

A Magistrate's Duty

**A One Round Low-Rank Tournament for Living
Rokugan**

Chapter 4 of “The Soul of Iuchiban”

by Robert Hobart

A Dragon clan magistrate asks your help in solving a mysterious crime wave in Scorpion territories. Terrible things are afoot, and it may already be too late.

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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 Rank adventure. This means that only Rank 1 or 2 characters should be allowed to play. This adventure was not written with Rank 3 or higher characters in mind and cannot anticipate what these characters may bring to the table.

The world of Rokugan is a cross between feudal Japan and China. It is set in an age of honorable samurai, serving their Lords (Daimyo) 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

The Bloodspeaker Cult is on the move. After more than two centuries, they have at last found a way to free their dreaded master Iuchiban from his imprisonment in his legendary Tomb. But to complete that task, they must liberate a portion of his jade coffin from the heart of the tomb itself.

To this end, packs of Bloodspeakers are searching throughout the southern territories of the Empire, trying to hunt down the lost Tomb. In their wake they leave terror, murder, and disaster. A large group of cultists is operating in the lands of a Scorpion daimyo, Bayushi Samoshii, believing the hidden Tomb to be somewhere on his territories. The cultists, traveling in the guise of a group of monks on pilgrimage, stopped at a small local monastery and took it over, murdering the four resident monks that night. Despite being surprised, the monks did not go without struggle – one cultist died. The remainder, secure in their new base, set about the work of finding the tomb.

Their activities have not gone completely undetected, however. An Emerald Magistrate, Kitsuki Yumi, has

noticed the sudden surge of unsolved murders and strange incidents in the area, and is seeking help to solve the problem.

Unfortunately, Yumi's attempts at investigation are being thwarted by bad weather, ill health, and a local daimyo, Bayushi Samoshii, who not only distrusts all Kitsuki on general principles but is also unwilling to admit that his lands may be having problems (such as would be admitting his own ineffectual rule, to his mind). The PCs, traveling through these lands on their own business, will find themselves caught between Kitsuki Yumi's investigation and Bayushi Samoshii's intransigence.

If the PCs agree to help Yumi, they will have a chance to track down a pack of Bloodspeakers and follow them to a tomb. Luckily, this is not the real Tomb, but rather one of the two false tombs which were built to lead the Bloodspeaker Cult astray. Unluckily, the real Tomb is discovered just as the PCs are dealing with the cultists at the false one... and the Bloodspeakers' plot advances one more step.

Credit Where it is Due: The brief exploration of a false Tomb of Iuchiban which occurs late in this adventure is based directly on the original *Tomb of Iuchiban* boxed set (Alderac 1999).

Introduction

It is the early days of the month of Togashi, the month of the Rat (November) in the common usage. The winds of autumn, laden with the damp chill of the impending winter, accompanied you as your lords' business took you to the southern Scorpion territories. Even the light of Mother Sun seemed wan and tentative, and when dark gray clouds came rushing out of the west, you made haste to seek shelter before the storm might break. It proved a wise decision, for when the clouds burst they brought icy sleet, sleet which became a wet, early, unseasonable snow by the time you reached the next village. The warm light from the inn's windows seemed a blessing from the Fortunes themselves, and you staggered inside gratefully. By the time you had bathed and changed into clean clothes, the snow was piling thickly on the road, and it was apparent that travel would be halted for at least a day or so. As the innkeeper brings out your dinner, you have a chance to make the acquaintance of others who share your snowbound fate.

This is the cue for the players to describe their characters and role-play introducing themselves to each other.

The Inn of Ikaru Village

The inn's common room is crowded with people, both commoners and samurai, taking shelter from the unexpected storm. The air is damp and close, and the pleasant smells of dinner and sake are a welcome distraction from the odors of close-packed humanity.

The inn is normally clean and well-kept (only the sudden arrival of so many people, sheltering from the bad weather, impinges on its atmosphere) and offers excellent food and drink. Since this is also a Scorpion inn, there is a gambling room in the back (behind the kitchens) although the innkeeper will be careful who he tells about this. He knows better than to mention such things to honorable sticklers like Lion or Crane, but will be sure to notify any Crab or Ronin.

Besides the PCs, the following other individuals are at the inn:

- **Various commoners.** A variety of peasants and craftsmen from the village are here, eating, drinking, and gossiping. They sit separately from the samurai, and are careful to keep their voices lowered and their eyes averted from their betters. Any PC who tries to overhear their talk (rolling **Simple Perception** at TN 10) can catch that they are concerned about rumors of murders and disappearances in neighboring villages.
- **A merchant, Iyashii.** This pudgy little commoner will grumble to anyone who can listen about being snowed into this "profitless backwater." He has no significance.
- **Fuku, a Monk.** This man is one of the Bloodspeakers, here to keep an eye on things in the local daimyo's town. He will not be detectable as a Bloodspeaker unless the PCs have a way of finding Taint (such as a Witch-Hunter). He avoids initiating any conversations and simply observes the scene with a faint smile. Any PC who watches him for a time can make a **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 15 to notice a sense of arrogance and hostility beneath his calm veneer. If any PC grows suspicious of him, or accuses him of Taint, Fuku pretends to be saddened and insulted by their attitudes, and departs for his monastery to warn his fellows that nosy samurai are in the area.

- **Various anonymous Scorpion bushi.** These samurai look a little askance at strangers, but are polite enough. The GM should feel free to improvise Scorpion bushi personalities to round out the crowd.
- **Bayushi Kishoku, Scorpion castle guard.** Currently off-duty, this thirty-something man has rough-edged but pleasant features (think Rutger Hauer) and wears his hair in a precise topknot. He is here to drink some sake, enjoy a few stories with fellow samurai, and toss a few gambling dice in the back room. If any PCs speak with him, he will mention the troubles his lord has been having with “an interfering Dragon magistrate, one of those meddling Kitsuki.” He will invite likely-seeming PCs to join him in the gaming room.
- **Bayushi Dainashi, son of the daimyo.** This arrogant, irresponsible young man is an example of the very worst the samurai caste has to offer: a self-centered, childish thug who uses the Celestial Order and the code of Bushido to abuse others and amuse himself. He is also carrying on a torrid affair with one of the samurai-ko at his father’s castle, Bayushi Kumi. Dainashi is quite young (mid-teens, just a year past his gempukku), and fairly handsome in a pouting-young-punk sort of way. He is also the only man in the inn who is carrying his swords, a severe breach of etiquette which everyone carefully ignores.
- **Bayushi Kumi, local samurai-ko.** Kumi is Dainashi’s secret lover. She is a pretty young samurai-ko with a heart-shaped face and hair worn in a long braided pigtail. Although she is a couple of years older than Dainashi, she is still young enough to be swept away by her desires, forgetting her duties to bushido. Although superficially her behavior seems no different than the other samurai, anyone watching for a little while and rolling **Simple Awareness** (TN 15) will notice the way she and Dainashi often look at each other with distinctly un-samurai-like expressions. The other guards know better than to pay attention to such things – after all, Dainashi will someday be their lord.
- **Ide Chian, Unicorn traveler.** This man is literally “just passing through,” a Unicorn indulging the wanderlust which afflicts so many of their clan. Quiet and contemplative,

with long hair under a fur hat and a thin, neatly-trimmed goatee, this man will speak pleasantly enough with fellow Unicorns but does not otherwise involve himself in the PCs’ affairs. He is an inveterate gambler and will spend the latter half of the evening in the back room tossing dice (which he considers a “harmless and amusing diversion”).

- **Goju Ota.** Tucked into one corner of the inn is a small, unprepossessing commoner who minds his own business. This “man” is a Goju, a servant of the Living Darkness who is passing through the area on the business of his nameless master. He has no significance to the scenario, and will not play any role in this encounter unless one or more of the PCs have been marked by the Living Darkness (such as by wearing a Shadow Brand, or by getting Shadow Corruption in the adventure *A Foreign Legacy*) or carry Crystal weapons. In that case, have each such PC roll **Simple Perception**. The PC with the *lowest* roll happens to glance at the quiet man in the corner and sees, for just a moment, the face of a hated and dangerous foe they had believed dead. Then the face blurs into a blank oval that somehow, impossibly, is smiling at them. The air in the inn seems to flicker; when the PC looks again, the little man is gone, as though he had never been.

The Incident

The main purpose of this encounter is for the PCs to get into a violent confrontation with Bayushi Dainashi. The rotten young samurai regards himself as above any rules of proper behavior – after all, he’s a daimyo’s son! He is also drunk, getting drunker as the evening wears on, and becomes belligerent and temperamental when under the influence of alcohol.

