

Blood and Iron

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An Adventure Module for the LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS 3rd Edition Roleplaying Game¹

We walk in the darkness to protect the Empire from a darkness greater still.

—Shosuro Masanori



The Shinomen Mori, the great, dark forest of southern Rokugan, has always been steeped in mystery and menace. Now, it appears the shadows beneath the ancient trees have begun to spread. After years of relative peace, a town near the forest border is falling into unrest, as old rivalries suddenly flare between two of the Minor Clans. A war on its southern border is something the Scorpion Clan can ill-afford at the best of times. With tension rife among the Great Clans, Bayushi Paneki, Scorpion Clan Champion, requires eyes and ears in the south, and quickly.

But even for the Clan of Secrets, this is no simple task. The resources of the Scorpion are stretched across the Empire, and few are available to meet this new and sudden threat. Difficult times sometimes call for unusual measures, so Paneki has chosen to dispatch a group of investigators into the south to determine what has sparked the embers of conflict between the Kitsune and Suzume Clans in the normally peaceful town of Kudo. Is Paneki's promise of lucrative payment—as well as his thinly veiled threat of retribution for any betrayal of Scorpion trust—enough to unite these ad hoc investigators in common purpose? Can anything cause such a disparate group to put aside personal differences and clan rivalries long enough to learn the truth about what is happening in Kudo?

And will they be prepared to deal with whatever that truth may be?



- BLOOD AND IRON is an adventure for 4 to 6 player characters of Insight Ranks 3 to 4.
- Combining both political and underworld intrigue with supernatural menace, BLOOD AND IRON can be used as a stand-alone adventure, or integrated into an ongoing roleplaying campaign.
- The *LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS 3rd Edition Core Rulebook* is the only published material specifically required to play this adventure. *The Way of the Scorpion*, *Secrets of the Scorpion* and *The Way of the Minor Clans* are useful references, but are not required.
- Enterprising GMs would not find it difficult to further embellish the module with materials from *The Four Winds Sourcebook* and *The Art of the Duel*.

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BEWARE...IF YOU ARE A PLAYER, OR EXPECT TO BE A PLAYER, YOU SHOULD STOP READING NOW. CONTINUING TO READ WILL LESSEN OR EVEN SPOIL YOUR ENJOYMENT OF THE ADVENTURE, AND MAY FURTHER ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF DARK POWERS BENT ON PUNISHING YOU FOR DISREGARDING THIS WARNING. ONLY GMs MAY SAFELY VENTURE BEYOND THIS POINT.



BACKGROUND

South of the Scorpion Lands and east of the vast Shinomen Mori lie the lands of the Minor Clans. Much smaller than their Great Clan counterparts, and not founded to serve a specific Kami as the Great Clans were, these so-called Minor Clans are, nonetheless and in their own way, significant players in the turbulent landscape of Imperial politics. Each has been formally recognized by the Emperor, and each has been protected from the predations of the Great Clans by Imperial Edict. And while they do, indeed, languish in the shadows of the Great Clans, the Minor Clans still wield power in their own particular spheres of influence. It is in such an environment that BLOOD AND IRON is set.

Located on the eastern shore of Kawa no Kin (the River of Gold), the town of Kudo is fairly unremarkable among the towns and villages of Rokugan (see the Kudo Region Map). Closer, perhaps, to the dark and dangerous Shinomen Mori than its inhabitants would like, it is nonetheless a reasonably prosperous place, the center of an agricultural “cluster” of sprawling rice paddies and farms. Once, Kudo had belonged to another Minor Clan, the Hare. But in 1123, the Hare were all but destroyed in a campaign orchestrated by the shadowy underworld organization known as the Kolat. Restored two years later, Kudo fell outside the reformed Hare Clan boundaries. The town now lies in a sort of “no man’s land”, outside any Great Clan’s territory, but not clearly within the jurisdiction of any Minor Clan, either. Because of this essentially unaligned nature, Kudo is, technically, currently administered by the Mantis Clan who are charged with the oversight of all unaligned holdings in Rokugan on behalf of the Emperor. However, the closest Mantis holding, the town of Shaiga, is many miles to the east. The Mantis have placed a senior Clan Magistrate in the town, but it has fallen to the Kitsune (Fox) and Suzume (Sparrow) clans to secure an uneasy governance over Kudo.

UNREST IN KUDO

With their respective roles already unclear beyond simply being jointly “in charge”, each Clan subsequently began—and continues—maneuvering to obtain a greater degree of influence over the town and its rich surrounding farmlands. Now, following the last Imperial Winter Court, Kudo is being considered as the location for a new Minor Clans Court. With the prospect of Kudo becoming the very center of the Minor Clan political universe, tension between the Suzume and Kitsune has ratcheted up another notch. Arguments over simple administrative matters have escalated into incidents of outright violence. Worse, an attempt has recently been made on the life of the Suzume governor. Ostensibly, Kudo’s Mantis Magistrate should be working to restore order, but is either unable or unwilling to do so. Likewise, the Emerald Magistrates, the enforcer’s of the Emperor’s Law, have paid scant attention to events in Kudo. Not only is there no Emperor, there is no Emerald Champion, so the Magistrates are leaderless. Moreover, the recent strife in the Empire has drawn the bulk of the Magistrates into the war-ravaged lands of the Lion, Crane and Dragon, and the vicinity of the Imperial Capital.

For detailed backgrounds and descriptions of the Kitsune and Suzume Clans, the GM and players should consult pages 67 and 69 respectively in the 3rd Edition Core Rulebook (3ECR).

THE NERVOUS SCORPION

It is against this backdrop of tension in Kudo that BLOOD AND IRON begins. Of course, one could wonder, who CARES if these Minor Clans are bickering over the control of a backwater farming village in the middle of an Imperial “no man’s land”? The answer to that is simple—Bayushi Paneki, Champion of the Scorpion Clan cares. Alerted by the Soshi, whose mastery of the kami of Air has brought word of the problems in Kudo to Kyuden Bayushi with supernatural swiftness, it just adds another entry to the dreary litany of problems and threats facing the Scorpion—a famine, brought about by a blight on their rice crop by the Fortune Bishamon; unrest arising from the schemes of the Mad Prophet, Kokujin, who lurks somewhere in the southern Scorpion provinces; the general unrest around the Imperial Capital and its empty Throne following the unsuccessful Unicorn attack during the winter; and recent and still-simmering tensions with the Crab. The last thing the Scorpion can afford now is a conflict between two of the Minor Clans on their southern border.

Ordinarily, Paneki would simply deploy some covert resources—spies, blackmailers, saboteurs and assassins—into Kudo, with instructions to determine the root cause of the growing problems and either put a stop to them or, at the very least, come back with recommendations about how to do so. But, between the many threats facing the Scorpion, and the need to maintain a focus on the political machinations around the Throne, Paneki’s resources, like those of the Emerald Magistrates, are stretched to the limit. The time has come to resort to somewhat more unorthodox means (for the Scorpion, anyway) of rooting out the troubles in Kudo—and quickly, before matters get worse.

PANEKI’S SOLUTION

Luckily, the Fortunes have delivered a solution to Paneki. Kyuden Bayushi is the site of a Memorial Service for the late Imperial Chancellor, Bayushi Kaukatsu, who was slain during the Battle of Toshi Ranbo. Delegations from all of the Clans have gathered at the Bayushi Castle, to attend this Memorial Service and represent their various Champions’ in mourning the Chancellor’s passing (in reality, at least some of the Clans consider Kaukatsu’s death more a cause for celebration than sorrow, but this is Rokugan, where appearances can be more important than fact and protocol demands at least a pretense of sorrow over the Imperial Chancellor’s passing).

And this is how the Fortunes have favored Bayushi Paneki. The head of the Mantis Delegation to the Chancellor’s Memorial Service, Tsuruchi Okame, is the Chief Magistrate of the Tsuruchi Family. It is within Okame’s power to appoint his own yoriki, or assistants. It is this fact that Paneki intends to exploit. He has struck a deal with Okame (the details of which are no doubt fascinating, but are also none of the players’ business!) to have a party of yoriki travel to Kudo, in order to investigate the goings-on there.

The players are assumed to be, at the outset, members of their respective Clan delegations. This is true regardless of whether theirs is an existing party of adventurers (in which case they are conveniently together and assumed to have been close to Kyuden Bayushi), or they have not met before and this will be their first adventure together (in which case, it doesn’t matter...they are all simply “there”.) This is true for any Minor Clan player characters and, if you allow them, Nezumi characters and the like (mind you, if you’re a GM who allows particularly strange player characters in your campaign, like ghosts, ogres or oni, then you’re on your own to explain how they get engaged in this adventure!)

It would be best if at least one of the party is a Mantis character, who will be designated the “lead” or “senior” yoriki for the purposes of the investigation. If it does not, or the party is being formed from the pre-generated characters, then Tsuruchi Motoki, the pre-generated Mantis character, could be used (preferably assumed by a player, but he can also, if necessary, be used as an NPC). A party without a Mantis character acting as a lead yoriki will still function. However, accomplishing things will be somewhat more difficult in Kudo, as the key Minor Clan and Mantis NPCs there would, naturally, be less inclined to cooperate fully with a group of investigators that include no actual Mantis representatives. Ultimately, it’s up to you, as the GM, because you always have the option of forcing them to take along Tsuruchi Motoki as an NPC.

The rest of the party will be designated yoriki to Tsuruchi Okame. Some of the players may not be willing to accept this appointment—that’s fine. Just remember that such players will have no particular

investigative jurisdiction in Kudo, so if they try to exercise any, they'll effectively be acting as vigilantes, outside the law. Moreover, they certainly won't be entitled to the compensation or expenses those who do accept the yoriki appointment will receive.

Once you're clear regarding how you're going to engage the players in this adventure, it's time to get things started. BLOOD AND IRON opens with the players at Kyuden Bayushi....



THE CASTLE OF SECRETS

Kyuden Bayushi, sometimes called “the place where secrets come from”, is, to outward appearance, a straightforward castle—an exquisite and stunningly wrought castle, but a castle nonetheless. Ravaged and left to ruin during the exile of the Scorpion Clan after the Clan Wars, Kyuden Bayushi has been rebuilt with a renewed splendor, and is probably surpassed only by several of the finest holdings of the Crane for sheer beauty.

But, like the Clan who calls it an ancestral home, the castle wears a mask. The breathtaking architecture, the artful ponds and fountains, the tranquil gardens—all of it is a ruse. Beneath this façade, Kyuden Bayushi is a combination of powerful fortress and impenetrable vault, laced with cunning defenses, hidden rooms and secret passages of such complexity that only a handful of the most powerful Scorpion know all of the castle's secrets. Don't hold back in emphasizing the beauty of the place, even while hinting at its hidden complexity—but don't fall victim to any desire by the party to “explore” Kyuden Bayushi. If they insist on poking and sneaking about, immediately present them with false trails, dead-ends and, if necessary, even a few harmful traps. Make it clear that they are wasting their time. Kyuden Bayushi was designed to thwart far more powerful opponents than them. You simply want to set the scene, giving them the flavor of the place, before moving on to the real action—their meeting with Bayushi Paneki following the conclusion of Bayushi Kaukatsu's Memorial Service. You may offer them the following description:

Kyuden Bayushi is an architectural marvel, likely surpassed in beauty only by the likes of Kyuden Doji in the Crane lands. Fashioned of a charcoal-gray stone cut and polished to a soft, pearly sheen, it is dominated by a great, five-story keep whose roofs, with their delicately up-turned corners, are capped by dark red tile. Around the adjoining yashiki (mansion), various out-buildings, and shrines of similar construction, the castle grounds are strewn with ponds and fountains interspersed among tranquil gardens containing a dizzying array of flowers, shrubs and trees collected from across the Empire. The legendary hedge-maze is located here as well. Within the castle, the same red and black motif that distinguishes castle exterior is echoed in polished beams, floor- and wall-boards of mahogany and cherry-wood, set off by shoji-paper of pale tan. Simple, elegant ikebana floral arrangements and sumi-e ink drawings grace otherwise bare tables and discreet alcoves. The whole effect is one of peace and wholeness, which almost makes the castle's admirers forget that this is as much a powerful and cunningly constructed fortress of war, as it is the ancestral home of the Bayushi.

The Chancellor's Memorial

Bayushi Kaukatsu's Memorial occurs in one of the gardens, in front of the Shrine of Fukurokujin, Fortune of Wisdom. Seppun Kiharu, elderly Daimyo of the Imperial Seppun Family and Master of the Order of the Ten Thousand Temples, has personally made the journey to Kyuden Bayushi to preside over the ceremony, underscoring the height of Kaukatsu's station as Imperial Chancellor. All of the Clans are represented by significant delegations, each led by a samurai of high station. The Scorpion, of course, are represented by Bayushi Paneki, Clan Champion. In his company are the most powerful members of the Scorpion Clan, including the Daimyos of the various families. All present bear some article of white, the color of mourning; Paneki is particularly striking, a tall, handsome man in a white kimono, belted with an obi of dark red. The Ceremony is a somber and lengthy affair, as befits the Imperial Chancellor of Rokugan. When it concludes, Paneki himself will rise to speak, thanking the various delegations for their attendance and inviting all present to a dinner that evening

in the Great Hall of Kyuden Bayushi. The assembly will break up, with some delegates remaining to engage in quiet conversation in pairs or small groups throughout the garden, and the rest taking their leave.

