealth (Ex) The ninja can move at full speed using the Stealth skill without penalty.

Ki Pool (Su) A ninja has a pool of *ki* points, supernatural energy she can use to accomplish amazing feats. As long as she has at least 1 point in her *ki* pool, a ninja treats any Acrobatics skill check made to jump as if she had a running start. By spending 1 point from her *ki* pool, a ninja can make one additional attack at her highest attack bonus, but she can do so only when making a full attack. In addition, she can spend 1 point to increase her speed by 20 feet for 1 round. Finally, a ninja can spend 1 point from her *ki* pool to give herself a +4 insight bonus on Stealth skill checks for 1 round. Each of these powers is activated as a swift action.

Light Steps (Ex) As a full-round action, a ninja can move

up to twice her speed, ignoring difficult terrain. While moving in this way, any surface will support her, no matter how much she weighs. This allows her to move across water, lava, or even the thinnest tree branches. She must end her move on a surface that can support her normally. She cannot move across air in this way, nor can she walk up walls or other vertical surfaces. When moving in this way, she does not take damage from surfaces or hazards that react to being touched, such as lava or caltrops, nor does she need to make Acrobatics checks to avoid falling on slippery or rough surfaces. Finally, when using light steps, the ninja ignores any mechanical traps that use a location-based trigger.

No Trace (Ex) A ninja learns to cover her tracks, remain hidden, and conceal her presence. The DC to track a ninja using the Survival skill increases by +2. In addition, her training gives her a +2 insight bonus on Disguise skill checks and on opposed Stealth checks whenever she is stationary and does not take any action for at least 1 round.

Poison Use (Ex) A ninja is trained in the use of poison and cannot accidentally poison herself when applying poison to a weapon.

Smoke Bomb (Ex) As a standard action, a ninja can throw a smoke bomb that creates a cloud of smoke with a 15-foot radius. This acts like the smoke from a smokestick. The ninja can center this smoke on herself, or throw the bomb as a ranged touch attack with a range of 20 feet. Each use of this ability uses up 1 *ki* point.

* See *Ultimate Combat*.



MIYARO

MIYARO

CR 8

XP 4,800

hp 53 (see page 56)

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY

After the battle, Miyaro introduces herself to the PCs. She is an ally of the kami of the Forest of Spirits and has walked a long way to meet the PCs and offer Ameiko and her companions safe passage through the forest. The kami are aware of the PCs' arrival in Tian Xia and the precious treasures they bear with them—the *Amatatsu Seal* and a true *Amatatsu* scion. The ancient nature spirits are anxious to see the Five Storms destroyed and the rightful empress return to the throne of Minkai, but the kami are bound by ancient agreements not to directly interfere with the world of mortals, and so they have sent Miyaro as their herald and ambassador.

Miyaro informs the PCs that the Five Storms control much of Minkai, as well as the Spirit Road from Hongal to Minkai. If the PCs wish to enter Minkai secretly, they need

a less obvious way to enter the empire than the main road. Fortunately, however, the PCs have allies. Miyaro offers to guide the PCs through the Forest of Spirits, the vast “haunted” forest that grows between Hongal and Minkai, via a secret route that bypasses the heavily patrolled Spirit Road. Once there, she promises to introduce the PCs to these mysterious allies and bring them to a place that may aid them all in the battle to come.

The PCs have likely already learned about the existence of the Five Storms—whether from defeated agents of the group, from *Suishen*, or from visions received from the *Amatatsu Seal*—but if they are still ignorant of their foes, Miyaro can fill them in on exactly who has been trying to stop them from reaching Minkai.

If pressed about the Forest of Spirits or her unknown allies, Miyaro is reluctant to give too many details, but she promises that all will be revealed when the PCs reach the forest. She is very anxious for the group to leave as soon as possible—the following morning at the latest—for if one group of Five Storms agents is in the city, others are sure to follow. Miyaro worries that the next attack might be from a much larger group, or that the Five Storms might use political pressure to convince Prince Batsaikhar to take action against the PCs himself.

If the PCs seem reluctant to trust Miyaro, she does her best to convince the PCs to go with her (as do the PCs' NPC allies), but ultimately it is their choice. If the PCs choose not to go with Miyaro, they can attempt to take the Spirit Road or make their own way through the Forest of Spirits, but they will likely encounter more agents of the Five Storms sent to stop them. In this case, Miyaro will attempt to secretly follow the PCs' caravan, aiding them when she can, and hopefully convincing them at a later time to visit the House of Withered Blossoms.

If the PCs wish to know more about the kami who inhabit the Forest of Spirits, they can learn the following information with Diplomacy checks to gather information or Knowledge (planes) checks.

DC 10: Kami are spirits tasked with protecting parts of the physical world that cannot defend themselves, in order to protect the natural order of things.

DC 15: Kami can manifest physical bodies, but doing so makes them “mortal” and susceptible to being killed—the price they must pay if they wish to physically protect something.

DC 20: A kami's power depends upon the nature of its ward—a rock kami or a frog kami might be weak, but a blue whale kami or a mountain kami is quite powerful.

DC 25: Although seen as good spirits, kami are not mortal and thus think differently. Tales tell of kami tearing people apart for felling trees while ignoring a raging murderer.

LEAVING ORDU-AGANHEI

Whether or not the PCs go with Miyaro, they soon find they have worn out their welcome in Ordu-Aganhei. News of the ninja attack on the PCs soon reaches the ears of Prince Batsaikhar, who is well aware of the Five Storms and the danger they represent. Not wishing to anger Minkai, the prince decides to have nothing more to do with the PCs, and strongly encourages the PCs to leave. It would be impolite to actually ask his guests to leave, of course, but the prince no longer invites the PCs to gatherings, and refuses to even see them (even the object of his fixation). To drive the point home, the prince sends one final gift to each of the PCs: a tooled, gold-filigreed riding saddle worth 200 gp. Each saddle also comes with a famed Hongali horse—a combat-trained light horse with the advanced simple template—worth 300 gp.

If the PCs fail to take the hint, they soon find themselves ejected from their lodgings in the palace (accompanied by the prince's most profuse apologies, of course, delivered through Chua). If the PCs remain in Ordu-Aganhei, the prince orders all the shops and inns closed to them, making it plain the PCs are no longer welcome in the city.

Once the PCs leave the city, it is a 500-mile journey southeastward through the steppes and outlying villages of Hongal to reach the northern fringes of the Forest of Spirits. You can enliven this journey with caravan encounters, or keep up the pace of the chase by having another group of Five Storms ninja attack the PCs en route.

PART TWO: THE FOREST OF SPIRITS

The Forest of Spirits is a vast subarctic pine forest separating Minkai from mainland Tian Xia. It is a dense forest with massive trees and virtually no undergrowth, almost continuously shrouded in snow. Beyond the outer fringes, there is a paucity of human and other civilized life in the forest, though it teems with animals and the spirits that give the wood its name. Minkai lies over 1,200 miles from the forest's border with Hongal, though the PCs' journey will not take them straight through the forest.

SPIRITS OF THE FOREST

Countless incorporeal spirits wander the Forest of Spirits, and are attracted to those living creatures that wander inside the forest's boundaries. Something between ghosts and haunts, these spirits are actually neither, though they have abilities similar to both. A spirit can possess a living creature, but it cannot control the body as a ghost does. A spirit does have an effect upon a body it possesses, however, sometimes beneficial and sometimes detrimental.

Spirits are incorporeal, but they are not creatures that can simply be destroyed in combat. They function more like haunts (*Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide* 242), but are not limited to a specific location and are not necessarily evil or vengeful. All spirits have a fly speed of 30 feet with perfect maneuverability.

Spirits are difficult to detect since they are typically invisible until they manifest. *Detect undead* or detect alignment spells of the appropriate type allow an observer a chance to notice a spirit before it manifests (allowing that character the appropriate check to notice the spirit, but at a -4 penalty).

A spirit manifests in a surprise round, rolling initiative as normal (spirits have an initiative modifier of +0). All characters in the spirit's proximity can attempt to notice the spirit at the start of this surprise round by making a notice check. All spirits can detect life sources and manifest as a result of the approach of or contact with living creatures.

Once it manifests, a spirit tries to possess a living host. This is a supernatural ability. Spirits are drawn to similarly aligned creatures, and attempt to possess those creatures first, but if no such characters are available they go for the next closest until they find a suitable host. Attempting to possess a body is a full-round action, and the spirit must be adjacent to the target. The target can resist the possession with a successful Will save. A target can willingly fail this save to allow possession by a spirit. A creature that successfully saves is immune to that same spirit's possession for 24 hours. A protection spell of the correct alignment prevents a spirit from possessing a creature's body for the duration of the spell. A possessed creature can make a new saving throw each day to throw off the possession.

Once it successfully possesses a host, a spirit has an ongoing effect on its host. The spirit whispers in its host's mind, creates empathic urges and impulses, and appears in daydreams or moments of slumber. In addition, a spirit provides either a boon or a bane to its host. Unless otherwise noted, these effects last as long as the spirit continues to possess the host. A *greater restoration*, *heal*, or *miracle* spell removes all permanent effects.

Once a spirit manifests, it can be damaged by positive energy (via channeled energy, cure spells, and the like). A spirit never gains a Will save to lessen the damage done by such effects, and attacks that require a successful attack roll to work must strike AC 10 (modified by the spirit's size) in order to affect the spirit. Unless the spirit has an unusual weakness, no other form of attack can reduce its hit points. If the spirit is reduced to 0 hit points by positive energy, it is destroyed.

Once a spirit possesses a host, however, positive energy no longer harms it. It must be driven out of its host, either with a protection spell of the proper alignment (allowing

the host a new saving throw to end the possession), or with a *dispel* spell of the proper alignment, which destroys the spirit (the spirit's Will save modifier is equal to its CR + 3).

More than one spirit can possess the same host, but the more spirits a creature hosts, the more confusing and distracting the babble of voices in the creature's head is. A possessed creature takes a cumulative –2 penalty on Will saves and on all Wisdom-based checks for each spirit possessing it beyond the first.

ELEMENTS OF A SPIRIT

Spirits are presented in the following format.

Spirit Name: The spirit's name, followed by its CR.

XP: This is the amount of XP to award the PCs for destroying the spirit, as determined by its CR. The PCs do not earn XP for destroying a good spirit or a spirit that provides a boon.

Alignment and Race: This line gives the spirit's alignment, gender, and race. A spirit is never simply neutral in alignment; it always has at least one other alignment component on either the good-evil and/or lawful-chaotic axis.

Notice: This indicates the skill check and DC required to notice the spirit in the surprise round before it manifests. The sensory input for what a successful check notices—such as a muted ghostly wailing, an almost imperceptible wavering in the air, or the faint smell of decay—is listed in parentheses after the DC.

hp: This line lists the spirit's effective hit points for the purposes of resolving positive energy damage. A spirit's hit points are equal to its CR × 4.5 (round fractions down).

Will Save: The DC of the Will save to avoid possession by the spirit. The save DC is equal to the spirit's CR + 9.

Ongoing Effect: This line describes the ongoing effects a host experiences while possessed by the spirit. These effects last for as long as the spirit possesses the host.

Boon or Bane: This describes the boon or bane the spirit grants its host.

Dismissal: If the spirit can be damaged or affected by effects other than positive energy or *dispel* spells, those effects are listed here.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE FOREST OF SPIRITS

The PCs will encounter a number of spirits and other denizens of the wood as they journey through the Forest of Spirits. With the exception of the first and last encounters—Guardian of the Way, which takes place when the PCs first enter the Forest of Spirits, and Ancestral Spirits, which takes place just before the PCs reach the House of Withered Blossoms—these encounters do not have set locations or times. You should place these encounters at locations of your choosing along the PCs' route, in an order that best fits the needs of your campaign. They should be used to enliven

the PCs' journey and impress upon the PCs the unique character of the Forest of Spirits and its inhabitants.

GUARDIAN OF THE WAY

A narrow dirt path disappears into the dark edge of the forest ahead. The boughs of the trees hang heavy with fallen snow, and an almost preternatural silence reigns over the area. Ahead, a small stone pillar engraved with strange symbols has fallen across the path, blocking the way forward.

The fallen pillar is a waymarker, but also a warning to those who would enter the Forest of Spirits naively. The waymarker's function can be easily determined by anyone who speaks Tien, or with a DC 15 Knowledge (local) or DC 20 Linguistics check. Although the fallen waymarker is blocking the path, it is easy to simply go around it. However, Miyaro informs the PCs that such markers often have guardian kami who watch over them. If the PCs were to set the waymarker back upright and leave an offering for the kami, they might gain its blessing or favor.

Creature: The waymarker is indeed the ward of a shikigami kami named Shunkichi, who is currently invisible, watching over his ward from behind a nearby tree. Shikigami kami are the protectors of minor works of civilization, and though the least of the kami, they are courageous and steadfastly loyal. Should the PCs attempt to desecrate or destroy his waymarker, Shunkichi leaps out of hiding to attack, even though such an action is likely to be fatal for him. Otherwise, Shunkichi watches the PCs without revealing himself.

If the PCs set the waymarker back into place (it weighs only 100 pounds) and leave a small offering (a bit of food, a few coins, or the like), they feel a sense of satisfaction and well-being settle over them. A moment later, Shunkichi comes out of hiding. He appears as a wizened, 2-foot-tall man in homespun robes. He bows to the PCs and thanks them in Tien (Miyaro offers to translate if none of the PCs speak Tien), and informs the PCs that because they helped him, they have earned the blessings of the local spirits—the sense of gratification that they feel. Each of the PCs gains a +1 luck bonus on all saving throws for the next week. Miyaro then introduces the PCs to Shunkichi, and tells him of their purpose in entering the Forest of Spirits. The little man nods sagely, and offers his blessing for their journey, but warns them that the wood contains many dangerous spirits and creatures, and that mortals should not tread carelessly beneath the forest's boughs. Nevertheless, he promises to inform the other kami of the PCs' coming. With that, he once more merges with his waymarker and disappears from view.

SHUNKICHI

CR 2

XP 600

Male shikigami kami (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 163)

hp 19; fast healing 2

TACTICS

During Combat Shunkichi throws rocks at attackers, hoping to drive them off. He knows he has little chance of defeating a large group of foes in melee combat, but he tries to do so anyway if he has no other choice, grabbing a tree branch to use as an improvised club.

Morale If reduced to fewer than 10 hit points, Shunkichi merges with his ward. If enemies attack the waymarker itself, Shunkichi manifests again, fighting to the death to defend his ward.

ENTERING THE FOREST

Once the PCs enter the Forest of Spirits, they soon have the feeling of being watched, though they can see no signs of anything following them. Strange noises occasionally ring out through the forest, though it's impossible to discover their source. These occurrences only increase as the journey progresses.

Spirit: Soon after entering the forest, the PCs encounter the first of many spirits in the wood. Li Xu was a young poet and lyricist who died in her sleep while camping in the forest. She does not realize she is dead, however, and believes her entire existence as a spirit is just a vivid dream.

LI XU, THE WANDERING SONG

NG female human spirit

Notice Perception DC 15 (to hear a tuneful humming)

hp 22

Will Save DC 14

Ongoing Effect Epic songs.

Li Xu sings Tien epics and recites complex poetry while possessing a creature. These tales grant the possessed creature a +2 bonus on Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), and Knowledge (nobility) checks, and the possessed creature can make such checks untrained.

Boon Speak Tien. As soon as Li possesses a creature, the host begins to learn the Tien language. The process takes 1 week, but if Li has not been dismissed by the end of that time, the creature learns to speak Tien, and retains that knowledge even if Li is later dismissed. If Li possesses a creature for 1 month or more, the creature permanently

gains a rank in Perform (sing). If the creature already has ranks in Perform (sing), it instead gains a permanent +1 bonus on Perform (sing) checks.

Dismissal Magic only.

AMBUSH AT THE RIDGE OF CHILL BREEZES (CR 11)

This encounter occurs as the PCs are following a line of high tors that rear above the forest.

Creatures: Three stone giant brothers have built a home atop the tors, where they hunt great birds by hurling rocks. The giants are loafing as the PCs approach, but they likely hear the noises of the PCs' caravan. If they detect the PCs, one giant makes a strange bird call to alert his brothers. The PCs can make a DC 10 Perception check to hear the call, but DC 20 Knowledge (nature) check recognizes that the sound was not made by an animal. The giants take up positions flanking the PCs or their caravan; the biggest, Feng, marches ahead of any opponents, while his brothers sneak up from behind to hurl rocks with surprise. If not alerted, Feng simply wanders into the PCs on the trail. He shouts to alert his brothers, who come rushing to help him in 1d4 rounds, and he immediately attacks.

YU, YE, AND FENG

CR 8

XP 4,800 each

Male stone giants (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 151)

hp 102 each

TACTICS

During Combat The giants are somewhat simplistic in battle. They hurl rocks, then move in to bash opponents with their clubs.

Morale A giant flees to the brothers' house atop the tors if reduced to 20 hit points or fewer.

Treasure: The giants' house is built on top of a tor not far from where they ambush the PCs. The house is a crudely built mishmash of wood and stone, but it offers the giants a warm and dry place to sleep. There are six comfortable rooms in the house, each heated with a great fire. In addition to plenty of salted meat and cured meat (equivalent to 20 cargo units of caravan stores), the house contains a 25-foot-long woven tapestry worth 300 gp, two white tiger skins worth 250 gp each, two bolts of fine silk worth 140 gp each, and three barrels of very good sake worth 50 gp each.



SHUNKICHI



THE ANGER OF STORMS (CR 8)

Spirit: The spirit of an angry samurai named Onashi Taisuke drifts into the area. Known for his cruelty to prisoners, Onashi was killed by his escaped convicts during a revolt.

ONASHI TAISUKE, THE ANGER OF STORMS CR 8

XP 4,800

LE male human spirit

Notice Perception DC 25 (to hear the crack of a whip)

hp 36

Will Save DC 17

Ongoing Effect Disturbing dreams. The possessed creature must make a DC 17 Will save each night to fall asleep, or the creature is unable to get proper rest because of vivid dreams of Onashi's acts of rage and brutality against prisoners. A creature that does not sleep properly is fatigued the following day. Three or more days without sleep make the creature exhausted.

Bane The possessed creature must make a DC 17 Will save when Onashi is dismissed, or his anger remains and the dreams, albeit milder, continue. Although the creature no longer wakes, it needs an extra hour's sleep each night to gain the full benefits of a night's sleep.

Dismissal Magic only.

THE AGONY OF GRIEF (CR 8)

A tiger kami named Gushiang recently died nearby, and its death has driven its ward, an albino dire tiger of great age named Tieqing, insane with grief. The huge tiger now stalks the forest, attacking any who trespass on its former kami's territory.

Creature: Tieqing simply appears out of the forest, rushing toward the PCs from a distance of 300 feet away. It roars at the PCs' caravan, but it almost seems as if the sounds contain half-formed words. A DC 20 Knowledge (nature) or Sense Motive check reveals that the tiger is not acting naturally (Miyaro can make this check for the PCs if they are unable to), while a DC 20 Knowledge (planes) check allows the PCs to realize that such tigers are sacred to the kami of the Forest of Spirits.

The tiger charges the PCs, but suddenly halts and sniffs at the air when it reaches them. Although it appears hostile, Tieqing is considered unfriendly. It eyes the PCs suspiciously for 3 rounds. During this time, the PCs can attempt to improve the tiger's attitude with wild empathy or magic. If the PCs make Tieqing at least indifferent, the tiger departs as suddenly as it arrived. If the PCs fail to improve the tiger's attitude, or if they do nothing or attack the tiger, Tieqing immediately becomes hostile and

attacks the PCs. The tiger fights until killed, an event that has unforeseen consequences (see Development below).

TIEQING **CR 8**

XP 4,800

Dire tiger (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 265)

hp 105

Development: If the PCs kill Tieqing, proceed to The Consequences of Hasty Actions (see below).

Story Award: If the PCs avoid killing Tieqing, award them 9,600 XP.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF HASTY ACTIONS (CR 8)

This encounter only occurs if the PCs killed the dire tiger Tieqing (see The Agony of Grief, above).

Spirit: The death of Tieqing enrages the spirit of an ancient hunter named Kungang. Kungang spent his years killing tigers, until one day the hunter became the prey, and Kungang finally understood the meaning of the proverb, “he who rides a tiger is afraid to dismount.” Filled with regret for his actions, Kungang’s spirit now wanders the forest admiring the tigers that inherit the area, particularly Tieqing. Kungang tries to possess the PC who struck the killing blow against Tieqing, or who dealt the most damage to the tiger. He does not attempt to possess any character who did not fight Tieqing, and he is unable to possess a character who has no regrets about any of her actions (such as a paladin, for example).

KUNGANG, THE ENDLESS HUNT **CR 8**

XP 4,800

LN male human spirit

Notice Perception DC 27 (to catch a glimpse of a stalking tiger through the underbrush)

hp 36

Will Save DC 17

Ongoing Effect Regret hasty actions. The possessed creature is racked with guilt about hasty actions that it now regrets. The creature becomes indecisive, and takes a –2 penalty on initiative checks.

Bane The regret of hasty actions never leaves the creature. The possessed creature must make a DC 17 Will save when Kungang leaves or is dismissed, or it takes a permanent –1 penalty on initiative checks.

Dismissal If the possessed creature truly regrets its actions and atones for them (such as through an *atonement* spell), Kungang is dismissed.

THE FIRE SPIRIT (CR 10)

Spirit: A pyromaniac wizard named Mieko once tried to burn down the Forest of Spirits, but was killed when her own fires grew beyond her control. She now wanders the

forest looking for a host so she can burn again. Mieko prefers to possess arcane spellcasters above all others.

MIEKO, THE ARSONIST **CR 10**

XP 9,600

CE female human spirit

Notice Perception DC 25 (to smell smoke on the wind)

hp 45

Will Save DC 19

Ongoing Effect Pyromania. The possessed creature has the urge to burn things, and the DC of all evocation spells cast by the possessed creature increases by +1.

Bane The possessed creature must make a DC 19 Will save when Mieko is driven out, or the DC of all evocation spells cast by the creature permanently decreases by –1.

Dismissal Magic only.

BERRIES OF MADNESS (CR 11)

Spirit: An angry spirit named Bokeghan is drawn to the PCs as they pass through this area. After eating poisonous wild berries, Bokeghan went mad and killed his beloved family with an axe. He now seeks to vent his rage on any living creature he finds.

BOKEGHAN, THE BREAKER **CR 11**

XP 12,800

NE male human spirit

Notice Perception DC 30 (to hear the sound of an axe hitting flesh)

hp 49

Will Save DC 20

Ongoing Effect Unfathomable anger. Bokeghan’s rage makes it difficult to concentrate. The possessed creature takes a –2 penalty on all Charisma-, Intelligence-, and Wisdom-based skill checks.

Boon or Bane If the possessed creature identifies the berries that drove Bokeghan mad (see Dismissal), the spirit leaves a portion of his love for his family in the creature before departing. Once per day, the creature can call upon this love as a free action to gain the effects of a *heroism* spell (duration 10 rounds). If driven away by magic before identifying the berries, some of Bokeghan’s anger remains. The possessed creature must make a DC 20 Will save when Bokeghan is driven out, or every time that creature rolls a natural 1 on a Will save it becomes confused for 2d4 rounds.

Dismissal Identifying the berries that drove Bokeghan mad. The berries are not uncommon in the forest, and the possessed creature can make a DC 30 Perception check each day to spot some and realize that something is amiss with the berries. A (DC 20) Knowledge (nature) check identifies the berries as being poisonous (causing madness in some) but very similar to a nutritious berry. If this knowledge is passed along to the possessed creature, Bokeghan is dismissed.

JADE REGENT

ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

After almost a month of travel through the forest, Miyaro guides the PCs to the clearing where the kami are waiting for them.

The trees part to reveal a twilight clearing, the thick leaves blocking most of the sunlight from the sky above. A giant, wooden torii gate, unpainted and unvarnished, stands before the entrance to the clearing.

Creature: As the PCs approach the torii, an armored figure appears beneath the gate, floating just a few inches above the ground. This is Noburo, a zuishin kami—guardians of gates and doorways and sworn enemies of the oni. Noburo hails the PCs (using telepathy if necessary) and demands they explain their presence in the Forest of Spirits. Miyaro explains in hurried whispers that Noburo is the guardian of this grove and that all must face him before they are allowed to enter. He is not an enemy, but the PCs must respectfully ask permission to enter.

Allow the PCs to introduce themselves and state their business. Noburo listens to them impassively, but if any of the PCs are currently possessed by evil spirits, Noburo can see them with his *detect evil* ability, and refuses to allow them to pass while so possessed. Regardless of whether or not they are possessed, the PCs must convince Noburo to allow them to pass through the gate (Miyaro can aid another to assist them, if necessary). Noburo has a starting attitude of unfriendly. If he is made indifferent, he grudgingly allows them through the gate, but keeps a close eye on them while they are present. If made friendly, he bids them welcome and steps aside, allowing them to enter the clearing. If made helpful, Noburo welcomes them and offers to dispel any evil spirits possessing them (with *dispel evil*), or to use his spell-like abilities to heal them or remove a spirit's boon or bane from a character (with *heal*).

If the PCs decide to attack Noburo, the kami responds in kind. Whether or not the other kami then approach the PCs (as described in Development below) is left to your discretion. If not, the PCs will have to make their own way to the House of Withered Blossoms.

NOBURO CR 10

XP 9,600

Male zuishin kami (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3* 165)

hp 123; fast healing 5

TACTICS

Before Combat Noburo casts *alarm* on his torii every day.

While merged with his ward, Noburo casts *true seeing* when the PCs approach his gate.

During Combat Noburo prefers to make ranged attacks, attacking evil characters or those possessed by evil spirits in preference to other foes.

Morale Noburo fights to the death to defend this sacred grove.

Development: Once the PCs enter the clearing, the rest of the day passes quietly until they make camp for the night in the still air of the forest. Slowly, the kami begin to arrive. The PCs gradually become aware that something is gathering in the darkness—a family, an army, or both. They can make out vague, strange shapes in the shadows, and palpable sense of fear and curiosity permeates the forest twilight.

Gradually, a few kami hesitantly approach the PCs to look upon them—most of these kami are merged with their animal wards, but others inhabit the trees, the rocks, or the snow, or simply manifest in a variety of forms, both humanoid and other. If the PCs earlier helped Shunkichi, they might catch a glimpse of the little kami among his fellows. Miyaro urges the PCs to remain still as they may terrify the spirits into fleeing.



NOBURO

Be careful when handling this encounter—you should try to create an atmosphere of mystery and wonder, while impressing upon the PCs that they are gaining a rare glimpse into what is almost another world. The kami are fascinated by the PCs but also afraid of them, and stay at the edge of sight at the fringes of the clearing. If the PCs make sudden moves, the kami back away, then gradually creep forward again. The intent is to make the PCs aware of the ancient spirits' numbers and power without frightening them.

The kami begin whispering strange words, which Miyaro translates for the PCs. She tells them that the kami swore an oath long ago to guard the oni of the Five Storms, who were imprisoned in a pagoda called the House of Withered Blossoms. For centuries, the kami kept the Five Storms contained, but one night, 160 years ago, most of the oni somehow escaped their prison. The kami do not know how, but they do know that at least one oni still remains in the House of Withered Blossoms, for their oath forbids them from stepping over the threshold while even one oni remains inside, and the way is still barred to them.

The kami ask the PCs to enter the pagoda to learn what happened to the Five Storms and, if necessary, to defeat the last oni within. They know that the PCs seek to depose the Jade Regent, and that he is allied with the Five Storms—an exploration of the oni's former prison might give them information and weapons they can use against their enemies.

If the PCs agree to go to the House of Withered Blossoms, an audible sigh passes through the kami gathered in the clearing. At length, a single kami approaches the PCs, a tiny ancient warrior with a tree branch growing from the top of his head. This is Akumi, a fukujin kami (see page 84). He bows to the PCs and introduces himself, and humbly asks them for one more favor. Akumi's ward, a small bonsai tree, was recently stolen by hobgoblins who took it inside the House of Withered Blossoms. Bound by his oath, Akumi was unable to follow, but he can feel that his bonsai is still alive somewhere within or beneath the pagoda. He has tended his ward for centuries, and should it die, Akumi believes he will die as well. He begs the PCs to go into the House of Withered Blossoms and recover his precious tree for him.

PART THREE: HOUSE OF WITHERED BLOSSOMS

If the PCs agree to investigate the House of Withered Blossoms on behalf of the kami, they may leave the next morning. The pagoda stands in a blighted section of the forest only a day's travel from the kami's clearing. Miyaro agrees to guide the PCs to the House of Withered Blossoms, but she refuses to go inside with them. Instead, she promises to wait with the PCs' caravan in the kami's clearing. She wishes the PCs luck, and if they did not attack the tiger Tieqing, she gives them her magic fan, *Kikuya's sensu*, to help them inside the pagoda (see page 61).

When the PCs are ready to enter the House of Withered Blossoms, read or paraphrase the following.

The animal calls soften to a whisper as the forest parts to reveal a vast bowl, the ground sinking from the forest tangle into descending rows of frozen terraces. At the center of the depression stands a towering porcelain pagoda, its walls and eaves smothered in thick, clinging vines and draped with heavy webs, soaring to a golden rooftop. Stylized representations of forgotten creatures and beasts dance upon the pagoda's walls, and a band of huge thorny spines juts from its midsection. A decaying garden surrounds the pagoda, a frozen echo of past magnificence. Broken statues litter the garden, and icy clouds of violet blossoms drift through the ruin. The overpowering scent of death and decay hangs in the air.

The pagoda and its subterranean dungeons form the House of Withered Blossoms, named for the strange, flowering vines that cling to the structure. Currently, two opposing factions vie for control of the ancient palace: the aranea followers of the sorcerer Akinosa, and the hobgoblin forces of the ja noi oni Munasukaru. The araneas, most of whom are neutral evil in alignment, inhabit the aboveground levels of the pagoda, while the hobgoblins occupy the dungeons below.

FEATURES OF THE HOUSE OF WITHERED BLOSSOMS

The House of Withered Blossoms has the following features.

Exterior: The outer walls of the House of Withered Blossoms are choked by the vines of the withered blossom plant (see below). Many of these vines are covered in sticky webs and several entrances into the pagoda are trapped. The araneas frequently use the exterior walls as a way of ingress and egress, however, and signs of this use are plainly evident. The outer walls of the pagoda can be scaled with a DC 15 Climb check.

Interior: Each level of the pagoda is 20 feet high, with stone ceilings supported by stone beams, though some of these ceilings have been removed to create large, multilevel chambers. Large portions of the pagoda have been destroyed over the years during the war between Akinosa and Munasukaru, but the pagoda's four central support pillars remain intact. These pillars, wreathed in stylized pictures of dragons eating hosts of people, are 5 feet in diameter. Even if these pillars are destroyed, the pagoda is likely to remain standing, because of the withered blossom vines encircling its walls (see below).

Teleportation: Because of the strictures placed on the House of Withered Blossoms by the gods, extradimensional travel (such as *dimension door*, *gate*, *plane shift*, *teleport*, and the like) into or out of the House of Withered Blossoms or the Penance is impossible. Such movement within

the confines of the pagoda or the dungeons below is unaffected.

Webs: The araneas have erected webs in several sections of the pagoda to make progress more difficult and to conceal the various traps they have set. Araneas can move across the webs at their climb speeds and pinpoint the location of any creatures touching the webs. As the web from area **A8a** upward is essentially one large, single web, the araneas in those areas can pinpoint the location of any creature touching the web. Most of these webs are thick and easy to spot, requiring no Perception check to see. The webs are sticky, and any creature touching them or attempting to move through them becomes entangled. Entangled creatures can escape with a DC 14 Escape Artist or Strength check. Each 5-foot-square section of web has 5 hit points and DR 5/—.

Withered Blossoms: The thick, woody vines of the withered blossom plant cling to every exterior wall of the House of Withered Blossoms. These vines bloom every night, bursting into life at sunset and growing steadily until, by midnight, the pagoda is cloaked with violet blossoms the size and shape of human hands. At midnight, the blossoms fall from the vines, drifting in great clouds through the garden surrounding the pagoda, obscuring vision and providing concealment equivalent to fog (*Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook* 439) in a 100-foot-radius area around the pagoda for 1d3 hours. During that time, fleshy ochre fruits develop like cancers on the vines, growing with alarming swiftness until they burst 1d3 hours later with a stench like honey and horse sweat. Both the flowers and fruits of the withered blossom vine are completely harmless.

A1. RAIN OF FLYING DAGGERS (CR 10)

The huge bronze door is marked with stylized pictures of dueling dragons. Hundreds of open-mouthed dragon faces surround the doorframe, all leering out hungrily.

The paranoid aranea Akinosa has rigged up several locations on this level with traps, including the main entry to the pagoda.

Trap: The stone door is barred on the inside (hardness 8, hp 60, Break DC 30) and trapped. Anyone opening the door triggers a spray of deadly flying daggers from the door.

RAIN OF FLYING DAGGERS TRAP CR 10
XP 9,600

Type mechanical; Perception DC 29; Disable Device DC 29

EFFECTS

Trigger location; Reset manual

Effect Atk +20 ranged (6d6); multiple targets (all targets in a 15-ft. cone)

A2. FLOOR OF LONG KNIVES (CR 7+)

This corridor runs along the perimeter of the pagoda and is choked with aranea webs. Stairs in the southeast corner lead up to area **A5** on the next level.

Trap: Among the webs in the eastern corridor, the araneas have set a trio of dangerous traps at the locations marked **T** on the map. A creature that steps into one of these squares is attacked by several long knives that jut up from between the floorboards.

FLOOR OF LONG KNIVES TRAPS (3) CR 7
XP 3,200 each

Type mechanical; Perception DC 29; Disable Device DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger location; Reset manual

Effect Atk +15 melee (3d4 long knives for 1d4+5 damage each)

A3. THE FUNNEL (CR 8)

The core of the pagoda on this floor has been gutted. The few remaining walls in this area are crumbling, and only the presence of four huge stone pillars, carved with pictures of battling dragons, seems to keep the building up. Thick webs fill the four corners of the room. The central section of the pagoda has suffered the most, with a great rip in the floor creating a steep-walled pit sloping down to a dark shaft choked with webs.

The Funnel marks the hinterland between the pagoda and Munasukaru's Penance below. As the main entrance from the dungeons below, this area is seen by the araneas as the frontier of their domain. The pit slopes down 10 feet to the top of the Throat (area **A4**).

Creatures: Four araneas watch the chamber at all times from webs near the ceiling.

ARANEAS (4) CR 4
XP 1,200 each

hp 37 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 30)

TACTICS

Before Combat The araneas cast *mage armor*, renewing it as needed. If alerted to intruders, they cast *invisibility* and *mirror image*.

During Combat The araneas are on guard against invaders coming up the shaft, and generally keep their attention on the Throat (area **A4**). Once they detect intruders, the araneas raise the alarm by blowing their horns. They prefer to attack using web-slinging (see sidebar) from their high vantage point near the ceiling. If their webs seem ineffective, the araneas cast attack spells (such as *magic missile*) before entering melee combat.

Morale Akinosa has assigned his most loyal and foolhardy followers to watch the Throat, and they fight to the death.



A4. THE THROAT

A warm breeze carrying the unpleasant smell of decay wafts upward from this web-filled shaft.

This long shaft is 100 feet deep, finally emerging in area **B1** in Munasukaru's Penance. The top 20 feet of the shaft has completely smooth sides, created by a *stone shape* spell, making it impossible to climb by normal means, and it is filled with aranea webs. Beyond that point, very narrow, short stone steps have been carved in the walls of the Throat over long years by the countless followers of Munasukaru. These steps spiral down to the bottom of the shaft, and require a DC 10 Climb check to descend.

A5. WALK OF LACQUERED SCREENS (CR 10+)

Tall black lacquered screens with prancing dragon designs turn this corridor into a twisting maze.

