

A Chance Meeting

**A One-Round Low-Rank Adventure for Living
Rokugan (Champions of the Emerald Empire)**

by Robert Hobart

A simple journey through the lands of the Fox Clan leads in unexpected directions after a dying Scorpion entrusts you with his secrets.

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This is a RPGA Network adventure game. A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing the game (or this round of the game), but the actual playing time will be about three hours.

It is a good idea to ask each player to put a name tag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name, race, and gender at the top. This makes it easier for the players to keep track of who is playing which character.

Scoring the game for RPGA points: The RPGA has three ways to score this game. Consult your convention coordinator to determine which method to use:

1. *No-vote scoring:* The players write their names and numbers on the scoring packet grid, you fill in the top of the grid. That is all. No one is rated. This method is used for people who are just playing for fun.
2. *Partial scoring:* The players rate the game master and the scenario on their player voting sheet, and provide personal information, but don't vote for other players. The game master rates the scenario and completes personal and event information, but does not rate the players as a team or vote for players. This method is used when there is no competition, but the convention coordinator wants information as to how the game masters are performing, or the game master wants feedback on his or her own performance.
3. *Voting:* Players and game masters complete the entire packet, including voting for best player. If this method is used, be sure to allow about 15-20 minutes for the players to briefly describe their characters to the other players, and about 5-10 minutes for voting. This method is used when the players want to know who played the best amongst them, or when the adventure is run in tournament format with winners and prizes. Multi-round adventures usually required advancing a smaller number of players than played the first round, so voting is required for multi-round adventures.

When using Voting, rank the players in order of your voting choice while they are completing their forms, so that you are not influenced by their comments on your abilities.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment and weapons their characters are carrying.

Some of the text in this scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in ***bold italics***. It is strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

GM's Information

THIS TOURNAMENT SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD!

This adventure is a Low Level adventure. This means that only Rank 1 and Rank 2 Characters should be allowed to play. This adventure was not written with Rank 3 through 5 characters in mind and cannot anticipate all that these characters may bring to the table. If there are less than six players at the table, you should adjust the combats slightly – especially the Bloodspeaker encounter, which can be lethal to unlucky PCs.

The world of Rokugan is a cross between feudal Japan and China. It is set in an age of honorable samurai, serving their Lords (Daimyos) and Empire. Remember that family names come before personal names. Akodo Toturi is from the Akodo family and his personal name is Toturi.

A note on female designations: If a samurai has the designation of -ko, then the samurai is a female. For example, if you see Samurai-ko, then this denotes a female samurai.

A note on commerce in Rokugan: Samurai are not supposed to care about worldly possessions, especially money. A samurai pays a commoner as if the money is meaningless, a concession to the commoner's silly needs. Between samurai, the exchange of money and merchandise is an exchange of "gifts."

Adventure Background

This scenario is a demonstration that chance (what a Rokugani would call "the will of the Fortunes") can bring strange adventures where they are unlooked-for. An apparently random encounter on the road puts the PCs on the trail of a long-forgotten stash of Maho (black magic). A cell of the Bloodspeaker Cult is also seeking the treasure, however, and the Scorpion Clan has its own reasons to be involved...

Over a hundred years ago, a cell of the Bloodspeaker Cult formed in Fox lands. The local daimyo, Kitsune Gendo, was a cruel and oppressive master, a man separated from the Fox spirits who watch over the clan; the peasants flocked to the Bloodspeakers' promise of power and freedom from the Celestial Order. Within a few months, there was a bloody uprising: Gendo was killed, but the local peasants were completely

exterminated by his vengeful samurai. Unfortunately, the leaders of the cult had managed to protect their most powerful scrolls and artifacts with a summoned Oni. The new daimyo, Gendo's son Kitsune Ota, lacked the resources to kill the Oni, but was also afraid to admit that there had been a Maho uprising in his lands – the Clan Champion might see that as a failure of duty and take his position. Ota sealed off the underground chamber which held the Oni and erased all records of the incident. In hopes that he might later be able to seditiously acquire jade or magic to kill the Oni (thereby erasing all evidence of the shameful incident), he created a puzzle-box whose design was actually a cunning map to the village where the Oni was sealed away.

The puzzle-box has been passed down through five generations of daimyo, its secret passed from father to son. Recently, a Scorpion emissary named Bayushi Shirow visited the castle for a few weeks and discovered that the puzzle-box was supposed to contain an important family secret. He notified his Clan of his finds and, after careful preparations, stole the box.

Unfortunately for Shirow, the Bloodspeaker Cult has recently learned from its own records that the Maho stash in Fox lands still exists. The Cult is plotting to free its sinister master, Iuchiban, and acquiring these lost scrolls and items would go a long way to furthering that goal. Arriving just too late to steal the box for themselves, the cultists pursue Shirow, wounding and harrying him through the thick forests of Fox lands.

And into the middle of this affair walk the PCs...

PCs' Introduction

Chance and the Fortunes have brought the PCs together on Doro no Uso no Itsuwari (the Road of False Deceit), a road which runs through the lands of the Fox Clan. The Fox are a minor clan, one of oldest Minor Clans in fact, and occupy the heavily forested lands between the Scorpion and Crane. The PCs each have their own reasons for travelling in these lands – perhaps they are on a mission for their daimyo, or travelling to a new assignment, or simply touring the Empire in search of enlightenment. Let the players come up with their own reasons for why they are on the road at this time, and have them describe and introduce their characters; then read the opening text.

As evening darkens the sky, the twilight fading in the wake of the departure of Lady Sun, you spy the lights of a village ahead of you, glittering through a belt of trees. Weary and dusty from your journey, you think

eagerly of a warm Inn, a bath, food and sake. Your thoughts are interrupted, however, by a sudden crashing commotion from the nearby trees. A samurai, his colors and mon invisible in the fading light, staggers out of the trees and weaves across the road toward you. As he draws closer you see that he is a Scorpion, and that he is wounded, blood dripping from his belly.