If any of the characters choose to hang about the garden and eavesdrop, they may be able to glean some of what is being discussed. They may:

- Read Lips, if they possess this advantage. The normal TN for Reading Lips is increased by 10, as these are generally experienced Courtiers and tend to be careful who they face, use fans to obscure their faces, etc.
- Attempt to overhear. The speakers are, naturally, conversing in “Courtly whispers”, so this requires a Raw Perception vs. a TN of 25 for each minute of conversation the player is seeking to overhear, which increases by 1 for every foot farther away than 5 feet the target is. The maximum distance to overhear a conversation is 15 feet.
- Simply participate in a conversation. This requires a successful contested Awareness/ Etiquette (Conversation) roll to allow the conversation to proceed naturally and avoid, by participating in it, deflecting it into different, spurious subjects.

Regardless of success or failure, you may require a listening character to make an Awareness/Deceit (Lying) or Awareness/Etiquette (Sincerity) roll against a TN of 15 to avoid having the subjects of the eavesdropping become aware that they are being overheard. If failed, the conversation is most likely to be abruptly ended in a barrage of dirty looks.

Characters who successfully eavesdrop and aren't caught at it right away will overhear the following conversations, or portions thereof. You should describe who the speakers are, and let players choose who they are trying to overhear. Each character may overhear only one conversation. Note that numbered rumors are directly implicated in the plot of the module and will be linked to later events.

- Two Scorpion courtiers (both Soshi) are discussing the reactions of the various delegations to the Memorial Service. They consider the Crabs' behavior to be particularly scandalous, and are determined to embarrass one of the Crab delegates before their delegation departs Kyuden Bayushi. Note that all TNs associated with this conversation are at -10, as these two are “practicing” their gossiping skills and want to be overheard, so they can track the progress of the rumor through the Court!
- A Lion (Ikoma) courtier and a Crab (Hida) bushi are discussing the recent passage of a caravan southward, from the Crane and Lion lands, through those of the Scorpion (between two and three weeks ago) and onward to those of the Crab. The caravan contains an exhibit of artifacts recovered from the ruins of Otosan Uchi, the former Imperial Capital. It is sponsored jointly by the Miya, and is intended to help promote unity among the Clans in the wake of the Unicorn attack on Toshi Ranbo. The Crab finds it odd that the caravan did not pass through the Unicorn lands, as “they, more than anyone, need a lesson in Imperial unity”. The Ikoma's reaction is scornful, along the lines of “the Unicorn need a lesson, alright...at the point of a sword.” (**Rumor 1**)
- A Crane (Doji) courtier is telling a Phoenix (Asako) courtier that she thinks Bayushi Paneki dies his hair.
- A Scorpion (Bayushi) bushi mentions to a Scorpion (Shosuro) magistrate that bandit raids have intensified along the Kawa no Kin (the River of Gold). The Bayushi believes the bandits responsible are based out of the Shinomen Mori. Recently, however, another group has appeared, apparently fighting against the bandits. (**Rumor 2**)

You may find that enterprising characters will try to take advantage of Clan affiliation to pump these speakers for more information (for instance, a Soshi PC may try to get more information out of the two Soshi in the first conversation). Feel free to add additional color and incidental conversation, but the PC shouldn't get any more essential information out of these NPCs than described above.

Dinner with the Scorpion

Dinner that evening is a likewise solemn affair, with the various courses of miso soup, tempura, sashimi, rice, steamed vegetables, sake and tea quietly served in the lamp-lit, sparsely elegant Great Hall of the Keep. Quiet conversation drifts through the Hall as the servants place each course on the low, deeply polished tables.

Once again, characters may try to eavesdrop on conversations around the tables. Although those present are physically closer together, there is more conversation and more incidental noise from servants moving about, the soft clatter of dishes and cups, and so on. Accordingly use the same approaches to listening in and the same TNs as in the Garden. Characters who successfully eavesdrop and aren't caught at it immediately will overhear either a purely incidental bit of meaningless dinner conversation (1-5 on a d10), or one of the following conversations or portions thereof (6-10 on the d10). Again, describe the speakers. Each character may overhear only one conversation, but several may overhear the same one. As before, numbered conversations are directly implicated in the plot of the module and will be linked to other events.

- A Scorpion (Yogo) courtier and a Mantis (Yoritomo) courtier are discussing the recent passage of the Miya caravan, described in **Rumor 1**, carrying artifacts from Otosan Uchi through the Scorpion lands. The Yoritomo regrets missing the caravan while it was at Kyuden Bayushi; the Scorpion notes that it has been making only brief stops on its southward journey. Both express concern about the recent unrest in the southern Scorpion lands, along the Crab border, as well as the apparent bandit raids along the River of Gold (**described in Rumor 2**) and hope that this does not impede the caravan in its “noble purpose”. (**Rumor 3**) *Follow up note: if the players choose to investigate, they will find that the caravan arrived in Kyuden Bayushi eighteen days ago, and left sixteen days ago.*
- A Crane (Doji) courtier is expressing dismay to a Lion (Ikoma) courtier over the pace of the ongoing reconstruction efforts in Toshi Ranbo. The Lion believes that the Unicorn should bear the full cost of reconstruction there, and also in the Lion lands. If a Unicorn player is caught overhearing this conversation, the Ikoma will give him or her a truly poisonous look and comment that “gaijin ears are not fit to listen to words exchanged by loyal subjects of Rokugan”. This could have interesting results if the Unicorn has the Brash disadvantage....
- A Scorpion (Bayushi) courtier is explaining to another Scorpion (Bayushi) courtier that she was recently troubled by strange dreams...nightmares, actually. Two consecutive nights, in particular, she was wracked by these frightening dreams, and it has been bothering her ever since. The second Scorpion is silent for a time, then offers that he, too, was afflicted by two nights of troubled sleep...the same two nights, in fact. It seems that blood figured prominently in the dreams of both. They agree to consult with a Soshi shugenja they both happen to know, to ask what this may mean. (**Rumor 4**) *Follow up note: if the players are somehow able to determine which two nights these two suffered their nightmares—by figuring out a polite way to ask, for example, or otherwise making a successful Awareness/Etiquette (Conversation) roll against a TN of 15—they will learn that it was seventeen and sixteen nights ago. Yes, that corresponds to the two nights the Miya caravan was at Kyuden Bayushi, where both of these courtiers currently reside.*

Following the final course, Paneki, dressed now in more traditional Scorpion colors of black and red, addresses the diners. In a smooth and polished voice, he recounts stories of Kaukatsu's life and times as Chancellor, praising his devotion to the Empire and generally painting the man in glowing terms. Finally, he once more thanks the delegates for their attendance and observance, asks Seppun Kiharu to beseech the Fortunes to bestow their blessings upon all present, and then ends the dinner.

Before the player's can take their own leave of the Hall, however, each is intercepted by a senior member of their Clan delegation. Each has been invited to attend a meeting with a “senior Scorpion official” in a small tea-house in the Gardens immediately outside. Clearly, this is not an invitation to be refused.

A Meeting With Paneki

The tea house is a small building, artfully constructed of teak and cherry-wood, set amid a grove of weeping willow trees on small peninsula jutting into a large, placid pond. The place is secluded and approachable from only one direction, making it ideal for discreet meetings. Inside, when the players arrive, they will find a

bare room with polished wood floor and a single, low table surrounded by cushions. Paper lanterns cast a soft illumination through the room. A servant will see that each is seated and offered tea. Once all of the players are in place, Bayushi Paneki will arrive, accompanied by two Mantis—a rather gruff and weathered, middle-aged man, followed by a sharp-looking, older woman. This is Tsuruchi Okame and his aide, Moshi Yumako. They will take their own places at the table, whereupon Paneki will get right to business. His is the Champion of a Great Clan, after all, so his demeanor will be one of doing what must be done here, then needing to be elsewhere.

You should use the following as the basis for information for the PCs; you may even wish to read it aloud.

“My friends,” he says, “you are in a position to aid the Scorpion Clan, their friends, the Mantis...and the Empire as a whole.” Paneki’s voice is smooth, rich and even sounds sincere. He goes on to describe the deteriorating situation in Kudo—rising tension between the Kitsune and Suzume Clans, outbreaks of violence, an attempt on the life of the Suzume governor and, in the midst of it all, the apparent and puzzling inaction of the appointed Mantis Magistrate. “It is important that order is restored in Kudo,” Paneki goes on, then nods to Okame. “The Mantis, as you know, have jurisdiction on behalf of the Emperor over Kudo, as it is an unaligned territory. However, sending word to the nearest Mantis holding, the town of Shaiga, and dispatching investigators from there will waste many days of valuable time. Accordingly, my honored friend, Tsuruchi Okame, is prepared to temporarily designate a group of yoriki, in order to investigate and strive to restore order in Kudo. Since it would be... problematic... to have a group composed solely of Scorpion be so designated and proceed into the territory of the Minor Clans, we have decided that a group composed of members of several Clans would most appropriate for the task.”

Paneki is, of course, not telling the complete truth...but he is not likely to reveal, to a group of low-ranking samurai he doesn’t know, that the Scorpion Clan’s lack of resources is the real reason he’s struck a deal with Okame to enact this particular plan. Assuming that the PCs accept the mission—and again, don’t be afraid to (within reason) bribe, cajole or coerce them into it (and remember, you can always play the ultimate trump card and simply tell them the Head of their Clan Delegation at Kyuden Bayushi has ordered them to accept it)—Okame will pick up the thread of conversation....

“Your mission is quite straightforward. You are to travel to Kudo. Once there, you are to determine exactly what is going on. At a minimum, you will document your own observations, obtain testimony from the Kitsune and Suzume governors, and from anyone else you deem relevant. Your status as yoriki to me should be sufficient to compel such testimony. If anyone refuses to cooperate, you will document that as well. Ideally, as a result of this investigation, you will determine exactly what is happening in Kudo. More to point, you will determine what is causing this sudden...tension...between the Suzume and Kitsune, and what can be done to put an end to it.” He pauses, as though considering how to approach his next point, then continues. “You will also interview Yoritomo Meiji, the Mantis Magistrate responsible for overseeing matters of law and administration in Kudo. You are to obtain from him an accounting of the actions he has taken regarding recent events in the Town. Once you have obtained all of this information, you will return here, to Kyuden Bayushi, and report everything you have learned to myself or, if I am not here, to my designate.” He gestures to the woman beside him. “My aide, Moshi Yumako, will prepare the necessary documents designating you as my yoriki for the purpose of this mission, and will deal with any questions you may have. May the Fortunes watch over you.” With that, both Paneki and Okame will rise and depart.

The Mission

Over the course of the next day or so, Moshi Yumako will have a scroll prepared for each of the PCs, designating him or her as a yoriki to Tsuruchi Okame and marked with Okame’s personal chop. Their powers as yoriki are narrowly defined; they last for only one month from this date, and provide for jurisdiction only in the town of Kudo and a surrounding area, designated by specific land-marks, that corresponds to five miles from edge of town in all directions. Within this area, the PCs are empowered to:

- enter any place to conduct an investigation;

- identify witnesses and record their testimonies;
- conduct arrests; and
- conduct questioning of prisoners (but this does NOT include conducting torture). Any such prisoners are to either placed in the custody of the Mantis Magistrate overseeing Kudo, or else conducted safely to either Shaiga or Kyuden Bayushi, whereupon they will be transferred to the senior Mantis representative there (the PCs' jurisdiction as yoriki to Okame specifically allows them to conduct such transport of prisoners, even beyond the area around Kudo described above).

Yumako will emphasize that yoriki do not enjoy the “diplomatic immunity” that actual magistrates would have in their area of jurisdiction. They must be careful, therefore, in the execution of their duties, lest they run afoul of the law themselves. They must also, at all costs, avoid bringing dishonor to Tsuruchi Okame, since they are acting in his name. Other than this, the yoriki have considerable autonomy in the execution of their assignments. As described by Okame, the PCs must:

- investigate the current situation in Kudo and document their findings;
- interview and obtain testimony from the governors of the Kitsune and Suzume, and anyone else they deem appropriate, and document such testimony;
- interview the Mantis magistrate, Yoritomo Meiji, and obtain from him an accounting of events from his perspective, and what actions he has taken to address them.

Once they have completed their investigation, the PCs are to return, with any prisoners they may have taken, to Kyuden Bayushi and report back to Okame or his designate, before their terms as yoriki expire.

Upon receipt of the scroll confirming their appointments as yoriki to Tsuruchi Okame, each PC's Status will be raised to 2.5 (if already higher, it remains where it is). Likewise, each PC's Glory will be raised by the amount by which his or her Status increased, or by 1.0, whichever is greater. Each new PC yoriki will also receive 5 koku to cover expenses during the mission. Additional compensation will be settled once the mission is successfully completed.

Moshi Yumako will answer any other reasonable questions the PCs may have, but her knowledge is limited to essentially what is given above. She knows nothing about the important Suzume or Kitsune personages in Kudo. If, however, a PC is canny enough to ask her about the Mantis Magistrate in Kudo, Yoritomo Meiji, she will offer the following.

“Yes, I know him. A wise and honored man, with a long history of duty to the Mantis. His son had his gempukku the year before the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, and both father and son stood and fought close to Yoritomo, the Son of Storms himself, when he fell on that terrible day. As I knew him, Meiji was wholly devoted to the welfare of the Minor Clans. I do not know why he would allow matters in Kudo to fall into chaos.” She shrugs. “Perhaps his years of loyal service are weighing too heavily upon him, now.”

You may wish to allow the PC's to take some time to arm and equip, if necessary. Everything in the list of armor, weapons and miscellaneous items given on pages 171-182 of the 3ECR is available at Kyuden Bayushi, all of Average Quality (or, if for reason they wish it, of Poor or Low Quality) and at the prices listed.

The PCs will also be given traveling papers for passage through the Scorpion Lands between Kyuden Bayushi and the Clan's southern border at Shutai. Like the Mantis papers, these are good for one month, and are signed by a senior Scorpion bureaucrat on behalf of Bayushi Paneki himself. At this point, your party of PC yoriki adventurers is ready to journey southwards, towards Kudo....



