

Corrupted Ground

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

Shadows of an Iron Citadel, Part One

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The Empress has sent you on an expedition to assess the condition of the Phoenix Clan. Bandits, Shadowlands Taint, and social unrest plague the Clan, and your task will be a difficult one.

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A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing this game. The actual playing time should be about three and a half 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.

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 SCENARIO SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD! Please read the scenario thoroughly before attempting to run it.

This adventure is a Multi-Rank adventure. This means that it has two sets of statistics for NPCs, one for low-end parties (Ranks 1 through 3) and one for mid/high-end parties (Ranks 2 through 5).

All bulleted information is just that, pure information. Feed it to the players through an NPC when appropriate. Sometimes, reading it straight just doesn't sound right.

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."

Glory and Honor Awards and Penalties

This adventure contains suggested Glory and Honor awards (and penalties) for dealing with the challenges presented herein. However, at times the players may take extra actions which the GM judges worthy of additional reward – or punishment. The following may be considered as guidelines:

- Performing an act of selfless, sacrificial loyalty to one's daimyo or clan: +1 point of Honor.
- Abiding by the tenets of bushido when one could gain an obvious advantage from breaking them: +1 point of Honor.
- Betraying or disobeying your duty, Clan, or family: lose 1-10 points of Honor and Glory, depending on the severity of the failure.
- Crying out in pain when injured: lose one point each of Honor and Glory.
- Using sneaky, underhanded, or treacherous methods when at an Honor rank higher than zero: lose 1-5 points of Honor.
- Using poison: lose 1-10 points of Honor, depending on the circumstances (there is always an Honor loss for using poison).
- Performing a socially acceptable public act of extreme courage and skill: +1 point of Glory.
- Drunk, insulting, or otherwise ill-mannered in public: lose 1-5 points of Glory.
- Made ronin: Glory drops to zero.

Adjusting for Party Strength

This is a Multi-Rank adventure, and contains two sets of statistics for the villains: one for Low-End parties (School ranks 1-3, average 2) and one for High-End parties (School ranks 2-5, average 3.5).

The Skill and Trait roll TNs listed in the module are for high-end parties. For a low-end party, reduce the TNs by 5.

The GM may need to make additional "tweaks" for parties which lie at an extreme end of the power curve. Suggested tweaks are listed below:

Low End Party (most/all characters Rank One):

- Taroku the Dokufu has Carapace of 10.

High End Party (average party Insight Rank is higher than Four):

- Magical jade does not bypass Taroku's Carapace, although fire will still do so.

Adventure Summary and Background

The lands of the Phoenix Clan have been ravaged and devastated by the corruption of the Elemental Council and the rise of the Iron Citadel in Kyuden Isawa. Although the brave actions of many samurai have destroyed the Fallen members of the Council and brought down the Iron Citadel, the scars of that battle lie heavy on the Phoenix Clan. Patches of their territory remain Tainted, and monsters of the Shadowlands roam the dark corners of the Clan's territory. The Phoenix may take generations to recover from this blow, and while they are crippled all the Empire will suffer from the lack of their wisdom and power.

The PCs are one of several survey groups which have been sent to the Phoenix lands this spring by the Empress, Otomo Kaede (a former Phoenix herself). They are tasked with reviewing the conditions in the Clan's territory, determining just how bad things are and what sort of help is needed, and then reporting back with the results.

An Unwelcome Visitor

A Dokufu, a Shadowlands creature sometimes known as "The Mountain Spider," has recently moved into the Phoenix lands, attracted by the residual Taint and the aura of fear and despair. This particular Dokufu usually takes the form of an old bent-backed monk or hermit, Taroku. Currently, he is living in the forest outside the town of Sobamura in Ukabu Province, near the trade center of Nikesake. An intelligent and cunning creature, this Dokufu realizes that he must conceal his appetite for human flesh, and has created various "red herrings" to explain his victims and deceive those who might hunt for him. For example, he has spread rumors of a pack of Tainted wolves in the area, and created faked footprints and howls to support these tales. He has also built a false "Bloodspeaker altar" which he has hidden in the forest to be "discovered" at a suitable time. Finally, he has gone to considerable effort to ingratiate himself with the local peasants, using his skills at Herbalism to treat their sick.

Taroku the Dokufu is unusual for his kind: due to long living among humans, he has developed a twisted obsession with the Celestial Order, and a perverse desire to spawn children from someone of great purity and high rank. This has attracted him to his latest victim, a young woman named Shiba Akina.

Shiba Akina is a beautiful young shugenja-ko just past her gempukku. Although trained as an Isawa shugenja on the path of Earth, her true desire is to be a weaponsmith, and she harbors a secret desire to forge swords which will rival the great blades of the Kaiu and Kakita. Recently, she began sneaking away from her father's household to learn sword-making from a blacksmith in the village of Sobamura. It is these secret trips which have attracted the Dokufu, and bring her into its clutches.

Player's Introduction

The Empress of Rokugan, Otomo Kaede (formerly Isawa Kaede) has dispatched several groups of samurai to survey the situation in Phoenix lands and to see where the Emperor's aid will be most needed. The PCs are one of these groups. Clan PCs have been sent at the orders of their daimyos, who are eager to prove their worth to the Empress. Ronin PCs have been hired, for 4 koku, to carry out this mission.

The PCs are expected to conduct a survey of the southern and western regions of Phoenix lands, starting with the City of Remembrance. Other teams have already been sent to the eastern and northern territories, to survey the damage to Shiro Shiba and Kyuden Isawa.

The PCs are not necessarily expected to intervene and solve every problem they encounter – the Empress wants information, and knows that some problems may be beyond the PCs' resources. However, they are not forbidden from helping if they feel they can do so.

Scene One: The City of Remembrance

The PCs have arrived in the Phoenix lands at the City of Remembrance (Toshi no Omoidoso), the first major city north of the Mountains of Regret. It is a bustling metropolis and trade center, home to over 3,000 people, and even in this grim spring after the rise and fall of the Iron Citadel, the city is crowded with commerce and energy. It is a major trade hub for this part of the Empire, with roads running not only north toward the heart of Phoenix lands, but also west toward the Lion and Dragon territories.

Toshi no Omoidoso hosts a shrine to the memory of Matsu Hitomi, among the most famous tragic heroines of Rokugan, and it is there that the PCs meet with the city's governor, Isawa Hitsukawa, an aging and

peaceful shugenja of Air. PCs may have met him in adventures such as *Kuro's Fire* and *Time to Pay the Price*.

The governor of the City of Remembrance is an older man, approaching the age of retirement. He kneels before the shrine, praying to the Fortunes and to the spirit of Matsu Hitomi to watch over the city and the surrounding lands. Dozens of other citizens kneel behind him, likewise offering fervent prayers to the lady who is remembered as one of Rokugan's most famous tragic heroines.

Finished with the ritual, the governor rises and turns to meet you. "Greetings, samurai," he says. "Perhaps you could walk with me as I return to my residence? I apologize for such informality, but I have much that concerns me this day, and little time to spare for visitors."

Isawa Hitsukawa is a serious and thoughtful older man who has led a life of pacifism and contemplation. He walks through the city at a careful pace, escorted by two Shiba yojimbo (bodyguards), and stopping from time to time to speak with merchants, artisans, and other residents about problems or concerns.

Hitsukawa is, of course, quietly delighted that the Empress is performing a survey of the Phoenix lands, and expresses the hope that the PCs' report may be able to bring help from the Imperial treasury. "Toshi no Omoidoso has not suffered as badly as the lands to the north, of course. We were not ravaged by monsters here. But our food stores are low after sheltering so many refugees for the winter, and the losses in the ranks of the Shiba have allowed bandits and criminals to flourish in many areas."

Hitsukawa will express particular concern over the town of Nikesake, located five days' travel to the west on the Road of Lion Tears. "There have been several reports of bandit trouble in that area, as well as some rumors of disappearances. I am sure the local daimyo, Shiba Takagashi, would be glad to speak with representatives of the Empress."

The governor will also mention that he has heard reports of trouble in the Asako lands to the north, although they are more distant (eight to ten days' travel).

Hitsukawa has little else to share with the PCs, and much work on his hands. As he approaches the governor's residence, he will bow to the PCs, bid them good fortune on their journey, and dismiss them.