The corridor that runs along the perimeter of this level is divided into a maze by numerous lacquered wooden screens (hardness 5, hp 10, Break DC 10). Each screen is 5 feet wide and 8 feet tall. Akinosa and the araneas find it amusing to drop prisoners into this corridor and watch as the creatures within stalk and devour them. For even greater amusement, the araneas have built metal grilles into the ceilings of this level so they can more easily view the carnage below. These grilles are 3 feet in diameter, blocked with four iron bars (hardness 10, hp 30, Break DC 28). Small creatures can clamber through the gaps between these bars with a DC 30 Escape Artist check. Smaller creatures or those in *gaseous form* can pass easily through the bars. Two of these grilles (to the east and west) are also trap doors, and are locked with average locks (DC 25 Disable Device check to open; Akinosa has all the keys).

Creatures: Two mohrgs stalk the screened corridor. The mohrgs have become extremely adept at stealth, sneaking up on their prey using the screens for cover.

JADE REGENT



MOHRGS (2)

CR 8

XP 4,800 each

hp 91 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 208)

TACTICS

During Combat The mohrgs stalk opponents using stealth, and try to draw opponents into the raining shuriken traps to weaken them.

Morale The mohrgs withdraw to area A6 if reduced to fewer than 45 hit points.

Traps: To add more amusement, and to create a more effective attack deterrent, the araneas have rigged up traps that launch poisoned shuriken when pressure pads on the floor are triggered in several locations, marked T on the map. The mohrgs know the location of the traps and avoid them. Because of the large number of these traps, you should no longer award XP for them once the PCs realize their danger and are able to bypass them. Likewise, if the players are getting bored with repeated encounters with these traps, you can simply allow them to bypass the traps automatically, unless they are lured into traps by the mohrgs.

STORM OF RAINING SHURIKEN TRAP

CR 6

XP 2,400

Type mechanical; Perception DC 25; Disable Device DC 25

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Reset** manual

Effect Atk +15 ranged (2d4 shuriken for 1d2+1 damage each plus aranea poison [*save* Fort DC 15; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d3 Strength damage; *cure* 1 save])

Treasure: Each of the 5-foot-by-8-foot black lacquered screens is worth 20 gp, if undamaged and safely removed from the pagoda.

A6. HALL OF UNBREAKABLE SCREENS

More screens fill this chamber, but they are made of metal, and depict writhing dragons in bas-relief devouring hidden prey.

The screens in this chamber are metal (hardness 10, hp 30, Break DC 26) and fixed to the floor with hefty bolts. Noise within this room has the potential to alert the other mohrgs on this level (see areas A5 and A7).

Traps: Several storm of raining shuriken traps have been rigged in this chamber as well.

A7. CHAMBER OF IRON CAGES (CR 10)

Four great columns carved with depictions of dragons overlook a gruesome scene in the center of the pagoda. Four gibbets hang from an iron column in the center of the chamber, next to a steep stone spiral stair that climbs to the ceiling.

ARANEA TACTICS

The araneas in the House of Withered Blossoms use the following tactics in battle.

Sorcerer Spells Known: Unless otherwise noted, the araneas know *grease* (DC 14) and *magic missile* instead of *silent image* and *sleep*.

Web-Slinging: A favored tactic of the araneas involves creating a web and then using that web as a swinging rope to fight from. Generally speaking, the aranea is considered to be on higher ground for these attacks (+1 on melee attacks). To use this tactic, an aranea must first throw a web to a nearby fixed point (usually a ceiling or beam, both of which are generally Large, with an AC of 9). The araneas make one of three attacks using their webs in this way.

Angry Falling Leaves: In this attack, an aranea uses its web to break its fall as it suddenly drops up to 30 feet downward into combat, treating itself as a falling object that crashes into an opponent from above. This attack requires a melee touch attack, and deals 3d6 points of damage. The aranea itself takes 1d6 points of damage if this attack is successful.

Attack of the Lotus Whirlwind: In this attack, an aranea puts itself into a spin as it descends from its web. If the aranea descends 20 feet or more using this attack, its descent counts as a charge.

Graceful Descent of the Flying Blade: An aranea can swing up to the web's length (moving up to the aranea's speed) and make a single melee attack action without provoking an attack of opportunity, similar to the Spring Attack Feat. Doing so requires an Acrobatics check with a DC equal to the opponent's CMD. The aranea then releases the web and drops to the ground.

The araneas usually try to entangle opponents in their webs and aim to capture rather than kill (a standard tactic used against the followers of Munasukaru to learn more about the Penance). Prisoners are taken to Akinosa to decide what to do with them.

Recently, two Tian peasants, a man and a woman, had the misfortune to wander near the House of Withered Blossoms and were captured by the araneas. Finding the peasants of little use in his war against the oni, Akinosa released them into the Walk of Lacquered Screens, where they were caught by the mohrgs and dragged here to be imprisoned upside down in the cages in the middle of the room. The spiral stairs lead to area A8a above.

Creatures: Two more mohrgs lurk in this chamber, tormenting their prisoners to madness until the undead tire of them. If alerted to the presence of intruders in area A6, the mohrgs split up—one stalking the intruders from the south,

the other coming from the north—using stealth while trying to draw opponents into the raining shuriken traps.

MOHRGS (2) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

hp 91 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 208)

TACTICS

During Combat The mohrgs attacks with their tongues, attempting to paralyze opponents. If successful, the mohrgs drag their paralyzed victims to the gibbets, locking them shut to play with their prisoners later.

Morale If more than half of the mohrgs are killed, the survivors attempt to escape so they can continue hunting their prey later. If cornered in this room, the mohrgs fight until destroyed.

Development: The gibbets are locked with average locks, with the keys still in the locks, but the cage bars are so tight that a DC 25 Escape Artist check is required to unlock them from the inside. The two prisoners, **Junzo** (N male human expert 1) and **Udtsetseg** (N female human commoner 1), are obviously petrified, and if released, prostrate themselves at their saviors' feet. During their captivity, the pair overheard frequent discussions between Akinosa and his aranea followers, and have a reasonable idea of the general layout of the pagoda on the levels above this one. If freed, they happily share this information with their rescuers.

A8A. CARPET OF SPINES (CR 10)

Hundreds of stone needles and spikes jut from the floor of this large, open chamber. A row of iron grilles in the floor runs around the perimeter of the room, providing views into the level below. Thick webs sweep upward from the jagged floor toward the roof some sixty feet above, ending in a dark and shadowy funnel that slopes upward into the farther reaches of the pagoda. On each wall, a round window surrounded by iron barbs looks out over the garden surrounding the tower.

Two floors of the pagoda were destroyed to form this large area, leaving a single web-choked space 60 feet high. Akinosa has created a floor of stone spikes using *stone shape*, and the entire floor (with the exception of the immediate 5-foot-square sections around the grilles) is considered to be covered with caltrops for the purposes of movement and combat (*Core Rulebook* 155). Creatures falling onto the floor of this chamber take normal falling damage, plus 1 point of additional damage per 10 feet fallen from the spikes.

Anyone attempting to climb the webs is automatically entangled, but creatures can fly or levitate safely through gaps in the webs or climb the walls. The walls are relatively smooth, requiring a DC 25 Climb check to climb. However, the dragon pillars in the center of the room are easier (DC

20 Climb check). See area **A5** for details on the grilles. A stone spiral stair leads down to area **A7** below.

The windows are circular openings 5 feet in diameter, resembling open mouths with iron barbs that point inward. A Medium or smaller creature can safely pass through the windows to the east and west as a move action that provokes attacks of opportunity.

Traps: The north and south windows are trapped, and bite down on any creature attempting to pass through them.

VICIOUS BITING IRON TRAPS (2) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

Type mechanical; Perception DC 25; Disable Device DC 25

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Reset** automatic (immediate)

Effect Atk +20 melee (8d6 damage)

Development: Eight aranea guards dwell in the webs 20 feet above this room (see area **A8b**). Excessive noise or touching the webs in this chamber alerts them to the presence of intruders, and they lower themselves down to attack.

A8B. THE OPEN WEB (CR 10)

The thick webbing continues to rise and expand through this open space within the pagoda.

Like the areas below and above, this floor has been opened out to better suit the araneas. This area is 20 feet above the floor in area **A8a**.

Creatures: Eight araneas guard this chamber.

ARANEAS (8) CR 4

XP 1,200 each

hp 37 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 230)

TACTICS

Before Combat The araneas cast *mage armor*, renewing it as needed. If alerted to intruders, they cast *invisibility* and *mirror image*.

During Combat These araneas attack intruders in both area **A8a** and area **A8b** using web-slinging to move, attack, and withdraw, attacking with bites and webs. The araneas prefer to cast *invisibility* and *mirror image* before entering melee combat.

Morale Once half their number are slain, the araneas retreat to area **A9b** to guard Akinosa and defend him to the death.

Treasure: Several cupboards and concealed storage areas are hidden within the web on this level. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check discovers a hidden shelf near the western ceiling containing a trio of small bamboo chests. The first chest contains 3 flasks of *elixir of tumbling*, the second is filled with saffron worth 200

gp, and the third holds four simple opium pipes and 8 doses of opium, worth 25 gp each (*GameMastery Guide* 236). A PC who makes a successful DC 25 Perception check locates a small hidden cupboard high on the south wall containing an ancient string of coins worth 200 gp.

A8c. THE FUNNEL

The webbing rises to become a black curtain draping the ceiling of the chamber, with only a single brooding funnel of webs rising farther upward. Numerous humanoid bodies hang in the webs here, shriveled and desiccated.

The pagoda narrows at this level, which lies 40 feet above the floor at area **A8a**. The desiccated bodies hanging in the webs are former victims of the araneas, mostly unfortunate travelers and hobgoblins. The web funnel is 10 feet across and leads to area **A9a** above, passing through an opening in the stone floor between the two levels. If the webs are removed, a successful DC 30 Climb check is required to climb along the overhang to reach the opening.

Treasure: A DC 15 Perception check discovers the following treasures among the various bodies: masterwork nunchaku, a *potion of cure serious wounds*, a fine teak carving of a Tian dignitary worth 75 gp, a battered breastplate, and a pair of fine leather shoes, one of which contains a small white opal worth 300 gp hidden in its toe (DC 10 Perception check to find).

A9a. THE FIRST WEB (CR 9)

The webs on this level appear older, more festooned with decay and withered husks. The floor bristles with stone teeth. While most of the ceiling has been destroyed, part of the level above remains in place where the dragon pillars rise.

The spiked floor of this chamber is similar to that found in area **A8a**. The ledge above (area **A9b**) lies 20 feet up. Thick, ancient webs hang between the floor and the ledge, created by Akinosa himself (DC 16 Escape Artist or Strength check to burst).

Creatures: Akinosa has encouraged a strain of giant spiders native to the Valashmai Jungle to infest the webs here. These large hunting spiders have blue-and-white bodies and bright iridescent blue legs, and their venom is particularly toxic.

GIANT SAPPHIRE SPIDERS (8) CR 3 XP 800 each

Advanced giant spider (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 258)
N Medium vermin

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 15, flat-footed 11 (+5 Dex, +1 natural)

hp 32 each (5d8+10)

Fort +6, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2

Immune mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

Melee bite +5 (1d6+3 plus poison)

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 21, **Con** 14, **Int** —, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 20 (32 vs. trip)

Skills Acrobatics +13, Climb +18, Perception +5, Stealth +9 (+13 in webs)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Bite—injury; *save* Fort DC 16; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d3 Str damage; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

Treasure: Various trivial oddments hang among the hundred or so bodies in the webs here. A DC 25 Perception check locates a beautifully delicate silver snuff box in the shape of a turtle (worth 200 gp); a rhinoceros horn drinking vessel depicting herons in flight (worth 90 gp); a jade belt hook (worth 300 gp); and a silver altar set with lotus flower decorations in a leather traveling case, consisting of a candle stand, flower vase, and incense burner, each depicting a crane standing on a turtle's back (worth 500 gp in total).

A9b. AKINOSA'S PARLOR (CR 11)

The thick webs converge around the ceiling of this shattered chamber. Ancient skulls grin down from their last, terrible resting places, and skeletal arms seem to reach out for succor. The sagging remnants of the floor hang over the rest of the web below. A great ornamental palanquin stands on this dark ledge, next to a huge war drum. Above, another webbed funnel leads upward.

Most of this level's floor has been destroyed to create a broad, open area, leaving only a ledge in the northwest corner, 20 feet above the floor of area **A9a**, from which Akinosa views his subjects and smites his enemies below. The web funnel is 10 feet across and leads to area **A10a** above, passing through another opening in the stone floor between the two levels. If the webs are removed, a DC 30 Climb check is required to climb along the overhang to reach the opening.

Creature: The aranea leader Akinosa lives in this area. In human form, Akinosa is a corpulent figure swathed in filthy silk robes, which look as though they haven't been changed in decades. Insects and spiders scuttle in and out of the folds of his robes and skin, and he occasionally plucks one up to chew as a crunchy snack. Akinosa spends much of his time lounging in the large palanquin, sleeping, eating, and indulging in opium and

sake, drawing the latter from his *flask of endless sake* (see page 60).

When intruders enter this level, Akinosa shouts for his Gossamer (see area **A10b**) to defend him. If they don't respond (because the PCs have already defeated them), he attempts to speak with the PCs. Although he suspects any invaders are agents of Munasukaru, he is always on the lookout for allies of his own. If attacked, Akinosa fights to defend himself.

AKINOSA CR 11
 XP 12,800
 hp 125 (see page 54)

Trap: A secret door in the western wall leads to Akinosa's hidden treasure vault (see Treasure below), but the door is trapped with an insanity mist trap that triggers when the door is opened.

INSANITY MIST TRAP CR 8
 XP 4,800
 Type mechanical; Perception DC 25;
 Disable Device DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger touch; **Reset** repair

Effect poison gas (insanity mist [*save* Fort DC 15; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect 1d3 Wisdom damage; cure 1 save]); never miss; onset delay (1 round); multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. area)

Treasure: Akinosa's palanquin is an open, gilded, thronelike litter with a silk roof and four poles for bearers, worth 2,000 gp for its workmanship alone. Inside the palanquin are a red lacquered wedding trunk containing three bags of silver (250 sp in each) and two sacks of gold (250 gp in each), a tooled leather document box containing a *scroll of blade barrier*, a plain wooden box containing 10 doses of opium (worth 25 gp each; *GameMastery Guide* 236), and an elaborately carved silver-and-jade opium pipe with matching opium lamp (worth 225 gp as a set).

Next to the palanquin is a huge drum the size of a barrel, held on an iron stand. This Hongali war drum, or *guangu*, functions as *drums of panic*, though it is a single instrument that weighs 20 pounds.

A DC 30 Perception check discovers the secret door concealing Akinosa's hidden treasure vault in the western wall. The door is disguised as a feature of the wall and is trapped (see above). The vault contains six strings of gold coins (each containing 400 gp), a silk purse embroidered with an arched bridge containing three diamonds (worth 600 gp each), a black lacquered opium box containing 32 doses of opium (worth 25 gp each), and a magnificent

bone-and-silver chalice set with jet (worth 900 gp) that holds three handfuls of *dust of disappearance*.

A10A. WEFT OF UNSEEN WELCOME

The entirety of this level has been cleared of obstructions save for the four dragon pillars, which rise upward into more webs hanging in the rafters far above. More stone teeth cover the floor here.

The floor between two pagoda levels has again been removed, creating a 40-foot-high chamber. The spiked floor of this room is similar to that found in area **A8a**. This entire level is draped in sheer webs spun by the Gossamer. Approaching creatures must succeed at a DC 20 Perception check to notice such webs; otherwise they stumble into them and become entangled. Entangled creatures can escape these webs with a DC 16 Escape Artist or Strength check.

Development: Akinosa's honor guard, the Gossamer, occupy the level above, but keep a keen eye out for prey below. Touching any of the webs in this chamber alerts them to the presence of trespassers, and they quickly attack such intruders.

A10B. CATHEDRAL OF LONG SHADOWS (CR 12)

Thick webs cling like sinews among the roof beams above this level. A narrow, jagged hole exits through the roof.

This level is 20 feet above the floor in area **A10a**. The central 10-foot-square portion of this level contains more gauzy webs designed to trap the unwary (see area **A10a**). The hole in the roof is 5 feet in diameter and requires a DC 10 Escape Artist check to clamber through to reach the pagoda's roof (area **A11**). The hole in the roof illuminates this area with only dim light.

Creatures: Akinosa's personal elite guards, four aranea shadowdancers known as the Gossamer, lurk in the webs on this level, along with their four shadow companions. Like their master, the Gossamer are addicted to opium, and spend much of their time in indolent repose in their webs. When alerted, the Gossamer languidly move to engage intruders. The opium makes them listless, but they are still Akinosa's personal guards, and are ready to fight to defend him. The Gossamer usually stay in spider-humanoid hybrid form, but the black porcelain masks they wear completely cover their faces, preventing them



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from using their bite attacks. The Gossamer attack anyone entering areas **A10a** or **A10b**, or anyone they encounter if sent elsewhere in the pagoda by Akinosa.

THE GOSSAMER (HYBRID FORM) (4) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

Female aranea shadowdancer 4 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 30)

LE Medium magical beast (shapechanger)

Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision; Perception +10

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 16, flat-footed 17 (+4 armor, +5 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 natural)

hp 75 each (9 HD; 5d10+4d8+32)

Fort +9, **Ref** +11, **Will** +1

Defensive Abilities evasion, uncanny dodge

Weaknesses opium addict

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft. (cannot run or charge)

Melee mwk dagger +14/+9 (1d4+1/19–20 plus aranea poison [DC 14])

Ranged mwk dagger +14 (1d4+1/19–20 plus aranea poison [DC 14])

Special Attacks web (+13 ranged, DC 16, 5 hp)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 4th; concentration +8)

2/day—shadow illusion (DC 15)

1/day—shadow call (DC 18)

Sorcerer Spells Known (caster level 5th; concentration +9)

2nd (5/day)—*false life*, *mirror image*

1st (7/day)—*charm person* (DC 15), *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *vanish**

0 (at will)—*bleed* (DC 14), *ghost sound* (DC 14), *mage hand*, *message*, *resistance*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 14)

* See the *Advanced Player's Guide*.

TACTICS

Before Combat The Gossamer cast *false life* and *mage armor* before combat, and poison their daggers with their own poison.

During Combat The Gossamer initially use their shadow call abilities to summon 1d3 shadowy giant spiders to attack enemies, hoping to draw their opponents' attention while they try to outflank them. The Gossamer use their shadowdancer abilities and spells such as *mirror image* and *vanish* to confuse their enemies, always attempting to flank their enemies with each other or their shadow companions. They reserve their shadow jump abilities to escape if they are cornered.

Morale The Gossamer fight to the death to protect their lover and master Akinosa.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 20, **Con** 16, **Int** 14, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +8; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 25

Feats Ability Focus (web), Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Eschew Materials⁹, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Weapon Finesse

OPIMUM FIENDS

Both Akinosa and his beloved Gossamer (see area **A10b**) are severely addicted to opium, a highly addictive drug. While under the effects of opium, they gain +1d8 temporary hit points and a +2 alchemical bonus on Fortitude saves for 1 hour, but they are also fatigued during that time, and take 1d4 points of Constitution damage and 1d4 points of Wisdom damage. They must inhale opium every day, or take a –2 penalty to their Dexterity, Constitution, Strength, and Wisdom scores and be unable to heal ability damage caused by the drug until they take another dose. While the exact time the araneas take the drug is not detailed, assume that they are under the effects of the drug during any period of alarm.

Rules for drugs and addiction can be found on pages 236–237 of the *GameMastery Guide*.

Skills Acrobatics +16, Bluff +11, Climb +8, Escape Artist +12, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Perception +10, Perform (dance) +15, Sleight of Hand +12, Stealth +16

Languages Common, Minkaian, Sylvan, Tien

SQ change shape (humanoid; *alter self*), hide in plain sight, rogue talent (finesse rogue), shadow jump (40 feet/day), summon shadow

Combat Gear *potion of blur*, *potion of cure serious wounds*;

Other Gear masterwork daggers (8), black porcelain mask, black silk kimono embroidered with dark draconic figures (worth 75 gp), necklace of Akinosa's hair

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Opium Addict (Ex) The Gossamer are addicted to opium (see the sidebar above). While under the effects of the drug, they gain +1d8 temporary hit points and a +2 alchemical bonus on Fortitude saves for 1 hour, but they are also fatigued. In addition, they have taken 2 points of Constitution damage and 2 points of Wisdom damage from the drug (already reflected in the stat block).

SHADOW COMPANIONS (4) CR —

Female shadow (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 245)

LE Medium undead (incorporeal)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 12 (+2 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 35 each (3d8+6)

Fort +7, **Ref** +8, **Will** +3

Defensive Abilities cannot be turned or commanded, channel resistance +4, incorporeal; **Immune** undead traits

OFFENSE

Speed fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee incorporeal touch +10 (1d6 Strength damage)

STATISTICS

Str —, Dex 14, Con —, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 15

Base Atk +8; CMB +10; CMD 23

Feats Dodge, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Fly +11, Perception +8, Stealth +8 (+12 in dim light, +4 in bright light)

Treasure: The webs in the upper reaches of this level contain many years' worth of treasure and gifts from the Gossamer's beloved master Akinosa. A DC 30 Perception check locates the main cache—a narrow wooden shelf hidden just below the roof which holds a magnificent small lacquered screen (worth 30 gp), a bolt of very fine turquoise silk (worth 200 gp), an ancient tapestry depicting a lion embroidered on blue silk (worth 100 gp), a pair of embroidered silk lotus shoes set with opals (worth 750 gp), a blue silk robe with a dragon figure embroidered in gold thread (worth 95 gp), a porcelain tea set depicting eagles with silver and platinum handles (worth 450 gp), a carved jade dragon brooch (worth 200 gp), four jade hairpins (worth 20 gp each), a carved soapstone pig (worth 25 gp), a jade belt buckle depicting a demonic

face (worth 75 gp), and a jade belt hook in the shape of a heron (worth 60 gp).

AII. ROOFTOP

The rooftop lies strangled in the grip of withered blossoms but is clearly made of gold. A hole has been punched into one section of the roof, opening into the pagoda's dark interior.

The hole in the roof leads to area **A10b**.

Treasure: The roof is covered in gold leaf, though the gold is so thin that even if it is all scraped off, it is only worth 100 gp total.

MUNASUKARU'S PENANCE

Beneath the House of Withered Blossoms lies Munasukaru's Penance, the lair of the ja noi oni Munasukaru and her hobgoblin followers, who have fought the araneas in the pagoda above to a stalemate for 60 years. The Penance is Munasukaru's toil, her physical devotion to her demented mind. Her insane thoughts and anger have not only been vented upon those unfortunate enough to cross her, but on the very fabric of the dungeon itself, a honeycomb of twisted corridors, tortuous confines, and corrupted architecture. These broken and convoluted subterranean chambers are confusing to follow—their stone walls are cracked and tilted, and the floors are ruptured and uneven, requiring a DC 10 Acrobatics check to run or charge across them. Unless otherwise noted, ceilings in the Penance are 20 feet high, and all areas are dark.

The entire dungeon area is carved and decorated in the most unpleasant way. The most numerous images involve themes of those pleasures of the flesh craved by all oni, such as food, drink, sex, and violence. Several chambers detail these insane glimpses of oni madness and desire, giving an idea of Munasukaru's deranged thoughts. Graven images of oni—obvious from their huge size and twisted shapes—are also present in many places, but each such figure has been defaced and disfigured, reflecting Munasukaru's anger at her fellows who left her here. You may add other descriptions to sections of the dungeon as you wish. Remember that Munasukaru has had a long time to inflict her insanity on her surroundings, which she transformed into her own personal work of art.

The majority of the rank-and-file hobgoblins who once served Munasukaru have long since been sacrificed to the ongoing war effort against Akinosa's araneas, as the oni has proclaimed that any force leaving the Penance returns in glorious victory, or not at all. As a result, only Munasukaru's best and most loyal warriors remain. If these troops were to make an all-out offensive against the araneas, they would likely prevail, but Munasukaru's insanity does



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not lend itself to effective command. The oni is far more concerned with keeping the araneas out of the Penance, and is easily distracted by her madness, sometimes ordering her troops to fight each other for her amusement while ignoring the araneas above. The hobgoblins worship Munasukaru as something akin to a god, however, and their fear of the oni and her offspring keeps them from rebelling or striking out on their own. The hobgoblins are extremely well organized, and are constantly on guard, expecting attack at any moment from their enemies in the pagoda above.

SECRETS OF THE HOUSE OF WITHERED BLOSSOMS

As the PCs explore the House of Withered Blossoms and Munasukaru's Penance, they should discover a number of clues about the nature of the Five Storms, their escape from the House of Withered Blossoms, and their weaknesses. Rather than identify specific locations for these clues in the adventure, they have been left for you to place where you see fit to best meet the needs of your group and your campaign. The clues should be spread out, and the method of finding them should vary (for example, the PCs could learn single clues from piecing together notes in an old book, talking with freed slaves, interrogating captured prisoners, deciphering a wall carving, receiving warnings from spirits, and so on). Some suggested locations and sources for this information are in areas **C5**, **D4**, **D6**, **D9**, or **E5**; questioning the prisoners in areas **B1**, **E1**, or **E4**; interrogating Buto Futotsu in area **B12**; or interrogating any of Munasukaru's Chosen or Spawn.

The specific pieces of information the PCs can learn are detailed below.

- The Five Storms, while powerful, are disorganized and easily distracted, and the oni who make up the organization are constantly at odds with each other. Yet despite these internal conflicts and disruptions, the leader of the Five Storms has always been the same—a powerful wind yai oni named Anamurumon, with power over storms and lightning.
- The Five Storms, long trapped in their prison-palace at the heart of the Forest of Spirits, have always lusted over the lands of Minkai, intending to remake that nation into an empire of excess and horror in which to indulge their twisted pleasures and appetites.
- The Five Storms can't just simply conquer Minkai. Just like the kami, the gods set in place strict laws preventing the oni from taking direct action to seize worldly power. In order to create their private empire, the oni need to do so subtly, infiltrating all levels of society.
- The linchpin to the Five Storms' plan is the extinction of the five imperial families of Minkai. If no one can claim descent from the divine line of emperors, then no one can challenge the claim of the pretender the Five Storms place on the throne.

- Many different varieties of oni make up the Five Storms, but all of their best warriors escaped the House of Withered Blossoms many decades ago, taking most of their resources with them.
- Munasukaru was one of the weakest oni of the Five Storms, known as Munasukaru the Least among her peers. To keep the kami in the forest outside from learning their plans, Anamurumon commanded her to stay in the House of Withered Blossoms while the other oni fled using the kimono, a magical demon gate powered by living souls.
- While the oni of the Five Storms are powerful, Anamurumon also commands mortal agents. The oni often promise mortals great rewards for their service, and the Five Storms are well known to honor those promises.
- Beyond relying on hired mortal agents, Anamurumon was also obsessed with siring half-human progeny. He needed the "perfect" grandchild—a tiefling who would not only be unquestioningly loyal to Anamurumon, but could also pass as human. Such a child would be the perfect agent to infiltrate the imperial families of Minkai, but all of Anamurumon's descendants were deemed "unsuitable" and killed by the oni.
- Despite his power, Anamurumon has an unusual weakness to weapons imbued with royal honor—such as the ancestral weapons of the five imperial families of Minkai, including *Suishen*, Guardian of the Amatatsu.

BI. THE THRESHOLD

After a dizzying descent, the seemingly endless shaft finally ends. The tortuously narrow steps in the shaft broaden into huge, stone-flagged stairs that descend sharply into a wide, smooth-walled chamber. The room widens as it slopes upward to the northeast, ending at a vast wall of huge stone blocks. Rusting double iron doors, bristling with bloody spikes, offer the only passage through the wall. The air is hot, and smells of sweat and toil.

The frontier of Munasukaru's Penance starts at the foot of the 100-foot-deep shaft known as the Throat (area **A4**). This area forms the first line of defense for the oni and her followers, who lurk behind a fortified rampart known as the Great Wall. The spiral stone stair from the Throat opens directly into this chamber. The floor is made of hefty stone slabs worn smooth, and rises a little over 5 feet from the base of the stairs to the wall, and offers no cover from defenders on the wall.

The Great Wall is nearly 120 feet across and stretches 20 feet high from floor to ceiling. The lower 10 feet of the wall is 10 feet thick, while the upper 10 feet is 5 feet thick. Numerous arrow slits overlook this chamber from the top 10 feet of the wall (connecting to area **B2**). A creature at the

foot of the wall is out of sight of the arrow slits, but sloping murder holes beneath the arrow slits still allow defenders to pour boiling oil on attackers at the base of the wall.

The iron doors in the wall are each 10 feet wide and 10 feet high, barred with iron (hardness 10, hp 60, Break DC 30). The outsides of the doors bristle with iron spikes caked with dried blood, and open on a 20-foot-wide arched passage through the wall.

Creatures: Two Tian slaves (N human commoners 1) hang impaled on the door spikes, close to death. The slaves are both disabled with 0 hit points, and weakly twitch and moan, unable to free themselves. If rescued and healed, they can describe the layout and inhabitants of this level, having worked here for some time before being chosen to decorate the door.

Development: The hobgoblin guards in area B2 are always on alert, watching the approach to the wall and

taking 10 on their Perception checks at all times. The watch is changed every 12 hours. If they detect intruders, they immediately attack.

B2. THE SHADOW OF THE WALL (CR 11)

A broad stone-floored courtyard lies on the other side of the wall. A stone parapet runs behind the arrow slits atop the wall, connected by a wooden bridge that crosses above the door.

A 5-foot-wide walkway runs along the wall 10 feet above the floor, with arrow slits and murder holes overlooking area B1. Steep stone stairs lead up the parapet on both sides, and a 4-inch-thick wooden bridge crosses the gap 10 feet above the door. Four iron braziers with cauldrons bubbling atop them lie on iron rails running the length of the walkway.

The cauldrons hold boiling pig fat and oil and can be tipped through the murder holes onto intruders on the other side of the wall. A pair of hobgoblins can move a cauldron 30 feet per round, and tipping a cauldron is a standard action that provokes attacks of opportunity. Creatures directly beneath a tipped cauldron take 6d6 points of fire damage (DC 15 Reflex save for half). In addition, all creatures within 5 feet of the target take 2d6 points of fire damage from the splash (DC 10 Reflex save negates).

Creatures: Four of Munasukaru's guards, hobgoblin sentries known as Withered Blossom Warriors, are on watch on the wall's battlements, and attack anyone trying to breach the wall's defenses.



WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIOR

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (4) CR 7

XP 3,200 each

Hobgoblin fighter 5/rogue 3 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 175)

LE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 13, flat-footed 17 (+5 armor, +3 Dex, +2 shield)

hp 82 each (8 HD; 5d10+3d8+37)

Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +2; +1 vs. fear

Defensive Abilities bravery +1, evasion, trap sense +1

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk morningstar +13/+8 (1d8+6)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +11/+6 (1d8+3/x3)

Special Attacks sneak attack +2d6, weapon training (flails +1)

TACTICS

During Combat The hobgoblins on watch fire arrows at intruders until the intruders reach the wall, at which point they attempt to pour boiling oil on the attackers (see above). The warriors are well organized and fight as a unit once their defenses are breached, flanking with one another to make

sneak attacks when possible. In combat, the hobgoblins attack araneas and elves in preference to other creatures.

Morale The hobgoblins worship and fear Munasukaru, and they fight to the death, knowing that if they flee, their treatment at her hands will be unimaginably brutal.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 16, **Con** 16, **Int** 12, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +7; **CMB** +10; **CMD** 23

Feats Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (morningstar), Weapon Specialization (morningstar)

Skills Acrobatics +11, Climb +11, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +6, Perception +11, Stealth +15

Languages Common, Goblin, Tien

SQ armor training 1, trapfinding +1

Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds*; **Other Gear** masterwork do-maru*, masterwork heavy wooden shield, masterwork composite longbow with 20 arrows, masterwork morningstar

* See *Ultimate Combat*.

B3. FALSE CHAMBER (CR 10)

This chamber contains a false door built to lure the unwary inside.

Trap: The entire floor of the room is a pressure plate that triggers a trap. One round after someone first steps on the floor, the outer door slams shut and locks (hardness 5, hp 20, Break DC 25, Disable Device DC 25) and the room fills with whirling blades.

CHAMBER OF BLADES TRAP

CR 10

XP 9,600

Type mechanical; Perception DC 25; Disable Device DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Duration** 1d4 rounds; **Reset** repair

Effect Atk +20 melee (3d8+3); onset delay (1 round); multiple targets (all targets in 20-ft.-square chamber)

B4. MUNASUKARU'S EMBRACE (CR 12)

Grotesque carvings of sex, gluttony, violence, and oppression decorate the walls of this chamber, seeming to leap from the walls. The broken bodies of half a dozen humans, their flesh seared, hang among the vile imagery.

The bodies are the remains of human slaves tortured and killed by Munasukaru's hobgoblins. Eight arrow slits are concealed among the horrible carvings on the walls, noticeable with a DC 15 Perception check. The eastern door is of strong wood and is barred on the opposite side (hardness 5, hp 20, Break DC 25).

Traps: Four 5-foot-square spiked pit traps have been constructed in the floor of this chamber.

CAMOUFLAGED SPIKED PIT TRAPS (4)

CR 8

XP 4,800 each

Type mechanical; Perception DC 25; Disable Device DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Reset** manual

Effect 50-ft.-deep pit (5d6 falling damage); pit spikes (Atk +15 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d6+5 damage each); DC 20 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft.-square area)

Development: The hobgoblin guards in area B5 fire arrows through the arrow slits at any intruders in this room.

B5. ENVIOUS WATCHERS (CR 11)

More vile carvings and figures decorate this long corridor, this time depicting acts of envy. To the east, stone stairs climb to a balcony lined with pillars.

Creatures: Four Withered Blossom Warriors stand on guard in this corridor. They fire arrows at any intruders in area B4 through the arrow slits overlooking that room.

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (4)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

Development: When intruders enter the room, the hobgoblins join in melee combat, with the support of the hill giants in area B6.

B6. BALCONY OF PILLARS (CR 9)

A stone-pillared balcony overlooks the room below, the columns decorated with revolting scenes of vice and violence.

Two large piles of rocks have been heaped up on the balcony on either side of the stairs.

Creatures: Two hill giants watch area B5 from the balcony and throw rocks at anyone other than a hobgoblin entering that room or approaching the stairs. The giants give no consideration to hobgoblins in melee combat with intruders, and fight until killed.

