

Darkness Beyond Darkness

Shadow's Path, Part One

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

by Robert Hobart

Something has gone wrong in the lands of the Badger Clan. Investigators arrive from the Empire, but will they be able to learn what is happening before it is too late?

LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS is a registered trademark of Alderac Entertainment Group. RPGA is a registered trademark of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Scenario detail copyright 2003 by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This scenario is intended for tournament use only and may not be reproduced without approval of the RPGA Network.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GM's Information

THIS TOURNAMENT SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD!

This adventure is a Low Level adventure. This means that only Rank 1 and Rank 2 Characters should be allowed to play. This adventure was not written with Rank 3 through 5 characters in mind and cannot anticipate all that these characters may bring to the table.

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 Low/Mid-Rank adventure, and thus can involve parties of widely varying capabilities. The encounters have been optimized for a party of average Rank Two.

Although most of the challenges here are role-play oriented and thus not terribly dependent on party strength, a few changes can be made to adjust the adventure difficulty for low-end and high-end parties, as follows:

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

- TN for the Simple Void roll to resist the Living Darkness is 10, not 15.
- TNs to dodge the Goju's rockslide ambush are 5 lower. Other skill-roll and Contested Roll TNs may also be reduced by 5, at the GM's discretion.
- Statistics for the Goju, and for the "turned" Hideo, are lower. See "NPCs and Monsters" for details. In the final combat with Ichiro Hideo, the supporting Goju number only 4 instead of 6.
- The Shadow-Oni is TN 20 to hit, and takes full damage from jade and half damage from normal weapons.

High End Party (all characters at least Rank Two and half or more Rank Three):

- Statistics for the Goju, and for the "turned" Hideo, are higher. See "NPCs and Monsters" for details. In the final combat with Ichiro Hideo, the supporting Goju number 8 instead of 6.
- Skill-roll TNs may be increased by 5, at the GM's discretion.

Adventure Summary and Background

The Badger Clan is the guardian of the northern passes into Rokugan. For centuries it has waited there, alone, ready to defend the passes against gaijin invasion. But now something has gone wrong. The autumn taxes went unpaid, no word has come from the Clan in weeks, and now a lone madman stumbles out of the mountains ranting about "faceless monsters" and a "devouring beast."

In truth, the Badger Clan has become the victim in a terrible new alliance which is forming among the enemies of Rokugan. The Living Darkness, the nameless, formless, yet somehow sentient force which seeks to unmake the Universe, has decided to ally itself to Fu Leng, the fallen god who has begun to awaken after a thousand years of imprisonment. One of the Black Scrolls has already been opened, and Fu Leng's power is growing. The Living Darkness knows that in a world ruled by Fu Leng, a world of evil and fear and death, it will be able to spread far more quickly. Its mutable representatives, the Goju, have met with Fu Leng's champions, offering their powers in his service. In response, the Dark God has demanded proof of their power. The Goju have chosen the Badger Clan to be their proof.

The Living Darkness has spent the last several months corrupting and weakening the Badger Clan. The culmination of their efforts was focused on a pair of brothers, Ichiro Hideo and Ichiro Koturi. Koturi, a rare Badger shugenja training in Dragon lands, is in love with Hideo's fiancée, Agasha Momuko. The Goju showed Hideo that his brother and fiancée were betraying him, and used Hideo's rage to seduce him into summoning a powerful Oni. Now that Oni, a fusion of the powers of Fu Leng and the Shadow, is systematically destroying the Badger Clan.

The PCs enter the scene as part of a group of samurai sent to investigate the Badger Clan's failure to pay its taxes. They will have the chance to save the remaining members of the Badger Clan, and perhaps to gain a warning of the unholy alliance which has begun between the two most dangerous forces in Rokugan.

CREDIT where it is DUE: Some of the plot background for this adventure (particularly the NPCs Ichiro Hideo, Ichiro Koturi, and their relationships with Agasha Momuko) is taken from *Way of the Shadowlands* (Alderac 2001).

Note on the Source Material: Players who have read *Way of the Shadowlands* will be somewhat familiar with the story of the Badger brothers Ichiro Hideo and Ichiro Koturi, and their love for Agasha Momuko. It should be noted that the scenario here (and in particular, who is to blame for the doom of the Badger) is different from the original, which should prevent any players from exploiting meta-game knowledge of the situation.

Introduction

The Badger are one of the most obscure of the Minor Clans, dwelling alone on the north side of Komichi no Kanashimi, the Path of Woe, the pass guarding the Empire against an invasion from the Burning Sands. They have fulfilled this duty alone for centuries, all but ignored by the rest of the Empire.

Now, however, the Badger have finally gotten some attention. This spring, as the Emperor's servants reviewed their records, they realized that the Badger had failed to pay their modest Imperial taxes last autumn. Shocked, the Emperor demanded an explanation, but the messengers dispatched to the Badger lands failed to return. Now, a larger group of samurai has been ordered to travel to Badger lands and get an explanation for these unprecedented events. Accompanying them are the handful of Badger samurai found outside their ancestral lands. Each of these samurai has given a pledge of seppuku if their Clan cannot account properly for its affairs.

The PCs are among the samurai dispatched to investigate the problem with the Badger Clan. If any of the PCs are themselves Badger, they are assumed to have spent the last half-year elsewhere in the Empire (having been lucky enough to get an invitation to another Clan's Winter Court). As a result, they are just as ignorant as the rest of the party of what has transpired in their home territories. And of course, they have given a pledge of seppuku, ritual suicide, if their Clan cannot present a proper explanation for the failure of its Imperial obligations.

It is late in the month of Hantei, the month of the Serpent in the common usage – the last month of spring (May). The PCs are presumed to have traveled together for some weeks in order to reach Badger lands, so allow them a chance to describe and introduce themselves and to role-play with each other. In addition, the PCs have been accompanied on their journey by the following NPCs (stats are listed at the end of the module):

Otomo Mishogi, Imperial representative and tax auditor. This is a slim, quiet, unprepossessing man who is here to prepare an official report for the Emperor and, if possible, to collect the delinquent taxes. He will take no action or initiative of his own, instead waiting on the PCs and the other NPCs. If anyone speaks with him on a personal level, they will learn that Mishogi is a scholar of the Tao and an avid player of Go. He carries a small Go board in his traveling pack and is always ready for a game. In any sort of violent situation he will be quite helpless and frightened, hiding behind the samurai and fully expecting them to risk their lives to protect him.

Ichiro Honda, Badger Clan Imperial representative, and his family. Honda, a muscular man with graying hair and a jutting jaw, is the Badger Clan's ambassador to the Imperial Court. It was he who offered the pledge of seppuku if the Badger were found to have failed in their Imperial duties. Honda is an honorable and rather rigid man, and is firmly convinced that the Badger are innocent – only some terrible disaster could have prevented his Clan from paying its proper taxes. He is accompanied on this journey by his wife, Akemi, and their two sons, 11-year-old Kaji (already starting to show the characteristic Badger musculature) and 6-year-old Gofu, a brat spoiled by the constant attentions of his mother. The family is also accompanied by two loyal servants, an old married couple.

Ichiro Fubutsu, Badger bushi. This huge man, with muscles so massive they seem more like sculpture than real flesh, always carries a heavy Dai Tsuchi (war hammer) over his shoulder. Fubutsu was assigned to the Imperial capital as a guard for Ichiro Honda, and is in many ways the “prototypical Badger” – loud, crude, provincial, and obsessed with strength and displays of physical prowess. He is very happy to be out of the city and heading back to his own lands. Fubutsu will try to challenge any large or strong PCs to contests of might – lifting heavy logs, throwing large rocks, and so forth. He seems largely oblivious to the problems with his Clan and, if asked, shrugs that “it's all a misunderstanding, probably.”

Ichiro Koturi, Badger shugenja. Koturi is a thin man with long hair (worn loose) and a short goatee. He has an anxious, slightly furtive look about him. Koturi is the only Badger currently in training as a shugenja, and has spent the last five years in Dragon lands, learning at the feet of the Agasha. He is also in love with Agasha Momuko, a pretty shugenja-ko who is betrothed to his older brother, Ichiro Hideo. Koturi is deeply jealous of his brother's betrothal, and at the

same time consumed with guilt over his relationship with Momuko. A sympathetic (or clever) PC may be able to get Koturi to open up about some of these things, especially after he meets Hideo and his feelings become more overt.

Once the PCs have had time to meet each other and to make the acquaintance of the NPCs, move on to Scene One.

Scene One: The Village of Kibukitu (Far North Village)

After many days of travel in the pleasant warmth of late spring, you have reached the rolling plains of the northern Unicorn Lands. The snow-capped peaks of the Kyodai Kabe sano Kita, the Great Wall of the North, march across the northern horizon, shielding Rokugan from the foreign lands. Directly ahead of you, the road leads into a deep, narrow pass that climbs up through those mountains. This is the Komichi no Kanashimi, the Path of Woe, which leads through the mountains to the Burning Sands and the castles of the Badger Clan.