The Scorpion, Bayushi Shirow, will preferentially approach a PC who belongs to his own Clan. If no Scorpion PCs are available, he will pick a Dragon, Crab, Crane, Phoenix, ronin, Unicorn, or Lion/Minor Clan, in that order. Under no circumstances will he approach a member of the Fox Clan. He grasps the chosen samurai by the front of his/her kimono (shockingly breaking the Rokugani taboo on public touching) and mutters, "Don't let them have it. Important...they mustn't..." His voice fades as the life leaves his body. As he speaks, he presses a small wooden puzzle box under the PC's obi. He is using the Sleight-of-Hand skill, of course – other PCs must roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 25 to notice what he has done.

The now-dead samurai wears the family mon of the Bayushi, and the school mon of his family's bushi school. His katana is still sheathed at his side, but his wakizashi is missing. There is nothing else obvious here to identify him, and of course the PCs cannot search a dead body (that would mean contaminating themselves, becoming temporary eta until they can be cleansed – any PCs who so much as entertain the idea of searching the body themselves suffer a loss of 1 point of Honor from the shame of their own unclean thoughts).

Presumably the PCs hurry on to the village to call for eta to remove the body; if some of the PCs choose to remain and guard the body, they can do so. If anyone tries to follow the Scorpion's blood-trail, they can pursue it with a **Hunting/Perception** roll at TN 20 (TN 15 if they fetch lanterns or candles from the village, or wait until morning). See "Following the Trail," below.

Following the Trail

Bayushi Shirow's blood-trail leads through the woods for a couple of hundred yards before it reaches the place where he was attacked. Here, in the fading light, the PCs can just make out the evidence of a struggle: torn ground, scraps of homespun cloth (easily identified as coming from peasant garments), and spilt blood. Shirow's wakizashi, itself blood-stained, lies in the brush, and can be found with a

Investigation/Perception roll at TN 10. If the roll makes TN 20 or greater, the PC also finds an orange obi bead stamped into the mud. **Heraldry/Intelligence** at TN 5 reminds the PC (if s/he doesn't know already) that orange is the favored color of the Phoenix Clan.

Two different trails lead away from the ambush site, but following them will prove more difficult, since they were made by people moving carefully and stealthfully rather than crashing through the trees. It will require a **Hunting/Perception** roll at TN 25 to follow either of the trails (TN 20 if the PCs have light sources, or return in the morning). One trail, of a single man in sandals, leads back to Shiro Ouchi (this is Bayushi Shirow's trail, obviously) while the other, of a large number of barefoot men and one person in sandals, follows a roundabout route back to Kikuza Village, where the footprints are lost in the general mud and traffic.

If the PCs should happen to use the spell "The Ties That Bind" on the scraps of homespun cloth, they can track them to a pile of ashes elsewhere in the forest (the peasant Bloodspeakers, advised by their Phoenix leader, destroyed their bloodstained garments). If the spell is used on the obi bead, it leads the PCs to the "Phoenix Caravan" encounter.

The Secret of the Puzzle-Box

If and when the PCs examine the puzzle-box, they discover its exterior is painted with a strange pattern of lines, slashes, and dots. Opening the box requires an **Investigation/Intelligence** roll at TN 25 (using the **Nazodo** skill in place of Investigation lowers the TN to 15). However, the box is empty. Why would the dead Scorpion have gone to such effort to steal it and keep it from being returned?

The answer is in the pattern which covers the box's exterior. Any PC who specifically states that s/he is examining the exterior of the box, or the pattern which covers it, can make an **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 15 (TN 10 if using **Nazodo/Perception**) to realize that the pattern is actually a map. Reading the map requires careful study, or copying it onto a flat surface; either feat will entail a **Calligraphy** (or **Cipher**)/**Intelligence** roll at TN 10. If successful, the PCs realize it is actually a map of the local Fox Clan territories, Shiro Ouchi at the center and each village and trail painstakingly marked. The kanji for "Inheritance" is inscribed above one especially remote and isolated village.

Kikuza Village

The village which lies ahead of the PCs is large and fairly prosperous, and in the distance the PCs can just make out the outlines of a castle silhouetted against the twilight sky. The village itself contains (in addition to dozens of peasant huts) several sake breweries, a carpenter, a blacksmith, a geisha house, and a large inn, the House of the Sleeping Kitsune. A sign over the door shows a Kitsune (fox spirit) snoozing next to a fallen bottle of sake. There are fewer rice fields than normal for a village this size – the people of the Fox Clan rely heavily on foraging and hunting for their diet.

Wherever the PCs go, the peasants are quite frightened at the news of a samurai dead on the road (many of them wonder fearfully whether they will somehow be blamed for the incident) and promptly dispatch runners to the castle and *eta* to collect the body.

In due course a half-dozen samurai arrive from the castle. These Fox Clan bushi are guardedly hostile to Scorpions, friendly to Unicorns and members of the Three Man Alliance (the Fox, Sparrow, and Wasp Clans), and cautiously polite to all other samurai. Their commander is a man named Takui, a polite but proud man in his thirties and a loyal retainer to the current daimyo. He is also the only one of them to have received training at an actual Bushi school.

Once the *eta* bring the dead Scorpion, Takui exclaims that the man is a thief, an abuser of hospitality who stole something valuable from the Fox Clan. He orders the *eta* to search the body, and shows himself disappointed with the results (a katana, an empty wakizashi sheath, a personal chop for "Bayushi Shirow," a fan, a purse with 4.3 koku). If the PCs can provide him with any additional information (such as the site where Shirow was ambushed), Takui is thankful and listens carefully to their report.