THE ROAD SOUTH

South from the glorious sprawl of Kyuden Bayushi, the road leads through the rice paddies and scattered forests between Kyuden Bayushi and the Ronin Chiiki (Ronin Plains) that mark the southern border of the Scorpion lands. The PCs will note, as they pass through the occasional clusters of heimin huts along the road that shelter the rice farmers of the Scorpion peasantry, that the rice crops seem rather sparse. It is no secret that the Scorpion are suffering a famine of some degree owing to a blight upon their rice crops, but only the Scorpion characters in the party would be likely to know just how severe the shortages are.

Traitor's Grove

Less than an hour's journey south of Kyuden Bayushi, the party will note a large copse of dark trees standing about a mile east of the road. No matter what weather conditions you've established for the journey, this stand of trees will always appear to be shadowed with a deep and oppressive gloom. If there is a Scorpion in the party, he or she will be able to confirm that this is the infamous Hyashi no Uragirimono, or Traitor's Grove, where those who betray the Scorpion are taken for their final punishment. Allow your Scorpion characters to say whatever they wish about this place. If there are no Scorpion present, allow the PCs to speculate wildly. The PCs really have no reason to go here, and while the Scorpion make no particular attempt to prohibit access to the Grove, they don't encourage it, either. If the party, or some members of it, nonetheless insist on poking their noses into this darkest of Scorpion business, allow them to do so. Paint a picture of a grove of large, darkly ominous trees, with such gloom pooled beneath them that the forest floor is nothing more than a carpet of dead leaves and needles, hanging tendrils of damp moss, and occasional clumps of eerily phosphorescent lichen. Sounds are flat and muffled...the air is oppressive, stagnant and still...and the characters will keenly feel a distinct sense of being watched. Odd bits and pieces dangle from the branches of trees on strings, or lie among the roots where the strings have broken—kabuto (helmets), bits of armor, katana and wakizashi, masks, sandals, shreds of cloth that may have once been kimonos—turning slowly on unfelt currents of air. Most disturbing are the remains—skulls, loose bones and occasional sections of intact skeletons, some still hanging from long spikes driven into the trees. Let the characters think they hear voices, whispers, perhaps a distant scream or two. If any of them (unwisely) decide to try to take of the items or fiddle with the bones, hit them with a hissing shriek from the nearest tree and a Curse...the 3 point version of the Unlucky Disadvantage. Any Scorpion will know that this curse will be them until midnight on the third day of the Monkey—which happens to be the birthday of Bayushi Tesaguri, the first Scorpion to be slain in the Grove. A successful Intelligence (Lore: Ghosts) roll against a TN of 15 or an Intelligence (Spellcraft) roll against a TN of 20 will reveal that it can also be removed by a shugenja using the Water Spell "Hand of Jurojin", or by spending a day fasting and praying in a Temple or Shrine to Jurojin and offering a sacrifice worth at least 5 koku. However, there is some good that can be achieved here. If anyone attempts a Divination here (Awareness (Divination) roll against a TN of 10), inform them that the spirits in this place are in turmoil, and that turmoil has something to do with the south. You may give a character with Divination (Omens) a nudge, by telling him that every mask, kabuto, mempo and skull in the Grove—anything with "eyes"—is facing southwards.



SHUTAI

South of Traitor's Grove, the lands of the Scorpion become somewhat more wild. Although the landscape is dotted by small farming villages surrounded by rice paddies, there are stretches of rocky and forested lands, unsuited for agriculture. Even so, the road is well-traveled and the chances of an unfriendly encounter are remote. The PCs are likely to meet other travelers, predominantly farmers and merchants carrying on the basic commerce of Rokugan. None of these are likely to interfere with a party of samurai, and will simply put their heads down and make way for the PCs. The party may also encounter the occasional Scorpion Clan Magistrate,

who may ask to see their traveling papers, but would otherwise not likely be particularly interested in prying into the PCs' business (particularly when they see that said papers are endorsed by the Clan Champion). None of these people will have any useful information about matters in Kudo. Closer to Shutai, farms and farmlands will again become somewhat more common, but will be more scattered and obviously less prosperous than those closer to Kyuden Bayushi.

As the players approach Shutai, they will have three options:

1. Continue on the main road and enter the town (**Go to Option 1 below**);
2. By-pass the town to the east, moving cross-country and through the surrounding farmlands (**Go to Option 2 below**); or
3. By-pass the town to the west, by finding passage across the River of Gold and moving cross-country through the wilderness on that side of the river (this route dramatically increases the chances of hostile encounters with bandits, or worse. If this doesn't fit your plans for the adventure, GM, then simply declare that the River of Gold cannot be crossed because of width, current, lack of boats, etc.) (**Go to Option 3 below**).



OPTION 1 – PASSING THROUGH SHUTAI

The best way to describe the town of Shutai is to borrow a quote from a famous Jedi Knight...

...you won't ever find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy....

As far as the Great Clans are concerned, Shutai is all but on the edge of the world. As such, it is so far from the minds and interests of "civilized" Rokugan that, in spite of being a fairly large town, it is essentially forgotten by the vast majority of the Empire. Even the Imperial Magistrates pay it scant attention...why bother investing the time and effort in monitoring the place, when no one of importance really cares about it?

This is exactly how the Scorpion want it. Shutai, "wretched hive of scum and villainy" that it is, serves the Clan of Secrets well. The bandits, outlaws, ronin and other, assorted nastiness that prowl its dingy streets provide a ready source of cheap (and unquestioning) labor for all sorts of unsavory plots...as well as convenient scapegoats, should any of those plots happen to go wrong. The town is a Scorpion holding, meaning that that Clan oversees and administers the place on behalf of the Emperor, and—nominally, at least—maintains order and dispenses justice. In fact, the Scorpion do maintain a significant presence in the city, but only a portion of it is obvious. Scorpion Clan Magistrates patrol the streets, while Scorpion bureaucrats, administrators and merchants oversee trade and commerce. But this is just another Scorpion play, staged for the benefit of Shutai and the Empire at large—and everyone knows it. The Magistrates patrol at regular times, and rarely vary their routes or routine; the bureaucrats barely skim official papers and scarcely bother to inspect more than a fraction of the goods and cargos that pass through the town. All of this is quite deliberate, to paint a convenient veneer of civilized behavior over a far more valuable commodity to the Scorpion...all of that readily available "scum and villainy".

Any Scorpion in the party will know this, but would be unlikely to admit the Scorpion administration to be anything less than fully purposeful and effective. Anyone else will have certainly heard rumors about Shutai. The description of the town will just reinforce the stories:

Shutai is a rambling collection of shabby buildings lining a mile or more of broad flood-plain along the River of Gold. Most of the town consists of smaller, more or less ramshackle structures, scattered about with no apparent sense of plan or purpose. Larger buildings—temples, warehouses, commercial and administrative buildings—rise out of the sprawl, but even these are dingy and somewhat tattered, compared to what the samurai would find in the more civilized parts of Rokugan. Among them wind and twist a maze of narrow, crooked streets and alleys that double back on themselves, come to abrupt dead-ends or simply meander off into a warren of side-

streets and trash-strewn courtyards. And the whole town is damp. Water from the flood-plain lurks just beneath the surface, meaning the streets are frequently wet, puddled with grimy pools and slick with mud. A reek of smoke, mildew and packed humanity hangs in the clammy air.

The only street that runs more or less continuously through Shutai is the main road (no town map is provided for Shutai; while there are interesting things that can happen here, none of them require a detailed town map). The party will share it with a jam of pedestrians—farmers, merchants hawking all sorts of cheap wares and food of dubious quality (not to mention health effects), beggars (who will generally leave anyone obviously of the samurai caste alone), and many, many non-descript “citizens” (that is, bandits, ronin and other unpleasant types). After dark, there will be fewer people on the streets, but the ones that are about will be of a more sinister sort. Even then, unless the PCs decide to start trouble themselves, no one is going to harass a party of heavily armed samurai. If they do provoke a confrontation, or otherwise somehow manage to run afoul of the locals, then the party will find themselves facing 1d10 + 4 “Typical Bandits”, with the stats given on page 283 of the 3ECR.

Eyes on the Party

That isn’t to say, however, there’s *no one* interested in the PCs. Regardless of the time of day, one of the “non-descript citizens” will begin stalking the party. This is Shosuro Noburo, a minor Scorpion agent assigned to Shutai. Noburo has been given the task of shadowing any “interesting” newcomers to Shutai by his superiors. This is largely due to the activities of an as-yet largely unknown group of warriors that have begun prowling the margins of the Shinomen Mori. All that is known about them is that they have adopted a Spider emblem as their

insignia, and apparently attack bandits preying upon travelers and farmers through the lower course of the River of Gold (this links to Rumors 2 and 3 above). The power and ruthlessness of these attacks suggests that this “Spider Clan” is more than just another bandit gang, and includes at least some samurai or ronin skilled in the martial arts (of course, the Spider Clan is really the Dark Lord of the Shadowlands, Daigotsu, and his followers, infiltrating the Empire in a more insidious guise. But, at the time of BLOOD AND IRON, essentially no one in Rokugan knows this).

Shosuro Noburo					
• Rank 2 Scorpion Shosuro Shinobi					
Air	3	Reflexes	3	Awareness	3
Earth	2	Stamina	2	Willpower	2
Fire	3	Agility	4	Intelligence	3
Water	2	Strength	2	Perception	2
Void	3				
Status	1	Honor	0.5	Glory	1
Skills					
Athletics 3, Deceit 2, Defense 3, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Minor Clans, Ninja Ranged Weapons 2, Poison 2, Stealth (Sneaking, Shadowing) 2, Underworld 2					
School Technique(s)					
• The Shadow Has No Mask • The Shadow Has No Mercy (see page 141 in 3ECR)					

Noburo will tail the party as they make their way through Shutai, using Agility/Stealth (Shadowing) as a contested roll against the PCs’ Perception/Investigation (Notice). He will make no attempt to interfere with the party and, if the party simply passes through Shutai, will break contact and vanish back into the masses. If he is detected by the party, he will attempt to evade them and vanish into the crowds and side-streets (use Noburo’s Raw Agility, with a +3 bonus to his roll as he knows Shutai’s streets well, as a contested roll against the PCs’ Raw Perception). If he fails and is cornered by the party, he will attempt to pass himself off as a humble nobody simply intrigued by this imposing party of samurai (roll Noburo’s Awareness/Deceit, contested by the PCs’ Perception/Investigation, as he tries to convince them of this). He will strive to maintain his “cover”. If the party succeeds in flushing

out the truth, he will just go silent. His attitude will change, however, if the party decides to show him their various Scorpion and Mantis documents. Noburo isn’t stupid, and will offer to assist the party to the extent that it doesn’t further compromise his position in Shutai.

If Noburo ends up assisting the PCs, he can provide them with all sorts of interesting information about Shutai and its underworld...none of which is particularly useful for this adventure (although he could end up being a useful contact for the PCs in later adventures). Feel free to be imaginative and offer the party some of this

useless “noise” i.e. odd bits and pieces of Shutai unpleasantness. However, there is one piece of information he will provide to the PCs that they may find of interest. He will explain that his interest in the PCs was spurred by the reported activities of the mysterious “Spider Clan”, whose ranks seem to include samurai and other skilled warriors and who seem to be based in or near the Shinomen Mori. He believes that these mysterious “Spider” may be linked to several ghastly murders that took place in Shutai fourteen days ago.

If the PCs picked up on Rumors 1, 3 or 4, or some combination thereof, while at Kyuden Bayushi, they may realize fourteen days ago would be approximately when the Miya caravan would have passed through Shutai. If they ask Noburo, he will think for a moment, then confirm that, yes, the caravan was in Shutai at that time. Of course, if they *didn't* pick up on the rumors at Kyuden Bayushi, then they would have no reason to even consider the Miya caravan. In either case, if they ask Noburo about the murders, he will have little information to offer—murders are all too common in Shutai, and the only thing that distinguishes these ones is that they were nastier than usual—but will take them to where the murders occurred, if they wish. If they don't, and the party has nothing further for Noburo, he will wish them well and quickly vanish back into Shutai.

Note that, should the party not detect Noburo shadowing them, or not succeed in cornering and speaking to him, they have an alternate way of finding out about the murders. A PC who spends at least two hours “exploring” the rumors and innuendo swirling through the sake houses, merchant stalls and other gathering places in Shutai can make an Awareness/Courtier (Gossip) or Intelligence/Underworld roll against a TN of 10 (note that this abbreviated timeline is a special exemption to the normal requirements for Courtier (Gossip) given in the 3ECR on page 96). If successful, the PC will learn the same information that Noburo provides above. Again, he or she will also hear many, many other juicy tidbits of information, none of which have any particular bearing on this adventure.

Of course, if the party manages to miss both Noburo and the rumors, then they will proceed through Shutai without incident (at least, without incidents they don't cause themselves!) Remember that the PCs have no legal jurisdiction here...their Mantis yoriki status doesn't apply, and their Scorpion papers are travel documents only. They most definitely can run afoul of the law, if they misbehave! Assuming they don't you can simply proceed to the section “*South from Shutai*”, below.

The Scene of the Crime

The murders occurred in a shabby sake house, that itself forms the front for an even shabbier establishment that generously calls itself a “geisha house”, but is really just a seedy brothel. The owner, a wiry old woman named Megu, will insist on being paid for access to the room at her standard rate of 2 bu, regardless of whether they want a “geisha” to go with it. She maintains a pair of “bouncers”—surly-looking ronin, each with the stats of a “Typical Bushi” as given on page 283 of the 3ECR—to enforce her pricing policies. Again, remember that the PCs have no legal jurisdiction here. If they make trouble, they'll find themselves on the wrong end of the law, in the form of a Scorpion Town Watch patrol, consisting of six more “Typical Bushi”. The Scorpion Chief Magistrate for Shutai will take a very dim view of one of his patrols being assaulted, so feel free to penalize the PCs heavily in terms of both Honor and Glory if they mire themselves in an altercation with the lawful authorities in Shutai (not to mention that neither Paneki nor Okame will be impressed, when they find out).