At the mouth of the pass, a large village straddles the road. Above it, a small castle perches on a low outcrop of the mountains. You can see many peasants working the broad fields below the pass. The air smells fresh and invigorating, cleansed by a recent rainstorm whose clouds are drifting away to the east.

This is Kibukitu, Far North Village, the most northerly settlement of the Unicorn Clan. Any Unicorn PC will know the name of the village, and other PCs will have heard of it with a **Simple Intelligence** roll at TN 10 (or if they have Way of the Land for Unicorn lands). The village is large and prosperous, with over fifteen hundred inhabitants, and rice and barley fields cover the lands about it for miles, producing rich crops. The castle above Kibukitu is home to the local daimyo, Shinjo Fusawari.

It is early afternoon when the PCs reach Kibukitu, and they may decide to press on into the pass. However, Badger PCs will know – and locals can explain to other PCs – that it is a three-day journey through the pass to the Badger lands. There are roadhouses along the route for travelers to rest, but no villages or inns. If the PCs continue on now, they will have to travel well into the night to reach the first of those roadhouses – or else camp outdoors.

If the PCs do decide to press on without stopping, they will be followed by a samurai rider beyond the village. The courier gallops up on a Unicorn riding horse and speaks loudly: “Samurai! You travel to the Badger lands? My lord has need of your assistance!” He will not say any more, and in fact does not know anything except his message.

If the PCs stay in an inn at the village (there are three), a similar messenger will summon them to the castle. If they go to the castle (to ask questions or simply out of courtesy), they will learn of the matter directly.

A Meeting with the Magistrate

Regardless of whether the PCs are summoned to the castle or go there on their own, their reception is the same:

You are ushered in to an audience room, where you find yourself facing several grim-looking Unicorn samurai. Standing behind them is a figure, apparently a man, dressed in the robes of a shugenja but wearing a wooden mask which completely covers his face.

The leader of the group of samurai, a stocky Unicorn with a thick beard, introduces himself as “Shinjo Kobotsu, magistrate to Shinjo Fusawari, daimyo of Kibukitu Village and surrounding lands.” He confirms that the PCs and NPCs are traveling to Badger lands, listens to their reasons, and then explains the situation:

“Six days ago, we found a mad Badger samurai wandering in the pass. He raved about huge monsters and demons without faces, and when we tried to speak to him, he attacked us with the mighty ono he carried. We hold him in our dungeon now. We have tried to get sense from him, but he only babbles. The honored shugenja Iuchi Karasu,” he bows briefly at the masked figure behind him, “has come here to examine him. Karasu-san tells us this Badger may carry the mark of Fu Leng on his soul.”

Shinjo Kobotsu wants the PCs and their Badger companions to try to talk with this maddened, possibly-Tainted samurai and, if possible, to take him back to Badger lands, removing him from the concern of the Unicorn. He also wants them to return the Badger’s ono, since it is the property of the Clan.

Ichiro Fubutsu and Ichiro Honda will both be eager to speak with the strange Badger in person, although Koturi will be quieter and less eager to volunteer. Shinjo Kobotsu will be more than willing to let the

party visit the prisoner in the dungeon, and will release him into their care if they pledge to take him back to Badger lands.

Kobotsu can share the following additional information, if the PCs ask the right questions:

- The Badger samurai has named himself “Hideo.” Any PC who rolls **Simple Awareness** at TN 15 will notice a nervous start from Ichiro Koturi at that name. Asked, he will reluctantly confess that his brother carries that name.
- Hideo’s rants are not coherent. He speaks sometimes of “faceless men” who somehow killed or destroyed everyone. At other times he has spoken of a great, terrible beast which smashed everything in its path.

The shugenja, Iuchi Karasu, stands silent until someone addresses him personally. PCs of the Iuchi family have heard of Karasu’s story – that the Crab Clan rescued him from the Shadowlands, that his mask hides the terrible scars of his experiences there, and that he has a Kuni wife. Other PCs can remember these stories by rolling **Lore: Unicorn/Intelligence** at TN 15 or **Lore: Shugenja/Intelligence** at TN 20. Any PC who looks closely at Karasu can see that the skin of his hands (just visible within the voluminous sleeves of his robed kimono) is horribly scarred.

If the PCs speak with Karasu (none of the NPCs will volunteer to do so), he turns his blind, blank wooden mask toward them and answers in a rasping whisper that chills their blood. He will not answer questions about anything except the Badger prisoner. He can share the following:

- The Badger shows tell-tale marks of the Taint – insanity, violence, loss of appetite. The application of Jade does not yet burn him, however. Perhaps his soul can still be saved.
- The Badger’s tales of faceless men resemble something which Karasu once met in the Shadowlands. He will not say anything further on this topic.

Ichiro Hideo

If the PCs agree to meet Ichiro Hideo, they are led down into the castle dungeon. As they approach the cells, they hear a loud bellow ahead of them, and see a servant retreating quickly, followed by a flung bowl of rice which scatters across from the floor.

Behind the bars of the cell, a heavily-muscled man crouches like a beast of prey. His wide, wild eyes are darkly shadowed, and his bared teeth shine a dirty yellow. He wears a ragged, filthy kimono on which you can just make out the mon of the Badger Clan.

The moment he sees Ichiro Koturi, the wild look suddenly fades from his eyes. He blinks, shakes his head, and sits down heavily. “Koturi? What is happening?” Ho looks around in confusion. “Why am I here?”

The sight of his brother has brought Ichiro Hideo out of his maddened state. He remembers almost nothing of what has happened, and will be angry and defensive at the suggestion he might be Tainted. He will cautiously answer questions from the PCs and Ichiro Honda, all the while staring at Koturi and periodically asking, “What are you doing here, brother?” Koturi, clearly troubled, answers that he is here to see what has happened to the Badger, but seems reluctant to question Hideo in return.

Hideo has forgotten most of what has happened to him, and cannot clearly remember anything since last autumn. He will grow angry and frustrated as he tries to remember. He can eventually manage to recall the following:

- Something was wrong at the castle. Everyone was suspicious and unfriendly. Fights broke out; he can’t remember why.
- Men went missing from their posts. Villages were empty. Hideo was part of a group who went to investigate. He can’t remember what happened, but he is convinced that the samurai who accompanied him are dead.

The Taint and the Ono

Hideo is indeed Tainted, but the Living Darkness which infests his soul is protecting him from being exposed. Jade will not burn him, and Witch-Hunters and Moto bushi will not be able to detect any Taint within him. However, his Shadow Corruption brings other vulnerabilities. Crystal makes him uncomfortable, and light shone through a crystal will burn his flesh.

Hideo will insist on accompanying the party back to Badger lands, and both Ichiro Honda and Ichiro Fubutsu will support him on this. (Ichiro Koturi, plagued by his guilty conscience, will again say nothing, while darting anxious looks at his brother.)

Hideo will want his weapon, an Ono (axe), returned to him. Honda will agree to this, but at least one PC will need to agree as well before the Unicorn will reluctantly hand over the weapon. The Badger seems to regain more of his poise after recovering the weapon, and clutches it to him like a lifeline, never relinquishing his grip even in sleep.

The weapon is actually the Ancestral Ono of the Badger Clan, which was given to Ichiro by the Lying Darkness. He firmly believes it to be his own weapon.

There is no outward way to identify the weapon, but anyone rolling **Weaponsmith/Perception** or a suitable **Lore** skill (also with **Perception**) at TN 15 can tell it is an extremely old weapon, well cared-for. The spell *Reflections of Pan Ku* can determine the weapon's true identity. Hideo will fervently deny the Ono's true nature, and demands its return quite stridently.

If a PC does not agree to the return of the weapon, the Unicorn will give it to Ichiro Honda for safe-keeping. Ichiro Hideo will nag everyone continuously for the weapon, insisting that he needs it and that there are "terrible things" waiting for them in the mountains (although he cannot explain or remember what those things are). Unless the PCs argue strenuously for keeping Hideo unarmed (or correctly identify the weapon as the Ancestral Ono), Ichiro Honda will eventually give in and hand over the weapon to the frantic young bushi.

Whether or not Hideo gets the Ono, Ichiro Honda will insist that he be provided with a daisho set.

Scene Two: Journey Through the Path of Woe

The trip up the Path of Woe to Badger lands will take three days and three nights. The road winds up through the mountains, climbing thousands of feet before cresting the pass and starting down the other side. At the top of the pass, the air is as cold as deep winter, icy wind howls through the rocks, and unmelted snow is visible only a few hundred feet up the mountainsides. Looking back, the PCs can see much of northern Rokugan spread out like a map. Looking ahead, they see a great yellow-brown steppe, flat as a tabletop and stretching as far as the eye can see. The road descends again, down toward the Badger lands.