The key to this encounter, of course, is the question of the puzzle-box. Takui is in something of a quandary – he has been ordered by his lord to find the puzzle-box, but he has also been told not to let anyone outside the castle know about the box. Takui will attempt to get around this by obliquely asking the PCs if the Scorpion "dropped anything, anything at all." He asks other Scorpions especially, and in fact begins questioning them sharply about why they are here, what they are doing in Fox lands, etc.

The PC who has the puzzle-box may find this to be an ethical problem, as may any other PCs who already

know about the box (unless they are Scorpion, of course). There are two considerations here. First, Takui never *specifically* asks about the puzzle-box, so a PC who wants to walk a fine ethical line can probably get away with not mentioning the box. (PCs with high Honor scores, however, may feel more inclined to mention the box.) Second, Rokugani ethics do not necessarily require that one tell the truth to someone from another Clan – particularly a Minor Clan, which are looked down upon by the seven Great Clans. Most samurai are regularly expected to lie in defense of their lord or Clan, so the PCs are not automatically compelled to volunteer the box’s existence solely because Takui is “obviously” looking for it. The personalities of the PCs, and their personal attitudes on truth and duty, are important here.

If they do admit to having the puzzle-box, Takui immediately demands that they hand it over, claiming it as the property of his master. Again, it is up to the PCs whether or not they obey, but if they refuse (for whatever reason) he will then demand that they come to the castle and speak with his master, who can assure them that it is, indeed, his puzzle box. If the PCs do hand over the box, he will likewise invite them to the castle to receive the thanks of his master.

If the PCs do not admit to having the box at all, Takui invites them to the castle so that his master can thank them for finding the “thief” Shirow. He shoots any Scorpion PCs a dark look when he issues this invitation. If the PCs accept the invitation (if they refuse, they will need to roll Awareness+Etiquette at TN 15 to avoid offending Takui), go to “Shiro Ouchi,” below.

This situation should not be a lethal or insoluble one for the PCs. Takui will not push things to a fight, although he might offer a non-lethal duel (as his master’s champion) to settle the matter – especially if the PCs in question are Scorpions.

Ultimately, the main purpose of this encounter is to let the PCs know where the box came from, to confirm that something about it is important and secret, and to let them realize that the people who killed Bayushi Shirow were not the local Fox samurai.

Shiro Ouchi

The castle of Kitsune Gendo’s descendent is a small, humble structure as such things go – only four stories high, with barely enough room inside for the daimyo, his family, his personal retainers, and a couple of visitors. The forest crowds close around the structure, and the PCs may glimpse wild animals moving in the

trees as they approach. Currently, one of the castle guest rooms is empty (having just been vacated by Bayushi Shirow) while the other is occupied by Suzume Asamiya, a visitor from the neighboring Sparrow Clan.

When the PCs arrive at the castle, they are immediately escorted into one of the small audience rooms, where the daimyo (Kitsune Iuki) awaits them. His description is given below, under “Dinner at Shiro Ouchi.” What happens next depends on how the PCs handle the problem of the puzzle-box:

If they say they don’t have it (the most probable course): The daimyo is disappointed, although he masks it as well as he can. He questions the PCs further about what they saw and learned in their encounter with Bayushi Shirow, and mutters darkly about “abusers of hospitality.” If any of the PCs are Scorpions, he is quite suspicious of them, although he never breaks the rules of etiquette. Finally, he thanks the PCs for whatever information they could give him; although his castle is too humble to offer them a place to stay, he asks that they stay for dinner with him as a gesture of thanks. Polite PCs decline twice, allowing Iuki to offer three times.

If the PCs hand over the box, either to Takui or Iuki himself: Iuki’s relief is palpable, although he does his best to hide it. He thanks them gravely for their honesty, “a virtue all too rare in Rokugan,” and invites them to stay for dinner as above.

If the PCs admit to having the box, but won’t hand it over: Iuki is furious, denouncing the PCs as “mannerless ruffians and thieves,” and declares that they have made an enemy. “Leave my castle at once,” he thunders. “You have one day to depart my lands, before I declare you bandits and outlaws. If we meet in future, it will be as enemies.” All PCs must write down **Minor Enemy: Kitsune Iuki** on their character sheets; the PC who kept the puzzle-box gets him as a **Major Enemy**, instead. This does not actually end the adventure – the PCs still have time to look into the secret of the puzzle-box – but it may have ramifications for the future.

Dinner at Shiro Ouchi

Although the castle is small, the food at Kitsune Iuki’s table is excellent, and after the meal his daughter Mai entertains everyone with a performance on the biwa. Iuki’s family will recount at some length their disappointment with Bayushi Shirow, who was here as a guest of the Fox Clan and clearly did not respect his

hosts. Beyond that, their conversation is mundane, focussed on local topics such as the upcoming gempukku of their Clan daimyo's heir, Ryosei. The following people are present at dinner:

Kitsune Iuki, the daimyo: The descendent of Kitsune Gendo is a thin, bald-headed man in his mid-thirties. Although Iuki is a far kinder master than his ancestor, he is also painfully aware that the discovery of his family secret could doom him, and consequently is desperate to recover the puzzle-box. He will be hostile and suspicious toward any Scorpion PCs, but otherwise his manners are impeccable. However, any PC making a **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 20 (or **Ichi Miru/Awareness** at TN 10) can tell that beneath his calm facade Iuki is wracked with fear and worry. This will be especially noticeable (+5 on the roll) if any of the PCs are Emerald Magistrates or belong to schools or families associated with hunting maho (e.g. Kuni family, Witch-Hunters, Scorpion Black Watch, Phoenix inquisitors, and so forth).

