

City of Masks

An adventure of mystery and confusion

Introduction

In *City of Masks* an old, long-forgotten city returns to the empire and brings with it an unseen threat believed to have been defeated decades ago. A dark cult walks its streets, but destroying them will be far more difficult than simply drawing a blade. First they must be found, and to do that the secrets of the city's past must be discovered.

The Story So Far

A city has appeared in the plains just north of Shiro no Soshi and within a days ride of Seikitsu pass and what is left of Kyuden Ikoma after the Khan's march. No one knows where it came from, but everyone knows that cities as large as this one don't spring up overnight. The Scorpion Mon decorates the city's outer wall. Both the Unicorn and Lion are convinced it is proof of Scorpion aggression towards their lands and are preparing armies. Without an Emperor or Emerald Champion, there is very little to stop them from starting a three-sided war, which Paneki, and the rest of the Scorpion, would rather avoid. The Soshi, meanwhile, are simply baffled how a previously unknown city can simply manifest so close to them without evidence of any construction or magic.

In the few short weeks since its appearance, rumor has spread throughout the empire and nearly every clan has heard at least some small inkling of its presence and of its mysterious appearance. Its close proximity to Seikitsu pass places it in the direct path of most travelers through the Spine of the World Mountains, making it an ideal rest stop for weary travelers. Its mysterious reputation has already brought dozens of curious tourists to the city, though most people avoid it for the same reason. Among the curious was a small team of Emerald Magistrates who, despite having arrived at the city nearly two weeks ago, have failed to make a report to the regional Magistrate.

Ancient History (GMs Only Beyond this Point)

This section contains the back-story about what happened to the city, where it came from and is generally a spoiler for the entire adventure. As such, players should stop reading now in order to maintain the mystery and surprises in store for them.

In the year 1123, Bayushi Shoju staged his infamous coup that triggered a chain of events that saw his clan destroyed, the Hantei line end, and brought about the second Day of Thunder. In the chaos, no one noticed the disappearance of a large but relatively insignificant trading port just north of Scorpion lands. Imperial Cartographers assumed that the speck on their maps that represented a Scorpion city was a lie, just another deception from the Clan of Secrets and paid no attention to it. Only the Scorpion archives maintained any record of the city, but most of those

were destroyed when the clan was ordered disbanded. In fact, the only surviving record of it ever existing is buried in the archives of a long-retired Miya cartographer.

Soshi Giseiki, who was the head shugenja prior to his disappearance, uncovered a cult within the city's walls. It had infiltrated many facets of the city and more and more of the citizens fell under its sway each day. The cult threatened to overtake the city completely. Once they held the city, they would use it as a stronghold to spread to every corner of the empire, one city at a time. And once they had done that, there would be no empire. The cult was in service to the Lying Darkness.

Giseiki gathered those few shugenja he knew he could trust to be free of the Shadow's influence. They knew many of the citizens were now minions of the Darkness, but they had no way of knowing who, exactly, was affected and who remained innocent. Their first priority was to protect their souls, and those not yet touched. They enacted a ritual that swept the city, binding every inhabitant's soul into a mask, leaving their bodies as soulless husks. The Shadow, finding no remaining souls to un-name, assumed it had won and prepared to spread its loyal cultists to the surrounding areas.

Thinking quickly, Giseiki and his fellows enacted a second ritual, which many of the shugenja gave their lives to power, that uprooted the entire city and hid it within the Realm of Dreams. The Soshi, having studied the magic of Nothing, used its own power to convince the Lying Darkness that the city had simply been unmade and the Darkness felt secure in its victory.

A recent cataclysm within the Realm of Dreams, one that caused the earthly deaths of hundreds of Nezumi, has also been responsible for shattering the effects of the ritual enacted so long ago. The wards that held the city there were disrupted, and the city was re-deposited in the real world as though it had never left.

The cultists sense something missing, an absence of nothing within themselves. Since the destruction of the Lying Darkness, they find that their power is drastically lessened and many have gone mad as a result. It is only a matter of time before they gain the notice of the Shadow Dragon and are once again restored to their former power. If that were to happen, the empire would be in great peril.

Some GM Notes

This scenario is intended to make your players a little uncomfortable and more than a little paranoid. Once in the city, they should have a constant feeling of being watched, not knowing who they can trust. The enemy is intangible, they see something out of the corner of the eye, but there's nothing there when they look. Have your players make raw perception rolls and describe some innocuous detail, but make it sound important. Have them make void or willpower rolls and write down the results. Make them uneasy about every decision they make. Ask them, "Are you **sure** you want to do that?" about very unimportant things. Their characters are in uncharted waters and they should feel just as uneasy.

Getting Started

Getting your characters to the city is the first priority, and there are several ways to get the characters to the city. Your PCs have duties in the city.

If your party consists of Emerald Magistrates they may be ordered to investigate the fate of the previous magistrate team, regardless of clan. They will be expected to provide constant reports to the regional Magistrate. Should they miss a single report, the regional Magistrate will summon an Imperial Legion to secure the city for further investigation.

Unicorn and Lion players can be sent to the city to investigate and determine what, if any, threat it may pose to their respective clans. Both have already sent clan magistrates to the city and any PCs will be expected to meet with them and provide either direction or assistance the magistrates (depending on their status). Publically, their purpose is to establish trade within the city.

News of the city has spread as far as the Phoenix and Crab lands, and both are sensitive to the possibility of Shadowlands involvement. Phoenix and Crab characters (and any Jade Magistrates) are sent to the city to root out any taint and determine if there is any credible threat to the safety or purity of the empire.

Dragon can become involved on direct orders from Togashi Satsu, who rarely requires a reason for doing anything. If he (you) happens to feel an explanation is necessary, he will state that a mystery has presented itself and, as allies of the Scorpion and the clan most adept at solving riddles, the Dragon must aid in solving it.

The Mantis and Crane have heard tales of the city as well. They know that a city without noticeable farmlands must be a trade hub. And a trade hub of that size must be considerably wealthy. Mantis and Crane characters are sent to evaluate the potential economic gains for their respective clans and what economic threat this Scorpion hub might present. Rumor of the city's wealth can easily travel to Ronin in search of new opportunities, or they can simply accompany any other members of the party as appropriate.

Any Scorpion in the party will be the easiest to involve, as they are simply ordered by their respective family daimyo to investigate.

Part 1: Rumors

The city is a topic of great interest in the areas surrounding it. As soon as they get within three-days ride, the characters begin to overhear some hushed conversations as they pass peasants on the road. The peasants, of course, fall silent and prostrate themselves as appropriate and will only repeat the rumors if pressed to do so by Samurai. Within two-days ride of the city, peasants and Samurai alike talk openly about it with their peers and will readily repeat what they've heard. The gossip spreads fast and it changes slightly with each new teller. Some of the rumors surrounding the city are true, some are blatantly false and still others are close the truth, despite being fabricated. Of course, if questioned, everyone has a relative or a friend who "saw it for

himself.” The only constant is that everyone has come to call it *Kamen no Toshi*, the City of Masks. Feel free to make up your own rumors or exaggerate those already here.

- The city was built in a single night using magic.
- The Scorpion built the city to ignite more war between the Lion and the Unicorn.
- The Unicorn built the city to get the Lion to attack the Scorpion.
- The Lion built the city to get the Unicorn to attack.
- They built the city to take control of Seikitsu pass from the Unicorn.
- Bayushi Paneki ordered it built as a base from which to find the lost city in the pass.
- All inhabitants of the city wear a mask that covers their whole face.
- Everyone wears a porcelain mask because they are all zombies.
- They all wear masks to hide the fact that they are faceless Goju.
- The Emperor’s heir is hiding within the city and will be revealed soon.
- The city is filled with Bloodspeakers and everyone who visits is sacrificed.
- Everyone in the city is rude. They ignore you completely.
- The city is an oni in disguise and eats all visitors
- The governor of the city is a maho-tsukai
- If you go into the city, you go back in time.
- Being there is like watching a play; nearly everyone talks to each other, but not to you.