There are roadhouses stationed periodically along the route – small wooden structures, tile-roofed, and equipped with a well, blankets, and a firepit. The party

will stop at one of these roadhouses each of the three nights. Ichiro Honda's two servants will do most of the work of setting up beds, cooking dinner, and so forth. Ichiro Fubutsu will chop wood for the fire, and invites PCs he likes to assist him. Ichiro Hideo, however, will spend each evening sitting alone in a corner of the roadhouse, fingering his Ono (if he has it) and shooting dark looks at his brother Koturi – who sits quietly and guiltily on the far side of the building.

Any PC who speaks with Koturi can soon realize (with a **Contested Awareness** roll) that the young shugenja feels a huge sense of guilt in connection to his brother. Getting him to speak of this, however, will be extremely difficult. PCs will have to be both sympathetic and persistent to get Koturi to open up a little. He will not confess the full nature of his failings, but may drop hints about the Three Sins (Fear, Regret, and Desire), conflicts between emotion and duty, and so forth.

If a PC asks him about his status as a shugenja, or why he has not been in Badger lands, he will explain that he has been training with the Agasha for the last five years. "It is not often that one of our Clan is born with the gift of the spirits," he observes with melancholy pride. If a PC has been friendly and sympathetic, Koturi may confess that his training in Dragon lands was part of a bilateral agreement which also won his brother Hideo a betrothal to a Dragon shugenja-ko, Agasha Momuko. Koturi extols her virtues at some length before sobering and observing, "She will make a fine wife for Hideo."

If a PC speaks with Hideo, he will find that the bushi still seems strangely confused and incoherent. He is angry with his brother but cannot remember why, knowing only that his brother betrayed him somehow. He is also generally paranoid and suspicious, and tends to put the worst possible interpretation on anything he is asked or told. He will be especially suspicious and hostile toward anyone who suggested he might be Tainted.

PCs who speak to him about his betrothal to Agasha Momuko will get an especially hostile response. Hideo will demand how the PCs know about her, ask whether they have seen her, and so forth, all the while clutching his ono and growling like a feral beast. Eventually, if the PCs are calm and soothing, he will subside to angry mutterings. (An aggressive or belligerent PC may find themselves provoking a berserk rage, with possible lethal consequences unless someone manages to intervene.)

The Dream Attacks

Each of the three nights which the party spends on the Path of Woe, the Living Darkness will attack one of them. The Darkness will preferentially attack a character who suffers from flaws of character (symbolized by Disadvantages such as True Love, Lost Love, Dark Secret, Driven, and so forth). On the first two nights the Darkness will preferentially attack PCs (unless none of them have Disadvantages that seem to give the Darkness an opening), while on the third night it will attack Ichiro Koturi.

The targeted PCs will each experience strange, unpleasant dreams in which they seem to confront someone or something which symbolizes their character flaw – the man/woman they love, a friend they failed, a parent they look up to, and so forth. The dream-visitor will verbally attack the PCs' emotional weaknesses and vulnerabilities, trying to break their spirits and lead them to anger, despair, or humiliation. This should be run as a private, one-on-one role-playing exercise, with the GM trying to provoke a strong emotional response from the PC (especially a response that suggests dishonor or loss of control).

If a PC allows the goading of the Darkness to affect him/her, the PC must make a **Simple Void** roll at TN 15. Failure means the PC has been corrupted by the Living Darkness and gains the Shadow Corruption cert (at one Shadow Point). If the PC already gained Shadow Corruption in a previous adventure (such as *A Foreign Legacy*), a failed roll means the PC gains one additional Shadow Point.

Regardless of whether the PC gained Corruption or not, s/he will awaken in a confused emotional state, sweating despite the cold, unable to remember clearly the dream which was so disturbing.

On the third night, Ichiro Koturi will be the target. Although haunted by his guilt over his betrayal of his brother (and the nagging suspicion that his betrayal somehow caused whatever has happened to Hideo), Koturi manages to resist the fears and temptations of the Lying Darkness. The next day he seems remote and distracted. If any PCs ask him about this, he confesses to having “bad dreams” the night before. PCs who share their own dreams can realize that he has shared a similar experience.

Scene Three: Shiro Ichiro

Early on the morning of the third day, about an hour after leaving the roadhouse, the PCs finally spy the Badger territories:

Below you, the pass opens out into a series of narrow terraced valleys, winding and climbing down toward the plains far below. You can make out the geometrical shapes of rice paddies, fed by the water of thin mountain streams. Just above the first of the fields, crouching on a stony outcropping right above the road, is a large, squat fortress. Even from this distance, you can see that something is wrong – the roof of the fortress is broken in like an eggshell, and huge rents have been torn in the steep stone walls. The wind shifts and you suddenly catch the awful reek of rotting flesh.

Any Badger PC (and the various NPCs) will recognize this castle as Shiro Ichiro, the largest and strongest of the Badger castles. Ichiro Akemi and her children utter shocked, horrified cries at the sight of what has befallen their home; Ichiro Honda and Ichiro Fubutsu's faces tighten and jaws clamp in rage. Ichiro Koturi looks pale and sick, tottering on his feet. Hideo tightens his grip on his Ono, and any PC who checks his reaction can roll **Investigation/Awareness** at TN 20 to notice a momentary stricken look cross his face – a flash of guilty memory that vanishes as soon as it appears.

The Shadow-Oni

As the PCs get closer, the stench of death becomes far more noticeable. Mingled with it is a strange, acidic odor which makes the hairs in their nostrils crinkle. At this point, call for rolls with **Hunting** or **Battle** (using the **Perception** trait) at TN 15. Success means the PC spots motion within the walls of the castle in the instants before the Shadow-tainted Oni attacks. Such PCs may react normally to the attack of the Shadow-Oni. PCs who fail their rolls cannot act on the first round of combat, and have their TN to be hit reduced by 10 on that round as well.

With blinding speed, a massive humanoid form rises up out of the broken shell of Shiro Ichiro, splitting the sky with an inhuman bellow. In a nightmarish flash of vision you realize that the gigantic monstrosity is composed of hundreds of interwoven human corpses! Then a barrage of large missiles is hurtling down on you from the monstrosity's gigantic hands.

The Oni is a terrifying opponent, exerting a Fear rating of 4. The missiles it hurls are corpses (costing it 20

Wounds each time) plucked from its horrible form. PCs who are struck by these awful missiles lose not only Wounds, but also Honor – they have touched dead flesh, however involuntarily the touch may have been delivered. (PCs who attack the Shadow-Oni with hand-to-hand strikes also suffer dishonor.)

The Shadow-Oni is a creature which merges the powers of Fu Leng and the Living Darkness. It appears to be a gigantic humanoid form, almost forty feet tall, made up of the corpses of hundreds of dead human beings – the samurai and peasants of the Badger Clan. The corpses shift and move through its body as it walks and fights. Red eyes blaze from its face, and foul yellow-black teeth fill its mouth, but otherwise it has no discernable features that are not formed from dead bodies. However, anyone who looks closely at the Oni's form notices (with a **Simple Perception** roll at TN 15) that the faces of the corpses seem oddly blank, and occasionally familiar faces seem to flicker across the features of all the bodies. The outlines of the Shadow-Oni often seem slightly indistinct and blurry, especially at night, and its booming voice seems to be made up of a vast chorus of howls and screams.

It should quickly become apparent that the Oni severely outmatches the PCs and NPCs. Jade (whether natural or magical) does only half damage to it. Magical fire (such as *Fury of Osano-Wo*) and other non-jade magical forces will likewise do half damage, but normal fire has no effect at all. Likewise, normal weapons do no damage. Only crystal weapons, crystal magic, and true magical weapons (nemuranai) will do full damage to the entity.

Anyone who is slain (or rendered unconscious and not quickly dragged away) in this fight will be picked up by the Oni and absorbed into its massive corpse-body. Each such victim will heal the Oni 40 Wounds. At the GM's option, the Oni might kill and absorb a minor NPC (such as a servant, one of Ichiro Honda's family, or Otomo Mishogi) in order to demonstrate its awful power to the PCs.

Unless the PCs are uniquely well-equipped, the Shadow-Oni will be near-invulnerable to their attacks. The higher-ranking NPCs (Ichiro Honda and his family, Otomo Mishogi) will quickly realize they are facing an impossible opponent and will retreat, seeking shelter in rocky crevices or in the basement chambers of the castle. (At the GM's option, a heroic opportunity can be created out of the threat to Ichiro Honda's wife and children, and the self-sacrificial courage of the old servants who look after them.)

Smart PCs will likewise seek to flee or take shelter, since the alternative will be destruction at the hands of the Oni. Ichiro Fubutsu will follow the PCs' example. Ichiro Koturi will turn pale at the sight of the Oni, casts one or two spells on it, then flees. Oddly enough, the Oni will never attack Ichiro Hideo, who first stands dazed, then screams and attacks it with reckless courage. PCs who watch closely when Hideo attacks can roll **Battle/Perception** or **Lore: Shadowlands/Perception** at TN 20 to realize that Hideo's Ono is actually hurting the creature.