Kitsune Aoi, his wife: Iuki's wife is a pleasant, gracefully-aging shugenja whose nerves have been badly frayed by this sudden crisis and her husband's fearful reaction to it. She does not know why her husband is so frightened by the loss of this family heirloom, and that lack of knowledge preys on her mind. She will play the gracious hostess to the PCs, but anyone making a **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 15 (or **Ichi Miru/Awareness** at TN 5) can tell that she is very worried about her husband.

Retsu and Mai, their children: Iuki and Aoi's two children are approaching the age of their gempukku – Retsu is a handsome boy of 14 who has begun his studies as a shugenja, while his sister Mai, 12, already shows promise of future beauty. Neither of the children knows anything about what is going on, although they will readily agree with their parents' assessment that Bayushi Shirow was a "lying, thieving Scorpion dog." Anytime the topic of the Scorpion and his theft comes up, however, PCs may make **Simple Perception** rolls at TN 15 to notice a slight flinch from Mai. It was actually Mai who, innocently answering the Scorpion's friendly questions, told him where the family documents and heirlooms were kept. She now blames herself for the theft, and if any PC asks her about her behavior, she quickly breaks down and confesses. Her parents are sad but understanding: "An innocent child cannot be expected to understand the wily manipulations of a Scorpion."

Takui, captain of the guard (and acting karo): 30-year-old Takui is a classic retainer, completely loyal

and unquestioningly obedient to his master. He has no idea why the puzzle-box is so important, and does not ask – it is not his place to ask, only to obey.

Suzume Asamiya, guest: A young storyteller from the eccentric and poverty-stricken Sparrow Clan, Asamiya is travelling through the lands of the Three Man Alliance (Sparrow, Fox, and Wasp) looking for new stories to share with his fellow Clanmembers. He will ask the PCs to recount any interesting experiences in their recent lives, asking carefully for the details and specifics of the stories, and then rewards them with a story of his own, an interminably detailed recounting of the tale of his Clan's founding (GMs wishing to recreate this story can find the tale in both *Way of the Crane* and *Way of the Minor Clans*). If the subject of Bayushi Shirow and his theft comes up, Asamiya shrugs eloquently: "One cannot expect any creature, man or beast, to act other than according to its nature."

A Night Ritual

Presumably the PCs spend the night at the local inn, the House of the Sleeping Kitsune, which offers good-quality private rooms for five *zeni* a night. If the PCs prefer, they can instead order the local headman to put them up in his house. Regardless, as the PCs are settling in for the night, have them make **Investigation/Awareness** rolls at TN 10. If successful, the PC is awakened in the middle of the night with the sensation that something is wrong. After a moment, s/he realizes what woke them – a distant, choked scream.

The Bloodspeakers have sacrificed a local peasant child to perform a divination, and determined that Bayushi Shirow gave the puzzle-box to the PCs. If the PCs ask where the sound came from, they can make **Hunting/Intelligence** rolls at TN 10 to guess that it came from outside the village, probably to the south.

Searching the forests south of the village takes quite some time, and the Bloodspeakers are long gone by the time the PCs arrive – they are plotting to attack the PCs the following night, after acquiring more victims to power their leader's spells (the fallen Phoenix, being a selfish sort, prefers not to spend his own blood on his spells, and the local peasant members don't really want to volunteer themselves). If any of the PCs have the ability to sense the Shadowlands Taint (such as a Kuni Witch-Hunter or a Rank 2 Moto Bushi), the search is speeded up considerably, but the cultists are still gone by the time the PCs find the site of the ritual.

In a small dell within the forest, sheltered from wind and sight, a peasant boy lies dead, blood from his slit throat making a small pool on the ground. The burnt-down stubs of several candles are scattered around the area, and footprints suggest several people were here. A **Lore(Maho)/Intelligence** roll at TN 10 (or **Lore (Shadowlands)** at TN 15) instantly recognizes the site as the scene of a Maho ritual, although what sort of ritual is unknown. An **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 10 can deduce that six to ten people were here, all barefoot except for one, who wore the quality sandals of the samurai caste. If the PCs want to follow the tracks, they must roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 15 – following tracks at night is difficult. If they return in the morning, the TN is 10.

There are four sets of tracks. Three of them (each of at least two people) are of barefoot peasants, and lead to various villages in the area – including Kikuzu village, where the PCs are staying. Unfortunately, it is impossible for the PCs to determine which of the peasants in each village are involved, since the tracks vanish into the general morass of mud and mess which fills every peasant village. The fourth set of tracks is more productive – it is the marks of a single individual wearing sandals, and leads to the Phoenix Caravan encounter.

The PCs may decide to use magic to help in their investigations. Summoning spirits to describe what happened can confirm that a ritual and sacrifice took place, with nine people participating; if the PCs summon water spirits, they can actually watch the ceremony, confirming that all the participants are peasants except for one man in Phoenix orange (roll **Investigation/Intelligence** at TN 10 to remember his face) who sacrifices the boy. Also, if the PCs can read lips, they can confirm that the mysterious Phoenix was trying to learn who had the puzzle-box. If the PCs have seen the Phoenix in this fashion, they could use the spell “Reflecting Pool” to see where he is now (at the Phoenix Caravan). They might be able to gain some of this information by using *Raises* on the summoning of some other spirits (such as Air or Earth) to have them remember what noises the humans made during the ceremony. Finally, the spell “The Ties That Bind” could be used on the candles to locate the Phoenix Caravan.

The Phoenix Caravan

The PCs can find the Phoenix Caravan by following the trail from the site of the Night Ritual, or by casting “The Ties That Bind” on either the candles at that

ritual, or the obi bead found where Bayushi Shirow was attacked.

