

# Hindsight (part I)

## INTRODUCTION

*Hindsight* is an adventure for the Legend of the Five Rings roleplaying game, first run at Origins 2000. Intended as an alternative to the story line of the current official L5R products, *Hindsight* makes reference to the Scorpion Clan Coup and resulting wars as a future possibility but does not actually require them to have occurred; the adventure can be run in games set before, after, or entirely indifferent to those events.

But that doesn't mean running it will be easy.

*Hindsight*, by its nature, will not suit the taste of every gamemaster or campaign.

A predominately low-magic campaign that relies on the details of feudal Japan will find *Hindsight* over-the-top. Story-line adherents may not like the power we give the player characters, or even the concept of the adventure. Gamemasters who can't improvise Rokugani historical detail, characterization, or consequences may find themselves reaching to the players for help in Rounds Two and Three -- situations that start off complex and become more so with every action the PCs take. They may even find themselves frustrated because while the adventure and the supplements it references have a hefty amount of detail, the GM will have to not only spot and understand retroactive continuity, but make it up on their own.

Quite frankly, it takes a lot of preparation, a lack of distractions, and a keg of mad glee to run *Hindsight* and pull it off right. This is by no means an old-fashioned dungeon crawl in which we write up a map and your players follow it down the road. What players and gamemaster must realize is that *Hindsight* is only half of a road map, and the entire L5R story line is the other half.

And as Dr. Emmett Brown would say, "Where we're going, we don't need roads."

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

In **Part One**, the magistrates are asked by the Dragon Clan to investigate into the murder of Togashi Nobue, an *ise zumi* who was last seen alive on the Island of Silk. Once there, they are hassled by an irritable Mantis of the Storm Legion before getting down to business. They find evidence that the victim was actually the third in a series of *ise zumi* troubleshooters who came to the islands, working under the cover story of educating the populace in Shintao. The first two monks disappeared, but left clues for their successors in the form of coded Shinseist doctrine, which leads the characters to the ruins of Kyuden Gusai. There, they find Nobue's notes.

She was here tracking Togashi Akuro, a renegade *ise zumi* who went mad after seeing a vision of the future. Her assistant in the search was Kakita Kumpei, an artisan who, unknown to the characters, has been an accessory to Akuro and helped murder the three monks. Sending the

PCs into a trap on a deserted island, he rejoins Akuro, and the characters catch them just as they disappear into a magical painting, made from the skins of the dead monks. The heroes, presumably unwilling to let a murderer go free, follow.

In **Part Two**, they emerge from the painting in time to save a young nobleman from being killed by his Seppun bodyguard. The man, they soon learn, is the Emperor Hantei...the *Sixth*.

With the blood of Togashi powering a Kakita artisan painting, Akuro and Kumpei have emerged in Imperial Palace in the year 400, when the Emperor was a puppet, *gaijin* were a common sight, and the *gozoku* rule of three Clan daimyo determined the fate of the Empire. Hantei Kusada does not seem nearly as important in court as the corpulent Bayushi Atsuki, the young Doji Tomeko and her champion Seikidera, and the war hawk Shiba Katsutoshi, the Phoenix behind the ruthless recent purge of the *gaijin*.

As the characters try to keep their secret from the interested nobles, they soon realize anything they say or do could warp Rokugan's past, and they'll need to remember all the history they can when the rich and powerful ask for favors in return for helping them find Akuro. It is not easy -- due to the fading magic of the painting, Akuro has arrived a week earlier, changing his appearance using his Chameleon *ise zumi* tattoo to that of Shosuro Matsuo, the right-hand man of the Scorpion daimyo, Bayushi Atsuki. Interrogation of the corrupt bodyguard, Seppun Ushimo, reveals a second traitor urged him into it: Gusai Iami, a Mantis bushi financially hurt by the recent purge of the *gaijin*, and the former incarnation of Yoritomo's corrupt Storm Legionnaire from Part One. Though he is not present to ask, it is deducible that "Matsuo" convinced him.

Crane Champion Doji Seikidera says the false Matsuo was last seen heading to a small hunting-lodge castle called Shiro Izumida. While some of the heroes try to repair the damage done to the Seppun family and ensure they will still be the bodyguards of the Emperor, the others scout Izumida and find the scraps of two scrolls Akuro stole from the Ikoma library six hundred years in the future...the entire outline of the Rokugani strategy for the Battle of the White Stag.

If the player characters say nothing, Rokugan is doomed.

A *gaijin* horde marches up the coast, visible from Shiro Izumida. Meanwhile, Gusai Iami is turning the Mantis against Rokugan, forming an alliance that will let the cannon ships of the *gaijin* bombard Otosan Uchi unopposed.

While they puzzle out strategies, Doji Seikidera, the Crane Champion whom history books say was instrumental in gathering a merchant fleet to win the battle, has disappeared from court to talk peace with the foreign sailors, as history decrees. But Akuro, whose textbook knowledge is unerring, knows where he will be. Just as the player characters track him to the ships, Akuro, Iami, and a pack of Mantis betrayers shoot Seikidera dead. They have changed history irrevocably...or so they think.

In **Part Three**, the player characters must win the Battle of the White Stag in the name of Rokugan and temporal integrity. The horde on land must be stopped; the merchant fleets

must be gathered by someone that *looks* like the Crane Champion to provide ships for the three arguing Clans; the Mantis must be convinced through force that the *gaijin* are not worthy allies; the enchantments of the Isawa must hold until the Dragon and the Centipede arrive; the sea battle must be fought as the *gaijin* pound Otosan Uchi with cannons, blades, and magic; the future Isawa Asahina must live through the barrage; and finally, in the chaos somewhere is Kakita Kumpei, with a fragile painting that is the heroes' only way home.

As you can probably tell by now, this isn't an adventure for sheep.

## BEFORE PLAY BEGINS

*Hindsight* was initially playtested with the provided pregenerated characters; six samurai averaging Rank 3, in good standing with the Dragon Clan and amiable toward the Mantis. The protagonists have many uncommon skills such as Lore: Mantis, Sailing, Battle, Mimic, and especially History at high ratings to help smooth the plot twists. If you are trying to integrate the adventure into a home group, you may wish to provide a "voice in the party" NPC possessing these skills to shore up any PC weaknesses.

We personally prefer making the players stretch their dramatic range and play the pre-gens, but then, we're tournament organizers. Adjusting *Hindsight* to fit the fates of home-grown PCs will take some customization, especially when it comes to the reincarnation theme.

*Hindsight's* central conceit allows the gamemaster to create resonance among the players by exploiting such Advantages and Disadvantages as Great Destiny, Nemesis, Kharmic Tie, or a family curse. By making the characters feel glimmers of their lovers, friends, and enemies in the people of the past, the adventure can provide closure or illustrate themes about spiritual justice in Rokugan. Being enemies in one life and lovers in another can add new dimensions to a current campaign relationship; perhaps, as the pregenerated bushi Kanimoto and his Nemesis Tadayasu, your characters find themselves helpless before destiny, fighting in this life and the next; has one always defeated the other, or does the dharmic wheel balance them with wins and losses? And what of the temptation to erase mistakes or change history to your family's advantage?