How the incident happens depends on whether any of the PCs have decided to partake of the gambling room. If they have, Dainashi stumbles back to join them, accompanied by his lover Kumi. He will rapidly begin losing (he is too drunk to play effectively) and begins accusing the PC(s) of cheating. The other samurai (such as Bayushi Kishoku) will try to calm him down, but the more he loses, the angrier and more insulting he gets. If his behavior does not provoke a challenge from a PC, he will finally either “demand satisfaction” (from most Clan PCs) or simply draw his katana and attack (against ronin, Crab, or Minor Clan PCs). A PC who challenges him will be met with an immediate attack.

If none of the PCs go to the gaming room, Bayushi Dainashi will remain in the common room and begin insulting one of their Clans – preferably one the Scorpion typically despise, such as the Crab, Unicorn, or Lion. The other Scorpions will sycophantically laugh along with the insults, and Dainashi will deliberately step on sacred cows and cross etiquette lines, secure in his own superior station. If a PC does not challenge him, Dainashi will eventually pick a fight with someone (again, preferably a member of a Clan he despises). He may well simply draw and attack if a PC returns his insults.

The point of all this is for a PC to end up in a violent confrontation with Bayushi Dainashi. As soon as this happens, one of the Scorpion bushi will leave in search of the castle guards, and the others head to the door to get their weapons. Meanwhile the PCs will find it fairly easy to defeat the drunken Dainashi, who looks shocked and dismayed (the expression of a bully faced with resistance for the first time) when he is hurt. At that point the luckless PC(s) will be abruptly surrounded by armed Scorpion bushi, while one of them helps Dainashi up. “Are you unhurt, Bayushi-sama?”

The PC(s) involved in the fight will be arrested immediately, along with any other PCs who supported them or can be connected to them. All other PCs will be detained as witnesses. In case any PCs harbor notions of fighting their way out, a large troop of reinforcements (fifteen Scorpion bushi) arrives from the castle.

A Difficult Situation

The PCs are disarmed and escorted into the castle’s main audience hall, where they find themselves interrupting a confrontation between the daimyo, Bayushi Samoshii, and Kitsuki Yumi.

The middle-aged man who is apparently the local daimyo is in the midst of an angry argument with a slim woman dressed in the green and gold colors of the Dragon Clan. It seems she is requesting (or more precisely, politely demanding) the assistance of his troops to root out some criminals in the area. The woman is obviously ill, pale and slightly shaky, but her voice is firm as she insists that Lord Bayushi Samoshii offer her the assistance of his samurai.

“These so-called crimes are merely peasant rumors!” the daimyo replies angrily. “I certainly cannot spare any of my valuable samurai on such a fool’s errand.” Rudely turning his back on the Dragon woman, he whirls to confront the guards. “What is all this?” he

demands. “These samurai attacked your son,” they reply.

Any PC who rolls **Heraldry/Perception** at TN 5 recognizes that the woman is of the Kitsuki family. TN 10 or better notices the sash of an Emerald Magistrate around her waist. Any PCs who have played the adventure *Kitsuki Evidence* will automatically recognize Kitsuki Yumi.

Let the PCs offer whatever defense they wish against the guards’ accusations. If some of them are of significant social position (Emerald Magistrates, Imperial family, Glory of 3.0 or more, etc.) they will probably be able to argue themselves out of trouble, but anyone without such protections, and anyone (regardless of position) directly involved in the incident with Dainashi, will not be able to get through to Lord Samoshii with their arguments. It should be plain that Bayushi Samoshii has no intention in finding the actual truth of what happened.

At this point, Kitsuki Yumi intervenes. She clears her throat carefully and remarks, “It would pain me greatly, Bayushi-sama, to report to the Emerald Champion that you have refused my lawful requests for help.” The daimyo breaks off to bark that they have already discussed such matters, and his ruling is final. “Ah,” Yumi nods. “Then I must prepare for my journey to Otosan Uchi. It has been a while since I visited the capital, after all. I’m sure the court would be fascinated to hear my tales of the far-distant corners of the Empire, and,” she pauses to regard the PCs for a moment, “of the ways in which justice is dealt there.” She smiles pleasantly. “But don’t let me keep you from your business any longer, Bayushi-sama. Let me collect my mount from your stables and I will be on my way.” She is walking (slightly shakily) toward the exit when Bayushi Samoshii says, in a voice that seems dragged from within him, “Wait.”

Samoshii sarcastically suggests, “if Kitsuki Yumi-sama is so interested in the conduct of justice in my realm, she explain how I should punish these visiting samurai for their crimes.” Yumi smiles sweetly and says, “Well, since you have no guards who can be spared to assist my investigations, perhaps these unfortunate samurai could be given that pointless duty. After all, I am sure they have many more important duties than helping some visiting magistrate investigate a non-existent crime.”

Samoshii sputters for a moment, then waves his hand. “Very well. But they are not to remain within this castle, Kitsuki Yumi-kun, and neither are *you*.” He points at the PCs. “Begone!” He whirls and stalks out

of the room without bowing. His son follows him, shooting the PCs a poisonous glance as he goes.

Meeting Kitsuki Yumi

After this incident, Kitsuki Yumi will return to the Inn and meet privately with the PCs, both those she saved and those who were able to rescue themselves. Seen up close, it is obvious that she is suffering from a fever: dark rings lie beneath her eyes, and she is sweating despite the cold. Nevertheless, she holds herself stiffly under control, and her words are clear and lucid.

“I am an Emerald magistrate, and in recent months I have been investigating sudden outbreaks of murder and disappearance throughout the western and southern Empire. I believe these matters are connected, part of some larger pattern of evil that threatens the very foundations of our beloved Empire. Of course,” she smiles self-deprecatingly, “I have no proof for such a suspicion. It is merely an intuition, the Fortunes whispering in my ear. And I am afraid that Lord Bayushi Samoshii has proven quite reluctant to assist my inquiries.”

Yumi explains that she has followed a trail of vanishings and murders south through Scorpion lands to this region, where the intransigence of the local daimyo and her own poor health have stymied her work. “I fear that by investigating in poor weather, I may have pushed my body beyond its limits.” (Another self-deprecating smile.) She arrived at this village thirteen days ago, but due to her failing health has been unable to do more than learn the local gossip. Her appeals to Bayushi Samoshii for help have of course gone unanswered.

Yumi intends to remain at the inn for now, since she needs to rest and recover her strength. She asks that the PCs investigate in her stead, and is prepared to name them as temporary yoriki (assistants) to that purpose. She suggests they especially look into unsolved murders, vanishings, and any reports of strangers traveling in the area recently, since she suspects the crimes may be caused by a traveling pack of Bloodspeakers (whether she confides this suspicion depends on whether the PCs seem sympathetic to her or not). Regardless, she expects them to report back to her periodically on what they have discovered, especially if they learn anything concrete.

Yumi has a sketch-map of the area (HANDOUT #1) which she will offer to the PCs. She has managed to accumulate the following practical information since arriving here:

- There are rumors of disappearances in the neighboring village of Houi.
- About two weeks ago, right before Yumi arrived, another village (Sencha) reported the disappearance of a visiting Phoenix shugenja-ko and her yojimbo.
- There are recent reports of a violent murder in a third village, Juujiro.
- Yumi explains that she has been noticing this same pattern (waves of disappearances and mysterious violent murders) throughout the lands of the southwestern Empire, and believes them to be connected. She may mention, if she trusts the PCs, that a similar crime wave in Miya lands late last winter was caused by a Bloodspeaker cult. She believes the same evil may be at work here.
- If the PCs ask whether she knows of any useful local information sources, Yumi thinks for a while, then suggests trying to meet with the local Scorpion magistrate. “I am afraid my own efforts focused solely on Lord Samoshii. The magistrate might not cooperate, of course, but it cannot hurt to try.”
- Yumi also mentions that there is a monastery in Sencha Village, although she has been unable to travel there herself. “They may know more of what is happening than the samurai, since they are closer to the common folk.”

A Meeting with Bayushi Samoshii

If any of the PCs are Scorpions, or have allies or favors among the Scorpion Clan, Lord Samoshii will send them a message demanding their attendance at his castle the next morning. He meets the PCs in the same audience chamber where they encountered him the day before. His son does not attend the meeting, of course, but the PCs may pass him in the halls of the castle – the young Scorpion glowers at the PCs menacingly.

Samoshii will try to convince these PCs to sabotage Kitsuki Yumi’s investigations. “Her unjustified investigations are an insult to me, to our family, to our Clan itself. My own magistrate can easily deal with whatever minor problems have arisen here.”

It is up to the PCs whether they go along with Samoshii or investigate honestly.

The Local Magistrate

Although Lord Samoshii is determined to be uncooperative with this hated Kitsuki, the local magistrate, Bayushi Kojime, is actually a fairly competent and honorable man who is trapped by his lord's intransigence. If the PCs wish to meet Kojime, they will have to speak with him directly (his lord will insist that he is too busy to speak with the PCs). A private message to Kojime can elicit a meeting (especially if the PCs make effective use of manners and etiquette). This will lead to the following scene:

The magistrate meets you in a room of his private dwelling. He is a large man, but moves with an odd delicacy as he offers you tea and rice cakes. His voice is soft and smooth. "Although my lord has forbidden me from assisting your investigation, I see no harm in a simple conversation. Words are nothing, after all."