Emerging from the woods, you see a small caravan encamped next to the narrow roadway. A half-dozen tents, colored orange, are pitched in a rough circle near a pair of wagons; several ponies graze at the roadside nearby. A few armored bushi, dressed likewise in orange and sporting the mon of the Phoenix Clan, stand guard outside the encampment. They call a challenge to you, but their hands stay away from their weapons for the moment.

This caravan is home to three Phoenix shugenja (Isawa Gonto, Isawa Mariko, and Asako Tanaka) who are travelling across the Empire, researching lost magics and meeting with members of other shugenja schools. Currently they are on the way south to Kyuden Asahina in Crane lands, having just finished visiting the Scorpion Clan (with typical Great Clan arrogance, they have decided that the Kitsune shugenja school is not worthy of their time). As it happens, one of their number, Isawa Gonto, is also a Bloodspeaker who is using the trip as cover to meet with various cult cells around the Empire. The PCs will not be able to speak with him or his companions, however, since a dozen Shiba bushi accompany these noble shugenja as bodyguards and escorts.

The guarding bushi (there are always at least three, even at night) will speak with the PCs in a polite fashion, and will be genuinely friendly if any of the PCs are of the Phoenix Clan. They can, if asked, name their shugenja masters and explain the purpose of their journey across the Empire. They can provide the following additional information, if asked:

- They are encamped here because their masters prefer a private camp, free of the noise and distractions found in an Inn. They have been following this custom throughout their journey across the Empire.
- No one has been absent from their camp tonight. (This is untrue, of course, and the PCs can tell the bushi are holding something back if they make Contested rolls of their own **Perception** against the guards’ **Awareness** of 2. Any guard who is accused of lying will be offended, and demands an immediate apology on pain of a duel.)
- They passed through Kikuzu Village yesterday, and stopped there briefly while purchasing additional supplies for their

caravan. They did not notice anything strange there.

- If the PCs ask to speak with one or more of the shugenja, the guards will send word into the camp (unless it is very late at night, in which case they tell the PCs to come back tomorrow). However, the shugenja send back a servant with an apology: they regret they do not have the time at present to speak with the PCs. The refusal is final, and if the PCs argue they will antagonize the guards.

Shiba Bushi (12)

FIRE 3 Intelligence 4	AIR 2 Reflexes 3
EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 20 (Light Armor)

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 1

Honor/Glory: 2.5/1.3

Skills: Archery 1, Defense 2, Etiquette 1, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Meditation 2, Naginata 1, Shintao 2, Sincerity 1, Tea Ceremony 1

Equipment: Daisho set, light armor, bow with 20 arrows, naginata

A Morning Visitor: Shosuro Tajiki

When the PCs awaken the next morning (whether or not they had the Night Ritual encounter), they find another samurai eating in the Inn's common room. The visitor is a young man in a splendid kimono in Scorpion red-and-black, his handsome face covered only in a thin silk half-mask. This visitor is Shosuro Tajiki, a Shosuro Shinobi (shadow-magic assassin) masquerading as a Bayushi-trained bushi. Tajiki may be familiar to PCs who have played in other Living Rokugan scenarios, such as *Satsume's Tournament*; he greets these PCs in a friendly fashion, and introduces himself to those who are strangers.

Tajiki is smooth, charming, and friendly, and deflects any insults or inconvenient questions with practiced aplomb. He is here to rendezvous with Bayushi Shirow, and has already learned from local gossip that Shirow is dead and that the PCs were involved in the discovery of his body.

Tajiki will ask after his "poor cousin" Shirow, inquiring gravely (and with interest which is not at all feigned) as to how Shirow died, whether the PCs learned who killed him, and so forth. He will ask where the body was taken, whether any of his belongings were missing, and so forth. If any of the PCs are Scorpions, he will question them especially closely, and will make specific mention of "a small puzzle-box, of exotic design." He will claim the puzzle-box belonged to Shirow and contained valuable personal effects. If the PCs have already opened the puzzle-box, they will know this is a lie, of course, but Tajiki is skilled enough at Etiquette and Sincerity that it will be almost impossible to catch him out ("The box was empty? Ah, someone must have opened it and taken poor Shirow-san's belongings! And just why did YOU open it, ____-san?"). If the PCs actually give the box to Tajiki, he thanks them gravely, assures them of his future friendship, and cheerfully departs.

The PCs do not have to tell Shirow they have the box, or give it to him if they do tell him, but any Scorpion PCs in the party will be facing a serious breach of Clan loyalty in such circumstances. If the PCs admit having the box but refuse to hand it over, Tajiki will become less friendly, delicately pointing out that it is a vile and dishonorable act to steal the property of a fallen samurai, suggesting that a duel could be arranged in future to test such a dishonorable decision, and dropping oblique hints about how dangerous it is to antagonize the Scorpion Clan. Some of this is bluff (since the box actually belongs to the Fox Clan, Tajiki cannot risk the publicity of a duel) but the prospect of making an enemy of a Scorpion should be enough to give the PCs pause.

Regardless, if he did not get the box from the PCs, Tajiki will smile politely and depart, urging them to seek him at the local daimyo's castle "if you remember anything important." He then shadows the PCs from a distance, hoping for a chance to steal the box and, perhaps, to learn what the PCs themselves are doing.

Whether or not the PCs gave up the box, the Bloodspeakers believe they still have it, and will attack again tonight if the PCs have not left the area or tracked down Somatsu Village.

Going to Somatsu Village

Any PC worth their salt will want to know what in the remote village on the puzzle-box map is so important – especially if they have uncovered evidence of the Bloodspeakers. Following the map found on the puzzle-box is the only way to find out. If the PCs

handed over the puzzle-box before learning its secret, they can make **Simple Intelligence** rolls at TN 20 (or skill rolls with **Meditation** or **Nazodo** at TN 10) to remember the pattern on the box. They will still need to make the roll with Investigation or Nazodo to figure out the map, but the TNs are now 5 higher because they are working from memory. The name given on the map for the village is “Somatsu,” meaning “obscure.”