If it is at all possible, we recommend using Kanimoto's story arc, though whether this is done by playing Kanimoto is less important. The essential idea is that you have a reason for the PC to meet his Nemesis or Enemy on the isles in Part One, get entangled in Akuro's plot and the delicacies of time travel, and just when he least wants it, meet his enemy's previous incarnation in Part Three. This has the advantage of player-proofing at least some drama in the climax. Even if the PC wastes his opponent early on, he can still run into him a second time in a different skin.

If their personal enemies have already been established to live elsewhere, integrating them may prove too troublesome. On the other hand, tossing out Tadayasu and surprising the players with their expectant enemy waiting at Yoritomo's right hand might chill their blood just the way you like it.

## A Handy House Rule

Because many Clan Lore rolls will probably be made over the course of the adventure, you may want to institute our house rule: a samurai is considered to have the Clan Lore skill of their own clan equal to their School Rank. The pregenerated characters were not created with this rule.

## A Note on Storyline and Second Edition

*Hindsight's* statistics are written in First Edition rules, since they are more suited to the heroic style of play necessary for this story. In addition, the pregenerated characters' backgrounds assume a setting before the Scorpion Clan Coup. If you are integrating into an existing, post-Coup campaign, the plot should work just as well in a time after Yoritomo has increased the Mantis' power, but before the coming of the Hooded Ronin's revelation and the Day of Thunder.

The exact timeline of Rokugan's important events is somewhat inconsistent from supplement to supplement, and *Way of the Scorpion* makes it clear that recorded history in Rokugan is by no means objective.

*Winter Court: Kyuden Kakita* attempted to make a single history reference table, but it did so in several places by changing years previously given in the *Way of the Clans* supplements. Since the contradictions and confusions of each individual clan history results in many subplot ideas, *Hindsight* was created using the Clan books for its dates. If you wish to alter the adventure to suit the *Kyuden Kakita* timeline, you are welcome. Cross out a few of the dates and scribble in. It's your printer paper.

Remember, what actually occurs, what a "historian" writes down, what a student interprets from the text, and what the student remembers under stress is a long, easily-broken causal chain. You don't have to know every word of published *L5R* history to run *Hindsight*, but you should be able to explain it to your players on the fly. When the inevitable discussion sparks in Round Two and Three, tell the noisy players, "Sure, that's what you were *taught*," with a big smile and keep going. The skill is called "Clan Lore," not "Clan Facts."

## PART ONE: UNDER THE SKIN

### Background: The Death of Togashi Nobue

The characters are summoned to Shiro Kitsuki by the family daimyo Kitsuki Yasu (or, if their Glory is not sufficiently high, by an underling attempting to impress Yasu by handling the affair alone). There, in a quick brief, he tells them that a Mantis herald arrived not long ago with a case of some import.

It seems an eta's dog had been searching a garbage heap on the Isle of Silk when it found a body that has been tentatively identified as Togashi Nobue, a venerated *ise zumi*. It was not an easy identification -- it had decomposed for perhaps two weeks, and it had been skinned. The body was burned, and a messenger dispatched to the Dragon.

Yasu knows little more than this, and if the PCs question the Mantis herald, all he can add is

some details on the neighborhood where the body was found. Cresting Wave Row, the area which uses that particular garbage dump, is a sheltered sea-side community. The houses are used by samurai and wealthy merchants who plan a brief stay in the islands and don't care about finding a dwelling further away from the ports. Few people stay longer than a year. A Lore: Mantis Clan roll, TN 15, can reveal the same information.

In addition, characters with Lore: Dragon Clan, may roll at TN 25 to recognize Togashi Nobue as a troubleshooter within the *ise zumi* ranks, specially hand-picked by Togashi Yokuni to deal with supernatural problems. It is important that the players learn this eventually; if necessary, provide a Dragon escort or servant, who might be able to assist the PCs with Dragon-specific information. (Kitsuki Fumiko of the pregenerated characters can, of course, serve in this regard.)

The messenger tells the characters that Kanimoto, whom the pregenerated characters have worked with in the past, will be their guide while on the islands. He will meet them there.

## ARRIVAL ON THE ISLANDS

Most players should know the importance of making a formal introduction to Yoritomo, informing him of their stay in his lands. If they forget, then they are here without official permission, and GMs should feel free to wait until they are on their hottest lead before having the Storm Legion show up and ask to see their travel papers. If you want to give them a nudge, an Etiquette roll, TN 15, will tell them the proper behavior.

The Isle of Silk is one of a handful of places in Rokugan with a tourist industry. Years of semi-secret trade with the Ivory Kingdoms and acres of silkworm farms have led to a nouveau riche feel -- both in the visitors and those who profit from them.

Yoritomo's palace is a simple square, stone structure, reflecting hundreds of years of silent protest against the destruction of the beautiful, ornate Kyuden Gusai (torn down when Gusai Rioshida tried to hold the Emperor's son hostage, resulting in the dissolution of the Gusai family, and near-destruction of the Mantis). Inside, the castle is a strange mix of Rokugani and foreign decorations, more furniture than in most Rokugani dwellings, including carved wood chairs and tables, thick rugs, and silk curtains, all of which spell "ostentation" to most classy samurai.

Although Yoritomo is fairly civil to characters who come voluntarily rather than waiting to be summoned, the audience is awkward at best.

Yoritomo, whose statistics are in *The Way of the Minor Clans* (p. 22), is a strong-willed, powerful man in a lousy position. He is widely considered to be among the top ten bushi in Rokugan and has a Glory of 7.9, so the PCs should technically defer to him on all matters. However, in this instance they are acting as the representatives of Togashi Yokuni (Glory 9), after one of Yokuni's hand-picked monks was just murdered in Yoritomo's backyard.

The Dragon tend to be favored at court because they are the most neutral clan in Rokugan and often seen as free of deception. With war threatening Rokugan (when is it not?) and

Yoritomo making a bid to increase the Mantis' power (when is he not?), he knows the last thing he needs is to be bad-mouthed by the Dragon.

So throughout their conversation, Yoritomo plays a balancing act, speaking bluntly and giving an impression of unrestrained power and temper, while being very careful not to actually antagonize the player characters. If they cooperate with his requests and seem intimidated, he'll walk all over them. If they argue, he growls and bluffs, but doesn't follow through unless they are actively rude, in which case he throws them off the island and risks the consequences rather than seem weak.

Although Yoritomo tries to make it seem like a great concession to allow the characters to search the islands, he is actually more than happy to use a free Kitsuki detective to rid his lands of murderers, and agrees.

With one condition.

He wants the PCs to bring all suspects to him before subjecting them to Yokuni's justice. Most PCs will not object; if they do, they'd better have convincing leverage, or Yoritomo will suspect some Minor-Clan "family profiling" on the part of the magistrates.

If the magistrates are polite during the rest of the conversation, Yoritomo is willing to answer a few questions before sending them on their way. If asked about Togashi Nobue, he tells the characters she came to the islands as a missionary, one of a number of *ise zumi* who wished to teach the Tao of Shinsei to the provincial Mantis peasants. Their school is inland, near the farming village of Rakusho. Though Yoritomo himself is indifferent to religion, he has learned that the other clans have more respect for the Mantis when he mentions the missionaries' "civilizing influence," so he has encouraged the monks to continue.