Staying in the City of Remembrance

There are several good inns in the city, and as representatives of the Empress the PCs will be welcomed and treated with great respect. Samurai and commoners alike will be eager to share stories of the horrors from last autumn and the struggle to survive the winter. The PCs can pick up the following general rumors:

- Although no bandits have been reported in the immediate vicinity of the City of Remembrance, there have been many reports of bandits to both the north and west. In particular, the two western Shiba family provinces (Enjaku and Ukabu provinces) have been subjected to heavy bandit trouble ever since last autumn. (Nikesake lies at the eastern juncture of those two provinces.)
- There are many rumors of Shadowlands monsters roaming the lands. No two of these stories are alike, but it seems that every disappearance or bad fortune is being blamed on "monsters" and "shadows in the night."
- There are also rumors that the Bloodspeaker Cult has become active again, kidnapping victims for sacrifice. Some folk even blame the Bloodspeakers for the entire disaster, suspecting that the fall of Kyuden Isawa was caused by some kind of evil *maho* ritual.

Traveling to Nikesake

The Road of Lions Tears derives its name from the fact that it was the route which Matsu Hitomi used to approach the City of Remembrance, centuries ago. It is a heavily-used trade route, and the PCs meet several trade caravans each day, as well as passing through three or four minor villages per day. Despite the appearance of prosperity, there is a sense of anxious gloom everywhere – the villagers all know that taxes will be high this year, in order to feed the refugees and survivors in other provinces.

The PCs hear a number of reports of bandits farther west, especially in Enjaku Province, which has been the scene of heavy fighting in the Dragon-Phoenix war. There are also rumors of a powerful bandit gang operating in the north, in the Asako province of Yogen. As for Nikesake itself, although the town has not been attacked, several caravans in the area have been raided or destroyed, and some disappearances and kidnappings have been reported in the area as well.

The villagers think that Shiba Takagashi, the daimyo of Nikesuke, has been doing as well as can be expected, given that most of his bushi were sent away last year to fight the Dragon.

Although the weather is mostly clear and pleasant, springtime is also the season of sudden rains, and on the afternoon of the last day, as the PCs approach Nikesuke, a brisk rainstorm blows up from the south. Although the weather is not overly cold, the rain is still unpleasant, and the PCs will be looking forward to shelter, baths, and hot food by the time they reach the town.

Scene Two: Hospitality at Nikesake

When the PCs arrive at Nikesake, they find a town of about 1,400 people, with a modest four-story castle on the western side. Like the City of Remembrance, Nikesake is a prosperous trade center, with roads leading north toward Pale Oak Castle in the Asako lands and south toward Shiro Kyotei and the Lion and Crane territories. The town is walled (as most larger Rokugani settlements are), but has clearly not been attacked in centuries, with a large outgrowth of buildings outside the walls. Only a few bushi stand watch at the gates, making perfunctory inspections of travel papers.

The guards will be quite impressed at the PCs' papers, and bow low. "Lord Shiba Takagashi will be pleased to welcome the messengers of the divine Empress. Please, proceed to the castle, where you will be welcomed with honor."

At the castle, the PCs are met first by servants, who escort them inside to the main courtyard. There a smiling young woman, dressed in Phoenix orange, bows in greeting. "Greetings, honored samurai," she says in a sweet voice. "I am Asako Keiko, *karo* to lord Shiba Takagashi. In his name I bid you welcome to Shiro no Kaidou (Meeting Castle)."

PCs who played the adventure *Legacy of the Dark One* may remember Asako Keiko, a young *henshin* who served as court historian at the minor castle of Shiro no Bujisokusai, and was falsely accused of maho. She will delightedly remember any PCs who helped her in her defense at that time, and pauses to reminisce briefly with them. "Yes, my lord Asako Hiroshige has been most pleased with my service in his court since then. When his friend, lord Shiba Takagashi-sama, expressed

the desire for an honorable young samurai to serve as *karo*, Lord Hiroshige recommended me. It was more generosity than I deserved, after all the trouble I had caused him."

Whether or not the PCs remember Keiko from the past, she welcomes them to the castle and escorts them to the finest guest quarters in the place. "Please, bathe and warm yourselves from the rainy weather, and join us for dinner afterward. Lord Shiba Takagashi-sama is out visiting his lands, but I will be pleased to serve as your host in his stead."

A Pleasant Dinner

The PCs will enjoy a fine dinner in the company of the *karo*, the daimyo's children, and the other courtiers and guests at the castle. About a dozen people total will attend the dinner, including the following specific NPCs – the GM should feel free to create additional courtiers as needed.

Asako Keiko, *Karo* of Shiro no Kaidou: Keiko is a charming woman with a ready smile and perfect manners. She is modest and self-deprecating despite holding such a prominent office (*karo* to a regional daimyo). She has no obvious Clan prejudices, although she shows a certain distance toward members of the Mirumoto family, and is careful not to speak too openly around Scorpions. Keiko is unmarried, and will flirt decorously with any male PCs who seem likely matches.

Shiba Huromasa, son of the daimyo: Huromasa is a handsome young man of fifteen, just past his *gempukku*, and a student of the Shiba Yojimbo school. He is bright and friendly, and is also protective of his twin sister Akina, with whom he has a Kharmic Tie. He knows she is sneaking off to visit the blacksmith, but does his best to cover for her, even though it is defying his father.

Shiba Akina, daughter of the daimyo: Huromasa's twin sister as an almost unbearably pretty young woman of fifteen, and is normally very shy and easily startled or confused. Officially, she is training as a shugenja on the path of Earth, but she has done poorly in her studies and will be embarrassed if anyone asks her about this. PCs who watch her and roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 may notice the small burn marks and calluses on her hands, partly concealed with cosmetics. (PCs with any kind of smithing or weapon-making skill get a Free Raise on this roll.)

Shiba Tobimura, Phoenix courtier: A smooth-faced man in his late twenties, although not particularly handsome. Tobimura possesses a small stutter but has learned to use this to his advantage in the courts, allowing others to sneer at him and underestimate his abilities. He dislikes Lions, considering them over-aggressive, boastful fools, although he is careful never to do more than needle them gently.

Doji Senmitsu, Crane courtier: The Crane ambassador to Nikesake is an older man with lines on his face and graying hair (he has ceased dying it). He plays the role of the “kindly old uncle,” which he uses to gain the trust and assistance of others. Unflappable, he takes the sharpest insults with equanimity, and is adept at turning insults back on their sources.

Soshi Sauketsu, Scorpion shugenja and “diplomat”: A short, rotund man in his mid-thirties, with a balding pate and a half-masked face creased with scowls. He is a bitter man of limited talents, and will amuse himself by heckling and insulting those of lesser station. (He is Glory 4.2.) Unfortunately he does this with a war-hammer’s wit, lacking the subtlety of more skilled and effective Scorpions. His favorite targets are Lion, Unicorn, *ronin*, and anyone from a minor clan. He will sullenly avoid provoking those of equal or higher social standing.

Soshi Hokaru, weary yojimbo: This bushi (rank 3 Bayushi) is Sauketsu’s bodyguard. He is a quiet man who secretly despises his shallow and venomous master, and will refrain from any speech or open action unless Sauketsu is challenged or attacked.

(Tsurushi) Okame, Wasp bounty hunter: A young man with pleasant features, a ready smile, and quick, precise mannerisms. He shows a certain degree of distant hostility to members of the Lion and Scorpion Clans, but never makes an open insult, and is otherwise very polite. He is passing through the region on a contract from the Emerald Champion, heading for Kyuden Isawa to hunt for remnants of Shadowlands corruption in those lands, and carries a bundle of twenty jade arrows for that purpose.

Togashi (Goju) Togatsu, fallen Ise Zumi: A tall, muscular young man of great beauty, his facial features almost delicate despite the mass of his frame. He dresses in a hakama and gi, and wears the gi open to display his chest. Togatsu is a former Crab shugenja who joined the order of tattooed monks, but fell to the Living Darkness due to his uncontrollable physical desires. He is currently traveling with a female monk

(Togashi Amera) who he is seducing onto the path of Shadow.

Togatsu has the tattoos of the Cat, Ocean, and Centipede. He is a skilled speaker and enjoys dropping disruptive and unsettling remarks into conversation, trying to make people doubt themselves and lose faith in the Celestial Order. He is subtle about such machinations, always couching them in such a way that he can fall back on the excuse that he is simply “speaking in riddles” as Ise Zumi so often do.