The room where the murders occurred is dingy little space on the second floor, containing a shoji screen covered with crudely-done erotic scenes and a grimy tatami mat on the floor. A tiny window admits light during the day, while illumination at night is provided by a smoky oil lamp. In spite of having been “cleaned” since the murders, not to mention having been...used...an indeterminate number of times, there remain a variety of marks and stains on the floor and walls. A successful Perception/Investigation roll against TN 15 will reveal that some of the stains appear to be old blood, half-heartedly cleaned, some distributed in a spatter pattern around the room that suggests great violence. However, much of the blood appears to be concentrated on one section of floor. Another Perception/Investigation roll against TN 15 will reveal that the blood-stains here appear to form a pattern—but what pattern is unclear. Deciphering the pattern will require an Intelligence/Spellcraft (Maho) roll against TN 25 to determine it is, in fact, some form of maho summoning ritual. The blood is too obscured to

determine any further details, other than that whatever was being attempted here, it doesn't appear to have been completed.

If the players question Megu, she will offer little information without some form of inducement. Five bu will be enough to loosen her tongue. If they choose another approach, like Deceit (Intimidation), consider all of Megu's Rings and Traits to be 2, and her own Deceit (Intimidation) to be 2. Once convinced to talk, she will recall that on the night in question, the man who had hired the room had exceeded his allowed time. When she sent one of her bouncers to clear him out or collect further payment, he had found a charnel house. The "geisha" the man had hired was very dead, her throat slit and her blood staining the walls and floor in a strange, disturbing pattern. Just as shocking, the murderer—the man who had hired the room in the first place—was kneeling beside her, coated in blood, a bloody tanto in his hand...and dead. The eta who had cleaned the room and carried off the bodies hadn't found a mark on him. He had apparently just...died, in place. The magistrates who investigated had labeled it a murder/suicide, chalked it up to yet another bad night in Shutai, and the bodies had been carted off and burned. Megu has nothing further to offer.

Once the party has done anything else they wish to do in Shutai, proceed to the section "*South from Shutai*", below.



OPTION 2 – BY-PASSING SHUTAI TO THE EAST

The lands east of Shutai rise up from the River of Gold, forming a shallow slope defining eastern side of the river's valley. The area is reasonably fertile, allowing for the cultivation of crops, including rice in terraced paddies dug into the valley's side, irrigated by streams flowing into the river from above. The general squalor of Shutai extends into these "suburbs"; the peasants or heimin who live here are impoverished compared to their counterparts in other parts of Rokugan. Movement through this area is relatively easy, as the farmers have constructed numerous paths and trails for the tending of their crops. Encounters in this area are unlikely to involve anything other than farmers and their families, who will do their best to avoid a group of samurai. If confronted, the peasants will fling themselves to the ground, beg for their lives, and offer whatever meager possessions they have to the PCs. Aside from some food, this will amount to nothing of significance. Remember that needlessly abusing heimin such as farmers, while not strictly dishonorable, could result in a loss of up to 1 point of Glory for PC who shows particularly wanton cruelty.

If you particularly desire to have the party encounter something nastier than farmers in this area, you should restrict the encounter to one of several types of Normal Creatures, starting on page 277 of the 3ECR; choose between 1-3 Boars and a pack of 3-8 feral Dogs.

Proceed to the section "*South from Shutai*", below.



OPTION 3 – BY-PASSING SHUTAI TO THE WEST

By-passing Shutai to the west will, obviously, require crossing the River of Gold. The river is a major watercourse, draining all of central Rokugan, including run-off from the Spine of the World mountains to the east, and the vast expanse of the Shinomen Mori to the west. At Shutai, the river is half a mile—or about 2600 feet—wide, with a steady current of about 5 miles per hour. At the center, it is about 50 feet deep. If the party has its own means of crossing—for example, magical means, such as flying, water-walking or breathing under water—and can apply them to deal with the river's size, depth and current, then more power to them. Otherwise, they will have to find a more mundane means of crossing, such as a boat. Boats are easier to find in Shutai itself, since there are commercial docks along the river. However, the party can, with some checking about, find a boat for hire to take them across the river in the farmlands north of Shutai. The boatman, who will be an enterprising

farmer or peasant who keeps the boat for fishing and the occasional trip to the western bank, will charge 1 bu per person and require one trip per 3 characters. Carrying horses across will require a small barge (also available), but will cost 3 bu and will require one trip per person and horse.

Once on the western bank, the party will find itself in a very different environment. Where the eastern shore is relatively tame and cultivated, the western shore is much more wild. One or two days' journey to the northeast, civilization reappears around Zakyo Toshi (Pleasure City), close to the edge of the Shinomen Mori, but the area in which the party now finds itself, between the Shinomen Mori and the River of Gold, is essentially wilderness. The terrain rises steadily from the river, becoming rolling and hilly as it levels off into scrubby grasslands and marshes separating stands of pine and poplar, maple and cedar, themselves outliers of the great Shinomen Forest. There are no permanent roads (other than the road leading southward from Zakyo Toshi, towards Kudo) only infrequent, sporadic trails used by hunters, wood-cutters and, on occasion, less savory sorts, such as bandits.

The wild nature of the area greatly increases the chances of chance encounters. If you wish to have the party stumble into trouble, roll a d10 and use the following table as a guide (consult pages 277-283 of the 3ECR):

- **(Roll 1-5)** Encounter a normal creature. Roll d10: (1-2) Bear with 2 cubs; (3-5) 1-3 Boars; (6-8) Stag; (9-10) Pack of 1-10 Wolves. Note that only the Boars are likely to be aggressive without provocation; the other animals are likely to flee if not provoked.
- **(Roll 6-9)** Encounter humans. Roll d10: (1-6) Hunters, wood-cutters or other “non-combatant” humans; (7-9) Bandits (5-14 Typical Bandits led by a Typical Bushi). Note that the “non-combatants” will be suitably subservient to a group of samurai and will answer questions put to them, but will have no useful information to offer. Bandits will attack the party if they outnumber the PCs by at least 2:1, or are able to Ambush the party (roll PCs' Perception/Investigation (Notice) or Perception/Battle against a TN of 20; if the PCs succeed and the Ambush is compromised, the Bandits will flee).
- **(Roll 0)** Encounter intelligent or Shadowlands Creature: Roll d10: (1-4) 1-10 Nezumi; (5-7) Ogre; (8-9) Bog Hag; (0) Troll. Note that Nezumi will not attack, but will fight to defend themselves. Ogres and Trolls will attack without much thought. Bog Hags will seek an opportunity to attack a lone party member, and will stalk the party awaiting such a chance (assume the Bog Hag has Stealth 3 (Sneaking)).

It will not be difficult for the party to by-pass Shutai on the western shore without being detected (barring a random encounter, above). Returning back across the River of Gold to its eastern side will be more problematic (assume the same width, depth and current data given above) if the party doesn't have its own means of doing so (again, by using magic, for example). Finding a suitable boat on the western side is a chancier affair; assume a 10% chance per day of finding a heimin or similar person with a boat on the western shore, hunting, gathering wood, etc. The same costs and crossing statistics used previously will apply. The only other way to cross back to the east is via the bridge on the road between Kudo and Zakyo Toshi.

Smoke on the Wind

One day's journey southward, the party will notice smoke rising to the west (at the location marked “Battle and Pyre Site” on the Kudo Region Map”). Note that they will only see it if they chose to by-pass Shutai on the west side of the River, however; if they passed through Shutai, or by-passed it to the east, the smoke is not visible.

If the party chooses to investigate, they will find that the smoke is rising from a clearing trampled into the grass on the edge of a marsh. A battle was obviously fought here recently. There are numerous foot-prints in the soft ground, along with the dark brown stains of blood. If has been raining at any time during the last day, the footprints and blood-stains will be somewhat obscured, but still recognizable. The most striking, and rather

gruesome feature of the site, however, is a heaped and still-smouldering pile of burned corpses in the middle of the clearing, from which wafts the sickly sweet smell of charred flesh. There are at least a dozen, and perhaps as many as 16; the party will have to investigate closely to determine the exact count (there are 14 bodies).

Someone has taken the time to gather the dead from this recent skirmish and incinerate them, using a mixture of wood and oil as fuel. And that someone has left a “calling card”. Rising from a pole thrust into the midst of the pile is a black banner, upon which is imprinted a white mon in the shape of a spider. Beneath the banner hangs a parchment, on which is printed in rough calligraphy the following:

So end all bandits, and all who prey on those weaker than themselves.

If a PC wishes to examine tracks around the site, a successful Perception/Hunting (Tracking) roll against a TN of 15 will reveal that a number of individuals left the clearing, heading westward. However, the tracks quickly lead into a marsh and disappear into open water. There is no indication where they emerge from the marsh, which is at least a half-mile across (in other words, there is no chance of following the tracks any further. We really don't want the PCs to run afoul of the Spider Clan...at least, not in this adventure!)

If the PCs examine the burned corpses, they will determine that, other than their clothes, all other possessions of the “bandits” have been taken away (so there are no weapons, armor, etc.). Remember that physically contacting dead flesh is considered most revolting and unseemly for samurai (that's what eta are for, after all), so if any of the PCs do fiddle directly with the bodies or parts of them, they will lose a point of Glory. While examining the corpses, a PC who makes a successful Perception/Investigation (Notice) against TN 20 will discern that two of the corpses are different. While physically they don't appear very different than the rest of the bodies, they have burned somewhat less thoroughly, and are definitely smouldering more than the other corpses (the players can infer what they will from this fact; what it means is that these two bodies were added to the pile after the rest, and then burned). A successful Intelligence/Anatomy (Autopsy) roll against a TN of 20, or a successful Intelligence/Medicine roll against a TN of 25, will reveal that these corpses have burned differently because they have been entirely drained of their blood. If either of these rolls is successful by 10 or more, the examining PC(s) will also learn that, unlike the rest of the bodies, whose visible wounds show they died in battle (obvious slash and puncture injuries), these two unfortunates had their throats very deliberately slit.

This may prompt further investigation of the area by the PCs. A successful Perception/Investigation (Search) roll against a TN of 25, or a Perception/Hunting (Tracking) roll against a TN of 20, will reveal a faint trail—much fainter than the one that led into the marsh—leading to the east, marked out both in damage to vegetation, and sporadic blood-drops. Investigation/Search won't suffice to follow the trail, however, as it will, at once, disappear into the underbrush. Another successful Perception/Hunting (Tracking) roll against a TN of 20 will be required to follow the trail about another half-mile to the east, to a clearing in the middle of a stand of cedar trees. There are a series of blackish stains in the middle of the clearing, and the surrounding vegetation is yellowed and dead. A successful Intelligence/Spellcraft (Maho) roll against a TN of 20 will confirm that this is the remains of a maho summoning ritual, preserved as much as it is only by the shelter of the overhanging cedars. Succeeding by 10 or more will also reveal that the summoning was completed—*something* passed through the gate that was created here. As for the blood itself, a successful Intelligence/Anatomy roll or Intelligence/Medicine roll against a TN of 20 will indicate that the blood is more than a week old (it isn't possible to tell how much older). If, through luck or clever use of skills, spells, etc. they PCs end up entitled to more information, see “*Find and Interview the Kitsune Governor*” in the “Kudo” section below, as this is where the Kommei no Oni was summoned.

Yet another successful Perception/Hunting (Tracking) roll against a TN of 20 will disclose a second trail that leads from this clearing, this time to the south and east. It vanishes in marshy ground close to the river and cannot be followed any further.

From here, the party may choose to travel a short distance to the west and pick up the road that traverses between Zakyō Toshi and the bridge across the River of Gold. If they do, use the travel times shown on the Kudo Region Map. If they choose to remain in the wilderness—closely paralleling the River, for example—add 0.5

days to their travel time to the bridge. If you wish to provoke any encounters in the wilderness, use the table given above, for when they first crossed the River.

SOUTH FROM SHUTAI

Regardless of which of the three options for passing by or through Shutai the party chooses, eventually, they will end up in the same place—at or near the bridge over the River of Gold, on the road between Kudo and Zakyo Toshi. Depending on the route they chose, whether they traveled by foot or mounted, and any distractions or side-trips you created for them (or they created for themselves!), they will reach here from four to seven days after leaving Kyuden Bayushi. Another one and one-half to two days of travel will bring them to the northern outskirts of Kudo, and the next stage of the adventure.

Give each PC 2 XP...then hint to them that, from here, things will begin to much more interesting—and dangerous.



KUDO

Unlike the dank flood-plain that hosts Shutai, Kudo is built on a higher, drier stretch of land along the River of Gold, where rock out-crops form a series of shallow, terraced bluffs leading up and east from the water's edge (see Kudo Town Map). Originally a holding of the Hare Clan, the town is now home to contingents from both the Suzume and Kitsune Clans. While these Minor Clans aren't "enemies" by any means, and generally get along amicably, Kudo has become something of a point of contention between them. The town is surrounded on the north, east and south by fertile lands that have been terraced and irrigated into productive rice paddies. And, in spite of a recent decline in river commerce along the River of Gold, a thriving river port still forms the focus of the town's economy, with rice and other food-stuffs shipping out, and a wide range of other commodities coming in. All in all, the town is a prosperous, bustling hub of activity—making it the perfect sore spot between these two, proud Minor Clans.