## Enter Tadayasu

Tadayasu, the captain of the Storm Legion for the area where Nobue was found, enters the room halfway through the characters' conversation with Yoritomo. A corrupt police chief with a violent temper and contempt for those below him, and a smarmy, toadying charm when with Yoritomo, Tadayasu is also the Nemesis of Kanimoto.

Tadayasu is a physically imposing man with a shaved head, a tendency to wear armor even in court, and enough trust from the daimyo to interrupt his meeting and not get killed for it. Though he cares little for politeness, and is furious that outside investigators are being brought into his jurisdiction, he rarely shouts. "Firm menace" is what comes to mind with his few words.

(For those of you without a clear picture of the Legion's station house on the Isle of Silk, visualize the most corrupt police who ever hit the news in your section of the world, carrying kama rather than nightsticks, and the attitude that change represents. Paying off a Legionnaire to go break some dope-peddlin' Yasuki's jaw is not considered abnormal law enforcement in these parts. It's considered the first warning.)

Tadayasu considers any law enforcement the characters do to be a direct insult to his entire squad. He fears competent magistrates will discover his brutal practices, and he'd rather soil their names pre-emptively. Once Yoritomo gives him the news, he'll question their motives and qualifications, and request that his loyal lieutenant Kosai accompany the PCs at all times. Unless the PCs can convince him that it will be a direct threat to the investigation (without insulting the Storm Legion in the process), Yoritomo agrees. In game terms, this is an opposed Awareness + Sincerity test with Tadayasu, who is rolling 6k2; the TN is five times the opponent's Willpower.

If the players succeed, they are free to investigate alone. If both sides succeed, Yoritomo is pleased with everyone's vigilance, lets the magistrates do their thing, and tells Tadayasu to take five samurai from the castle garrison to step up his own investigation. This will please Tadayasu and get him off the PCs' backs for about a day.

If Tadayasu wins, the PCs are given Kosai as a constant chaperone and shadow.

Kosai is a Rank 2 Mantis bushi (use the statistics for the opponent bushi given at the end of Part One) and he's a thug from a long line of thugs. He insists on being the first to talk to the locals (using the opportunity to intimidate them into silence), reports any "suspicious" behavior on the PCs' part straight to Tadayasu, and generally tries to sabotage the investigation to "prove" that the Kitsuki are incompetent.

While Kosai is a pain, he is respected among the Storm Legion, and killing him is a fast way to get into a duel with Tadayasu. Getting into a duel with Tadayasu is a fast way to be woken up in the middle of the night by twenty Storm Legionnaires who don't like to see a Mantis lose.

### **Tadayasu**

#### **Rank 4 Mantis Bushi**

**EARTH 4, Willpower 5, FIRE 3, Agility 4, WATER 3, AIR 2, Reflexes 4, VOID 3**

**Skills:** Archery 3, Athletics 3, Battle 4, Bojutsu 3, Commerce 4, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Forgery 4, Jujutsu 4, Kenjutsu 4, Heraldry 2, Investigation 3, Medicine 3, Nofujutsu 4, Poison 2, Sailing 4, Sincerity 4, Stealth 3.

**Honor: 0.5 Glory: 6.2**

**Advantages:** Heartless, Vain

**School Techniques:** Tadayasu may fight with any weapon as if he had at least a skill of 1, and ignore all penalties for unsure footing or imbalance. He may spend a Void point to make a Full Attack with no penalty. He may attack with a weapon in each

hand, rolling separate Initiative for each, and when making a normal attack, his TN to be hit is increased by his Water Ring times 5.

**TN To Be Hit:** 20(35)

**Weapons:** Katana (Str +3k2), Kama (Str +4k2).

Kosai

**Rank 2 Mantis Bushi**

**EARTH 3, FIRE 2, Agility 3, AIR 2, Reflexes 3, WATER 2, VOID 3**

**Skills:** Athletics 2, Nofujutsu 3, Defense 3, Jiu-jutsu 3, Kenjutsu 3, Sailing 3, Hunting 2, Sincerity 3, Commerce 1, Stealth 2, Battle 2, Lore: Mantis Clan 2.

**Honor:** 0.7 **Glory:** 2.5

**School Techniques:** May fight with any weapon as if he has a skill of 1, and ignores all penalties for unsure footing. May spend Void to make a Full Attack without penalty.

**TN To Be Hit:** 15 (20 in armor)

**Weapons:** Parangu (Str + 2k2), Kusarigama (Str +2k2, or can attack to entangle with the chain; this attack inflicts no damage but if successful, lower the target's TN to Be Hit to 5 for one round +1 per Raise; this does not prevent the target from taking an action to get free, nor does it prevent them from continuing to attack the kusarigama wielder).

Once they have finished their audience, the characters (with Kosai or not) have a few options of where to go, namely whether they want to first investigate where the body was found, or the temple school where Nobue taught. These can occur in either order.

## CRESTING WAVE ROW

Exploring the garbage dump where Nobue's body was uncovered doesn't get the characters much. The murder was three weeks ago, so all physical evidence is gone, and transient spirits have dissipated. If shugenja player characters try to Commune with Earth spirits, they are hit with a shrieking, aching voice, "*BLOOD! FIRE! PAIN!*" The spirits have gone insane from absorbing the blood of Togashi (all *ise zumi* have a drop of Togashi's dragon blood in their

veins), and cannot speak in anything but heart-rending screams and moans. The communing shugenja must make a Willpower roll, TN 15, or pass out.

If Kitsu Mihime (the pregenerated half-blooded *sodan-senzo*) tries to access the spirits, she hears the voice of an ancestor she has never heard before, screaming "*A text! Take a text!*" with many cries in the background, as if there were more than one spirit attempting to communicate. The voice is high and urgent, and fades away uncontrollably. Feel free to have this same voice speak up at other junctures to provide subtle nudges of weirdness throughout Round One.

Kosai, if present, will be slightly shaken, but if called on it, will say real samurai have no feelings except those their lord issues to them. He has little experience with magic and can only theorize that Mantis rocks don't like mainlander shugenja.

### Going Door to Door

If the characters question residents in the nearby houses, they meet Hosho, an aging merchant who tells them he was not yet living here at the time of the murder. He'll do what he can to excuse himself from the conversation; like other locals, he doesn't want to talk to police. (If Kosai is present, Hosho won't want to talk at all, which Tadayasu will blame on the characters during any debriefing.) If pressed, he will say he bought the house a few days later, from a young, male monk with exotic tattoos. The monk did not give his name, nor mention to where he was moving.

Most of the non-local residents scrupulously avoided learning anything about the body ("Oh, can you imagine? I insisted they send eta immediately to clean the walkway around my house where she might have walked. I mean, these Mantis, they seem so used to this kind of thing, but I am from Shiro sano no Kakita and..."), but can point the characters in the direction of the mortuary where Muika, the eta who found the corpse, currently works.