Togashi Amera, apprentice Ise Zumi: A young and pretty female monk, formerly of the Scorpion Clan, newly embarked on her life as a servant of Togashi. Togatsu is seducing her to the path of Shadow, and she currently has Shadow Corruption of rank 2. PCs who make **Simple Awareness** at TN 20 realize that her respect for Togatsu is more than the simple admiration of student for teacher.

In general, the only NPCs who are significant to the further progress of the scenario are Keiko, Huromasa, and Akina. The rest are here to offer interesting role-play. It is not intended that the PCs should be able to learn that the two Togashi monks are Shadow-Corrupted – if the PCs do somehow learn this, the two will simply disappear.

Conversational Topics

Obviously, the PCs will be interested in what Asako Keiko can report about any problems in the area. She can share the following information:

- Keiko can confirm that a bandit gang has been attacking merchant caravans on the roads to the south. Lord Shiba Takagashi rode out two days ago to destroy the bandit gang, and is expected back soon.
- She can also confirm that there have been a few disappearances, possibly kidnappings, among the local villages. “Of course, in these unsettled times, there needs to be a sinister explanation for every disappearance – some may simply be folk taking counsel from their fears and running away. Sadly, peasants have little other recourse during such crises.”
- There have also been some problems with wolves in the area. Several peasants have reported seeing a pack of wolves with red eyes and misshapen bodies, and some deaths have been blamed on them. “It is possible that the poor animals may

have been afflicted with the Taint. If we find them, of course, we will free them from that and purify the bodies.” Keiko is clearly saddened at the thought of natural animals being afflicted by the Taint, and quickly changes the subject.

- If the PCs ask where these problems (disappearances and wolves) have been reported, she mentions that several farming communities on the outskirts of Nikesake have sent such reports, notably the villages of Tobomura, Kogane, and Sobamura.

If the PCs ask for more information on the daimyo, Shiba Takagashi, Keiko will explain that he has ruled these lands since the retirement of his father eleven years ago. His wife Yoiko died in childbirth, giving birth to the twins (Akina and Huromasa), and he never remarried.

Soshi Sauketsu will spend the evening casting jibes, often crude and obvious ones, at those who seem suitable targets – this will include Okame, Doji Senmitsu, and any PCs who meet his criteria. Okame will grit his teeth and endure, while Senmitsu will skillfully respond with subtle put-downs that pass over Sauketsu’s head. Asako Keiko will clearly be irritated at this disruption to the evening’s hospitality, and will step in to halt any exchange which seems in danger of escalating to open hostility or violence.

As mentioned, Shiba Akina will be quiet and restrained unless one of the PCs begins speaking about weapon-smithing (or a related topic such as fletchery or armor-smithing), in which case she will listen attentively while trying to look uninterested. (**Courtier/Awareness** at TN 15, or **Simple Awareness** at TN 25, to catch on to this.)

Akina will pretend weariness and excuse herself fairly early in the evening, while it is still daylight, in order to sneak off and visit the blacksmith in Sobamura village. Her brother Huromasa will cover for her, making a sympathetic remark about “you must be tired, it’s been a long day.” He explains to the rest of the table that Akina has been worried about her father’s mission against the bandits.

Spending the Night

Asako Keiko will arrange rooms for the PCs at the castle, and will do her best to see to any other needs they might have. “Shiro no Kaidou is at your disposal,” she promises. The PCs will enjoy a restful night’s sleep.

It is possible that some PCs may be intrigued by Shiba Akina and wish to spy on her or follow her. However, unless they can present a good in-character reason to do so, the GM should not allow this. Rokugan is a society which values privacy, and Akina is the daughter of a daimyo, certainly not someone whose actions should be questioned by traveling PCs.

Scene Three: A Daimyo’s Plea

The next morning, the castle is bustling with energy. Asako Keiko does not meet with the PCs for breakfast, and sends a message with her regrets – her master Shiba Takagashi has returned this morning, and will require her attention.

The PCs and the other guests and ambassadors are served a pleasant breakfast in one of the castle’s smaller dining halls. The two Togashi eat only briefly and modestly before departing – they are heading back to Dragon lands. The others remain and will chat briefly with the PCs over the meal.

The meal will be interrupted by the arrival of Shiba Kojekkai, a grizzled retainer from Shiba Takagashi’s personal guard:

A door slides open and an older man in the garb of a bushi steps into the room. His right arm is apparently missing at elbow, and he wears his swords on that side. Other, less dramatic scars mark his face and his intact arm. His hair is speckled with white, and a salt-and-pepper beard adorns his chin. He looks around the room with a troubled expression for a moment, then speaks: “My apologies, samurai-samas. Our lord Shiba Takagashi requests your presence at once.”

The Crane and Phoenix diners will immediately rise and prepare themselves. Soshi Sauketsu will do the same, but grumbles and whines about this interruption to his morning. The Wasp Okame will likewise rise and adjust his garments for a moment, making sure to exit the room last.

You are escorted to what appears to be the main audience hall of the castle. Several bushi are already in the chamber, and from the look of them they have only recently returned from the field. Some have freshly bandaged injuries. All of them are kneeling, facing toward the head of the room.

There, a middle-aged man sits in a precise, rigid posture, his garments perfectly arranged and his face set in a serene expression. Kneeling behind and to either side of him are Shiba Huromasa and Asako Keiko, both of whom appear anxious and concerned, although they are doing their best not to show it. The one-armed bushi places himself nearby, his expression grim.

The daimyo's voice shows only the faintest quiver as he addresses the PCs. *"Please forgive my rudeness at interrupting your morning meal. I trust you will understand my lack of manners. It seems that during our time of weakness, some have chosen to prey upon the innocent. My daughter has been stolen, from this very castle."*

Although Shiba Takagashi's tone remains even and self-controlled throughout this speech, a successful **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 20 will show that he is, in fact, greatly troubled. As a dignified and experienced samurai, he is holding his emotions well in check, but they are there, buried beneath the surface.

"Although I realize that this is an imposition, I would ask if any of you can spare time from your current duties to assist me in the search for my daughter. My own bushi will do their best, of course, but we have suffered heavily in our recent actions against the bandits harassing our lands. Any and all help will be a blessing from the Fortunes."

Shiba Takagashi will be quietly grateful and appreciative toward anyone who offers aid, even members of the Mirumoto family. After the audience, he will speak separately with any Wasp or ronin PCs, offering to hire them for six koku to help with the search.

PCs who refuse Takagashi's request will meet with understanding ("I realize your duties to the Empress must take priority") and will be politely dismissed from the audience hall. They will not suffer any serious repercussions for their decision, but they will find that the former cooperation and generosity of their host dries up quickly, and they will be encouraged to move on and continue their mission for the Empress elsewhere. In effect, they will be out of the adventure unless they choose to investigate independently.

Obviously, the various ambassadors at the castle will be unable to help with the search for Akina, although all of them (even, grudgingly, Soshi Sauketsu) will offer their condolences and their fervent prayers for Akina's safe return. The Wasp Okame will meet with

Takagashi afterward and offers to take a bounty on Akina's kidnapper – however, he will conduct his own investigation, independently of the PCs.

Speaking with Takagashi

Once the courtiers and any reluctant PCs have been dismissed from the room, Takagashi will relax just slightly, allowing a (very) small amount of his emotion to show on his face.

Shiba Takagashi is a very traditional and conventional samurai, and adheres strictly to both the ideals of bushido and the rules of etiquette. He also is very much a prisoner of traditional Rokugani beliefs. For example, he views "ninja" as a peasant superstition, and does not consider the notion that his daughter might be unhappy with her current life.

The daimyo suspects that Akina has somehow been kidnapped by survivors of the bandit gang he has spent the last two days hunting. Although he succeeded in slaying many of them, his limited number of bushi prevented him from completely destroying the gang – many of them scattered and escaped. He intends to send as many troops as he can to search the surrounding area for any remaining bandits, hoping to find his daughter that way. However, he is realistic enough to realize that there may be some other explanation for her disappearance – especially in these times of Shadowlands corruption – and hopes the PCs will be able to cover these possibilities.

- Takagashi returned from his bandit-hunting expedition early this morning. After a quick bath, he asked to meet with his family at breakfast. His daughter did not come to the meal. A search of the castle has determined that she is nowhere in the place.
- The daimyo has briefly visited Akina's quarters and says there is no blood and no sign of a struggle. Although he does not know whether anything has actually happened to Akina, the fact that she disappeared on the morning he returned from dealing with the bandit gang seems like an impossible coincidence to him. "Sadly, we did not completely destroy the bandits. Some of them may have done this as vengeance."
- Takagashi suspects Akina was stolen with the assistance of magic. (He does not know whether any of the bandits were shugenja.) The servants have confirmed to him that Akina retired to her

room after dinner last night, and the castle guards report that no one has seen her this morning.