There are a few villages within a day’s ride that would make ideal rest stops; depending from what direction the party is traveling. One of the stops is far more welcoming and relaxing, but the other is a better source of information. Of course, it won’t really matter since the players shouldn’t have the option of choosing as it’s determined by geography. If they approach through Lion lands, which is the likely route for anyone coming from Lion, Dragon, Phoenix and Crane lands north of the Spine of the World, the nearest stop is Shiranai Toshi (L6). Through Unicorn lands, or through the pass (from Crab, Mantis, Scorpion and southern Crane lands), they will likely stop in Hisatu Kensu (U22) for the night.

Part 1a: Shiranai Toshi

Shiranai Toshi, or Darkness City, has become a fortress since the recent Unicorn attacks. The guards at the gates will thoroughly inspect all travel papers and interrogate the characters about their business in the city. Any Unicorn PCs will be treated with open hostility, and Scorpion with thinly veiled suspicion (of course, any Scorpion should be used to that). If the party happens to be all Unicorn, they will be denied entrance and asked to camp across the river. If there are any Lion in the party that will earn the group a little more leeway, but they will be expected to understand the city’s paranoia.

Assuming the party can prove it has legitimate business in the area and valid travel papers (the guards will roll a 4k3 to spot any forgeries), they will be led - under armed guard - to their “Guest Districts” for the night. Upon arriving, they are informed that they will be escorted out at first light and it would be in their best interest to be awake and ready. It should be clear that the city’s proximity to both the Unicorn and the City of Masks has put the Lion in this city extremely on edge and they aren’t taking any chances. At the very least, if the characters have many any

enemies in their adventures to this point, they should feel at least somewhat safe in a garrison of trained and high-strung Lion soldiers. Any attempts to disobey them will not be tolerated and will earn the disobedient character a one-way trip to sleeping outside and that safety is forfeit.

If they get to sleep inside, they will find their rooms are more of a sparse military barracks. They are provided two rice balls and a small amount of dried fish for a meal and a coarse wool blanket and a wooden floor to sleep on. They will only be allowed out of the room one at a time, and even then a guard accompanies them everywhere. A trio of guards stands watch outside their door and they are replaced every three hours until sunrise. Attempts to talk to the guards will be answered with a cold stare. If the PCs have the status to demand to speak to anyone in charge, they will be told that he is out on maneuvers and may meet with him in the morning.

Part 1b: Hisatu Kensu

Hisatu Kensu is an immense village that is a common tourist destination. The citizens of the village take great pride in their hospitality and encourage the characters to relax in one of their many hot springs. Any guests (including Lion) who accept their offer are provided with a personal attendant and a private onsen. Their rooms are small but posh and comfortable. They have soft cotton blankets, goose-down mattresses and an extremely well prepared meal.

But no one will talk about the city at all. If asked about it directly, the peasant's jovial mood will go dark and they will change the subject as quickly as possible. They will insist that they know nothing, or they think it's bad luck or a bad omen and leave it at that. If the characters press the issue, the peasants will become extremely uncomfortable and look around like a cornered animal trying to find a way to escape and just repeat one of the more sinister rumors. If they wish to discuss the matter with someone of authority, their hosts will arrange a meeting with the local magistrate for first thing in the morning.

Part 2: Morning

Regardless of where they stay, they wake up feeling as though they didn't sleep at all. Troubling dreams disturbed their sleep and everyone is sore despite (or because of) the amenities provided by their hosts. If you want to go into detail about the dreams, some possibilities have been included below:

- A PC sees himself walking alone down a strange street. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees shadows leering at him, but when he turns they're gone.
- One PC snaps awake when he hears someone calling his name, but once awake there is only silence until he starts drifting back to sleep.
- One of them is shocked awake when they feel something crawling up their leg. Of course, there is nothing there, but when they start to fall asleep they feel it again, but higher on their body. If they can keep going back to the sleep despite this, the sensation stops on their face.
- One stands alone in an expansive blackness in all directions. Masks begin to appear, floating, out of the haze. They surround the dreamer and stare with their empty eyes. He can outrun the masks, but when he stops they once again emerge from the darkness.

- The PC finds himself in a small square room with stark white walls. They see no door or windows or clear indication of how they got in. After turning around the room, they see the first wall now covered in a grid of kabuki masks where it was blank before. Sitting in front of the wall is a faceless monk.
- It is dark and hot. After a moment the haze of heat clear enough for him to realize that he's standing next to a forge. A large blacksmith hammers forcefully on something before quenching it in the water beside him. As it emerges from the water, they see their own face in the blacksmith's tongs.
- He is a child watching a puppet show. The conscious mind wonders if it recalls having actually seen such a puppet show in the past. The puppets are marionettes of smooth, featureless wood but bear his face and those of his companions. The wind blows and they shiver on their strings. As sand smoothes away the wooden facial features, the strings break and the puppets collapse in a heap.

Part 2a: The Lion

If they stayed with the Lion, their guards will investigate any unusual noise the PCs make. They will be woken at sunrise and led, almost like prisoners, to the training grounds for morning exercise. If they wished to meet with someone in charge, he is here. *Taisa* Matsu Nijiro is a short and surly man who is very insecure in his masculinity, a side effect of being raised Matsu, and will attempt to establish his dominance at every opportunity. He is extremely rude and brash and feels no qualms about interrupting anyone. If asked about the city, he knows very little: just that its presence has made his men extremely uneasy and tired. He knows that there is something wrong about it and he doesn't like it. He also knows that if the order comes, his men will be the Lion army that assaults the city, though he won't tell them that. With a little prodding (flattery will go a long way with him, but too much and he'll know they're full of it) he is willing to disclose the following about the city:

The city appeared almost three full weeks ago, during the night, and somehow without the guards on lookout mountain noticing. They spotted it the next day and sent two scouts to the city. Everything that's known about it is based on their report, and the Lion leadership wants it watched carefully until enough is known about it to determine if it's a threat or not. Its clear to Nijiro that it is a very clear threat, but he will wait for orders. According to the scouting report, the city has a bustling marketplace and each of the clans has at least one shop set up. Everyone in the city wears masks, as Scorpion samurai often do, but even the representatives of other clans and the peasantry cover their entire face. The only ones not wearing masks are the tourists who are just passing through and they seem to be almost completely ignored by the citizens. About a week ago, one of the scouts, Ikoma Yoshi, was sent back out on another mission and the next night the other, Kitsu Kenshai, cut off his own face with his shaving blade and bled to death in his barracks. He did didn't make a sound and none of his fellow soldiers saw anything until they found him the next day.

Part 2b: The Unicorn

If they stayed with the Unicorn, the peasants greet them in the morning with an extravagant breakfast of hot rice, fresh fruit and exotic teas and juices. They will notice almost at once that

the characters had a restless night's sleep and will make quite a show of apologizing for their poor hospitality and failure as hosts. The characters are allowed to eat, bathe and leave at their own whim or, if they wished to speak to the local magistrate, a meeting has been arranged.

Ide Xue is a large, round woman who is clearly of gaijin blood. She is constantly smiling, though after a while it seems less than genuine. After talking to her for a while, it's clearly false to disguise the fact that she is very stupid. She smiles and nod at anything she doesn't understand, which are most things of any complexity. She is sweet to the peasantry and in return they pay their taxes without complaint and police their own. For difficult problems with outsiders, they look to Xue's yoriki – a pair of gruff Shinjo bushi. She knows nothing about the city and is entirely oblivious that there is even anything to be concerned about.

Part 3: The Mask

About mid-day on the last leg of their journey to the city, they are approached on the road by a disheveled Lion soldier. His light armor is battered and he himself is bloodied from a deep cut down his face. If the characters stayed the night with the Lion, they might suspect that this is the other scout and their suspicions would be correct. He identifies himself to them as Ikoma Yoshi and hurriedly bows (as well as he can).

He staggers into their path, waving his hands for them to stop. Through gasping bloody coughs, and frantically looking from one character to the next, he manages to stammer out that he “must reach the Scorpion to deliver...” before he coughs up a significant amount of blood. Anyone in the party with the medicine skill will be able to tell that he doesn't have much time left. A shugenja might be able to stabilize him, there's no way he could make a trip through the mountains to Scorpion lands. He knows it, too.

After his coughing fit, he looks to the remaining members of the party and, pausing on one, exclaims, “You! I saw you in my dream! Take this, it was meant for you!” He takes a cloth bag from his traveling pack and unceremoniously dumps its contents onto the road. Staring up at them is an intricate red and black mask. He grabs it with bloodied hands and thrusts it up at the chosen recipient. If they hesitate or refuse, he grabs their hand and forced the mask into their grip (leaving a nice blood stain on the character in the process) before he falls into another coughing fit and dies.