When they arrive at the small building, Muika is busy painting the face of a corpse to prepare it for burning, but is happy to talk to samurai about his work. While deferential, he tries to make the samurai feel comfortable by putting himself in an open, and therefore, lesser position...in other words, telling them plenty of things they don't want to hear. ("So we put a little plaster in the wounds for smoothness before we paint. Also clots him a bit, so he won't gush when you move him onto the bier. Once we load the honored one into the oven, the fire takes the client, the body goes, and soon all that's left is the fat, um...I mean, 'the pools of heavenly residue.' Careful, the drip pan is full.")

But even he turns pale and refuses to speculate when Nobue is mentioned. The fact that the body was skinned terrifies him because it means the death was deliberate and for some terrible purpose. He makes a sign for warding off minions of the Fallen (specific to the Mantis' worship of Suitengu and Osano-Wo). If they PCs interrogate him further (a Willpower + Intimidation roll, TN 5), he tells them that the corpse had very little blood in it, and two knife wounds. One was a stab in the lower back, the other a deep cut across the left side of the neck, across the front and turning slightly down. Muika sent the body off before anything...*unseemly* happened.

## THE TEMPLE SCHOOL

When the PCs arrive at Nobue's temple in Rakusho, they find Riichi, a young peasant boy, sweeping up the floor. The boy is a bit simple in the head, and hasn't exactly realized that his teacher hasn't been around for the last three weeks. She used to give him food and a few zeni to sweep and mop, and that's what he's been doing, every day, waiting for her to come back and teach him more about Shinsei.

Shintao is Riichi's life. In it, he found respect and an understanding of his place in the universe that lets him accept being born hinin (or not very bright). He knows there is something better further down in the cycle.

He answers any questions without guile, but knows nothing of Nobue's disappearance or why anyone would wish her harm. He can tell them that she was the third of the nice teachers -- Togashi Ayaru was the first, and after he left came Togashi Jotaro, then he left and Nobue arrived. Each one arrived only days after their predecessor stopped coming, so (PCs can figure out) they would have to have begun their week-long journey from Dragon lands before the other's disappearance.

A Lore: Dragon Clan roll, TN 25, lets the PCs know Ayaru and Jotaro are also members of Yokuni's *ise-zumi* troubleshooting squad. For one highly-trained operative to be teaching peasants on a remote island is unlikely, three is flat-out impossible.

If the characters tell Riichi that Nobue is dead (or ask enough questions to make him nervous), he'll wax philosophical and quote the Tao of Shinsei. On a Shintao roll, TN 15, the characters can tell that his version of the wise man's words is far from orthodox. Yet he insists he's always been told his memory was very good, and if his memory is tested (for instance, told a quote by one of the magistrates and asked to repeat it), Riichi isn't wrong. He has an eidetic memory, and can parrot information back perfectly. He just can't form connections.

The conclusion? The phrases and riddles have been twisted, deliberately distorted from the Tao. For him to get these verses so wrong, the monks would have to have taught him the mauled quotes deliberately. A Nazodo or Ciphers roll, TN 15, can help clue the samurai in that the monks were most likely passing coded messages to each other through the altered Tao they helped Riichi memorize.

The alterations include:

**"Choosing between two steps is still choosing the path."** (The real quote is "Choosing between two evils is still choosing evil," proverb 4.)

**"The Emperor asked Shinsei how to achieve enlightenment. He said 'there are three stones in the garden. The first stone kills me, the second stone kills your parents, the third stone kills yourself. Are you ready to carry those stones?'"** (This is misquoting Verse 33 of the Tao, the "three steps" of Shinsei).

**"The impatient man sees nothing before him. The patient man will remember to**

rise." (This is a misquote of "A patient man learns quickly, an impatient man, not at all," verse 20.)

With Raises or a Lore: Mantis Clan roll, TN 20, the magistrates can figure out that the most famous "steps" and "path" on the Island of Silk are the winding mountain staircase into the ancient Kyuden Gusai, the Mantis family's ancestral home, which was destroyed hundreds of years ago. The abandoned ruins are on the north side of the island, and Yoritomo's laws prohibit anyone from disturbing the site.

Little else of interest can be found in the temple. Nobue did not leave behind any personal possessions other than a few cotton kimonos, and it's a school in name only: no one else visits often enough to be worth talking to.

## KYUDEN GUSAI

The lush foliage in the volcanic soil near Kyuden Gusai gives the area a naturally exotic or forbidden feel, only enhanced by the steep hill and overgrown ruins, and the widely spaced stone steps meant to stave off erosion.

Kosai, if present, won't let the characters poke around his ancestors' memorial palace any more than a museum guard would allow a P.I. to dust the Mona Lisa for fingerprints. There's a torii arch to pray to the Gusai family down by the beach, and that's as close as the locals and tourists go. Kosai will have to be ditched somehow.

Once at the palace, the characters must find the correct interpretation of the clues.

A Perception + Investigation test, TN 15, reveals a break in the stairs at the fourth set of steps up the mountain. There is a narrow footpath leading off at that point. This is a good candidate for the meaning of a twisted Verse 4 -- if they choose between the literal steps, they will still find a path. If your players are not riddle fans, let them make a Nazodo or Cipher test, TN 20, to guess at the meaning.

If they follow the footpath, the samurai next find three unusually large stones, each exactly 33 steps apart, a likely meaning for the three stones mentioned in Verse 33. If the stones are lifted, there is an arrow drawn in ink on the bottom of each, pointing to the next. The third arrow, if followed for thirty-three steps, ends at a ruined stone wall.

Twenty stones up (if the characters "rise" as suggested in Verse 20) is a loose brick, behind which is hidden three sets of notes from the three different monks.

According to the notes, all three monks were sent to the islands at different times by Togashi Yokuni to track Togashi Akuro, an elderly *ise zumi* who was given his final tattoo a year before, and with it, a vision. Evidently he could not handle the responsibility, talked about the fate of Rokugan incessantly and attacked his superiors when they told him it was not his place to act. With Togashi Ayaru on his tail, he fled Dragon lands and went to the Lion, from several inns to Otsan Uchi, where he was seen near the Scorpion nobles' quarters. Two officers tried to arrest him there in a routine stop.

Akuro somehow poisoned both officers (who died after a few hours) and disappeared before being spotted in a brief stay at Kyuden Ikoma. He was then tracked to the Spine of the World Mountains to the coast, and thence to the Isle of Silk, where Ayaru lost him in a crowd. (He notes Akuro has the ability to change appearances.) Ayaru's notes then end.

Jotaro's notes say Ayaru broke contact with Togashi Yokuni, though it is not mentioned how the *ise zumi* were *in* contact with Yokuni, nor how that connection was severed. Jotaro was sent to search for Akuro, found Akuro's notes, and noted there were several robberies among the Mantis merchant class -- Jotaro theorized Akuro was hoarding money for something. Most curiously, he notes, is that despite Akuro's violent and erratic behavior, and a growing sense of unease, Jotaro never felt a trace of the Taint anywhere that Akuro had been seen. Jotaro's notes end and Nobue's notes begin.

Nobue was no more able to find her predecessor's body than Jotaro, but the notes end hopefully, stating that she believes she is close on Akuro's trail. A few days ago, she met Kakita Kumpei, an artisan who had seen Akuro around the islands, and he aided her by sketching a good likeness for her to show people (the picture of Akuro is included with the notes). The last sentence says that Kumpei has given her a great lead regarding Akuro's whereabouts which she intends to follow up before recording it. She never got a chance to write it down.