If the PCs kept hold of the Ancestral Ono themselves, or handed it over to Ichiro Honda, they can make the same roll to notice that the weapon is harming the Shadow-Oni. However, the creature will not hesitate to attack and slay such opponents.

The Shadow-Oni is sentient and malicious. It will boom out mocking laughter at the PCs/NPCs, calling on them to "show their samurai courage" and fight it. It names itself "Oni no Kage-Tanuki" (Shadow-Badger Demon) and takes great amusement in crushing its foes and absorbing their bodies. However, if any PC asks how the Oni came here, who summoned it, etc., the Oni roars in fury: "I have no name, and when I take the name of my summoner, I will still have none!"

PCs who roll **Lore: Shadowlands/Intelligence** at TN 15 are fairly certain they are facing an Oni – and are also fairly certain they have never heard of an Oni like this before. A TN of 20 or more suggests that this is a unique named Oni – one with the potential to become an Oni Lord.

Assuming the PCs are smart enough to flee and take shelter, the Oni will eventually lose interest and move off, striding down the pass and then turning aside into the hills. Ichiro Hideo chases after it, waving his Ono and screaming, before collapsing into a heap and weeping hysterically.

Throughout the rest of the module, the PCs occasionally hear distant bellowing roars from the creature.

In the highly unlikely event that the PCs actually manage to slay the Shadow-Oni, the remainder of the scenario will be somewhat anti-climactic (although they will still have to track down the surviving members of the Badger Clan, and survive the threat of the Goju). However, given the Oni's size, strength, and capabilities, this is an extremely improbable result.

Searching Shiro Ichiro

After the Oni moves off, the surviving PCs and NPCs can explore the ruins of Shiro Ichiro. The castle is a shattered husk, but most of the basement and lower floors are intact, and fragments of the upper floors survive as well.

The basement of the castle is completely intact (although the doors which lead to it are gaping open). These underground rooms contain extensive food supplies and other stores. It appears that it should have been more than sufficient to withstand several months of siege, and there is no sign of invasion by the Oni here. There is, however, evidence of violence – dried blood, broken furnishings, and so forth. Any PC making an **Investigation/Intelligence** or **Battle/Intelligence** roll at TN 15 can tell that the damage here was caused by clashes between men (or at least man-shaped combatants) rather than a large monster.

Elsewhere in the castle, there is other evidence of hand-to-hand combat (detectable with the same skill rolls) mixed in with the smashed walls, gaping holes, and huge craters which mark the attacks of the Shadow-Oni. No bodies are to be found anywhere, although large dried bloodstains mark where men were smashed by Oni-claws, and smaller spills show where other men died from blades. A few broken or abandoned samurai weapons may be found as well, along with shreds of torn clothing, bits of armor, and other detritus left behind by the lost Badger.

If the PCs hazard a search of the damaged upper floors, they can easily find the quarters of the Badger daimyo, Ichiro Chuga. (Ichiro Honda will insist on searching for Chuga-sama if none of the PCs think of doing so.) Chuga's quarters (located on the half-crushed fifth floor of the castle) are missing one wall, and the furnishings are shattered and piled about wildly. Searching these rooms can discover the following clues:

- An **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 15 (or casting *By the Light of Lord Moon*) will discover a torn, battered sheaf of papers under a broken writing desk. This is Ichiro Chuga's personal journal (HANDOUT #1).
- The Badger Clan Ancestral Ono is missing. Besides the journal itself (which records the disappearance of the Ono), the PCs can learn this simply by searching Chuga's quarters: they will find a fallen weapon rack and a broken wakizashi,

but no sign of any other weapons. Ichiro Honda will be quite perturbed at the absence of his Clan's ancestral weapon, especially if the PCs read the journal.

Searching the Village: The Surviving Peasants

If the PCs search the wrecked village, they will soon find that not every resident is dead. A **Hunting/Perception** or **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 15 will discover fresh footprints and other such evidence that a few survivors are still lurking among the ruined huts and shattered rice paddies. In order to find these survivors, the PCs must make a concerted effort (including calling out, identifying themselves, and so forth) to coax them out of hiding. Otherwise, the PCs will have to systematically search every hut and hovel in the village (a process which will take several hours) until they find the handfuls of survivors hiding in the wreckage.

There are a total of twenty-three peasants left alive in the village (out of an original population of almost four hundred). Of these, nine are adult males, while the rest are women, children, and elderly. Most of them are hiding in the wreckage of the huts, although a few are also sheltering under cloths or in hastily-dug earthen caves at the edge of the village. Once the PCs make it clear that they are friends (and once the Shadow-Oni has been gone for a while), all of the survivors will trickle out and gather around, bowing, weeping, and pleading for protection and salvation. The Badger NPCs will be deeply affected by this display – especially Ichiro Honda and Ichiro Koturi. Even Ichiro Hideo will seem shaken, and PCs who watch him can again roll **Investigation/Awareness** at TN 15 to notice a brief expression of profound guilt and self-loathing cross his features.

It will be difficult to get the peasants to calm down and speak clearly, but with some effort the PCs will be able to get the following information from them:

- Things have been going wrong since last winter. There were "ghosts" in the fields at night, and sometimes villagers would disappear or go mad. The samurai in the castle seemed troubled as well, and had short tempers (shorter than usual).
- The villagers cannot describe the "ghosts" except that they appeared only at night, and seemed to change their shape at will. Some of the villagers reported meeting old friends or relatives, ones they had thought dead. Others speak of mocking

faceless things, which whispered to them of terror and doom.

- This spring, the Badger samurai seemed very nervous and upset, often patrolling the hills and mountains around the castle, or dispatching messengers to the other castles farther down the pass. They were suspicious and angry with the peasants, and sometimes attacked or punished them for trivial misdeeds.
- The monstrous Oni appeared almost two months ago, just before the spring planting. It appeared suddenly, in the middle of the night. It was much smaller then, but even so, the Badger could not stand against it. It returned again and again, night after night, day after day. Each time it was larger, and each time it killed more samurai and peasants, wrecked more structures. Finally, it smashed the castle completely and slaughtered the remaining samurai.
- The samurai sent messengers for help, both up the pass toward the Empire and down the pass to the other Badger castles. The peasants will be quite alarmed to learn that none of these messengers reached the Empire (they assumed the PCs came in response to the messages).
- Two of the bolder young peasants, teenage boys named Jiko and Kyosuke, have been slipping out to explore the lands around, forage for food, and seek help. They will be able to report seeing that several other Badger castles have been destroyed in the same way as Shiro Ichiro, but the farthest castle down the pass – Shiro Daiishi, the Castle of the Large Stone – looked intact when they saw it from a distance four days ago. The Oni was lurking nearby and they did not dare approach the castle any closer.

If any PCs have the skills **Lore: Ninja**, **Lore: Shadow**, **Lore: Living Darkness**, or any similar, they can roll skill/**Intelligence** at TN 15 after listening to the peasants' tales of shape-changers and faceless things in the night. Success indicates that the PC(s) suspect the involvement of the Living Darkness. By the same token, any PC with the skills **Lore: Shadowlands** or **Lore: Ghosts** can tell (with a skill/**Intelligence** roll at TN 15) that these apparitions do not match any recorded behavior or accounts of ghosts or Shadowlands creatures.

Where Next?

Once Ichiro Honda learns that Shiro Daiishi may be intact, he will insist on traveling down the pass to reach it. "There may yet be time to save some of the Badger Clan. Who will go with me?" Any surviving Badger NPCs will agree to accompany him, as will Otomo Mishogi if he is still alive. Ichiro Koturi will appear grimly determined, while watching his brother nervously. Ichiro Hideo just nods, clutching his Ono.

The Ichiro Brothers

After the encounter with the Shadow-Oni, the attitudes of Ichiro Hideo and Ichiro Koturi will change.

- Koturi will grow much more serious and determined, and begins watching his brother with a wary eye. If any of the PCs have cultivated a friendship with him, he may now confess to them about his secret affair with Hideo's fiancée. "I fear that my sins and my brother's fate may be connected somehow." He will also confide that Hideo seems very different, and hostile. "Perhaps he has learned about our affair... although it would be unlike him to keep it secret if he had learned the truth."
- Hideo will become even more sullen and withdrawn, answering questions as briefly as possible. Hideo is slowly losing his struggle with the power of the Living Darkness. PCs who watch him may notice (**Simple Perception**, TN 20) occasional odd shifts on his face, as though different features are trying to show through. These quirks pass so quickly that the PC is not sure if they were real or a trick of the light. PCs who have encountered the Living Darkness before (such as in the adventure *A Foreign Legacy*), or who have a skill such as **Lore: Shadow**, will be more likely to notice these oddities.
- If any PC has crystal items or weapons, Hideo will begin subconsciously avoiding that PC. If he is threatened with the possibility of touching a crystal item, Hideo will become nervous and angry, fingering his Ono and muttering "all against me, all" to himself.