- Takagashi will give the PCs permission to conduct their own interviews and investigations if they ask.

Once he has finished speaking with the PCs, he will depart to direct his bushi in searching the area for bandits. The PCs will be free to investigate in the castle, to interview other residents (Asako Keiko, Shiba Huromasa, the old guard Kojekkai, the servants), and to investigate in the surrounding area.

Scene Four: Investigations in the Castle

Smart PCs will start their investigation by searching the castle and speaking with everyone there.

Asako Keiko

The *karo* will help the PCs to the best of her ability, offering her full cooperation and answering every question as honestly as she can.

- If the PCs ask her about Akina, Keiko describes her as a “gentle and intelligent girl.” Keiko is clearly worried about her.
- She will not volunteer any information on Akina’s relationships with her family, but if the PCs politely ask about that (and couch it in terms of helping with the investigation), Keiko will reluctantly confess that Akina has “clashed” with her father. “Lord Takagashi-sama expects Akina-san to train as a shugenja and make a good marriage for the benefit of the family, but Akina-san is not happy with such a path. Her skills as a shugenja are only indifferent, and she has resisted every effort by her father to arrange a marriage.”
- Keiko does not know that Akina has been sneaking out of the castle, and will be shocked if she finds out.
- Keiko has personal doubts about Lord Takagashi’s assumption that the bandits are involved in Akina’s disappearance. She has heard no previous reports of shugenja among the bandits. “Lord Takagashi-sama is a good man, but he is sometimes... too ready to make the obvious assumption.”

Shiba Huromasa

Huromasa is actually one of the most productive persons the PCs can interview, since he knows that Akina has been visiting the blacksmith in Sobamura Village and suspects that she is there now. Due to the current situation, he is now constantly escorted by Shiba Kojekkai, the old one-armed samurai – his father is much too worried about the future of his family to leave his remaining child unwatched.

Huromasa has a Kharmic Tie to his sister, and instinctively knows she is still alive and somewhere fairly close. He also knows she is very frightened, and possibly in pain. As a result, he is deeply conflicted – he does not want to betray Akina’s secrets, but fears that if he does nothing, something terrible will happen to her. (Sadly, something already has.)

The PCs will be able to tell that Huromasa is hiding something about his sister by beating him at a **Contested Awareness** roll. Actually convincing him to open up and tell them will require good role-playing.

He can be convinced either by (a) eloquently invoking the danger to his sister, or (b) playing on his sense of duty and bushido. Either approach will work with a well role-played appeal, combined with a **Sincerity/Awareness**, **Courtier/Awareness**, or **Manipulation/Awareness** roll at TN 20. (Certain types of role-play might also be able to make an **Intimidation** roll.) PCs who role-play exceptionally well should get a Free Raise on the roll.

If Huromasa does break his silence, he will (with much hesitation and embarrassment) share the following information:

- His sister dreams of being a sword-smith. For the last year, she has been slipping out of the castle to take lessons with a blacksmith, Satetsu, in Sobamura Village. All the servants in the castle know she is doing this, as do a few of the older retainers, but they have kept it a secret from their father, who does not understand Akina’s wishes.
- Huromasa escorted Akina on her first few trips to Sobamura, but since then she has traveled on her own. He is sure she went there again last night.
- He is sure she is alive, but senses that she is very frightened. “My sister and I have always known what the other was feeling, even when we are far apart.”

- If the PCs ask whether Akina has acted strangely recently, or if she was threatened by anyone, Huromasa will reluctantly admit that she complained of a recurring dream in which someone watched her through her window. “Nonsense, of course – her room is atop the castle.”
- Given the chance, Huromasa will plead with the PCs to keep Akina’s sword-smithing dreams a secret from her father. He will be especially likely to make this appeal to Unicorn, Crab, or *ronin* PCs. “Please, samurai-samas, it means so much to her. Our father is a good man, but he cannot comprehend that Akina’s path might lie elsewhere than the way of tradition. If she is forced to give this up, it will be a loss to all those who value excellence.” It is up to the PCs how they handle this appeal – if they insist on informing the daimyo, Huromasa will reluctantly agree.
- Kojekkai knows that Akina went to visit a blacksmith, but does not know which village she visited. He never actually accompanied her.
- He knows that Huromasa sometimes went with Akina.

The Castle Servants

The servants of Shiro no Kaidou are deeply loyal to the ruling family, especially to Akina, who they describe as “a gentle and good-hearted girl.” Only a PC who can connect to commoners, and who approaches them in a sympathetic and compassionate manner, will be able to get any information from the servants. This will require either a Tortoise Clan PC, a PC with the “Hero of the People” advantage, or rolling **Sincerity/Awareness** at TN 25 or **Kuenai/Awareness** at TN 15.

If the servants do open up, they will confess that “Lady Akina-sama” sometimes leaves the castle through the servants’ gate, to visit a blacksmith in one of the neighboring villages. “Lady Akina-sama dreams of learning the art of metalworking, but her father will not hear of such a thing. I am sure that is where she is now. Please, honored samurai, do not tell her that we betrayed her!”

The servants do not know which village Akina visits, but they can list the nearby villages that have blacksmiths: Kogane and Sobamura.

Akina’s Room

Shiba Akina’s room is located on the fourth floor of the castle, along with the quarters of the other family members and the *karo*. It appears to be a normal residence for a woman of the upper levels of the samurai caste. There is a futon, a writing desk, a cosmetics stand with a mirror, a closet for clothing, a shelf with her shugenja scrolls (left behind), and similar furnishings. The window is shuttered.

There is no sign of a struggle. The futon is rolled up against the wall, and anyone who examines it and rolls **Simple Intelligence** at TN 15 can tell that it was not slept on last night.

If the PCs search the room for anything hidden or concealed, they can roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 to discover a cache of scrolls hidden behind the writing desk. They are accounts of sword-smithing, written by several famous swordsmiths (mostly Crane and Crab) from the past history of the Empire.

Although Huromasa will not be able to leave the castle (even if he informs his father of the truth), he will tell the PCs where they can find the blacksmith, Satetsu.

Shiba Kojekkai

The old one-armed samurai will accompany Shiba Huromasa for the remainder of the adventure, acting as his personal guard. He is the oldest retainer in the castle, and began his adulthood serving Lord Takagashi’s father.

Kojekkai is one of the few samurai besides Huromasa who knows that Akina has been sneaking off to visit the blacksmith. Although he does not know that Akina went there last night (he was out with Lord Takagashi’s group, hunting the bandits), he suspects this to be the case, and is wondering whether his charge Huromasa will say anything.

If Huromasa speaks candidly with the PCs, Kojekkai will likewise open up, confirming that Akina sometimes slipped out of the castle through the servants’ entrance.

If Huromasa does not speak, the PCs will be able to tell that Kojekkai is unhappy by rolling **Simple Awareness** at TN 15. He will confess if the PCs make a well role-played appeal to him privately and roll **Sincerity/Awareness**, **Courtier/Awareness**, or **Manipulation/Awareness** roll at TN 20. (Again, skilled role-play earns a Free Raise.) Kojekkai cannot be Intimidated.

If any of the PCs look around outside the window, they can roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 to notice small gouge marks on the outer wall of the castle, and a few scraps of a sticky, silken substance. (These clues were left behind by the Dokufu when it spied on her.) A **Lore: Shadowlands/Intelligence** roll at TN 20 will suggest that these things are the spoor of a creature from Fu Leng's realm. PCs who can detect Taint will pick up a faint residue of corruption on the spider-silk with a **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 25.

Scene Five: The Villages

The PCs should have picked up enough information from Akina's room, her brother, and the guards and servants to be looking for blacksmiths in the surrounding villages. If they ask which local villages have blacksmiths, they can learn that both Kogane Village and Sobamura Village have smithies. Depending on what they learned from Akina's brother Huromasu, they may know that the specific blacksmith they seek is located in Sobamura.

PCs who ask about the geography of the region can learn that Tobomura lies about a half-day's travel to the north, Kogane about a half-day's travel northeast, and Sobamura three hours' travel north-northeast. All three villages border a small forest, Hitomi Mori (Forest of Vision), which supplies them with lumber and firewood.