Kojime has very restrained body language, and never grows angry or raises his voice – these are mannerisms he has developed to compensate for his disturbingly large size. He seeks always to project harmlessness.

Kojime is one of those rare Scorpions who actually takes Honor seriously, although he is careful not to reveal this to other Scorpions, or to courtiers who might use the knowledge against him. How he responds to the PCs depends on the impression they present. PCs who seem both honorable and diplomatic will impress him best. Loud, talkative, or obviously dishonorable samurai will get much less cooperation.

Kojime has the following information:

- There have been a total of three disappearances in the neighboring village of Houi, all in the last month.
- He sent two samurai out to investigate in Houi after the third disappearance. They reported finding nothing, but Kojime suspects that at least one of them, Bayushi Jakkou, was lying. If the PCs impress him favorably, Kojime will confess, "Something about Jakkou-kun's eyes just did not seem right. Still, my Lord says there is no need to investigate further, so I dismissed the matter."
- Another village, Sencha, has indeed reported the disappearance of a visiting Phoenix shugenja, Isawa Taeko, and her yojimbo Shiba Otembo. This happened fifteen days ago. The two Phoenix were traveling through the area, and had briefly called at the castle to present their names. If Kojime favors the PCs, he mentions he has heard rumors that Taeko was

an Inquisitor and was investigating the disappearances. Kojime was going to investigate the disappearance, but when Kitsuki Yumi arrived, Lord Samoshii ordered him to halt all activities until after she left.

- The murder in Juujiro Village happened three days ago. A woodcutter was found mutilated in the forest outside the village. Lord Samoshii forbade an investigation, dismissing the matter as a "peasant rumor."
- If (and only if) the PCs come across well to Kojime, he mentions that a peasant from Sencha Village came to the castle the same day as the PCs arrived, reporting the disappearance of a neighbor woman and her child. Kojime has not yet dispatched anyone to investigate the report.
- If the PCs ask about any unusual visitors or travelers, Kojime will mention Kitsuki Yumi and the aforementioned pair of Phoenix ("we seldom get visitors from their lands"). As an afterthought, he also mentions a group of traveling monks that are staying at the Monastery in Sencha Village. They arrived here late last summer and joined the smaller group who already lived there. Kojime has considered asking the monastery for help with these crimes, but fears Lord Samoshii would hear of it.

Kojime's Two Scorpion Samurai

Bayushi Eiki and Bayushi Jakkou are both young men, only a few years past their gempukku. The PCs can only meet with them if they have learned of their visit to Houi Village, either from Bayushi Kojime or by questioning the peasants in Houi Village.

The two samurai explain they were dispatched to investigate in Houi at Magistrate Kojime's orders, after the third reported disappearance.

- The samurai found nothing to point to any sinister cause for the reports. The three supposed victims were a boy, an old man, and a teenage girl. None of them knew each other or were connected in any way. Further, none of them were of any importance to the village, and in fact, only the testimony of the peasants proved they had ever existed at all.
- The only apparent link between the three supposed disappearances was that all three happened in the evening or at night.
- If the PCs ask about the names of the victims, the samurai do not recall, and suggest the PCs speak with the village headman. "These

peasants are all alike.” They will recall that the girl, who was the most recent to vanish, was supposedly engaged to marry a boy from another family.

- If any PCs should ask about monks (perhaps as a result of information they gained from speaking with the villagers), Eiki mentions that some monks were visiting the village, trying to comfort the family of the most recent disappearance. Jakkou will say nothing about the monks, claiming he never spoke with them.
- Any PC who tries to test the truthfulness of these samurai may roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 20 (TN 10 if using **Ichi Miru/Awareness**). Success indicates the PC notices an odd hitch in Jakkou’s speech whenever he describes his search of the village, as though he is skipping something (to a 20th Century listener, like a skipping record).

Jakkou’s memory has been magically altered by the Bloodspeaker monks. He can be broken out of his amnesia through any of the following methods:

- A PC can try to browbeat/intimidate Jakkou into telling the truth. This will require a Contested Roll of the PC’s **Willpower** (or **Intimidation/Willpower**) against Jakkou’s Awareness of 3. If successful, Jakkou’s face contorts as he struggles to remember, and he finally recalls the tale listed below.
- A shugenja PC can *Commune* with the Air spirits around Jakkou. The Air spirits reveal that Jakkou’s thoughts have been disordered by “ugly Air spirits.” A roll of **Lore (Shugenja)**, **Lore (Maho)**, **Theology**, or **Spellcraft** (all with **Intelligence**) at TN 10 surmises these “ugly spirits” are kansen, the evil spirits which Maho invokes.
- PCs who realize that Jakkou’s mind has been clouded by kansen can attempt to summon proper Air spirits to cleanse his thoughts. This will require casting *Summon* (Air) with two Raises. If successful, Jakkou recalls the tale below.

If Jakkou recovers his memories, he recounts the following story. It is incomplete, but he cannot remember more than this.

“I was investigating the northern edge of the woods, past where the girl’s fiancée lived. It had occurred to me that she might have gotten lost on her way home from his house. And... in fact,” he frowns as he struggles to recall the memories, “I did find some tracks. Sandaled feet, heading into the woods. I

followed them for a time... and then I found bloodstains.” He shakes his head in confusion. “I was going... to look around more, and I met two monks. I spoke with them, asked if they had seen anything. One of them... said something. I don’t remember... his voice was very deep. Like it echoed through my whole head. And then I returned to the village.” He shakes his head again, like a dog emerging from water. “I don’t know why I didn’t remember that before.”

INVESTIGATING at the VILLAGES

The snowy weather makes investigations difficult, as travel is slowed to almost nothing. It will take the PCs several hours of laborious travel to move between each of the four villages (Ikaru, Houi, Juujiro, and Sencha). How long the total investigation takes depends on where the PCs go and how aggressive they are – a party which happens to visit Sencha Village first, and immediately visits the monastery, will finish things in a single day, while a slower party may take two or three days or even never solve the mystery at all.

The descriptions given here offer only a few NPCs. The GM should feel free to improvise whatever additional peasant/commoner personalities seem appropriate to round out the different villages

Houi Village

The village huddles amid squat trees and snow-covered ridges, carefully terraced for now-frozen rice paddies. There is no obvious inn or teahouse, although you can see a few larger buildings that may be craftsmen’s shops. Smoke curls from vents in the roofs of most of the huts, but other than that, there is no sign of the residents.

This village, as the least-traveled of the four, has been the cultists’ major target for acquiring victims, and three people have been kidnapped and sacrificed. The people are frightened, and hide inside their dwellings until the PCs approach them.

The obvious route here is to speak with the village headman, a pudgy fellow in his fifties named Taro. He is nervous and clearly unhappy speaking with strange samurai, and keeps asking whether the PCs are from Lord Samoshii-sama, and if not, why they are here. “Those other samurai from Lord Samoshii-sama didn’t stay long.”

From speaking with headman Taro the PCs can learn the following:

- The first disappearance was a boy, who vanished around sunset while out fetching firewood. The villagers thought maybe a wolf or other beast had taken him.
- The second disappearance was an older man, returning from an evening trip to his outhouse. The villagers reported the disappearances to Magistrate Kojime after this incident, but there was no response.
- The third and most recent victim was a teenage girl, Natsuko, who went to visit her fiancée's family. She vanished on the way home later that evening.
- After Natsuko's disappearance, the two samurai (Bayushi Eiki and Bayushi Jakkou) came to the village. They went around the village asking questions but claimed not to find anything.
- If the PCs ask whether the village has gotten any help other than the visit of the two samurai, Taro mentions that monks from Sencha village have visited after the second and third disappearance, offering comfort and kind words to the families. If the PCs ask, the third visit was on the same day that the samurai came from the castle.

If the PCs ask around the village about the two samurai, they can find a boy who remembers seeing one of the samurai (Jakkou) walk into the woods, as though following something, and then return later. The boy recalls that Jakkou looked "strange and distracted, like he was listening to something" when he returned.

The Families

If the PCs speak with the families of the three victims, they will mostly hear only a longer and more tearful version of the tales which Headman Taro offered. However, if they speak with the family of Natsuko, something interesting may happen: as the mother says that the visiting monks were "very comforting," her youngest son (about eight years old) suddenly screams, "They were bad!" He flees as his parents scold him for his bad manners.

If the PCs chase down the little boy (whose name is Gako), he is extremely uncooperative and bratty, but can be intimidated or bribed into confessing that the monks "all looked at us like we were bugs!" He can offer no concrete words or evidence to back this angry claim – it is an instinctive perception. "I just know! I could tell! They hated us!"