If the recipient's dreams contained masks they get a feeling in the pit of their stomach that they have seen this mask before, and if it contained their face in some way they get the feeling that what they saw wasn't their face but actually the mask. If his dream was of someone calling his name, he will only now realize that the voice was that of the Lion scout that now lies dead in the road.

So who gets the mask?

If the group has any Scorpion Shugenja, the Lion will give it to them (if there's more than one, he'll give it to the highest ranked one). He'll give to a Scorpion first or, if none are available, the most powerful shugenja within the group. If

there are no shugenja or Scorpion, he'll give it to a bushi from (in order of preference) the Phoenix, Dragon, Lion, or Crab. If the party consists of all Crane, Mantis and Unicorn or all courtiers, he'll go with whoever is closest to him at the time.

Honorable samurai will want to return Yoshi's swords to the city. Whoever suggests it gains 3 points of honor and the Lion are grateful to them for sacrificing a day of their journey. They will have to remain there overnight, but they will be treated as honored guests rather than prisoners. If they did not stay here before, Nijiro will take this opportunity to provide them with the information he has on the city.

Returning the blades or not, they'll have to decide if they take the mask to the Scorpion as the Lion was intending to do, or if they keep it since he did say it was meant for them. If they decide to keep it instead of making the trip to Scorpion lands, skip part 4.

What happens if they wear the mask?

Nothing. Yet. It will be very important later on in the adventure, but for now, outside the city, it's just a mask.

Part 4: The Scorpion

Rolled up and stuffed into the mask is a set of travel papers authorizing travel through Scorpion lands, but they seem to be extremely old. Any character with significant Lore: Heraldry can attempt to identify the chop, but this particular one hasn't been seen in the empire in quite some time. If they can succeed at a heraldry roll, TN 25, they will recognize it as belonging to Bayushi Shoji, a fact that should give them considerable pause as that indicates these travel papers were authorized prior to the Scorpion Clan Coup, nearly half a century ago.

As they travel through Scorpion lands, if they choose to use those travel papers, roll a die at each checkpoint. On a 1 or 2, the yoriki checking them recognizes the chop and assumes they're a forgery or they don't recognize it and therefore assume they are not legitimate. Either way, they will delay and question the party. On a 9 or 10, they recognize the chop – and the travel papers – for the antiques that they are and will not only allow them passage, but an escort the rest of the way to Shiro no Soshi.

On arrival, the guards at the gates check their travel papers one final time and ask their business. These guards are able to identify the chop and stare at the characters with a mixture of awe and disbelief. They are allowed in and treated like royalty. Soshi Uidori's karo attends to them immediately. Assuming they were honest with the guards about the purpose of their visit, the mask, the karo informs them that not only does Soshi Uidori wish to meet with them, but that Bayushi Paneki himself is visiting Shiro no Soshi on the matter of the city as well and he would like to discuss matters as well. Unfortunately, both are presently occupied with important clan business and will not be available until the following day and request that the characters remain overnight as their guests. Refusing such an offer would be extremely unwise and is likely to earn the ire of two very influential Scorpions.

The next day, just as promised, they are shown to a large audience chamber. Bayushi Paneki is sitting at a table with Soshi Uidori to his right. A large map of the area is spread out and observant characters will note that there is no sign of a city where this one is supposed to be. Paneki regards the characters like a predator and sizes them up. While he talks to them, Uidori is secretly studying them with her magic.

The Scorpion demand to know why they are in the area, what they are looking for and where they obtained the mask. Uidori confirms what the scout said when he gave it to the recipient saying, "This mask was meant for you. Perhaps it belonged to an ancestor."

Paneki will be honest with the characters if they are honest with him. Attempting to lie to the Master of Secrets is not a good idea. Uidori can tell if someone is lying as well and will call them on it. If the characters attempt to deceive them, they will thank them for their time and send them on their way. They have no time for games. He will not admit that they are as confused about the city's appearance as the rest of the empire, but he will say that there are some unknowns that he would like answered and, frankly, he can't spare anyone to look into it at the moment and if they accept this task he would find a way to repay them. The fact is that he has been put into a bad position by all of this and doesn't want to admit to ignorance by sending a team of Scorpion investigators. He merely wants a report of everything that can be discovered about the city and where it came from.

Part 5: The City

When they finally lay eyes on the city, it appears visibly wrong against the horizon and mountains. It has an almost hazy surreal quality to it, like a distant dream. As they get closer, the city grows more distinct and the surreal quality can be blamed on a trick of the light or a mirage effect.

Getting in is not especially difficult: the gates are wide open and a few travelers can be seen walking in and out as the characters approach. As they enter, everything seems somehow out of place. Everyone's style of dress is horribly out of date (PCs can make a Courtier or Lore: History roll, TN 15, to recall that style was made popular during the reign of Hantei XXXVIII – in the few years before the Scorpion Clan Coup. Also, as the stories indicate, everyone is wearing a mask, not just the Scorpion samurai. The only faces visible within the walls belong to visitors.

The city is logically laid out and broken up into districts. The first, and which the PCs have just entered into, is the Hospitality District. It contains the various inns, restaurants, sake houses and geisha houses that might interest travelers through the city, as well as most food and entertainment. The second, and by far the largest, lies just north of the Hospitality district and is the Merchant's district which contains the marketplace as well as a sake brewery, a forge and other commercial endeavors by craftsmen. The third, west of the Hospitality district, lay the temples and shrines of the city as well as a small monastery. Note that this is simply to get you familiar with the layout of the city; be sure you read the next section before you allow the players to interact with anyone.

Part 5a: The Hospitality District

There are six main attractions within the Hospitality District.

The largest, by far, is the Sweet Cup sake house. The Black Water brewery in the Merchant's District is their provider and makes very potent but smooth sake. Their shochu is particularly strong. The proprietor of the sake house is a dainty young woman with a pleasing figure by the name of Shosuro Osuko who also happens to be the city's governor. Were her face visible she would, no doubt, be a stunning beauty. Her mask is delicate white porcelain that contrasts dramatically with her stark black hair and black and red kimono. Next door is an inn and teahouse, also owned by Osuko, called the Crimson Blossom. It is large, comfortable and welcoming. A third establishment of hers is the Sweet Plate, which is known for its rich sweets. Though the establishments are always filled, and people order tea and sake, none of them ever drink it.

Across the street is the Crimson Blossom's competition, another inn that is clearly not as well taken care of. The sign out front reads "The Pleasant Dream" but the paint is worn away on the 'P'. The owner of this inn is a drunken Unicorn named Moto Zhang. He spends nearly all of his time across the street at the Sweet Cup. Despite being Unicorn, Zhang also wears a mask. His is coarse water-stained wood with sagging, almost tired features and no decoration. He co-owns a gambling house with Osuko. It is an elaborate gambling house with all manner of games, many not found in Rokugan.

The Silken Touch geisha house may not be the largest or wealthiest establishment in the Hospitality District, but it is one of the more lavish. Silk curtains and cover nearly every wall and hang in doorways and silk streamers brush against anyone walking down the hall. The owner is a gracefully aging woman by the name of Yogo Meyako. Her mask is also white porcelain, but is decorated with the traditional geisha makeup. She has three girls that work for her, all of who are masters in more than one entertaining art.

Part 5b: The Merchant District

The Merchant District is the focal point of the city and as such occupies slightly more than its share of the real estate. Warehouses line the northeastern outer edge of the district, enough to supply the city for quite some time. The marketplace occupies most of this area and hosts dozens of small shops and booths from every clan and several minor clans. Among the booths is one bearing the Badger clan mon. A Lore: History roll (TN 10) confirms that the Badger clan was effectively wiped out in the year 1126 and, though a few scattered members remain, they no longer have the resources to undergo a merchant endeavor.

There are ten primary merchants and dozens of smaller sellers here and each wears a mask.

1. A Scorpion herbalist named Soshi Onaka has a booth selling miracle remedies to all manner of illnesses and his own personal mixture of hot spices, guaranteed to liven up any meal. His mask is red with a scorpion gripping the corners of his left eye.