The Village of Tobomura

There is no blacksmith in this village, but the PCs may decide to come here anyway to investigate the rumors of disappearances and Tainted wolves in the area. Tobomura lies about a half-day's travel north of Nikesake, and is a medium-sized village with about 400 people. The edge of the Hitomi Mori forest lies on its eastern side.

Four villagers, one man and three women, have disappeared from here in the last five months. In all four cases, they vanished in either the evening or early morning, and howling wolves were heard either that night or a night before or after. In two instances, actual wolf-tracks were found, leading into the forest.

- Two boys claim to have seen a pack of huge wolves with glowing red eyes. They are lying, but it will be difficult to tell (**Investigation/Awareness** at TN 25) – they have told the story so many times they have half-convinced themselves that it really happened.

- Many villagers claim to have heard of someone else, usually a traveler or a villager from a neighboring village, who saw the wolves in person (“great shaggy dark beasts with glowing eyes!”). These hearsay accounts have actually been spread by Taroku, but the PCs will not be able to trace them to him unless they spend an entire day tracking down leads and roll **Kuenai/Awareness** or **Investigation/Awareness** at TN 20, or **Courtier/Awareness** or **Manipulation/Awareness** at TN 25.
- The actual “wolf tracks” are long since gone, washed away by weather (it has been almost a month since the last disappearance). If the PCs investigate with magic, they will have no luck with any spirits save Earth spirits – with three or more Raises, they can *Commune* with an Earth spirit which remembers an “old man with a stick” who took away the victims and “struck the ground” with the end of his stick. The spirit remembers that the old man “felt bad.”

If the PCs ask anyone here about wandering old men, hermits, etc., some of them will remember such a wandering old man, perhaps a monk (“I think he’s a monk, he acts like one, he dresses in rags and carries a stick”), who sometimes visits the area. “He’s a kindly old fellow, wouldn’t hurt a fly. I think he calls himself Taroku.”

- A few villagers wear small wooden amulets which Taroku gave them. “He said there was black magic in the area, and these would protect us.” Since nothing bad has happened to the villagers who wear the amulets, they generally believe what Taroku said.
- The amulets are simple wood, crudely carved into a strange abstract symbol. A **Simple Intelligence** roll at TN 20, **Calligraphy/Intelligence** at TN 15, or **Nazado/Intelligence** at TN 15 suggests that the symbol is a distorted spider. There is a very faint residue of Taint on the amulet which can be detected (by those who sense Taint) with a **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 30.

The Village of Kogane

Located a half-day's travel northeast from Nikesake, Kogane is the largest town in Ukabu Province (outside of Nikesake itself), with a population of almost 1,000. The town is well-supplied with rice fields, silk

orchards, a stream, and other natural gifts. Lumber and firewood come from a modest forest to the north.

There is a samurai residence on the western edge of the town, but at present it houses only a wife and children – the bushi who lives there is away at war. A pair of sturdy doshin (armed peasants) do their best to protect the town in his absence.

As you approach the town, you see a farmer struggling with a heavily-laden ox-drawn wagon. The wagon has gotten deeply stuck in the rutted mud of the road, and the farmer is heaving against the back while his ox strains and bellows, trying to get the wagon free of the sucking mud.

Compassionate PCs may decide to help the farmer, whose plight has so far gone unnoticed by anyone else. It will require a combined Strength score of 6 to lift the wagon out of the mud (up to two PCs can work on it at a time). If their total Strength is less than 6, an **Athletics/Strength** roll at TN 30 will do the job. Shugenja PCs may also be able to help in various ways, such as drying out the mud or soothing the ox. PCs who volunteer their time and effort to help the farmer are demonstrating the virtue of Compassion, and earn 1 point of Honor.

The farmer, Okuta, is grateful for the PCs' efforts, although his smiles do not wholly hide the sense of sadness lurking behind his eyes. (**Simple Awareness** at TN 20, or **Kuenai/Awareness** at TN 15, to notice this.) If a PC asks him about this in a friendly manner, he confesses that his daughter went missing two months ago. "The other villagers gossip, say she ran away to be with a man," he mutters. "But I know my little Kurumi would never have done such a thing. It's broken her mother's heart." If the PCs ask further, he can share the following additional information:

- His daughter Kurumi disappeared from their hut one night, while they were sleeping. There had been no indication that anything was wrong before that night.
- There was no sign of a struggle. None of her meager belongings were missing, which is why Okuta does not believe she ran away.
- If the PCs ask him more about his daughter, he will mention that she fell ill early last winter, but a local hermit was able to help her with an herbal drink. "His name's Taroku, he comes through the village sometimes. A kindly old fellow, sort of a monk. A bit odd in the head, I think, but old folks get that

way. He knows his herbs – he helped the blacksmith's son when he was sick last week." He knows the old man lives near Sobamura Village.

- If the PCs ask whether Kurumi ever spoke with Taroku at other times, Okuta will be confused. "I'm sure she did, once or twice, samurai-san. He would sometimes stop for a drink at the village well, where the women go to get water." He will be hurt at the notion that Taroku could be connected to Kurumi's disappearance.
- If any PCs think to ask, Taroku did not give Kurumi an amulet.
- If the PCs ask Okuta about incidents with "wolves," he will mention that there have been two wolf attacks since last winter. Nobody has seen them, but they left tracks and blood behind. He has heard rumors of Tainted wolves with red eyes, although he has not seen any.
- Okuta knows nothing about Shiba Akina.

If the PCs ask around Kogane Village about wolf attacks, supernatural incidents, disappearances, and so forth, they can learn the following:

- There have been two wolf attacks, on a man and a woman, in the last four months. In each case, the victim went missing, leaving behind blood, torn clothing, and wolf tracks leading back to the Hitomi Mori.
- Nobody in Kogane has personally seen the wolves, although there are many villagers who claim to have heard them howling at night.
- Again, there are many villagers who claim to have heard of someone else, usually a traveler or a villager from a neighboring village, who saw the wolves in person ("great shaggy dark beasts with glowing eyes!"). These hearsay accounts have actually been spread by Taroku, but the PCs will not be able to trace them to him unless they spend an entire day tracking down leads and roll **Kuenai/Awareness** or **Investigation/Awareness** at TN 20, or **Courtier/Awareness** or **Manipulation/Awareness** at TN 25.
- A girl in the village, Kurumi, disappeared two months ago. The villagers assume she ran away. If the PCs track down her family, this can lead them back to Okuta, although he will be much less

cooperative if they did not help him with his bogged cart.

- If the PCs ask about the local blacksmith, some of the villagers will mention that his son was sick last week, but “old Taroku” helped him.
- If the PCs ask more about Taroku, or simply ask about wandering old men, travelers, or people new to the area, they can get the same story as from Okuta: an old man named Taroku sometimes visits the village, and helps those who fall sick, like the blacksmith’s son. At least some of the villagers know that Taroku lives somewhere near Sobamura Village.
- As with Tobomura, there are a few villagers wearing wooden protective amulets given them by Taroku. None of the “wolf” victims had amulets.

Any of the villagers can lead the PCs to the places where the “wolf attacks” took place. As with Tobomura Village, there will be no physical clues at any of these locations, but shugenja PCs who call for Earth spirits with three or more Raises can learn that the victims were taken away by an old man with a walking stick. He stamped the ground around the attack zones with the end of the stick.

If the PCs visit Okuta’s hut, they can search the area for clues. If they check outside the hut (especially between the hut and the outhouse), they can roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 or **Hunting/Perception** at TN 25 to spot a few strands of a spider-web like substance on the ground. If a shugenja PC *Communes* with the local Earth spirits, two or more Raises can get the following account: a “small woman” came out of the hut, walking toward the outhouse, when “something big” came out of the darkness, wrapped her in sticky stuff, and carried her away. The spirits cannot describe the thing except that it was “big,” had “many legs,” and “felt bad.”

PCs who can sense Taint can roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 25 to detect a faint residue of evil from the strands of webbing.