Searching the Area

If the PCs explore the woods around the village (acting on their own initiative, or based on information they extracted from Bayushi Jakkou), they can roll **Investigation/Perception** or **Hunting/Perception** at TN 20 (TN 15 if they specifically search in the area near the girl's fiancée's hut). A success discovers some spatters of dried blood on a few trees. Searching beneath the snow will find more dried blood on the ground. If any of the PCs can detect Taint, there is a very faint residual of it here.

There is no trail to follow from here. However, if there are shugenja among the PCs, they can interrogate the Spirits here. The Water spirits are newcomers (in the snow), but the Earth and Air spirits can provide the following information:

- If the PCs ask about the blood, or about a girl, the spirits describe "some men" who dragged a girl here, made lots of noise, and then cut her and "let out her water." If the PCs question Air spirits, they mention that the men wore clothing "the color of the snow." (Monks traditionally wear either white or saffron.) Both spirits will mention that "bad spirits" came when the girl died, although they mostly left afterwards.
- If the PCs ask where the men went, the spirits direct them southwest (toward Sencha Village).
- If the PCs ask about Bayushi Jakkou's visit here, the spirits describe the "red man with swords" speaking with two other men (again, in snow-colored robes). The other men spoke and "spilled some of their water," and "ugly Air spirits" came and danced around the man in red. Then he went away.

Juujiro Village

The road winds through the forest and finally emerges at a clearing, where a half-dozen huts cluster around a crossroads, a meeting between your route and another secondary road. You can see a few fields and rice paddies, frozen and white with snow, beyond. A small inn perches next to the crossroads, displaying a sign with the kanji for "Meeting."

This village was home to the recent violent murder of a woodcutter, three days before the PCs arrived. The PCs can learn more by speaking with the headman (a short, squat little fellow named Toba) or by visiting the "Meeting Inn" and speaking with the innkeeper and

local clientele. There are no samurai in this village – it exists only because of the crossroads.

The PCs can easily learn that the woodcutter was named Eijiro, and that he failed to return from a trip into the forest to collect firewood. His family eventually (that evening) went in search of him and found his mangled corpse deep within the woods.

The Murder Site

If the PCs ask to be guided to the murder site, they walk over a half-mile into the woods before reaching it. The trees have kept out the worst of the snow, but the ground is still coated in white. The murder site is thus largely invisible beneath the snow, although it can be recognized from the splatters of dried blood on the surrounding trees. Any peasants who guide the PCs here will be fearful and anxious to leave. PCs investigating the scene can find the following clues:

- If the PCs scrape away the snow, they can see frozen bloodstains and deep, claw-like gouges in the ground. A **Hunting/Intelligence** (or a suitable **Lore** skill) roll at TN 10 determines that the marks do not match the claws of a natural animal. If a PC asks whether a monster could make such marks, a roll of **Lore (Shadowlands)/Intelligence** at TN 15 suggests that they could indeed be the clawtracks of an oni or similar being.
- If the PCs look for any kind of trail, a roll of **Hunting/Perception** or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 15 discovers a few scattered bloodstains on trees heading off in a northwesterly direction.
- If the PCs have shugenja in their party, they can *Commune* with the spirits in the area. The numerous Water spirits in the snow know nothing – they arrived here after the murder – but Earth and Air spirits can both describe seeing the “man” run through the trees pursued by “a bad thing” or a “dark spirit” which destroyed him. The man came from the northwest, and the dark spirit returned that way after destroying the man.
- If the PCs travel to the northwest, another half-mile of travel brings them to the Ritual Site (see below) outside Sencha Village.

Sencha Village

The trail winds down into a narrow valley between two rocky hills. Most of the huts perch on the slopes, sheltering under overhanging trees, although now the bare limbs and branches sport only snow. The bottom

of the valley holds the frozen, snow-shrouded rice paddies and grain fields which feed the village. You can see a large building which is probably an inn at the edge of the fields. Across the valley, a torii arch guards a cleared stone path which winds into the hills – probably denoting a monastery.

This village was where the Phoenix visitor, shugenja Isawa Taeko, and her yojimbo Shiba Otembo vanished fifteen days ago. The village has also just had a pair of disappearances a day before the PCs arrived, right before the snow. As a result, the villagers are quite anxious and fearful, and readily cooperate with the PCs in hope of getting help, any help.

The Disappearances

These took place the day before the PCs first arrived in the area. The victims were Kozue, a widowed mother, and her six-year-old daughter. Kozue’s husband died of “the flux” last year. Her child was ill, and she was afraid it might be the flux again; she took the child to the local monastery to seek help and medicine. The wife of a neighbor saw her return that evening. The next morning, however, when another villager called at her house, nobody was home, and the fire was cold.

There are no physical clues to be found in Kozue’s hut. However, if shugenja PCs question Air spirits (and only Air spirits) in or around the hut, they can learn that Air kansen (“ugly Air spirits”) were here that night. (The Bloodspeakers created a dark illusion of Kozue to throw any suspicion off themselves.)

The Inn of the Clever Frog

The signboard of this inn shows a frog smiling at a Scorpion. Below the frog are the kanji for “No, please, after you.” Any PC rolling **Simple Intelligence** at TN 5 will recognize this as a humorous reference to the famous tale of the scorpion and the frog. The innkeeper Mako (who is, unusually for a peasant, literate) will be happy to recount that tale to any guests. He explains his signboard thusly: “A wise and clever frog will always recognize the scorpion’s nature, and his own, yes? Just as a wise and clever innkeeper will never aspire to be anything but what he is.” He smiles engagingly.

If the PCs ask at the inn about the vanished Phoenix, they can learn the following:

- Isawa Taeko and her yojimbo both stayed at the inn for many days. They had clearly done much traveling before coming here.
- They asked questions about the disappearances in neighboring Houi Village. They were often

gone for hours at a time, sometimes not returning until the evening.

- Taeko often went for a walk alone in the evening, much to the distress of her yojimbo. The young Shiba was very earnest about his duties, and seemed frustrated with Taeko's willfulness.
- The night they vanished, Taeko returned from her walk and ordered Otembo to "fetch his swords and follow." She seemed very serious, maybe even angry. They both went out and never returned.

The inn still has the remaining belongings of the two Phoenix. The innkeeper would much rather be rid of these things, given their association with mystery, and if any of the PCs are Phoenix or magistrates he eagerly hands them over. These comprise the following:

- Isawa Taeko's traveling bag. It contains her journal (HANDOUT #2), a personal chop identifying her as an Inquisitor, spare clothing, and 11 koku in coins.
- Shiba Otembo's traveling bag. It contains spare clothing, a small ivory plaque inscribed with the kanji for "Duty," a piece of paper with an incomplete love-poem, a personal chop, and a jade-edged tanto (0k2).

Note that keeping any of these items (rather than returning them to the Phoenix Clan) is dishonorable. However, using them during the investigation might be acceptable, since that would be fulfilling the incomplete mission of this poor Inquisitor.

If the PCs question other villagers about the night when the Phoenix vanished, they can roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 15 to discover a peasant who remembers seeing the two Phoenix heading into the woods in the direction of the monastery. "Come to think of it, there was some light in the woods, like someone had a fire burning."

The Ritual Site

The PCs may find this location if they follow the tracks from the Dark Monastery, if they simply search the woods around Sencha Village (inspired, perhaps, by accounts of "a fire in the woods"), or if they backtrack from the murder site in Juujiro Village.

Amid the thin tree-trunks is a patch of bare earth, at the center of which lies a thick pile of ashes and charred wood. A thin stream of smoke still trickles upward from the gray-white coals. The bare ground surrounding the ashes is covered in dark stains. Many sandaled footprints cover the snow around the area.

- Anyone who examines the remains of the fire can roll **Simple Perception** at TN 10, or **Medicine/Perception** at TN 5, to notice scorched bones among the ashes – including, if the PC probes the wreckage, a human skull.
- If the PCs examine the footprints, they can clearly see that there is a line of traffic running to and from here (this leads to the nearby monastery).

The Fallen Monastery at Sencha Village

If the PCs visit the monastery, the stone path visible from Sencha Village (and which is always swept clean of snow) leads through the trees and up a low hill. The woods are quiet, and no wind blows within the bounds of the trees.

At the end of the path is a low stone wall, about four feet high. The path passes through the wall under another torii arch. Beyond you can see a large unroofed shrine with a statue to Hotei, Fortune of Honest Work. Next to it is a sizable single-story building, probably a residence hall, with a few attached outbuildings. Most of the remaining grounds within the walls are covered by a large garden, which looks to be a mixture of ornamental and practical styles, now shrouded beneath snow. A single shaven-headed monk walks forward from the residence, bowing and smiling politely. "How may I assist you, noble visitors? Do you seek the enlightenment of Shinsei?"