Even then, the residents of Kudo, divided more or less evenly between the Suzume and the Kitsune, generally get along. Although each Clan group is largely focused into one of the town's "districts", these are by no means ghettos, and there is much co-mingling of the people. Suzume-Kitsune marriages are not uncommon, and if there is rivalry between the two Clans, it is expressed more in the political and economic maneuvering of their local governors, than in the day-to-day life of the average citizen.

As they arrive in Kudo, well-tended farms and rice paddies (which, by comparison to the Scorpion rice paddies to the north, are positively lush) will give way to the austere Suzume District of Kudo. (This presumes the party enters Kudo from the north, along the road. If your party chooses some other, less conventional way of entering town, you'll have to start somewhere below and describe the first part of Kudo they would see.) The Suzume are the Clan of "noble poverty" (see the background to the Clan on page 69 of the 3ECR), and this is reflected in the general "flavor" of their District. This is not to say that Suzume District is impoverished! Rather, it is Spartan, with little flourish or decoration, but clean and ordered, with generally simple architecture in drab, neutral colors. The PCs may be surprised to see Suzume samurai performing what, to any other Clan, would be unthinkable menial tasks—tending gardens, repairing roof-tiles and sweeping dust out of courtyards—that would be performed by servants. But the Suzume philosophy extends event to their own day-to-day life, so it isn't unusual at all to see their samurai toiling alongside the commoners...often enough, at least, to show their Clan's devotion to the concept of "noble poverty".

In contrast, the Kitsune District, further to the south, is much less ordered and more "organic". Trees, shrubs, grass and flowers run riot among the brightly colored houses. The effect is more of a town carefully worked into place amid a forest, than of a forest brought in and deliberately planted in place among the buildings

of a town...although the latter is obviously the truth. Although more conventional in their ways (no menial toil for the samurai of the Kitsune), the overall effect is one of cheerful disorder.

Note that more details of other locations in Kudo are given in the Kudo Town Map Index.

When the party arrives in Kudo, they may seek a place to stay at once; presumably, they will do so eventually. They can, if they wish, use their status as Mantis yoriki to requisition quarters held by the Town Magistrate for just that purpose; if so, they will be assigned a plain but serviceable house at location 1 on the Kudo Town Map. If some or all of the party prefer an inn, they can stay at the “mid-grade” *Dreaming Carp* (location 2), or the “high-end” *House of Radiant Fog* (location 3). If they wish to be “frugal”, they can also bed down at the *Suzume Hostel* (location 4), where payment for a night’s rest is in the form of a minor task, or a donation to the Shrine of Inari. Finally, if they truly wish to “slum it”, there is always floor-space available in the *Place of Dancing Coins* sake house, a favored and often rowdy haunt of river-men, down by the docks (location 5; but note that there is a “quarantined” building nearby, which may factor into their decision).

Incidentally, if the party begins to question the locals, they will learn the following, but nothing else of immediate interest:

- The tension in Kudo is very real. A gulf of animosity has opened between the Suzume and the Kitsune, exacerbated by the attempted assassination, eleven days ago, of Suzume Soseki, the Suzume Governor. The Mantis Town Magistrate has done little to address the situation, but rumor has it that he and his senior yoriki are both ill.
- The Miya Caravan of artifacts from Otosan Uchi was in town ten days ago, but quickly left after being targeted by thieves. Rumor has it several items were stolen, but most were recovered.

Once they’ve settled in (or right away, if they want to get down to work and leave finding quarters for later), the party has essentially four, optional courses of action from which to choose:

1. Find and interview the Suzume governor;
2. Find and interview the Kitsune governor;
3. Find and interview the Mantis Town Magistrate; or
4. Do something else.

According to their instructions from Okame, they eventually have to do each of the first three; the order in which they do so is up to them. As for number 4, doing “something else”, this is really the party’s call. For example, they may simply want to explore the town and gather some sense of the “mood”—a perfectly legitimate pursuit, but they will learn nothing more than the two points noted above.

As you work through the following sections, in whatever order, make sure you do your best to “punch up” the sense of growing tension, like the still, stagnant air before a great storm. You want to steadily ratchet up the feeling of apprehension now, as the climax of the adventure grows nearer. The following will help you in that...you can use the following mini-encounters as the characters move around Kudo both to sharpen the adventure’s “edge”, and to illustrate just how bad things in Kudo are becoming.

- As they round a corner, the PCs see, about 100 feet away, group of six young Suzume attacking and beating a middle-aged Kitsune. A group of a dozen or so citizens look on in horror. There is no sign of any Magistrates or Town Watch. The Suzume have the statistics of “Typical Bandits” from page 283 of the 3ECR, are armed with a variety of peasant weapons, and are clearly drunk. If the PCs intervene, apply a Fear 3 effect to the Suzume; any who manage to stand their ground will turn and fight the PCs (the by-standers will scatter in any case). The Kitsune is badly injured and will die without medical attention or healing. Remember the PCs have legal jurisdiction here. Hopefully, the PCs remember this, too, because if they DON’T intervene, they will each lose 1 Honor and 1 Glory.
- An elderly Suzume woman will intercept the PCs, showing barely sufficient deference before launching into a complaint about a Kitsune woman, who lives near her, who has been “harassing” her. If they follow the

woman back to her house and confront the Kitsune, the PCs will find themselves in the middle of an epic encounter between two stubborn old women, each trying to out-shout and out-gesture the other about decades of transgressions: dirty looks, spilled garbage, trespassing, petty vandalism, more trespassing, etc. This is good one to play up for its comedic value...how will the PCs handle these two relentlessly formidable old gals?

- As they walk down the street, an arrow comes sailing out of some nearby bushes at the party. It is fired at a random party member, with an attack roll of 2k2. If the PCs close in on the attacker, they will find it is a scared, but defiant young Kitsune boy—pre-gempukku—who’s father is an injured and retired samurai that has been drafted into a new “Kitsune Town Militia”. This is a more tragic sort of encounter, as the boy is clearly frightened by the collapse of his cozy little world around him.
- A far more serious encounter occurs when the party stumbles into a clash between two armed groups, one of Kitsune and one of Suzume, who will put aside their battle to confront the PCs (alternatively, this could be a joined group of Suzume and Kitsune who take severe umbrage about ANY “outsiders”—including, and perhaps especially, representatives of the Great Clans—who meddle in the affairs of Kudo and the Minor Clans. In this case, the group will attempt to ambush the PCs). In either case, this group will not hesitate to attack the party.
 - Suzume: six “Typical Bushi” per page 283 of the 3ECR, led by a “Typical Bushi” with a –5 bonus to all TNs related to Combat;
 - Kitsune: four “Typical Bushi”, supported by two shugenja. For the shugenja, use the stats for a “Typical Bandit” on page 283 of the 3ECR, but Perception and Willpower both 3 (and, therefore, a Water and Earth Ring each of 3), and the following spells: *Earth’s Stagnation*, *Elemental Ward*, *Tetsubo of Earth*, *Armor of Earth*, *Walk Without Passing*, *Grasp of Earth*, *Heart of Nature*, *Path to Inner Peace*

Option 1 – Find and Interview the Suzume Governor

Finding the Suzume governor isn’t difficult...and yet, it is. Suzume Soseki is ensconced in the Governor’s House in the Suzume District (location 6), but getting to him will be difficult. Since the recent attempt on his life, loyal Suzume samurai have been keeping a careful watch on Soseki, and anyone approaching will find themselves stopped by armed and wary retainers. These will be 3-12 Suzume samurai with the statistics of “Typical Bushi” on page 283 of the 3ECR. They will be suspicious in the extreme of strangers, bordering on hostile. Simply showing these retainers the PCs’ Mantis yoriki papers will have a 60% chance (1-6 on a d10) of causing them to relent (70% if there is a Mantis character in the party) and allow the PCs to proceed to the Governor’s House. If not successful, the Suzume will not be impressed by the authority represented by a Mantis yoriki, and will hold their ground, preventing the PCs from getting any closer to Soseki. In this case, the PCs have several options:

- Attempt to bluster their way through. The PCs must make a Contested Awareness/Deceit (Intimidation) roll opposed by a Willpower/Deceit roll; assume a Deceit skill rank of 2 for the Suzume retainers, and add or subtract 2 times the difference in numbers between the retainers and the PCs. If the PCs’ roll is successful, the retainers will back down. If unsuccessful, the situation will escalate and ANY further attempts to obtain passage that day will not only fail, but have a 30% chance (1-3 on a d10) of becoming violent.
- Attempt to cajole or manipulate their way through. The PCs must make a Contested Awareness/Courtier (Manipulation) roll opposed a Raw Awareness roll. If successful, the retainers will relent and decide it is reasonable to allow the PCs through. If unsuccessful, another attempt can be made, but with a –3 penalty. This penalty is applied with each failed attempt, until the PCs give up, or their chances of success drop to 0.

All of the above chances, penalties, etc. are reset at the end of the day, so the players can start fresh the following day.

Once the party succeeds in making their way past the “cordon”, they will be greeted at the door to the Suzume Governor’s House by a strapping pair of Suzume samurai, no less paranoid than those surrounding the place. However, these are professional yojimbo (body-guards, with the stats of “Typical Bushi” on page 283 of

the 3ECR, but with a blanket +2 bonus to all of their Combat rolls, reflecting their somewhat superior skills), so their Mantis yoriki status will be sufficient to allow the PCs entrance. They will be taken to an audience chamber off of the entrance hall; they will note, as they are, that in keeping with the usual Suzume philosophy of “less is more”, there is virtually no decoration...every piece of furniture and unadorned shoji screen is purely

Suzume Soseki

• **Rank 4 Suzume Samurai**

Air	4	Reflexes	4	Awareness	4
Earth	3	Stamina	3	Willpower	3
Fire	4	Agility	4	Intelligence	4
Water	2	Strength	2	Perception	2
Void	3				

Status	5	Honor	2.5	Glory	3
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Skills

Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2 (Political Maneuvering), Commerce 2 (Mathematics), Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Games 4 (Go), Kenjutsu 5, Kyujutsu 4, Knives 1, Lore: Law 2, Lore: Heraldry, Lore: History, Lore: Minor Clans, Storytelling 4, Underworld 1

Advantages

Irreproachable (15 TN modifier)

functional—no more, no less. After a brief wait, they will be joined by Suzume Soseki, who remains accompanied by his two burly yojimbo, and a young woman with quick eyes, whom he shall introduce as Suzume Rika, his personal aide and scribe. All are of typical Suzume appearance—they resemble the Crane, but with an edge to their features. Where the Crane tend to slender and regular features, the Suzume are more angular and, particularly in the case of Soseki himself, a somewhat leathery and weather-beaten cast. Soseki, a man in his early 50’s, has clearly seen his share of sun, wind and rain and, in spite of his years, is still a healthy, with a wiry, muscular physique.

Soseki will greet the PCs somewhat coolly, his attitude being “it’s about time that someone took some action around here”. Clearly, Soseki does not consider himself a friend of the Mantis; the look he exchanges with his aide, Rika, at any mention of Tsuruchi Okame’s name is less than respectful. He will observe to Rika that she “must make record of this, the Mantis showing interest in something that doesn’t involve a sailboat.” If anyone in the party (such as a Mantis character!) takes obvious exception to this, then all Social skill rolls involving Soseki will, thereafter, have their TN increased by 3.

as a scribe and taking “minutes”, Rika is passing information to Soseki. She is holding her papers in such a way that

After tea is brought (as etiquette demands) and as they converse, an observant player may note that, in addition to being she can write notes to the Governor and, in fact, is feeding him not just observations about the ongoing conversation, but is actually prompting him about what to say. Soseki is an old soldier, well acquainted with the battlefield...but the political battlefield is something he’s never had much time for or interest in. Rika, a skilled courtier, has become his courtly eyes, ears—and mouth. A successful Awareness/Courtier (Political Maneuvering) roll opposed by Rika’s Awareness/Etiquette will reveal that Rika is passing copious notes to Soseki, who is surreptitiously reading and absorbing them “on the fly”. This is obviously a well-developed little relationship, and the result is that even though the characters are speaking to Soseki, they are working against Rika’s much superior Political and Social Skills (so all such rolls in this situation use Rika’s stats, not Soseki’s!). If the players can find some way to disrupt this cozy little working relationship between the Governor and his aide, then Soseki will be forced to rely on his own Courtier and Etiquette Ranks. Note that any overt “attack” on or threat against Rika will be met with swift and brutal retaliation from Soseki and his yojimbo, so the PC’s had best be both careful and subtle in how they proceed!

Suzume Rika

• **Rank 3 Suzume Courtier**

Air	3	Reflexes	3	Awareness	4
Earth	3	Stamina	3	Willpower	3
Fire	3	Agility	3	Intelligence	4
Water	3	Strength	3	Perception	3
Void	3				

Status	4	Honor	2.5	Glory	1.5
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Skills

Calligraphy 4, Courtier 4 (Political Maneuvering), Commerce 2, Defense 3, Etiquette 4, Games 2 (Go), Knives, Lore: Law, Lore: Heraldry, Lore: History, Lore: Minor Clans, Storytelling 2, Underworld

Soseki will explain—with a clear and understandable Suzume bias—how the deteriorating situation in Kudo is a result of “less than perfect” Mantis oversight, and the obvious machinations of the Kitsune. Soseki will

recount how the “amicable” arrangement whereby the Suzume and Kitsune would share governance of Kudo has never really worked, and clearly suspects that the Kitsune, who are finally making their move to seize effective control of Kudo and its surrounding farm-lands are receiving outside assistance. He doesn’t name any party in particular, but he will turn a dark glance on any Mantis OR Scorpion in the party. After all, the assassin that attacked him was obviously a professional—otherwise, how could he have been so easily overwhelmed—and assassins of that caliber are not easy to come by.