Scene Four: Pursuit to Shiro Daiishi

In order to reach the surviving castle, the PCs must travel another two days down the Path of Woe. This will be a hazardous journey, for the pass is now the

domain of Goju, shadow-creatures created from those Badger samurai and peasants who were not devoured by the Shadow-Oni. The Goju will stalk the party as they travel down the pass, seeking to subvert them to the path of Shadow.

Ichiro Honda, despite his eagerness to reach Shiro Daiishi, will be reluctant to push the journey on through the night – he has a wife and children to worry about. Aggressive PCs can argue him into continuing the trio overnight, but they will have to be convincing. Otherwise, he will insist on making a camp at night.

If the PCs follow Ichiro Honda's choice and rest during the night, it will take them a little over two full days of travel (and hence, probably, two nights) to reach Shiro Daiishi. If they push on during the night, they will reach the castle in a little over a single day and night (roughly 26 hours).

The Ruined Castles

Along the route to Shiro Daiishi are three other Badger castles, all destroyed. Each castle has obviously been attacked by the dreadful Shadow-Oni: outbuildings and peasant huts smashed flat, huge sections of the walls beaten down, gaping rents in the central keeps, and so forth.

The Badger NPCs, especially Ichiro Honda and Ichiro Koturi, grow more grim and sorrowful with each ruined castle, while Ichiro Fubutsu mutters about vengeance and Ichiro Hideo silently fingers his axe-blade.

The first castle, identified by the Badger NPCs as Shiro Shinichi, is in the same condition as Shiro Ichiro: wrecked, but no bodies can be found anywhere. The second castle, Shiro Ganseki, does contain something of interest: a single body, lying on the main ramp which approaches the gate.

The corpse is a Badger samurai, lying facedown, swollen and rotten within a kimono blackened by old blood. One hand is trapped beneath his torso while the other is stretched out ahead of him, reaching for a sanctuary he never found. He has been dead for at least two weeks (determined with a **Medicine/Intelligence** roll at TN 15). If PCs try to determine how he died, a **Medicine/Perception** or **Kenjutsu/Perception** at TN 15 can recognize that he was hamstrung and then stabbed to death as he tried to crawl up the ramp to his castle.

The mystery of why this body has remained here while all others were absorbed by the Shadow-Oni can only

be solved if a PC can find a way of turning the body over. This might entail touching a dead body (and losing Honor), or a clever PC might be able to find a way to turn over the corpse without making direct physical contact. Pressed into the corpse's chest is a crystal pendant, a fairly ordinary trinket of the sort which lovers or a betrothed couple might exchange. This item was not enough to save the Badger's life, but it did protect him from being absorbed by the Living Darkness.

The crystal pendant is not large enough to be used as a weapon, but a clever PC might be able to use it as an arrow-head or attach it to a tetsubo or dai tsuchi. Such stop-gap measures will allow such a weapon to do half damage to a Goju or the Shadow-Oni. More importantly, the crystal can be used to focus the light of a candle, lantern, or fire. Such focused light will inflict 2k2 wounds on any Shadow creature.

After the discovery of the pendant, PCs who watch Ichiro Hideo closely might notice (with an **Investigation/Awareness** roll at TN 20, an **Ichi Miru** or **Nazado/Awareness** roll at TN 15, or a **Simple Awareness** roll at TN 30) that he keeps darting nervous glances at the PC who carries it.

After viewing the ruins of Shiro Ganseki, Ichiro Koturi will mention that the next castle, Shiro Maruishi, was his home, and expresses a fervent prayer that it may somehow have been spared the worst of these ravages. Ichiro Hideo will say nothing, but if asked, mutters that of course he lived in the same castle where his brother grew up. "It's gone," he whispers, closing his shadowed eyes and clutching his Ono. "Everything's gone, all destroyed." He cannot explain his words, and if pressed about them, grows angry. "I cannot remember!" he roars. "Leave me be!"

The Goju Stalkers: Day

During the day, the Goju will be fairly restrained, since most of their powers work best in darkness. However, as the party descends the pass the PCs will be able to occasionally glimpse figures moving in the rocks above them, skulking in the distance, and so forth. These figures are never glimpsed for more than a moment, and are never identifiable. If a PC employs some method of seeing things at a distance (such as a spell, or a gaijin spyglass), they can roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 15 or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 to get a clear enough glimpse of these figures to see that they are dressed in loose, baggy dark clothing, rather like "ninja" outfits, but without masks. If a PC makes TN

25 on either roll, they see that the stalkers have no faces, only suggestive blanks.

Rockslide Ambush

At some point during the daylight trip (chosen by the GM for maximum dramatic effect) the PCs will hear a sudden loud nearby roar from the Shadow-Oni. Have each PC roll **Battle/Perception** at TN 15 (or **Simple Perception** at TN 20). With a success, the PC avoids being distracted by the noise and notices the small avalanche of boulders which the Goju have loosed from the slopes of the pass. Failure means the PC was busy looking around for the source of the roar and doesn't notice the rocks until they are right on top of them.

PCs who noticed the rocks can roll **Defense/Agility** at TN 15 (or **Simple Agility** at TN 20) to avoid them. PCs who failed to notice the rockslide must roll **Defense/Reflexes** at TN 20 (or **Simple Reflexes** at TN 25) to dodge the rocks. A PC who fails to dodge is struck by one or more small boulders (an extra boulder hits for every increment of 5 by which the PC failed the roll to dodge). Each rock inflicts 3k2 wounds.

Of the NPCs, Ichiro Fubutsu will be struck (suffering 21 wounds), and one of Ichiro Honda's old servants, the man, will be struck and killed (the servant's wife, as well as Honda's wife and children, weep over the body). The other NPCs make it through uninjured. If a PC asks about who was targeted by the attack, they can roll **Battle/Perception** or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 to realize that none of the boulders targeted Ichiro Hideo.

PCs who look for their attackers after this ambush can roll **Battle/Perception** or **Hunting/Perception** at TN 20 to catch a brief glimpse of shadowy figures darting away through the rocks.

The Goju Stalkers: Night

During the night, the Goju are far more aggressive. If the party does not stop for the night, the Goju will follow them openly, leaping across rocks and boulders just beyond arrow range, briefly silhouetting themselves against the moon, and generally letting the PCs know that they are being stalked. Ichiro Honda's family will be terrified by these phantoms, the younger son Gofu soon breaking down in tears.

If the PCs stop and camp anywhere, the Goju will creep up on them, watching them silently. A PC who rolls **Simple Perception** at TN 15 will realize with a shock that several dark figures are surrounding them, watching them silently (from just beyond firelight, if

the PCs have lit a fire). The Goju will take no direct action, and if attacked they will fade into the darkness and vanish. If they are not immediately attacked, they continue to watch the party, shifting their faces into old friends and enemies of the PCs. Soft and wordless whispering sounds drift through the air around them.

Night Murder

If a PC or NPC wanders off from a night campsite alone, or is standing watch alone, the Goju will attempt to sneak up and strangle the unfortunate, replacing them with a shapeshifter who will travel with the party thereafter. If the party is foolish enough to let Ichiro Hideo stand watch alone, the Living Darkness will put him to sleep while a Goju strangles and replaces another member of the party.

A targeted PC who is awake must roll **Contested Perception** (or **Hunting/Perception**, or **Investigation/Perception**) against the Goju's **Stealth/Agility** in order to detect the skulking assassin in time. Failure means the PC is attacked at TN 5. If the PC is asleep, they must roll **Contested Awareness** against the Goju's **Stealth/Agility**, but the Goju gets three Free Raises. PCs who employ some form of magical protection or surveillance, such as leaving an Elemental Spirit on guard, may be able to get bonuses to these rolls (GM's discretion).

The Goju's preferred target will be someone who has previously proven resistant to the Lying Darkness' attack (such as someone who played *A Foreign Legacy* but failed to get Shadow Corruption). If none of the PCs meet this criteria, the Goju will target Ichiro Koturi.

A PC or NPC who is caught by surprise in this way must make a **Contested** roll of **Simple Stamina** against the amount of damage which the Goju inflicts with its garrote (see the Goju stats at the end of the module). Failure means the PC has been silently strangled to death. Success means the PCs awakens and may now engage in combat with the Goju. The PC is still being strangled and will automatically take garrote damage each round until they can break free with a **Contested Strength** roll.

Dreamstalking

If the party stops for a night's sleep, the Living Darkness will again attack them in their dreams. This time everyone will be targeted, both PCs and NPCs. The NPCs are presumed to successfully resist the

attacks (except for Ichiro Hideo), although they will all awaken feeling dazed and uncertain.