If the PCs arrive at night, the monk will not come out to visit them, but a few lights will be visible inside the main residence hall.

The wall which surrounds the compound is pierced at the back by a small wooden gate (no torii arch). If the PCs look there, they discover two major sets of tracks in the snow. One, which leaves and returns, goes to the Ritual Site (see above). The other, which leaves but does not return, heads to the northwest (to the Tomb).

There are normally three false monks left in the monastery, staying here to deal with any visitors who may arrive while the rest of their companions seek the Tomb. If the PCs were suspicious of the monk Fuku at the inn of Ikaru Village, he will have fled to here as well. During the day one monk will always be outside, sweeping the walk or "praying" in the shrine.

The false monks will attempt to distract and allay the PCs. Given the chance, they will offer tea and rice

cakes (which are poisoned). They offer the following excuses/explanations:

- They freely admit to visiting the villagers in Houi to offer them comfort and sympathy in difficult times. “Samurai cannot offer such things, after all, so it is our duty to remind simple folk that this world is fleeting and all souls are reborn to a better life.”
- They claim not to know about a meeting with Bayushi Jakkou. “I do not recall such a meeting. Perhaps it was one of the traveling monks who stopped here for a time?”
- Where are those other monks? “A group of our fellow seekers of enlightenment did stop here for some months. They have gone on to continue their quest elsewhere.” If the PCs mention the tracks leaving the back of the compound, the monks confirm that is the route by which the others departed.
- What of the lost Phoenix shugenja and her bodyguard? “We never had the fortune of meeting her. You say she has disappeared? How tragic.”
- If the PCs ask them about Kozue, they admit that she visited them. “Yes, that poor woman came here with her sick daughter. We offered such help as we could. She returned to the village that same evening. You say she has vanished? That is most unfortunate.”
- If any PCs ask about lights or fires in the forest, or the ritual site and its bones: “A peasant custom, perhaps? We do not interfere in their affairs.” If the PCs mention tracks leading to the site, they change their story and confess, “Yes, we have visited, to make sure the fire did not spread.” They act horrified if the PCs mention bones in the fire. “We saw no such things, but we did not search closely.”
- If the PCs discover anything “on-site” (such as the buried bodies in the garden), the monks pretend to be shocked and horrified. “What madness is this?”

The PCs can determine that the monks are lying by rolling **Contested Awareness** (or **Ichi Miru/Awareness**) against the false monks’ **Acting/Awareness**. If successful, the PCs realize the monks are putting on a false front. The monks will

claim to be offended if the PCs accuse them of lying, and insist on their innocence (while trying to get the PCs to have some tea).

If any PC asks if the monks seem strange or odd in any way, they can roll **Theology/Intelligence** or **Shintao/Intelligence** at TN 10 to realize that the monks aren’t quite “right” in their discussion of shintao, the celestial order, and the Fortunes. Also, any PC who has the Stealth skill can roll **Stealth/Perception** at TN 10 to notice that the monks are concealing weapons (knives) in the sleeves of their white robes.

A Fight?

Unless the PCs are extremely covert, it is likely they will eventually push the false monks into taking direct, violent action. The monks will always attempt to poison the PCs first, by serving tea and rice cakes. Any PC who eats or drinks more than a small amount of these offerings must roll **Simple Earth** at TN 10 or perish, doubling over in agony. Even if they succeed in the roll, they are still at +10 to all actions for the next twelve hours, due to crippling stomach pains. A suspicious PC who sniffs, tastes, or otherwise tests the offerings may roll **Poison/Perception** at TN 5, **Herbalism/Perception** at TN 10, or **Medicine/Perception** at TN 15 to notice a suspicious odor/taste.

Once the monks realize the “jig is up,” they draw knives and attack, striking without warning or hesitation. Unless the PCs were specifically being cautious, watching the monks closely, or otherwise prepared for combat, the monks automatically win initiative on the first round of combat. They will attempt to fight to the death, and try to stab themselves or bite through their own tongues if grappled or reduced to the Down rank.

Clues at the Monastery

Once the PCs begin searching the monastery (before or after they dispose of the false monks), there are several clues they can discover.

- There are a number of oblong mounds in the garden. Anyone who examines the garden, or who looks around for bodies, will discover them easily enough. If the PCs are bold enough to dig them open (shovels and mattocks are available in the monastery outbuildings), they will discover a total of six bodies. These comprise five shaven-headed men, a boy, and a woman.
- If the PCs examine the bodies and clothing (without touching them, lest they violate the

most fundamental of Rokugani taboos), they can roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 10 to determine that all of them died of multiple stab/slash wounds except for one of the shaven-headed men, who died of a shattered skull. Furthermore, the shaven-headed men were buried in the white robes of monks, the child is clearly a peasant (from both his garb and his physical condition), and the woman is dressed in Phoenix orange.

- If the PCs search inside the monastery, an **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 15 will find a few traces of dried blood in some of the living quarters. It appears there was originally much more blood, but most of it was scrubbed away.
- If shugenja PCs try to interrogate spirits in the monastery, there are Air and Earth spirits in abundance, Fire spirits in the candles and lanterns, and Water spirits in the kitchen. All the spirits agree that fourteen men, dressed as monks, came here some time ago (spirits aren't good at time). The newcomers "felt bad." They attacked and killed the "good men" who lived here. Since then a lot of "ugly spirits" have been coming here. Most of the bad men recently left.
- If the PCs search the kitchen, they can roll **Poison/Intelligence** at TN 5, or **Medicine** or **Herbalism/Intelligence** at TN 10, to spot a bundle of poisonous mushrooms among the herbs and spices.
- If the PCs search the entire place for documents, papers, or secret compartments, they can roll **Simple Perception** at TN 20 (or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 15) to find a bundle of scrolls and papers hidden under a futon. The spell *By the Light of Lord Moon* will also work. This bundle contains the spell-scrolls of Isawa Taeko (which should be returned to her Clan) and a set of letters from Yajinden (HANDOUT #3). Taeko's scrolls can only be deciphered and used by a shugenja rolling **Cipher/Intelligence** at TN 10, **Calligraphy/Intelligence** at TN 25, or **Spellcraft/Intelligence** at TN 20. They are: *By the Light of Lord Moon*, *Secrets on the Wind*, *Whispering Wind*, *Jade Strike*, *Katana of Fire*, and *Sympathetic Energies*.

If the PCs actually manage to take one of the false monks alive, it will be very hard to question him (he

will keep trying to bite through his own tongue). At the GMs option, however, he might babble something about "we have found our Master's Tomb, and your Empire is doomed!" as he bleeds to death.

On the Trail of the Bloodspeakers

At some point, the PCs should figure out that a large group of cultists left the monastery and is heading somewhere, perhaps toward the Tomb of Iuchiban. It is up to them whether to pursue alone or first report to Kitsuki Yumi. If they do speak with Yumi, she insists on immediately joining them for pursuit, staggering to her feet and bundling herself in a heavy cloak to ward off the winter weather. She will not let herself be dissuaded, no matter what the PCs say or do. Since she is almost certainly of substantially higher Glory than they are, they really have no choice but to agree.

If any PCs suggest getting help from the local Scorpion authorities, Yumi will snort dismissively. Scorpion PCs, or PCs with Allies or Favors in the Scorpion Clan, may decide to seek help on their own – their efforts, however, will be thwarted by the obstinate anger of Bayushi Samoshii. The daimyo steadfastly refuses to believe that a "meddling Kitsuki" or her "instant yoriki" could have found anything of value. He will directly prohibit his magistrate, Bayushi Kojime, from offering any help either. If the PCs approach Kojime separately, he regretfully declines to assist them, but wishes them good fortune in their efforts.

In any case, regardless of whether the PCs go alone or with Kitsuki Yumi, their discoveries are the same:

You follow the trail from the monastery for several miles before striking a narrow, ancient-looking road that winds between the trees. The road is obviously old and seldom used, but not completely overgrown. A thin layer of snow lies upon it, and you can clearly see the trail of your quarry.

Scorpion PCs, or those with Way of the Lands (Scorpion), are puzzled by this road, which is not on any maps and does not connect to any known castle or city. PCs who examine the trail of the monks can determine (with an **Investigation/Intelligence** or **Hunting/Intelligence** roll at TN 10) that there are tracks of about ten people. At least one of the sets of footprints is oddly dragged, as though the person were limping or shuffling their feet.

If the PCs follow the road, after about an hour they notice smoke rising above the trees ahead of them. The

smell of burning comes to them on the wind. At this point, have them roll **Simple Perception** at TN 10. Success notices a small dark shape under the trees to the side of the road – the corpse of a young girl, her throat slit and dried blood staining her garments and the snow around her. The sandaled footprints pause here – clearly the cultists sacrificed her before proceeding. Anyone with the ability to sense Taint will pick up some residual traces of it around here.