## LOOKING FOR KAKITA KUMPEI

Nobue's artisan friend is the next likely lead. Kumpei is hardly famous as artists go; while talented, his days of exhibition at Kyuden Kakita were brief due to a number of ill-intentioned Scorpion critics. The prevailing opinion was that he made a better theorist than an artist, and Kumpei retired to the Mantis isles, where most of the court has heard of him.

One of the first people the characters find is Aisaku, a friendly gossip with a lame leg from a childhood injury, whose entire life is following the politics of Yoritomo's court. He's grateful for any attention, and the biggest difficulty for the samurai is in separating the truth from his exaggerations.

He tells them that Kumpei is a respected artisan ("Absolutely outstanding. His work would be better respected among the ancestral shrines of Ootosan Uchi") who has lived on the islands for about a year, in a fine house ("I hear Yoritomo himself recommended it...") on Spring-Petal-Tide-Way.

## Speeding? We Were Walking!

If Tadayasu has not been a problem for the characters so far, this is a good time for him to catch up with them. He'll invite himself into the conversation ("Oh, carry on, continue what you were saying...") lurk about, listen to what Aisaku tells them, imply ugly things about the heimin, and start asking how the investigation is going. He will then proceed to pounce on any tiny slip-up the PCs make about Mantis law ("You didn't wash after walking out of the mortuary? You have brought impurities into this palace! And you wore geta on the docks! Gusai Rojo prohibited that five hundred years ago!").

This instigation is, of course, a trap. Assaulting the Storm Legion captain will screw this investigation from now until forever. Anyone who wants a legal duel will need the consent of both his lord and theirs, a process taking a week of travel at best. (An *illegal* duel carries the death penalty, enforced by Tadayasu and a pack of Legionnaires whenever it looks practical.)

Tadayasu doesn't like investigators. He's connected to the highest power on the island, and he certainly can't trust them to remain intimidated once this mission is complete and they are home on the mainland. So he must keep them from discovering any tales of extortion, disappearing prostitutes, opium dealing, or black-market Kaiu blades that might happen to fall out of a peasant's lips and prompt an Imperial investigation. As such, he wants to find out the "real" reason for their presence, since he thinks the Kitsuki and Togashi want blackmail information on him the way he certainly would.

While he may not believe an honest answer, it is certainly the safest course.

### Spring-Petal-Tide-Way

Kumpei's house is empty when the characters arrive. A Nazodo or Investigation test, TN 15, lets them check the mold on the rice and the dust on the shelves and figure out he left two or three weeks ago and in a hurry. Most large items have been left behind, including an easel big enough for a four-by-six-foot painting. Considering he was assisting Togashi Nobue and now she's gone, the PCs may assume he's in hiding.

If the magistrates ask Kumpei's neighbors (heimin named Hisoka and Fusae), they say they last saw him three weeks ago. Fusae was up late when a covered wagon such as a fruit vendor might use pulled up outside. She turned away politely when she saw Kumpei go out to talk to the driver, and that was the last time she ever saw the artisan.

Hisoka has not yet heard of Kumpei's disappearance, and with a Perception + Sincerity test, TN 15, the characters can notice he looks uncomfortable at its mention. With a little persuasion, and a promise from the samurai that he will not be in trouble, Hisoka admits that it is common knowledge among the lower classes that the fruit merchant Yasuki Korehiro is a smuggler who transports people on and off the islands.

Korehiro is easy to track down. His shop does a brisk business in imported plums and lychee fruit from the mainland, and he seems every bit the forthright businessman. But if the characters wave around some koku and convince him that they won't turn him in, he takes them into a back room that stinks of rotting fruit and admits that sometimes he accepts payment to get people on and off the island ("Just for discretion, you know. The Storm Legion, sometimes, they, ah, get their books confused and tax everything twice. Not everybody wants to pay, so they come to me."). He was hired by Kakita Kumpei to smuggle him down to the docks three weeks ago, just before dawn, no questions. But he didn't say that he wanted a ship...

### Do Mantis Buildings Smoke?

The dock is plastered with warehouses and boathouses that would make swell hiding spots.

However, Kumpei has to eat, and whenever he cooks rice and mackerel, characters can make a Perception test, TN 10 (20 at night), to see smoke coming from the upper window of the boathouse that serves as his hideout.

If they knock at the door no one answers, but the flimsy lock will not stop determined player characters. Kumpei will scramble for his nearby wakizashi, though his grip on it will be tense and amateur. When he realizes the PCs aren't tattooed monks looking to skin him, he will breathe a sigh of relief and put the sword away.

Kumpei tells them he's been hiding in terror since he heard what happened to Nobue. He's desperately eager to share everything he told her: he had talked to a sailor who saw Togashi Akuro on Tortoise Island, one of the unpopulated islands at the edge of the archipelago. There's a few old homes there from a time when the islands were more heavily populated, and it looked like Akuro was living among them. Kumpei doesn't know why Nobue wanted Akuro, she said only that it was urgent and he was dangerous.

If shown Nobue's notes and his sketch (e.g. in answer to his inquiry, "How did you find me?"), he will examine the sketch and mutter that if only he'd had the materials at the time, he would have made a hundred and posted them all over the islands.

Kumpei should seem like nothing more than a sheltered, slightly older Crane who thought it would be a fine adventure to play detective, and is now terrified that he's put himself in real danger.

The following information should **not** reach the players: The reason Kakita Kumpei looks so terrified is that he's had nothing to do but practice that look for the last few weeks. Akuro told him to lay low until the rituals were complete, and he's damned if he's going to cross Akuro.

You see, Kumpei used to be a sheltered little Crane, but that was years ago. His story is an all too familiar one: put in a career by unloving parents; self-expression ridiculed with a few wry comments at court; career ended by Scorpion critics with political rather than aesthetic motives. Once he fell out of favor, he was sure the ruthless Clan daimyo (specifically Shoju) would eventually run the Empire into the ground. When an *ise zumi* showed up and told him he had a great destiny and his painting could save the Empire, he listened. Since then, he has been working with Akuro to gather as much *ise zumi* blood as he can.

Ayaru's murder was the easiest; he was drugged, and Akuro did all the work. Then, once the grand project began, Kumpei wanted to gather the canvas and paints himself. Jotaro went in his sleep; Nobue was the most difficult. Kumpei led her to Tortoise Island, but she suspected treachery, and Kumpei had to hold her as Akuro stabbed her. It was then that Akuro hired a gang of ronin to protect his interests: he knew there would be more investigations.

Kumpei is an accomplice to murder, but he believes this is right and necessary to save the Empire. He is secure in his knowledge that he will save all of Rokugan with his crimes, and even if he condemns his soul through his actions, the Fortunes have shown him a unique way to regain it. (see **Do I Smell Another Tainted Bad Guy?**).

Back to the action.