If the PCs visit the **blacksmith**, they will find his shop near the center of the village. It is a busy place, full of noise and activity – the smith, Akusoku, has two grown-up sons and an apprentice from another family. Most of the work here is farming tools and other practical items – Akusoku is not a weaponsmith. If the PCs speak with him, they can learn the following:

- He does not work with weapons. However, there is a smith, Satetsu, at Sobamura Village who does weapons-work for the local samurai.
- Shiba Akina visited him once, last year, asking about his work. She was accompanied by her brother. He describes her as a “sweet girl, very curious. It was a great honor for her to visit my humble shop.” He has never seen her since then.
- If the PCs ask about the hermit Taroku, or about his son’s sickness, he breaks into a smile. “Little Hiro-kun was feverish, and we feared the worst. Taroku heard about the trouble when he stopped in the village for some water, and he came straight here. Mixed up an herbal drink for him, and that night the fever broke and he was fine by morning. The old man wouldn’t even let us thank him.”
- Taroku gave the boy one of his wooden amulets.

Suspicious PCs may want to meet with Akusoku’s son Hiro. He is a charming, sweet-natured six-year-old boy. There is nothing wrong with him and he is not Tainted or otherwise affected by his experience. His amulet is the same as the others (an abstracted spider, with very faint Taint).

Sobamura Village

Sobamura is a medium-sized village, about 700 people, located roughly in between Tobomura and Kogane, and crowding close to the Hitomi Mori forest. There is normally a samurai garrison stationed here, in a barracks building on the southern edge of the town, which enforces the law and patrols the area for bandits and other problems. Due to the war, the garrison is now absent.

The blacksmith in this town, Satetsu, is the one who is teaching Akina how to create weapons. The village has also suffered two “wolf attacks” and a disappearance (the daughter of the local innkeeper).

The PCs can learn about the wolf attacks and the disappearance by talking with any of the villagers. Likewise, if they visit the inn, they will notice that the service is slow – the innkeeper will apologize, explaining that his daughter Mieko has “gone missing.”

- The two “wolf” victims were an older man and a young woman. The most recent, the old man, was last month. The evidence at these sites is basically the same as in the other villages. However, at the most recent site, the PCs may be able to find “wolf

tracks” with an **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 25 or **Hunting/Perception** at TN 20. Anyone who looks at these tracks and rolls **Hunting/Intelligence** at TN 20 or an appropriate **Lore** skill (such as **Lore: Animals**) at TN 15 can tell that the tracks are not real wolf tracks – they are the wrong shape, and look more like they were made from a crude carving of a wolf’s paw.

- As with the other two villages, nobody has actually seen the wolves (although many have heard them howling at night). Taroku has spread the same stories of travelers and villagers from a neighboring towns who saw the wolves in person. Again, the PCs can trace the stories to him by spending an entire day tracking down leads and rolling **Kuenai/Awareness** or **Investigation/Awareness** at TN 20, or **Courtier/Awareness** or **Manipulation/Awareness** at TN 25.
- The disappearance took place two weeks ago, when the innkeeper’s daughter was fetching a guest’s horse from the stable. Mieko never returned. The horse ran away but was found the next day, several miles away.
- If the PCs search the stables and the area around it, they can find two clues: First, **Hunting/Perception** at TN 20 (or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 25) can find a pair of marks in the soil that look as though some spiked huge pole was stamped into the ground (the Dokufu’s spider-tracks). Second, **Simple Perception** at TN 25 will spot some wisps of spider-silk in the area.
- As with the other sites, those who can sense Taint can roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 25 to catch some residual Taint in the area, focused on the silk.
- The horse is long gone (the customer was a samurai courier), but the inn’s own pony is kept in the stable. A spell or Inner Gift that allows communication with animals can determine that a “huge spider” took the girl.
- If a shugenja PC *Communes* with the local Earth spirits, two or more Raises can get the following account: a “small woman” came out and fetched a horse. As she was leading the horse away, a “big black insect with many legs” came out of the darkness, wrapped her in sticky stuff, and carried her away.

If the PCs ask the locals about Taroku, or simply about an old man, many of them will describe him as a “kindly hermit” who lives in the forest and sometimes offers medicine to the sick.

- Taroku has lived in the area since last autumn. They don’t know where he came from.
- None of the villagers know exactly where his hut is located, other than that it is “somewhere in the forest.”
- They worry about him being threatened by the wolves, but he always shrugs off such worries. “He says the wolves wouldn’t get more than a stringy mouth-full from him, so he isn’t frightened.”
- As in the other villages, some of the villagers wear the small wooden amulets which Taroku gave them. “He said they were charms, to protect us from black magic. He said he could sense there was black magic around here, and wanted us to be safe from it.”

Satetsu the Blacksmith

The smithy is a large structure with a thick sod roof. The sides are open to the air, and you can see the glow of the forge within. A teenage boy is heaving at the bellows, feeding air into the fire, while a thick-bodied middle-aged man with arms like tree-trunks pounds on a piece of red-glowing metal. Pausing in the work, he thrusts the metal back into the fire to heat again. His chest works in counterpoint to the bellows as he sets down his hammer and sucks in deep breaths of air.

Satetsu’s shop contains many examples of weapons, some completed, others in various stages of work. There are also pieces of armor and more mundane items such as tools, kitchen knives, and plows.

Satetsu will be respectful and polite to the PCs, clasping his hands and speaking in a low rumbling voice, while his apprentice Yoto nervously keeps the fire hot.

- Satetsu will try at first to deny any knowledge of Akina. He is loyal to her and does not want to betray her trust. This can be seen through by rolling **Contested Awareness** against his **Awareness** of 2.

- The PCs can get Satetsu to open up by invoking danger to Akina (her disappearance), by threatening Satetsu with arrest/punishment, or by pressing him hard on his duty to tell the truth to his superiors. Any of these approaches should require an appropriate skill roll (**Intimidation**, **Sincerity**, **Manipulation**, etc) at TN 15.
- If the PCs examine the weapons on display in Satetsu's shop, they can roll **Weaponsmith/Perception** at TN 10, **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20, or an appropriate **Lore** skill (such as **Lore: Swords**) at TN 15 to notice two incomplete sword-blades which are of significantly lower quality than the rest. These are the weapons which Akina is working on.

Once Satetsu opens up, he will admit that “Shiba Akina-sama” has been coming her for many months, learning the arts of sword-making. He apologizes for any wrong he may have done by training her, but explains that he could not bring himself to refuse her request. “She asked me so politely, and with such respect, samurai-sama... how was I to refuse?”

He was expecting her to visit on the evening that she disappeared, but she never arrived. He assumed that something at the castle had intervened – she has sometimes missed appointments before, due to duties at home.

If the PCs ask Satetsu about the old man Taroku, he thinks well of the old fellow. “He helps the people around here, takes care of the sick,” he says. If the PCs specifically ask whether the old man ever spoke with Akina, Satetsu shakes his head, but then frowns. “He did come by one evening and watch as she was working. I didn’t think much of it – he’s always wandering about and watching things, almost like a child sometimes.”

Wolves at Night

The PCs will probably spend the night in one or more of the three villages. If this happens, the PCs will hear the distant howling of wolves. The sound is distant and will fade after a short time – it cannot be traced.

Any PC who listens to this howling can roll **Hunting/Intelligence** at TN 20, **Animal Husbandry/Intelligence** at TN 15, or an appropriate **Lore** skill (such as **Lore: Nature**) at TN 20, to realize that the howling does not sound quite right for a wolf. In fact, it sounds like someone trying to imitate a wolf.

Scene Six: Hitomi Mori Forest

At some point, the PCs should head into the forest in search of the “wolves” or the old monk Taroku. Whenever this happens, they can roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 10 or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 15 to spot several sets of obvious tracks, probably peasant sandals, leading to a clearing fifty yards inside the treeline. This is the false Bloodspeaker site which Taroku has created to try to lead astray anyone who investigates

At the center of a small clearing is a crude stone altar. It is stained with dark, rusty splatters. Atop the altar is a pile of cold ash, from which emerge several half-burned human bones. Human footprints cover the trampled grass and earth of the clearing, forming a semi-circular pattern in front of the altar. There are also wolf-prints mixed in.