A few hundred yards further, the PCs emerge from the forest to the following sight:

A small village, no more than a half-dozen huts, lies before you. At the center of the village is a large, sturdy building, clearly a barracks or dojo. Almost all of the buildings show obvious damage – smashed-in doors, holes in the walls – and several of them are burning, slowly and sullenly, sending pillars of dark smoke into the air.

Bodies lie scattered everywhere – some obviously samurai, others in the simple garments of commoners. At least one wears the white robes of a monk. Many of the victims have died as though torn apart by beasts. Others seem to have been burnt or blasted as though by fire or magic. Blood has turned the snow to dark crimson slush and ice around the corpses, and trampling footprints are everywhere.

This was once a small secret garrison of Imperial troops, protecting the false Tomb which lies beyond. Nothing living is visible, although one badly wounded survivor still hides beneath the shattered barracks.

If the PCs search the area for clues and information, they can discover the following:

- The monk died of sword blows. Anyone who looks at his corpse can roll **Medicine/Perception** at TN 10 to realize that the organs and bones exposed by his wounds are oddly distorted (a common symptom of Maho practice).
- The samurai all wear the mon of the Seppun bodyguard school (identifiable with **Heraldry/Intelligence** at TN 5). Their family mons come from all seven of the Great Clans. Their weapons and armor are of the finest quality, although most of the weapons have been broken as though they were beaten against stone. Some of the blades have traces of a black, tarry substance which exudes Taint (anyone who touches this must roll **Simple Earth** at TN 10 or get a point of Taint).

- Anyone who specifically searches for useful weapons can roll **Simple Perception** at TN 15 to find the scattered remains of a quiver of arrows. Two of the arrows have jade tips.
- Many of the villagers and most of the samurai died from terrible claw-and-tooth wounds. Those blows ripped through armor as though it was origami. A **Lore (Shadowlands)/Intelligence** roll at TN 10 determines that this was almost certainly the work of a powerful oni.
- One samurai and a few peasants were slashed to death as though by a sword, and several peasants were stabbed with knives or had their throats cut.
- Some of the dead were burned or blasted apart. There is residual Taint upon all these victims. There is also residual Taint on the burning buildings.
- If the PCs ask how long ago this happened, anyone who rolls **Battle/Intelligence** or **Medicine/Intelligence** at TN 10 can guess that it has been at least the better part of one day, but no more than two (unless the PCs took an extremely long time to discover and follow the trail from the monastery).
- If the PCs search the barracks, they can easily find duty rosters, letters from superiors, and other materials which prove this was an Imperial garrison charged with protecting some vital secret. Rolling **Cipher/Intelligence** at TN 5 or **Calligraphy/Intelligence** at TN 15 determines that this garrison protected the Tomb of Iuchiban.
- Whenever the PCs search in or around the barracks building, have them roll **Simple Perception** at TN 15. If successful, they hear a faint moan from beneath the building. A quick search will discover a broken panel and a blood trail where someone crawled under the floor. Inside, half-conscious and frostdriven, lies Shiba Aburatsubo.

Beyond the village, the tracks of the Bloodspeakers are clearly visible – several of them were wounded, and the trail is marked with crimson blood droplets. Anyone who looks at the trail and rolls **Investigation/Perception** at TN 15 or **Hunting/Perception** at TN 10 notices that there are actually more tracks than before – the number of dragging, shuffling trails has increased dramatically. The trail leads into the forest beyond the village, along a narrow track between heavily overhanging trees.

Shiba Aburatsubo

The sole survivor of the Imperial garrison has lost a great deal of blood, and is very pale, his breathing shallow. Occasionally he moans. He is at the Out rank, having suffered a terrible sword-slash from the zombie which was once Shiba Otembo. The PCs will have to heal him at least one Wound rank (four Wounds) before he can speak with them. This will require either some sort of healing magic, or a **Medicine/Intelligence** roll at TN 25.

If the PCs manage to speak with Aburatsubo, he will tell them that the village was suddenly attacked by a “pack of mad monks” and a “terrible monster” which floated in the air and shrugged off their weapons like toys. He also says, with tears running down his face, that the madmen had a zombie with them – a zombie with the garments and arms of a Phoenix samurai! Aburatsubo was struck down by that abomination, but managed to crawl away and take shelter beneath the barracks. He heard the madmen rampaging through the village for some time before he passed out. He does not know how long ago that was.

“The Tomb,” Aburatsubo moans, “they are seeking the Tomb.” If the PCs question him about this, or about his duty here, he will confess that his garrison was assigned here to guard the secret Tomb of Iuchiban. He does not know whether he is guarding the real Tomb or one of the two decoys.

In the unlikely event that the PCs can heal Aburatsubo up to a functional Wound Rank (with the spell *Regrow the Wound*, for example), he will still be too weak from blood-loss and frostbite to help them. He urges them to pursue the Bloodspeakers with all possible speed.

To the False Tomb

The bloody path finally leads to a small clearing, surrounded by large trees. In front of you is a great square stone building, single-story, and clearly built with excellent workmanship despite its great age. It is rectangular, structured as a series of squares nested within one another. The trail leads directly to the great pair of stone doors in one side of the structure. Statues of Osano-Wo and Bishamon, the Fortunes of Thunder and Courage, stand to either side of the doors. The great stone portals have been wrenched open as though with great force.

If the PCs do not already realize this is one of the Tombs of Iuchiban, they can recognize it with a roll of **Lore (Maho)/Intelligence**, **Lore (Bloodspeakers)**, or

any related skill, at TN 20. They can also recognize it with a **History/Intelligence** roll at TN 25.

It is clear that the footprints of the cultists enter the Tomb but do not leave. At this point the PCs have two choices: they can wait outside to see if the Bloodspeakers return, or they can go inside after them. If Kitsuki Yumi is here, she will favor waiting outside, being both unwell and inherently cautious.

Going Inside the Tomb

If the PCs are bold enough to go inside the false tomb, they will have the opportunity to get themselves hurt or killed before their encounter with the Bloodspeakers.

Beyond the doors is a large square chamber whose roof is supported by four massive pillars. The pillars are carved into the shape of gigantic guardian samurai whose fierce faces seem to glare down at you like disapproving parents. The walls to left and right are pierced by open archways; directly in front of you is a large door of wood and iron, closed. In the middle of the room is a large pool of blood. Drops and spatters of blood lead from there to the archway on the right.

If the PCs examine the bloodstains, they can see them to be fairly fresh (within a day). There is a faint aura of Taint surrounding them, if any of the PCs can detect it. There are a few smeared footprints amid the bloodstains which lead to the right, but anyone rolling **Medicine/Intelligence** at TN 5 can tell that no man could have survived that much blood-loss.

If anyone searches the entire room carefully, they will find several heavy iron arrows in the corners. Some of them are old and rusty, while others look fairly new. Two of the new ones are coated with dried blood.

The door is a heavy construction of iron and wood, more like a castle gate than a conventional Rokugani door, and opens outward from a heavy iron ring. If anyone examines the door closely before opening it, have them roll **Simple Perception** at TN 15. Success indicates the PC notices a few dark drops and spatters on the floor in front of the door, and smears of a similar substance on the iron ring. This is the Tainted, rotten blood of a zombie, and can be identified with a **Lore (Shadowlands)/Intelligence** roll at TN 15.

If any PC opens the door, it first sticks, then pulls open suddenly as a catch releases. Beyond is a flat stone wall pierced by eight small holes. Iron arrows shoot out of each hole, flung by some powerful spring mechanism. The PC who opened the door is

automatically hit by two of the arrows, taking 2k2 damage from each. Roll randomly between all PCs in front of the door (including the poor unfortunate who opened it) to determine the targets of the remaining arrows, which roll 4k2 to attack and inflict 2k2 damage each.

To the Left

The archway to the left leads into a room which has suffered some sort of collapse. The room is choked with massive stone blocks, each a yard or more on a side, and everything you can see is coated with gray dust. A single dusty human hand sticks out of the wreckage, clenched as though the victim perished while reaching for aid.

The hand is attached to a smashed zombie – the shattered white ceramic of a zombie mask is visible between two slabs of rock. The zombie wore the clothing of a peasant (it was a reanimated victim from the guard village). There is Taint on the mask and the corpse. If a PC looks closely at the zombie's corpse, they can see a pair of iron arrows lodged within its body (from the door trap at the entrance).

The ceiling of this room appears to be an interlocked grid of stone blocks – somehow, the cultists caused the first two layers of blocks to fall into the room. It is impossible to proceed through the room, since the collapse has completely blocked the far exit and the stones are too heavy to move (three or more PCs with Strength of 4 or better might be able to slowly move the blocks). The cultists gave up and took the other route after their exploratory zombie got smashed.