2. A young Crane girl, Kakita Yuko, who can't be older than twelve, has a small booth where she flawlessly performs the work of great playwrights with puppets for spare coins. Her mask, crafted from mother of pearl, which shines and glimmers in the light.
3. A Dragon monk, Togashi Sumi, bears no physical mask, though his face is covered in an intricate tattoo that resembles a wall of stone. He sits in meditation, surrounded by jars of ink. He is an exceptional tattoo artist.
4. A Dragon apothecary, Agasha Kusuri, bearing her family mon (yet another reminder that things in this city aren't current) has a mask made of smooth gold with flecks of green copper.
5. A Yasuki in drab gray is hocking all manner of useless trinkets and baubles. He claims they're jade, but most are actually colored glass. The only real jade he has is his mask, which is carved from a single piece. His name is Kasamashi.
6. Daidoji Hagane has his booth across the square from the Yasuki and the two spend most of their time glaring at each other. The Daidoji sells "fine art crafted by the most skilled Crane Artisans." His mask is blue steel with silver studs outlining the shape of a face.
7. Bayushi Shiruko sells fine quality silks and dyes, as well as exotic perfumes. Her mask is a simple silk cloth.
8. A smooth gold mask framed with shining yellow threads is worn on the Lion, Akodo Tadoshi, who sells all manner of weapons and armor produced by the Crab forge just outside of the marketplace.
9. The Badger, Ichiro Itami, sells a wide variety of very detailed and intricate pieces carved from stone and wood. His mask is carved from a worn-smooth stone.
10. The Unicorn booth, run by Shinjo Gotaro, sells several curiosities from beyond the sands. His mask is made from crystal that has been stained purple.

A rotund Crab runs the Black Water sake brewery. Hida Dorin's favorite thing is testing the product of his efforts. His mask is formed from several flat wooden pieces held together with metal bands, like a barrel.

Another Crab business, the forge, is run by Kaiu Naname and supplies all of the weapons to Tadoshi's weapon shop. Naname is a hulking brute of a man whose mask is solid steel scorched from constant exposure to the heat of the forge.

Part 5c: The Temple District

The Temple district boasts some exceptionally beautiful architecture and contains all the temples, shrines and gardens in the city. These are maintained by the monks from the monastery in the center of the district.

The Monastery of the Silent Self is a modest structure, not nearly as intricate as the shrines and temples surrounding it. It could almost be described as plain. The purpose of this is to remove distractions from the minds of the monks meditating there, allowing them to silence their mind for the purpose of attaining enlightenment. The monks here believe that detachment from the physical world is the key to truly becoming one with the Universe. A retired Akodo leads the monastery. Now he simply goes by the name Munashii. His mask is simple wood that has been worn smooth by the elements.

There is a temple to the fortunes, surrounded by dozens of shrines of varying sizes to certain individual ones. The largest shrines are to Fukurokujin, the Fortune of Wisdom, and Daikoku, the Fortune of Wealth. Smaller shrines to unidentifiable minor fortunes dot the area around the temple.

There is a temple to the sun and moon that depict statues of Amaterasu and Onnotangu. The statue of Lady Sun seems to have suffered some catastrophe recently, as an immense crack has formed down her center. Several monks – all masked – work feverishly to restore it.

A third temple, to the Ancestors, is smaller than the other two and is in the worst shape. It doesn't seem to see many visitors and so, while they keep it clean and standing, the monks' efforts are better spent on the temples that see the most wear.

Part 5e: The Inhabitants

The inhabitants of the city that the players might encounter are part of one of several factions: the citizens, the cultists, and the shadow hunters.

The citizens are the largest group and consist of every person that was in the city (and not shadow-touched) at the time the city vanished. This includes tourists who originally intended to just pass through, but now they live here. A vast majority of them are blissfully ignorant of everything that has transpired. As far as they're aware, everything is exactly as it was.

The cult is the second largest group and consists of those people that had lost their souls and names to the Lying Darkness. Since the city's return, their connection with the Nothing is much lessened and their sense of self is warring with the darkness still gripping their souls. The result is a group of very unstable homicidal cultists.

The shadow hunters are the smallest group and consist of the shugenja and a handful of bushi and ninja who were attempting to root out the cult before the city's disappearance. They have been unsuccessful thus far, but their hunt continues.

Part 6: Interactions

The largest challenge the characters will face in interacting with the inhabitants is that very few of the citizens will actually acknowledge their presence, let alone talk to them. They should be given free reign to wander the city and try to talk to those they encounter, but most everyone will simply walk around them or ignore them outright. One citizen might bump into a character and rudely walk past without noticing. A handful of citizens will respond, only to say, "I have nothing to say to the faceless," "I will not speak to the unmasked," or something similar. Among those that will say this much to the characters are any Scorpion in the city or any of the monks or shugenja. If they happen to be wearing a mask, they will be treated differently (see the next section). If not, they should have a clue that they'll need a mask if they hope to get anywhere. Someone might remember that they were given a mask, but if not one of the citizens will suggest visiting the marketplace.

Part 6a: Obtaining Masks

If the players recall that they have a mask or not, their first task will be to obtain one for each member of the group or they will make very little headway. Anyone who has their own mask or mempo can get away with using that, but only if they cover the wearer's entire face. The Merchant District is the most likely place to be able to get them.

If the recipient of the mask has chosen to wear it by this point, they are struck with an overwhelming sensation from it. They must make a void roll, TN20, or lose a void point temporarily. If they succeed, they get a sensation like trying to remember a minute detail, something from their distant past or like a thought trying to push its way to the surface of their mind. If they keep the mask on at this point (another willpower roll, TN10, to do so) things slowly start to become familiar. The city, the streets and the people are all well known. Also, anyone he looks at that's not wearing a mask, for instance his companions or other tourists to the city, fades away slightly like a ghost or a shadow. Their features become indistinct and blurry, until their faces blend into nothing. Anyone with knowledge of Goju or the Lying Darkness should be appropriately alarmed at their companion's lack of faces. Even someone with no knowledge of it should find it extremely unsettling.

On the way there, a bald man in monk's robes and a plain white metal mask acknowledges them in a way they have not yet encountered in the city thus far: he looks directly at them and actually approaches, quickly. He bows and says in an urgent tone, "Visit the blacksmith or the Badger. Once you are properly attired, meet me at the Crimson Blossom. I need your help." As he hurries away, the characters can make a perception check (TN 10) to notice that some of the other masked citizens are staring after him as he goes. They do not acknowledge the players. Two raises (TN 20) will also reveal two black-clad samurai on a rooftop also watching him go. One of them glances at the characters before they both walk away from the edge and out of sight. Chasing them is futile, but if the players try they can get to the roof fairly easily, but there is no sign of them. If the recipient of the mask is wearing it, he is struck with an uneasy sensation of extreme danger.

Within the Merchant District, it is not difficult to follow the heat, and the sounds of a hammer on an anvil, to Kaiu Naname's forge. En route, many of the characters may encounter things that conjure reminders of their dreams. The street they're on seems oddly familiar. The dragon monk with the tattooed face resembles the monk in one of their dreams. The puppet shows the Crane girl is performing seem chillingly like the one from their dreams. And, finally, as they reach the forge, they will recognize the blacksmith as the one forging their faces in their dreams.

He looks up as they enter. He silently nods and sets aside the blade he's working on, not seeming to care that it will cool and he'll have to start again. He immediately puts a handful of metal sheets into the fire, equal to the number of characters in the party (minus any that are already wearing full face masks), and says in a gruff voice "Return in an hour." Note that this is just one possible source for the party to obtain their masks and they may want something a little more fitting to their character. Togashi Sumi can provide tattoo masks and Bayushi Shiruko can offer silk ones. For how the citizens react to the various masks, see **Appendix A**.

As they leave the forge, secretly make a perception check for each character, TN 25. If they succeed, they notice another black-clad samurai watching them from the mouth of an alley. If they notice him, he'll duck back into the shadows and vanish before they can pursue.

Ok, so who are these samurai in black?

They are the shadow hunters, a small group of individuals who have become something like police in the city. Their purpose is to hunt down the cultists. They know all about the rituals and they are the only ones in the city who know it has returned to Ningen-do. They are watching the characters to see if they are shadow-touched or if they might be potential allies. They also assume, correctly, that the cult will be interested in them as well and so they watch and wait for the cult to make its move on the characters. When they do, the hunters will be ready.