Although this appears to be some sort of *maho* or Bloodspeaker ritual site, there are a number of clues and errors here:

- Those who can sense Taint can roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 25 to sense some very faint Taint in the area. It comes from the blood and bones on the altar.
- Careful examination of the human tracks in and around the clearing will allow a roll of **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 or **Hunting/Perception** at TN 25. Success reveals that all the tracks are the same size, and probably from the same person.
- Anyone who examines the “wolf tracks” and rolls **Hunting/Intelligence** at TN 20, or an appropriate **Lore** skill (such as **Lore: Animals**) at TN 15, can tell that the tracks are not real wolf tracks – they are the wrong shape, and look more like they were made from a crude carving of a wolf’s paw.
- The Earth spirits in this area are deeply asleep, irritated by the repeated presence of the Dokufu. They can only be awakened by a shugenja who casts *Commune* with at least five Raises. If awakened, the Earth spirit will explain (confusingly) that the altar and tracks were created by both an “old man” and a “huge spider.” It does not recognize that these are the same being, but does say that they do the same things: make

footprints, burn bones, put blood on the altar, etc. Both of them “feel bad.”

- A PC who casts *Commune* (Air) with four or more Raises can find an Air spirit which has seen an “old man with a stick” visiting the site and creating footprints. No Air spirits have seen the Dokufu’s spider form (it only comes out at night).

Finding Taroku’s Hut

If the PCs search the area around the “ritual site” for tracks leading elsewhere, they can roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 25 or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 30 to find a few tracks leading deeper into the forest. These will eventually lead to Taroku’s hut. Asking the local Earth or Air spirits which direction the “old man” went from here will allow a Free Raise on the rolls.

If the PCs enter the forest to search for wolf tracks, they can roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 15 or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 to find a handful of the faked wolf tracks at the edges of the forest. Looking around these tracks for signs of human presence will allow the same rolls at TNs 20/25 to find a few tracks of a man in sandals. These can be followed back to Taroku’s hut. Likewise, *Communing* with the spirits around these tracks can reveal that they were made by an old man, and can grant a Free Raise on rolls to track him back to his hut.

If the PCs simply enter the forest to look for Taroku’s hut, they can roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 20, **Investigation/Perception** at TN 25, or **Simple Perception** at TN 30 to locate a faltering, intermittent path which leads to the hut. Shugenja PCs may also be able to find the hut with magic – the GM should adjudicate such efforts, rewarding creativity.

Taroku’s Hut

In a small clearing is an old, decrepit hut, which appears to be well over a hundred years old. The thatch roof, however, appears to have been somewhat fitfully repaired, and a small herb garden is growing outside the building. A decrepit, bearded old man, dressed in a ragged garment and his back bent nearly double, peers at you from the door of the hut and breaks into a snaggle-toothed smile. “Hello there!”

Taroku appears to be a very old man, wrinkled and decrepit, bent over by the weight of years. He hobbles around using a gnarled staff with a knobby base. He will play his role as a kindly, slightly dotty old man to the hilt – inviting the PCs into his hut, offering food

and tea, and peppering his conversation with religious quotations and the occasional mischievous joke. If any of the PCs suffer from obvious health problems (such as Permanent Wounds) he will offer to prepare one of his herbal remedy drinks. (This is a sincere offer – Taroku really is a master herbalist, and his concoctions can dampen fevers, soothe pain, and relax tense muscles.) He will also offer the PCs one of his hand-carved wooden “charms,” claiming they are protection against ill-fortune and evil spirits.

The Dokufu will do his best to bluff the PCs, pretending to be just “an old monk seeking peace and harmony” and denying with horror any involvement in disappearances or murders. He is a skilled deceiver, having lived among humans for many decades – PCs who wish to test his truthfulness will need to defeat his **Acting/Awareness** with their **Investigation/Perception** in a Contested Roll. (The spell *Whispering Wind* can also work, of course.) Given the chance, Taroku will try to steer the PCs toward the false Bloodspeaker site, perhaps speaking of seeing “strange fires at night” in that direction.

The interior of Taroku’s dwelling appears to be a normal, albeit old and unkempt, peasant hut. He claims (truthfully) to have found it abandoned last year. “It seemed a shame for such a fine old building to go unused.” He has installed a trapdoor in the floor, concealed under a moth-eaten tatami mat. It leads to the underground lair where he stays when in his spider form.

Observant PCs (**Investigation/Intelligence** at TN 15) may notice an oddity: although Taroku keeps a cook-fire burning in the hut’s central firepit, there are no lanterns or candles anywhere in the hut. He can see in the dark.

If the PCs manage to examine the bottom of Taroku’s staff (he will resist this, complaining that the PCs want to “take away an old man’s stick”), they will find that it is carved in a crude imitation of a wolf’s paw.

Aside from this, the only physical clue is the presence of a few strands of spider-web in the corners of the hut, which can be noticed with an **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 20 or **Simple Perception** at TN 30. (PCs who are specifically looking for spider-webs get a Free Raise on these rolls.) Taroku will try to explain this away as “simple cobwebs, they’re all over the place in this old hut.”

Taroku is a Tainted monster, and any PC who can sense Taint can roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 20 to pick up his evil aura.

If Taroku realizes that “the jig is up,” he will suddenly jab his staff into the roof of the hut, popping loose a ceiling panel and unleashing a massive cloud of dust and straw. The PCs will be blinded and choking, unable to act for one round, and Taroku will take this opportunity to open his trapdoor and flee underground.

Visiting at Night

If the PCs approach Taroku’s hut at night, he will come outside and serve them tea on his porch. This will free him to instantly transform into his spider form instantly when in danger. (He does not want to transform inside the hut, since his immense size would destroy the building.)

Scene Seven: The Lair of the Dokufu

Beneath the trapdoor is a narrow earthen tunnel, descending almost straight down. The walls of the tunnel are covered in thick white spiderwebs, sticky to the touch. A foul, charnel stench rises from the hole.

The sticky webs will allow the PCs to easily descend the tunnel (**Athletics/Agility** at TN 5, or **Simple Agility** at TN 10), although the paranoid among them will probably want to rely on ropes instead. The tunnel descends vertically for about thirty-five feet and opens into a large cave. There is no light below (except what might filter down from the trapdoor).

The cave is a large, irregular earthen chamber, about twenty feet high and thirty wide, and stretching for about a hundred feet from end to end. At the far extremity of the cave it narrows into a fifteen-by-fifteen tunnel which winds away for about a quarter mile. The end of the tunnel opens into the forest – Taroku keeps it concealed beneath dead branches and rocks, and usually uses his human form to climb up into the hut when he wants to leave.

The floor of the cave is sticky with spider-webs, and human bones and desiccated animal corpses are mixed in with the webbing. The entire place smells incredibly foul, requiring a **Simple Willpower** roll at TN 15 to avoid retching violently and uncontrollably (which costs 1 Honor, 1 Glory, and leaves the victim helpless for one round). Also, any PC who falls down, crawls,

or is knocked down in this place will have a good chance of involuntarily touching dead flesh, which causes a hit of 1 honor.

Battling Taroku

Regardless of whether they confront him outside his hut or within his tunnel, Taroku is a fearsome opponent:

The old monk suddenly swells and changes, his body distorting with horrific speed. In mere blinks of an eye, he swells into a monstrous spider, the size of a peasant cottage. The spider’s hide is gray and knobby, as though formed from rock, and seven tiny red eyes glare at you from its misshapen head. Below them, a slobbering toothless mouth drools slime. An abominable stench rises from its flesh. The gigantic spider scuttles forward with fearsome speed, hissing in fury.

The Dokufu exudes Fear (rank 3). PCs may roll **Lore: Shadowlands/Intelligence** at TN 20 to recognize it and remember its strengths and vulnerabilities.

Taroku is a fearsome opponent – his incredibly tough and rocky Carapace will repel most blows, even magical attacks. He is mildly vulnerable to jade, but his true weakness is fire, which bypasses his Carapace completely, searing and melting his loathsome flesh.

PCs can take four Raises (or use the Akodo “called shot” technique) to strike at the Dokufu’s eyes. This will bypass 10 points of the creature’s Carapace.

The Dokufu’s preferred tactic will be to use his webbing to immobilize as many of his opponents as possible. His pointed forelimbs also inflict fearsome wounds. If he wins the fight, he will deposit eggs in any living victims, then swallow them to gestate and hatch in his intestines.

The Children

If Taroku is reduced to half or more of his wounds, he will stop for a round, lurch and shudder, and then vomit up a fountain of yellow-white stinking bile. Mixed into this disgusting expulsion are 1-10 of his young, spider-creatures the size of large dogs. Black umbilical cords run from their bodies back into Taroku’s mouth. The spawn will immediately attack the PCs, while Taroku resumes fighting as well.

If Taroku is killed, the surviving spawn will squeal in rage and terror, and try to escape, tugging loose their umbilicals and scuttling away.