HILL GIANTS (2)

CR 7

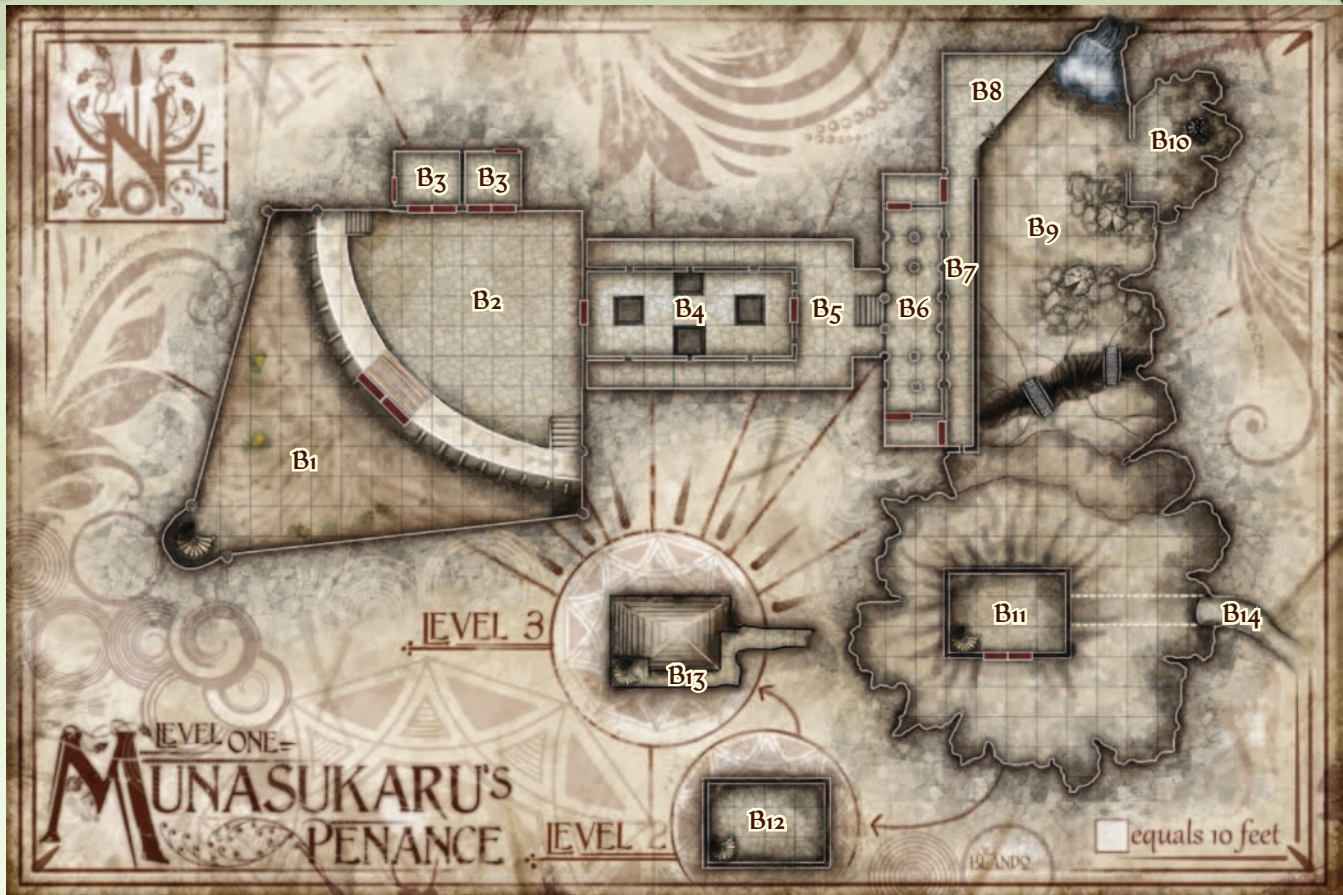
XP 3,200 each

hp 85 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 150)

B7. HALLWAY OF ENDLESS AGONIES

Broken bodies, some of which seem to have died where they were tormented, line the walls of this long, arched corridor amid carvings and figures of torture and anguish.

JADE REGENT



This passageway links the Penance's outer defenses with the rest of the complex, and as such has been worn smooth with the passing of feet. Much of the corridor's walls are smothered beneath more of Munasukaru's twisted thoughts given shape, mixed with the remains of the oni's tortured victims. These unfortunate victims have been dismembered in such horrifyingly varied ways that anyone closely examining the walls or bodies must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d10 rounds.

A narrow metal grille (hardness 10, hp 30, Break DC 28) sits in the wall at the southern end of the corridor. The grille is only a foot wide, and sits some 60 feet above the floor of area B9 below, but a Small creature could squeeze through it with a DC 30 Escape Artist check.

Spirit: The broken body of one of Munasukaru's victims, the monk Kusatsu Yuka, hangs mangled on the wall of the corridor. Her restless spirit now haunts this corridor, attempting to possess a similarly aligned creature.

KUSATSU YUKA, THE SOUL OF UNENDING MISERY

NG female human spirit

Notice Perception DC 30 (to hear the sound of breaking bones)
hp 49

Will Save DC 20

Ongoing Effect Seek vengeance. If, while possessing a creature, Yuka sees her own mangled body, she begins to sob in grief, and constantly urges her host to slay her killer Munasukaru. If Yuka possesses a good-aligned creature, she grants her host the use of her still mind monk class ability. The possessed creature gains a +2 bonus on saving throws against enchantment spells and effects for as long Yuka possesses it.

Boon If Yuka witnesses the death of Munasukaru, she offers her host her blessings and knowledge before she departs. The possessed creature gains Exotic Weapon Proficiency or Martial Weapon Proficiency in a single Tian weapon as a bonus feat.

Dismissal Killing Munasukaru dismisses Kusatsu Yuka.

B8. THE LEDGE

The corridor ends at a stone shelf perched above a large cavern. A shaky-looking wooden ladder climbs down from the ledge to the floor of the cavern. The overwhelming roar of a waterfall to the east of the ledge echoes across the huge chamber.

The ledge has no railings and stands 60 feet above the floor of the great cavern below. The unstable ladder requires a DC 5 Climb check to safely ascend or descend.

B9. THE GREAT CAVERN (CR 12)

Strange hovels constructed from assorted debris clutter the floor of this vast natural cavern. A large waterfall crashes into a pool along the north wall while a deep pit runs through the southern portion of the cavern, bridged by two stone arches. So large is this chamber that a small stone keep has been constructed far away in the gloom to the south. Freshly fallen rocks litter the floor of the cavern, amid a profusion of animal droppings and fungi.

This cavern serves as the main living quarters for the hobgoblins in the Penance, with the exception of their leader, the Swine Shogun Buto Futotsu, who lives in the small keep to the south (area **B11**). Dozens of pigs wander through the chamber, feeding off the leavings of the hobgoblins.

The cavern's floor is uneven natural stone and liberally sprinkled with pig manure, increasing the DC of Acrobatics checks by 5. Some of this filth has been heaped into piles to form a breeding ground for a particularly ugly variety of fungus, which the hobgoblins (and their pigs) eat. Between these piles, the hobgoblins have constructed a cluster of unpleasant huts, each generally with a roof (to keep out the dripping water and mist from the waterfall) and a rudimentary door. A seam of coal follows the eastern wall, and piles of coal lie throughout the cavern.

The waterfall plummets 80 feet from the ceiling above into a small, deep pool that quickly drains away. The large pit crossing the cavern is 30 feet deep and filled with dirt, filth, and rusted weapons. Creatures that fall into the pit take falling damage as usual, and must make a DC 20 Reflex save to avoid taking 2d6 points of additional damage from falling onto rusting spikes and discarded metal, which exposes them to filth fever as well (*Core Rulebook* 557). The stone bridges over the pit are 3 feet wide, requiring a DC 10 Acrobatics check to cross at full speed. The cavern floor on the south side of the pit rises in two shelves of stone, each of which is 10 feet high (DC 15 Climb check to scale).

Creatures: At any given time, half a dozen Withered Blossom Warriors are resting in this area, usually in their squalid huts. Six more hobgoblin fighters tend to loiter in the area, idolizing the more powerful warriors. The hobgoblins attack any intruders in the cavern. In addition, the pit is home to countless rats, which form into swarms and attack any creature that falls into the pit.

HOBGOBLINS (6)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

hp 17 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 175)

TACTICS

During Combat The hobgoblins support the Withered Blossom Warriors with ranged attacks.

Morale If more than half of the warriors are killed, the hobgoblins flee to the relative safety of Buto's Keep (area **B11**).

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (6)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

RAT SWARMS (3)

CR 2

XP 600 each

hp 16 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 232)

BIO. KITCHEN (CR 6)

A blazing fire pit burns in the middle of this chamber, which smells of blood, sweat, and misery. Several dirty workbenches stand around the pit.

The hobgoblins' food is prepared in this chamber—primarily pork, rats, stew made from the rather revolting fungi that grow in the cavern outside, or rarely, slaves captured from the forest above. The meat is crudely slaughtered and smoked by hanging it from metal hooks high above the fire pit. Much of the food here is edible, if revolting. The chamber is crammed with cooking utensils, most of which are bent and rusty.

Creatures: A dozen hobgoblin drudges toil away in this chamber working as butchers and cooks for the rest of the hobgoblins. Many of the females are mothers as well, their offspring playing and fighting at their feet, ready to replace those warriors who fall fighting the araneas. Nevertheless, these hobgoblins have still been trained for war, and while they attempt to get out of the way of the fighting, they fight back if attacked.

HOBGOBLINS (12)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

hp 17 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 175)

TACTICS

Morale As soon as any trouble starts, the hobgoblins attempt to flee to Buto's Keep (area **B11**).

B11. BUTO'S KEEP (CR 10)

A stone keep sits on an outcrop of rock in the belly of the huge cavern. Several of its walls have clearly seen better days—the structure sags in places, and heaps of rubble line the keep's flanks. From the building's roof, which almost touches the ceiling of the cavern itself, a stone bridge arches across to a precarious rocky outcrop high above the cavern floor.

This small keep is the home of the ostensible general of Munasukaru's hobgoblin followers, Buto Futotsu, who has styled himself the Swine Shogun. Buto rarely sets foot in the northern portion of the great cavern, for not only would doing so sully his feet, but it would also invite assassination from those who might seek to supplant him.

Buto's keep is falling down—its 3-foot-thick masonry walls are crumbling (hardness 8, hp 90, Break DC 35) and relatively easy to climb (Climb DC 15). The keep has no windows, but a great ironbound wooden door sits in the south wall, though it is kept barred (hardness 5, hp 20, Break DC 25).

The ground floor of the keep is squalid and foul, little more than a sty for the Swine Shogun's precious pigs. Three iron cages and a wooden stall fill the rest of the chamber. Both the cages and the stall doors are fairly well rotted (hardness 3, hp 10, Break DC 15), and held closed by a simple latch. Ordure seeps though the stone floor of the Swine Court above (area B12), creating a rain of foul smelling rot, and the floor is covered in an unpleasant mix of filth and rolling pigs. This layer is 3 feet deep and slippery. The entire floor is considered difficult terrain, and the DC of Acrobatics checks is increased by 5. A teetering stone spiral staircase climbs clumsily upward out of the muck in the southwest corner.

Creatures: Two hill giants, who switch shifts with those on the Balcony of Pillars (area B6), sleep in the pigsty along with a dozen or so squealing pigs. The wooden stall houses Buto's dire boar mount, Tonkatsu. The cages hold the shogun's three pet snow leopards, captured long ago. Buto often takes the leopards with him when he leaves his keep, chaining the animals to his saddle horn. The animals break out of their stalls and attack if prolonged combat (more than 6 rounds) occurs here.

HILL GIANTS (2) CR 7
XP 3,200 each
 hp 85 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 150)

TONKATSU CR 4
XP 1,200
 Dire boar (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 36)
 hp 42

SNOW LEOPARDS (3) CR 2
XP 600 each
 Leopard (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 40)
 hp 19 each

Treasure: Buto's saddle hangs in the boar's stall. The saddle is huge and ornate, with a leather base and lacquer overlay set with small bloodstones, and is worth 850 gp. The three leopards wear collars that are inlaid with gold and worth 75 gp each. Next to each cage hangs a 10-foot-long chain with a leather handle.

B12. THE SWINE COURT (CR 12)

The floor of this open chamber runs with filth and refuse and swims with scores of cockroaches and rats, as well as over a dozen pigs. A huge table rises crookedly from the waste, holding

the putrid remains of a huge feast on a tarnished silver salver, including a half-devoured pig's head with a hand thrust into its mouth leering out from the center of the revolting meal. Numerous war trophies hang from the walls, while countless rusted weapons dangle on hooks from the ceiling above. The stone stairs continue to stagger upward in the southwest corner.

The Swine Shogun Buto Futotsu runs a bizarre court where his word is law, and with every word, he sings the praises of pigs and boars, who he believes provide for the hobgoblins' every need. The Swine Shogun rules his hobgoblins with an iron fist, and his followers are careful to keep on his good side, aware that the bullying shogun has not only a terrible temper but also a copious appetite. For all his strength and bluster, however, Buto is mortally petrified of Munasukaru, who he believes is immortal. He is aware that the oni has the ability to use *scrying* and perpetually acts as though playing to an audience, singing out the oni's divine qualities and righteous justice.

Creatures: The Swine Shogun is normally found in this chamber, either eating or sleeping, guarded by three Withered Blossom Warriors. Buto is a large hobgoblin with a great belly and a cloak made from the sewn skins of piglets. He wields a mighty greataxe and frequently carries a piglet around with him. The swollen belly of the large hobgoblin is matched only by his fury when crossed or disturbed. When angry or in combat, Buto squeals and snorts like the pigs he loves so much. The Swine Shogun occasionally leaves his keep mounted on his dire boar Tonkatsu and accompanied by his pet leopards, but only when he is very angry and sure that it's safe outside for him to administer his own peculiar justice. In addition to Buto, his guards, and over a dozen pigs, a harem of four female hobgoblins inhabit this chamber to attend to Buto's needs.

BUTO FUTOTSU, THE SWINE SHOGUN CR 10
XP 9,600

Male hobgoblin fighter 11 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 175)
 LE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)
Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 14, flat-footed 21 (+10 armor, +3 Dex, +1 luck)
hp 120 (1d10+55)

Fort +13, **Ref** +7, **Will** +5; +3 vs. fear

Defensive Abilities bravery +3

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 *thundering greataxe* +21/+16/+11 (1d12+12/19–20/x3)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +16/+11/+6 (1d8+4/x3)

Special Attacks weapon training (axes +2, bows +1)

TACTICS

During Combat Buto assumes that Munasukaru is watching him, so he tends to be flashy in combat, using his Dazzling

FOREST OF SPIRITS

Display feat before entering combat or when there is a lull in the fighting.

Morale Buto drinks *his potion of cure serious wounds* when reduced to fewer than 30 hit points, but if he then reaches 10 hit points or fewer, the Swine Shogun screams an oath to Munasukaru's glory and commits seppuku (ritual suicide by performing a self-inflicted coup de grace with his dagger).

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 16, **Con** 16, **Int** 10, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +11; **CMB** +16; **CMD** 29

Feats Dazzling Display, Great Fortitude, Greater Weapon Focus (greataxe), Improved Critical (greataxe), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Shatter Defenses, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greataxe), Weapon Specialization (greataxe)

Skills Handle Animal +6, Intimidate +15, Perception +2, Ride +10, Stealth +5

Languages Goblin, Tien

SQ armor training 3

Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds*; **Other Gear** +2 *o-yoroi**, +1 *thundering greataxe*, dagger with gold hilt (worth 400 gp), masterwork composite longbow (+4 Str) with 20 arrows, *belt of giant strength* +4, *cloak of resistance* +1 (made from the skins of 47 piglets), *jingasa of the fortunate soldier* (see page 60), bronze rice bowl worth 15 gp, carved horn box with 6 spinels worth 100 gp each, horn libation cup worth 75 gp, 22 gp

* See *Ultimate Combat*.

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (3)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

TACTICS

Morale So close to their lord, the hobgoblins dare not flee for fear of retribution, and fight to the death.

FEMALE HOBGOBLINS (4)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

hp 17 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 156)

TACTICS

During Combat The female hobgoblins throw themselves at attackers to defend their beloved shogun.

Morale More sensible than the warriors, the females flee when reduced to 5 hit points or fewer.

Spirit: Buto's addled mind is possessed by the spirit of a wereboar ranger cannibal named Ha Jau. If the Swine Shogun is slain, Jau looks for a new host.

HA JAU, THE WILD HOG

CR 10

XP 9,600

NE male wereboar spirit

Notice Perception DC 25 (to smell the aroma of roast pork)

hp 45

Will Save DC 19

Ongoing Effect Gluttony. The cannibal Jau delights in feasting on pork but is happy just to eat. The possessed creature must make a DC 19 Will save every morning or be compelled to immediately consume a meal of the most unpleasant things available (rotten food, dirt, worms, or slugs are a good start) and be sickened for 1d6 hours. At the GM's discretion, such meals might also expose the creature to afflictions such as filth fever (*Core Rulebook* 557).

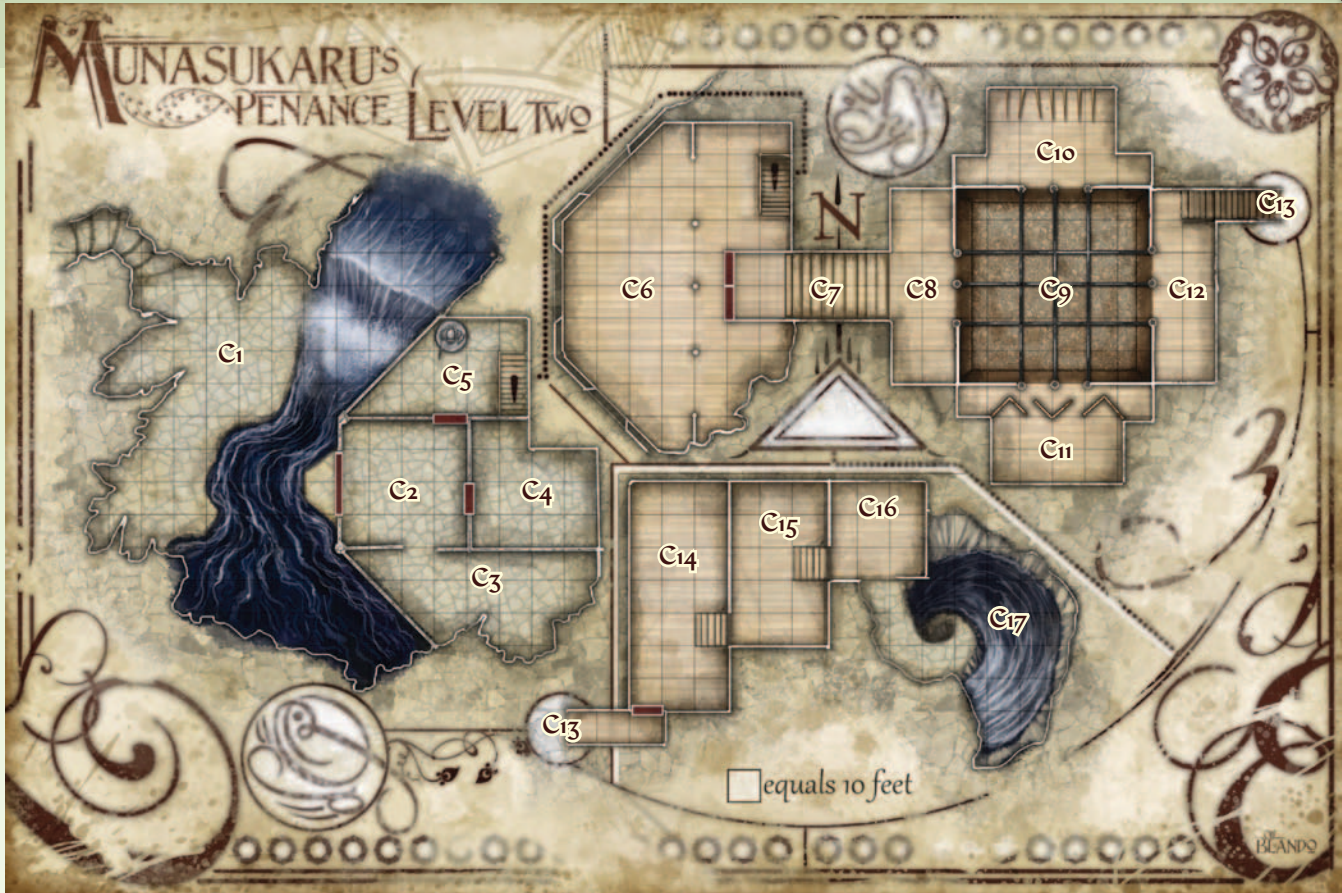
Bane The unpleasant hungers continue even after Ha Jau is dismissed, but the creature need only make a DC 19 Will save to avoid the compulsion to eat once per week, rather than every day.

Dismissal Fasting for 3 consecutive days dismisses Ha Jau.

Treasure: The silver salver and feasting set on the table are worth 800 gp in total. Among the trophies on the wall are a foot-tall



SWINE SHOGUN



gold-and-bronze dragon figure (worth 200 gp), a silver inlaid box containing hobgoblin teeth (worth 200 gp), a kukri inlaid with gold leaf decorated with superb filigree depicting herons (worth 100 gp), and a fine silver and copper candleholder (worth 65 gp). In addition, two masterwork glaives hang among the many useless weapons dangling from the ceiling.

B13. ROOFTOP AND BRIDGE

The spiral stairs stumble to the roof of the keep, which lies barely ten feet from the cavern ceiling. A narrow walkway clings to the rooftop and eventually reaches a stone bridge that gracefully arches from the roof of the keep to a small stone balcony on the far cavern wall.

The stone bridge is narrow and slippery, and rises to within only a few feet of the cavern ceiling, requiring a DC 10 Acrobatics check to cross.

B14. THE JOINING

The bridge ends at a narrow shelf of rock high above the cavern floor. At its rear, a corridor descends steeply into the rock.

The stone shelf is barely 5 feet wide, but the corridor beyond soon opens up. Crude stone steps have been worn into the floor of the corridor, which descends over 200 feet to arrive in the Mockery Pagoda (area C1).

C1. THE MOCKERY PAGODA (CR 11)

The thundering roar of another waterfall fills this chamber. The water falls from a subterranean river some ninety feet above to the north, plunging into a cold, deep lake. On the far side of the lake stands a crooked pagoda, carved with the forms of twisted animals, as if in mockery of the pagoda in the daylight high above. A raised drawbridge hangs from the front of the pagoda.

This pagoda serves as a temple to the worship of the oni Munasukaru. The pagoda's walls are easy to climb (DC 15 Climb check) and are covered with obscene representations of animals and creatures, caricatures of those on the pagoda above. The drawbridge is currently raised, blocking entry into the pagoda. It is only lowered for groups returning from assaults on the araneas above, but the PCs might be able to trick their way past the guards in areas C2 and C6 by pretending to be a returning team of combatants. The pool is 60 feet deep,

with a swift current (DC 15 Swim check or DC 15 Strength check to avoid going under).

Creatures: Two greater water elementals are bound in the waters of the lake, and attack anyone attempting to cross the water.

GREATER WATER ELEMENTALS (2) CR 9

XP 6,400 each

hp 123 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 127)

Development: The Withered Blossom Warriors in area B6 fire arrows at any invaders attempting to cross the lake.

C2. DRAWBRIDGE (CR 11)

The walls of this room are carved with more obscenities: bas-reliefs of half-human, half-beast creatures copulating with and feasting on each other, creating an endless panorama of lust and gluttony.

This square chamber contains the controls for lowering and raising the pagoda's drawbridge. The drawbridge mechanism is old but kept in excellent condition by the hobgoblins. The drawbridge can be lowered by means of a simple lever that can be pulled as a move action that provokes an attack of opportunity, but it takes 3 rounds for the drawbridge to lower completely. Raising the drawbridge requires three DC 25 Strength checks (up to six creatures can grab the lever at once).

Creatures: Four Withered Blossom Warriors stand watch in this room, ready to raise or lower the drawbridge as needed, or defend the pagoda against attack.

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (4) CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

C3. THE FUNGAL PILE

A repulsive pile of waste and rot fills this chamber, home to a large number of ugly fungi.

The fungi are a staple diet of the hobgoblins when they can't get fresh meat. Any creature searching in the pile must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or contract filth fever (*Core Rulebook* 557).

C4. STOREROOM

This well-stocked storeroom serves to feed the pagoda's occupants in case of emergencies or sieges.

Treasure: The storeroom contains enough dried food (mostly badly cured meat of dubious origin and dried fungi) to feed 50 creatures for 10 days (equivalent to 50

cargo units of stores for a caravan), as well as mundane materials such as backpacks, fishing nets, picks, poles, spades, 12 flasks of oil, 100 feet of silk rope, and a small crate holding 5 flasks of alchemist's fire.

In addition, one of the Withered Blossom Warriors has been thieving from her companions for years. Hidden behind a loose stone at the back of the room (DC 25 Perception check to discover) are a *potion of invisibility*, a *fan feather token*, and 97 gp.

C5. SHRINE OF MUNASUKARU

A revolting statue of a repulsive, strangely goblinoid creature dominates this chamber.

The hobgoblins worship their "goddess" Munasukaru in this shrine. The statue depicts the ja noi oni in all her glory, but the hobgoblins have embellished her image. The statue stands on a bed of nails and has four demonic heads—one smiling, one angry, one eating, and one screaming. The statue is obscenely pregnant, with multiple teats sagging over her swollen belly, and is shown giving birth to monstrous creatures, some humanoid with demonic goblinoid features, others wormlike with human faces—Munasukaru's children. A DC 15 Knowledge (planes) check identifies the statue and the humanoids as ja noi oni, while a DC 19 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check recognizes the human-headed worm creatures as spirit nagas. A set of stairs along the east wall lead up to area C6.

Treasure: A pile of offerings is heaped on the floor in front of the statue, including the mummified arm and head of an aranea, numerous dead giant spiders, a *brooch of shielding* (that can only absorb 13 more points of damage before melting), a *scroll of spike growth*, a set of masterwork artisan's tools (Craft [armor]), a pair of good locks with keys, a gold-plated merchant's scale worth 100 gp, 11 obsidians worth 10 gp each, 91 gp, and 203 sp.

C6. LAKE OVERLOOK (CR 11)

A broad balcony with wide openings overlooks the lake from the pagoda's upper floor. The walls of this room are covered with carvings of bound prisoners being subjected to agonizing tortures.

A barrel containing 100 arrows stands in the center of the room.

Creatures: Four more Withered Blossom Warriors are stationed here, watching the lake in case of attack. They are particularly mindful of potential climbing attacks by the araneas and have plenty of arrows on hand to repel such assaults.

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (4) **CR 7**

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

C7. GUARDIAN OF THE STAIRS (CR 10)

A steep staircase climbs upward. Bas-reliefs of faces distorted by pain cover the steps and walls.

Creature: A clay golem sculpted in the form of a Tian temple guardian guards this passage. The creature has orders simply to watch the area for attack and defend it. The golem fights until destroyed.

CLAY GOLEM **CR 10**

XP 9,600

hp 63 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 159*)

C8. LEPER COLONY (CR 10)

A simple, bare chamber with an arched doorway depicting tormented dragons opens into a wider area beyond.

Creatures: To amuse herself and to ensure compliance from her other followers, Munasukaru keeps a handful of leprous hobgoblins within her Penance. Three of the lepers reside in this chamber. Should any of the oni's subjects fall out of line or displease her, Munasukaru imprisons them in this chamber with the contagious lepers. Always trying to gain Munasukaru's favor, the lepers attack anyone entering the room.

LEPERS (3) **CR 7**

XP 3,200 each

Withered Blossom Warriors (see page 32, with the following changes)

hp 82 each

TACTICS

During Combat The lepers try to afflict their enemies with their disease, either as part of a successful melee attack or with simple touch attacks. The lepers flank with each other to make sneak attacks whenever possible.

Morale The lepers believe that Munasukaru will cure their affliction if they show proper devotion. Equally terrified and worshipful of the oni, they do not flee combat.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Disease (Ex) The hobgoblins are afflicted with leprosy (*Core Rulebook 557*), and each has taken 1d6 points of Charisma damage. Creatures making unarmed attacks or touch attacks against the lepers, or who are injured or touched by the lepers, must make an immediate DC 12 Fortitude save to avoid contracting the virulent strain of leprosy afflicting the hobgoblins.

Development: Sounds of combat in this area have a chance of alerting the monks in area C10, who move into area C9 to face the invaders.

C9. THE LATTICE (CR 10)

A wide, open pit fills this chamber, with arched openings in each wall above the pit. Six thick iron bars crisscross the pit, from which a greenish-gray, bitter-smelling mist rises.

The chamber serves two purposes—defense, and to test the Sisters of the Broken Path (see page 41) on their balance and concentration (one of the easier challenges the monks must face in this chamber is standing with one foot on one of the bars for 24 hours). When less agile troops or important visitors must pass through this room, the monks lay a bamboo floor across one section of the bars (the floor is currently rolled up and stored in area C12).

The iron bars are each 6 inches wide (DC 15 Acrobatics check to cross). The pit is 80 feet deep, with natural rock walls (DC 25 Climb check), though the pit's bottom cannot be seen through the thick mist. The bottom of the pit contains numerous petrified victims of the pit's inhabitants. All of the petrified corpses are female, both hobgoblin and human, and the majority of them have been trampled, shattered, and half-eaten.

Creatures: Munasukaru's firstborn son Ichirou (see area C11) has trapped two gorgon bulls (offspring of the giant gorgon in area D3) in the bottom of the pit. The mist rising from the pit is the result of the creatures' droppings and breath weapons. This mist obscures sight as fog does, granting the gorgons concealment from more than 5 feet away. The gorgons attack any creatures falling into the pit, fighting until they or their opponents are dead, petrified, or both.

GORGONS (2) **CR 8**

XP 4,800 each

hp 100 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 165*)

Development: If alerted to the sounds of combat in area C8, the Sisters of the Broken Path in area C10 move onto the iron bars in this chamber to attack intruders.

C10. MONASTIC CELLS (CR 11)

The northern portion of this simple chamber has been divided into eight bamboo-walled cubicles.

This chamber is the living quarters for Munasukaru's most devoted followers—an order of female hobgoblin monks called the Sisters of the Broken Path. Utterly loyal to Munasukaru, these monks have risen above their lesser

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kin through their dedication to the art of combat, seeking to achieve purity through their art. The monks keep nothing of value in their cells other than minor mundane objects for basic living needs, such as clay water jugs, sleeping mats, and spare clothes.

Creatures: Three Sisters of the Broken Path meditate in this chamber. All of the monks are heavily tattooed with scenes of greed, and their skin displays numerous piercings set with minor gemstones (mostly jet). If alerted to combat nearby, the monks make their way into the Lattice (area C9) to await intruders. Otherwise, they leap to attack as soon as anyone enters this room.

SISTERS OF THE BROKEN PATH (3) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

Female hobgoblin monk (hungry ghost monk) 9 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 175, *Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide* 110)

LE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +14

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 18, flat-footed 17 (+2 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 monk, +2 Wis, +1 natural)

hp 80 each (9d8+36)

Fort +8, **Ref** +11, **Will** +8; +2 vs. enchantment

Defensive Abilities improved evasion

OFFENSE

Speed 60 ft.

Melee mwk nunchaku +10/+5 (1d6+3) or

unarmed strike +9/+4 (1d10+3) or

mwk nunchaku flurry of blows +11/+11/+6/+6 (1d6+3) or

unarmed strike flurry of blows +10/+10/+5/+5 (1d10+3)

Ranged dagger +9 (1d4+3/19–20)

Special Attacks flurry of blows, life funnel*, punishing kick* (9/day, DC 16), steal ki*

TACTICS

Before Combat The Sisters drink their *potions of blur* before combat ensues.

During Combat The monks work together, attacking as a single group flanking one or two opponents if the opportunity presents itself. They attempt to push enemies into the pit in area C9 using their Punishing Kick feat, or make flurry of blows attacks, using their nunchaku to disarm opponents. If fighting on the Lattice (area C9), the monks use their superior acrobatics skills to maneuver around and outflank foes. The Sisters think nothing of leaping the 10 feet between the iron bars.

Morale Devoted followers of Munasukaru, the Sisters of the Broken Path do not surrender, defending their living god to the death. When a monk reaches 10 hit points or fewer, she screams an oath to Munasukaru's glory and commits seppuku (ritual suicide by performing a self-inflicted coup de grace with her dagger).

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 16, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +6; **CMB** +12; **CMD** 27

Feats Combat Reflexes, Deflect Arrows, Dodge, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Punishing Kick*, Skill Focus (Acrobatics), Toughness

Skills Acrobatics +18 (+39 jump), Climb +15, Intimidate +10, Perception +14, Stealth +11

Languages Goblin, Tien

SQ fast movement, high jump, ki pool (6 points, magic), maneuver training, slow fall 40 ft., still mind

Combat Gear *potion of blur*; **Other Gear** daggers (4), masterwork nunchaku, *amulet of natural armor* +1, *bracers of armor* +2, 100 gp worth of jeweled studs for piercings

* See the *Advanced Player's Guide*.



SISTER OF THE BROKEN PATH

CII. CHAMBER OF THE LUSTFUL OVERSEER (CR II)

High black lacquer screens shield this chamber from view, set between twin archways carved to resemble beheaded humanoid figures.

Beyond the lacquer screens lies a chamber wallowing in excess, an extension of the vices and lusts of its occupant. The walls are carved with explicit carnal scenes and a dozen statues of similar nature stand throughout the room among several lacquer and bamboo cabinets. A magnificent bed, decorated with similar erotic carvings, dominates the room.

Creatures: Munasukaru's firstborn son, a ja noi oni named Ichirou, oversees the Mockery Pagoda from his lair in this chamber. As one of Munasukaru's lesser spawn, Ichirou has endured agonizing abuse and torture at the hands of his mother and sisters. His body is disfigured with countless scars, brands, and tattoos, but Ichirou's twisted mind views these savage mutilations as symbols of his mother's love and favor. Ichirou prefers to enjoy the fruits of his position rather than exercise its responsibilities, and spends most of his time indulging in dissolute vices in this room, leaving the hobgoblins stationed in the pagoda to oversee themselves. Currently, Ichirou shares his bed with two Sisters of the Broken Path, who fight to the death to defend the offspring of their living goddess.

ICHIROU, SPAWN OF MUNASUKARU CR 9

XP 6,400

Male ja noi barbarian (scarred rager) 4 (see page 90, *Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Combat* 29)

LE Medium outsider (oni, goblinoid, native, shapechanger)

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 14, flat-footed 18 (+5 armor, +1 deflection, +4 Dex, +1 dodge, +4 natural, -2 rage)

hp 123 (10 HD; 6d10+4d12+64); regeneration 3 (acid or fire)

Fort +15, **Ref** +10, **Will** +7

Defensive Abilities scarification*, tolerance*

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee +1 *nodachi** +21/+16 (1d10+16/18-20)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +15/+10 (1d8+6/x3)

Special Attacks rage (14 rounds/day), rage powers (auspicious mark*, roused anger)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; concentration +10)

3/day—*command* (DC 15), *doom* (DC 16), *fly*, *magic weapon*

1/day—*bull's strength*

TACTICS

Before Combat Ichirou has little interest in helping the monks defend this area, but he casts *bull's strength*, *fly*, and *magic weapon* if alerted to the presence of intruders.

During Combat Ichirou orders the two Sisters of the Broken Path to engage opponents while he remains in the rear watching the fray and using his spell-like abilities. If enemies get past the monks, Ichirou rages and attempts to bull rush foes into the pit in area C9.

Morale A lustful coward, Ichirou withdraws from combat once he is reduced to 60 hit points or fewer. He attempts to bargain for his life with information, preferably with an attractive female. Ichirou knows the general layout of the Penance, although not many specifics (he's far more interested in sating his lusts than paying attention to such mundane matters as personnel and staffing). If his parlay is refused, Ichirou rages once more and fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 30, **Dex** 18, **Con** 22, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +10; **CMB** +20 (+24 bull rush); **CMD** 34 (36 vs. bull rush)

Feats Cleave, Dodge, Greater Bull Rush, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack

Skills Acrobatics +17, Bluff +15, Climb +18, Fly +16, Intimidate +17 (+19 vs. non-barbarians), Perception +9, Stealth +17

Languages Goblin, Tien

SQ change shape (Small or Medium humanoid; *alter self*), serene fighter, terrifying visage*

Gear +2 *studded leather*, masterwork composite longbow (+6 Str) with 20 arrows, masterwork *nodachi**, *ring of protection* +1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Auspicious Mark (Su) Ichirou's impressive scars and tattoos mark him as touched by the spirits. Once per rage, as a swift action that costs 2 rounds of rage, Ichirou can call upon the spirits' favor, granting him a +1d6 bonus on one d20 roll he has just made. Ichirou can call on the auspicious mark after seeing the result of the d20 roll.

Scarification (Ex) Ichirou can ignore 1 point of bleed damage per round.

Terrifying Visage (Ex) Ichirou adds 1/2 his barbarian level (+2) on Intimidate checks against humanoids who are not members of barbarian tribes. When dealing with barbarians, Ichirou may add this bonus on Diplomacy checks instead. The DC of any fear effect created by Ichirou also increases by +1.

Tolerance (Ex) If Ichirou fails a save against an effect that causes him to become nauseated, sickened, fatigued, or exhausted, he can make a second save to negate the effect on the start of his next turn. Only one additional save is allowed. If the effect does not allow a saving throw, its duration is halved instead (minimum of 1 round).

* See *Ultimate Combat*.

SISTERS OF THE BROKEN PATH (2) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

hp 80 each (see page 41)

Treasure: The three lacquer screens are bulky (each is 10 feet across and weighs 20 pounds) and worth 50 gp each,

while the ornately carved bed is worth 150 gp. A DC 20 Perception check made while searching the cabinets in the room locates a beautiful silver and enamel ring decorated with the Tien characters for wealth and luck worth 110 gp, a silver foo dog brooch worth 75 gp, a pendant made from interlocking jade rings worth 60 gp, a silver hairpin with a kingfisher feather worth 50 gp, a carved ivory-and-coral bracelet worth 40 gp, and four silver wedding rings worth 10 gp each.