To the Right

Beyond the archway to the right is a rectangular room with a low ceiling, no more than seven feet high. The floor is of smooth polished stone and is divided up into a grid of black and white squares, like a shogi board. There is an ugly red smear on the floor about halfway across the room. A matching smear is on the ceiling above.

It should be obvious that a portion of the ceiling smashed down on someone. Close examination of the bloody smear shows that it is the remains of a human body, and notices a smashed porcelain mask and two mashed iron arrow shafts.

If the PCs examine the floor closely, they can roll **Simple Perception** at TN 15 to notice the faint blood-smears, dirt from evaporated snow, and other evidence left behind by the cultists as they passed through here.

PCs can follow this trail safely through the room (if they avoid the big smear).

Another way to safely cross the room is for the PCs to tap or test each stone square as they proceed. Shugenja PCs could probably interrogate spirits to learn which squares are dangerous. Also, a PC with the **Traps** or **Siege** skill (such as a Kaiu engineer) could make a skill roll at TN 15 (**Intelligence** trait) to deduce which squares are safe.

If the PCs try to cross the room without detecting the safe squares, they must each roll **Simple Void** at TN 20 to make it across without triggering the trap. Failure means the PC is mashed by a stone block pistoning down from the ceiling (8k8 wounds). The block slowly ratchets back into place afterward.

Past this room is a short, empty hallway leading to another archway. If the PCs make it this far, they hear the footsteps of the approaching Bloodspeakers as they return from farther into the Tomb.

Battle with the Bloodspeakers

Once the PCs reach the Tomb, this encounter will occur regardless of whether the PCs invade the tomb or wait outside – the only difference is the setting. Either way, the cultists and their monstrous allies will attack immediately.

You hear the clatter of sandals on stone, and a moment later several people emerge from the Tomb (or from the next room of the Tomb, if the PCs are inside). They appear to be monks, from their garb and shaven heads, but their robes are torn and bloody and they carry knives. With them staggers a man in the armor and colors of the Phoenix, but with a blank white porcelain mask on his face. You can see that one of his feet is missing, sheared off at the ankle, and he leaves dark smears on the ground as he limps forward.

The false monks shout in alarm and confusion at the sight of you. Then one of them raises his voice to a shout. "Hishou! Destroy them!" A bloated inhuman shape, like a gigantic dead insect with the head of a demon, floats through the door behind them. It sheds clouds of dust and fragments of its own crackling hide as it advances toward you, hovering on blurring fly-wings.

There are a total of four normal cultist "monks" left, plus one cultist sorcerer (also dressed as a monk), the

zombie, and the Oni no Hishou. If the total number of PCs at this point is four or less, reduce the number of normal cultists to two. Regardless, the cultists fight as best they can, consumed with fury and despair, for their own quest has failed – this was a false Tomb.

- The sorcerer will hang back, protected by the others, while he casts his spells. He will start with *Fires of Corruption*, then moves on to other spells as his remaining Wounds allow.
- The zombie will mindlessly attack until destroyed. It can be defeated by reducing it to 0 wounds, or by destroying the mask or chopping off its head – either of the latter options requires three Raises.
- The Oni no Hishou will attack as directed by the sorcerer. If the sorcerer is killed, the Oni simply attacks everything in sight until it is killed.
- Kitsuki Yumi, due to her poor health, will fight defensively, trying to stay alive and keep away from the fearsome Oni. However, if any of the PCs have a Favor with her from a previous adventure, she will intervene to protect such PCs from death.

Victory

It is likely that the PCs will be able to take one or two cultists alive (by reducing them to the Down or Out rank). Due to their failure to discover the correct Tomb, the cultists are depressed and lack the willpower to commit suicide. The PCs can interrogate survivors (here or at the castle of Bayushi Samoshii) and learn with certainty what they were doing: they seek the jade of Iuchiban's coffin, which will somehow free Iuchiban from his binding to the tomb. "Soon our master will be free again, and the Hantei will fall!" they gibber.

A Message Arrives

At some point when the PCs are interrogating their prisoners (or binding their own wounds, if no cultists were taken alive), a sudden rush of wind runs through the area. The unnatural wind whirls around the cultists and PCs, and anyone who rolls **Simple Perception** at TN 10 hears the words, "We have found it," carried on the wind.

The surviving cultists hear the message and laugh madly, crowing about certain victory.

Aftermath

If Kitsuki Yumi survived, she thanks the PCs for their help and promises to alert the Emerald Champion to the danger from the Bloodspeakers. If any of the PCs are

ronin (or Wasp archers), she pays them each 2 koku for their help.

As for the Bloodspeakers' message... That will be resolved in future adventures.

Rewards and Consequences

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:

Playing through the scenario:	2 XP
Good role-playing:	1 XP
Learning the truth about the Monastery:	1 XP
Defeating the Bloodspeakers and learning their plan:	1 XP
TOTAL POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE:	5 XP

Honor:

Helping Kitsuki Yumi track down the Bloodspeakers: +1 Honor (+2 Honor to Emerald Magistrates, Inquisitors, Black Watch, and Witch-Hunters).

Glory:

None

Other Consequences:

If any PCs started the adventure with a Favor from Kitsuki Yumi, that Favor is considered to have been "expended" by her rescuing the PCs from the questionable justice of Bayushi Samoshii.

If the PCs did not have a Favor from Kitsuki Yumi, but successfully completed the investigation and destroyed the Bloodspeakers, they gain a Favor with her now (assuming she survived).

Finally, any PCs who were involved in the altercation with Bayushi Dainashi now have him as a **Sworn Enemy**.

NPCs and Monsters

Bayushi Dainashi, spoiled heir

[In the initial encounter, Dainashi is at +15 to all actions due to his severe intoxication.]

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 2	WATER 3
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 15 (20 with Light Armor)

School/Rank: Bayushi bushi 1

Honor/Glory: 0.8/3.8

Skills: Athletics 2, Etiquette 1, Gambling 2, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 3, Kenjutsu 4, Sincerity 3

Advantages/Disadvantages: Social Position (daimyo's son)/Bad Reputation (spoiled)

Equipment: Fine daisho set, light armor.

Kitsuki Yumi, Emerald Magistrate

[Note: Due to her illness, Kitsuki Yumi is at a +5 penalty to all actions.]

FIRE 3	AIR 4 Awareness 5
EARTH 2	WATER 3 Perception 5
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Kitsuki Magistrate 3

Honor/Glory: 3.8/4.5

Skills: Battle 3, Calligraphy 4, Courtier 4, Etiquette 6, Herbalism 4, Heraldry 4, History 5, Iaijutsu 2, Ichi Miru 7, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 4, Law 6, Lore (Battle) 2, Lore (Bushi) 3, Lore (Maho) 2, Lore (Shugenja) 2, Nazodo 5, Poison 4, Shintao 6, Sincerity 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose (Justice), Social Position (Emerald Magistrate)/Bad Health

Equipment: Daisho set

False Monks (Bloodspeaker Cultists)

FIRE 2	AIR 2
EARTH 0	WATER 1
Stamina 3	Strength 3

EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 1	

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.5

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Acting 3, Athletics 3, Bojutsu 2, Knife 3, Sincerity 3, Stealth 4

Advantages/Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker)

Equipment: Clothing, sandals, bo stick (2k2) or sharp knife (0k2)

Bloodspeaker Sorcerer

It should be noted that the cultists know other spells, such as Dark Divination and a maho-powered version of Mists of Illusion, in addition to the combat-oriented spells which are actually described at the end of this section.

[Note that this cultist starts at the +3 Wound Rank, due to injuries taken in the Tomb.]

FIRE 2	AIR 2
EARTH 3	WATER 2
VOID 2	

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 2.3

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Acting 3, Athletics 3, Knife 3, Sincerity 3, Stealth 4

Spells: *Fires of Corruption, No Pure Breaths, Pain*

Advantages/Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker)

Equipment: Clothing, sandals, sharp knife (0k2), spare zombie masks (3).

Zombie (reanimated Shiba Otembo)

[Note: the Zombie has already taken 24 Wounds]

FIRE 1	AIR 0
EARTH 0	WATER 1
Stamina 3	Strength 3

TN to be Hit: 5

Attacks: 1k1

Damage: 4k2

Carapace Armor: 7

Wounds: 60: Dead

Special Abilities: Zombies take half damage from slashing and piercing weapons, and quarter damage from crushing weapons. A zombie which takes more than 15 points of damage in a single blow loses a random limb or extremity. Severed parts will continue to crawl after and attack the enemy. If a zombie is decapitated, it dies instantly.

Oni no Hishou (Flying Oni)

[Note: the Oni has taken 18 Wounds already.]

FIRE 4	AIR 4
EARTH 4	WATER 4

TN to be Hit: 25

Attacks: 6k3

Damage: 4k2 (stinger)

Carapace Armor: 6

Wounds: 24: +5; 48: +10; 72: +15; 96: Dead.