If they choose to visit the Badger, Ichiro Itami, he will fix them with a stare and pull a wooden box from beneath his table. Inside is a stack of masks carved from lightweight stone or wood. If any of them strike the characters' fancy, they are welcome to them. If they try to purchase the masks, or offer him money, he simply holds his hand up in refusal and does not say a word. If one of them is wearing the mask they were given, he will deal only with them. As he offers the masks, he states, "You surround yourself with questionable company, *sama*. You are welcome to my wares, but I ask that you not trouble me again."

If they are still waiting on masks from Naname, they have an hour to kill in the city. They are free to wander, but no one will talk to characters not wearing a mask. If they try to go to the Crimson Blossom, even the monk they saw earlier will proclaim, much too loudly, that he has nothing to say to the unmasked.

Once they return to the forge, he has a stack of metal masks in the colors of their clans waiting for them. Each one is etched with an intricate design. He nods to them and returns to work on his sword.

Ok, so NOW what do the masks do?

Every mask originating from within the city is a repository for someone's soul, intended to hide it from the Lying Darkness. The ones crafted by Naname are empty, meaning that anyone who wears it has the possibility for their soul to be trapped by the mask. They must make a Void roll at TN 5 or one of their void points is absorbed into the mask. They can still use these points and as long as they wear the mask they will have no reason to suspect anything is amiss. For every hour they wear the mask within the city, they must make another test and TN goes up by 5 or lose another void point into the mask. Once their mask has absorbed all of their void points, their soul is entirely contained within and removing the mask causes their body to 'die.' Without a mind or spirit to guide it, their physical form shudders and collapses to the ground and, for all intents and

purposes, appears dead. It would be easy to mistake the body for dead and have it cremated.

Putting the mask back on the body, or any soulless husk, will re-animate it and return it to complete control of the soul in the mask. The body retains its physical stats and advantages (strength of the earth and the like) and the soul provides everything else (mental and social attributes, void and all skills). The soul is incapable of perceiving the passage of time while not worn. When it once again has control over a body, it will seem like only a blink or a momentary blackout. This could also be used on a corpse, animating it like a zombie, but any honorable soul inside the mask is likely to find such a thing horrifying, not to mention the reactions of their fellow Rokugani.

Once a soul is in a mask, it is not trapped there forever. After a number of days outside the city equal to the number of hours it took for the mask to fully absorb the soul, it begins to filter back into the body at one void point per day. A character aware of the phenomenon may hurry the process by making void rolls equal to 5 x the number of void points remaining in the mask. Each success moves one void point across. Once the mask contains no void points, the soul is completely returned.

Other masks that aren't empty, such as the masks of any citizen in the city, or those offered by Ichiro Itami, already contain souls. Any mask that once belonged to a cultist, such as a few of Itami's masks, contains a fragment of the essence of the Lying Darkness. Lacking a soul, the cultist's masks absorbed the closest thing to it – Nothing. Wearing one of these cultist masks will attempt to switch places with the wearer's soul (as described below), but during the process will imbue the wearer with a fraction of the Shadow's power.

The mask given to them on the road contains the soul of Soshi Giseiki, the shugenja responsible for saving the village so long ago. Each mask can contain, at most, one soul. If a mask already containing a soul is placed on someone's face – for instance when the PC wears Giseiki's mask – the two souls subconsciously compete for dominance of the host body. Each must make a contested void roll equal to 5 x the void of the opposing soul. Whichever one succeeds controls the body and whichever one fails is trapped in the mask. Even the trapped soul can influence the mind as it can attempt to push thoughts, impulses and memories. Giseiki's memories will be one of the PC's greatest assets in figuring out what's happening in the city.

Part 6b: Seeking Answers

Now that everyone has a mask (that is slowly consuming their soul) the inhabitants of the city deal with the characters as normal. Merchants will try to hock their wares to them and business owners in the Hospitality district will serve them. For a much more detailed account of how the citizens interact with one another, see **Appendix A**.

With that hurdle out of their way, they can proceed with their various other assignments. There has been no sign of the missing Emerald Magistrates or the Lion and Unicorn magistrates. There is no evidence of the taint to be found, if that's the characters' purpose here, but you shouldn't discourage them from looking. If any characters can sense the presence of the Lying Darkness, it's up to you if the ability works on the cultists or their masks. Since the masks have absorbed the Nothing out of the person, these techniques might fail to identify it. Mantis and Crane will quickly identify a potential for economic expansion in the city and maybe be somewhat surprised that the marketplace isn't larger, considering its proximity to the main pass through the mountains.

In fact, the best lead they have at the moment is waiting for them back at the Crimson Blossom.

Part 6c: The Crimson Blossom

As they enter the Crimson Blossom, a thick cloud of incense and pipe smoke fills the air mixed with the sweet smells of the bakery next door. The room is bustling with activity and many masked citizens hold cups of sake and carouse. None of them seem to be drinking it, however. A few visitors to the city, not wearing masks, have grown irate at not being served and storm out.

Sitting at a corner table, alone, is the monk they passed earlier on the street. Noticing them, he gestures for them to join him. "Greetings," he begins, "I have seen you before. I recognize all of you but I know not from where. My name is Kitsu Kenshai and I am in need of your help."

Players who pay attention to NPC names will recognize it as the Lion scout who supposedly bled to death after cutting off his own face. Give the characters an intelligence roll, TN 15, to recall this fact if the players don't think of it. If they get 10 or higher, the name will sound familiar but they can't recall why.

Kenshai continues, "My partner, Ikoma Yoshi, and I were sent here to investigate the city. After two days here, a group of men attacked us. They forced this mask on my face and I blacked out. When I awoke, Yoshi was gone and I was not myself. This is not my body and everyone keeps calling me 'Suto'. It is dark sorcery that has done this to me. Please, you must help."

At this point, the characters don't need to roll and they know the rest of his story. Somehow he is not in his own body, which returned to Lion lands and killed itself by cutting off its own face. Kenshai doesn't know anything about that or Yoshi's death. At the mention of either topic he gasps and invokes the fortunes. A successful awareness roll, TN 15, will notice that his eyes don't show the same shock that he expresses vocally. Have the character wearing Giseiki's mask make a void roll, TN 20. If they succeed, they learn nothing. *Failure* (meaning Giseiki's soul won the contested roll, but don't tell them that) will cause a flash of insight to enter his mind. "Darkness took his body, the mask took his soul."

Once they've asked him all the questions they have, he will stand and politely excuse himself, "They will be expecting me back at the monastery. I mustn't keep them waiting or they will suspect something is amiss. Perhaps the merchants can provide more information for you."

Part 6d: Questioning the Inhabitants

Below is a list of the various important NPCs in the city and what information each one can impart on the characters if questioned.

Shosuro Osuko can be found at her teahouse, the Crimson Blossom, gliding through the crowd and acting the social butterfly. She has seen the magistrates. “They stayed here for a few nights and then left. I assumed they went across the street to that hovel, the Peasant Dream” (she intentionally mocks the poor condition of her competition’s sign). If asked about the city’s appearance, she’s confused, “Appearance? The city has been here for years. My father helped fund the construction effort.”

She will be more than happy to allow the characters to search the rooms they occupied. They are mostly empty, but one room has a used poultice. Anyone handling it has to make a stamina check, TN15 or become dizzy and disoriented and prolonged exposure increases the TN and the symptoms until they fall unconscious. An herbalism skill roll (TN 20) indicates a poisonous agent mixed in with the medicines.

Moto Zhang is found in a drunken stupor in the Sweet Cup sake house. He is entirely useless to their investigation, as he has not seen any magistrates. Of course, just because he hasn’t seen them doesn’t mean much since he’s here drunk all the time. Questioning the manager of his inn produces little more, but she confirms that the magistrates have not been their guests.

Yogo Meyako comments on the lecherous advances the barbarian Unicorn magistrates made towards her girls. “I do not run a brothel,” she insists, “If you see them, tell them they are no longer welcome here.”

Soshi Onaka saw the Emerald Magistrates and concocted a poultice for them two days ago. It seems that one of them was badly injured in a drunken confrontation the day before. It was purchased by a large Crab. If the characters found the poultice and question him about the poison, he is truly ignorant of it. He provided some of the herbs, but none of them are poisonous. He mentions that his friend Kusuri helped him produce it.