Once the PCs set out for Somatsu Village, they quickly find that their route takes them farther and farther into the Fox Clan woodlands, the villages which interrupt the trees becoming rarer and rarer. Finally, the PCs travel for over three hours through the forest, the road reduced to little more than an ill-used dirt track between the close-pressing, moss-shrouded trees of Kitsune Mori. During this journey, the GM should secretly roll **Shintao/Awareness** for each PC (if any PCs are of the Fox Clan, add 10 to their roll). The PC with the highest roll suddenly glimpses a fox with a rich red pelt and startling green eyes. The Kitsune spirit (for that is what it is) regards the PC for a few seconds with an expression which can only be described as grave concern, then vanishes into the forest. None of the other PCs see the being. The Kitsune can be identified for what it is by rolling **Lore (Kami)/Intelligence** (or **Fox Clan Lore**) at TN 10.

Other than this glimpse of the Fox Clan’s mysteries, the trip is without incident. However, any PC making a **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 20 (or a **Stealth/Awareness** roll at TN 10, if the PC has that dishonorable skill) suspects that they are being followed, although whoever is doing it is too cautious and skilled to be discovered.

Eventually, as the late-afternoon sun is slanting through the trees, the PCs emerge into a small cleared area nestled close to the base of the mountains. Any PC making a **Hunting/Perception** roll (or **Commerce/Perception**) at TN 10 can tell that this region used to be much more travelled than it is today. The village which huddles in this small clearing is obviously poor, dilapidated, and underpopulated. The handful of peasants working the small rice fields regard the PCs with obvious fear and trepidation. There is no inn or teahouse in this town, and any inquiries or questions are directed to the house of the headman, Inu.

Inu is a thin, sunken-chested old man whose large family cowers behind him as he meets with the PCs. “How may we serve you, mighty strangers?” Inu quavers. “We are loyal peasants, great samurai, very loyal!” The other villagers nod and murmur in anxious agreement. “Anything you need, we will do our best!”

The secret of Somatsu Village is easily found: at the far edge of the clearing, where the forest has reclaimed old farmland, lies a large round capstone, about eight feet in diameter and obviously quite thick (ten inches). Carved into the top of the stone is the kanji for “Forbidden.” Any questions about maho, Bloodspeakers, strange happenings in the village, and so forth will cause the peasants to quickly lead the PCs to this site, all the while proclaiming that they have never touched it, no never, have no idea what could be underneath it, loyal peasants like them would never meddle with such things, and so forth. If the PCs ask how the stone came to be here, and what the story is behind it, the peasants will (with great reluctance, and much prodding) recount the following tale.

The Legend of Somatsu Village:

“There was a rebellion once. Of course we had nothing to do with that, noble samurai.” (Mass agreement.) *“We are very loyal, samurai-sama! Very loyal!”* (Much bowing and scraping.) *“This was in our fathers’ fathers’ time, samurai-sama, a hundred years ago and more. There was a rebellion, and the peasants used evil magic.”* (Much horrified whispering and making of warding gestures.) *“Yes, terrible magic, blood sacrifices. So my grandmother said. Kitsune-sama killed them, of course. They deserved it!”* (Mass enthusiastic agreement.) *“Then he sealed their evil magic away beneath that great round stone. We have never touched it, great samurai! We are good, obedient peasants!”*

Any PC making a **History/Intelligence** roll at TN 15 (or **Lore (Fox Clan)/Intelligence** at TN 5) knows there are no records of a peasant uprising, maho-inspired or otherwise, in this region. The peasants know nothing else about the rebellion, which has long since gained the status of myth for them. They do know that Kitsune Iuki is the linear descendant of the “Kitsune-sama” who defeated the peasant rebellion.

The Bloodspeakers attack!

The Bloodspeakers have been following the PCs, hoping to find a chance to seize the puzzle-box; the presence of the Kitsune spirits prevented them from acting during the journey, but now that they have reached the village, the proximity of the very stash they seek drives them to action.

When the Bloodspeakers strike will depend on the PCs’ actions. If the PCs decide to open the sealed pit immediately, the Bloodspeakers attack before they can complete the task; the cultists rush from the nearby

woods while Isawa Gonto stands at the edge of the trees casting spells. If, on the other hand, the PCs decide to wait until morning, the Bloodspeakers will wait and stage a midnight ambush, hoping thereby to gain a greater advantage. In that case, much depends on whether the PCs set watches or not – if they do, whoever is watching must roll **Battle/Perception** at TN 10 to notice the skulking Bloodspeakers in time to waken the rest of the party. If they do not set watches, have all the PCs roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 15 to awaken in time. PCs who are asleep are TN 5 to be hit.

Shosuro Tajiki has also followed the PCs (unless they gave him the puzzle-box, in which case he is long gone). He will observe everything from a distance, concealing himself in the shadows of the forest. However, if it appears the Bloodspeakers are about to slaughter all the PCs, Tajiki will intervene by flinging poisoned shuriken at the cultists. He will not show himself directly (the shuriken simply flash out of the darkness, each striking from a different direction), and the PCs will never be able to see him at all unless they have the spell “By the Light of Lord Moon” (which will show an athletic figure sprinting through the darkness). If the PCs ever meet Tajiki later, he will of course deny any knowledge of the mysterious “ninja” who saved them from the Bloodspeakers.

Regardless, the cultists will attempt to turn tail and flee if they are losing the fight badly (five or more of their number down, and the majority of the PCs still standing). Isawa Gonto will use the spell Know the Shadows to escape. As the cultists flee into the forest, however, the PCs hear a sudden burst of screaming quickly ended. If they pursue, all they find are a few ragged scraps of bloody cloth, and the prints of numerous foxes. The Kitsune have not taken well to these unpleasant visitors.