If asked about the assassination attempt in particular, Soseki will be somewhat dismissive (he is embarrassed at being so easily overcome by his attacker). If prodded, he was attacked in his bed-chamber (alone; his wife died under circumstances he won’t describe several years previously. It was, in fact, just unfortunate but natural causes, but if he is pushed on this, he will become resentful and the next Social or Political roll he makes will have a +3 bonus) by a rather non-descript man, heavily hooded and cloaked; he saw the face in shadow but it was no one he recognized. The assassin obviously used poison, because the only thing Soseki remembers of the attack was being grabbed, a sudden wash of some greenish-yellow gas, and then...nothing. It was fortunate that one of his retainers happened into the bed-chamber and raised the alarm, bringing his yojimbo running. The yojimbo and retainer saw a hooded figure flee through the window, into the night. He left behind an acrid yellowish cloud that quickly dispersed, but not before provoking a coughing, choking and—oddly—a sense of profound fear in those exposed (see “*Find and Interview the Kitsune Governor*” below for the explanation behind this). Soseki recovered after a day of fitful, nightmare-laden sleep. In spite of a search, no trace of the assassin was found. Soseki will add that the Mantis were no help. Their Town Magistrate was “supposedly” ill and, if there is no Mantis in the party, the Governor doesn’t bother concealing his obvious suspicion that the Mantis were somehow actually involved (at the very least by not bothering with a meaningful response to the attack on him).

One or more successful Awareness/Courtier (Manipulation) or Awareness/Deceit (Seduction) rolls, opposed by Rika’s (or, if they PC’s have managed to block her unspoken communications with the Governor), Soseki’s Awareness/Etiquette (with a –3 penalty if there are no Mantis in the party), will be required to obtain each of the following items of additional information:

- The worsening situation has already prompted some citizens to leave Kudo. It appears that there are more Suzume than Kitsune leaving, and they are leaving very suddenly, not even bothering to take many of their possessions with them.
- If asked about the Miya Caravan of artifacts from Otosan Uchi, he will confirm that it was in Kudo about a week ago, but only stayed one day and night before moving on. Apparently, it was robbed and something was stolen from it...he doesn’t know what, or really care, but this just underscores how Kudo is “falling apart”.
- Word has been sent to the Suzume Daimyo, Suzume Yugoki, that the Suzume in Kudo are effectively being “besieged” and requesting aid, in the form of military force. There has not yet been any response, but Soseki expects a “legion” of Suzume samurai to soon arrive, to solidify his Clan’s “legitimate and historical claim” to Kudo.
- Word has also been sent to the Mantis in Shaiga, requesting a “peacekeeping” force...but Soseki clearly expects little or no help, as it would involve “leaving sight of the ocean”.
- Finally, Soseki has had no direct contact with the Kitsune Governor, Kitsune Hyobe, since the attempt on his life. All communications have been through an intermediary, a Tortoise Courtier named Kasuga Yodo—and none of it has been useful communication, as it appears Hyobe is quite intent on starting a war between the two Clans over Kudo.

The PCs will learn nothing else from Soseki. He will simply continue his taut and deceptively quiet “rant” about the Kitsune, the Mantis, and the worsening situation in Kudo.

Option 2 – Find and Interview the Kitsune Governor

In contrast to getting to see the Suzume Governor, there is little challenge in finding or meeting Kitsune Hyobe. He is holding court in the Kitsune Hall (location 7 on the Kudo Town Map). This is a large and rather ornate wooden structure used as a sort of “community center” by the Kitsune of Kudo. Imagine a gigantic log-

cabin constructed in an “Oriental style”, decked out with much ornamentation of a generally “woody” or forest-themed nature. Inside, the Hall is a single, large room, lined with huge wooden columns that through some trick of silviculture or magic, are actually sprouting leafy branches, in spite of obviously not being rooted in the earth. The light from the high windows (by day), or the numerous silvery-white and golden lanterns (by night) is given a greenish cast as it filters through these leaves, reminiscent of the sun through a forest canopy. The room is largely empty; six Kitsune bushi acting as guards and yojimbo are within, with two at the doors and the rest scattered about (like the Suzume yojimbo, they have the stats of “Typical Bushi” on page 283 of the 3ECR, with a blanket +2 bonus to all of their Combat rolls, reflecting their superior skills). On a dais at the far end of the Hall, the players will find Kitsune Hyobe sitting on an ornately carved wooden chair. He is in conversation with a wiry old Tortoise; this is Kasuga Yodo, the go-between for Hyobe and Suzume Soseki. Nearby stands a striking, older female Kitsune dressed in robes of dark green embroidered with a golden leaf pattern. She will be introduced as Kitsune Hana, a shugenja and Hyobe’s aide. As soon as the PCs arrive, she will bow and take her leave, citing business to attend to on Hyobe’s behalf. Aside from an appraising look at the PCs, she will offer no interaction. If the PCs try to engage her, she’ll be polite, but aloof (Don’t worry, “she’ll be back”).

Hyobe is a big man, bordering on rotund, with a loud voice and booming laugh. His face is somewhat flat and broad, with quick eyes surrounded by deep laugh lines. The PCs would place his age to be, like Suzume Soseki’s, around 50. Also like Soseki, his skin shows the effects of frequent exposure to the elements; unlike the Suzume Governor, however, Hyobe has clearly come to enjoy the “good life”, and if he ever was a man of martial skill, that was then, and this is now. He wears a heavy robe of forest green over a kimono of leaf-green and brown; its hood is pulled up, covering his graying hair.

Hyobe is unlike Soseki in another way. In contrast to the wary reticence of the Suzume, Hyobe is positively effusive. After offering tea or, if the PCs prefer, sake (“good Kudo sake, from the works just across the River”), he will tell the PCs essentially anything they wish to know, but within the following overall theme:

- He agrees with Suzume Soseki in one way—the uneasy joint oversight of Kudo isn’t working, and it’s time for a “new arrangement”.
- The Suzume, as any student of history knows, were given the barren lands overlooking the Golden Sun Plains by the Emperor in which to carry out their “deeply honorable and respected practice” of “noble poverty”. Kudo just is not properly their place.
- It is, however, a natural place for the Kitsune.
- To that end, Hyobe is anxious to find a peaceful and equitable way of resolving the current situation to the satisfaction of all involved—including proper compensation for the Suzume, when they surrender their claim upon Kudo to the Kitsune.

The PCs may note that the Tortoise, Kasuga Yodo, appears deeply unhappy at the Kitsune’s words...but he says nothing and merely gives the PCs a barely perceptible shrug. Hyobe, meanwhile, will simply go on in the above vein. If the PCs ask him any specific questions, he will respond as below:

- Regarding the assassination attempt on Suzume Soseki, he will look unhappy and shake his head, stating it is truly deplorable that such a thing would happen. But he will disavow any knowledge of the matter, and suggests that, while other parties may have a vested interest in seeing the Suzume left leaderless, he does not. After all, doesn’t he wish to negotiate an agreement “to the benefit of all parties, and Kudo itself”, with the Suzume? Why, then, would he disrupt their leadership? Perhaps there are those radical elements within the Suzume Clan itself that worry that Soseki will see reason and begin to negotiate....
- Regarding the Miya Caravan, he will wave dismissively, acknowledge he remembers it passing through Kudo about a week previously, but have nothing more to say about it.
- Regarding the Mantis, he understands that the Town Magistrate, Yoritomo Meiji, has taken ill. This is unfortunate, but perhaps not surprising for a man of his advanced years. In any case, he will again be somewhat dismissive and suggest that the Minor Clans really have no need to rely on the Mantis to help them settle what is, essentially, a “misunderstanding”.

- He has heard that some citizens have chosen to flee Kudo. Noting that these are mainly Suzume, he smiles and suggests that perhaps, deep down, the Suzume recognize that their own claim to Kudo is the weaker, and are choosing to do “the right thing”.

Kommei no Oni

Air	3	Reflexes	3	Awareness	5
Earth	4	Stamina	4	Willpower	4
Fire	3	Agility	3	Intelligence	3
Water	4	Strength	5	Perception	4
Void	na				

Characteristics

- Rolls When Attacking: 7k3
- Rolls for Damage: 5k2
- TN to be Hit: 25
- Wounds per Wound Level: 6
- Shadowlands Taint: 6

Abilities

- Carapace 4
- Fear 3
- Oni Qualities: Regenerate wounds at 2 x normal rate while in Shadowlands; jade and crystal weapons ignore Carapace.
- Shapeshift: Use a Complex Action to change and resemble any human it has killed with its breath attack. However, their back transforms to the last human they imitated.
- Spirit Leeching: Breath yellow fog on those caught in their grip. Opponent must succeed on Willpower Roll at TN 25 if he inhales fog. If he fails four tests, he dies.
- Spirit Trading: Breath yellow fog on two opponents simultaneously; if both fail two tests as above, they switch spirits. Those switched retain all mental Traits, School Techniques, Skills and supernatural Advantages and Disadvantages, but switch all Physical Traits. Can only be reversed if the Kommei no Oni that performed the switch is killed.

Description

Natural form, rarely seen, is humanoid, with long claws, small horns on head and back, and a thick, gray hide. Normally assumes form of a human it has killed with its breath attack, in which case, it can readily pass as a normal Rokugani human—except that its back becomes the form of the last human it imitated.

Hyobe will continue talking with the PCs for essentially as long as they like, but he will stick to the above script. If the PCs attempt to “probe” Hyobe to determine his degree of sincerity, or anything about his underlying motivations, they can attempt a Perception/Investigation roll, or an Awareness/Etiquette roll, against a TN of 75. Yes...it’s a TN of 75. This is because Hyobe isn’t what he seems. In fact, he isn’t even human. He is a demon in human form, a Kommei no Oni.

Kitsune Hyobe is, in fact, dead, his body hidden in the woods somewhere across the River of Gold from Kudo. His place has been taken by a Kommei no Oni, a creature the Crab call the “Demon of Confusion” (this is no random event; the Oni was very deliberately summoned, as you will soon see). Kommei no Oni are natural shapeshifters, and can assume the form of any human they have killed with their horrific breath attack (see side-bar to left). It was the Kommei no Oni, in the form of a non-descript peasant, that attacked Suzume Soseki, in an attempt to take his place. When the demon was thwarted by the untimely arrival of Soseki’s retainers and yojimbo, it turned its efforts to the Kitsune Governor instead, and found the portly, sake-addled Hyobe a much easier target. Now it has assumed his place, and is busy sowing discord and dissent between the two Clans. This explains the robe and hood; the back of the creature’s head is, in fact, the face of the peasant whose form it had taken to attack the two Governors...a rather obvious give-away if not kept hidden.

However, Kommei no Oni are clever and subtle creatures. They have an innate understanding of Rokugan and its politics, and benefit from supernatural political and social abilities (hence the 75 TN!) If they can keep the obvious deformity of their backs hidden, there is really little to betray their true nature. However, a test for the Taint will reveal that they are Tainted...but tests for the Taint that aren’t obvious are rare (Jade Striking someone just to see if they are Tainted is hugely insulting, and can lead to all sorts of difficult consequences if the target is NOT Tainted).

If the PCs do somehow manage to discern the Oni’s true nature, it will attempt to flee. Kommei no Oni’s strength lies in deception and spreading disorder and confusion, not combat. It will, if necessary, assume its true form and attempt to cause Fear in order to assist in its escape. It will also use its breath weapon, even if only to make its attackers hesitate. If cornered, it will fight until it is destroyed, and attempt to inflict as much harm on its attackers as possible in the process.

If the Oni is not “outed” by the PCs, then the meeting with Hyobe will draw to a close whenever the party decides they’ve learned enough—or had enough. They will take their leave, but later...either that day, or early the next, depending on exactly what time they meet with Hyobe, the Tortoise, Kasuga Yodo, will seek the party out. He will do so as surreptitiously as possible, even following the party at a distance until he can discreetly make contact with them. He will tell them that all is not right with Kitsune Hyobe. Following discussions among

the Minor Clans at the preceding Winter Court at Kyuden Otomo, events were in motion to establish a Minor Clans Court in Kudo, at which all of the Minor Clans—Suzume and Kitsune, as well as Monkey, Tortoise, Tsi, Hare, Badger, Bat, and even the more distant Dragonfly and Ox—would be represented. That was, in fact, Yodo’s mission here—to begin the “legwork” required to get such an ambitious undertaking underway. Kitsune Hyobe had been a fervent supporter of the idea...at least, until very recently. Now, he goes on about the Kitsune “enforcing their rightful claim to Kudo”, a position that makes no sense. Yodo is adamant that neither the other Minor Clans, nor the Mantis, will tolerate such a thing. And yet, Hyobe doesn’t seem to care...in a single week, he has gone from being a strong supporter of closer Minor Clan relations, to threatening to tear them apart in a needless war. Even the Kitsune are fracturing, with some doggedly supporting their Governor, while others are drawing back, horrified at the position he has taken. Urgent messages have been sent to the Kitsune Daimyo, Kitsune Ryukan, but there has not yet been a response. Yodo fears that by the time any response comes ordering Hyobe to relent (or even relieving him as Governor in Kudo), the damage will be too great to be undone. On that note, he will take his leave.

Incidentally, if Yodo’s concerns about Hyobe prompt the players to make a return visit to the Kitsune Governor, they will find him unavailable...in fact, his retainers will not be certain of his whereabouts, aside from him being “somewhere

in Kudo, presumably on Clan business”. The truth is that the Oni is not stupid, and recognizes the PCs for the threat that they are. After the initial meeting, it will strive to avoid the party, by adopting other shapes (you can assume that, in addition to Hyobe, it has several other non-descript forms taken from peasants it has killed around Kudo). If the PCs somehow track it down, then it will flee or fight as described above.