C12. STORAGE

This chamber is crammed with objects relating to combat, including wooden practice weapons, wooden dummies, breaking boards, and similar martial arts training accessories. Two 12-foot-wide, 40-foot-long segments of bamboo flooring are rolled up against the eastern wall. Each weighs 30 pounds and can be unfurled across the iron bars in area C9 to form a stable walkway across the Lattice to area C8. It takes 3 full rounds to unfurl each section of floor.

Treasure: A DC 25 Perception check discovers a lacquer box containing a set of silver acupuncture needles worth 50 gp beneath a pile of fighting equipment.

C13. WALK OF ANGER

A short flight of stairs leads to a long corridor decorated with scenes of anger, illustrating humanoid figures suffering in scenes of shockingly brutal violence.

The corridor is 200 feet long and leads to the Mockery Pagoda's barracks, and the passage to the next level of Munasukaru's Penance beyond.

C14. HOBGOBLIN BARRACKS

This room was a barracks for hobgoblins in Munasukaru's service, but their last assault on the araneas was unsuccessful, and none of the hobgoblin troopers returned from the battle. The fur bedrolls scattered throughout the room are currently unoccupied, and there is nothing of value here. A dark hole in the corner, which serves as a latrine and midden for the hobgoblins, drains into a small cavern fed by an underground stream below.

C15. WITHERED BLOSSOM BARRACKS (CR 11)

This barracks houses the Withered Blossom Warriors stationed in the Mockery Pagoda. In the event of attack, this unit is sent out to deal with threats, under the command of the ogre mage Fujai (see area C16). There are enough collapsible bamboo cots here for a score of hobgoblins, though only 14 are in current use. Even so, this chamber doesn't see much use, as the Withered Blossom Warriors are never off-duty.

Creatures: Four Withered Blossom Warriors currently rest in this room. They still wear their armor, and snatch up their weapons to attack intruders.

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (4) CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

Treasure: Among the few mundane personal items scattered throughout the room are 143 gp and 206 sp, casually tossed about as if the coins had no value.

C16. COMMANDER'S QUARTERS (CR 11)

Several trophies and art objects are proudly displayed in this room. A simple military cot rests against the north wall. The south wall opens into a broad natural cavern, through which can be heard the sound of roaring water.

This chamber is the quarters for the officer commanding the hobgoblins of the Mockery Pagoda.

Creatures: The ogre mage Fujai resides in this room. He is one of Munasukaru's Chosen, three ogre mage samurai that serve as her generals. Fujai has been forbidden by Munasukaru to keep his mount, as she delights in placing her followers in such dilemmas. Fujai is a brutal taskmaster, and ignores the sounds of combat from area C15—his warriors should be able to handle themselves, but he immediately attacks any intruders who make it past the hobgoblins in that room. In addition to Fujai, two Withered Blossom Warriors—Fujai's lieutenants—are present in the room, discussing strategy with their commander.

FUJAI, MUNASUKARU'S CHOSEN CR 9

XP 6,400

Male ogre mage samurai 1 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 221, *Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Combat* 18)

LE Large outsider (giant, native, oni, shapechanger)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +16

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 11, flat-footed 21 (+7 armor, +2 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)

hp 113 (9d10+64); regeneration 5 (acid or fire)

Fort +15, **Ref** +6, **Will** +12

SR 19

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 40 ft. (average)

Melee mwk katana* +18/+13 (2d6+9/18-20) or

mwk silver wakizashi* +18/+13 (1d8+13/18-20)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +11/+6 (2d6+9/x3)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks challenge (+1, 1/day)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +12)

MUNASUKARU'S SPAWN

Over the years since she was trapped in the House of Withered Blossoms, Munasukaru has repeatedly mated with her hobgoblin followers, displaying a peculiarly swift and particularly loathsome ability to reproduce. Most of her spawn are twisted abominations that soon fall prey to the oni's prodigious appetites, but those that survive their birth and subsequent tortures at their mother's hands are given positions of power and become her most devoted disciples. Munasukaru's offspring are not merely loyal to her; they love her, hate her, worship her, and fear her.

Munasukaru's spawn fall into two types—her sons and her daughters. Like their mother, Munasukaru's sons are ja noi, fiery-skinned hobgoblin oni with ape-like arms. The sons enjoy the respect and adulation of their mother's hobgoblin servants, but their standing is significantly lower than that of Munasukaru's favored and adored daughters—horrid, wormlike spirit nagas, who occupy positions of status second only to Munasukaru herself.

Munasukaru's violent method of reproduction has resulted in only two such daughters, but she has given birth to countless sons. Fortunately, so great is her offspring's hatred of each other that only a handful of her sons remain alive today.

Constant—fly

At will—darkness, invisibility

1/day—charm monster (DC 18), cone of cold (DC 19), gaseous form, deep slumber (DC 17)

TACTICS

During Combat Fujai lets the Withered Blossom Warriors engage opponents first, while he assists with his spells before joining in melee combat himself.

Morale Fujai does not allow dishonor among those under his command. If any hobgoblins attempt to flee combat, he ignores enemies to slay them for their cowardice. Fujai refuses to dishonor his living god and liege Munasukaru by failing her or surrendering. He fights to the death, even if he must commit seppuku with his wakizashi.

STATISTICS

Str 28, **Dex** 15, **Con** 25, **Int** 14, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +9; **CMB** +19; **CMD** 31

Feats Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Bluff +16, Disguise +14, Fly +7, Intimidate +16, Perception +16, Ride +9, Sense Motive +16, Spellcraft +14

Languages Common, Giant, Goblin, Tien

SQ change shape (Small, Medium, or Large humanoid; *alter self* or *giant form I*), flight, mount (currently none), order of the warrior*, resolve* 1/day

Gear Large masterwork tatami-do*, Large masterwork katana*, Large masterwork composite longbow (+9 Str) with 20 arrows, Large masterwork silver wakizashi*, lacquer opium box set with pearls (worth 40 gp) containing 2 doses of opium (see page 29)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Challenge (Ex) This functions as the cavalier ability of the same name (*Advanced Player's Guide* 32).

Order (Ex) Fujai belongs to the order of the warrior. Whenever Fujai declares a challenge, he receives damage reduction 1/— against attacks made by the target of his challenge.

Resolve (Ex) Once per day, Fujai can call upon his resolve to endure wounds and afflictions in a number of ways.

Determined: As a standard action, Fujai can use his resolve to remove the fatigued, shaken, or sickened condition.

Resolute: Whenever Fujai is required to make a Fortitude or Will save, he can use his resolve as an immediate action to roll twice and take the better result. He must decide to use this ability before he rolls the saving throw.

Unstoppable: When Fujai is reduced to fewer than 0 hit points but not slain, he can use his resolve as an immediate action to instantly stabilize and remain conscious. He is staggered, but he does not fall unconscious and begin dying if he takes a standard action. He does fall unconscious if he takes additional damage from any source.

* See *Ultimate Combat*.

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (2)

CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

Treasure: Among the items displayed in the room are a trio of very fine bearskins worth 100 gp each, a bronze dagger set with jets worth 130 gp, a ceremonial elephant dagger in a silver and lapis lazuli scabbard worth 250 gp, and several bleached aranea skulls.

C17. THE DRAIN (CR 11)

A stone walkway plunges into the heart of a large cavern that is itself a roaring shaft of water, so that the steep and narrow stone pathway descends like a corkscrew along the edges of the shaft, with a waterfall roaring through the center.

Called the Drain, this cavernous shaft is 220 feet deep and leads to a steppingstone in the Lake of Broken Stones (area D1) below. The 5-foot-wide walkway was created by several *stone shape* spells. Because of the cascade of water all around it, the walkway is wet, slippery, and dangerous to fight on, requiring a DC 7 Acrobatics check to descend at full speed. The corkscrewing walkway descends straight downward, making it difficult to see directly up or down the path.

FOREST OF SPIRITS

Creatures: Three Sisters of the Broken Path guard the Drain, usually positioned halfway down the stone walkway. The Sisters carry *potions of levitate* to use the nature of the pathway to their advantage. When first entering combat, the monks drink their potions, leaving one monk in front of any attacking group while the other two Sisters levitate to the rear, sandwiching attackers between them.

SISTERS OF THE BROKEN PATH (3) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

hp 80 each (see page 41)

Combat Gear In addition to their normal gear, each of the Sisters carries two *potions of levitate*.

D1. LAKE OF BROKEN STONES (CR 12)

The waterfall drops into an underground lake, its surface broken by jagged boulders that form makeshift steppingstones from the pathway to an arched doorway. Hundreds of screaming, leering faces cover the walls of this cavern.

The path from the Drain above ends at the northernmost boulder in the lake. The steppingstones are broad, but steep and slippery, and Acrobatics checks to jump between the stones are made with a –7 penalty. The lake is 60 feet deep; its waters drain into four underground streams, creating strong currents in the water (DC 15 Swim check). A narrow side passage leads off of the north stream, connecting to the water trough in area D6. A DC 30 Escape Artist check enables passage between the two places.

Creatures: Two Sisters of the Broken Path guard the passage between the two levels, usually from area D2, where it's drier and safer, but they leap onto the steppingstones to confront any intruders coming down the Drain. The monks always plug their ears with melted wax to avoid effects of the choir of screaming voices traps (see below). In addition, Munasukaru has placed a pair of giant gars in the lake. The gars attack anything edible and moving that falls into the water, but ignore dead meat.

GIANT GARS (2) CR 6

XP 2,400 each

hp 73 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 128)

SISTERS OF THE BROKEN PATH (2) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

hp 80 each (see page 41)

Traps: Anyone treading on the steppingstones marked T on the map triggers a trap. The carved faces that cover every wall of the cavern begin to scream (courtesy of a *major image* spell), creating a *confusion* effect throughout the whole chamber. The spell only affects those who can

hear it, and creatures who have plugged their ears (such as the monks) or are underwater (such as the giant gars) gain a +5 circumstance bonus on their saving throws.

CHOIR OF SCREAMING VOICES TRAPS (3) CR 5

XP 1,600 each

Type magic; Perception DC 29; Disable Device DC 29

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Duration** 7 rounds; **Reset** none
Effect spell effect (*confusion*, DC 16 Will save negates); multiple targets (all targets in area D1)

D2. WATCHWAY

A low stone shelf forms a natural harbor carved with screaming figures with distended jaws. Ten-foot-high natural stone ledges rise in tiers to the southeast. A set of stone steps climb from the middle ledge to the topmost ledge and into area D3.

Development: If the PCs somehow made it through area D1 without being detected by the Sisters of the Broken Path, the two monks are on guard here.

D3. GUARDIAN OF THE BRIDGE (CR 11)

The natural stone walls of this chamber become worked stone to the north, decorated with carvings of figures being torn apart by beasts.

Creatures: Another of Munasukaru's Chosen, an ogre mage named Ryosanjin, waits in this room, guarding the approach to area D5. Ryosanjin has dwelt in the Penance since before the Five Storms escaped 160 years ago, and he is clearly very old. In those days, Ryosanjin was just a foot soldier, but Munasukaru rewarded his unwavering loyalty over the years by making him one of her Chosen. As Munasukaru's favorite, only Ryosanjin, alone among the other Chosen, has a mount—a giant gorgon named Jiaogu—but the gorgon was given to him by Munasukaru, not chosen by Ryosanjin. As a result, Jiaogu does not gain the standard abilities of a samurai's mount, though Ryosanjin does not take an armor check penalty on Ride checks while riding Jiaogu.

RYOSANJIN, MUNASUKARU'S CHOSEN CR 9

XP 6,400

hp 113 (see page 43)

Skills Ride +14

TACTICS

During Combat Ryosanjin forgoes using his *invisibility* and enters combat mounted on Jiaogu. On the first round of combat, Ryosanjin issues a challenge to an honorable opponent—preferably another warrior—and charges. He reserves his spells for spellcasters or rogues, rather than sully his honor by fighting such lowly opponents in hand-

to-hand combat. If Jiaogu is killed, Ryosanjin uses *gaseous form* to honorably withdraw if the odds are greatly against him (such as when he is outflanked or reduced to half his hit points) so that he can take up a better defensive position.

Morale A haughty combatant, Ryosanjin fights with the honor of his order. He would rather die than dishonor Munasukaru, so he does not surrender.

JIAOGU

CR 9

XP 6,400

Giant gorgon (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 165, 295)

hp 116

D4. RYOSANJIN'S QUARTERS

A huge, lice-covered bed squats in the center of this chamber, which is decorated with curious, somewhat disturbing objects. Hundreds of beetles form a living carpet on the floor.

When not on duty, the ogre mage Ryosanjin (see area D3) resides in this room. The beetles on the floor are disturbing, but harmless.

Treasure: The chamber is cluttered with objects from the oni's past, all of which show signs of great age. A DC 10 Perception check discovers the following items of value among the various aged figurines, statues, and other curiosities: a *headband of alluring charisma* +2, an offering bowl decorated with gold leaf and set with a pair of poor quality rubies (worth 300 gp), a gilded elephant tusk (worth 125 gp), a fine jade and silver rooster funerary figure (worth 100 gp), and a superb 10-panel painted landscape screen depicting the House of Withered Blossoms in its heyday, weighing 30 pounds (worth 750 gp).

D5. BRIDGE OF FEASTING KIRIN

This magnificent stone bridge is carved with enraged kirin devouring a bridal feast. Swift, dark waters flow under the crossing.

The bridge stands 20 feet above the river, whose waters flow from area D1 toward area D8. The river is 20 feet deep and fast-moving, requiring a DC 15 Swim check to navigate.

D6. HALL OF LOST GRANDEUR (CR 11)

The bridge leads to a stone ledge overlooking a cobbled stone plaza in a huge chamber. Forty feet above the ledge, a vaulted ceiling soars over the room, supported by great columns, some of which have collapsed. At one time a stone bridge crossed the chamber from the ledge to the opposite wall, but both the span and the enormous archway it led to have collapsed, leaving a pile of shattered rubble on the floor twenty feet below. Frescoes depicting blinded ettins pulling obscene creatures on

vast golden wagons, surrounded by slaves averting their eyes, cover the walls in a riot of extravagant colors.

Long ago, during the heyday of the House of the Withered Blossoms, this room was an antechamber to the central lair of the Five Storms, a vast subterranean palace filled with magnificent chambers and temples to the oni, maintained by hundreds of slaves. After the Five Storms escaped, leaving Munasukaru behind, the complex fell into disrepair and eventually began to disintegrate, helped along at times by Munasukaru's insane rage. All that remains now is this great anteroom, now fractured beneath the ledge where oni masters once tormented their slaves.

The wall frescoes depict the oni of the Five Storms, Munasukaru clearly visible among them, nursing her two naga daughters. The scenes are of luxury, extravagance, triumph, and the deification of the oni.

The wall beneath the ledge is very smooth (DC 25 Climb check), but the rubble of the collapsed bridge forms a sloping ramp down to the floor, and can be traversed with a DC 10 Climb check. A huge stone trough sits against the west wall in the plaza below, fed with cool water from area D1. A DC 30 Escape Artist check enables passage between the two places. At floor level to the east, a tunnel passes beneath the walkway to the south, leading to area D8.

Three huge grappling hooks attached to long chains hang from hooks on the south wall along the ledge. Dried blood still cakes the hooks, where victims in the plaza below were once hooked like fish and tormented by watching guards on the ledge above.

Creatures: Three Withered Blossom Warriors and a hill giant have chosen this room as their resting place when not guarding area D9 below. The hobgoblins stand atop the ledge to the south, while the hill giant wanders around in the plaza below, throwing rocks at any intruders entering the chamber.

HILL GIANT

CR 7

XP 3,200

hp 85 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 150)

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (3)

CR 7

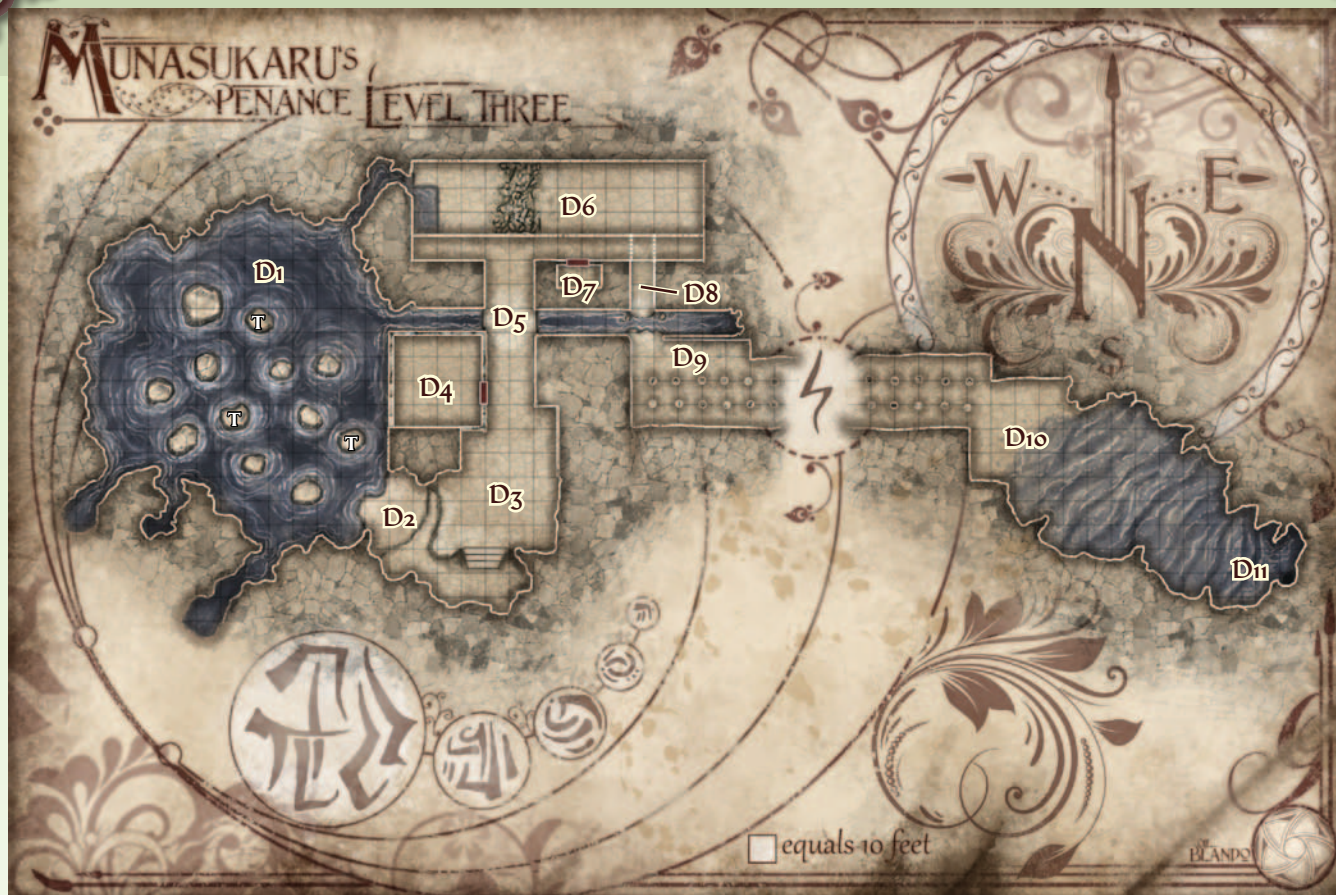
XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 32)

D7. CHAMBER OF LONG REGRETS

Water slowly drips onto the damp floor of this otherwise completely bare chamber.

The wooden door to this room is swollen shut with dampness and age (hardness 5, hp 15, Break DC 16). This room was used to carry out various torments, including the dreaded



water torture—an endless, slow drip of a water splashing on a victim's forehead to drive him mad. Rusted anchor points on the walls and floor show where manacles and torture devices once lay, but they have all since succumbed to rust and age.

Treasure: A small, wilted bonsai tree in a simple pot sits in the middle of the floor. The ward of the fukujin kami Akumi (see page 21), the bonsai was stolen from the Forest of Spirits by one of Munasukaru's Withered Blossom Warriors and stashed here. When that hobgoblin fell in battle against the aranea soon after, the bonsai was abandoned and forgotten. The endless drip of water from the ceiling has kept the tree barely alive thus far, but it will quickly wither and die without sunlight. See page 60 for details on Akumi's bonsai.

Story Award: Award the PCs 12,800 XP for recovering Akumi's bonsai and returning it to the kami.

D8. FALLEN BRIDGE

The remains of a broken bridge lie shattered in the waters of an underground river. Across the torrent, an open archway beckons.

The river is 10 feet wide and 20 feet deep, its fast waters (DC 15 Swim check) soon plunging into a shaft to the east, and gradually draining through several narrow cracks.

D9. THE GREAT PROCESSION OF MORTALITY (CR 11)

Innumerable columns depicting writhing oni feasting upon fleeing peasants support this magnificent arched corridor, which vanishes into darkness to the east.

The floor of this corridor is worn smooth with heavy traffic, its walls covered in carvings by Munasukaru depicting dragons punishing humans for their frailty and mortality. The corridor runs 600 feet east to area D10.

Recently, a quartet of destrachans has made its way from the Darklands into this area. The cruel and cunning creatures have taken great pleasure in hunting and ambushing Munasukaru's hobgoblin followers, and their destructive harmonics have collapsed many of the columns in the central portion of the corridor. Fortunately, movement between the upper levels and Munasukaru's lair below is rare, so the destrachans have mostly been left to their own devices.

Creatures: Ryosanjin has set a watch here to guard against the destrachans plaguing the area. Three Withered Blossom Warriors and a hill giant keep a close eye along the corridor east, but they attack any intruders coming from the north as well.



HILL GIANT CR 7

XP 3,200
hp 85 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 150)

WITHERED BLOSSOM WARRIORS (3) CR 7

XP 3,200 each
hp 82 each (see page 32)

TACTICS

Morale If more than half their number are slain, the remaining hobgoblins flee to area D6 to join their companions.

D10. DESTRACHAN LAIR (CR 12)

The pillared corridor ends in a broad stone platform that overlooks a series of crude stone steps descending to the southeast. The mangled, rotting corpses of hobgoblins litter the floor.

The destrachans plaguing this level have made their lair in this chamber. The creatures bring their victims here to torment, and the mutilated bodies of 12 hobgoblins lie in ruin on the floor.

Creatures: Four destrachans occupy this chamber, toying with what remains of their victims. As soon as they detect creatures coming down the corridor, the

destrachans prepare another ambush, lurking behind pillars or on the first of the steps leading down to area D11 to take foes by surprise.

DESTRACHANS (4) CR 8

XP 4,800 each
hp 90 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 83)

TACTICS

During Combat The destrachans delight in causing fear and pain.

Attacking in pairs, the creatures try to split up their opponents, either by stunning them with their pain harmonics or by collapsing the ceiling (see Hazard below). The destrachans prefer to use their destructive harmonics, but once a foe is stunned or immobile, they enjoy attacking with their claws and bites.

Morale The destrachans are cowardly, and an injured destrachan (one that has taken 20 or more points of damage) backs away from combat, only to return when it hears cries of pain or suffering again. If two of the destrachans are slain, the survivors attempt to retreat to area D9. If cornered, they fight to the death.

Hazard: The damage caused by the destrachans' destructive harmonics has weakened the ceiling in this chamber. A major impact (such as an area effect weapon or a direct attack) that delivers 25 points of damage or

more to the ceiling (beyond the stone's Hardness of 8) has a 25% chance of causing a collapse (*Core Rulebook* 415). The destrachans know this and relish the possibility.

DII. THE FALL OF SOBS

Water cascades from narrow openings in the walls down a series of stone ledges or steps, each some twenty feet or so apart. One hundred feet below, at the bottom of the steps, the swirling waters drain into a deep black hole.

The floors are slippery but require no Acrobatics check to cross. Simple, narrow steps carved in the sides of the ledges can be traversed with a DC 5 Climb check. The hole at the bottom of the steps is a shaft leading to area E1 some 100 feet below. Again, narrow stone steps have been carved into the walls of the shaft, but the flow of water is so great that a DC 10 Acrobatics or Climb check is required to descend safely. Anyone passing through the hole triggers a mental *alarm* spell cast by the naga Mei in area E2.

EI. HALL OF SCREAMS (CR II)

The long stair leads to a flooded cavern devoted to anguish and madness. Rusted iron cages hang from stone pillars and screams of pain and anguish echo throughout the chamber.

The shaft from area D11 ends in the west of this chamber. The cavern's floor is flooded to a depth of just over 1 foot, and is treated as a shallow bog for the purposes of movement (*Core Rulebook* 427). Two of Munasukaru's sons have constructed a living garden of pain in their lair, delighting in inflicting mental and physical suffering on the living. Each of the cages holds a human, captured long ago in the forest above. The prisoners are pale from lack of sunlight, malnourished, and quite insane after years of torture. Even if freed, the prisoners are utterly unable to interact with the world or even care for themselves, unless cured. *Greater restoration*, *heal*, *limited wish*, *miracle*, or *wish* immediately cures a person of all insanity.

A hole in the floor in the southeast portion of the cavern drops 20 feet to area E2. Anyone passing through the hole triggers a mental *alarm* spell cast by the naga Yasu in area E2.

Creatures: Two ja noi oni, lesser spawn of Munasukaru, named Jirou and Saburo lurk in this chamber, tormenting their prisoners. Like their brother Ichirou (area C11), Jirou and Saburo were scarred both physically and mentally by their upbringing, but now wear their disfigurements as badges of honor.

JIROU AND SABURO, SPAWN OF MUNASUKARU (2) CR 9
XP 6,400 each

hp 123 (see page 42)

TACTICS

Before Combat Jirou and Saburo each cast *bull's strength* and *magic weapon* if alerted to the presence of intruders.

During Combat The brothers rage and attempt to flank foes with one another.

Morale When reduced to 40 hit points or fewer, or if one of them is slain, the other flees to their sisters' lair in area E2 to make a final stand.

E2. THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY SUFFERING (CR II)

The contaminated waters flooding this cavern lap against natural stone walls and pillars, every inch of which are covered with dreadful carvings and hung with burnt and mummified aranea, hobgoblin, and human corpses.

The charred and mummified remains of scores of victims litter the cavern. The cavern's floor is flooded to a depth of 4 feet and strewn with rotting body parts from the corpses on the walls. The entire cavern is treated as a deep bog for the purposes of movement (*Core Rulebook* 427).

Munasukaru's two daughters have created an homage to mental anguish and terror, decorating their lair in their own unique styles. In deference to her mother's insane devotions, Mei has decorated her half of the lair with carvings of dislocations and dismemberings, while the subtler Yasu prefers to decorate her half of the lair with images of victims having their minds and internal organs devoured. So disturbing are these vile carvings that the PCs must make a DC 10 Will save when first confronted with the images or be sickened for 1d3 hours.

To the east, a hole in the floor drops 30 feet to area E3.

Creatures: Munasukaru's beloved daughters, the wormlike spirit nagas Mei and Yasu, live in this cavern, guarding the entrance to their mother's sanctum. The sisters cast *alarm* spells in areas D11 and E1 every day; thus, they are likely to be aware of the PCs' intrusion into their lair, and use Stealth to hide beneath the water to take the PCs by surprise. The nagas can swim through the flooded cavern with ease, and creatures in the water do not have cover against the nagas' underwater attacks.

MEI, FIRST DAUGHTER OF MUNASUKARU CR 9
XP 6,400

Female spirit naga (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 213)

AC 27, touch 14, flat-footed 22 (+5 Dex, +9 natural, +4 shield, -1 size)

hp 95

OFFENSE

Spells Known (CL 7th; concentration +10)
3rd (5/day)—*dispel magic*, *fireball* (DC 16)

JADE REGENT

- 2nd (7/day)—*mirror image*, *scorching ray*, *silence* (DC 15)
1st (7/day)—*alarm*, *cure light wounds*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *shocking grasp*
o (at will)—*acid splash*, *bleed* (DC 13), *ghost sound* (DC 13), *mage hand*, *ray of frost*, *resistance*, *virtue*

TACTICS

Before Combat If alerted by her *alarm* spell, Mei casts *shield* and *mirror image*.

During Combat Far more haughty than her sister Yasu, Mei attacks using brute force, throwing her most powerful spells into combat, even if her sister would be caught in the effect. She delights in casting destructive *fireballs*, and singles out one enemy, preferably a spellcaster, to target with her magic.

Morale Cowardly and in love with her own skin, Mei retreats every time she takes 20 or more points of damage. She casts *cure light wounds* on herself before stealthily returning to attack again with surprise. As Munasukaru's favorite daughter, Mei knows that she cannot fail her mother, and fights to the death.

YASU, SECOND DAUGHTER OF MUNASUKARU CR 9

XP 6,400

Female spirit naga (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 213)
AC 27, touch 14, flat-footed 22 (+4 armor, +5 Dex, +9 natural, -1 size)

hp 95

OFFENSE

Spells Known (CL 7th; concentration +10)

- 3rd (5/day)—*bestow curse* (DC 16), *summon monster III*
2nd (7/day)—*acid arrow*, *blur*, *hideous laughter* (DC 15)
1st (7/day)—*alarm*, *cure light wounds*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement* (DC 14)
o (at will)—*bleed* (DC 13), *flare* (DC 13), *ghost sound* (DC 13), *guidance*, *mage hand*, *resistance*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 13)

TACTICS

Before Combat If alerted by her *alarm* spell, Yasu casts *blur* and *mage armor*.

During Combat Yasu casts *summon monster III* to summon a fiendish constrictor snake to aid her in combat. She uses her charming gaze as much as possible to remove troublesome spellcasters from the fray and casts spells upon remaining opponents.

Morale As cowardly as her sister, Yasu retreats every time she takes 20 or more points of damage. She casts *cure light wounds* on herself before stealthily returning to attack with her spells once more. Like Mei, Yasu knows that retreat is not an option, and fights to the death.

Treasure: Mei wears a magnificent inlaid platinum-and-jade pendant of great size worth 800 gp. In addition, a DC 10 Perception check finds three porcelain pots just underneath the surface of the water in the north of the cavern, containing a carved censer with a gold edge worth 200 gp, a pair of silver armbands worth 50 gp, a *swan boat feather token*, and 1,012 gp.

E3. THE CELEBRATION OF CHAINS (CR 11)

Thick chains crisscross this chamber, attached to the walls and hanging from the ceiling, their links clinking in the fall of water from the shaft above.

The thick web of chains impedes movement through the room, made even more slippery by the constant rain of water dripping from cracks in the ceiling. A creature can walk through the room with a successful DC 12 Acrobatics check, or fly through the chains with a DC 15 Fly check. Alternatively, a creature can climb among the slippery chains with a DC 10 Climb check. Failure at any of these checks results in the creature being entangled for 1 round. The water eventually drains from the room through numerous cracks in the floor.

MEI

Creatures: Munasukaru's major-domo and the last of her Chosen—Ochiyo the Messenger—spends her days in this chamber when not serving her mistress. If the PCs have made it this far, Munasukaru realizes that she has underestimated these strangers and orders Ochiyo to instead appeal to their more base feelings. When the PCs enter the room, Ochiyo—in human form—kowtows to them and addresses them as an ambassador with a traditional Tian greeting (recognizable as such with a DC 20 Diplomacy check). The ogre mage then explains that the PCs are most welcome in these lands, but that what occurs in the House of Withered Blossoms is none of their concern. Should the PCs continue to interfere, the living god Munasukaru will see to it that they die, in a variety of particularly unpleasant ways.

Ochiyo adds that if the PCs were to turn their backs on what does not concern them and return to the Forest of Spirits, all their earthly pleasures will be indulged when the storm breaks across Minkai and the rest of Tian Xia. The living goddess offers this as her word of honor, and will never betray that word. Ochiyo then goes on to describe in explicit detail exactly what kind of pleasures the Five Storms intend to indulge in within their earthly garden of paradise. If the PCs refuse to leave, or attack, Ochiyo assumes her normal form and attacks, rebuking them for refusing such a generous reward.

In addition to Ochiyo, two advanced kytons lurk among the hanging chains. Longtime allies of the oni of the Five Storms, the kytons remained in the House of Withered Blossoms when the oni escaped, relishing Munasukaru's suffering from her abandonment and indulging in their own sadistic pleasures.

OCHIYO THE MESSENGER, MUNASUKARU'S CHOSEN CR 9

XP 6,400

hp 113 (see page 43)

TACTICS

During Combat Ochiyo flies through the chains, using *invisibility* and *darkness* to surprise or flank enemies with the kytons. She challenges the PC who refused her offer, targeting her attacks and spells at that person, unless faced with a greater threat.

Morale If reduced to 50 hit points or fewer, Ochiyo retreats in *gaseous form* to area E7 to join her living goddess. Once at Munasukaru's side, she fights to the death.

ADVANCED KYTONS (2) CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 76 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 185, 294)

TACTICS

During Combat The kytons are unhindered by the chains in the room, climbing through them at their normal speed without the need for Climb checks. They use their dancing chains ability to attack any opponents moving through the chains.

Morale The kytons fight until killed.

NPC RELATIONSHIPS

If you're using the relationship rules presented in the *Jade Regent Player's Guide*, the PCs have the opportunity during this adventure to further increase their Relationship Scores with the significant NPCs traveling with them. The PCs can increase their Relationship Scores with the following NPCs by the listed amount for taking the following actions or completing the following tasks.

Ameiko Kaijitsu: impressing Prince Batsaikhar enough to receive at least three gifts during his feasts: +1 for each gift; giving Ameiko the morin khuur won at the Feast of the Ancients: +1; learning about Anamurumon in the House of Withered Blossoms: +1

Koya Mvashti: taking Koya to explore the city of Ordu-Aganhei: +1; resetting Shunkichi's waymarker: +1; showing Koya the Five Storms' library (area E5): +1

Sandru Vhiski: taking Sandru to Prince Batsaikhar's five feasts to sample new foods: +1; giving Sandru the +1 scimitar won at the Feast of the Honored Visitors: +1; getting the caravan through the Forest of Spirits without losing a single wagon: +1

Shalelu Andosana: giving Shalelu the *efficient quiver* won at the Feast of Three: +1; killing the Swine Shogun (area B12): +1; recovering Akumi's bonsai tree (area D7): +1

E4. HALL OF HANGING GIBBETS (CR 11)

A double row of columns runs down the center of this broad chamber. Iron gibbets hang from chains along the walls, limp forms visible through the bars of the cages.

Creatures: Only half of the gibbets still hold living prisoners (N human commoners 1); the rest have long since succumbed to torture and disease contracted from their captors, four hobgoblin lepers who torment their caged victims while they guard against intruders.

LEPERS (4) CR 7

XP 3,200 each

hp 82 each (see page 40)

TACTICS

During Combat The lepers fearlessly engage opponents in melee, confident that their living goddess will save them if they fall in battle defending her.

Morale In the divine temple of their living goddess, the hobgoblins fight to death in honor of Munasukaru.

Story Award: Freeing the eight surviving prisoners should be an emotional moment, but nothing compared to seeing their faces as they see daylight for the first time in months,

or even years. If the PCs release the prisoners and take them to the surface, award them 12,800 XP as the freed humans fall to the ground sobbing and laughing at the sky in joy.

E5. LIBRARY OF LOST LORE

Long shelves filled with books and scrolls line the walls of this dusty chamber. A score of carved figures scowl down on the room from the walls above the shelves. Each of the images has been defaced, but they are still clearly recognizable as oni.

Treasure: This library details the history of the kami and oni of the Forest of Spirits. The collection includes carved stone tablets, calligraphic writings on bone and tortoise shell, rice paper journals with bamboo covers, silk scrolls scores of yards long, and countless other tomes, some of huge size. The entire library would fill multiple carts or wagons. Scattered among the shelves are a green jade plaque set in gold worth 1,300 gp, a pair of antique gold lions worth 3,500 gp, and a magnificent hinged silver bracelet set with turquoise and emeralds worth 6,100 gp.

E6. GUARDROOM (CR 12)

Detailed carvings and paintings of a powerful female oni decorate the walls of this otherwise simple room. Twenty feet high, the images loom over the chamber, a tribute to monstrous domination.