If Isawa Gonto is killed, the PCs can have his body searched by the village’s lone *eta* family. Besides his scrolls and weapons, which should be returned to the Phoenix Clan (failing to do so incurs an Honor penalty), he is also carrying a letter from one of his superiors in the Bloodspeaker Cult. This is HANDOUT #1. If Gonto flees into the woods and is killed by the Kitsune spirits, the PCs can make **Investigation/Perception** rolls at TN 15 to notice the crumpled letter amid the shredded remnants of Gonto’s kimono.

Bloodspeaker Cultists (8)

FIRE 1	AIR 1
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Agility 2	Reflexes 2
EARTH 2	WATER 1
	Strength 2
VOID 1	

Shadowlands Taint: 1.5

TN to be Hit: 10

Skills: Knife 2, Stealth 3

Equipment: Knife (1k1)

Isawa Gonto, Phoenix Clan shugenja and Bloodspeaker

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 4	WATER 2
VOID 3	

Shadowlands Taint: 3.2

Honor/Glory: 0.4/3.5

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja 2

Skills: Acting 3, Calligraphy 2, Defense 1, Etiquette 1, Investigation 1, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Bloodspeakers) 2, Meditation 2, Shintao 1, Sincerity 2, Tantojutsu 2, Theology 2

Spells: *Sense, Commune, Summon, (Fire) Fury of Osano-Wo, Inflammation, (Earth) Earth’s Stagnation, (Air) Command the Mind, Know the Shadows, Tempest of Air, (Water) Sympathetic Energies, (Maho) Animate the Dead, Dark Divination.*

Advantages/Disadvantages: Innate Ability (Fury of Osano-Wo), Strength of the Earth (rank 1)/Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker)

Equipment: Kimono, scroll satchel, wakizashi, tanto

The Well: Gendo’s Legacy

If the PCs decide to find out what lies beneath the massive capstone, they will need to pry it up; this requires an **Athletics/Strength** roll against a TN of 30. However, using prybars and other tools will reduce that to TN 20, and up to four additional PCs can assist with the effort (each PC who helps adds their Athletics skill, or 1 die if they have no skill, to the total number being rolled by the PC making the primary effort). Each PC can make one attempt to move the capstone, although there is no limit to how many times they can assist another PC; thus the maximum number of attempts is equal to the total number of PCs playing in the tournament. The PCs can also use magic against the

capstone, such as by persuading the Earth spirits to ease their grip on the rock. Reward any PCs who use creative ideas. However, the peasants will not help (except to provide prybars to samurai who demand them) since they are terrified of what lies beneath the stone.

Beneath the capstone, a foul-smelling shaft descends into the earth. The light of Mother Sun cannot reach the bottom, although you think you hear water splash faintly far below. But as you squint into the darkness, you notice an opening in the side of the shaft, about thirty feet below the surface.

To reach the opening, the PCs will need rope (if they don't have any, the peasants can reluctantly supply some heavy hempen cord) or flying magic; the sides of the shaft are sheer damp earth, impossible to climb. Climbing down a rope requires an **Athletics/Agility** roll at TN 5 to avoid an unlucky slip; if the PC wasn't tied off, allow any eligible PCs a **Hand-to-Hand/Agility** roll at TN 10 to catch their falling comrade. Otherwise, s/he will plummet seventy feet down to land in the mixture of water and mud which fills the bottom of the well, taking 5k5 damage (quite possibly fatal).

The side-passage is quite cramped, only six feet high and barely four wide, requiring the PCs to go in single file. The PCs will also need light sources (again, the village can provide torches if the PCs don't have anything suitable) to see anything once they enter the tunnel. The passage runs straight for about twenty feet, then slopes downward for thirty more, at which point the floor of the passage becomes soft and muddy. At this point the lead PC must roll **Simple Perception** at TN 20, or **Traps/Perception** at TN 10, to avoid a nasty trap which the previous tenants left behind a hundred years ago. (If the PC is probing the floor or otherwise exercising caution, the TN is reduced by 5.) The trap is a small pit concealed beneath the semi-liquid mud, just large enough for someone's foot to plunge in; at the bottom are several caltrops. The PC suffers 2k1 damage and is considered to be under the effects of the **Lame** disadvantage (-2 dice to all Agility rolls) for the duration of the scenario.

Twenty feet beyond the trap, the passage slopes up again, and the PCs notice that the foul stench which pervades the place is worsening. Any PC with the ability to detect Taint (such as a Rank 2 Moto Bushi) is sure that something vile is waiting up ahead.

The cramped earthen passage opens into a small, circular earthen cave, about fifteen feet across and

seven high, the roof supported by several old, rotting oaken beams. There is a small wooden chest or crate on the far side of the cave, but your attention is immediately riveted on the bony humanoid form which is seated crosslegged in the exact center of the room. Its skin is a sickly grey, stretched tight across monstrous, deformed bones, and long filthy claws adorn the hands which rest on its folded knees. Its face is sunken and withered, the lower jaw protruding grotesquely and sporting crooked yellow teeth. The thing makes no motion, and you might almost believe it was a statue if it were not for the dull, bluish light which flickers hatefully from its sunken eyes.

The PCs must roll **Fear** (rank 3). This thing is the Oni no Yotogi (Oni of Watching) which was left here by the Bloodspeakers to protect their treasure. It makes no motion until the PCs step into the cave, at which point it pops to its feet (shaking off a layer of mold and dirt which has accumulated in the last hundred years) and attacks. It cannot leave the cave, but can move anywhere within it. Only two PCs can enter the cave from the tunnel each round, and due to the cramped conditions here, archery is near-impossible (+15 to all TNs, and a fumble indicates a PC was hit instead). On the other hand, the Oni is not Invulnerable, and its only magical power is the corrupting effect of its touch. With courage and a little luck, the PCs should be able to defeat it.