Each of the PCs who sleeps must make a **Simple Void** roll at TN 15. With a success, the PC likewise awakens feeling dazed and disoriented, remembering vague dreams of darkness, shadow, and fear. If a PC fails the roll, however, they experience the following vision:

You awaken in a dark room. After a moment you realize it is your bedroom at home, where you are safe. The darkness of deep night surrounds you. A moment later you realize with a start that someone else is in the room with you.

The person in the room will be an NPC which the PC trusts and who could plausibly be in their room – wife, mother, sibling, and so forth. This person begins speaking with the PC, asking what they are doing, how they feel, and so forth. They do not allow the PC to light a lamp or otherwise illuminate the room. At some point, the stranger says something odd and unsettling (the GM should choose something based on the nature of the PC involved). The statement should be chosen to creep-out the PC as much as possible. When the PC reacts, the stranger suddenly sets a hand on their leg or arm.

The fingers touching you feel like writhing worms. “We want you,” a voice whispers, soft and sibilant. “All of you, mind and body and soul.”

The PC awakens, feeling disoriented, uncertain whether this was really a dream or not. The place where the Goju touched them still tingles. Such PCs have suffered Shadow Corruption, and receive the Shadow Corruption cert at One Point. If the PC already has Shadow Corruption (from earlier in the adventure, or from the adventure *A Foreign Legacy*), they must make another **Simple Void** roll at TN 15 or gain another Point of Shadow Corruption.

Morning Ambush

If the PCs actually convince their NPC comrades to keep going all night, the Goju will spring an ambush (either just before dawn, as the eastern horizon begins to turn a pale gray, or just before the party reaches Shiro Maruishi, whichever comes first). This will be a fairly straightforward attack, four Goju striking from hiding, leaping off overhanging rocks to drop on the party with their ninja-to drawn. The PCs and NPCs must roll **Contested Battle/Perception** or **Hunting/Perception** against the Goju’s **Stealth/Agility** in order to spot the attackers before they strike. Those who fail

the contested roll are caught by surprise – on the first round of combat they may take no actions and are TN 5 to be hit.

The Goju fight to the death – they have no natural life of their own, after all. Their bodies are misshapen caricatures of the traditional “ninja” image, and they bleed black fluid which dissolves away into smoke. When killed, they unravel into smoke with thin, inhuman shrieks.

Shiro Maruishi

The third castle, which is reached fairly late in the journey, is Shiro Maruishi (formerly ruled by daimyo Ichiro Koru). Hideo and Koturi’s home and its neighboring village have shared the same ruinous fate as the previous castles, but as the party approaches, they can see that the castle is partly intact, about two-thirds of the inner keep still standing. If the PCs approach the castle at night, a very faint fire is visible flickering within the ruins, about two floors up. If they approach during the day, a faint curl of smoke will be visible trickling out of the ruins.

If the PCs search the castle ruins for the source of the smoke/fire, they will eventually reach Hideo’s room on the castle’s third floor. What they see there depends on whether it is day or night:

Day: The room is empty, one corner of the ceiling caved in and exposed to the daylight. A smoldering fire, little more than a pile of ashes, lies in the center of the room. Most of the furnishings in the room have been destroyed and burnt, but a large weapon rack still stands on one wall, with a heavy Ono (Hideo’s real weapon) on display. The room is eerily silent, and apparently empty... although many footprints are visible in the ashes on the floor.

Night: The fire is lit and fills the room with a flickering yellow-orange light. As before, the only intact furniture is the weapons rack with Hideo’s Ono. The firelight illuminates a ring of shapeless dark figures sitting around the fire, casting shadows on the wall which seem to leap and caper insanely. The figures turn their featureless faces toward the party – faces which seem to be somehow smiling. “At last,” they say, in sibilant voices, “you have come to join us.” They welcome Hideo by name, as well as any PCs with Shadow Corruption.

Hideo’s Fate

It is possible that the PCs may be able to drive Hideo into violence before they reach Shiro Maruishi. If they

are extremely suspicious of him, constantly questioning him, and so forth – and especially if they try to take away the Ono he carries – he will eventually lose control and succumb to the Lying Darkness, attacking the party.

If this does not happen, Hideo will not “turn” until the party reaches his quarters in Shiro Maruishi. If they come during the day, Ichiro Koturi will see Hideo’s Ono still resting in its rack. He turns to his brother and says, “But... if your weapon is here, what are you carrying?” This will cause Hideo to immediately whip out his Ono, attacking Koturi and the rest of the party.

If the PCs arrive at Shiro Maruishi at night, the greeting from the Goju will be the final push that sends Hideo over the edge. He stands stock-still and unresponsive while the rest of the party confronts the Goju. He takes no action until a PC speaks to him or touches him – at which point he turns around, faceless.

Regardless of when he “goes over,” Hideo will immediately lose his last vestiges of physical identity, his face sliding and shifting like putty as he laughs maniacally and lays about himself with his Ono. “The Badger are ours now!” he hisses, “You will be ours soon as well, brother! And so will *she*! I saw you! I saw you with her! She was supposed to be mine! Mine! And now she will be!”

He will also taunt by name any PCs who have Shadow Corruption or a Lore skill related to the Shadow (such as **Lore: Shadow**, **Lore: Ninja**, or **Lore: Living Darkness**), promising all of them that they will soon be consumed as he has been.

Battle with the Goju

Once Hideo “goes over,” he will be reinforced by the Goju lurking in Shiro Maruishi. This will be a default group of six Goju (four against a low-Rank party, eight against a high-Rank party). If the fight is at night, these will be the creatures which were sitting around the fire. If it is daylight, they spring out of dark corners of the room, popping out of the shadows as though from nowhere.

Regardless, Hideo will preferentially attack his brother and any PCs who carry crystal or jade weapons. If the PCs actually kept the Ancestral Ono from him, he will attack whoever is carrying it.

Hideo takes half damage from normal weapons, jade, or magic (double damage from crystal), and his blood is an inky black that oozes dark smoke. He shows no

signs of pain until he loses all his Wounds, at which point he drops the Ancestral Ono with a clang and collapses to the ground. His face shifts back and forth between his real features and a formless blank as he writhes and groans.

The other surviving Goju break off their attack and gather around the fallen Hideo, stooping over him like carrion birds. “He is ours now,” one of them hisses at the PCs. “The alliance is sealed. We have given them a servant more powerful than any they could make themselves. The Badger are only the first sacrifice we will offer to your Dark Kami. The first of many.” The Goju depart in a whirl of shadows, taking Hideo with them.

If the PCs did not already get the Ancestral Ono (such as by disarming Hideo), the Goju will take the ancient weapon with them. In order to recover it, the PCs will have to snatch it from the Goju as they vanish into the shadows. Ichiro Honda will lunge forward and try to do this if none of the PCs thinks of it. To grab the Ono, the PCs will have to succeed in a **Contested Agility** roll against the Goju.

After the fight, Ichiro Koturi will collapse sobbing, mourning his lost brother and his own dishonor. Wracked with guilt, he will freely confess his affair with Agasha Momuko. Ichiro Honda will suggest (none too gently) that Koturi should commit seppuku to atone for his actions. It is up to the PCs whether to support or moderate Honda’s suggestion – absent any intervention from the PCs, Koturi will agree to commit seppuku as soon as the threat to the Badger Clan has been ended.

Scene Five: Showdown at Shiro Daiishi

Unless they choose an unusual time to begin their journey, the PCs should reach Shiro Daiishi during the day. During the last part of their journey (after the fall of Hideo), they should catch frequent glimpses of the Shadow-Oni in the distance, and hear its monstrous bellows on the wind.

Ahead of you, the Path of Woe descends a final long slope before debouching onto the open plains of the Burning Sands. A last spire of rock rises up from the edge of the pass, and a blunt, squared-off castle rests atop it. The peasant huts and terraced grain fields which climb the slopes to the castle are smashed and wrecked, but the walls of the fortress itself are intact,

and you can see the silhouettes of samurai on the battlements.

After their experiences in the pass, the PCs may be more than a little paranoid about the status of the samurai in Shiro Daiishi. For their part, the Badger samurai are deeply suspicious of the PCs, since they have seen Goju moving up and down the pass for weeks now. As soon as the PCs approach the castle or hail it, a large rock will come hurtling down, bouncing several times and scattering fragments of stone. The missile is followed by a bellow: “Name yourselves, strangers!”

This is a role-playing challenge – the PCs must convince these desperate, suspicious samurai that they are allies and are here to help. If Ichiro Honda or Ichiro Fubutsu are alive and here with them, they can offer testimony on their behalf. Ultimately, however, it is up to the PCs to convince the Badger they are friends and should be let into the castle.