Kakita Yuko has seen the Lion magistrates. She remembered them because she thought it was odd that they were being so nice. “Mother always told me that the Matsu hated us.”

Togashi Sumi will simply smile knowingly, but won’t provide them with any straight answers that will make sense to the characters at this time. “You do not seek answers, you seek Master Giseiki.” If asked where they can find him, he answers, “On the face of the one who wears him.”

Agasha Kusuri helped Onaka make a poultice, but she didn’t know that it was for magistrates. This is a lie. She knew and the herbs she put into the poultice were intended to drug the Magistrate so the cult could abduct her. Onaka had no knowledge of it but if asked about it directly, she will mention that she helped him mix the herbs and he could have added the poison afterwards.

Yasuki Kasamashi is a thief, a liar, a conman and a kolat. He also may be one of only two people that know everything that's going on in the city. Unfortunately, neither of them is going to be very forthcoming just yet. The characters are unknowns and neither he nor Osuko are willing to tip their hands to them. He will answer any questions with half-truths and blatant lies but will insist that he has seen no magistrates in months.

Daidoji Hagane is a bitter, hateful man and it comes through in his answers. He will practically spit on any Crab or Lion characters and attempt to taunt them into dueling him so he can prove that he's not just "some lowly fishmonger like that Yasuki over there." He is generally useless when it comes to information.

Bayushi Shiruko sold a very fine kimono to a Crane Emerald Magistrate three days ago. She comments on how the color of the silk truly brought out the color of her eyes. She is certain the woman was alone and not with a group of other Magistrates.

Akodo Tadoshi saw the Lion magistrates and they commented on the fine quality of his wares. He sent them to Naname to fill a custom order.

Ichiro Itami insists that he knows nothing and he is a very stubborn man. He knows more than he is letting on. He is one of the shadow-eaten and he has no intention of giving out information on his fellow cultists.

Shinjo Gotaro has been in contact with the Unicorn magistrates. He reassured them that the city was not a devious Scorpion plot and he would swear that Shinjo Yokatsu-sama already knew that and didn't understand why he would send magistrates to investigate a city that he, himself visited just a month ago. He's fairly certain the Unicorn left the city shortly afterwards.

Hida Dorin challenged a Crab Magistrate to a drinking game at the Sweet Cup. After every drink, they would have to take a punch. The first one to fall, from too much drink or too much abuse, would lose. He admits that things might have gotten out of hand and it spilled into the street and then into the gambling parlor where the other Crab's "delicate Crane flower got in the way."

Kaiu Naname is very knowledgeable. He was involved in the first creation of the masks for the ritual and was Giseiki's confidant. He has spent years pouring through the evidence, trying to discover the head of the cult but thus far has not had any luck. He suspects that Osuko is involved, or at least that she knows more than she's saying. If asked about the magistrates, he will confirm that he made masks for three separate groups: four emerald magistrates a Crab, a Crane, a Phoenix and a Scorpion; three Lion clan magistrates; and a pair of Unicorn magistrates. He doesn't know where they went after they left his shop.

Munashii is responsible for everything, but of course he has no intention of confessing. Two of the Emerald Magistrates are dead (Crab and Scorpion), one of them has been inducted into the cult (Crane) but the fourth (Phoenix) is missing. One of the Lion magistrates killed the other two. He just has to keep an eye on the remaining Lion and the Unicorn and now he has a whole new

set of Magistrates to add to his collection of faces. Of course, when they ask, he will tell them “Some magistrates have prayed at the temples recently, but not in a few days. Perhaps they left the city.”

Part 7: Confessions of a Lion

Once you feel they’re getting tired of all the talking, you can interrupt their conversation with the unmistakable sounds of combat. Presuming your PCs are looking for some action, they will jump at the sound. You probably want to save this until they’ve questioned at least one of the three cultist leaders (Munashii, Itami or Kusuri) just for good measure.

Where they are and whom they’re questioning at the time will determine where the fight is taking place. If they are in the Temple or Hospitality districts, then the sounds of combat are coming from the center of the marketplace and otherwise the fight is happening outside the Sweet Cup in the hospitality district. In other words, make them run to get there.

The sounds of fighting are loud, but no one else seems to notice or care. People don’t get out of their way and look at them with abject confusion when they rush past. By the time they get to the source of the battle, everything is done. Two Unicorn bodies, bearing the badges of office of clan magistrates, lay dead in the street cut to ribbons. Beside them is the body of a monk, apparently dead, but showing no obvious wounds (a perception + investigation roll, TN 15, will reveal a row of stitches all around his face). A Lion, also bearing a Magistrate’s badge, is panting shallow, furious breaths. He, his armor, his wooden mask and his blade are dripping with gore.

A second monk retrieves a mask from the ground nearby and places it on the fallen monk’s face. For the briefest of moments, the nearest PC catches a glimpse of what look like dark, spectral hands reaching out from the mask and pulling it onto the monk’s face. A moment later, the fallen monk stands with some help from his friend and the two begin walking towards the Temple district. The Lion’s breathing slows after a moment and looks down at the bloody corpses at his feet. He staggers backwards and drops his sword. He collapses shortly thereafter. Feel free to throw in a perception roll to notice another black-clad samurai observing them from the shadows, just out of their reach.

Do they stop the monks, chase the ninja or interrogate the Lion? Chasing the ninja is, as usual, a futile effort. They slip away as soon as they’re noticed and are long gone by the time the characters cross the distance to where they were. The monks claim innocent bystander status. They were walking past and were not involved in the confrontation. One of them was struck and he was knocked unconscious. (Of course, that is a lie. They incited the Lion to kill the Unicorn, which was extremely easy considering their already strained relations. One Unicorn suspected the Monks’ involvement with the cult and removed the monk’s mask just before the Lion struck him down. As described, the monk’s body collapsed, not having anything to sustain it.)

The Lion will be cooperative and will tell them everything he knows, but he is preparing to commit seppuku to erase the shame of murdering not only the Unicorn but his own fellow Lion. He’ll tell them this story, “We arrived and were directed to purchase masks from the merchants. We assumed it was a trick, a ruse to get people to buy from their marketplace. I chose a wooden

mask from the Badger because it would be lighter in this heat. I guess I was wrong because a few hours later I blacked out. I awoke in the monastery days later. They told me that Shinko had gone mad and killed Watsuwara in cold blood and that I was lucky to be alive. I set out to find Shinko and get her side of the story and, if the monks were telling the truth, take her into custody to answer for her crimes. She found me first and attacked. I asked her why and she answered because I had killed Watsuwara. She must have struck me because I became disoriented for just a moment and when my head cleared I was behind her with my blade in her heart. I returned to the monastery for two days, praying to my ancestors for forgiveness. I was there just a moment ago and then I was standing over the bodies of the Unicorn. I don't know what is happening to me, but I know that I must end it."

He will answer whatever questions they have to the best of his ability, but he doesn't know much more than what he's told them. In actuality, the mask he bought from Itami contained a cultist's 'soul' that possessed him and used his body to kill. He is extremely honorable and will commit seppuku to erase the dishonor brought on him, but he asks that the characters bring justice to the sorcerers responsible. He says he is genuinely surprised that they didn't hear about his confrontation with Shinko because there were easily a dozen witnesses and he finds it strange that they would not come forward.

He prepares a final haiku and asks that the characters return his blades, and those of his fallen comrades, to Kyuden Ikoma once they have brought justice to the city. If they accept (and actually do it) they will gain 3 points of honor and a minor ally in the Lion. He'll also ask any bushi in the group to be his second. As he prepares for the first cut, an arrow suddenly pierces his mask and into his brain. He slumps forward onto his sword, failing to complete the ritual and dying with his dishonor intact.

Part 8: Unseen Violence

Your players should have their swords drawn and in pursuit almost immediately. They catch a glimpse of one of the black-clad samurai disappearing into the Merchant District with a bow. That being sufficient evidence to suspect him, they will likely pursue. By the time they reach the edge of the district, however, they hear the sounds of combat. Pushing their way through the thick crowd they finally arrive at the source, but they are too late. The conflict is over and ended extremely badly for their target. Body parts lie strewn through the marketplace. Limbs lie severed in the dust and the body's entrails stretch for quite some distance down the road. The body's head sits well away from the rest, boasting a bloody skull where its face should be. There is no mask. The brutality and horror of the scene before them should be overwhelming and it takes a moment before they notice the reactions of the people around them.