Kumpei refuses to accompany them to Tortoise Island, claiming to be too terrified of Akuro to even leave the boathouse ("It worked for three weeks, it can work for four"). He will readily agree to stay on the mainland under guard, where it's safer. This is the best situation for him and appears to be the best one for the magistrates; they can continue on unimpeded by a dependent, noncombatant NPC and score points for entrusting an important witness to the Mantis.

If this guarding occurs, Kumpei can escape: he has a small portal painting of the sea cave wrapped around his leg beneath his kimono...all he must do is unroll it, put it on the ground, meditate, and hop in. Worse still, if he can hang on to his sketch of Akuro, he can whisper through it and warn him that magistrates are coming.

### Do I Smell Another Tainted Bad Guy?

As detailed in *Way of the Dragon*, the process that creates *ise zumi* includes feeding them the blood of the *kami* Togashi. Akuro's plan has been to kill these monks, collect their bodily tissues, alchemically separate the god's supernatural portion, and use it for his own purposes. Kumpei, using this blood in his *maya*, creates an entirely new metaphysical effect that involves no shugenja magic at all. And Akuro and Kumpei's motives, to be revealed in Part 3, are actually for the greater good.

Is the magic they are doing *maho*?

Only if you want it to be. This is where we give you options:

**Option A:** Akuro has hit upon an alchemical *mitsugusuri* formula, using as-yet-undiscovered techniques that tap into natural Void anomalies. At the proper time and placement along the earth's dragon-lines, he and Kumpei can create his portal for a limited time while the paint, as it were, is still wet. This has the convenience of getting around jaded L5R players who sniff everything and everybody for Taint. The down-side is, your player characters may want to fool around with it and create their own time-traveling formulae, and you will have to listen to their debates about Rokugani metaphysics until the end of time.

**Option B:** There's blood in the magic, and that means it's *maho* even if Akuro and Kumpei don't believe it is. This has the benefit of discouraging most PCs from trying their own experiments, but it means Kumpei and Akuro are yet another pair of Tainted bad guys, which is detectable and a bit cliché'.

**Option C:** The magic is *maho*, but Akuro and Kumpei are willing to take the risk because they believe they can erase their Taint off their souls by altering Rokugan's timeline and thus insuring their souls were never Tainted at all. This brings up paradoxes, reincarnation, and whether or not souls and Taint exist outside of time. You, the gamemaster can decide if that crazy plan would actually work -- no one ever said evil had to be genius.

**Option D:** Kumpei is telling the truth, he's an innocent dupe, and Akuro is working alone.

Using weird magics never seen before, Akuro has sucked the knowledge of how to paint *maya* out of this little artisan's head, mixed it together with his insane *maho-mitsugusuri* cocktail, and the only reason he hasn't pulled together his time-hop yet is because he's had to come back and suck fresh knowledge out of Kumpei's head to get his calculations right.

This has the advantage of not giving the PCs *any* chance of screwing with the time-jump before it happens. All a spectacular Lore skill will reveal is that there was some kind of magical effect on Kumpei, but it is something they haven't ever encountered. The disadvantage of this approach is that the heroes never see the bad guy before they whack him, and Akuro needs some other way of knowing the PCs are in town to send his thugs after them later in Part 1.

**If you go with Options A, B, or C**, be warned that this RPG plot-writing trick of introducing a villain so the heroes will know who he is later can easily get derailed by gamemasters who are better story-tellers than they are secret-keepers.

*Letting samurai know you're an evil villain when they first meet you is stupid: Kakita Kumpei is not.* He's not rude. He's not slimy. He's not villainous. That said, here are five layers of defense you can use during the scene:

**1) He's got a hollow back support filled with corrupted jade.** Back supports are common additions to hakama in order to improve posture: this handy device adds another 30 or 40 or whatever one needs to raise the Taint-sniffing TN out of reach, and since it's under his kimono and obi, wedged in the proper place, it can't be spotted as something unusual. Only if an investigator strips him down and handles it could they notice anything amiss.

**2) He has other obvious disadvantages** which can occupy their thoughts and character-divining abilities: he has had a history of epilepsy in his family (he can even have an attack, if you're desperate for a distraction) and he has fallen out of favor with the court, so he may have Enemies responsible for it. Feed this to a Bayushi Courtier first to throw them off the scent of Taint (which, after all, would be a Disadvantage).

**3) Keep conversations with him short and make his story function seem obvious.** This is the easiest method to prevent you from letting something slip. Do not call for an Awareness + Acting vs. Awareness + Investigation roll unless the players *ask* if they sense anything amiss. Show them he's scared, he has a problem that can be apparently easily solved; and he really wants to help them and get out of their way so they can find and kill the big, bad, evil man, preferably *before* the player with the Kitsuki Magistrate says "Hey, do I get the impression that this guy is full of it?"

If the player characters press for his expert opinions, he can hit upon the "idea" of staying in communication with them by painting a PC's portrait so he can speak to them across great distances. (Having you, the GM, roleplay through this process with crayons and forcing a player to sit still can be a great deal of fun and can make "evil" the last thing on the players' mind. If you want to be particularly sneaky, recruit the player with the best detection abilities to play Kumpei for you while the sketching is done.)

**4) You have the dice.** 9k5 for Acting ain't no bowl full of pepper. You could give him Raises

in any contested roll because he's practiced this sob story all week.

5) Swallow your damn pride and go with Option D.

**Kakita Kumpei**

**Rank 5 Kakita Artisan (Painting 3, Poetry 2)**

**EARTH 3, Willpower 4, WATER 4, Perception 5, FIRE 5, AIR 4, Awareness 5, VOID 4**

**Skills:** Acting 4, Courtier 4, Etiquette 4, Calligraphy 3, Lore: Myth and Legend 5, Painting 5, Sincerity 4, Lore: Maho 4, Poetry 5, Kenjutsu 2, History 4, Manipulation 3, Mizu-Do 3, Athletics 2

**Honor:** 3.2 (Apparent, actually 1.2) **Glory:** 3.1

**Advantages:** Perceived Honor, *nemuranai* (back support)

**Disadvantages:** Epilepsy, Fascination: Battle of White Stag, and Dark Secret

**Shadowlands Taint:** 0 or 2.5.

**School Techniques:** Create glyphs with magical effects which last until (School Rank) people have seen them. Roll Agility + Painting, TN 25, to make a painting of person with whom he can speak over distances or (with raises) see through their eyes. Roll Intelligence + School Rank to create painting he can travel through. Create mirage based on a poem he recites (to disbelieve, target rolls Willpower + Perception, TN 20). Can whisper back and forth to another person over distances. For complete Kakita Artisan rules, see *The Way of the Crane*, page 58-69.

**TN to be Hit:** 20 **Armor:** None

**Weapons:** Wakizashi (Str + 2k2)

## TORTOISE ISLAND

The five-square-mile rock here is barely worth the word "island," and the tortoises were hunted to extinction long ago. If the characters commandeer a boat and sail for the six hours

or so it takes to get here from the Isle of Silk, they will discover its rocky beaches and a few old houses in its interior.

Play up the suspense as the magistrates walk up the lonely trails of the deserted, silent island. Nothing lives here but sand flies and crabs; the wind and tides sound like human moans as they pass over the mouths of the half-buried caves. The bright white sand and sun play tricks on their eyes. Ask for frequent Perception tests, from which the characters learn only that they are alone. The houses on this island were abandoned after an earthquake some ten years back. But if the characters explore the houses, an Engineering roll, TN 10, lets them find one house of wood (with barely any stone in its foundation) built within the last year.