Inside Shiro Daiishi

The Badger are fearful and desperate, though determined to at least die with courage. The castle daimyo, Ichiro Daigoro, will immediately meet with the party and listens intently to their account of their experiences in the Path of Woe. He explains that the Shadow-Oni has raided the castle several times but has not yet pressed home an assault. The Badger have no jade or shugenja and have been unable to hurt the creature. How he reacts to the PCs’ news depends on what they can tell him:

- If they have recovered the Ancestral Ono, Daigoro will be filled with sudden hope. He snatches up the weapon and takes it outside, brandishing it in front of his samurai. “See, the Fortunes have not abandoned us,” he roars. “Beyond hope, our Clan’s ancestral weapon returns to protect us!” The Badger cheer fiercely and prepare for action with renewed enthusiasm. He will hand the weapon over to Ichiro Honda to wield in the ensuing combat.
- If the PCs were not able to recover the Ancestral Ono (or failed to identify it), Ichiro Daigoro is filled with gloom at their account of the death and destruction farther up the pass. “It seems it will soon be our fate to join our comrades in death,” he mutters, gripping his own monstrous dai tsuchi in a calloused hand. He and his men prepare grimly for the next assault by the Shadow-Oni.

- If the PCs have managed to figure out that crystal weapons are effective against the Goju and/or the Shadow-Oni, Ichiro Daigoro will be excited. “It has a weakness! Perhaps we may yet defeat it!” He dispatches his troops to search the castle high and low for crystal. They will produce a number of crystal items – pendants, earrings, and other such trinkets – which they will attach to dai tsuchi, tetsubo, and other heavy melee weapons. They can supply two such crystal items to the PCs.

The Oni’s Assault

The final battle with the Shadow-Oni will occur either at dusk or at dawn (whichever comes first after the PCs arrive). The Badger spend the time until then psyching themselves up for combat, swapping stories of courageous ancestors, drinking a last few cups of sake, and so forth. The surviving Badger women, children, aged and commoners hide within the castle, waiting with quiet terror for their fate. PCs can prepare for action however they wish, whether it be in quiet prayer, intense training, or sharing the Badgers’ crude but human methods.

The distant roars and bellows suddenly rise in volume as you see the dark outline of the Oni no Kage-Tanuki rise up above the mountains. “Time to die, little humans!” it booms, its voice so loud that several samurai drop to their knees, hands clenched over ears. “Time to join your brethren as part of my body!” A moment later, a hurtling corpse smashes into the battlement, splattering two of the defending bushi.

This final confrontation will be a do-or-die struggle. The Oni will initially attack with its corpse-missiles. Since the Badger samurai and the PCs are sheltering behind the battlements of a castle, these awful missiles inflict only 3k2 of splattering shrapnel damage.

Once the Shadow-Oni is down by 100 or more Wounds (whether from hurling missiles or enemy attacks), it will approach the castle (taking a single round to do so, and hurling a corpse-missile as it comes) and scoop up a couple of victims to heal itself. Then it begins smashing everyone in sight with melee attacks. It continues until the castle is wrecked and defeated, or until it is slain.

How this fight resolves depends on what help the PCs brought:

- If the PCs told the Badger that crystal hurts the monster, the Badger will be able to hurt the

Shadow-Oni once it closes in to melee range. The Shadow-Oni will automatically take 6k3 Wounds of damage each round as suicidal brave Badgers rush up to smite it with crystal-studded weapons. The Badgers will be able to sustain this assault for six rounds of combat before all their crystal-wielders are slain.

- If the PCs delivered the Ancestral Ono to the Badger, Ichiro Honda will use it unless the PCs convince him to give it to another, more capable, bushi. (Honda is a practical sort and will be perfectly happy to give the weapon to someone who can use it better than he can.) The Ono is a 0k4 weapon which uses the Tsubojutsu general skill (or the Ono specialized skill). It is of fine enough quality to add +1 rank to the Tsubojutsu skill. Characters must have a Strength of 3 or higher in order to wield the Ono. It does full damage to the Shadow-Oni, which will bellow in fury and concentrate its attacks on the one using this painful weapon (unless the Oni is actually taking more damage from another source).
- Unless the PCs have a large amount of jade or crystal to spare, the Badger will not be able to inflict damage on the Shadow-Oni in any other way. Nevertheless, they will try as hard as they can, hurling boulders at the monstrosity, smiting it with heavy weapons, and in general selling their lives as dearly as they possibly can.
- Ichiro Koturi will use his fire spells against the Oni to the best of his ability, and will also try to use his other spells to support and heal the party. If the situation is desperate and his spells are exhausted, Koturi will “life-cast,” sacrificing his own life-force to cast *Fires From Within* one last time.
- Aside from the Ancestral Ono, the party’s best chance lies in crystal. If they have no crystal, or fail to realize its effectiveness against the Shadow-Oni, they can still inflict half-damage with jade, and shugenja PCs with attack spells will be able to hurt the creature. Some parties may also have other nemuranai (such as the sword of Akodo Minobe), or possibly even obsidian weapons, which can inflict full damage. With courage and a little luck, the Shadow-Oni can be slain.

Defeat?

If the Shadow-Oni has not been slain after ten rounds of melee combat, the defenses are broken. The walls are shattered and the Shadow-Oni forces its way into

the castle, crushing all before it, while the remaining Badger vainly sacrifice themselves in hope of buying time for their women and children to flee.

Any surviving PCs must decide whether to flee or go down fighting. If they flee, they must roll either **Contested Athletics/Stamina** against the Shadow-Oni’s **Stamina**, or **Contested Stealth/Agility** against the Oni’s **Perception**, in order to escape alive.

Victory!

If the Shadow-Oni is reduced to zero Wounds, its body suddenly fissures and disintegrates into its component corpses. The monstrosity bellows in baffled fury and denial, struggling to inflict one final blow as it comes apart. The victorious Badger cheer wildly, smiting the monster even as it collapses. Eventually, only a monstrous mass of dead flesh remains. The castle eta, summoned to dispose of the mess, stare at it stunned. “What are we supposed to do with this?”

Conclusion

If the PCs succeed in defeating the Shadow-Oni (regardless of their other actions), they have saved the remainder of the Badger Clan. If Ichiro Honda survived, he is proclaimed daimyo of the Badger Clan. Otherwise, the title goes to the daimyo of Shiro Daiishi, Ichiro Daigoro (who will automatically survive unless his castle falls).

The Badger are deeply grateful to the PCs. For what it’s worth, all non-Badger PCs get **Major Allies: Badger Clan**. They also each get the gift of a Fine quality Ono. Finally, any ronin PCs are offered the chance (nay begged) to enlist in the Badger Clan.

If the PCs failed to stop the Shadow-Oni, it destroys Shiro Daiishi before wandering off into the Burning Sands, hopefully never to be seen again. The surviving remnants of the Badger Clan – numbering less than fifty, most of them women and children – gather together. If Ichiro Honda survived the trip down the Path of Woe, he will still be alive and appoints himself as their nominal daimyo. If he perished, they are leaderless. Eventually they retreat up the pass into the Empire, hoping to rebuild somewhere else.

Regardless, if the PCs recovered the Ancestral Ono, the Badger remain hopeful of rebuilding. “This Ono was given to our founder Ichiro by Hida himself, and while it endures, the Badger cannot perish.” If the Ono was lost, the Badger are clearly in despair, and there should be little doubt that the Clan is doomed.

The End

Clan and the gift of a Fine-quality Ono. Ronin PCs are offered membership in the Badger Clan.

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
Recovered the Ancestral Ono	1 XP
Defeated the Shadow-Oni	1 XP

Total Possible Experience: 4 XP

Honor

+2 Honor to Badger Clan PCs (only) if the Ancestral Ono was recovered.

-4 Honor to Badger Clan PCs (only) if the Ancestral Ono was lost.

+1 Honor to Badger Clan PCs, Crab PCs, Inquisitors, Kuroiban, and any other PCs who are dedicated to the fight against the Shadowlands, if the Shadow-Oni was defeated.

-4 Honor to Badger Clan PCs if Shiro Daiishi was destroyed.

-2 Honor to Crab PCs, Inquisitors, Kuroiban, and any other PCs who are dedicated to the fight against the Shadowlands, if Shiro Daiishi was destroyed.

Glory

+1 Glory to all PCs for defeating the Shadow-Oni.

+1 Glory to all Minor Clan PCs (including Badger Clan PCs) if Shiro Daiishi survived.

+1 Glory to Badger Clan PCs (only) if the Ancestral Ono was recovered.

-5 Glory to Badger Clan PCs if Shiro Daiishi is destroyed.

-2 Glory to all other PCs if Shiro Daiishi is destroyed.

Other Awards/Penalties

PCs who failed to resist the attack of the Living Darkness will gain the cert for Shadow Corruption.