The illustrations on the walls depict the oni Munasukaru, lovingly rendered by her most loyal adherents, the Sisters of the Broken Path.

Creatures: Munasukaru's elite force of personal bodyguards, four Sisters of the Broken Path, guard their mistress's sanctum. They allow no one to disturb their living "goddess," attacking anyone who enters the room.

SISTERS OF THE BROKEN PATH (4) CR 8

XP 4,800 each

hp 80 each (see page 41)

TACTICS

Before Combat The Sisters drink their *potions of blur*.

During Combat The monks work together to flank opponents, using their nunchaku to disarm opponents. They use flurry of blows to attack, and use their steal *ki* and life funnel abilities against foes when possible.

Morale Entrusted with Munasukaru's life, the monks fight to the death.

E7. MUNASUKARU'S SANCTUM (CR 13)

This repulsive chamber is a charnel house of death and decay, its glowering walls a vision of madness, sin, and unsated lusts. Countless figures are carved into the walls, glaring, pleading, and screaming in silence. But on closer inspection, the carved figures are revealed to be the rotting corpses of araneas, humans, hobgoblins, and more impaled on the walls, their anguished features frozen at the moment of death. To the east, a wide, open pit gapes in the floor. At the opposite end of the room, a ragged spur of stone supports a bloodstained iron frame above a bed of nails.



MUNASUKARU

A 20-foot-wide circular stone doorway lies at the bottom of the open pit 30 feet down, surrounded by a dozen golden figurines. Contorted humanoid faces and limbs lie frozen in stone within the doorway. This was the kimon, the demon gate created by Anamurumon to allow the Five Storms to escape the House of Withered Blossoms. The portal is now sealed and inactive, but it still radiates faint primal conjuration magic (determined with a DC 25 Knowledge [arcana] check). Characters studying the portal and making a DC 30 Spellcraft check understand that this is clearly the violent remains of a magic portal somehow powered by the souls of those trapped within it, and that it provided the oni a means to escape their imprisonment.

Creatures: The broken and mutilated body of an aranea hangs partially filleted on the iron frame in the west of the room. Munasukaru has made the aranea pay for Akinosa's continual insults, and has done so for a long, long time, keeping the creature alive with magic so she can inflict repeated tortures on it. The aranea is staggered, with 2 hit points remaining. It is in its hybrid form, shackled to the frame with tight iron bonds (hardness 10, hp 10, Break DC 26).

When the PCs first enter Munasukaru's sanctum, the oni is in her human form—a wrinkled, ancient Tian woman—next to the captive aranea. She cackles as the PCs enter, tearing off a strip of the captive aranea's skin and noisily smacking her lips as she eats it. Lost in her madness, Munasukaru ignores the PCs, focused on toying with her captive until the PCs attack her or interfere with her. At that point, she resumes her oni form and attacks.

MUNASUKARU CR 13

XP 25,600

hp 178 (see page 58)



Treasure: At the foot of the mangled aranea are 6 *potions of cure serious wounds* that Munasukaru has been using to keep him alive. The 12 golden figurines arranged around the kimon at the bottom of the pit depict the figures of the Tian zodiac, and are each worth 100 gp.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

With Munasukaru slain and the discovery of the kimon, the kami are no longer barred from entering the House of Withered Blossoms. When the PCs exit the pagoda, the kami are waiting for them, eager to learn what they discovered. If the PCs did not learn all of the information in the pagoda about the Five Storms, the curious kami who soon begin exploring the ancient prison discover those clues and share them with the PCs. Now that they have learned more about the Five Storms and their leader Anamurumon, the PCs might wish to use methods such as *scrying* to gather even more information. Unfortunately, both Anamurumon and the Jade Regent are shielded by the wards protecting the Imperial Palace in Kasai, and at this point, such attempts fail automatically.

If the PCs rescued Akumi's bonsai, the diminutive kami is overjoyed. Before merging with his ward, Akumi allows the PCs to take the bonsai with them if they promise to

take good care of the little tree. If one of the PCs is a lawful neutral spellcaster and the PCs helped Shunkichi earlier in the adventure, the shikigami kami offers to serve as that character's familiar. The character must be lawful neutral, have the Improved Familiar feat, and be an arcane caster of at least 7th level to take Shunkichi as a familiar. As a familiar, Shunkichi treats his master as his ward.

Miyaro offers to guide the PCs through rest of the Forest of Spirits and into Minkai. She believes that rebellion is coming to Minkai, but that while many Minkaians might wish to see the Jade Regent gone, those opposed to his rule have no strong leadership, and many factions squabble among themselves. Miyaro tells the PCs that they will emerge from the Forest of Spirits in a rural area in northern Minkai, where a large group of ronin are said to have retreated to. These dishonored ronin, it is said, are ready to rebel against the Jade Regent, but they cannot do so alone. If the PCs can find the leader of the ronin, a man named Hirabashi Jiro, and tell him what they have learned in the House of Withered Blossoms, they might gain a powerful ally in their future struggle against the Jade Regent. The PCs' meeting with Hirabashi Jiro, and with other factions that can help them retake Minkai, is the focus of the next installment of the Jade Regent Adventure Path, "Tide of Honor."



AKINOSA



A DRUNK AND AN OPIUM ADDICT, AKINOSA LEADS HIS ARANEA FOLLOWERS IN A NEVER-ENDING BATTLE AGAINST THE HOBGOBLIN MINIONS OF THE ONI MUNASUKARU FOR CONTROL OF THE HOUSE OF WITHERED BLOSSOMS.

AKINOSA

CR 11

XP 12,800

Male aranea sorcerer 7 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 30)

NE Medium magical beast (shapechanger)

Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +10

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 15, flat-footed 21 (+4 armor, +4 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 natural, +4 shield)

hp 125 (12 HD; 5d10+7d6+74)

Fort +13, **Ref** +14, **Will** +9

Weaknesses opium addict

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good) (cannot run or charge)

Melee bite +12 (1d6–1 plus poison) or dagger of venom +13/+8 (1d4/19–20)

Ranged mwk blowgun +13 (1d2 plus Medium spider venom)

Special Attacks long limbs (+5 ft.), poison (DC 15), web (+12 ranged, DC 15, 5 hp)

Bloodline Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th; concentration +17) 8/day—acidic ray (1d6+3 acid)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 12th; concentration +17)

6th (3/day)—*chain lightning* (DC 21)

5th (6/day)—*baleful polymorph* (DC 20), *interposing hand*

4th (7/day)—*dimension door*, *scrying* (DC 19), *stone shape*

3rd (7/day)—*fly*, *haste*, *lightning bolt* (DC 18), *slow* (DC 18), *tongues*

2nd (7/day)—*acid arrow*, *blur*, *false life*, *mirror image*, *scorching ray*, *see invisibility*

1st (8/day)—*burning hands* (DC 16), *charm person* (DC 16), *enlarge person*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*

0 (at will)—*acid splash*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 15), *mage hand*, *message*, *ray of frost*, *read magic*, *resistance*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 15)

Bloodline Aberrant

TACTICS

Before Combat Akinosa casts *false life* and *mage armor* every day. If alerted to the presence of intruders, Akinosa sends out his guards from the Open Web (area **A8b**) and casts *scrying* to determine the point of attack. He then positions his elite defenders, the Gossamer (area **A10b**), between the attack and himself. Before combat, Akinosa casts *blur*, *fly*, *mirror image*, and *shield*.

During Combat Akinosa casts *haste* on the first round of combat. If encountered in his lair, Akinosa plays his *drums of panic* (see area **A9b**) to scare away foes, then drinks from his *flask of endless sake* in the hope of getting a beneficial potion. Akinosa uses *fly* or *dimension door* to move around in combat and avoid melee, instead using his *wand of lightning bolt* and casting his toughest spells, including *chain lightning* and *baleful polymorph*. Akinosa enjoys polymorphing his enemies into rats, an animal considered unlucky by many in Tian Xia. If engaged in melee combat, Akinosa casts *interposing hand* for cover and attacks with his *dagger of venom*.

Morale Akinosa is likely to believe that any attackers are agents of Munasukaru and fears capture accordingly. If reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, Akinosa casts *dimension door* to flee to safety, gathering whatever followers he has left to launch a counterattack.

STATISTICS

Str 8, **Dex** 18, **Con** 18, **Int** 12, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 21

Base Atk +8; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 22

Feats Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +13, Climb +14, Escape Artist +8, Fly +12, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +5, Perception +10, Spellcraft +8, Stealth +9

Languages Common, Sylvan, Tien

SQ bloodline arcana (+50% duration on polymorphs), change shape (humanoid, *alter self*)

Combat Gear *wand of lightning bolt* (23 charges), Medium spider venom (4 doses); **Other Gear** *dagger of venom*, masterwork blowgun with 10 darts, *cloak of resistance* +2, *flask of endless sake* (see page 60), silver sake drinking bowl (worth 110 gp), magnificently carved hardwood ball medallion depicting the world being devoured by an imperial dragon (worth 50 gp), silver mirror worth 1,000 gp (focus for *scrying* spell), 2 doses of opium (worth 50 gp total), keys to all locks in the aboveground levels of the House of the Withered Blossoms

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Opium Addict (Ex) Akinosa is addicted to opium (see the sidebar on page 29). While under the effects of the drug, he gains +1d8 temporary hit points and a +2 alchemical

bonus on Fortitude saves for 1 hour, but he is also fatigued. In addition, he has taken 2 points of Constitution damage and 2 points of Wisdom damage from the drug (already reflected in the stat block).

Once, Akinosa was content to roam the Forest of Spirits with his band of aranea followers and his precious *flask of endless sake*. A sorcerer with far greater talent than most of his kind, Akinosa has always been fascinated with the arcane, but his desire to learn more has become his undoing. The rumors of dark secrets and forbidden texts hidden beneath the House of Withered Blossoms proved too much for him to ignore, and when news reached him that the Five Storms had escaped their prison, Akinosa led his followers to the pagoda to claim the oni's knowledge for himself. Unfortunately, Akinosa, a lazy drunkard at the best of times, was unable to defeat Munasukaru's forces, and his obsession with the wealth of arcana that he still believes is hidden in the House of Withered Blossoms has driven him to carry on his war for the past 60 years. During that time, a stalemate has existed between the aranea and the oni, with neither able to gain the advantage over the other, and Akinosa has added opium to his list of vices.

The endless stalemate has worn on the aranea's nerves, however, and his days are now long. In his drug- and alcohol-induced torpor, Akinosa is often unaware of what is reality and what is dream. He spends his days scrying on his enemy and making endless demands of his followers for preparations of attack. Of late, Akinosa has spent more time in indulgence than in strategy, and his addiction to opium and endless supply of sake has dulled his senses.

In hybrid form, Akinosa looks like a vast spider with a distended body and multi-jointed legs, topped with a humanoid torso wearing soiled robes. A disturbing cluster of arachnid eyes and mandibles mar his only vaguely human head. Swarms of spiders and insects crawl in and out of the folds in his robes and skin.

CAMPAIGN ROLE

Akinosa can fulfill a straightforward role as the villainous boss of the araneas, or he can be played as a pathetic failure in the grip of addiction. Obsessed with his enemy Munasukaru, in part out of fear and in part due to his desire to become lord of the House of Withered Blossoms, he only struggles on because of the oni. Akinosa can certainly serve as a

villain for this adventure, but he could also be a potential ally. If the PCs can convince Akinosa of their intentions to kill Munasukaru, or if they offer to collaborate with the aranea against the oni, Akinosa grants the PCs free passage into Munasukaru's Penance. Of course, any agreements made between the aranea and the PCs are likely to be viewed later by Akinosa as just another opium dream, and he assumes anyone coming up from below are agents of Munasukaru, ordering his followers to kill the PCs as soon as they return from his enemy's lair.

Should Akinosa survive the adventure, he explores Munasukaru's Penance as soon as it is safe to do so. When he finds that the arcane knowledge he has sought for so long is not there, he assumes that any tomes were taken by the PCs, and his obsession turns to them. The aranea's change shape ability makes him an easy pursuer to run. As the PCs move through the next installment of the Adventure Path, Akinosa can attempt to covertly attack the PCs on several occasions to get hold of the arcane knowledge he is obsessed with. If he finally discovers that such knowledge never truly existed, Akinosa's slender grip on reality finally vanishes and he slips into madness. Unless stopped, he continues to stalk the PCs until either they are dead, or he is.





MIYARO



GIVEN TO THE KAMI TO CLEANSE HER FATHER'S DISHONOR, MIYARO HAS LONG SERVED AS AN AGENT AND VOICE OF THE KAMI OPPOSED TO THE FIVE STORMS. WITH THE ARRIVAL OF THE PCs, SHE HAS THE CHANCE TO RECRUIT MORE MORTAL AGENTS TO THE KAMI'S CAUSE.

MIYARO

CR 8

XP 4,800

Female kitsune rogue (swashbuckler) 9 (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Dragon Empires Gazetteer 9, Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide* 135)

N Medium humanoid (kitsune, shapechanger)

Init +9; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 16, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +5 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 53 (9d8+9)

Fort +3, **Ref** +11, **Will** +4; +3 vs. fear

Defensive Abilities evasion, improved uncanny dodge

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 *kukri* +12/+7 (1d4+1/18–20), bite +6 (1d4)

Ranged mwk shortbow +12/+7 (1d6/x3)

Special Attacks sneak attack +5d6

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +12)
3/day—*dancing lights*

TACTICS

During Combat Miyaro uses her mobility to move about the battlefield, looking for the most advantageous position from which to make sneak attacks and never staying in one spot for long.

Morale As a servant of a higher cause, Miyaro is unwilling to throw her life away needlessly, and if a battle turns against her, she almost always prefers to withdraw and fight another day. She has been tasked with bringing the PCs to the kami of the Forest of Spirits, however, and she will fight to the death if necessary to ensure her charges safely reach their destination.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 20, **Con** 10, **Int** 14, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 16

Base Atk +6; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 22

Feats Dodge, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Mobility, Nimble Moves, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +22, Bluff +17, Diplomacy +17, Disguise +17 (+27 using change shape), Escape Artist +17, Knowledge (local) +14, Perception +11, Sense Motive +11, Sleight of Hand +17, Stealth +17; **Racial Modifiers** +2 Acrobatics

Languages Common, Senzar, Sylvan, Tien

SQ change shape (Medium humanoid; *alter self*), daring*, martial training* (*kukri*), rogue talents (charmer*, combat trick, finesse rogue, offensive defense*)

Other Gear +2 *leather armor*, +1 *kukri*, masterwork shortbow with 20 arrows, *belt of incredible dexterity* +2, *bird feather token*, *Kikuya's sensu* (see page 61), wicker baskets (2), peasant's outfit

* See the *Advanced Player's Guide*.

Born in northern Minkai, Miyaro was the daughter of a notorious kitsune bandit chieftain. When she was just a babe in arms, her father led his bandits into the southern fringes of the Forest of Spirits while trying to escape imperial troops. The bandits set up a defensive position in a grove of ancient trees, but when the imperial troops caught up to them, they found all of the bandits slain. Fearing the spirits of the haunted forest, the Minkaians quickly returned to their homeland.

When Miyaro's father did not return, her mother went into the forest in search of him. There, she found the kami of the forest, who informed her they had killed her husband when he desecrated one of their most sacred groves. Furthermore, as his widow, Miyaro's mother had inherited her husband's dishonor, and unless she made amends, the spirits would hold her accountable as well. Miyaro's mother, a traditional woman who had always honored the kami, was horrified at this revelation. She offered her daughter Miyaro to the kami, to be raised by the spirits and taught to respect them. When the kami accepted her gift, Miyaro's mother committed suicide, sealing the pact with her lifeblood.

And so Miyaro grew up in the Forest of Spirits, a child of the kami, but not one of them. As she grew older, she became an agent of her adoptive family, going where they could not and acting when they were forbidden to do so, always in opposition to the oni of the Five Storms, who had mysteriously escaped their imprisonment in the Forest of Spirits before she was born.

When the ripples of fate informed the kami that scions of the Amatatsu family, the last surviving imperial family of Minkai, were returning to Tian Xia, they sent Miyaro to the city of Ordu-Aganhei in Hongal to wait for the arrival of the strangers, and to verify that they bear with them the true heir to the throne of Minkai.

Like a fox prowling the edges of a farmyard, Miyaro risks living on the borders of human lands to learn what

she can about the Five Storms. The kami she serves do not leave the Forest of Spirits, so it is up to Miyaro to be their eyes and ears in the lands outside. Ordu-Aganhei offers Miyaro the chance to hear gossip about the Five Storms, so she goes to great lengths to blend into the villages near the city, passing as a simple peasant woman of no consequence to do so.

Although her appearance is no more unusual than any kitsune's, Miyaro's mannerisms seem odd at times, as if she were just a visitor in this world. Although a living, physical being, Miyaro feels more like a kami in her heart, and she responds to the outside world much as a kami would. She is strange and aloof, at times fascinated by the colors of the carpet of pine needles under the trees, at other times pausing for several minutes to admire the way the sun dances along a mountain ridge. Miyaro is not acquisitive—money and treasure do not interest her in the slightest, other than as means to reach an end. She is likely to walk past a jeweled sword to admire a flower or put aside a magic staff to look at the lichen growing behind it.

Miyaro has to work at blending in with humanity, and while she's had plenty of experience, she is not used to working closely with humans as companions. Those who observe her intently soon discover that Miyaro is a consummate actress—her performance is almost flawless, but she is nonetheless playing a role. Even so, with time, the PCs can truly befriend Miyaro, and as she becomes more comfortable in their company, so too does she warm to them and become a loyal and steadfast ally, though her heart will forever belong to the Forest of Spirits.

CAMPAIGN ROLE

Miyaro serves as the PCs' guide and counselor through the Forest of Spirits, as well as their contact with the mysterious kami of the forest. Even once she has led them to the House of Withered Blossoms, Miyaro's job is not done. The oni still threaten Minkai and the natural order of all of Tian Xia, so Miyaro continues to guide and assist the PCs in the coming adventures.

The kami cannot directly interfere with what is happening in Minkai, but their mortal agents, such as Miyaro and the PCs, have no such restrictions. However, Miyaro is more kami than kitsune, at least in her heart and mind, and might choose inaction over direct intervention.

But what happens if the PCs are down to their last fighter when being attacked by giants? Does Miyaro watch impassively or does she join in the fight? Try to make Miyaro a valuable ally who offers needed help at exactly the right moment, without being someone the PCs can constantly count on. Miyaro has her own masters, and their inscrutable

objectives might be more important than her aid in a single battle, even if such a fact is not revealed until much later.

When playing Miyaro, be careful to balance these two warring sides of her nature. If she is too neutral and aloof, she can seem less than helpful and may alienate your players. On the other hand, if she is too active, the players might feel that they have nothing to fear, as Miyaro will always be there to assist them. Even worse, they might feel their own characters are taking a secondary role. A subtle blending of both approaches probably works best for most groups, with Miyaro guiding the PCs, but actively helping them only when necessary, like a watchful parent who guides a child in riding a horse without herself taking the reins.





MUNASUKARU



THE LEAST OF THE FIVE STORMS, MUNASUKARU WAS LEFT TO HOLD THE HOUSE OF WITHERED BLOSSOMS WHEN HER COMRADES ESCAPED. SINCE THEN, SHE HAS FOUGHT A NONSTOP BATTLE AGAINST AKINOSA AND HIS ARANEA FOLLOWERS FOR CONTROL OF THE ANCIENT PAGODA.

MUNASUKARU, THE LEAST

CR 13

XP 25,600

Female ja noi fighter (polearm master) 8 (see page 90, *Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide* 106)

LE Medium outsider (oni, goblinoid, native, shapechanger)

Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 17, flat-footed 23 (+7 armor, +2 deflection, +4 Dex, +1 dodge, +4 natural)

hp 178 (14d10+101); regeneration 3 (acid or fire)

Fort +17, **Ref** +12, **Will** +8

Weaknesses negative level

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee *thundering blade* +23/+18/+13 (1d8+14/19–20/x4)

Ranged mwk repeating heavy crossbow with *screaming bolt* +19/+14/+9 (1d10+2/19–20)

Special Attacks pole fighting* –3, polearm training* +1, steadfast pike* +2

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 5th; concentration +6)

3/day—*command* (DC 12), *doom* (DC 12), *fly*, *magic weapon*

1/day—*bull's strength*

* See the *Advanced Player's Guide*.

TACTICS

Before Combat Munasukaru casts *bull's strength* and fly before combat.

During Combat Munasukaru flies into combat, firing *screaming bolts* from her repeating crossbow at approaching foes. Once in melee combat, Munasukaru wields her stolen naginata with precision, even though using it gives her a negative level. A mighty combatant, Munasukaru believes herself to be the progeny of the gods, and she attempts to intimidate opponents by describing to them exactly what tortures she plans to subject them to once she defeats them.

Morale The least and last of the Five Storms, Munasukaru considers it her sacred duty to guard the kimon and remain in the House of Withered Blossoms so that the kami outside cannot abandon their watch. If reduced to fewer than 50 hit points, she retreats temporarily to activate her armor's healing ability or drink one of the *potions of cure serious wounds* in area E7 before returning to the fray. Munasukaru does not surrender.

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 18, **Con** 24, **Int** 12, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +14; **CMB** +20; **CMD** 37

Feats Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Deceitful, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (repeating heavy crossbow), Improved Critical (naginata), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (naginata), Weapon Specialization (naginata)

Skills Bluff +17, Disguise +12, Fly +14, Intimidate +17, Perception +19, Sense Motive +12, Stealth +10

Languages Common, Goblin, Tien

SQ change shape (Small or Medium humanoid, *alter self*), serene fighter

Combat Gear *screaming bolts* (10); **Other Gear**, *do-maru of broken flesh* (+2 *do-maru*; see page 60), *thundering blade of the House of Sugimatu* (+1 *thundering naginata*; see page 61), masterwork repeating crossbow, flawed *crystal ball* (the subject of the scrying automatically notices the magical sensor created by the *crystal ball*), *clear spindle ioun stone*, *ring of protection* +2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Negative Level Wielding the *thundering blade of the House of Sugimatu* gives Munasukaru a permanent negative level. This negative level remains as long Munasukaru wields the naginata.

Long ago, the ja noi oni Munasukaru wandered the Forest of Spirits, leading a small band of goblinoid followers in hunting and slaughtering the wood's inhabitants, while avoiding the kami that patrolled the forest looking for her kind to eradicate. Eventually, she learned of other oni in the forest, including the powerful wind yai named Anamurumon who held court in the House of Withered Blossoms. Rather than fight an endless—and Munasukaru suspected, ultimately futile—battle against the kami, Munasukaru resolved to find Anamurumon and join forces with him.

Leading her hobgoblin followers to the House of Withered Blossoms, Munasukaru discovered that Anamurumon had more than enough allies and troops of his own, and her own pitiful band was just that. Nevertheless, in exchange for her fealty, Anamurumon made Munasukaru a commander in the Five Storms, though she was the least of his officers.

In the great halls of the oni palace beneath the House of Withered Blossoms, Munasukaru loyally served Anamurumon and the Five Storms. Over time, and always

from afar, Munasukaru began to desire her beloved leader. If not love—for such emotions are unknown to the oni—it was lust, or desire, and Munasukaru did everything she could to please Anamurumon.

When the time came to harvest souls to power the kimono, the demon gate that would allow the oni to escape their imprisonment, it was Munasukaru's hobgoblins who first began the search, whispering to the other goblinoids in the Forest of Spirits of the living gods who needed mortal hands to assist them. Such helpers, they said, would be greatly rewarded when these "gods" turned Minkai into a playground of sin, lust, and wanton destruction.

And when the souls had been harvested and the kimono opened, Anamurumon repaid Munasukaru's loyalty and devotion by abandoning her and ordering her to remain behind in the House of Withered Blossoms to further his own ends.

The long, lonely years in the company of only lesser beings such as her hobgoblin followers have driven Munasukaru to madness. In her boredom, she has tried to lift her spirits by using her followers and their aranea captives as playthings—both for breeding, and for tortures—but they are never more than a temporary diversion. And so Munasukaru sought a different outlet for madness and anger, a record of her experiments and amusements that became her Penance, an ongoing work of art that reflects the twisted, monstrous mind of its creator.

CAMPAIGN ROLE

Munasukaru is the last remaining oni of the Five Storms in the House of Withered Blossoms, bound by an oath to her leader Anamurumon never to leave, and thus she keeps the kami of the Forest of Spirits outside at their eternal vigil over an effectively empty prison. Her endless war with the aranea sorcerer Akinosa has filled her endless lonely hours with purpose, and that purpose has become her obsession. If that enemy no longer threatened her, Munasukaru might soon turn on her own loyal followers, if only to pass the time.

If she somehow survives this adventure, Munasukaru does not dare to contact Anamurumon or her oni kin, at least not at first. Having failed at her task to hold on to the House of Withered Blossoms, Munasukaru must redeem herself first. She thus follows the PCs into Minkai, certain that they are bound up with the fate of the spirits.

Seeking to halt the PCs, who managed to obtain information on how to defeat the Five Storms under her watch, Munasukaru quickly gains followers, who rapidly move through the lands of Minkai gathering more.

Eventually, this should result in a showdown between the PCs and the followers of Munasukaru in the next adventure. Like her forces in the House of Withered Blossoms, Munasukaru's new followers should be predominantly goblinoid. She rebuilds the ranks of the Withered Blossom Warriors with even more powerful hobgoblin warriors, and inducts new, more highly trained initiates into the order of the Sisters of the Broken Path. Giants or even human ronin in search of a new master might flock to her banner, as well as other oni, seeking their own glory and power by allying themselves to Munasukaru. Finally, if her spawn were slain beneath the pagoda, Munasukaru swells the ranks of her army with new monstrous children—ja noi, spirit nagas, or perhaps something even more strange and terrible.



JADE REGENT TREASURES

THE FOLLOWING UNIQUE TREASURES CAN BE FOUND IN “FOREST OF SPIRITS.” PLAYER-APPROPRIATE HANDOUTS APPEAR IN THE GAMEMASTERY JADE REGENT ITEM CARD SET.

AKUMI'S BONSAI

This small bonsai tree is the ward of the fukujin kami Akumi, who has grown and tended the tree over many centuries. The tree is nonmagical, but it is a magnificent representation of the art of the bonsai master. Although battered and withered when found, it can soon be brought back to strength with proper care and nurture. A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check is required to correctly tend the bonsai each month. Only one character can make the required Knowledge (nature) check and only one check is made each month. If correctly tended and watered for a period of 3 months, Akumi's bonsai is rejuvenated.

If the PC recover Akumi's bonsai from the House of Withered Blossoms and return it to the kami, Akumi allows the PCs to take the bonsai with them, and as long as they tend the tree and keep it in good health, he agrees to be at their service once per day. Akumi merges with his ward, and thereafter the PCs can call upon the kami to manifest once per day. The kami is not interested in engaging in combat, but he will use his abilities to aid the PCs as best as he is able. In addition, while Akumi is merged with the bonsai, anyone sleeping within 15 feet of the bonsai heals 2 hit points per character level with a full night's sleep.

On a failed knowledge (nature) check to tend the tree, the bonsai loses its enhanced healing property until a successful check is made. If a second check is failed, Akumi no longer manifests when called. A third failed check results in Akumi leaving the PCs, and taking the bonsai with him. These effects are cumulative.

Akumi's bonsai weighs 5 pounds.

DO-MARU OF BROKEN FLESH

Aura moderate evocation; **CL** 9th

Slot armor; **Price** 20,550 gp; **Weight** 30 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

Once per day as a standard action, the wearer of this +2 *do-maru armor* (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Combat* 128) can activate the armor to heal 4d8+9 points of damage and end any and all of the following conditions affecting the wearer: ability damage, blinded, confused, dazzled, deafened, diseased, exhausted, fatigued, nauseated, poisoned, and sickened. In addition, this effect functions as *break enchantment* upon a single additional effect of the wearer's choice that is affecting the wearer and that can be legally affected by this effect.

Such healing, however, comes at a cost. The *do-maru* of

broken flesh creates vivid, ugly scars on the wearer, who takes 1d4 points of Charisma damage each time this ability is used.

Do-maru is medium armor that provides a +5 armor bonus. The armor has an arcane spell failure chance of 25%, a maximum Dexterity bonus of +4, and an armor check penalty of -4. Do-maru costs 200 gp and weighs 30 lbs.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *cleanse* (*Advanced Player's Guide* 211); **Cost** 10,450 gp

FLASK OF ENDLESS SAKE

Aura faint enchantment; **CL** 5th

Slot none; **Price** 4,000 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This simple ceramic flask looks like any other normal container for serving sake, or rice wine. If the flask's silver stopper is removed and the command word spoken, up to 1 gallon of sake can be poured from the flask per round. In addition, once per day, a character can drink directly from the flask to gain the effects of a potion, determined randomly. Roll 1d6 on the following table to determine the type of potion.

d6 Roll	Potion type
1	<i>heroism</i>
2	<i>cure moderate wounds</i>
3	<i>enlarge person</i>
4	<i>reduce person</i>
5	<i>lesser restoration</i>
6	<i>rage</i>

This potion cannot be poured out or saved for later use; it must be drunk, and the potion's effects take place immediately.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, *create water*, *cure moderate wounds*, *enlarge person*, *heroism*, *lesser restoration*, *rage*, *reduce person*; **Cost** 2,000 gp

JINGASA OF THE FORTUNATE SOLDIER

Aura strong divination; **CL** 15th

Slot head; **Price** 5,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

This conical iron *jingasa*, or war hat, bears the crest of an ancient house of Minkai. The *jingasa of the fortunate soldier* grants a +1 luck bonus to AC when worn. In addition, once per day as an immediate action, the wearer can negate a single

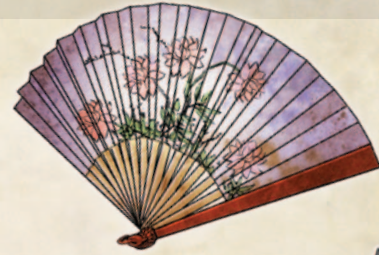
JADE REGENT TREASURES



JINGASA OF THE
FORTUNATE SOLDIER



DO-MARU OF
BROKEN FLESH



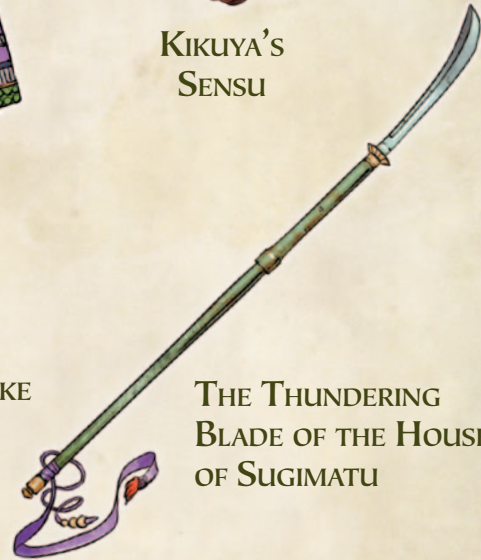
KIKUYA'S
SENSU



AKUMI'S
BONSAI



FLASK OF
ENDLESS SAKE



THE THUNDERING
BLADE OF THE HOUSE
OF SUGIMATU

critical hit or sneak attack. When a critical hit or sneak attack is scored on the wearer, the critical hit or sneak attack is negated and damage is instead rolled normally.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *divine favor*, *moment of prescience*; **Cost** 2,500 gp

KIKUYA'S SENSU

Aura moderate evocation; **CL** 11th
Slot none; **Price** 30,840 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This folding fan made from cypress wood and lacquered paper is said to have belonged to Kikuya, a legendary Minkai *oiran*, or courtesan. When held in the hand, *Kikuya's sensu* grants a +2 competence bonus on the bearer's Charisma-based checks. While held, the fan provides the somatic component for spells cast by the bearer.

Once per day on command, the bearer can use one face of the fan to cast *calm emotions*. Also once per day, the fan's other face can create a *forceful hand*. In addition, the bearer can whisper behind *Kikuya's sensu* and send the words up to 3 miles away, as the *whispering wind* spell, once per day.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *calm emotions*, *cat's grace*, *forceful hand*, *whispering wind*; **Cost** 15,420 gp

THE THUNDERING BLADE OF THE HOUSE OF SUGIMATU

Aura moderate evocation; **CL** 7th
Slot none; **Price** 28,415 gp; **Weight** 9 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

Once per day as a standard action, the bearer of this +1 *thundering naginata* (*Ultimate Combat* 133) can strike the blade against the ground, causing it to ring with a deafening clangor that functions as the *shout* spell.

Stolen by Munasukaru years ago, the *thundering blade* is the ancestral weapon of the Sugimatu family, one of the five imperial families of Minkai. The *thundering blade* is imbued with royal honor, and bestows one permanent negative level on any creature without honor that attempts to wield it (such as oni, traitors, kinslayers, and the like). The negative level remains as long as the weapon is in hand and disappears when the weapon is no longer wielded. This negative level cannot be overcome in any way (including by *restoration* spells) while the weapon is wielded.

A naginata is a two-handed martial melee weapon that deals 1d8 points of slashing damage and has a critical modifier of x4. A naginata is a reach weapon. A naginata costs 35 gp and weighs 9 lbs.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *blindness/deafness*, *shout*; **Cost** 14,375 gp



ECOLOGY OF THE KAMI

“KNOW YOU NOTHING, FARM BOY? I AM KAMI, AND YOU NEED NOT FLEE, OR FEAR. I AM WISER THAN THE WIND, STEADIER THAN THE STONE; I AM GUARDIAN OF THE INNOCENT, PROTECTOR OF SHRINES THAT HAVEN’T THE MEANS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. I AM THE VOICE OF THE SACRED PLACES, FROM THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN TEMPLE TO THE MOST HIDDEN SHRINE OF THE VALLEY, AND FRIEND TO ALL THOSE WHO PAY THEM RESPECT.

“WHY DO YOU SCURRY IN ALARM? ARE YOU WICKED? FOR ONLY THE WICKED NEED FEAR KAMI, WHO ARE THE PROTECTORS OF ALL WORKS, THE SHIELDS OF ALL CREATIONS.”

—THE CHARACTER TEKI,
FROM A PLAY ADAPTATION OF THE *TAYAGAMA*

Kami are spiritual beings created by the gods and tasked with maintaining the balance of the natural world. This maintenance comes in the form of protecting the various creatures and things on the Material Plane that are often unable to protect themselves. Each kami has a particular “ward” that it watches over, such as an inanimate object, a plant, a creature, or even a region. Intelligent beings (such as most humanoids) and objects that exist outside of the natural order (such as undead creatures and constructs) do not have kami. One can predict the strength of a particular kami by the nature of its ward: A rock or frog kami may be a relatively impotent thing, but a redwood kami, a blue whale kami, or the kami of a mountain often exercises massive power. The vast majority of kami are good or neutral in alignment. Those rare kami who fall to evil—usually after failing their ward in some way—generally have their physical forms revoked by the gods, and are condemned to become wandering spirits who either perish in their aimless voyages or are pushed to become hateful and vengeful oni.

A kami forms an extremely intimate bond with its ward, melding with the object or creature the majority of the time and manifesting a physical body when it must protect the thing or otherwise chooses. A kami prefers its spiritual form more often than not, and assumes a physical form only when necessary, such as when it must communicate with mortals or shield its ward. While this manifestation leaves a kami vulnerable to death like any other mortal creature, the kami is almost always willing to make this sacrifice in order to protect its ward.

Not everything in the world has a kami, as there aren't yet enough kami to represent every individual object, plant, and animal; filling this gap, however, is their eventual goal, and kami fervently spread themselves across lands in hopes of pairing every creation with a kami spirit. This grand design began in Minkai, and in the past several thousand years the kami have proliferated across much of Tian Xia. It is unclear exactly which regions the kami hope to expand into next, though they can potentially exist in any environment, and the other continents—including those of the Inner Sea region—are clearly viable options.