Oni no Yotogi (Oni of Watching)

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 4	WATER 4

TN to be Hit: 20

Attacks: 5k3

Damage: 6k2

Armor: 7

Wounds: 20: -1; 40: -2; 60: -3; 80: Dead

Special Abilities: Fear (rank 3), Corrupting Touch. Each time the Oni no Yotogi strikes a PC, the PC must roll **Simple Earth** at TN 15 or gain a point of Shadowlands Taint. Also, any normal weapon which strikes the Oni immediately begins to rot and corrode from the effect of the Oni's Taint; this results in the weapon losing one die from its DR for each hit. If the weapon's DR is reduced to zero, the weapon is destroyed.

The Chest: a Dark Legacy

If the PCs open the chest (**Athletics/Strength** at TN 5 to pry it open), they find that the contents have been almost completely destroyed by a century of the damp and mold which infests the cave. There are several daggers, now badly rusted and almost useless (0k1 weapons), some moldered sludge which might once have been clothing, and a great pile of scrolls which have rotted together into a festering mass. Carefully pulling them apart discovers two scrolls which are still reasonably intact. Underneath the scrolls, still intact and undamaged, is a porcelain mask.

Any PC making a **Lore (Maho or Shadowlands)/Intelligence** roll at TN 10 recognizes the mask as a Maho artifact used to create zombies. It is a cursed and tainted item which should be destroyed (or at the very least, handed over to the authorities).

The two scrolls are barely legible. One of them is an oath of loyalty to the Bloodspeaker Cult and its imprisoned leader, Iuchiban, “who will someday be freed from the unjust imprisonment imposed on him by the Hantei dynasty.” The other scroll contains a Maho spell, Touch of Death. Like the mask, these are items which should either be destroyed immediately, or at least handed over to the authorities.

Any PC who actually takes the mask or the Maho scroll is committing a vile and dishonorable act, and immediately loses Honor. Any PC who sees another PC take either of these items, and fails to prevent it, also loses Honor (see the Adventure Summary for exact amounts of these penalties). But if the PCs are willing to pay such a price, they can acquire some genuine Maho abilities.

Aftermath and Consequences

It is up to the PCs what they do with the secrets they have found. Obviously, any outbreak of Maho should be reported to the local authorities (this is the law, as any Emerald Magistrate PC will know), but exactly how the PCs do this is their choice.

If they go to Kitsune Iuki and confront him with their discoveries, he sags mournfully and confesses his family’s secret. He is properly horrified to learn that there are still Bloodspeakers active among his peasants, and promises a full investigation. If the PCs took any captives from the Bloodspeaker ambush, he orders them thoroughly interrogated by his torturer. He also

asks the PCs to keep this story quiet, lest the dishonor shame his family forever. If the PCs do agree to keep the secret, they may write down **Rank 1 Favor: Kitsune Iuki** on their character sheets.

If the PCs report their discoveries to outside authorities (the Fox Clan daimyo, the provincial Emerald Magistrate, etc.), a full-scale investigation is launched. A few weeks later, the PCs hear that Kitsune Iuki committed *seppuku* to wipe the shame of the Maho uprising from his family.

If the PCs report Isawa Gonto’s activities to the Phoenix Clan (while returning his equipment, for example), the Phoenix they speak with are properly horrified at Gonto’s extra-curricular activities. Phoenix PCs gain +1 Glory for this deed.

Rewards for Completing the Adventure

At the end of the scenario, any PCs with Shadowlands Taint must make a Simple Earth roll with a TN of 5 + (5 x Taint Rank). If the roll is failed, the PC acquires one additional point of Taint.

Experience Points

For playing the adventure:	2 XP
Good role-playing:	+1 XP
Defeated the Bloodspeakers without Tajiki’s help:	+1 XP
Destroyed the Oni:	+1 XP
TOTAL POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE:	5 XP

Honor

PCs discover and destroy/dispose of the Maho stash: +1 Honor to Emerald Magistrate, Witch Hunter, Black Watch and Inquisitor characters.

PC keeps a Maho item (scroll or mask): -5 points of Honor per item (one full Rank of Honor for Emerald Magistrate, Witch Hunter, Black Watch and Inquisitor characters).

PC does not stop another PC from keeping a Maho item: -2 points of Honor per item (-4 points for Emerald Magistrate, Witch Hunter, Black Watch and Inquisitor characters).

Glory

Phoenix PCs gain +1 Glory for reporting the crimes of Isawa Gonto.

Special Awards/Penalties

If the PCs returned the puzzle-box to the Fox Clan, or if they discovered the secret of the Bloodspeaker uprising and promised to keep it a secret, they may write down **Rank 1 Favor: Kitsune Iuki** on their character sheets.

This will only be relevant if Iuki appears in a future Living Rokugan tournament. If, on the other hand, the PCs admitted having the puzzle-box but refused to return it, the PC with the puzzle-box must write down **Major Enemy: Kitsune Iuki**, and all other PCs must write down **Minor Enemy: Kitsune Iuki**. Again, this will only be relevant if Iuki appears in a future tournament.

Player Handout #1

Letter found on Isawa Gonto

Gonto,

I write you with good news. Our lord Yajinden believes he has found a way to finally free our Great Master from the imprisonment which the Hantei have inflicted upon him. We must gather all our resources for this effort. Spread the word to our people as you travel through the Empire.

Also, it has come to our attention that a lost store of our artifacts is hidden somewhere in Fox lands. If you can recover these, it will aid our great effort immensely.

The future will be ours!

S.