Option 3 – Find and Interview the Mantis Town Magistrate

Yoritomo Meiji is as easy to find—he is in the imposing Mantis Magistrate’s House in the Noble District (location 8 on the Kudo Town Map). Getting in to see him, however, is virtually impossible. The PCs will, at once, notice the yellow banner hanging over the door, signifying that disease lurks within. A pair of Mantis samurai (posted some distance from the house) will stop the PCs and explain to them that no one is allowed in or out of the Magistrate’s house; it is under quarantine. Showing off their Mantis yoriki status won’t work here...the policies to halt the spread of disease are dictated by ancient Imperial decree, and even a Clan Champion would be hard-pressed to over-turn them (a Intelligence/Lore: Law roll at TN 10 is sufficient to confirm this, but also to know that a *bona fide* healer can gain admittance, if they are willing to be subjected to their own three day quarantine thereafter. If someone actually decides to do this, they will find a very genuinely sick Meiji and senior staff, and then will be out of action for the next 3 days. If you think they deserve it, you may want to give such a selfless character an Honor reward.) The PCs are directed to a smaller house nearby—a guest-house for the Town Magistrate (location 9 on the Kudo Town Map), in which they will find a young Mantis samurai-ko, Yoritomo Rui.

Kasuga Yodo

• Rank 3 Kasuga Courtier

Air	3	Reflexes	3	Awareness	4
Earth	3	Stamina	3	Willpower	3
Fire	4	Agility	4	Intelligence	4
Water	3	Strength	3	Perception	3
Void	2				

Status	2	Honor	0.5	Glory	2.5
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Skills

Athletics 3 (Swimming), Calligraphy 2, Courtier 3, Commerce 3 (Merchant), Deceit 4 (Lying, Seduction) Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Forgery 2, Horsemanship, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu 3, Knives 2, Lore: History, Lore: Minor Clans, Medicine, Underworld 3

Techniques (page 149 in 3ECR):

- Way of the Tortoise
- The Tortoise Shell
- Hand in Hand

Yoritomo Rui is a young Mantis courtier, attractive, but with the unmistakable air of a sailor about her. Clearly, she is uncomfortable with the current situation, her discomfort expressed as even more of the famous

“Yoritomo bluster” than usual. She will greet the party in a room that resembles a military headquarters more than a meeting chamber. There are papers and scrolls spread across tables, and a large map of Kudo hangs from the wall. Pins in the map hold smaller paper flags, each lettered with a brief summary of some crime or altercation that has happened at that location—an assault, a theft, threatening behavior, and so on.

There are at least two dozen flags on the map.

Assuming the PCs show Rui their Mantis papers, she will tone down her bluster, and suddenly look both very tired and very young. Rui is a junior yoriki to Yoritomo Meiji, the Town Magistrate. Under normal circumstances, she would be doing essentially what the PCs are doing—“walking a beat” and doing investigative work. However, as she informs the PCs, not only has Meiji been stricken ill, but so have several of his senior staff, including his most senior yoriki and the man who would normally take over as Town Magistrate. Rui therefore finds herself in charge of the entire Mantis magistracy in Kudo, right at the most difficult and contentious time in its recent history. Clearly, Rui believes she is in “over her head”, and is barely able to keep the routine administration operating, much less deal with the escalating troubles afflicting the town. As if to underscore this, an even younger Mantis samurai, clearly just past his gempukku, sidles up to Rui and whispers something to her, urgently. She listens, then droops slightly, nods and

whispers something back. The boy scribbles out another flag and plants it on the map. The PCs can read the first word on the flag—murder.

Rui is very glad to see the PCs, but is uncertain regarding their status. They are Okame’s yoriki, which technically make them superior to her in the complex world of magistrate hierarchy. On the other hand, she is a yoriki to the Town Magistrate, so her duty is, to her, clear. A successful Intelligence/Lore: Law roll at TN 15 will confirm that she remains the chief Acting Town Magistrate; the party forms a separate, “special investigative” unit responsible to Tsuruchi Okame, but responsive to Rui (that is, they need to keep her reasonably informed about their activities and what they have learned).

Rui can offer the party the following information:

- Yoritomo Meiji, as well as three of his senior staff, have been afflicted with a particularly virulent form of pneumonia. There has also been an outbreak of the same pneumonia at the River Port, suggesting that the disease came into Kudo along with river traffic. The outbreak at the Port appears to have been stopped from spreading, so that threat to Kudo, at least, has been stemmed. The entire outbreak, both at the port and in the Mantis magistracy, started eleven days ago.
- The Miya Caravan of artifacts from Otosan Uchi passed through Kudo ten days ago. It was scheduled to spend two days in Town, but only spent one, thanks to a robbery that occurred virtually at the same time the situation in Kudo began to truly spiral out of control. Several artifacts were stolen from the Caravan, including a bloody Crane Clan banner recovered from the ruins of their Embassy in Otosan Uchi, a broken katana, which had been found clutched in the skeletal hand of a Lion samurai surrounded by the bones of at least a dozen goblins, a small and rather unremarkable iron box found in the ruins of the Imperial palace, and two small marble statues of the Fortunes Fukurokujin and Benten, part of a matched set. Under normal

Yoritomo Rui

• Rank 2 Yoritomo Courtier

Air	3	Reflexes	4	Awareness	3
Earth	2	Stamina	2	Willpower	3
Fire	3	Agility	3	Intelligence	4
Water	2	Strength	2	Perception	3
Void	3				

Status	2.5	Honor	1.5	Glory	1.0
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Skills

Athletics (Swimming), Courtier 2, Commerce (Merchant), Deceit 2 (Lying, Intimidation), Defense 2, Etiquette 2, Investigation 3, Peasant Weapons 3 (Kama), Lore: History, Lore: Minor Clans, Lore: Sailing, Meditation, Underworld

Techniques (page 134 in 3rd Edition Core Rules):

- Duty Before Honor
- Storm Heart

circumstances, the robbery would have been a major event, but it somewhat paled in comparison to all of the crimes suddenly being perpetrated throughout Kudo. Fortunately, all of the items, except for the iron box, were found on the bank of the River of Gold the next day, presumably dumped by there by whomever stole them; the box was presumed lost in the river. The Caravan then packed up and moved on southwards, rather than face further risk from the worsening situation in Kudo. Rui is genuinely embarrassed by this, as it represents a very public failure of Mantis law and order that directly affected one of the Imperial families.

If pushed—that is, by a successful Awareness/Courtier (Manipulation) roll opposed by Rui’s Awareness/Etiquette as, although she wants to assist the PCs, she is somewhat reluctant to be too forthcoming about key and higher ranking members of Kudo society—Rui will additionally offer the following information. There is a –2 penalty if there are no Mantis in the party.

- Rui will confide that she believes that one of the real architects of the problems in Kudo is the Kitsune Governor, Kitsune Hyobe. She describes his behavior as “changed” over the past week or so, but has not explanation as to why. She admits that she doesn’t know the man well, however.
- She will also say that she has her doubts about the truth of the assassination attempt on Suzume Soseki, the Suzume Governor. The way it has been described suggests a professional assassin, and yet, there has not been a single sniff of evidence anywhere in Kudo—even among the usually well-connected underworld elements—to verify it. Rui suspects that the incident may have either been exaggerated, or even made up. Why, she can’t say, but it does suggest that Soseki may also be up to no good....
- ...which leads her to hint that the whole situation in Kudo may, in fact, be an elaborate plot. If this is true, she can’t say if it is local—cooked up by the two Minor Clan governors—or if it goes higher, to the Minor Clans’ leadership. She will make an offhand remark, wondering about the role of the Tortoise in all of this...she notes that the problems began not too long after their representative, Kasuga Yodo, arrived in town. GM, feel free to have her speculate darkly on Yodo’s motives...either they will have already met him, as above, or will, if they visit the Mantis Town Magistrate BEFORE they visit the Kitsune governor. Either way, it will muddy the waters somewhat regarding the Tortoise and further play into the party’s suspicions.

At this point, Rui will be interrupted again, this time by a more senior Mantis samurai. She reads the note he hands her, then excuses herself, citing urgent business she must attend to (no, she doesn’t need the PCs’ help). The PCs are free to stay and study the map or watch the proceedings. If they do study the map, a Perception roll against TN 35 may cause something to catch their eye—of all the crimes and problems flagged, almost all of the citizens who have fled Kudo have done so from the Suzume District, west of the main road into town from the north...that is, close to the River of Gold. This may mean something to the PCs, and it may not. None of the Mantis have any explanation for it and, in fact, hadn’t particularly noticed this.

It will, of course, be important later on.

Option 4 – Do Something Else

“Something else” is obviously vague, but you should allow the party some scope to simply wander and poke about. The Kudo Town Index will provide descriptions of key locations in town; anything not listed is mostly just indeterminate dwellings, with occasional commercial locations scattered about. Feel free to ad lib the sorts of places you would be likely to find in a town like Kudo. Just remember to paint it against a back-drop of simmering tension.

As for further information, the PCs are unlikely to find out anything they don’t already know from wandering through town. They will hear more stories of unrest and tension between the Suzume and Kitsune; will hear more about the ineffectiveness of the Mantis, brought about by the illness of Yoritomo Meiji and, perhaps, collusion with one or both of the Minor Clans; will hear increasingly lurid tales about the attempted assassination of the Suzume Governor (and will eventually come to hear stories about attempts on the Kitsune Governor’s life...such are is the way rumors grow in the telling). If you wish, you can make up other rumors and

bits of innuendo, but beware—your players already have a great deal of information to sort through, and the more you add, the more difficult it will be for them to make sense of it all.

And Now...

At this point, the PCs have technically done what they set out to do—they have interviewed the principals, gathered testimony and information, and may (or may not) now be able to draw conclusions from it all. They could just pull up stakes, return to Kyuden Bayushi and report their findings to Paneki and Okame (or his designate). What they will likely be doing is one of the following:

- Floundering about, awash with information and unsure of how to proceed;
- Setting off on a wild-goose chase after something trivial (“The Miya Caravan went south...let’s follow it!”); or
- Actually be closing in on the solution to this mess, which somehow ties together the unusual behavior of the Kitsune Governor, the attempted assassination of the Suzume Governor, the sudden illness of the Mantis Town Magistrate, the overall unrest in Kudo, the movements of and partly-aborted robbery of the Miya Caravan, the abrupt decision by some Kudo citizens—mostly from one part of town—to simply up and flee...and, if they encountered them, the murders in Shutai, and the dumped bodies and old maho summoning on the west side of the River of Gold.

If it’s the last, simply allow the party to continue “organically” working through the problem and see if they naturally move towards the dénouement in Part 2. Otherwise, you can offer them the following nudge.

The Nudge

As the party ponders its next move, they are interrupted by the arrival of a young Mantis bushi, who breathlessly explains that Yoritomo Rui needs to see them, IMMEDIATELY.

When they arrive back at the small house being used by Rui as her headquarters, they will find a virtual council of war underway. As they enter, Rui will interrupt the man speaking, and explain what has happened. Sometime during the preceding night, everyone who had been stricken with the mysterious pneumonia—Yoritomo Meiji, his senior staff, and the river-men who had been quarantined down at the River Port—vanished. Had it not been for the irresponsible actions of a drunken dock-worker, who decided to break quarantine at the Port in order to reclaim some money owed to him by one of the sick river-men, their disappearance probably wouldn’t have been known for at least another day. The dock-worker was arrested, but acting on a hunch, Rui decided to break quarantine at the Town Magistrate’s House...and found it empty as well. She needs the party’s help, and quickly, afraid that as news of this spreads, panic will set in and Kudo may very well, figuratively, and then literally, go up in flames.

There are no clues. In fact, the only piece of information comes from the drunken ramblings of the same dock-worker who had broken quarantine—that shortly before slipping past the Mantis guards watching the quarantined shed outside the Dancing Coins, he saw or felt something pass through the sky above him, heading west and briefly blotting out the Moon.

This should be enough to get the party very interested in the west side of the River of Gold. The Old Farmstead, the Sake Works and Temple Hill are all described in some detail in the Kudo Town Index. The only thing that isn’t are the Abandoned Barges....

ACROSS THE RIVER

West of the River of Gold, the PCs will find four distinct features, per the Kudo Town Map and Kudo Town Map Index:

- The Old Farmstead;

- The Sake Works;
- Temple Hill; and
- The Abandoned Barges.

Each of the first three offers some intriguing possibilities for roleplaying, but really have nothing to do directly with the adventure. The Abandoned Barges are different matter. Even if the PCs have examined them previously, this time, when they reach the east bank, they will find things have changed. One of the barges is no longer beached...in fact, it is slowly drifting down-river, carried by the current. Moreover, the barge is surrounded by a dozen or more gulls, who wheel and shriek above it and are following its progress downstream. Even more ominously, the PCs will notice a number of ravens hopping about the barge's deck; normally, gulls and ravens clash when in close proximity, and only put aside their differences when there is ample food available...like after a battle.

The PCs have two choices:

- Go after the Barge; or
- Cross the River and investigate the Far Side.

Option 1 - Go After the Barge

The PCs can commandeer a boat from the River Port and set off after the barge, if they wish. It isn't difficult to catch...but it is difficult to approach. Even several dozen feet away, the fetid stench of rot and corruption is apparent. Close up, it is almost unbearable. If the PCs wish to board the barge, they will have to overcome a Fear 2 effect. Once aboard, a Stamina roll at TN 20 is required to avoid being overcome by nausea.