Special Abilities: Fear (3). Venom (those hit by the Oni's insectile stinger must roll Simple Earth at TN 15 or be stricken with agonizing muscle contractions, causing a +15 penalty on all actions). Partial Invulnerability (takes half damage from normal weapons, normal damage from magical and jade weapons, and double damage from crystal or obsidian weapons).

GM's Note: Casting Maho Spells

Maho spells are cast by rolling Earth+Taint Rank, keeping Earth. The caster must spill blood (their own or another's) equal to the spell's Mastery level, and gains Taint equal to twice the Mastery level.

The caster may take Free Raises for each additional amount of blood (equal to the Mastery level) which they spill.

Fires of Corruption

Base TN: 20

Casting Time: 3 Actions

Duration: Instantaneous

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 9

Raises: Casting Time, Number of Targets (one per raise)

Effect: This spell is a twisted, maho-powered version of the shugenja spell Fires from Within. The caster calls forth a pillar of black, pulsating fire which smites the target(s), who must be visible and within 100 yards. The spell's DR is equal to the caster's Fire+Taint, keeping Fire.

No Pure Breaths

Base TN: Target's Earth x 5

Casting Time: 2 Actions

Duration: Instantaneous

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 5

Raises: Casting Time, Damage (one non-kept die per raise), Number of Targets (one per raise)

Effect: The air within the target suddenly corrupts and explodes out of the body, rupturing the lungs and tissues. The target suffers wounds of a DR equal to the caster's Taint rank. The victim also suffers a +10 penalty to all TNs until magically healed, due to the pain of ravaged, Tainted lungs.

Pain

Base TN: 10

Casting Time: 1 Action

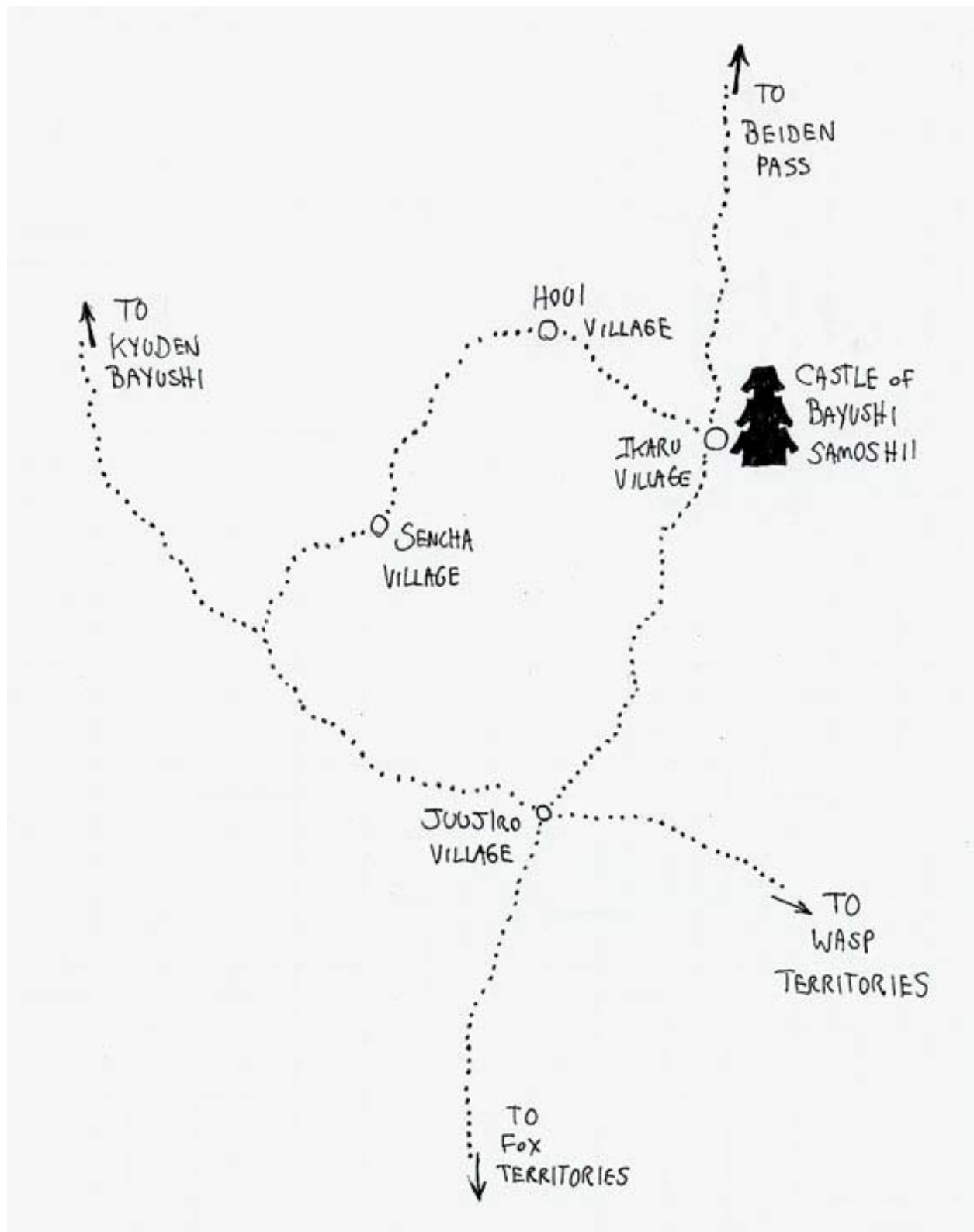
Duration: 1 Round

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 4

Raises: Duration (1 round per raise), Number of Targets (one per raise)

Effect: The target (who must be visible and within 25 feet) is suddenly wracked with terrible, debilitating pain. The victim may not act for the duration of the spell. Further, victims of this spell must roll Simple Earth at TN 15 or cry out in agony, dishonoring themselves.

Handout #1, Sketch-Map of the Local Area



HANDOUT #2 (Journal of Isawa Taeko)

26th Day of Shinjo

A letter finally came from the Miya. From Miya Yoto himself, that fool of a son seems to have ignored my earlier requests. Yoto confirms that the problem was caused by Bloodspeakers. This makes two regions where the cult has suddenly become active. What is happening?

28th Day of Shinjo

My investigations here have finally born fruit. The cult cell was small, only four members, but they fought fiercely and we only took one alive. Otembo-san apologized at length for not managing to disable more of them non-lethally. From his contrition one would think he had allowed me to be hurt!

In any case his concern was unneeded. The prisoner quickly broke when put to the question, but it seems this cell knew little. The cult believes some great victory or triumph is at hand, but he knew not what. Iuchiban?

29th Day of Shinjo

Execution at dawn. It seemed to make the proper impression on the villagers. Otembo-san would have preferred that I stay inside and spare myself from that "awful spectacle." I tried not to laugh at his words, for it would have mortified him. A good man, but too sensitive. He would have done better guarding some gentle Acolyte of Air.

4th Day of Hida

Based on the prisoner's confession I am traveling southwest to Scorpion territories. That seems to be where they are focusing their efforts, whatever those are.

6th Day of Hida

The border guard at Beiden Pass was most impolite, and seemed to imply I was here to accuse the Scorpion Clan of Maho. Arrogant fool. Otembo-san was most angry, and was perhaps on the verge of drawing his blade when the guard relented and let me pass. I scolded Otembo-san later for letting his temper nearly get the better of him, and he was so sincerely contrite that I ended up feeling compassion and forgiving him. Such a troublesome man!

17th Day of Hida

First chance to write in many days. No further signs of the Bloodspeakers until I came to the lands of this Scorpion, Bayushi Samoshii. Rumors of disappearances in another village. This may be worth examining.

The other matter – no, I should not write about that.

19th Day of Hida

When I returned from my evening walk last night I noticed a fire in the woods, north of the village. Perhaps it is merely the monks performing some religious ritual. One never knows with them.

Later. I learned today of a third disappearance yesterday, a young woman. Could there be a connection with that fire? If I see it again I will collect Otembo-chan and investigate.

HANDOUT #3 (Letters found in the Monastery)

This is a bundle of three letters. All are written in the same hand.

First Letter

Comrades,

I believe the Tomb lies further to the south. Our brethren in Ryoko Owari were discovered, and I had to spend precious time searching in their place. I suggest you try closer to the Fox border, among the more remote villages.

y.

Second Letter

(no salutation)

Well done. We should have thought of this subterfuge earlier. No one will question a group of traveling monks, even if they appear and vanish suddenly. Stay as long as you have to.

y.

Third Letter

Brethren,

I am sure it lies either in the lands you search, or those where K-S was searching. I am going there myself to take up his work. Do not hesitate to use as many as you need to be sure. When you find the Tomb, search immediately. If you cannot retrieve what you need on your own, notify us as quickly as possible. We will send whatever help you require.

The day draws near.

y.