Inside is a small wood shop, with a number of carving tools, cabinets, and a good deal of sawdust. One trunk holds a batch of Dragon alchemical equipment (no functioning potions, sorry -- a lot of paint, though), and there's some kind of stink coming from the trapdoor beneath the trunk. The trap door is locked, but a good whack with a nearby hammer can solve that easily.

As they descend by ladder to the basement, an overwhelming stench wafts up, and with a light source, they can see why. Tossed in a pile on the floor are two decomposed bodies. An Intelligence + Medicine roll at TN 20 let the characters confirm the conclusion: these are Ayaru and Jotaro, drugged, executed, and skinned.

### **Earthquakes and Ronin and Chase Scenes, Oh My**

As the old comic books say, "Suddenly..."

The ground starts to buckle, and then to sway, fiercely. The house above them creaks and the lab equipment starts falling.

If your players have never lived through an earthquake and often wonder why people say the movie villain trapped in a collapsing building "could not possibly have survived" when they always do, allow us to explain the sensation. It feels as if you have suddenly stepped from a dock onto a boat wobbling in the waves, but there is no place to step off. The light sources start to fall over (creating the same panic following any other small fire), and then there's the creaking and popping of the building.

Granted, this is only a two-room, wooden Rokugani house, but to viscerally understand just how much your building weighs, visit your local hardware store. Try to pick up and move a plywood sheet or 6" x 6" beam the length of your ceiling. Now imagine layers of those, loaded with tables, bookshelves and furniture, suspended one and two stories above your head.

Are the PCs keen to get out? Good.

At the end of the first round, PCs inside the house must roll Defense, TN 15, to avoid taking 2k2 damage from falling rocks, ceiling parts, lab equipment and floorboards. The ladder up to the second floor starts to move, and if no one can steady it from above, it requires an Agility + Athletics or Agility + Engineering roll at TN 10 to hold it still enough to climb. This would be

easy except that all actions taken during the earthquake are at -3 dice. The second round has no further Defense rolls until the house collapses at the end of the round, doing an additional 3k3 damage and requiring a Strength + Athletics test, TN 40 to dig a way out. (A worker on the outside has only a TN 30, dropped to TN 25 with tools, and Working Together rules apply.)

The earthquake subsides once the house collapses. A Spellcraft or Shugenja Lore roll, TN 15, shows the Earthquake was not natural. The magistrates can use locating spells or a Perception + Hunting skill at TN 15 to search for the caster...

Whom they find, with a gang of ronin, on the beach busily destroying the magistrates' boat. Let the PCs do what comes naturally.

**Shugenja: 2 Rank 3 Ronin**

**EARTH 3, FIRE 2, Agility 3, AIR 3, WATER 3, VOID 3**

**Skills:** Kenjutsu 2, Defense 3, Stealth 4, Shugenja Lore 2,

Calligraphy 3, Meditation 2, Poisons 3, Maho Lore 4, Hand-to-hand 3, History 2, Athletics 3, Sailing 4.

**Honor: 0.7 Glory: 0.4**

**Advantages:** Innate Abilities (starred).

**Disadvantages:** Driven, Mind-Controlled (they drank Togashi Akuro's potions and are under hypnosis).

**TN to be Hit: 15**

**Weapons:** Parangu (Str +2k2), Kama (Str +2k2).

**SPELLS:** All spells not listed in the basic book can be found in *Walking the Way*.

**Suitengu's Embrace (Water):** TN 20, permanent, no concentration. Fills target's lungs with seawater. Target must be within caster's Water x5 feet. Target takes DR1 first round, DR 2 second, etc.. First-aid allows victim to roll Willpower, TN 15, to restart wounds at 1k1, consecutive successes end the spell.

\* **Earthquake (Earth):** TN 15, lasts 5 rounds, total concentration. 50 yard radius. All actions in area at -2, characters may be affected by falling rocks, mudslides, etc..

**Calling the Elements (Earth):** TN 10, lasts 8 rounds, casual

concentration. 10-square-foot area grows roots and brambles to hinder movement. Anyone in area rolls Agility, TN of casting, or be ensnared. Strength test, TN 10, to move 1 foot per action.

**Know the Shadows (Air):** TN 5, lasts 10 rounds, no concentration. TN to see the caster is raised by 5.

**Quiescence of Air (Air):** TN 5, lasts 10 actions, casual concentration. Spell generates soundless bubble 5 feet around the caster. Spells cannot be cast inside.

\* **Tempest of Air (Air):** TN 15, 2 actions to cast, lasts 6 actions, total concentration. Caster is immune to missile attacks. May roll Air vs. target's Earth every round to knock target off his feet. Raises for casting time, duration and number of targets.

The shugenja will use this to protect themselves and their bushi from PC arrow fire.

\* **Wind-Borne Speed (Air):** TN 15, 4 actions to cast, lasts 12 actions, full concentration, raises for speed and additional targets. Moves caster through air at Air x 10 feet per round.

\* **Master of the Rolling River (Water):** TN 15, lasts 1 round, Target is hit with tsunami, range of caster's Water x10 feet. DR of caster's Water, and target must make simple roll against caster's Water x5 to remain standing. Target must roll Awareness + Meditation, TN 25, to do anything this round. Near a body of water, the DR is Water +2, the TN to remain standing gets +10. Failure indicates target has been swept into water and carried off.

**Ronin Bushi: 4 Rank 2 Mantis**

**EARTH 3, FIRE 2, Agility 3, AIR 2, Reflexes 3, WATER 2, VOID 2.**

**Skills:** Athletics 4, Nofujutsu 3, Bo Stick 2, Defense 3, Jujitsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Sailing 3, Hunting 2, Sincerity 2, Commerce 1, Stealth 1, Battle 2, Lore: Mantis Clan 2.

**Honor: 0.7 Glory:0.4**

**School Techniques:** May fight with any weapon as if they have skill of 1, and ignore all penalties for unsure footing. May spend Void to make a Full Attack without penalty.

**TN To Be Hit:** 15

**Weapons:** Tonfa (Str +3k2), Nunte (Str +3k2), Poor Katana (Str +2k2), Eku (Str +2k3), or Kusarigama (Str +2k2, or can attack to entangle with the chain; this attack inflicts no damage but if successful, lower the target's TN to Be Hit to 5 for one round +1 per Raise; this does not prevent the target from taking an action to get free, nor does it prevent them from continuing to attack the kusarigama wielder).

This fight, naturally, is assuming the PCs traveled in a clump and left no one to guard their boat or their rear. Otherwise, the ronin may be detected earlier, as they are not very thorough, deadly, or even courageous folk. The shugenja will leap into their boat and flee as soon as a blade gets drawn, using Wind-Borne Speed to stay ahead of the magistrates and Tempest of Air to protect themselves from arrows. The bushi are essentially a gang of ruffians, and once it's clear the PCs are on the offensive, the remaining fighters will withdraw into waist-deep tide.