KAMI AND WARDS

The inanimate object, creature, plant, or region with which a kami is paired is known as its ward. A kami does not possess its ward and therefore does not control it. While the relationship between kami and ward is a deeply intimate one, it is perhaps more accurate to think of a kami as simply inhabiting its ward. Once attached to one another, the two develop a strong interdependence. A kami may leave its ward in either its spiritual or physical form, but the kami must eventually return to its ward to rejuvenate its strength, and while immensely powerful magic can be called upon to

permanently separate kami and ward, nothing can break the mystical connection between them. A kami estranged from its ward for an extended period of time grows increasingly erratic; its powers wane significantly, and it is at serious risk of permanently losing its normally calm resolve, increasing the likelihood of the kami devolving into an oni. Wards whose kami have left them often show signs of premature aging or wear—animals become listless and appear ill, weak, or uncharacteristically skittish or aggressive; objects become brittle, lose their luster, or appear to wear down quicker; plants wither or lose their fragrance and potency; and regions slowly degenerate into dilapidated, ruined versions of their former selves.

Though kami are bound to defend their wards, this defense is always secondary to their defense of nature as a whole. Thus, a kami bound to a fox and a kami bound to a field mouse do not battle to the death when the former kills the latter. Predation, as well as death from old age, are part of the natural cycles laid down by the gods, and to end life in a matter fitting with one's station is all any ward—or its associated kami—can ask for. A kami whose ward dies in such an honorable manner still suffers ill effects, but will often either die itself shortly thereafter and be reborn as a kami attached to a new ward, or else set out to find another (and usually similar) ward to guard—in the aforementioned example, perhaps as one of the field mouse's offspring.

KAMI HISTORY

Created by the gods at the dawn of the Material Plane, kami were tasked with the sacred duty to multiply and shelter the gods' creations. The gods also established a set of labyrinthine rules known as the *Laws of Golden Perfection*, which affect every aspect of the conduct of kami and their interaction with the world and its inhabitants. Beginning in Minkai (which accounts for their extensive presence in that nation), kami have spread all over Tian Xia in compliance with this divine directive.

A kami who falls from grace or fails its ward because of negligence is punished severely, and may lose its status as a kami if the offense is serious enough. Most fallen kami accept this terrible fate if it comes to pass, becoming purposeless spirits who lack the ability to interact with the Material Plane at all. However, those who come to resent their status, or those driven mad by their homeless misery, become oni, evil spirits in the flesh. Oni exist in endless conflict with kami, resenting them for the favor the gods show them and for what the oni see as their misguided devotion to the divine directive to shield creation. (See “The Ecology of the Oni” in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #49* for more details on these vicious beings.) In contrast, oni see the world as a playground on which to indulge every base whim and desire that might cross their selfish and venal hearts. Though they often act in direct opposition to the

kami, oni too must abide by the tangled and voluminous *Laws of Golden Perfection*, but the cruel beings do their best to bend and manipulate these strictures in their pursuit of physical pleasures. Kami and oni recognize one another on sight, regardless of the form each has taken. Kami find oni to be dreadful embarrassments, or live in fear that they may one day fail in their sacred responsibilities and become oni themselves.

THE TAYAGAMA

This much-loved epic poem, written thousands of years ago by bards whose names have been lost to history, prominently features kami and oni. Like those creatures themselves, the poem has crossed numerous national borders throughout Tian Xia, becoming a shared touchstone for many different cultures. While comic exaggeration and hyperbole is its hallmark, the *Tayagama* also provides useful insight into both those mystical beings and the Tian peoples as a whole, as many varied cultural traditions often subtly tie back to the saga in some way. For instance, the most beloved of all kami presented in the poem is Teki, a fukujin who serves as the protagonist's guardian. As a consequence, Teki is a favorite name for a beloved pet in Minkai and several other nations. Several other cultural ties to the *Tayagama* include the following.

- It is considered an ill omen to name one's child after the protagonist of the *Tayagama*, Tayago, who in the end is killed by a vengeful oni. Tians often warn foolish children "not to follow in the path of Tayago."
- A tree or bush with a green cloth tied to it found along a path indicates that a hidden source of drinkable water or a plant bearing edible fruit lies nearby. This is a reference to the *Tayagama*'s protagonist, who comes upon a magic green scarf that guides him to that which he seeks when he lets it blow in the breeze. (Of course, in real life, bandits sometimes use this custom to trick unsuspecting or superstitious travelers into ambushes.)
- An adult who claps after sneezing reveals that she is a very superstitious individual. In the *Tayagama*, Tayago occasionally sneezes, blowing poor Teki away so that he must summon him back for aid by clapping his hands. This gesture, common among younger children, is considered silly by most adults.

KAMI-HUMANOID RELATIONS

Humanoid communities in Tian Xia have many different types of relationships with kami, and these variations are often related to the way in which a community interacts with its surrounding environment. Settlements that depend on cooperation with nature, such as those of farmers and herders, tend to coexist peacefully with kami. Citizens of these cooperative settlements often construct roadside shrines to kami, where they provide offerings of incense,

rice, wheat, milk, and so on. In these communities, nearby areas of wilderness are frequently honored by the people with celebrations and festivals intended to foster harmony with the neighboring kami. Most such festivals occur at the beginning of planting and harvest seasons. Cooperative communities frown on outsiders who do not show proper respect for the natural world or violate sacred areas, seeing this as a direct assault on the safety of their homes and the kami they live with.

Communities that sap the land via exploitation or extraction—such as through mining, fishing, or logging—tend to have tense relationships with neighboring kami. In these locales, shrines are often forbidding places, visited by designated representatives who bear offerings composed of materials that were taken from nature. For instance, those living near an iron mine may leave a dagger or bowl of arrowheads. Local ceremonies are geared toward appeasement of the spirits rather than thanking them, and dour festivals are intended only to avert kami's capricious wrath. Outsiders who anger local kami are treated with hostility for bringing misfortune upon a community, and the communities often demand recompense.

Places with naturally adversarial relationships with their environments—most notably urban centers—have difficulty maintaining relationships with kami. These larger settlements often try to appease kami in little ways, such as by constructing parks within city limits to placate the spiritual beings. More often, however, such communities resort to violence against kami, whom they see as enemies of progress or their industrial efforts. These settlements often place emphasis on setting up barriers and protections against kami, characterizing them as backward-minded monsters bent on destruction.

Of course, even communities that have hostile relations with kami of the forest, rivers, and hills may have better connections with the kami of inanimate objects, such as dosojins and zuishins. An urban scholar may have a playful and cooperative relationship with a book kami or the kami of a library, and a blacksmith might work closely with a furnace kami.

ORACLES, DRUIDS, AND RANGERS

Typically, people dedicated to the preservation of some sort of balance experience the greatest success in their interactions with kami. Of these people, the Tian oracles have much influence regarding the dealings of kami. Wealthier societies usually employ these mystics for the purpose of appeasing or wrestling with the neighboring kami. Many such mediums, however, wander the continent as itinerant priests who mediate on behalf of communities too small to support a permanent oracle. For a price, these seers aid settlers in mundane tasks to appease local kami, such as identifying the right place to dig a new well or plant a crop,

or how best to go about placating kami in potential mining, fishing, and logging areas. Such oracles might demarcate sacred regions of wilderness, establish and maintain kami shrines, and educate residents on achieving harmony with the spirits. Perhaps most importantly, these knowledgeable oracles identify what must be done to heal the breach if local kami have been severely agitated by humanoid activity. These oracles generally have the haunted curse, and always embrace a mystery that intersects with the natural world (such as life, metal, nature, stone, waves, wind, or wood). Most of these oracles are good or neutral in alignment, and while they tend to be hired by humanoids, at times they may actually side with kami to thwart unacceptable encroachments on the natural world.

The only reference to oracles in the famous poem cycle known as the *Tayagama* is to a charlatan named Hema Ri. Attired in clothes made of straw and owl feathers, with the wishbone of a chicken through his nose, this ne'er-do-well often contradicts Teki, the miniscule kami who serves as the guardian of the poem's hero. Without fail, hapless Tayago follows Hema Ri's advice, leading to comically disastrous circumstances from which the stalwart Teki must rescue him, only to have Tayago somehow attribute the positive outcome to the charlatan's supposed wisdom. While Hema Ri's role in the *Tayagama* is for the most part purely comical, insightful Tians know to garner important lessons from this character, as there are many such pretenders roaming the countryside. These con artists are most often lowly bards or sorcerers at best, swindlers who use their magical abilities to fool credulous country folk out of their money. True oracles do not take kindly to the manipulative games of these charlatans, revealing frauds with zest and allowing the victims of their deceptions to exact punishment.

Druids are as rare in Tian Xia as in other civilized parts of Golarion, though druidic influence in the Dragon Empires' rural communities is strengthened because of druids' peaceful relations with the populous kami. Though Tian druids are often hermetic and stick to the wilder regions within the nation, their reputation for upholding the sanctity of nature at all costs and steadfastly siding with kami in times of dispute makes them a feared force among many Tians.

Rangers, while typically associated with druids for their similar fascination with the wilds, ride the line between nature and society, and are more often seen as mediators between the sometimes incomprehensible dealings of kami and the acts of civilization. Though rangers are not regarded as highly as oracles in this role, they are often viewed as less cryptic and eerie, making them preferred

channels for Tians seeking immediate answers and aid in regard to kami interactions. Rangers may be more closely associated with animals rather than the land itself; such rangers usually work in close cooperation with these animals and their kami, whom they see as extensions of the animals themselves.

TYPES OF KAMI

The different types of kami exist in nearly endless variety. Listed below are brief descriptions of nine of the most common types of kami. Statistics for the jinushigami, kodama, shikigami, toshigami, and zuishin can be found in *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3*, while the others are detailed in the Bestiary of this volume.



TOSHIGAMI

KAMI SUBTYPE

Kami are a race of native outsiders who serve to protect what they refer to as “wards”—animals, plants, objects, and even locations—from being harmed or dishonored. All kami are outsiders with the native subtype. All kami possess the following traits (unless otherwise noted in a creature’s entry).

- Immune to bleed, mind-affecting effects, petrification, and polymorph effects.
- Resist acid 10, electricity 10, fire 10.
- Kami sleep, but do not need to breathe or eat.
- Telepathy.
- **Fast Healing (Ex)** As long as a kami is within 120 feet of its ward, it gains fast healing. The amount of fast healing it gains depends on the type of kami.
- **Merge with Ward (Su)** As a standard action, a kami can merge its body and mind with its ward. When merged, the kami can observe the surrounding region with its senses as if it were using its own body, as well as via any senses its ward might have. It has no control over its ward, nor can it communicate or otherwise take any action other than to emerge from its ward as a standard action. To merge with or emerge from a ward, a kami must be adjacent to its ward. In the case of a creature, plant, or object, the kami can emerge mounted on the creature if its body is at least one size category smaller than the creature. In the case of a location, the kami may emerge at any point within that location.
- **Ward (Su)** A kami has a specific ward: a creature with an Intelligence score of 2 or lower (usually an animal or vermin), a plant (not a plant creature), an object, or a location. Several of a kami’s abilities function only when it is either merged with its ward or when it is within 120 feet of its ward. If a kami’s ward is portable and travels with the kami to another plane, the kami does not gain the extraplanar subtype on that other plane as long as its ward remains within 120 feet. If a ward is destroyed while a kami is merged with it, the kami dies (no save). If a ward is destroyed while a kami is not merged with it, the kami loses its ability to merge with the ward and its fast healing, and becomes permanently sickened.



Dosojin (Travel Kami): Appearing at crossroads and along vast highways, dosojins represent the efforts of civilization to expand through travel and trade, taking as their wards both trails and roads. While a dosojin’s ward is often a remote road or far-off trail, these kami are known for being particularly social as well as helpful in regard to efforts toward humanoid expansion. Although they condone the growth and spread of humanoid

settlements, dosojins also seek a balance, and are quick to reprimand or outright abandon humanoid efforts if such expansions disregard their effects on nature and the wards of other kami.

Fukujin (Bonsai Kami): Peaceful and resolute, fukujins are small spirits that watch over the miniature trees of the same name grown by humanoids. While it is the eventual goal of many bonsai tree growers to attain a kami for her shrub, only the most patient and skilled gardeners draw the attention of such spirits. Those who garner the trust of a fukujin are often rewarded with sound advice about many different subjects, as the beings are exceedingly wise.

Jinushigami (Land Kami): The most powerful of all kami, these enormous spirits are the guardians of huge masses of land such as volcanoes, glaciers, and forests. They tower over most creatures, reaching heights of up to 40 feet and seeming to be composed of all elements of nature at once, including earth, stone, and plant matter. A jinushigami’s ward is an entire region, and when it is melded with its ward, the kami is able to see and touch all who traverse the expanse. Normally benevolent, jinushigamis aid travelers by manipulating the terrain around them as they travel through the kami’s ward, clearing paths and diverting disasters for those who respect the kami and their ways. However, jinushigamis can just as quickly turn on those who abuse their trust, bringing upon evildoers the wrath of entire landscapes, with disasters such as flash floods and rockslides punishing those who would seek to disrupt the balance of nature. Still more powerful are the elder jinushigamis, massive beings of legend who hold sway over entire mountain ranges, great reefs, and vast deserts.

Kaminari (Thunder Kami): These enormous kami dwell within the hearts of powerful storms, constantly beating upon their drums with bravado and boisterous glee. Kaminaris are known for caring about only two things on the Material Plane, their wards and their instruments, and most are only too happy to submit to this stereotype, as long as it allows them to play their music. While kaminaris often care little for the dealings of mortals, they are known to take great pleasure in conversing with bards, whom they see as fellow appreciators of musical arts. In the *Tayagama*, Tayago gains favor with a robust kaminari when he accompanies the thunder kami’s drumming with the melodies of a magical flute.

Kodama (Tree Kami): The typical spirits of wild trees, these kami appear as tiny bipedal humanoids. Usually a single uniform color with nothing more than dark spots denoting eyes and a mouth, these miniscule kami often function as a cohesive group, relying on their numbers to protect the forests they dwell in. The emergence of numerous kodamas from their wards can be startling to the uninitiated, but as long as trespassers don’t seriously perturb the surrounding forest, they find the kodamas

no more than curious distractions. In fact, encountering kodamas is often considered a good omen for travelers, as they are indicators of a healthy, peaceful forest. However, those who disrupt a wooded area will find kodamas capable of causing considerable harm to interlopers, especially if such miscreants are mounted. These kami have a great deal of influence over the flora around them, and can direct the foliage to hinder and trip foes when necessary, shifting from tree to tree to hide their positions and using the element of surprise to attack when they have to.

Shikigami (Garden Kami): These fragile beings attach themselves to small humanoid-made objects and works of civilization: garden statuaries, stepping-stones, and other minor works of art. Their physical form is in some ways like that of kodamas—vaguely humanoid in shape—but they resemble actual living beings even less than the tree kami, and sometimes wear miniature humanoid affectations like hats and jewelry made of base materials such as straw and rope. A shikigami is about 2 feet tall and is marked with a single rune on its chest. It is common to see stone statues in gardens and along walkways that represent these quiet spirits, and some Tian spellcasters manage to employ shikigamis as familiars.

Suijin (Water Kami): As the guardians of lakes, ponds, springs, and other relatively small bodies of water, suijin wield the powers of water in their efforts to protect their wards. Regarded as mystical and mysteriously beautiful, these spirits are known for their varying temperaments as well as their strange rituals in the dead of night. Aloof as far as kami go, most suijin interact with humanoids only when absolutely necessary, preferring to let things run their natural course, much like the waterways which they steadfastly watch over. But when a suijin's ward is endangered, it can prove a powerful adversary, and those who live in concord with other nearby water kami can call upon the great koi-serpents in times of need.

Toshigami (Blossom Kami): Toshigamis are unique in their attachment to those places and things related to the passage of time, and are thus quite powerful. A toshigami's physical form is that of an old woman seemingly made out of a cherry tree—half of the form blossoming, the other half barren—and wielding a staff that possesses the powers of both youth and

old age. These kami represent the beginnings and endings of all things, and are often honored by spiritual Tians through the celebration of cherry blossoms every spring. Because of their relation to both birth and death, however, most people have a very ambivalent response to these kami, seeing them equally as bringers of life and harbingers of death. Toshigamis are capable of manipulating the flow of time, and can be quite dangerous if incited.

Zuishin (Shrine Kami): Guardians of torii, gateways, and holy places, zuishins are watchful stewards who see themselves as the ultimate enemies of oni. Wielding halberds for close-quarters fighting and bows to ward off foes at a distance, zuishins take great pride in their weapons and the art of combat. Appearing in their physical form as floating, legless samurai, zuishins are always peaceable and helpful to other kami, but non-kami must earn the trust of these individuals before gaining their aid.



JINUSHIGAMI



WAY OF THE NINJA

“EVERY CITY HAS THIEVES. EVEN WITHIN THE MOST HONORABLE SOCIETY, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THOSE WHO SEEK TO BETTER THEMSELVES THROUGH ILLEGITIMATE MEANS. AND WHERE YOU HAVE ENOUGH MEMBERS OF ANY PROFESSION YOU WILL EVENTUALLY HAVE GUILDS, BOUND BY SHARED PROFIT.

“IN MINKAI, HOWEVER, THERE IS A SECOND TYPE OF THIEF: THOSE WHO SHARE A GREATER PURPOSE, AND KILL AND STEAL FOR THE COLLECTIVE. THESE ARE THE SAME CUTTHROATS AND SECOND-STORY MEN, YET BOUND BY A CODE OF HONOR THAT MAKES THEM BOTH A THREAT TO SOCIETY AND AN INTEGRAL PART OF IT. SOME REFER TO THEMSELVES AS SECTS, OTHERS AS FAMILIES, BUT REGARDLESS, THE NINJA CLANS ARE UNLIKE ANY CRIMINALS YOU HAVE FACED BEFORE.”

—INSPECTOR TAKEDA OF ODA, TO A FOREIGN COUNTERPART

Heavily shrouded in mystery and legend, the ninja clan is portrayed in various lights throughout the many lands of Golarion—most of which depict these collectives of guileful individuals as collaborations of violent rogues and assassins. Nowhere, however, is the mythos of the ninja clan so prevalent as in the birthplace of its tale, the nation of Minkai. Whether scheming within the sewers beneath a booming metropolis or huddled in the foothills of distant mountains, ninja hold sway in the underbellies of even the most ostensibly lawful societies, typically operating in shadows and under the guise of unified structures with larger goals.

NINJA CLANS

Ninja operate in a wide variety of circumstances, and under an equally diverse array of banners and goals. While many regard ninja as strictly evil entities who deal only in shadows and deceptions, the truth is that ninja can do as much to aid a society as to damage it, and that most of the time a ninja's motives are as elusive as the masked individual herself. Tales abound of vigilante ninja who assassinate corrupt dictators in the dead of night, yet more often ninja act as merciless mercenaries killing for the coin of powerful merchants and politicians. These masked individuals do not usually construct such elaborate schemes by themselves, however, and most subscribe to familial structures known as clans, which house members who share similar skills and motives. While ninja are commonly feared as glorified assassins, murder is merely a single facet of the shadow warriors' array of expertise, and they just as often possess the skills of spies, scouts, and informants. Each clan specializes in certain aspects of the ninja arts, such as espionage, kidnapping, or burglary, and a clan's particular realm of expertise is often a fair indicator of its larger-scale intentions and dealings.

The history of ninja clans in Minkai is almost as ancient as the nation itself, for the rogue organizations developed at the same time that Minkai warfare became a prominent driving force in the expansion of the empire, with small sects of shadowy warriors rising to power and functioning as soldiers of fortune for the wealthy warlords of the time. Clans' presences within Minkai society grew further as feudalistic principalities gave way to more elaborate governing forces, and open warfare became less viable than covert political dealings. As the Minkaians became accustomed to peace and a sense of calm within their governments, the need for ninja clans continued to expand, taking the fights from the crowded battlefields to the secluded shadows. While the samurai of Minkai—and the rest of Tian Xia—continue the tradition of honorable battle, no such over-arching strictures necessarily restrain ninja, allowing these warriors of darkness to infiltrate and thrive in countless communities.

Belonging to a clan offers a number of benefits to ninja characters, linking her to a cause and tradition. Advancement within the ranks of a clan may grant a character access to more tangible benefits such as the aid of fellow ninja, access to unusual items, or other boons, all subject to GM discretion. The following entries represent a handful of the most prominent ninja clans within Minkai, though other might exist in the country and elsewhere in Tian Xia. Each entry details a clan's founding, purpose, symbol, important members, weapons clan members seek to master, the clan's characteristic teachings, and any rivalries that may exist with other clans.

THE BLACK LOTUS

The Poison Ever Lethal

Symbol: A partially open lotus flower with sable petals.

Current Leader: Kinjo (LN male human ninja 7/ranger 2).

Favored Weapons: Dagger, shuriken, sickle.

Origin: The Black Lotus clan initially emerged within the underworld of Minkai as a band of poisoners with no alliances, willing to work for anyone and unified only under the banner of money. The ancient group's first leader, a ninja of myth known only as the First Lotus, severed ties to all patrons and rulers, knowing that the survival of his clan depended on its being an impartial tool of war rather than the captive weapon of one side or another. Now, the Black Lotus clan's connections and influences run deep in all realms of Minkai society. Their schemes dip into the affairs of every major city, though it is universally known that their aid can be bought for the right price, the clan pledging allegiance only to the highest bidder.

Outlook: Ninja of the Black Lotus clan are almost always lawful neutral, their morals dependent on what profits are to be gained. As long as it pays, no job is too despicable for the mercenaries, and when a sum is paid, the task's completion is assured. The only thing that binds a ninja of the Black Lotus more than the payment of a task is the pact itself, as each ninja stakes her honor on the agreement when it is made. If a ninja of the Black Lotus clan is paid to assassinate a wealthy lord, the ninja will see that the job is done, regardless of how much gold the sniveling victim offers the assassin to spare his life. Only after the completion of the task will she accept another mission. If this next task is the demise of a former employer, it matters not to an operative of the Black Lotus, for the members of the clan view each assignment as a singular loyalty in and of itself. Beyond this convoluted moral philosophy, the Black Lotus clan as a whole distrusts the use of brute force and powerful magic. A Black Lotus ninja may carry an enchanted sword or quaff a restorative potion in the heat of an unexpected battle, but will never stake the success or failure of a mission on anything less than precision and guile,

seeing one's body and one's skills as the only things that are truly trustworthy.

Members: Though the ninja of the Black Lotus clan are often strictly devoted only to the accumulation of wealth and power, members of this clan remain consistently loyal to one another, knowing that dissent within the group is a sure path to the clan's demise. It is strictly forbidden within the Black Lotus clan to accept a contract that targets a member of the clan or would otherwise jeopardize the success of the group, and the punishment for disobeying this law is the swift and silent death of the disobeier. Recruits come to the Black Lotus through many channels, and leaders of the clan themselves never have to search for members. Black Lotus ninja often come from humble origins, with apothecaries, street urchins, and con artists being among the most common candidates. An initiate's ability to keep his word is more important than his history, and few make it past the initial screening stages without proving their undying allegiance to the clan.

Black Lotus ninja sometimes take levels in the ranger class, allowing them to learn the skills of a practiced tracker without jeopardizing their abilities to remain hidden. Of all the clans of Minkai, the Black Lotus has the fewest spellcasters among its members. The current leader of the clan, however, has broken with tradition, and has begun recruiting alchemists for their knowledge of magical elixirs and compounds, which he believes to be the natural extension of the clan's original focus on poison, and necessary if his clan is to hold its own against more overt magic.

Tactics and Training: While most members of the Black Lotus clan retain their traditional respect for poison, many of them have moved beyond the subtlety of poisoned meals or drinks and instead prefer to deliver poison directly via blade or dart. The clan is also known for its impressive skills in the art of infiltration, its members perfecting the arts of infiltration and striking from the shadows of a victim's own home. Such ninja leave no evidence of their ever being in a location, though the clan's trademark memento is a petal from a black lotus flower, a parting gift that every member leaves in her wake upon successfully completing a mission.

Rivalries: The mercenary stance of the Black Lotus clan garners few rivalries from other clans, who often view the members of the Black Lotus as simply dramatic blades for hire. The one rivalry the Black Lotus clan does bitterly carry is with the Ruby Crypt, who use dark magic to pry secrets from the dead and even resurrect victims of Black Lotus attacks, the latter acts often undermining the Black Lotus's reputation for effective assassination. With their magic, ninja of the Ruby Crypt prove that even the most potent venom can be reversed, and their dealings often reveal the Black Lotus's inexperience with magic to be a crucial failing. Though Kinjo seeks to fix this shortcoming

within the strictures of the Black Lotus by making magic a more prominent aspect of training, Black Lotus agents still revel in accepting contracts that disrupt or otherwise compromise the workings of the Ruby Crypt.

THE DRAGONSHADOW

Claws of the Dragon

Symbol: A black silhouette of a dragon's claw.

Current Leader: Keirako (N male human fighter 2/ninja 7).

Favored Weapons: Katana, tekko-kagi.

Origin: The Dragonshadow clan boasts an expansive network of ninja across Minkai whose agents are thought to be in service to a powerful imperial dragon. Much of the clan's origins are as steeped in mystique as the ninja themselves, and while many opposing factions regard the rumor of an imperial dragon master to be nothing more than a hoax, some are not so easily assuaged. Thus the clan remains one of the most feared in the Dragon Empires. Though leaders of the clan come and go with some frequency, members of the clan swear allegiance to a single imperial dragon known as Mikaruna, and it is said that only the current leader of the clan may seek a direct audience with the dragon, a tradition that has reportedly led to many disputes and rivalries within the group.

Outlook: The Dragonshadow clan is said to be heavily influenced by the goals of its patron dragon, and the actions of the clan often stem from obscure prophecies spun by its leader. All of the clan's activities work toward strengthening their draconic leader and expanding his horde, and so its members are often in search of powerful artifacts and vaults of treasure. Particularly audacious members of the Dragonshadow clan earn prestige and power within their ranks by means of assassination and subterfuge among their own kind, but most ninja in the clan content themselves with elaborate schemes to grow their master's hoard.

Members: Due to the sporadic and unpredictable bouts of infighting within the ranks of the Dragonshadow clan, turnover rates are often high, and new blood is continually being introduced into the legions of ninja. Rumors abound of Dragonshadow ninja having access to powerful spells and intricate magical items, and these myths drive many fortune-seekers and treasure hunters to join the clan's numbers. Only the most dedicated candidates survive the rigorous recruiting process, a series of trials whose specifics remain among the clan's best-guarded secrets. Dragonshadow ninja are expected to utilize both physical and arcane strength when completing contracts, and the most powerful members are often individuals who have been trained from childhood in the shadow arts. Sorcerers are prized among the Dragonshadow clan—especially those whose bloodlines hint at draconic origins—and the most powerful members of the clan often train later as dragon disciples.

Tactics and Training: Members of the Dragonshadow clan employ both sorcery and stealth on their missions, increasing their intimidating reputation by barraging their enemies with fearful illusions while they silently destroy them. Using both magic and trickery, Dragonshadow ninja use destructive abilities such as alchemically produced breath weapons and enchanted claw weapons to perpetuate the tales of their draconic powers. While each member of the Dragonshadow clan emulates one particular kind of dragon, all training within the clan emphasizes speed and even flight (among those capable). Those who master such abilities are highly regarded within the clan's ranks.

Rivalries: Dragonshadow ninja possess a fierce pride similar to the dragons they exalt. While infighting is common enough, all members of the clan eagerly unite if it means shaming another clan and proving superiority. Few would call the Dragonshadow clan a direct rival, but fewer still would consider the power-hungry group an ally.

THE EMERALD BRANCH

For the People

Symbol: A cluster of bright green bamboo stalks.

Current Leader: Asahina Zetsu-kai (CG female human aristocrat 3/ninja 5/samurai 3).

Favored Weapons: Kama, bo staff.

Origin: Generally regarded as being composed of heroes of the common folk, the clan of the Emerald Branch is thought to have originally been founded by ronin. The first members of the Emerald Branch are said to have been honorable samurai who were duped by a manipulative and evil lord into performing atrocities against innocents. When the samurai discovered what horrors their master had made them do, they slew their lord in stealth and rededicated their lives to serving the common folk, renouncing their titles as samurai as penance for their crimes. Using the skills of deception and stealth they had gained while working for the evil lord, the ex-samurai formed the clan of the Emerald Branch, swearing to recruit any who prove themselves able and who are dedicated to the pursuit of good at all costs. Now, despite being labeled as instigators and rabble-rousers by their detractors, ninja of the Emerald Branch are often welcome in areas both rural and urban, and always sow their seeds of justice among the poor and fragile before lending any aid to the rich and powerful.

Outlook: Most members of the Emerald Branch are chaotic good, seeing the majority of laws—no matter how well intentioned—as a stepping stone upon which greater tyranny builds. Leaders among the Emerald Branch are often high-ranking members of other philanthropic organizations, using their influence to direct attention away from the clan's more questionable dealings. Their opponents often consider the clan's actions to be reckless

and without forethought, ideals which members of the clan claim are at the heart of true freedom.

Members: More than perhaps any other clan, the Emerald Branch seeks to recruit members from the common folk. While the Oni's Mask clan trains ninja to pass as artisans or laborers before dealing a deadly strike, most members of the Emerald Branch actually are workers of this sort. In the towns and villages where they operate, even the strongest ninja of the Emerald Branch often practice a trade during the day, using their earnings and materials to fund the clan while maintaining a positive presence within the public eye. While it may seem a life of tranquility, ninja of the Emerald Branch are as prone to violent action as any other, knowing the end of a blade is sometimes the swiftest way to a desired result. Reflecting the story of its founders, the clan of the Emerald Branch also counts many ronin among



its numbers, embracing those who seek to pledge allegiance to a valiant cause.

The clan's current head, Asahina Zetsu-kai, is a matronly but strong leader who runs a network of garment houses dealing in exotic silks. This cover allows Asahina to dispatch her most trusted operatives to even the most unlikely regions under the cover of textile merchants.

Tactics and Training: While opponents of the Emerald Branch do their utmost to spread rumors that the clan is no more than a band of amateurs, training within the Emerald Branch is as intense as any other ninja clan. In addition to the physical requirements placed upon a potential ninja, an initiate must prove apt at gathering the support of the people and making snap moral decisions under stressful circumstances. The use of symbols and signs is an important skill among members of the Emerald Branch, as communication between members is often discrete and swift. Emerald Branch ninja practice with a wide variety of weapons, making many members experts in using seemingly mundane equipment for deadly purposes.

Rivalries: The Emerald Branch usually seeks to combat the wrongdoings of tyrannical warlords and evil political figures rather than stimulate rivalries with other clans. The malevolent Oni's Mask clan often proves a thorn in the side of the Emerald Branch, and the two groups often find themselves on opposite sides of the same issues. Whenever the Emerald Branch and Oni's Mask clans cross paths, conflict is brutal and swift.

ONI'S MASK

Blood of the Fiend

Symbol: A snarling crimson oni mask.

Current Leaders: Genhara the Black-Winged (NE male yamabushi tengu ninja 6).

Favored Weapons: Katana, nodachi.

Origin: The clan of the Oni's Mask is a relatively new contender in the realm of ninja clans, but its expansion within Minkai has been swift, and those who know its name do well to fear it. The leader of the clan, a monster named Genhara the Black-Winged, formed the group after slaying the master of the clan he previously belonged to, an organization whose name the ruthless oni scoured from history. The cause of this feud remains unknown, but rumors suggest that the yamabushi tengu somehow absorbed the power of his previous leader and used it to fuel

his own efforts. Genhara makes no attempts to hide his ultimate goals, one of which is the death of a particularly powerful zuishin against whom the oni has long held a grudge. Using his highly skilled ninja to pursue and eliminate kami and other enemies of onikind, Genhara rules his clan mercilessly and with meticulous forethought. While it is usually difficult for casual outsiders to hire members of the Oni's Mask clan, those whose contracts involve the demise of significant kami may have an easier time of it.

Members: Genhara runs the Oni's Mask clan through precise and calculated cruelty, appointing trustworthy cronies to minor positions of power within the strictures of the clan. Though a few traitors have sought to oppose the yamabushi tengu and usurp his position of power, none have succeeded, and the punishment for dissent is both brutal and final. Lowly members rise among the ranks of the clan through unquestioning obedience and the slaughter of kami. Although some have thought to keep the skulls or other trophies from slain kami as proof of their annihilation, Genhara finds little pleasure in such vanity, being happiest when no trace of his enemies remain.

Members of the Oni's Mask clan value stealth above all other things, and followers are trained to shed all forms of pride in favor of fatal precision and skill. To leaders of the clan of the Oni's Mask, there is no room in a ninja's mind for what comes before or after a kill—only the kill itself matters. Most of the clan's recruits are abandoned children taken from the streets and trained as assassins from an early age. These recruits often prove the most loyal and the most skilled, and so Genhara personally sees to the capture of many orphans, urchins, and the young offspring of their victims.

Tactics and Training: Agents of the Oni's Mask typically target either kami or high-ranking government officials. By cutting off the heads of well-meaning factions, Oni's Mask ninja sow discord and darkness everywhere they strike, evils that Genhara assures are all part of his master plan. Since almost all of the missions assigned to ninja of the Oni's Mask come straight from Genhara himself, payment is distributed on a similar basis, riches acquired in heists and high-profile burglaries going to the clan's treasury before being split among its deserving members. Members of the Oni's Mask are dedicated to their master's



cause, and all wear fiendish red masks to conceal their identities. On the rare occasions where ninja of the clan have been caught, witnesses have said that the faces beneath the masks are those of monsters—disfigured beyond recognition, leading many to believe that the clan performs cultlike rituals of debasement upon its members in addition to their other evils.

Rivalries: Genhara's clan and its activities are known and feared by nearly all kami within Minkai, who seek mortal allies in their constant struggle against the menacing force. Beyond these natural rivals, the rampant fear spread by the clan has earned it the eternal enmity of the benevolent Swallowtail Clan, and its violence against peaceful and kind rulers also garners the scorn of the Emerald Branch. However, try as they might, few—if any—have ever pinpointed the hideout of the Oni's Mask, and the elusive ninja are known to seemingly disappear for months or years before striking.

THE RUBY CRYPT

Fates Worse than Death

Symbol: A ruby behind four vertical bars.

Current Leaders: Ranessa (LE female human ninja 7/ sorcerer 5).

Favored Weapon: Kusarigama.

Origin: Members of the Ruby Crypt embrace death in all its forms, and its most zealous members maintain that even death cannot accomplish what more sinister forms of manipulation can reveal. The history of the Ruby Crypt is cloaked by rumor and misinformation. Most origin myths take the form of some kind of riddle, and suggest that the Ruby Crypt clan was once no more than a small collaboration of otherwise unaligned ninja. These ninja joined together to accomplish the difficult mission of silencing a rich noble. While the ninja had little trouble completing the task, they found that the noble was so powerful that he could resurrect himself, and did so every morning after the ninja killed him. The ninja eventually managed to capture the noble, and they imprisoned him deep beneath this city so that though he lived, he was silenced. This story, whether true or merely a fable, aptly illustrates the Ruby Crypt clan's most powerful ideology: that death can be reversed, but imprisonment at the hands of a patient and cunning captor can be made eternal.

Outlook: The members of the Ruby Crypt are usually neutral evil, and they excel at both abduction and torture, performing such wicked deeds for anyone if the price is right. Ninja of the clan maintain that the acquisition of secrets and knowledge are tantamount to power, and that both can be achieved far more readily through coercion than murder. The merciless detachment clan members must possess in order to perform their work usually draws only the most wicked to their fold, with lawful

evil members rising to levels of leadership and others mastering techniques of capture and restraint.

Members: The clan's current leader is a mysterious woman named Ranessa, a ninja said to possess necromantic powers and a diabolical bloodline. Using her abilities to summon extraplanar allies and bend the will of even fiends, the sorcerer encourages the use of magic to augment the guile of individual clan members. Those who join the ranks of the Ruby Crypt often possess magical talent, encouraging numerous clerics, sorcerers, and wizards to join the clan. Yet more valued than all other spellcasters are inquisitors, those who perfectly blend magic and martial ability with the unique skills and demeanors required to wring valuable information out of victims. The most powerful members of the Ruby Crypt are those with the power to speak with the dead or even bring them back to life, though these abilities are only used when the dead in question possesses knowledge truly worth siphoning. Often, agents of the Ruby Crypt seek such subjects in jails and prisons, looking for magic users condemned for the darkest workings of spellcraft. These recruiters offer such criminals freedom in exchange for binding service to the clan, an offer that most happily accept.