Help Arrives?

If the PCs are losing the battle with Taroku badly, help will arrive: Okame the Wasp, who has independently followed the same clues which led the PCs here. He will immediately join the fight, using his jade arrows to best effect. Okame is brave but not suicidal, and will flee if the battle is clearly lost.

Victory?

When the Dokufu finally dies, it will collapse in a shuddering, heaving pile of stinking flesh. With convulsive motions, it expels the remaining contents of its stomach: the innkeeper's daughter Mieko, and Shiab Akina. Their bodies are grotesquely swollen by the gestating eggs of the Dokufu, and black tendrils run into their throats. Mieko is partially digested and clearly dead, her spawn approaching hatching, but Akina, horribly, is still alive.

There is no way to save the daimyo's daughter. Any attempts to "rescue" her will only prolong and intensify the agony of her death. Wise and merciful PCs will kill her swiftly, and spare her father the worst of the details.

Going for Reinforcements?

PCs who retreat from a lost battle, or simply flee when they realize the Dokufu outclasses them, will probably go back to Nikesake for help. Shiba Takagashi and Asako Keiko will immediately dispatch every bushi they can spare (over twenty) to deal with this menace. If the PCs can tell them about the Dokufu's weakness to fire, they will send torches, oil, and other such things along. With such a force, the Dokufu will be swiftly killed, although nine Phoenix bushi will perish in the struggle.

Conclusion

Shiba Takagashi's self-control does not crack when he learns the news of his daughter's fate, but any PC who rolls **Simple Awareness** at TN 10 can tell that the daimyo is screaming and howling with grief beneath the mask of his public face. He thanks the PCs, stiffly but graciously, for destroying the beast which was preying on his lands. Immediately afterward, he dismisses everyone and retreats to his private quarters.

Asako Keiko will also keep her composure, but only barely, her face twitching as she fights down tears. Shiba Huromasa, stricken with guilt and grief, sits stone-still for a long time, tears streaming openly down his frozen face. That night he asks his father for

permission to commit seppuku to atone for failing to protect his sister. The request is denied.

Asako Keiko will later send the PCs a letter thanking and praising them for their services to her lord's family. She promises to also recommend them to the attention of Isawa Nobuyoshi, a Phoenix Inquisitor "with whom I have certain connections."

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

Playing through the adventure:	1 XP
Good role-playing:	+1 XP
PCs find the Dokufu:	+1 XP
PCs defeat the Dokufu without help:	+2 XP
OR	
PCs defeat the Dokufu with just Okame's help:	+1 XP

Total Possible Experience: 5 XP

Honor

PCs who lose control and vomit while in the Dokufu's lair lose 1 point of Honor.

PCs lose 1 point of Honor for accidentally touching dead flesh.

PCs who help the bogged-down farmer (virtue of Compassion) gain +1 point of Honor.

Crab, Inquisitor, Kuroiban, and Emerald/Jade Magistrate PCs gain +1 Honor for slaying the Dokufu.

Glory

PCs who lose control and vomit while in the Dokufu's lair lose 1 point of Glory.

Phoenix Clan and Crab Clan PCs who defeat the Dokufu gain +1 point of Glory.

Other Awards/Penalties

If the PCs destroyed the Dokufu, Asako Keiko will recommend them to the attention of Isawa Nobuyoshi. All PCs gain him as an **Ally**.

Appendix: NPCs and Monsters

Asako Keiko, Phoenix Clan Henshin and Karo of Shiro no Kaidou, age 22

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

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Asako Henshin 3

Honor/Glory: 3.8/4.6

Skills: Advanced Medicine 3, Calligraphy 3, Cipher 2, Courtier 5, Defense 1, Etiquette 4, Heraldry 3, History 5, Jujutsu 1, Law 3, Lore (Elements) 5, Lore (Fortunes) 3, Lore (Shugenja) 3, Medicine 3, Meditation 4, Painting 2, Shintao 5, Sincerity 6, Tantojutsu 1, Theology 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Benten's Blessing, Social Position (karo)/Soft-Hearted.

Equipment: Kimono.

Special: Due to her intense mental training as a *henshin*, Asako Keiko's mind is very difficult to magically read or access – she is considered to have Magic Resistance +15 against such spells.

Shiba Huromasa, Son of the Daimyo

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 2 Willpower 3	WATER 2 Strength 3
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15 (22 with fine light armor)

School/Rank: Shiba Yojimbo 1

Honor/Glory: 3.2/3.0

Skills: Athletics 3, Courtier 1, Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu 3, Jujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Kyujutsu 2, Meditation 3, Naginata 3, Shintao 2, Sincerity 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Kharmic Tie (sister), Social Position (daimyo's son)

Equipment: Kimono, fine light armor, daisho set.

(Tsuruchi) Okame, Wasp Bounty Hunter and Occasional Diplomat

FIRE 2 Intelligence 3	AIR 4 Reflexes 5
EARTH 3	WATER 2

	Perception 3
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 25

School/Rank: Wasp bushi 2

Rank One: When firing an arrow, gains Free Raises equal to School Rank. Arrow range extended by 50' per School Rank.

Rank Two: When firing a bow, makes a number of attacks per round equal to School Rank.

Honor/Glory: 1.8/0.9

Skills: Courtier 1, Defense 2, Etiquette 2, Fletching 3, Hunting 4, Jujutsu 2, Kyujutsu 6, Sincerity 2, Stealth 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Benten's Blessing.

Equipment: Kimono, fine bow (Strength 3), twenty normal arrows (10 standard, 5 flesh-cutter, 5 armor-piercing), 20 jade arrows (all standard).

Taroku the Dokufu (low-rank stats)

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 3 Reflexes 4
EARTH 6	WATER 3 Strength 6

TN to be Hit: 15

Attacks: 6k3

Damage: 6k3

Carapace Armor: 15 (bypassed by fire and jade of all kinds)

Wounds: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90: +15; 120: Dead.

Skills: Acting 6, Herbalism 7, Shintao 2.

Special Abilities: Fear 3, Shapechanging, Webs, Vomiting Offspring.

Shapechanging: the Dokufu may take a human form of either gender, although it always appears to be a human of the same age as itself.

Webs: the Dokufu can spin webs to trap a single human victim with a normal attack roll. Breaking free of the webs requires one round and an Athletics/Strength roll at TN 15. The webs can also be burned, although this will inflict 2k1 damage on the trapped victim.

Vomiting Offspring: the Dokufu carries its egg-implanted victims inside its bloated stomach, where they are attached to black umbilical cords. It can vomit out 1-10 spawn to defend itself, re-swallowing them after the battle.

Taroku the Dokufu (high-rank stats)

FIRE 3 Agility 4	AIR 3 Reflexes 5
EARTH 8	WATER 3 Strength 9

TN to be Hit: 15

Attacks: 8k4

Damage: 9k6

Carapace Armor: 20 (bypassed by fire of all kinds, and by jade magic)

Wounds: 40: +5; 80: +10; 120: +15; 160: Dead.

Skills: Acting 6, Herbalism 7, Shintao 2.

Special Abilities: Fear 3, Shapechanging, Webs, Vomiting Offspring.

Shapechanging: the Dokufu may take a human form of either gender, although it always appears to be a human of the same age as itself.

Webs: the Dokufu can spin webs to trap a single human victim with a normal attack roll. Breaking free of the webs requires one round and an Athletics/Strength roll at TN 20. The webs can also be burned, although this will inflict 2k1 damage on the trapped victim.

Vomiting Offspring: the Dokufu carries its egg-implanted victims inside its bloated stomach, where they are attached to black umbilical cords. It can vomit out 1-10 spawn to defend itself, re-swallowing them after the battle.

Dokufu Spawn (low-rank stats)

FIRE 1 Agility 2	AIR 1 Reflexes 3
EARTH 2	WATER 2

TN to be Hit: 15

Attacks: 3k2

Damage: 3k1

Carapace Armor: None.

Wounds: 8: +5; 16: +10; 24: Dead.

Special Abilities: Fear 1.

Dokufu Spawn (high-rank stats)

FIRE 1 Agility 3	AIR 1 Reflexes 4
EARTH 2	WATER 2 Strength 3

TN to be Hit: 20

Attacks: 3k3

Damage: 4k2

Carapace Armor: 5 (bypassed by fire or jade)

Wounds: 10: +5; 20: +10; 30: Dead.

Special Abilities: Fear 1.