Tourists are screaming and scattering out of fear but... the masked citizens don't seem to notice. The marketplace continues as if nothing had happened, even though several people are drenched in blood. One masked woman's stride puts her bare foot directly onto a pile of intestines. She doesn't even flinch. In fact, they are getting more attention than the horrors in front of them. People are walking past them looking at them like they're crazy for shoving past them. If they try to question anyone around, they won't have much luck. Anyone wearing a mask will insist they saw nothing. Visitors not wearing masks will be only slightly more helpful, as any who haven't

fled are too traumatized to form coherent thoughts. What information there is to gain is that the victim was running through when several men jumped out of the crowd and attacked him. One of them cut his head off and the others went to work tearing the body to pieces. Then they took his mask and cut his face off. They took both the mask and the face with them.

Investigation rolls can turn up a handful of clues.

- Number of attackers (TN10): Witnesses indicate four assailants. There was nothing that could distinguish them from anyone else here.
- Observers (TN15) the players are being watched as they investigate. Two of the samurai in black stand at the edges of the crowd, watching them intently. They vanish into the crowd if they are noticed.
- Skill of attackers (TN10) the cut to the neck was clean and done by a skilled swordsman.
- Direction of escapes (TN15) tracks lead away from the body towards both of the other districts, but with the crowd the tracks aren't likely to be reliable.

Once again, Giseiki's mask attempts to communicate to its wearer. If they succeed at a void roll, TN 20, they block him out. If he gets through, they will have an insight, which tells them "The cult of shadow stole his face. They have no other way." They must make a willpower roll, TN15, to avoid saying this out loud and quite possibly confusing themselves and their companions.

Can they communicate with Giseiki?

No, not directly. Giseiki can interject thoughts, but the communication is one-way. In other words, they have no way of directly asking him for guidance. The only way for the PCs to interact with Giseiki directly is for the one wearing the mask to withdraw his soul into the mask and allow Giseiki to take over, but they should have no way of coming to that conclusion. If they somehow think of it, let them try (Void roll, TN 5 x their void ring), but don't tell them they can.

If you feel they're stuck, use Giseiki to offer them clues. He'll never give them anything direct, he isn't aware that he's talking to someone and these are his own thoughts and memories. He has no reason to explain things to himself but if they become really stuck he can try to logic through clues on his own and possibly provide them with more direct insights.

A perception roll at TN 10 (or 5 if they are specifically looking for them, but don't tell your players how easy it is) to notice the two watchers standing along the edge of the marketplace, near the warehouses. They are allowing themselves to be spotted and are taunting the PCs. They want them to follow. Any sufficiently paranoid person in the group should suspect an ambush.

They now have two reasonable options open to them. Do they go after the watchers or follow the killers' trails. Do they split up? If they hesitate too long to make a decision, or leave to follow the second set of killers, the watchers will vanish around a corner and they will have lost this chance (there will be others). Likewise, if they chase their watchers, they'll lose the trail of the killers.

Part 7a: Following the trails (Option 1)

The trails lead off in different directions. Two lead towards the Temple District and one towards the Hospitality District. With four assailants and only three sets of tracks leading out, that means one of them is still in the Merchant District somewhere. Allow them to decide if they want to split up or follow each trail in a group.

The Merchant District

There are too many people here to conduct a very thorough search. Many of them are even covered in blood from the attack so the killer might be among them but there is no clear indication of who it might be. This one has gotten away... for now

A perception roll will identify two more of their watchers (See Option 2)

The Temple District

If they follow the set of tracks that lead towards the Temple district, several monks (equivalent to the number of PCs) attack them. Two of these monks are covered in gore. They are unarmed and each follows the relevant stats below (feel free to beef them up for more advanced campaigns).

Monk Cultists

Earth: 3

Air: 2 (Reflexes 3)

Water: 3 (Strength 4)

Fire: 2 (Agility 3)

Void: 1

Skills: Jiujutsu 3, Defense 3, Knives 2, Kenjutsu 1

The monks' attacks are all directed at the PC's masks and they are attempting to remove them. Do they contain the character's entire soul yet? If so, he collapses and can't resist. If not, don't forget the void loss from whatever the mask has absorbed thus far. If any succeed, the rest will direct their attention to any character not wearing a mask and, attempt to pin him if he's still standing. If they succeed in getting him on the ground, one will remove his own mask and force it onto the face of the player. If they have to, the monks will all target one character to try to do it. Try to ensure that the monks get this far, even if you have to beef up their stats or fudge the dice some as the players should see the monks' faces during this battle. If the players are winning, have one of them knock one of the monks' masks off (the monk will, of course, collapse after one round).

With the mask removed, the players will notice immediately that the monks' faces are sewn on – there is stitching all around the face from the top of the eyebrows, around the eyes and cheeks and down below the chin. The skin tones don't match and the faces don't match the bone and muscle structure beneath them. They look contorted and misshapen.

If the monks succeed at getting one of their masks onto a character (they have a single action before they collapse) the mask attempts to take control of the new host body. If the characters

own mask contains his soul, then his body is empty and the monk takes control immediately, otherwise follow the contested rules. The monk will stand and attack using the characters' own body, forcing the others to either kill their friend or try to get the monks' mask off.

If things look too grim, two of their watchers join the fray to even the odds. They are skilled shadow hunters and know how to defeat the cultists. They will target, and attempt to remove, the monks' masks from whoever is wearing them. If your characters are winning, they will show up after the battle, gather the monk's masks, return the players masks to their faces, and ask that they join them in the Merchant District.

The Hospitality District

As they enter the Hospitality District, they are attacked by a single samurai and two monks (use the stats and strategies for the monks listed above). The samurai's relevant stats are below.

Doji Siko

Earth: 2

Air: 3 (Awareness 4)

Water: 2

Fire: 3 (Agility 4)

Void: 3

Skills: Kenjutsu 3, Iaijutsu 4

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 3

Siko begins at the Grazed wound level and clearly favors her right leg, but she is a skilled enough duelist to protect it. She will rely on her blade and attempt to kill the characters, rather than use the strategies of the monks. A perception roll, TN 20 (easy to notice later, but much harder during the battle) will allow the characters to catch a glimpse of the Emerald Magistrate badge hanging from her obi. If this causes the characters to pause in their assault, she will take advantage of it. Giseiki will try to offer this piece of advice if they refuse to kill Siko, "She is no longer a magistrate of the Empire. She is a servant of darkness."

If the cultists are losing, Siko will attempt to limp away but probably won't get very far before either the characters or one of the shadow hunters kills her. She will not allow herself to be captured and will throw herself on the characters' swords if she herself is disarmed.

Again, if the characters are outnumbered or seem to be losing, the shadow hunters will assist them. If they aren't needed for the battle, they will show up afterwards, gather the masks and lead the players to the Merchant District, promising to explain everything.

Part 7b: Searching for their mysterious watchers (Option 2)

The watchers lead them to one of the warehouses on the edges of the Merchant District. The players may have their swords drawn in preparation for an ambush that will never come, but if they fought the cultists and received the shadow hunter's help, they will likely be less suspicious.

Whether they are preparing for a fight or not, as they enter they hear a very pleasant and (possibly) familiar female voice...

Part 9: History Lessons

Shosuro Osuko sits at the head of a mahogany table in the midst of a large, empty warehouse. Several of the shadow hunters stand around her and guard the door. Kaiu Naname and Yasuki Kasamashi sit to her left and a small Phoenix woman (the last surviving Magistrate) and an elderly monk to her right. She gestures to the other seats at the table. There are exactly enough for the party. If the characters have fought against the cultists in the last part, she will mention it: “You fight well and now you have seen what it is we are against.”

“Welcome,” she begins, “Please do not be alarmed, you are in no danger here. Wards keep the Darkness out. We would not harm loyal servants of the empire such as you. We are in your debt for returning Master Giseiki to us.” She will then proceed to explain enough of the history of the city to summarize the cult and explain that they are the shadow hunters, the group that discovered the Darkness’ influence on the city decades ago and asks their help in destroying the rest of the cult.

The players are free to question her, or any of her associates about any topic they wish.

Osuko ordered the death of the Lion magistrate because he was under the cult’s influence, just as Doji Siko. Siko killed her fellow magistrates as well, the Crab and the Scorpion. The shadow hunters found Isawa Kasiko and have been protecting her from the cultists who are surely searching for her.