Tactics and Training: The members of the Ruby Crypt train in the shadow arts like all other clans, but specialize in abduction over assassination, often using sleep-inducing poisons or nonlethal weapons to knock out targets before dragging them back to a designated holding area. Later, a captured foe is usually imprisoned more permanently within one of the myriad dungeons the clan maintains throughout Minkai. Ninja of the Ruby Crypt keep their prisoners alive as long as possible, drawing secrets and potent knowledge from the victims via prolonged torture, both physical and psychological. Only those seeking extremely well-kept secrets or who otherwise wish to see rivals suffer hire agents of the Ruby Crypt, for its members demand exorbitant fees for their intricate labors.

Rivalries: Ninja of the Ruby Crypt primarily concern themselves with individual targets of great importance that provide access to equally important secrets. Benevolent ninja clans abhor the doings of the Ruby Crypt, not only for their crimes, but also their incessant meddling in the affairs of mortality. More than once have the ninja of other clans been hired to infiltrate Ruby Crypt bastions in the hopes of freeing select prisoners, though few such missions have ever succeeded. In addition to reviling these good-natured clans, the members of the Black Lotus hold particular hatred for the Ruby Crypt, as its dealings often result in the undoing of previously settled contracts. Although the two once fought much more fervently in times long past, the smirch to the Black Lotus's honor has neither been forgiven nor forgotten.



THE RACCOON DOG

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It don't have to be this way, doll face."

The first geisha threw her darts. I could have sidestepped, but Kazuko stood behind me. If I moved, she'd take the hit.

Instead I leaned back, pushing Kazuko down as I swept the big knife across what I was betting was the dart's path.

Desna smiled. Two darts missed me completely. The third sang off the side of my knife. I felt it hit my jacket, but it caught in the leather without scratching my pretty copper skin.

Kazuko hustled away, not into the love house with its bloody corpse, but toward the pond in the center of the Flower and Willow Pavilion. I couldn't decide whether that was smart or stupid. The house was a dead end, but now she was out in the open.

The second geisha guard drew a dagger from her sleeve and moved toward Kazuko. With my off hand, I flicked a dart at her. It pierced her skirt and pinned it to the ground. That was perfect. It wasn't her blood I wanted. It was her undivided attention.

Her partner tumbled toward me, producing a couple of daggers as she rolled up to strike. I saw it coming and swept her ankles. She went down where I'd meant to put her. I knelt hard on one wrist and grabbed the other to control her blades. A little grinding and she let go.

"Drop it," I told the other geisha. I'd heard her rip free the hem of her gown. Her shadow approached me, but I didn't look up. I leaned close to the one I'd caught, gave her a good look at my teeth. Her sweat mingled with the smell

THE RACCOON DOG

of jasmine, and I thought of a half-dozen other wrestling moves I'd prefer to try out with her.

"Izumi, do as he says."

The second geisha dropped her knives and stepped back. Behind her, Kazuko looked on from the edge of the tiny bridge. Her mouth formed an O of surprise or fear. I hoped I hadn't put her off with the big smile. After all that hard work bringing her around, it would be a shame to waste it.

I got up and offered a hand to the geisha I'd knocked down. "I'm not here to hurt anybody. Call your madame. She's the one who's got some explaining to do."

But Madame Chiyoko didn't need calling. Before the geisha could speak, her boss arrived with mine. Takeda, his samurai, and four more pretty guards came with them.

The geisha accepted my hand. I pulled her up into a brief embrace. I whispered a sweet something to make her blush and watched out of the corner of my eye for Kazuko's reaction. She didn't like it one bit.

I was in.

"How dare you send this foreign devil to break into our private garden?" Madame Chiyoko turned on Takeda, her voice rising like a siren as she built up a good mad. The inspector wasn't looking at her, though. He looked past me at the flayed corpse of Matano Hideo, the actor we'd come to find.

The guy Chiyoko told us wasn't here.

Takeda's face remained calm. As the boss moved into the love house for a look at the body, the inspector stood still. His eyes focused past the crime scene. I'd seen that look a thousand times before, usually on the boss's face. Takeda was looking back at a memory.

Beside him, Chiyoko wailed more abuse until Osamu whirled on her.

"Be silent, you shameful woman!"

His shout made her pause. When she opened her mouth again, he raised his hand to strike her. Before the blow could fall, she dropped to the ground, kowtowing at his feet.

"You must show respect," bellowed Osamu. "You have no right—!"

Shiro moved to one side, catching Osamu's eye. Trembling mad, Osamu glanced at his partner, who shook his head.

Osamu lowered his hand and turned away, still shaking. It had to be more than Chiyoko's lie or her rudeness that made him so angry, but I couldn't figure it without knowing more. And it didn't seem the right time to ask.

I retrieved the dart I'd thrown but kept one eye on the samurai. Kazuko joined me in watching the others.

Takeda conferred with the boss beside Matano's body, while Shiro stepped between Osamu and Chiyoko to question the geisha madame.

She confessed that she knew Matano was inside. Tonight was the occasion of something called the water-raising ceremony. In return for his financial sponsorship, the

wealthy actor had come to take the virginity of the house's newest geisha.

At that bit of news, I raised an eyebrow at Kazuko. I didn't say "whorehouse," but she read it on my face.

"It is not the same." She jutted her lip in defiance. I wanted to bite it, nice and soft.

"The honorable Matano was dead when the girl arrived," said Chiyoko. She had transformed since Osamu yelled at her. Instead of avarice, fear colored her face. "The reputation of the house was at stake! We dared not call for the constables."

"You planned to cover it up?" said Shiro. The younger constable sounded calm, but his lip twitched. "How?"

Chiyoko pressed her forehead onto the ground at his feet. She whimpered, "Please."

"Tell me," Shiro insisted.

"I dare not."

"Say it!" He scuffed his foot, threatening to kick her head. Chiyoko whispered, "The Kappas."

Osamu clutched the scabbard of his katana and charged Chiyoko. He might have drawn the blade and beheaded her, but Shiro stepped between them. The anger on his own face told Osamu that he felt the same way, but he wouldn't let the older man kill the witness.

The boss and Takeda finished in the love house. Osamu opened his mouth to report, but Takeda beckoned him to follow as he walked past Chiyoko. I fell in, Kazuko at my side.

As we wound through the inner and outer halls of the Flower and Willow Pavilion, geisha knelt outside the door to every room. They bowed low, turning as we passed. Not at the group of us, I could tell.

They bowed their heads toward Takeda.

Even as we exited onto the street, more geisha emerged to pay their respects. Takeda ignored them, or pretended to. Arnisant joined us at the gate, heeling to me when I gave him the sign. I fed him the rest of the sausage I'd promised. The boss heard the hound's jaws snap closed. He looked back at us—he doesn't like me feeding Arnisant except for training—but Arni and I put on our innocent faces. Arni's is better than mine.

Takeda didn't stop until we reached the line of rickshaws. When he turned, I could see he'd spent some effort composing his face. Whatever the problem with Madame Chiyoko, it bothered him more than he wanted us to know.

"We were too late," said Takeda. "I must inform Lord Koga immediately of my failure."

Osamu said, "Sir, it is not your fault—"

Takeda silenced him with a glance.

"In my absence, you must guide the honorable Count Jeggare to the Seahorse to look for Square-Head. After I report, I shall learn the address of this moneylender. Theirs are the last of the six tattoos the Kappas seek. Shiro, escort the housemaid to her home."

He said a few more things, but they stopped making sense, so I stopped listening.

Instead, I tried to figure out a way to keep Kazuko with us. I didn't like the idea of her being out of sight. Even forgetting my personal angle, these Kappas might want to eliminate her as a witness to the murder of Yamana.

"Listen," I said. "It's probably better to keep Kazuko nearby. Maybe we'll find some clue that relates to whatever she learned working for Yamana, and she can—what?"

Everyone stared at me. I checked to see whether I had something on my nose.

"What?"

"The language spell has expired," said the boss. "None of the others can understand you."

"All right," I said. "Hit me with another one."

He shook his head. "Not yet. I have only one more prepared. It is prudent to wait until you truly need to speak before casting it. Who knows how long this investigation will last?"

"But I want to say goodbye to Kazuko."

"A trifling matter compared with our pursuit of the killer and the recovery of the pearl husk I have been sent

to recover," he said. "Besides, past experience suggests you needn't speak the language to communicate with women."

He had a point, but I still didn't like it.

He spoke to the others in Minkaian. I saw from their expressions that he'd explained what happened. They finished their conversation without another look at me. It was as if I had disappeared. I didn't matter anymore.

I sidled up to Kazuko, but Shiro abruptly led her away. She glanced over her shoulder, and I saw the disappointment on her face.

"Me, too, sweetheart." I blew her a kiss. She didn't blush. She didn't look away.

I was going to have to find out where she lived and pay a visit when this was all settled.

Takeda sat in a rickshaw and told the lackey to go, leaving Osamu to lead the boss and me to the Seahorse district.

We hustled down the hills of Oda toward the shore we'd seen earlier. The boss filled me in on the way.

"The man known colloquially as Square-Head is a well-known member of the Snake Gang. He often gambles well into the night at an establishment called the Raccoon Dog. I will renew the translation spell on you just before we enter. You will take the lead."

"Got it." The boss usually sent me into dives alone, but sometimes he came along to observe in disguise. It was best that I did the talking in those cases. Street and dive were not, as the boss might say, foremost in his repertoire. "While we're talking Taldane," I said with a nod at Osamu, "what was all that between Chiyoko and Takeda?"

The boss thought about the question for a moment as we jogged behind the samurai. "It is difficult to explain."

"You're always saying I'm smarter than I look."

"It is not a question of intelligence," he said. "It is a question of rank. There is an implied code of discretion among nobles, even those of different lands."

I gritted my teeth. After our last caper, I didn't think we were going to have to do this again.

"I know nothing concrete," he added in a tone kind of but not really like an apology. "Only conjecture based on my observations filtered through my limited understanding of the native hierarchy. Still, it is not my place to discuss what might be Takeda's secret outside of our... that is, with a member..."

"With a commoner." Weeks ago he'd called me his friend for the first time. I'd wondered how long that'd last. Now I had my answer.

He winced before correcting me, "With anyone outside the samurai caste."

I'm the goddamned Prince of Wolves, I thought. But I could never say it. It was a secret I had to keep. Still, it was a hell of a lot more irritating for these counts and samurai to look down on me when I knew that if things had gone down different back in the bad old days, they'd be bowing to me.



"No wonder the little guy's so happy."

THE RACCOON DOG

We saved the rest of our breath for the run. The boss was half winded by the time Osamu stopped at the end of a narrow street filled with drunks, rickshaw porters, and beggars. An old man pushing a cook-cart called out in Minkaian. Everyone but the beggars ignored him, and he swatted them away as they reached for bowls, hoping he'd fill them out of charity.

People streamed in and out of several of the buildings. Music and laughter came from one. Shouts and the clatter of dice echoed in another. Osamu pointed at that one.

Beside the entrance stood a statue of a comical animal. It looked like a cross between a dog and a badger, but the stripes painted on its smiling cheeks gave it a raccoon's face. What really made it stand out were a pair of giant testicles hanging between its legs. They were so big the bottoms rested on the ground. Those entering the house paused to rub the critter's balls, revealing bright brass underneath the paint.

Lucky dog. I figured him for one of Desna's and knelt down to give his nuggets a good rub. Curious, Arnisant came over and gave the brass balls a sniff.

"Radovan!" The boss choked. "Some decorum, please."
"Just praying, boss."

He scowled until I stood again. When he turned back to the samurai, I pointed at Arni.

"Stop getting us in trouble."

The wolfhound planted his butt and looked up at me, hoping for a treat. I was out of snacks.

Osamu and the boss wrapped up their conversation. The constable strolled casual-like down the street, pretending to be out on patrol and putting on a brave face when some of the bolder beggars heckled him. They weren't afraid of a lone constable.

"Where's he going?"

"There is an informal agreement between the constabulary and the local gangs. Osamu cannot enter a gambling den without permission from the gang chief."

"I like this town more and more." Zandros the Fair could never get a deal like that from the Hellknights in Egorian. Either the samurai were weaker than I thought, or else the gangs were stronger.

"While I attempt to locate this Square-Head, you blend in and distract any locals who take an interest in us."

"Which one you want? Blend in or distract?"

"Time is of the essence, Radovan. Do as I say."

The hairs on my neck turned to needles.

"Fine."

The boss riffled his scroll at me. My tongue tickled, and I sneezed. He put away the expended scroll and gave Arnisant the signal to stay. I pushed through the door to the gambling den.

Inside the place was thick with smoke. Some of it rolled off braziers hanging from the ceiling. Some crawled up out of long brass pipes a few of the players held close to

their mouths. I didn't recognize the sweet smell, but I could tell from the smokers' half-lidded eyes that it was some naughty stuff.

There were no women inside. Most of the men went shirtless or had their sleeves rolled up to show off tattoos. I'd never seen so many before. They weren't just simple snakes and briars around the biceps or some girl's name inside Shelyn's glaive. On all the exposed skin I saw a regular menagerie of fierce animals and magical creatures, along with knives, dice, chains, cards, darts, and all the other tools of the trade.

One thing I saw a lot was snake tattoos. Each of the men handling the dice and tiles had one, as did about half of the gamblers and the thick-necked guys standing by the doors.

Some of the older men stood around a couple of tall square tables with edges a few inches high. There they played some kind of tile game, with each gambler concealing a dozen or so tiles and adding them one at a time to a maze in the middle of the table.

The other tables were low ovals, and the younger players knelt around them. These ones placed bets as a guy in the middle dropped a pair of dice into a bowl and slapped it onto the table's surface before making a dramatic reveal. He shouted, "Odd!"

I had to be missing something, but there weren't any places painted on the table. I watched for another round or two before deciding it was as simple as it looked. The players were betting against each other, hoping to be in the minority who came away with a pittance while the house claimed the rest.

And the house was raking it in.

"You, foreign devil!" cried a man with copper skin even darker than mine. He had no idea how right he was. "Show your money or get the hell out!"

Only then did I realize I didn't have any of the local coins. The ones on the tables were mostly copper and silver, perforated with a square in the center. I made three big gold coins appear between my knuckles.

"Those shiny enough for you?"

The glitter in the eyes of all the men at the table told me they were.

"What about the long-ears in the fancy clothes?"

At my side, I felt the boss move in, ready to say something.

"Never mind my servant. He's mute." I felt the count's eyes boring into my neck, but he deserved it after all that samurai crap. The gamblers stared doubtfully, so I sweetened the lie with shearing gestures at my mouth and crotch. "A mute eunuch. Snip, snip!"

At that they laughed. Between the joke and my gold, we were going to be friends for a few throws. I grinned, looking at the boss to see what he thought of my humor.

Count Varian Jeggare raised his fist to his chin and shot me the tines.

It took all my will to keep a straight face while the gamblers pulled me to the table. I watched as one of them traded my gold for a double-handful of the local silver. I couldn't look back to see what the boss was doing, or else I'd lose control. I'd never even heard him curse properly, much less make the most vulgar gesture known in Egorian.

"What is that sign?" asked the man beside me, trying to imitate the boss. He was a wiry fellow with a couple of missing teeth.

"It's for good luck."

"Like this?" He threw up his first and last fingers on either side of his chin.

"Perfect."

The houseman held up the dice and shouted out some numbers, some kind of countdown.

The player whose turn it was made his bet, a stack of five coins. All others would come after the throw of the dice.

The houseman dropped the dice into the bowl before slapping it down on the table.

The players cocked their heads, trying to hear which way the dice fell. That was impossible, but trying was another way of praying to Lady Luck. I liked that. The old gal had been pretty good to me.

I tilted my head, too, but just for show. I wasn't listening to the dice but watching the houseman's face. His eyes scanned the bets. I laid down five coins of my own before he called time. When everyone took their hands off the table, he uncovered the dice.

"Even!"

The gamblers cheered. Those of us who'd bet took in a modest win. That was no surprise on my first bet, me a rich foreign devil and all. I expected I'd win a few more before the dice turned.

A serving boy came around with drinks. I bought one and laid it on the back of my hand, slapping my palm on the table to flip the tiny cup into my mouth, where I caught it in my lips and let the liquor shoot down my gullet. It was a stupid trick, but it broke the ice some more. The locals laughed. Behind me, the boss sighed and kept watch on the door as gamblers trickled in and out. He hadn't spotted our man yet.

By the time my turn came around, my coins had grown into a healthy pile. I felt the mood of the table change. Would the houseman put me out now? Or would he draw me in to see how many more of those gold coins I had?

I bet half my stash. Everyone joined in after the roll, but in modest amounts. They were bracing to see me busted.

The houseman revealed the dice. "Even!"

Clever lads. They were taking the long view.

After a couple more turns, the boss brushed my sleeve. I stretched my arms, turning to scan the room. A block-headed fellow had entered the den. He was built like a shipping crate, barely over five feet tall but with shoulders so wide that he had to turn to slip through the narrow

doorway. When he grimaced at the doorman, I saw his teeth all had black gaps between them.

I scratched my neck, the secret sign for "What now?"

The boss scraped one foot across the floor. That meant "Wait and watch."

Knowing he'd keep an eye on Square-Head, I put my eyes back on the game. Before my turn came around, the boss plucked at my sleeve. I glanced back to see Square-Head leaving through a side door. Time to go.

"Thanks for the game, boys." I scooped up my cash.

"Where do you think you're going?" One of the other gamblers rose from his seat.

The houseman said, "You can't leave until you've bet everything you have on the table."

The cheerful atmosphere of the table changed. I'd broken their etiquette. Any other time, I wouldn't have cared. But I was still hoping to wrap this case in time to find Kazuko while the translation spell still worked.

"All right," I said, pushing all my winnings forward. "Make it snappy."

The houseman raised his hand to display the dice. I'd seen his fingers dip below the table an instant earlier, so I knew this was a different pair.

I should have let it go, lost the cash, and pushed away. I could've spared us a lot of grief if I'd done that. I would've done it, if the switch hadn't been so damned obvious.

Should've, would've, could've.

But I was tired of being treated like a jerk. It was bad enough the boss was talking down to me again. I wasn't going to let these mooks rip me and laugh about it.

Nobody supported my bet. They knew better. When the houseman lifted the bowl, his lips formed the word "Odd" before he could even see the dice.

I whipped out the big knife and brought it down like a cleaver on the dice. Chips of bone flew away. The remains of the dice lay on the table, the fat blob of their lead loads exposed for all to see.

"Radovan, don't!" The boss knew it was no use, even as the words came out of his mouth. At the same time, he blew that nice cover I'd given him.

"He's no mute!" shouted the houseman. "You came to cheat us!"

The dog at the door wasn't the only one with brass balls. This guy had some pair to accuse us of cheating with his loaded dice cut open on the table. But there was no point arguing. They showed me their knives. I showed them mine.

The boss drew his sword in one hand, a riffle scroll in the other.

A gambler crept up on my left. I nicked him on the thigh without turning to look at him. That was enough to make him think twice. Two more moved in, but I chased them off with a growl and a couple of feints. Behind me, the boss parted the crowd with a flourish of his blade.

THE RACCOON DOG

"Rolling out," I warned the boss.

I snaked my arm around his waist and fell backward, pulling him along. The boss folded his long body, rolling with me. I set him back on his feet within a step of the threshold.

Our quick retreat startled the gamblers long enough for us to back out through the door. There the boss thumbed his scroll. Thick white threads shot out from the riffled edge of the paper. They fattened as they flew into the gambling den, filling the place with a gooey network of webbing.

"Nice," I muttered. Until recently, he'd always been an armchair wizard. It was great to see him cast the spells he once only talked about.

The gamblers screamed curses at us, but they hung like trapped flies among their game tables. I shot them the tines.

The boss brushed the dust off his sleeve and scowled at me for the unwelcome hug. He hates close contact, but he couldn't complain. I'd gotten us out.

I spied our guy strolling off the way we'd come, pretending not to notice the commotion as he passed Osamu, who jogged toward us. The boss made a stirring motion with his thumb and pointed at Square-Head.

Osamu glanced back at Square-Head before nodding at the boss. He turned at the nearest street, waited a moment, and began tailing him. The boss nodded at me, and we followed, knowing we could afford to lose Square-Head as long as we caught up with Osamu.

Shouts erupted from a nearby alley. Those who'd escaped the boss's web streamed out of a side entrance. Seconds later, more armed tattooed men burst out of nearby houses. One look at us told them we were the cause of the trouble.

The boss ran and I followed, tensing at the thought of catching a blade in the back. Two axes whirled past us, one sticking into the corner of a house as we turned down the street Osamu had just left. We had to lead the gangsters away from Osamu and Square-Head. That part was easy. The trick was surviving to catch up with them.

All along the street, shutters opened at our approach and slammed shut as the mob followed. We dodged another flurry of thrown weapons. I caught an axe meant for the back of the boss's head. I meant to throw it back as we turned the next corner, but there we saw Takeda.

The rickshaw that had returned him to the Seahorse was already running away, but the samurai strode forward. He frowned at the sound of the mob behind us, but when they came around the corner he didn't even flinch.

"Too many to fight, Inspector," called the boss. "Come with us."

Takeda walked past us, his frown deepening. He drew the wakizashi from his sash, still in its scabbard. He held it above his head like a scepter of office.

The boss slowed, touching the scrolls in his bandolier to choose the right one. He loved the fireball, but he couldn't use that one around these wooden houses. Still, I couldn't think of another spell I'd seen him cast that would save our skins. I prayed to Desna that he had another of those webs.

The mob slowed at the sight of Takeda, those in the back crashing into the ones up front until they too recognized him. I counted maybe thirty men and didn't like our chances.

"Stand aside!" shouted an old gangster. His sagging breasts made the demon tattooed on his chest look drunk or sleepy. "Those foreign devils cheated us."

Takeda stood as still as a statue, his short sword held aloft.

The gangsters shouted threats, their breath white in the chill air. Little by little, their anger gave in to uncertainty. The blades they held above their own heads began to droop.

One young buck got tired of waiting. He pushed to the front and thrust a shiny butterfly knife toward the inspector.

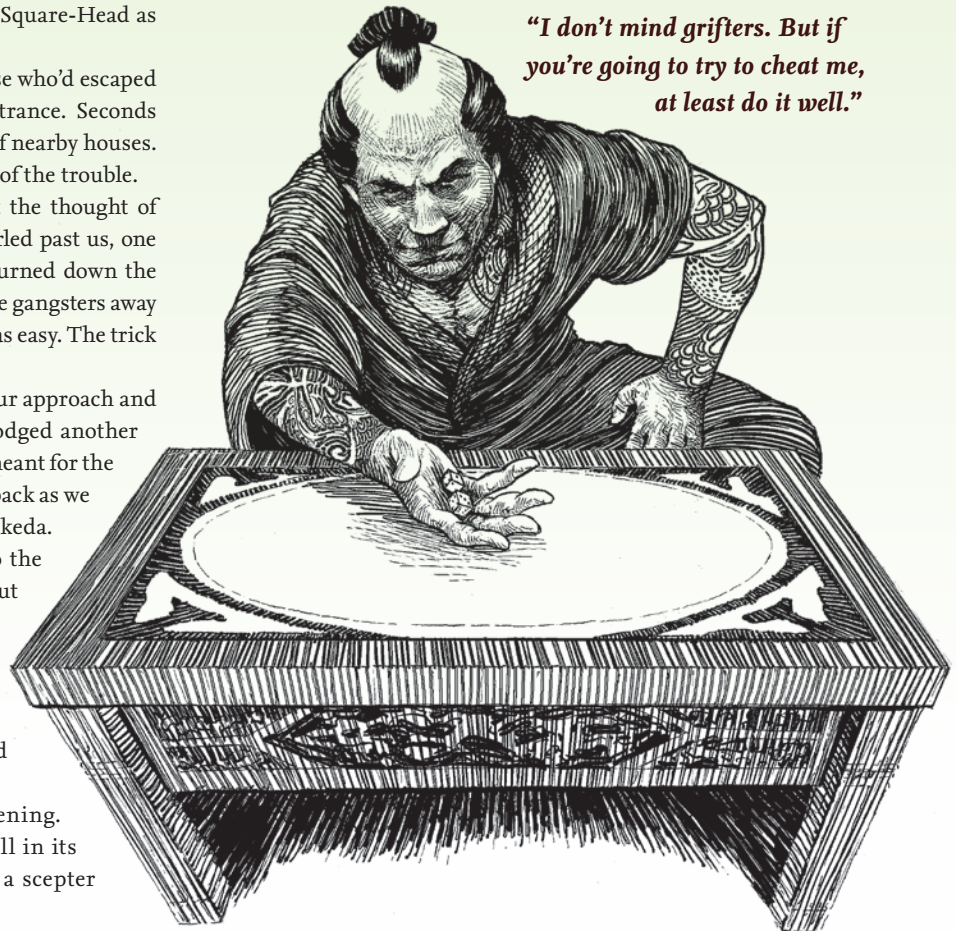
Takeda put his hand on the grip of his wakizashi.

The rest of the mob dissolved like sea foam, leaving the belligerent young man alone. He looked at his fleeing pals. He looked back at Takeda.

The inspector exposed an inch of his blade.

The young gangster tripped over his own feet and fled.

"I don't mind grifters. But if you're going to try to cheat me, at least do it well."





BESTIARY

UPON THE PLAINS OF MUN ROILED A SEA OF RAGE, AN ARMY OF BLOOD-SKINNED VILLAINS MORE TERRIBLE THAN A YAI OF ANY SHADE. TAYAGO HAD FACED THE SLAVES OF THE WARLORD HU, DODGED THE RAZORED HORDES OF PRINCESS DIAMOND, DISTRACTED THE DROWNED FLEET OF THE BAY OF THIRSTS, AND OUTSMARTED MORE SELF-PROCLAIMED ONI EMPERORS THAN HE COULD COUNT, BUT HERE STOOD A NEW CHALLENGE. FEROCIOUS, PURPOSED, UNITED, THE LEGIONS OF JA NOI WERE ALL THREE AND MORE, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY SEASONS TAYAGO KNEW DREAD.

—FROM THE *TAYAGAMA*

This month's entry into the Pathfinder Bestiary explores the world of the kami, creatures of the spirit world and aloof defenders of nature. These beings, ranging from whimsical to devastating, expand upon the members of that race presented in *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3*. More facts about these creatures—including their racial traits, referenced throughout these descriptions—can be found on page 60 of this volume in "Ecology of the Kami." Additionally, continuing the series running throughout the Jade Regent Adventure Path, a new breed of oni, the ja noi, appears here as well, wildly outnumbered by its race's ancestral enemies.

CARAVAN ENCOUNTERS

As the caravan travels, there's a 10% chance of an encounter each day. Encounters marked with an asterisk (*) have a 50% chance of occurring while the caravan is camped, and those with double asterisks (**) have a 90% chance of occurring while camped—all other encounters occur while the caravan is on the move. Encounters don't occur if the caravan camps at a settlement. If an encounter occurs, roll on the following table to see what the PCs have encountered. Note that all of the following encounters are caravan encounters and use the caravan combat rules found in the free *Jade Regent Player's Guide*.

Hangman Grove (CR 9): The caravan comes across a section of forest that contains several hangman trees (AC 21; hp 100; Attack +15; Damage 4d8+7) growing together. The hangman trees release spores every round that force the caravan to make a DC 19 Resolve check or take a –4 penalty on attacks and Security checks as some members of the caravan become passive. Because the hangman trees move so slowly, the caravan gains a +4 bonus on any Security check made to escape combat.

Monsoon (CR 9): A fantastically powerful storm brews. Winds tear out trees and blow over wagons. Rain comes in sheets, blinding those outside and reducing visibility for those under cover. If this encounter happens during the day, it reduces the caravan's progress for that day by 6d6 miles. The monsoon lasts for 2d12 hours. Each hour, the caravan must make a DC 18 Resolve check and a DC 18 Security check. Each failed check results in the caravan taking 3d8 points of damage. The caravan can gain bonuses to these checks by individuals using appropriate spells, such as *control winds*, or making appropriate skills checks, such as Craft (carpentry) to repair damaged wagons, Knowledge (engineering) checks to lash wagons and supplies together, or Profession (engineer) checks to set the wagons in a line against the wind. Each skill check is DC 18, and a successful check (or appropriate spell) grants a +4 bonus on a single Resolve or Security check.

Oni Assault* (CR 11): A patrol of oni warriors (AC 25; hp 145; Attack +19; Damage 4d10+35), under orders to

MINKAI CARAVAN ENCOUNTERS

d% Roll	Encounter
01–15	Hangman Grove
16–30	Monsoon*
31–45	Oni Assault*
46–85	Colony of Giant Tarantulas
86–100	Ninja**

investigate every group approaching from the north, demands to search the caravan. Though the oni do not expect to find much of interest, they need little excuse to engage in violence and banditry. If the caravan surrenders to the search, the oni steal 2d4 units of cargo and deal 4d10 points of damage as they rough up travelers, smash open boxes, and rip apart satchels. If the caravan makes a DC 20 Resolve check, the oni then leave. If the caravan fails this Resolve check, one of the travelers fights back, and the oni begin a full attack.

Ninja (CR 10):** Black-clad humanoid assassins (AC 26; hp 105; Attack +16; Damage 5d8) appear within the caravan, throwing poisoned shuriken and leaping from wagon to wagon. In addition to the normal combat each round, the caravan must make a DC 21 Security check each round or take 5d8 points of damage from sneak attacks, traps, poisonous clouds, and exotic chain weapons used to strangle caravan guards. No ninja bodies are found after the attack, even if the caravan wins the battle.

If the caravan does win, there is a 50% chance the ninja attack again the next night, though this time they flee after taking 50 hp of damage. After the second attack, the caravan must make a DC 25 Security check to find traps the ninja placed during their feinted attack. If the check is failed, the camp takes a –4 penalty on all attacks in its next encounter, as the ninja traps distract and disable members of the caravan.

Colony of Giant Tarantulas (CR 11): A crawling colony of Gargantuan tarantulas (AC 23; hp 160; Attack +21; Damage 3d10+25) attacks the caravan. The tarantulas begin by firing spear-like hairs from their bodies in a fusillade of ranged attacks. The caravan must make a DC 25 Security check or the tarantulas are allowed one round of attack before the normal rounds of combat begin. Since the tarantulas have large movement rates and ranged attacks, it takes two DC 15 Security checks for the caravan to successfully escape if it decides to flee, and the tarantulas are allowed to make an attack for each such check the caravan makes.

KAMI, DOSOJIN

This ancient, weathered statue of a venerable monk with a shaven head possesses an air of both reverence and patience.

Dosojin

CR 7



XP 3,200

NG Medium outsider (kami, native)

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +4

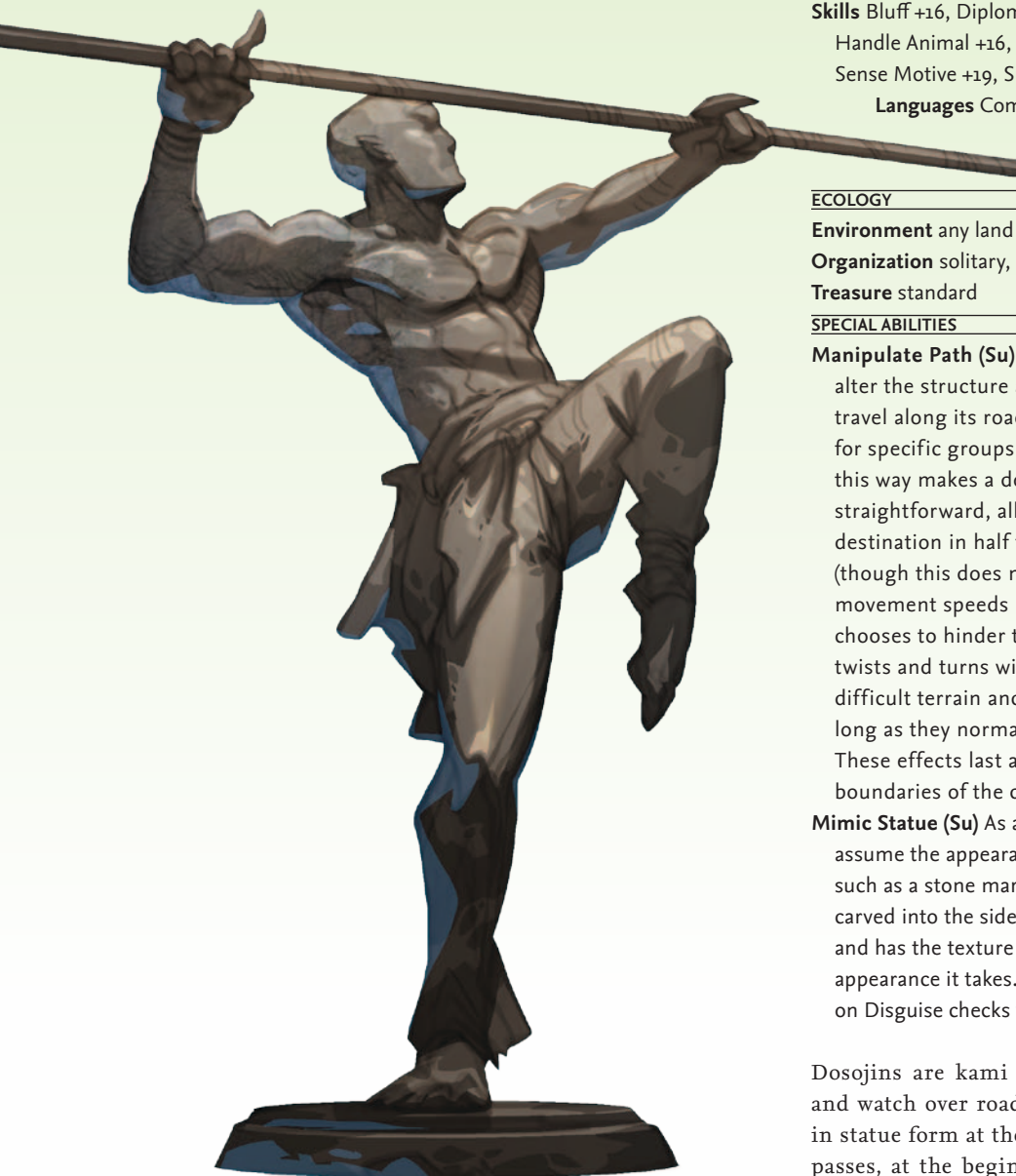
DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 13, flat-footed 17 (+3 Dex, +7 natural)

hp 85 (10d10+30); fast healing 4

Fort +10, Ref +6, Will +11

DR 5/cold iron; Immune bleed, mind-affecting effects, petrification, polymorph; Resist acid 10, electricity 10, fire 10



OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee 2 slams +13 (1d6+2)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 10th; concentration +13)

Constant—know direction, misdirection (DC 15), speak with plants

3/day—dispel magic, fog cloud, quickened invisibility, longstrider, pass without trace, stone shape

1/day—locate object, mirage arcana (DC 18), nondetection

Special Attacks manipulate path, mimic statue

STATISTICS

Str 15, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 17

Base Atk +10; CMB +12; CMD 25

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*invisibility*), Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Bluff +16, Diplomacy +16, Disguise +16 (+36 as statue), Handle Animal +16, Knowledge (nature) +14, Perception +4, Sense Motive +19, Survival +15

Languages Common; speak with plants, telepathy 100 ft.

SQ merge with ward, ward (roads or trails)

ECOLOGY

Environment any land

Organization solitary, mated pair, or cloister (3–10)

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Manipulate Path (Su) As a standard action, a dosojin can alter the structure and stability of its ward, making travel along its road or trail either easier or harder for specific groups of travelers. Helping travelers in this way makes a dosojin's ward sturdier and more straightforward, allowing creatures to reach their destination in half the time they would normally take (though this does not grant a bonus to creatures' movement speeds in combat). If a dosojin instead chooses to hinder travelers, it creates unexpected twists and turns within its ward, turning the path into difficult terrain and so causing travelers to take twice as long as they normally would to reach their destination. These effects last as long as the targets stay within the boundaries of the dosojin's ward.