Wading and fighting simultaneously is tricky: the bad footing gives those who are not Mantis -2 dice to attack and defense rolls, and drops the TN To Be Hit of both attacker and defender by 5. If a combatant moves into water deep enough to swim, melee weapons that are swung (not thrust) underwater do 4 fewer Wounds of damage per hit, to a minimum of 1 for sharp weapons and 0 for blunt trauma. A combatant who dives underwater in these shifting waves raises their TN to Be Hit for arrows by 10.

It is likely that the characters will give chase. Encourage them. It takes a Shipwright or Engineering test, TN 20, to patch the boat up, or consecutive Athletics tests at TNs 10, 15, and 20 to swim the distance. (Failure indicates the character takes identical damage to the effects of the Suitengu's Embrace spell described in the sidebar.) Naturally, PCs can easily make up the difference with their own magical means.

The ronin will typically flee rather than surrender; the shugenja to find Akuro, the bushi to save their skins. If the shugenja are captured, they will remain loyally silent even under torture; the bushi, on the other hand, will confess to having been hired by Togashi Akuro and ordered not a few hours ago to destroy the small house on Tortoise Island and anyone present.

Why, a magistrate might ask? If intimidated, interrogated, or persuaded (TN 15), one will say that during one argument over getting boats, Akuro told him to shut up and follow orders "if he wanted to save the Empire from the fools running it and

the traitors who would give it to Fu Leng." He also despised the Scorpion and Crab, and wouldn't hire mercenaries who'd worked for their Clans.

If your group seems inclined to split up in pursuit, feel free to have another dozen ronin come down the beach, blocking the PCs' route back to the island, and forcing them into the water. The whole point of the beachfront battle is to get them to...

### THE DANK DARK COVE CAVE

At least one shugenja should survive and stay ahead of them just long enough for the PCs to see him head toward a tiny island, nearly hidden in a misty cove. If he gets out of sight, they can track him with a Hunting test (TN 10) to a waterway, leading into a narrow channel of volcanic stone that turns into a cave. The shugenja will make a last stand here if the PCs find him.

(If the PCs wasted all of the ronin, there is an easy fix. You can hint at the direction they were fleeing or have one of them carrying a piece of rice paper, miraculously still legible, saying "Eggs, rice, salt, fresh water, 2 jars oil, lamp for cave.")

The cave's waterway, wide enough for a small boat, eventually gives way to a sandy floor. The walls are carved, and a History test (TN 20) will tell them it probably dates back about seventy years, and is in a Crane architectural style. Further in, the decorations begin, as does the strangeness.

It becomes difficult to walk between the miniature wooden buildings filling the sandy floor. Frescoes on the wall fill out the illusion, depicting the streets of a miniature city, leading up to the walls painted in the distance. A Lore: Imperial Family test, TN 10, (or the Advantage, Way of the Land: Otosan Uchi) lets the samurai recognize the three-walled layout of Otosan Uchi. But there's something off about it.

Its architecture changes from modern to ancient as they move toward the center of the city. Where the palace should be is a painting, in frame, depicting the palace and gardens. The canvas is human skin, cut from the dead *ise zumi*, and the paints smell of something old and rotting. But though it smells like decaying meat, the local sand crabs won't touch it.

There's a mark on its frame. Kind of like a footprint...

Any nearby ancestor spirits (e.g. a *sodan-senzo's* ancestors or a ghost haunting a character with the Disadvantage) will start to make a racket the closer the samurai gets to the painting. Ancestor spirits shy away from the painting in unusual revulsion (though few will know why) and *sodan-senzo* will hear the noise of a battle. With each clash of blade on armor, they feel a shiver or twinge. If they attempt to make any kind of contact with ancestor spirits, the *senzo* can hear the voice of an ancient spirit, saying "*The thunder is out of the sky. It has come here.*"

*It walks among us."*

It's in the *senzo's* own voice.

As the PCs watch, a small figure that looks remarkably like Kakita Kumpei and a hooded, barefoot man -- Togashi Akuro -- walk among the buildings in the painting. Anyone who knows Kakita artisans knows that portal paintings take the painter to the location they represent: right into the Emperor's backyard.

If a character touches the painting, their fingertips will disappear into it. They can feel a cold, oily film, and beyond that, warm sunlight. A few inches beyond that, raindrops.

What do they do?

If the samurai hesitate to enter, the borders of the painting start to blacken. From the outside in, the paint and magic start to disappear, and it doesn't take more than a Shugenja Lore test, TN 10, to feel this happening.

Kumpei, in the painting, goes out of sight behind a building.

### Troubleshooting

The most likely bug is if some bow-happy PC takes a shot into the painting in hopes of hitting Akuro or Kumpei. Don't panic -- because the magic powering the portal is starting to lose cohesion, there is an ever-widening time lag between what they see and when objects (including people) traveling through the painting will come out on the other side.

Also importantly: casting Grounding Energy, Suikinjin's Gift, or otherwise trying to erase or control the portal will cause Bad Things to Happen. Nobody wants a hole in the time-stream either a) flowing back to disperse in the cave, or b) reflected back in some direction it's not supposed to go. A nice way to handle this without telling the shugenja "no" is to have the effect leak out and hurl the entire cave back into time with them, so their dramatic entrance to the wrong century is crawling out of an enormous, shattered stone sphere. (Having the cave land on Seppun Ushimo, whose feet conveniently stick out wearing ruby-sequined *tabi*, is what we Professional Game Designers refer to as "over-the-top." In Hollywood, this is called "homage.")

If the samurai decide to split up, anyone on this side of the portal is in for a lot of twiddling their thumbs, and then sudden shocks as the time-line alters. While this could make for a cool solo session later ("Tonight, you play your half-*gaijin* alternate self in Bizarro Rokugan!") prodding the player to jump through now is easier. A pack of ronin archers showing up at the only entrance to the cave (just as the tide starts to come in) is an unsubtle hammer, but it may work.

If, for some reason, *all* of your PC samurai don't have the guts or brains to give chase to time-traveling psychopaths, we suggest you erase their Honor stat, feed them grass, and shear them once a year to collect wool. Then you may take some time off from *L5R* and take up traditional Bronze Age loom weaving, a vastly underrated hobby.

### GLORY, HONOR AND EXPERIENCE

If, despite all efforts, a Mantis character gets left behind in the present day, Yoritomo may award them a Glory point if word gets around that they trashed the local gang of ronin ruffians. Otherwise, there is little chance for any Glory to be recognized by the characters' daimyo, and the change will not be applicable in the following sessions.

Honor awards are subjective, based on the PCs' own feelings of confidence. Crane and Dragon characters shaken by the betrayers in their clans can be may suffer an Honor loss, though tracking down the renegades may give them a greater sense of their own purpose and thus gain Honor. In general, there has been fairly little to personally involve the PCs yet, so the likelihood of any serious change of Honor is low. The exception is if one of the PCs bests his Nemesis in some way, which should net him 1-3 Honor points.

Reward Experience for the following:

Survival 1 point

Breaking Nobue's code 1 point

Finding the bodies on Tortoise Island 1 point

Going into the painting 2 points

Failing to report to Yoritomo -1 point

On to [Part II](#)