Kasiko was fortunate enough to be away when the others in her group were killed by Siko. She was at Kyuden Miya, pouring through their archives. She was able to find one mention of a cartographer who insisted that a city had vanished. Fortunately for her, he was still alive. The man sitting beside her is Miya Hatomu. He was in charge of mapping this area and included this city. A few years after the coup, the area was re-checked and no sign of the city could be found. He was reprimanded for poor performance, though he knew he had been right. The city, he will say, vanished some time in the year 1123, coinciding with the Scorpion’s coup.

The shadow hunters will tell them about the ritual to hide their souls in masks and hide the city from the Darkness. Kasiko describes the madness of the cultists, as she observed in Siko and offer a possible interpretation: lacking the influence of the Lying Darkness, the cultists have become mindless killers. Their own souls are destroyed and the absence of the Lying Darkness has left them empty. Empty, even, than Nothing and that emptiness is likely to attract the attention of the Shadow Dragon, meaning they must hurry, or the cult may become just as powerful once again.

Part 10: Final Confrontation

With that inspiring bit of wisdom on their shoulders, the characters had best move quickly to find and destroy the cultists. A good place to start would be the Temple District, considering the

cultists already fought all seem to be monks. At least they will have backup in the form of the shadow hunters.

There are two ways this can go down; how you want to do it is entirely up to you. The first is a direct and even confrontation with Munashii and his monks. The second is a mass battle: characters against the entire city with the characters outnumbered 4 to 1.

Even Confrontation

Throw a few waves of monks at the players, using the stats and tactics described in the Temple District confrontation earlier. Munashii is calling the shots and will try very hard not to be cornered. He is aware of the Shadow Dragon now and the Shadow Dragon is aware of him. He will, if he is able, pray for its blessing. The characters must stop him before he can complete the prayer. Only let him actually complete it if you want to kill all of your players. They don't stand a chance against a dragon. Munashii has the stats below

Munashii

Earth: 3

Air: 3 (Reflexes 4)

Water: 3

Fire: 4 (Agility 5)

Void: 0

Skills: Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu 3, Knives 4, Battle 2

Munashii takes half damage from non-crystal weapons, but double damage from crystal.

Characters versus the City

As the characters and shadow hunters emerge from the warehouse, the entirety of the marketplace turns to stare at them. For the first time since their arrival, the marketplace is silent. The first character that moves will trigger the combat. They are, as mentioned, outnumbered by the cultists. Everyone who wasn't in that warehouse is a Goju – Munashii succeeded in gaining the Shadow Dragon's favor and only the wards in the warehouse saved the characters from the same fate.

Use the mass battle rules for this. The players and all shadow hunters begin at either engaged or heavily engaged. They do have the option of retreating back into the warehouse, but the Goju are smart enough to start a fire and eventually burn them out.

Allow a PC to direct their army or, if none are up to the task, let Osuko do it. Her stats are below

Shosuro Osuko

Earth: 2

Air: 4 (Awareness 5)

Water: 4

Fire: 3 (Agility 4)

Void: 4

Skills: Kenjutsu 3, Iaijutsu 1, Kyujutsu 2, Battle (Mass Battle) 2

The Goju are distinctly advantaged, outnumbering the PC's "army" 4 to 1, but the PCs are better equipped and have a defensive position. If the players notice, they can negate some of the opposing force's advantage by using the alleyways between the warehouses as chokepoints. The Goju, however, can use the shadows to their advantage in such a dark corridor. Tilt the odds significantly in the Goju's favor.

Once battle is going significantly poorly for them, Osuko will tell the PC with Giseiki's mask to give in to the mask. Make sure the player understands what that means: she is asking him to surrender his soul and give control of his body to another and very well may mean his death. Give the player the option to refuse. If he does, Osuko will demand they give it to her instead. She will remove her own mask and replace it with Giseiki's, effectively sacrificing herself to return their leader to his full power. Giseiki, if it is a PC's or Osuko's body, will ask that they defend him while he does what is needed.

He begins chanting and Isawa Kasiko joins him. The characters must defend them both for another three battle rolls, minus one for each shugenja PC that aids them in the ritual. Assuming they succeed the ritual finishes and everyone, PC's included, feels a surge of energy through them and then crumples to the ground. The only ones left standing are Kasiko and Miya Hatomu. Kasiko sets to work removing each of the PC's masks and, as she does so, they regain consciousness. The ritual inverted the energy of the mask, flooding the soul back into the body. The empty masks were left in control, acting as a suppressor for the body's own soul. Removing any masks will restore the bodies to life as they were. Restoring Goju will continue the fight. In order to stop the cult, they must destroy the bodies without removing the masks. The characters, and the shadow hunters if they revive them, must set about the grim task of beheading a hundred unconscious people.

Conclusion

The characters have discovered the fates of all of the magistrates and Kasiko will attest to the heroism of the characters. They gain glory and status as appropriate. If they are not Emerald Magistrates, they will be offered positions as Kasiko's Yoriki until such time as a new Emerald Champion is determined. If they make a report to Paneki and Uidori, they gain a minor but extremely influential ally who will be willing to do some small favor for them in the future.

The city has survived, though most of its citizens may be dead and any survivors are not fully functioning members of society. The Scorpion clan will cut their losses and harvest the city for any wealth and materials they are able. There is a store of long-lost knowledge which the Soshi claim as their own. Even though no one really knows who he is anymore, Miya Hatomu retires to a monastery knowing that he was right all those years.

Appendix A: Mask Reactions and Interactions

The citizens of the city react to one another based solely on the mask on their face because they have come to realize, possibly subconsciously that the mask is the only consistent part about how that person will react back. In other words, they know that people can switch bodies just by switching masks.

Each of the “Main Players” in the city (the named NPCs) has a distinct mask that the characters will come to identify them by, just as the city’s natives have. The city is extremely large, and these 20 or so NPCs aren’t the only ones around. There are literally dozens of monks, smaller-time merchants and staff in the various hospitality establishments. These have not been given detailed masks but should still be wearing one. The rank and file NPCs each have a mask that can be described using a combination of color and what material was used to construct it and their reactions to one another are based almost exclusively on that. Feel free to alter or elaborate on this detail as there is quite a bit of role-playing potential to be had in trying to discover the complex political undercurrent throughout the city.

The colors of a mask are loosely related to the clan colors and the reactions between those clans prior to the Clan Wars are mirrored in their reactions to masks of that color. Gray masks are a Crab color and dislike the Blue (Crane) colored masks and have a loose friendship with the Red (Scorpion) masks. Blue masks hate the Yellow (Lion) masks as well as the Gray masks, but are close with the Orange (Phoenix) masks. The Orange masks ally themselves with the Green (Dragon) masks and so on. This is only the first level of interaction, though.

The material from which the mask is crafted, and the elements that make up that material, also have a strong bearing on the reaction between two masks. A wooden mask, for instance, feels threatened by a metal mask as metal cut the tree from which the wooden mask was made. The roots of a tree penetrate the earth and so a clay or stone mask comes from the ground and is afraid of the wooden masked. As the earth absorbs water and thus defeats it, a mask made of shell fears the earthen one. Such relationships connect each of the elements: Metal destroys wood, wood destroys earth, earth defeats water, water extinguishes fire and fire melts metal. Each of these has an ally as well. Fire becomes earth as it falls to ash, earth produces metal, metal becomes liquid when it melts and so becomes like water. Water grows wood and wood produces fire. Other aspects of the elements are present as well. A delicate porcelain or glass mask representing air dislike earthen stone masks, for the stone mask will shatter the fragile one. Silk masks and porcelain masks tend to get along as they are equally non-threatening, but stone masks fear silk masks because the silk mask is too clever to be harmed by the stone. The shell mask of water fears the metal mask singed by fire, for the fire will crack and scorch the shell.

The possibilities of what masks you can introduce are nearly limitless. Use your imagination.

Appendix B: Alternate History & Ending

There is no Lying Darkness infestation and there never was. The masks are a sentient parasite, not unlike Gaki. The cult is still a threat and the masks behave the same way, feeding off of the

souls of those who wear them and proving deadly if they are removed. The ritual was not to hide the city from the Darkness but to prevent the spread of the masks to the rest of the empire.