Mimic Statue (Su) As a standard action, a dosojin can assume the appearance of any Medium-sized statue, such as a stone marker, a religious icon, or a sculpture carved into the side of a cliff. A dosojin's body is hard and has the texture of rough stone no matter what appearance it takes. A dosojin gains a +20 racial bonus on Disguise checks when imitating a statue in this manner.

Dosojins are kami that take the form of stone icons and watch over roads and trails. They are often found in statue form at the edges of villages, along mountain passes, at the beginnings of tunnels and other major

works of roadway construction, or at simple country crossroads. In urban areas, dosojins can sometimes be found on street corners and near bridges. They serve as the guardians of travelers, keeping the malicious and malevolent off the paths they diligently watch over. Wise travelers know to seek a dosojin's blessing before traveling upon its ward, for falling out of favor with the kami of travel is a sure way to become lost or hampered. Pious mortal couples also seek out dosojin for their own reasons, as the kami are often regarded as patrons of fertility, and are known for their habit of choosing mates and standing beside one another for their entire lives. In many regions, the blessing of a dosojin is believed to ensure a long and happy marriage, as well as many healthy children.

The average dosojin stands about 4-1/2 feet tall and weighs upward of 400 pounds.

ECOLOGY

As creatures that symbolize travel and connections, dosojins straddle the line between the lands of the civilized and the wild, often with one foot literally in each. Dosojins spend most of their time guarding their chosen sites in the form of nondescript statues and way markers, meditating motionlessly for seasons at a time. While semi-social dosojins within cities and other settlements are not uncommon, the majority of these kami stand along remote and secluded roads, going to great lengths to ensure that their true identity is not known. It is not uncommon for dosojins to create false duplicates of themselves using their *stone shape* ability, and these misleading markers inspire a certain amount of faith among those who look out for the kami of roads, as one can rarely tell if a sculpture is a dosojin by looks alone. A dosojin requires no sustenance, but it is not uncommon for travelers to leave offerings for a silent watcher, usually tributes of fruits, nuts, and potables, gifts that the kami gladly shares with hungry travelers, happy to inspire such good faith among passersby and to foster a system of give-and-take between strangers.

Dosojins are fond of the creatures that traverse their roads and trails, and maintain the roadways they guard to ensure both the ward's survival and the safe travel of the voyagers that traverse it. Though they have an affinity for the creatures that constructed their roadways, dosojins still protect their wards with the aggressive righteousness typical of all kami, and scarcely hesitate when faced with an oni or other evildoer seeking to disrupt the balance. Dosojin have little patience for those who litter on their roadways or unnecessarily obstruct the paths, and they take it upon themselves to discipline those they deem worthy of punishment. Rarely violent in an overt sense, dosojins

prefer to use their magic in order to trick travelers into becoming lost, letting the wilds they travel through become the primary instruments of their demise. Dosojins prove quite deadly to those who fail to show kami proper respect, as they use their powers of illusion to lead troublesome caravans into impassible ravines and destructive oni onto unsound, derelict bridges.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Dosojins are odd among kami in that they are known to select mates from among their own kind, and it is not uncommon to see two seemingly redundant statues standing next to one another near a trailhead or fork in the road. While they do not reproduce in any typical sense of the word, dosojins are nonetheless sought out by mortal couples hoping to conceive, as many people see the kami as symbols of fertility. However, most scholars agree that dosojins do not collaborate in this way to foster fecundity, but rather act as symbols of camaraderie and companionship for travelers on their roads, encouraging teamwork and cooperation among groups of diverse individuals with a shared goal.

While most dosojins are content to watch over particular highways or roads for their entire existences and act as helpful guardians for most passersby, some choose instead to act as appraisers of travelers' skills and bravery. Cunning individuals that indulge in acts of trickery more often than their tamer brethren, these rogue dosojins craft obstacles and trials for travelers they deem worthy of the challenge. The tests are not meant to substantially impede voyagers, and are simply forms of innocent fun that a dosojin uses to gauge the strength and resolve of various wayfarers. Those who surpass a dosojin's challenges (which usually take the form of puzzles or illusions) earn the kami's respect and the assurance of safe travel throughout the rest of its domain, while those who avoid the obstacle or overcome it through brutish and witless means garner only scorn. Careful travelers know to watch out for the statuelike kami when making their way along potentially protected roads, as the guardians expect voyagers to act honorably and respectfully while travelling upon their paths. Some of the most important mandates to keep in mind when interacting with dosojin and walking through their territories are as follows.

- Mortals who respect the land and its laws shall know no harm.
- Mortals who fail to show proper reverence for tradition shall not pass by a dosojin upon the first attempt.
- Mortals who actively harm the natural world shall be cursed to wander it.
- Mortals who stray from a dosojin's path to do harm should not expect to find that path ever again.

KAMI, FUKUJIN

This diminutive humanoid looks like a truly ancient but proud old warrior. A tiny tree branch juts from the top of his head.

FUKUJIN

CR 3



XP 800

LN Tiny outsider (kami, native)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +12

Aura aura of luck (15 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 12 (+3 Dex, +2 size)

hp 30 (4d10+8); fast healing 3

Fort +6, **Ref** +4, **Will** +7

DR 5/cold iron or evil; **Immune** bleed, mind-affecting effects, petrification, polymorph; **Resist** acid 10, electricity 10, fire 10

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee short sword +7 (1d3+1/19–20)

Special Attacks precise attacks

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 4th; concentration +6)

Constant—*speaking with plants*

At will—*mending, purify food and drink*

3/day—*detect snares and pits, remove sickness**

1/day—*delay poison, goodberry, soften earth and stone*

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 16, **Con** 14, **Int** 11, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 14

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 16

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative

Skills Appraise +7, Bluff +9, Diplomacy +9, Knowledge (nature) +7, Perception +12, Sense Motive +12

Languages Common; *speaking with plants*, telepathy 100 ft.

SQ merge with ward, ward (bonsai trees and small plants)

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, garden (2–4)

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Aura of Luck (Su) A fukujin brings good fortune with it wherever it goes. Any allied creature that begins its turn within 15 feet of a fukujin gains a +2 bonus on skill checks.

Precise Attacks (Su) A fukujin can detect weak points in a foe's defenses as an immediate action by succeeding at a DC 15 Perception check. Once these weak points have been determined, a fukujin gains a +2 bonus on attack rolls to confirm critical hits against that creature for 24 hours. A fukujin can inform a single ally within 30 feet of its findings as a swift action, granting that ally the same bonus. This bonus cannot be granted to more than one creature, even if a fukujin attempts to point out a weakness to another.

* See *Ultimate Magic*.

Spiritual guardians of ornamental shrubs and miniature trees, fukujin are highly regarded among Tians as bringers of good fortune and sound wisdom. Fukujins are thought to only come to goodhearted and devoted bonsai gardeners, and since bonsai plants are often only cultivated by astute and aesthetically minded humanoids, the kami are usually of a similar nature, speaking to mortals rarely and always cryptically. Regardless of how much of their coveted knowledge they impart upon favored mortals, however, fukujins always bring with them a sense of hope and good luck, and almost all within close proximity of the kami feel an instant sense of relief.

Fukujins resemble humanoids with tree branches protruding from their bodies, most often their heads, and some fukujins possess leafy hair or treelike limbs. A fukujin in its physical form is only as tall as its bonsai ward—usually only a foot or two—and weighs less than 30 pounds.



ECOLOGY

While many see the art of bonsai gardening as humanoids' attempts at controlling or forming nature, fukujins reflect the practice's virtues of patience and nurturing. Fukujins maintain that a moment of patience and study can reveal multitudes more than years of trial and error, and the diminutive beings spread this knowledge wherever they go. While kami do not reproduce in any typical sense, fukujins are known to sow seeds of bonsai plants in the wake of their footsteps, further delighting communities that appreciate such flora. Though assignment of kami remains up to the mysterious will of the gods, fukujins do their part in creating numerous hosts for these spirits.

The health and strength of the tree branch protruding from a fukujin's head is often said to be a good indicator of the skill of the warded bonsai tree's caretaker. While the aesthetic values of bonsai trees are often completely subjective, the kami spirits are evidence that there is perhaps a series of core doctrines bonsai farmers should adhere to when taking care of their plants—ideals that a gardener can strive toward to ensure he achieves success in his maintenance of the small tree. A poorly trimmed bonsai plant may sicken the spirit for a time, for instance, while expert grafting can result in a strong or knowledgeable kami. In most cases, however, a kami will almost always leave its ward if a bonsai gardener neglects the plant long enough or effectively ruins the effort, for though fukujins are patient, they have little tolerance for the virtues of negligence and wastefulness.

While nearly all fukujins are calm, collected, and patient spirits, the beings are by no means all the same, as their physical appearances, predispositions, and demeanors are just as often reflections of the particular bonsai plant that they watch over. Fukujins who reside within the hearts of deciduous trees, for example, tend to be of lighter color as well as more airy and spirited than the hardy and resilient fukujins of coniferous shrubs, who take on a red, earthy hue. Plant type can also hint at particular magical qualities the spirit might have—white-trunked trees tend to attract gaunter, more fatalistic individuals, while plants with brown or ebon bark inspire kami that are more attuned to the energies and mysteries of magic. The tree branch that sticks out of a fukujin's head while the spirit is in its physical form is often of the same variety as the bonsai tree that the kami protects, though exceptions have been known to exist among particularly dual-natured spirits.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Since their wards are by nature the direct result of humanoid intervention, fukujins are naturally social creatures, and most seek to assist their humanoid partners in not only cultivating beautiful plants, but

in all spheres of life. Many bonsai gardeners are often content to live in a permanent home, establish a family, and live a life of tranquility, and fukujins happily provide all manner of advice regarding these domestic issues. In other instances, however, fukujins have been known to travel alongside particularly adventurous cultivators, humanoids who keep the shrubbery and kami spirit in safe and comfortable packs or pouches and consult them for wisdom in circumstances both dire and unusual. The miniature kami's insights and good luck prove as useful in the heat of battle as in the hearthstone, and so humanoids from nearly all walks of life seek the favor of these beings.

Bonsai trees are delicate plants and their kami reflect this fragility. What they lack in physical defenses, however, fukujins make up for in grace and keen insight, using their natural acumen to avoid and deter hazards before they're even encountered. Some might mistakenly see this expert passiveness as a manifestation of fukujins' philanthropic ideals and good intentions, but more often than not their flightiness is simply what they deem to be the wisest course of action. In situations where violence is inevitable, fukujins seek the aid of stronger individuals to help protect them, true to the tradition of their wards' reliance on humanoid intervention and maintenance. Rather than view this reliance on humanoids as a weakness, however, most fukujins accept it as part of a long-lasting transaction between the two forces, each providing unique benefits to the other throughout the relationship. To bolster this partnership, fukujins harness healing powers as well as the strength of their insight, ensuring that their caretakers remain healthy and able to protect the kami and their wards.

While they almost always possess pertinent and useful advice, fukujins are known for being reserved under most circumstances, sharing what knowledge they have only when it is absolutely necessary, and they never share wisdom superfluously. Fukujins are normally individualistic and solitary like the plants they watch over, and when they interact with one another they usually do so telepathically. What people often perceive as the luck of fukujins is often merely the result of wise advice garnered from the spirits, though when asked if the kami really are bringers of fortune, fukujins are known to remain even more tight-lipped than usual.

Occasionally one might encounter a fukujin in the wild, in lands far from the societies and plants where they commonly make their homes. In such cases, these miniature kami often claim shrubs, young plants, and even whimsical-looking mushrooms as their wards, grooming nearby groves and glades into quiet meditation gardens or into artistic shapes, inviting visitors to rest and reflect.

KAMI, KAMINARI

This enormous humanoid possesses vibrant green skin and equally loud hair, and is surrounded by a ring of huge drums and storm clouds.

KAMINARI

CR 17



XP 102,400

CN Huge outsider (air, kami, native)

Init +9; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +29

DEFENSE

AC 32, touch 13, flat-footed 27 (+5 Dex, +19 natural, -2 size)

hp 264 (23d10+138); fast healing 15

Fort +19, Ref +12, Will +18

DR 15/cold iron; Immune bleed, electricity, mind-affecting effects, petrification, polymorph, sonic; Resist acid 10, fire 10; SR 28

Weaknesses vulnerable to silence

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee 2 slams +30 (2d8+9 plus cacophonous blow)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Special Attacks trample (2d8+13 plus cacophonous blow, DC 30)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th; concentration +27)

At will—*invisibility* (self only), *shatter* (DC 19), *sound burst* (DC 19)

3/day—*control weather*, *deafening song bolt**, *discordant blast**, *greater dispel magic*, *mass cacophonous call** (DC 22)

1/day—*empowered chain lightning* (DC 23), *greater shout* (DC 25), *storm of vengeance* (DC 26)

STATISTICS

Str 28, Dex 21, Con 22, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 25

Base Atk +23; CMB +34; CMD 49

Feats Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Empower

Spell-Like Ability (*chain lightning*), Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Improved Vital Strike, Iron Will, Power Attack, Stand Still, Trample, Vital Strike

Skills Bluff +33, Diplomacy +33, Fly +35, Intimidate +33, Knowledge (nature) +29, Knowledge (planes) +29, Perception +29, Perform (percussion) +30, Sense Motive +29

Languages Auran, Common; telepathy 100 ft.

SQ merge with ward, storm ward

ECOLOGY

Environment temperate skies, hills, and mountains

Organization solitary, duet, or symphony (3–5)

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Cacophonous Blow (Su) Whenever a kaminari deals damage with a slam or trample attack, it also deals 11d6 points of sonic damage. In addition, a creature struck with this ability is rendered permanently deaf. A creature that makes a successful DC 27 Reflex save takes half damage and avoids the deafening effect. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Storm Ward (Su) A kaminari treats a specific mass of transient

storm clouds as its ward. This storm is about 1 mile in diameter, and a kaminari can observe the world from any point within its storm ward, whether merged with it or in its physical form. A kaminari can only control the movement of its ward to a minimal extent, willing it to remain in one place or move in a cardinal direction for up to 2d4 hours every day. After this time, the ward continues on its natural course for 24 hours, after which the kaminari may will it to remain stationary again. When a kaminari is in its physical form and within its ward or within 120 feet of its ward's boundaries, it gains the power to call down bolts of lightning. The kaminari can call up to a total of 15 bolts of lightning each day, each of which deals 5d10 points of electricity damage. This ability is otherwise identical to *call lightning storm*.

Vulnerable to Silence (Su) A kaminari constantly surrounds itself with sound and music, and can't stand any form of silence. Whenever a kaminari is affected by a *silence* spell or effect or is rendered deaf by any means, it loses its cacophonous blow ability and its fast healing for the duration of the effect. But because a kaminari possesses incredible resilience to such effects, any silence or deafening effect lasts only 2d4 rounds or as long as the effect's duration states, whichever is shorter.

* See the *Advanced Player's Guide*.

Kaminaris are robust spirits of enormous size that watch over the balance of weather, taking the form of violent storms wherever they go. More monstrous-looking and boisterous than most kami, kaminaris are often mistaken for oni upon first glance, their unpredictable natures furthering the confusion. Kaminaris care little for most mortals, primarily concerning themselves with the maintenance and protection of their wards—enormous storm clouds that represent the awesome power of thunder and lightning. In addition to their duties guarding their storm wards and the balance of weather, kaminaris are endlessly fascinated with musical instruments, particularly drums.

Kaminaris have vibrant skin and equally colorful features; the specific hues vary from kaminari to kaminari. A kaminari stands roughly 25 feet tall and weighs about 10 tons.

ECOLOGY

Though a kaminari commands the awe-inspiring powers of lightning and thunder as though they were simply extensions of itself, the kami of storms have limited power over their wards. As dictated by the obscure and convoluted *Laws of Golden Perfection*, a kaminari has only limited ability to will its ward to travel in any particular direction or halt its movement for a modest amount of time per day. Thus it is often merely a passenger upon the clouds of a storm.

Though most storms collect and dissipate with some frequency, a kami-inhabited storm is more permanent than most weather patterns, and as long as both the kami and its ward are neither destroyed nor corrupted, the storm could exist for a potentially infinite amount of time.

Kaminaris despise the use of magic to alter weather patterns, and attempts to disrupt their storm clouds often result in the enormous kami's unabashed and wrathful ire. A kaminari is as volatile as the storm it protects, and the powerful spirit is quick to exterminate any creature—mortal or otherwise—it deems a threat to the natural balance of weather. Whether an evil sorcerer is trying to bring devastation to a seaside town by calling forth powerful hurricanes or a benevolent wizard is summoning rain to save a desert city in the midst of a natural drought, if such manipulation comes to the attention of the watchful and wandering kaminaris, they find little forgiveness. This is not to suggest that the kami of storms are evil—their threshold for nuisances is simply lower than most kami, and their punishments more destructive.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Floating thousands of feet above most civilizations, kaminaris are usually isolated from other creatures, and this suits the reclusive kami just fine. A kaminari does not interfere with the matters of mortals beyond the natural destruction caused by its storm clouds, and only aides such diminutive creatures when the task would be required of it because of some stricture of the *Laws of Golden Perfection*. Once a kaminari has fulfilled its required duty, it is only too happy to continue on its way, where it can remain uninterrupted as it creates its music and fills the air around it with thunder and lightning.

A kaminari is as devoted to its ward as it is to the practice of music, and the intensity of the storm it sits upon usually corresponds to the amount of aggression with which it plays its instrument. While it rarely cares to interact with mortals, tending first and foremost to its ward, a kaminari may entertain the idea of interacting with a fellow virtuoso. Kaminaris thus have a great affection for bards who practice an instrument, and will occasionally interrupt their diligent guardianship of their storm if doing so allows them the opportunity to play with a skillful accompanist. Amateurs need not apply, as the immortal kaminaris are often among the best players of their instruments, commanding powers



of music so stirring that even the most talented bard might have trouble keeping up.

A kaminari goes to great lengths to surround itself with booming noise, and is rarely seen without its instrument of choice. While most kaminaris prefer to use drums and other percussion instruments to fill the air around them with sound, rare individuals also adhere to the use of keyboard, string, and wind instruments. The powers of these kaminaris do not greatly differ, but their choice of instrument is usually a fair indicator of their temperament as well as the kind of storm they travel upon—those who play keyboards are usually found amid desert-quickening storms that wander arid environments, bringing with them the power of tornadoes and dust storms; players of string instruments tend toward oceanic environs, residing within the hearts of devastating hurricanes of incredible magnitude far out at sea; and kaminaris who use wind instruments occupy blizzards, commanding the powers of the ice and snow that constantly whip about them.

KAMI, SUIJIN

This massive, serpentine carp explodes forth from the water, its rainbow-colored scales gleaming in the sunlight and glossy eyes bright with good-natured intelligence.

SUIJIN

CR 14



XP 38,400

N Large outsider (kami, native, water)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +27

DEFENSE

AC 30, touch 12, flat-footed 27 (+2 Dex, +1 dodge, +18 natural, -1 size)

hp 207 (18d10+108); fast healing 7

Fort +17, **Ref** +15, **Will** +12

DR 10/cold iron and evil; **Immune** bleed, mind-affecting effects, petrification, polymorph effects; **Resist** acid 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (perfect), swim 60 ft.

Melee bite +24 (2d8+7/19-20), tail slap +19 (1d8+3 plus grab)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with bite)

Special Attacks breath weapon (80-ft. line, 9d6 bludgeoning damage plus push, Reflex DC 25 for half, usable every 1d4 rounds), constrict (1d8+3), whitewater barrier

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th; concentration +22)

Constant—*freedom of movement*, *speak with animals*

At will—*control water*, *create water*, *greater dispel magic*, *modify memory* (DC 18), *slipstream**

3/day—*aqueous orb** (DC 17), quickened *telekinesis* (DC 19)

1/day—*break enchantment*

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 15, **Con** 23, **Int** 18, **Wis** 22, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +18; **CMB** +26 (+30 grapple); **CMD** 39

Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Lightning Reflexes, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Quickened Spell-Like Ability (*telekinesis*), Stand Still

Skills Bluff +25, Diplomacy +22, Fly +29, Handle Animal +25, Intimidate +22, Knowledge (nature) +25, Perception +27, Sense Motive +27, Survival +27, Swim +36

Languages Aquan, Common; *speak with animals*, telepathy 100 ft.

SQ merge with ward, ward (small body of water)

ECOLOGY

Environment any water

Organization solitary

Treasure standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Breath Weapon (Su) When a suijin uses its breath weapon, it unleashes a pressurized blast of water that knocks over and soaks everything in its line of effect. Any creature that is struck by the blast and fails its saving throw is pushed back 10 feet as though bull rushed. For every 5 by

which a creature fails its saving throw, it is pushed back an additional 5 feet. This effect also extinguishes any normal fires within the line of effect, as well as magical fires, which are dispelled as though by *greater dispel magic*. A suijin can choose to have its breath weapon deal nonlethal damage instead of lethal damage before using this ability.

Whitewater Barrier (Su) Three times per day as a standard action, a suijin can create a wall of turbulent water. A suijin can make this barrier however long it wishes, up to a maximum length of 180 feet, and the wall is 20 feet tall. A whitewater barrier acts as a sheet of stormy water, and any Large or smaller creature that attempts to pass through the barrier must succeed at a DC 26 Swim check or be rushed to the top of the wave and pushed back to the side it started on, taking fall damage as appropriate. It is possible to create cylindrical or square whitewater barriers to enclose specific points. This effect acts like *wind wall* in regard to how ranged missiles, breath weapons, gases, and creatures in gaseous form interact with it. The Swim DC is Constitution-based.

* See the *Advanced Player's Guide*.

Suijins are the kami of lakes, ponds, springs, and wells. When they are not merged with their wards, these spirits of nature resemble giant carp or sea serpents, usually beautiful specimens with rainbow scales. While they are as benevolent and well meaning as all other kami, suijins are often mistaken for beasts of the waters they inhabit, and are thus feared by superstitious or simple-minded creatures. Those who encounter suijins know better than to believe such unfounded fears, however, as the kami often only emerge from their wards in order to protect innocent creatures in trouble near its waters. Considered reclusive even by other kami, a suijin usually tries to protect creatures within its wards by covert means if at all possible, slowing the flow of its waters' currents or pushing struggling creatures to shore via magic. Suijins are infinitely patient, and though most enjoy helping creatures, those in more remote regions are just as content to simply exist among their waters, protecting their wards from those who would seek to defile them. The general attitude among most suijins is often one of simple acceptance of things as they are, based on the belief that all things are fluid and subject to change; even the largest lakes are bound to recede or expand, and even the most eternal kami are not entirely permanent, a point proven by the vicious oni.

In its true form, a typical suijin is 15 feet long and weighs about 1,200 pounds, though numerous rumors suggest that lesser and greater suijins do exist in some parts of the world, typically residing in bodies of water that are proportionate to the kami's size and power.

ECOLOGY

A suiijin's particular ward is usually a good indicator of its temperament. A suiijin residing in a secluded and placid mountain lake is often more calm and forgiving of trespasses than one dwelling in the heart of a turbulent river, and though all suiijins typically mean well, those with more tumultuous wards are generally less tolerant of intruders within their domains. For instance, a suiijin protecting a natural whirlpool within a larger body of water may not help a passing boat of traders that happens to start sinking into its depths, viewing the ship as a disturbance to the forces of nature. Those suiijins who are used to seeing their waterways casually abused by the forces of civilization—as almost all cities in some way impose upon or corrupt the rivers and streams that flow near them, and even farming communities may pollute with manure and runoff—can be much more hard-hearted.

Suiijins in isolated areas care far less about the mortal world than those who interact with it on a daily basis, so the attitude of a suiijin dwelling within a mountain stream is often far different than that of one residing in a regularly visited pond. Travelers can earn the approval of a suiijin by placing minerals or gemstones within its ward, and those who pollute the waters or use it for evil (such as by executing innocents via drowning) are quick to encounter a normally calm suiijin's fearsome wrath. Unusual floods and droughts are both signs of a suiijin's displeasure with a nearby development's effects on the surrounding waters, and wary villagers are careful to appease a suiijin and change their destructive ways, lest they feel the full brunt of the powerful water kami's righteous wrath.

Those suiijins who continually fail to protect their waters from troublesome residents or visitors are often quick to fall out of favor with their kindred, and the wards of these kami often become treacherous during the time in which a corrupted suiijin makes its gradual transition toward becoming an oni.

HABITAT & SOCIETY


A suiijin can occupy virtually any body of water, whether it be a stream up to several dozen miles long or a lake no more than a single mile in diameter. A particularly social suiijin might choose to occupy the aqueduct of an urban development if the inhabitants are especially conscious of their impact on the surrounding environs, and such settlements recognize and appreciate the blessing of the benevolent resident, as a suiijin cleans and purifies the waters it inhabits.

Suiijins are solitary kami, and rarely go out of their way to band with others of their kind, preferring instead to protect isolated bodies of water. This form of aloofness isn't out of fear of or apathy for other kami; instead, suiijins merely adhere to a loosely established territorial pact, knowing that their powers are more valuable when spread throughout regions, rather than concentrated on particular bodies of water. When suiijins do interact with one another, they do so at points where two bodies of water meet, such as estuaries and deltas. If two connecting bodies of water are especially healthy and the suiijins residing in them are entirely undisturbed by forces of corruption, it is said that the water kami celebrate nature in a sort of bonding ritual. The rare event can be seen as motes of blue and green light whirling in the shallows of the adjoining water, and scholars speculate that this event may symbolize the creation of a new suiijin.



ONI, JA NOI

This hunchbacked, fiery-skinned humanoid possesses black eyes beneath the bony ridges of its brow, wears elaborate heavy armor, and wields an ornate metal club.

Ja Noi CR 5 

XP 1,600

LE Medium outsider (goblinoid, native, oni, shapechanger)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +10

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16 (+2 armor, +2 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 57 (6d10+24); regeneration 3 (acid or fire)

Fort +9, **Ref** +7, **Will** +3

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk tetsubo +11/+6 (1d10+6/×4)

Ranged longbow +8/+3 (1d8/×3)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; concentration +8)

3/day—*command* (DC 13), *doom* (DC 13), *fly*, *magic weapon*

1/day—*bull's strength*

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 15, **Con** 18, **Int** 12, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 14

Base Atk +6; **CMB** +10; **CMD** 22

Feats Cleave, Outflank*, Power Attack

Skills Bluff +11, Disguise +11, Fly +11, Intimidate +11,

Perception +10, Sense Motive +10, Stealth +11

Languages Common, Goblin

SQ change shape (Small or Medium humanoid, *alter self*), serene fighter

ECOLOGY

Environment temperate or warm hills

Organization solitary, patrol (2–4), warband (5–7 plus 8–15 hobgoblins), or company (8–12 plus 20–50 hobgoblins, 1–2 lieutenants of 4th–5th level, and 1 general of 7th–10th level)

Treasure standard (masterwork leather armor, masterwork tetsubo**, longbow with 20 arrows, other treasure)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Serene Fighter (Su) A ja noi is extremely disciplined and maintains its focus even in the midst of combat. Once per day as an immediate action, a ja noi may reroll a Will save.

* See the *Advanced Player's Guide*.

** See *Ultimate Combat*.

A ja noi is an oni spirit that takes the form of a hobgoblin, and differs physically from the hobgoblins in a variety of ways, most notably its unearthly strength and distorted appearance. A ja noi's skin blazes a fiery red rather than a drab gray, and the oni bears prominent ridges on its brow and forehead.

Ja noi live to fight. While not as physically powerful as most oni, ja noi nonetheless have an insatiable thirst for combat that drives them to pursue the trials of battle

and bloodshed. The sensation of hot blood splattering on a ja noi's skin provokes an adrenaline rush that only fuels its lust for the kill. Its broad, tightly muscled physique and prowess in combat inspire awe within typical hobgoblins, who see the ja noi as a leader who ensures victory in their conquests.

Towering over the hobgoblins it resembles, a ja noi stands a little over 6 feet tall and weighs about 220 pounds.

ECOLOGY

All oni believe the Material Plane's inhabitants fail to take advantage of the wealth of sensations they have at their disposal. While most of these evil spirits inhabit shells and rise to power by working behind the scenes—manipulating others into doing most of their foul deeds for them—ja noi take a more direct approach, conquering and slaughtering any who would stand against them and their armies. Ja noi embrace the carnal joys of slaughter, and no situation is more pleasant to a ja noi than the heat of combat upon a war-ravaged battlefield. These hardened oni often recognize the inevitable outcome of their warlike tendencies, knowing that death could always be just around the corner; this knowledge, however, only further stimulates their greed for sensation, inspiring them to embrace every fight, as they know it could be their last. A ja noi silences its mind and ignores everything else while on the battlefield, reveling in the current moment and the sensations of combat: the crunch of bones beneath a worn club, the spray of dying foes' blood, and the scattered guts and heads of fallen brawlers.

Like other oni, ja noi possess the ability to change shape, and often use this ability to confuse enemies in the midst of battle, altering their appearances to look like allies, only to bash in an unsuspecting foe's head before the victim knows what's happened. This brutish trickery is usually the extent of a ja noi's guile, however, as the hobgoblin oni are hardly known for their cunning. Even in regard to tactics, ja noi usually implement only the basest plans of action, simply relying on their weaker minions to take the brunt of an opposing army's blow while they target the commanders, always seeking the most worthy challenger and forever striving for that feeling that comes just as one is fighting for one's life. The most powerful ja noi are exceptions to this rule, however, and tales tell of expert ja noi leaders who excel in both physical prowess and tactical wit. These commanders quickly reach the status of generals, and work alongside other oni to manipulate vast armies of soldiers, both humanoid and goblinoid.

Once they take physical form, ja noi rarely last more than a couple years on the Material Plane, their deadly lifestyle often a limiting factor in this regard. They either

die in battle or at the hands of mutinous troops or allies, minions who realize that they are merely pawns in the game of war that the ja noi is constantly playing. Thus, most of these oni practice their battle skills constantly against one another, their strongest hobgoblin followers, and their adroit adversaries, always fighting and becoming more powerful. While they care little for the arcane, ja noi hone some magical abilities in order to inflict maximum damage on the battlefield, and a few even seek out magical items to bolster their strength.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Whereas many oni prefer to act alone and in secret, ja noi recognize the concept of strength in numbers, and understand that banding together is often a surer way to glorious victories than lone pursuits. The rare lone ja noi may seek out renowned heroes and martial senseis to challenge in one-on-one combat, but most of these creatures know the best way to demonstrate their prowess is in the midst of the chaotic battlefield in front of other oni, especially fellow ja noi. Often, when ja noi work together to bring carnage to the field of war, they keep track of each other's kills, ranking one another in terms of strength and skill. An individual who shows cowardice repeatedly or does not prove a useful ally swiftly meets the blade of a supposed comrade, as ja noi have little patience for weak accomplices.

Ja noi are seen as lowly and primal by other oni, but they possess immense amounts of authority among the lesser hobgoblins around them, and so they surround themselves with these minions, viewing them as useful fodder for the battles to come. During the fight, a ja noi's amateur hobgoblin warriors combat the masses of the opposing army, allowing the prideful oni to engage the commanders. Having found what they consider an ideal

militaristic race, ja noi prefer to use hobgoblins for their war campaigns if possible, though they settle for other soldiers if doing so clearly benefits the oni and they have the mortals' unquestioning loyalty. More often, a ja noi will employ non-hobgoblin minions to serve as slaves or some other form of chattel, putting them to work crafting armor and weapons or cleaning up during the aftermath of a successful battle.

In rare cases, more powerful oni ask ja noi to lead armies against particularly stubborn groups of opponents. Ja noi rarely refuse such requests, knowing that much blood will be shed in the ventures—and that denying the requests of stronger oni is a sure path to a quick death. Like all oni, ja noi despise and seek out kami, reveling in the destruction of minor spirits and hunting the more powerful individuals for the sheer challenge of it. Because of the strictures of the *Laws of Golden Perfection*, ja noi cannot directly slay kami, and so they work to direct their vicious hobgoblin armies to complete the task instead.

In extremely rare cases, when they have no campaigns to wage and no humanoid enemies to battle, ja noi simply disappear into the wilderness to fight the mightiest creatures they can find. Laying waste to big game such as bulettes and owlbears can distract a ja noi between large-scale battles, but it doesn't take long before the natural warrior quickly feels the lust for battle surge within it once again. Given too much time between skirmishes, a ja noi might turn its violent attention toward its followers, slaughtering entire hobgoblin tribes out of frustration and madness. Canny hobgoblins in service to a bloodthirsty ja noi are wise to find opposing groups for the oni to battle, that the resulting conflict might temporarily sate the ja noi's incessant desire for war.



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by *Tito Leati*

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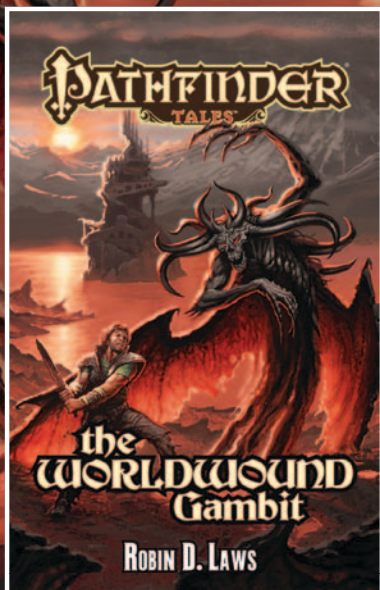
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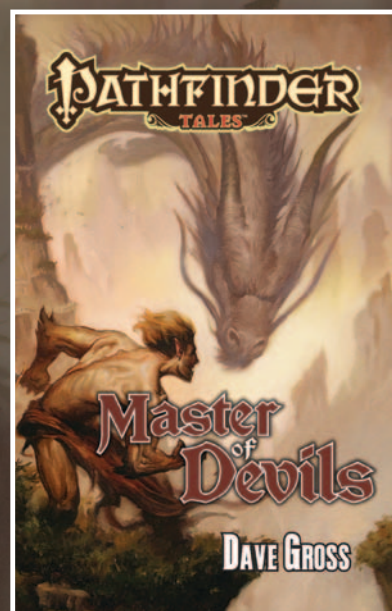
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TORN BETWEEN WORLDS

Across the mystical lands of Tian Xia there are places where the borders between the world of mortals and the realms of spirits have worn thin. Among the greatest evidence of this closeness between worlds is not a site, but rather a people: those capricious beings known as kitsune. Although living creatures, the foxlike kitsune are a race of legend and mystery, and they have walked among the other humanoid races of Tian Xia for generations. Yet despite their long history on Golarion, the eldest of their kind hint at a shared insight into the truths of life and reality that no mortal should know.



HOMES TO THE SPIRITS

The spirits of ancestors, the land, and the cosmos pervade all things, and blessed are those mortals who recognize and protect these sacred places where such beings congregate and make their homes. Many of these sacred objects are indistinguishable to the untrained eye, and a wise traveler thinks carefully before disturbing even the most mundane stone or cutting down a tree, as it may be more than it seems. All across Minkai, braided straw ropes called *shimenawa* encircle specific trees, rocks, shrines, and other blessed sites, either to ward off evil or to indicate that a kami resides within the sacred feature.

KEEPERS OF THE FOREST

After surviving one deadly wilderness, the heroes emerge into another—a land of ancient mysteries and sacred secrets known as the Forest of Spirits. But the forest knows how to defend itself from strangers, and its powerful and aloof guardians, the kami, brook no harm to their eldritch home. Those who would defy the spirits of the land have little hope of survival. Yet those who prove themselves friends to this mystical realm and its strange inhabitants stand to gain not just great allies, but also knowledge of a secret evil that has long festered in the forest's heart and now poisons all of Tian Xia.

This volume of Pathfinder Adventure Path includes:

- “Forest of Spirits,” a Pathfinder RPG adventure for 10th-level characters, by Richard Pett.
- An investigation of the mysterious creatures known as kami, honored defenders of the land and nature, by Mike Shel.
- Insights into the ways and deadly techniques of the ninja clans of Minkai, by Jesse Benner.
- Deadly guardian geisha and a journey into one of Oda’s seedier gambling houses in the Pathfinder’s Journal, by Dave Gross.
- Five new monsters, by Patrick Renie, Steve Russell, and Mike Welham.



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Printed in China. PZO9052