Yes, the barge is full of bodies. There are at least two dozen, perhaps more...some are quite badly decomposed, while others are more "fresh". Two things will jump out at those PCs who examine the barge—first, the body at the top of the pile is obviously that of Yoritomo Meiji, the Mantis Town Magistrate. Those would likely be his senior staff, piled around him. Secondly, among the more rancid bodies is that of a portly Kitsune whose general features are still recognizable. It is Kitsune Hyobe, the Kitsune Governor. A successful Intelligence/Anatomy (Autopsy) at TN 10, or a successful Intelligence/Medicine roll against a TN of 15, will indicate that he has been dead for at least several days, and probably at least a week. The other bodies appear to be mostly Suzume. Another successful Intelligence/Anatomy (Autopsy) at TN 10, or a successful Intelligence/Medicine roll against a TN of 15 will further reveal that all of the bodies seem to be completely devoid of blood. There will be nothing further to learn from these bodies without getting in and mucking about with them, and no samurai would sully himself that way.

What the samurai decide to do with the barge at this point is their call. The easiest thing to do would be to burn it, contents and all. Alternatively, they may decide to have it pulled to shore and eta brought to clean it out. Simply allow it to sail on its merry way is not a good choice, and will cost the PCs a full Rank of Honor if they decide to allow the dead to be dishonored so.

Option 2 - Cross the River and investigate the Far Side

Surprisingly, the area where the barge was beached and subsequently pushed off isn't particularly disturbed. There appears to be only one set of footprints, bare and small...too large for a child, too small for a man. Strangely, they appear in the wet soil near the water's edge, but don't obviously lead away to anywhere else. The PCs may try tracking, but there simply isn't anything to track. The footprints apparently appear spontaneously near the river.

As the PCs puzzle this, have them roll Awareness/Perception (Notice). Any who are successful will note that there are an unusual number of insects suddenly in the air, and all seem to be flying away from the trees on the west side of the river. As time passes, more and more insects will appear, all flying away from the trees. They will soon be joined by birds...then crawling insects...then larger animals, like mice, squirrels and

chipmunks...and finally larger animals still, foxes, badgers, a bear or two, several wild boars. These creatures are NOT interested in the party, and will, upon encountering the river, begin to move either up or downstream, but away from the trees. This will be true even at night. Wait for the PCs to react. If they don't move to investigate what's going on in the woods, that's fine. But a clock is ticking, and every moment they hesitate is a moment lost. You can give them a sense of this, telling them the air has gone still and thick, and is getting heavier and more sultry by the moment.

Greater Kansen

Air	4	Reflexes	4	Awareness	4
Earth	3	Stamina	3	Willpower	4
Fire	4	Agility	4	Intelligence	4
Water	3	Strength	3	Perception	4
Void	na				

Characteristics

- Rolls When Attacking: 6k4
- Rolls for Damage: 5k3
- TN to be Hit: 25
- Wounds per Wound Level: 7
- Shadowlands Taint: 8

Abilities

- Fear 3
- Invulnerability
- Incorporeal: cannot interact with physical objects or take damage from non-magical weapons
- Spirit Qualities: can only be killed by crystal or magical weapons or magical effects. Can be banished to Jigoku by any spell or effect that specifically banishes spirit creatures.
- Taint-Touch: attack with target's TN to be hit at +10. If hit, normal damage, plus Contest Willpower roll. If Kansen wins, target gains 1 Taint Rank. Kansen is then vulnerable to normal attacks and has all Traits and Rings at -1 for 10 rounds
- Maho-Sensei: casts following as Rank 4 maho-tsukai:
 - Blood Rite
 - Drain Soul
 - Caress of Fu Leng
 - Choking Death
 - Darkness Rising
 - Dark Wings
 - Fear
 - The Unblinking Eye
 - Obsidian Armor
 - The Touch of Jigoku

Description

Generally invisible. When visible, appears as a swirling, bilious yellow-green cloud within which hints of a man-sized figure can be seen.

Assuming they head into the trees to investigate, they will at first find nothing unusual, save for a complete lack of noise. This isn't surprising...there are no insects, birds or animals, after all. But as they proceed, things will begin to *change*. The trees will begin to look sickly, bereft of leaves, with scabs and tumors appearing on their bark. The undergrowth will become twisted, tangling around the PCs legs and plucking at them with barbed thorns. A thick, cold mist will rise among the trees, and the sky will become leaden and gray. Beneath their feet, the ground will become soft, wet and take on a slimy consistency. Eventually, the PCs will find themselves moving through a dank, dark tangle of stunted, twisted trees that drip with slime and water. There are sounds—mournful, evil cries that may be distant birds, but could just as easily be wails of pain and anguish, or the shrieks of children in distress. Things seem to loom suddenly in one's peripheral vision, as though something has suddenly lunged...but there is nothing there. At this point, anyone who might have accompanied the PCs, such as Mantis bushi, etc., will turn and leave, unwilling to proceed any further. Any PC in the party with experience in the Shadowlands will note that this place has many of the qualities of a Shadowlands Marsh...a shocking revelation, since this should be the middle of Rokugan....

Bursting, finally, into a clearing, the PCs will find themselves facing a scene lifted from nightmare. The circular space, about 100' across, heaves and convulses like a beating heart, and the ground suddenly assumes the feel underfoot of a decaying corpse. In the middle of the clearing is a pit, perhaps 10' in diameter, full of what can only be fresh blood that sloshes and slops about in time with the pounding throb that shakes the very air. And standing in front of the pit is a figure...a woman, barefoot, smeared with blood, but still recognizable as Kitsune Hana, aide to Kitsune Hyobe, former Governor of the Kitsune Clan in Kudo. She is holding something in both hands, over the pit, and it is from this object that the pounding beat is emanating. It is a small iron box.

When she sees the PCs, Hana will smile, showing bloodstained teeth. *"Ah, an audience,"* she says, her voice resonating like a hammer beating on iron. *"You are just in time to witness the beginning of the Master's triumphant return. From the Iron Box that held his mighty Heart, we shall call out and summon his Voice, his Presence, the great Oracle of Blood. After that...it is only a matter of time."*

Hana is, in fact, possessed by a Greater Kansen, a powerful, corrupted kami—a malevolent spirit with great cunning and great strength. The creature has been drawn from whatever dark place it had been

The Iron Box of Iuchiban

While in possession of the Iron Box, the following apply to its wielder:

- Can cast any maho spell, once per day
- All maho spells are cast at with a TN bonus of -10
- The Box supplies all of the “blood” required for any maho spell. There is no need for a maho-tsukai to shed blood to power maho spells while he possesses the box (although he certainly may, if he wishes!)

slumbering—in Beiden Pass, in the Shinomen Mori, or perhaps some even deeper, long forgotten hole—by the approach of an evil nemuranai, a Tainted magical artifact of great power. This was no less than the Iron Box that, for hundreds of years, held the heart of Iuchiban the Bloodspeaker. Carelessly tossed aside in Ootosan Uchi following Iuchiban’s destruction by Isawa Sezaru, the Iron Box lay forgotten...until, by chance, it was recovered as an interesting “artifact” from the ruined Imperial City and added to the Miya Caravan for all of the Empire to see.

Attracted by the Box’s siren call of latent power, the Kansen had responded to its lingering connection to its ancient Master by manipulating the foolish mortals in Kudo. It had summoned the Kommei no Oni (via the summoning ritual whose remnants the party may have found on the west side of the River

of Gold, near Shutai...the murders in Shutai were an aborted attempt do so the same thing) to spread fear and confusion...had used its Choking Death spell to visit disease on the Mantis Magistrate and ensure no effective response to the growing tension between the Suzume and Kitsune...and then began gathering victims (the citizens

Oracle of Blood

Air	3	Reflexes	4	Awareness	3
Earth	4	Stamina	4	Willpower	5
Fire	3	Agility	3	Intelligence	3
Water	3	Strength	4	Perception	3
Void	na				

who had “fled”, those it had infected with pneumonia using Choking Death) as the supply of blood it would need to bring about this moment—when the Oracle of Blood, Iuchiban’s connection to the mortal world during his long imprisonment, could be summoned again. Once more linked to the human realm, the Great Bloodspeaker could begin, again, to engineer his return from whatever deep corner of Jigoku holds him, and bring about another dark chapter in the history of Rokugan. And now, all that stands in the way is the party.

Characteristics

- Rolls When Attacking: 9k4
- Rolls for Damage: 5k2
- TN to be Hit: 35
- Wounds per Wound Level: 12
- Shadowlands Taint: 7

The Kansen has infused Hana’s body with its own power, so use its characteristics in battle. Note that the Kansen will NOT use its Taint-Touch, and will, instead, use its maho spells preferentially. It will also draw upon the powers of the Iron Box (see side-bar below) and employ those. Finally, thanks to *The Touch of Jigoku* spell which the Kansen has cast on this area, this clearing is effectively the Shadowlands, as far as bonuses, penalties and other effects are concerned (see pages 261 to 264 in the 3ECR). This battle will be nasty, so play up the effects of corruption and the vile, twisted nature of both the battlefield and the party’s opponents.

Abilities

- Fear 5
- Carapace 3 (except Jade)
- Invulnerability
- Drown: after a successful grapple, flows over mouth and nose of opponent, who is subject to drowning per p.160 of 3rd Edition Core Rulebook
- Liquid: can flow through any opening that is not watertight

Note that, notwithstanding the Box’s powers, the Kansen will not use it to *Summon Oni*, whatever demon appears is uncontrolled and could be more harmful than helpful. It will, however, use it to *Summon Greater Kansen*, which will cause another spirit identical to itself to appear and fight on its behalf (without the benefits of the Iron Box, of course). It will also happily use *Harvest of Death* to attack the party. Note that it can do all of this, and still continue the summoning ritual for the Oracle of Blood as long as it remains in possession of the Box

Description

Living pool of blood with humanoid shape.

and within the confines of the clearing (it can fly using, for instance, *Dark Wings*, but still must fly or hover within the clearing). The only way to stop the ritual is to physically separate the Kansen from the Iron Box (an

effective tactic anyway, as this also will immediately end all effects of possessing the Box and instantly terminate any maho spells cast using the Box's first power). After 10 rounds of combat, start rolling a d10. If the roll is equal to or less than the number of rounds past 10, then the summoning is complete (so, on round 11, the summoning is complete on a 1; on round 12, it's complete on a 1 or a 2; etc.)

When the summoning is complete, the Oracle of Blood will appear (see sidebar) and either join the fight against the party or, if the Kansen is on the verge of defeat, will simply flow into the ground and away. Note that the Oracle requires 1 full round to "soak" into the ground, during which time it can do nothing else. Once the Oracle is successfully summoned, the Kansen will attempt to break contact with the party and escape by the quickest means possible, taking the Iron Box with it.

The Aftermath

Assuming the party isn't obliterated, there are several possible outcomes:

- Complete success...the Kansen is destroyed before it can complete the summoning and the Iron Box is retrieved. **Each PC gains 6 XP and 1 Rank of Glory.**
- Partial success...the summoning is disrupted, but the Kansen escapes with the Iron Box, OR the summoning is successful (and the Oracle is not destroyed, but escapes into Rokugan), but the Iron Box is recovered. **Each PC gains 3 XP and 5 points of Glory.**
- Complete failure...the summoning is successful, the Oracle is loose in Rokugan, and the Kansen escapes with the Iron Box. **Each PC gains 1 XP.**

The party will limp back to Kudo where, over the next days, weeks and months, order will be restored and reparations made. The Kommei no Oni that the Kansen summoned to replace Kitsune Hyobe is long gone, off to wreak mischief somewhere else in Rokugan. Similarly, if the Oracle was successfully summoned and then escaped into Rokugan, and/or the Kansen escaped with the Iron Box, they will soon be up to no good in the Empire. But these are other adventures, for other times and, perhaps, other characters.

When the party (or, at least, its survivors) return to Kyuden Bayushi and make their report, Okame's karo will listen with shock and horror...but Paneki will remain impassive. He will thank the party for their efforts, ensure that they are re-outfitted as appropriate (and reasonable), and inform them that both the Scorpion and Mantis Clans are "grateful". Each PC will receive a "Favor from the Scorpion". This is a boon that takes the form of a small Scorpion pendant, carved in blood-red jasper. The carving is very specific and virtually impossible to duplicate, such that any Scorpion family Daimyo or his/her karo will quickly be able to tell an authentic "Favor" from a forgery (precisely how is a deep secret of the Scorpion). Possession of an attempted forgery of a "Favor" tends to lead to a dramatically shortened lifespan. The "Favor" will, once, allow one to make a request of the Scorpion that, as long as it is reasonable and does not harm Scorpion interests, will be granted (think blackmailing someone, arranging for something to be stolen, etc.) Genuine "Favors" can be transferred (but many people are, understandably, wary of accepting one if they aren't certain it's not a forgery!)

Finally, the party may, now, be in possession of the Iron Box. This is a profoundly evil nemuranai (even though it does not detect as Tainted). It cannot be destroyed—at least, not by any means available to the PCs. The only obvious way to destroy it would be to cast it into the volcano known as Tamori's Furnace, deep inside the Dragon Lands (another adventure...?) If the PCs happen to (foolishly) mention it to Paneki, he will, of course, demand to know what has been done with it. He won't allow them to simply wander off with something so dangerous, and will expect to have it given to the Scorpion for "safe disposal" (allow the PCs to take that as they will). Note that, in addition to the powers listed for it above, the Box also functions as a maho sensei; anyone who keeps it in their possession may, at their next Insight Rank, take Ranks in the Maho-Tsukai School. Alternatively, they may, once, choose to sacrifice a Rank in their current School and instantly gain 1 Rank in the Maho-Tsukai School. Needless to say, the Box is a hugely corrupting influence, so any PC who succumbs to temptation and use it will soon become a powerful—and evil—NPC under the GM's control!

But such is the way of Darkness.