If the PCs helped save Shiro Daiishi from the attack of the Shadow-Oni, they each gain **Major Allies: Badger**

NPCs and Monsters

Otomo Mishogi, Imperial Representative and Tax Auditor

FIRE 2 Intelligence 3	AIR 2 Awareness 3
EARTH 2	WATER 2 Perception 3
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 2.7/5.4

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Commerce 2, Courtier 2, Etiquette 4, Go 6, Investigation 4, Lore: Imperial Tax Records 4, Shintao 5, Sincerity 3, Tea Ceremony 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Social Position (Otomo family)/Compulsion (Go).

Equipment: Fine kimono, waterproof traveling pack, tax records for Badger lands, exquisite Go board and playing pieces.

Ichiro Honda, Badger Clan Imperial Ambassador

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 3	WATER 3 Strength 5
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Ichiro bushi 3

Rank One: Return the Strike. The Badger may voluntarily lower his initiative (to a minimum of 1) in order to add half that amount to attack or damage rolls for the remainder of the round.

Rank Two: Refuse to Fail. The Badger may add twice his Insight Rank to all Strength rolls, and may choose to re-roll any Strength roll once in order to get a better result. The ability may not be used for damage unless it is inflicted with hand-to-hand (jiujutsu).

Rank Three: Crushing Blow. The Badger ignores light and heavy armor when striking in combat. In addition, the Badger receives a number of Free Raises to damage rolls each day equal to half his Strength (rounded down).

Honor/Glory: 3.6/4.7

Skills: Athletics 5, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Hunting 4, Jiu-jutsu 3, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Badger Clan 3, Lore: Imperial Courts 2, Mountaineer 3, Shintao 2, Sincerity 3, Tsubojutsu 6, Yarijutsu 3

Advantages/Disadvantages: Gentry, Social Position (Badger ambassador to the Imperial Court)/ Dependents (wife and children), Social Disadvantage (Minor Clan)

Equipment: Kimono, traveling pack, daisho set, fine tetsubo (2k3), bow (yumi) and 20 arrows.

Ichiro Fubutsu, Experienced Badger Bushi

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 2 Reflexes 3
EARTH 3	WATER 2 Strength 5
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Ichiro Bushi 2

Rank One: Return the Strike. The Badger may voluntarily lower his initiative (to a minimum of 1) in order to add half that amount to attack or damage rolls for the remainder of the round.

Rank Two: Refuse to Fail. The Badger may add twice his Insight Rank to all Strength rolls, and may choose to re-roll any Strength roll once in order to get a better result. The ability may not be used for damage unless it is inflicted with hand-to-hand (jiujutsu).

Honor/Glory: 1.8/1.6

Skills: Athletics 4, Defense 3, Etiquette 1, Hunting 3, Jiu-jutsu 4, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Badger Clan 1, Mountaineer 2, Sincerity 1, Tsubojutsu 5, Yarijutsu 4

Advantages/Disadvantages: Large/Brash, Social Disadvantage (Minor Clan)

Equipment: Kimono, traveling pack, daisho set, dai tsuchi, nage-yari.

Ichiro Koturi, shame-faced adulterer

FIRE 4	AIR 2 Awareness 3
EARTH 3 Willpower 4	WATER 2 Strength 3
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: Agasha shugenja 2

Honor/Glory: 1.3/0.9

Skills: Calligraphy 4, History 4, Hunting 3, Lore:

Dragon Clan 2, Lore: Maho 3, Meditation 6,

Mountaineer 3, Shintao 3, Tantojutsu 5

Spells: *Sense, Commune, Summon*, (Fire) *Aura of Flame, Evil Ward, Fires from Within, Hurried Steps*, (Earth) *Force of Will, Know the Ground*, (Air) *Quiescence of Air, Wind-Born Slumbers*, (Water) *Path to Inner Peace*.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Different School (Agasha), Luck (rank two)/Black Sheep (shugenja), True Love (Agasha Momuko), Social Disadvantage (Minor Clan).

Equipment: Kimono, traveling pack, wakizashi, tanto, scroll satchel.

Generic Badger Bushi (Shiro Daiishi)

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 2
EARTH 2 Stamina 3	WATER 2 Strength 4
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: Ichiro Bushi 1

Rank One: Return the Strike. The Badger may voluntarily lower his initiative (to a minimum of 1) in order to add half that amount to attack or damage rolls for the remainder of the round.

Honor/Glory: 1.5/0.5

Skills: Athletics 3, Defense 2, Hunting 2, Jujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 3, Mountaineer 2, Tsubojutsu 3, Yarijutsu 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Social Disadvantage (Minor Clan).

Equipment: Kimono, daisho set, heavy weapon (ono, dai tsuchi, or tetsubo), nage-yari.

Ichiro Hideo, fallen Badger

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

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 2.9 (undetectable due to interference from the Living Darkness)

Living Darkness Corruption: Rank 2 at the start of the module. Rank 4 when he "turns."

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Ichiro bushi 3

Rank One: Return the Strike. The Badger may voluntarily lower his initiative (to a minimum of 1) in order to add half that amount to attack or damage rolls for the remainder of the round.

Rank Two: Refuse to Fail. The Badger may add twice his Insight Rank to all Strength rolls, and may choose to re-roll any Strength roll once in order to get a better result. The ability may not be used for damage unless it is inflicted with hand-to-hand (jiujutsu).

Rank Three: Crushing Blow. The Badger ignores light and heavy armor when striking in combat. In addition, the Badger receives a number of Free Raises to damage rolls each day equal to half his Strength (rounded down).

Honor/Glory: 0.7/1.3

Skills: Athletics 6, Defense 3, Jujutsu 4, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 2, Lore: Living Darkness 2, Mountaineer 2, Ono (specialized weapon skill) 6, Wrestling 2, Yarijutsu 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Ancestor Ichiro Fureshu (re-roll any skill or attribute roll once per day, substituting Strength), Crab Hands, Blissful Betrothal (Agasha Momuko)/Dark Fate (spared from death once per adventure), Dark Secrets (Shadow Corruption, Shadowlands Taint, summoned an Oni).

Equipment: Kimono, ancestral Ono.

Goju Hideo, former Badger, now minion of the Living Darkness

Goju Hideo has been consumed gradually enough that the Living Darkness took all of his memories and abilities. He retains the School abilities listed above, in addition to his new qualities as a Goju.

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

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 3.1 (but takes only half damage from Jade).

TN to be Hit: 25 (20 against Low-End parties, 30 against High-End parties)

Attacks: 6k3+6 (with Ono), 3k3 (with bladed weapons), 4k3 (hand-to-hand)

Damage: 4k4 (with Ono), 6k2 (with katana), 4k1 (with bare hands)

Wounds: 90: Dead (72 Wounds against Low-End parties, 108 Wounds against High-End parties).

Special Abilities: Shadow Invulnerability (takes double damage from crystal attacks and half damage from all other attacks). Can move instantaneously between any two shadows within 100 feet. Retains his skills and School Rank abilities from when he was a Badger (see above).

Generic Goju, faceless servants of Shadow

FIRE 2	AIR 2
EARTH 2	WATER 2

TN to be Hit: 20

Attacks: 4k3 (3k2 against Low-End parties, 5k3 against High-End parties).

Damage: Ninja-to (3k2), Shuriken (1k1), or Garrote (2k2).

Skills: Stealth 5 (3 against low-end parties, 6 against high-end parties)

Wounds: 18: Dead (24 wounds against High-End parties).

Special Abilities: Shadow Invulnerability (take double damage from crystal attacks and half damage from all other attacks). Can move instantaneously between any two shadows within 100 feet.

Oni no Kage-Tanuki (Shadow-Badger Oni)

The monstrous Shadow-Oni appears to be a forty-foot-tall monster composed almost entirely of human corpses. It's outline is vaguely humanoid, but with a bestial head and gaping jaws. Glowing red eyes shine from within the eye-sockets of its lumpy snout, and yellow-black jagged teeth fill its mouth. Those who look closely on the Shadow-Oni's terrible form see that the faces of the myriad corpses are oddly blank, and occasionally recognizable faces (perhaps of persons not yet dead) seem to ripple across the faces. The Oni speaks in a roaring voice which seems to be formed from a chorus of howls and screams.

FIRE 6	AIR 6
EARTH 8	WATER 7

TN to be Hit: 25 (20 against Low-End parties)

Attacks: 7k4

Damage: 8k3 (7k2 against Low-End parties)

Carapace Armor: 6

Wounds: 300

Special Abilities: Fear 4. Improved Shadow Invulnerability (no damage from normal weapons or fire, half damage from jade, full damage from crystal, nemuranai, and magical fire). Corpse Healing (heals 40 Wounds each time it absorbs a corpse). Corpse Missiles (loses 20 wounds each time it pulls out a corpse and hurls it at the enemy).

Player Handout #1: Journal of Ichiro Chuga

The journal is fragmentary, with many pages smudged or cut into illegibility. The following is most of what can be puzzled out of the text:

...good harvest, and with any luck that sickness in the chickens won't recur again. Heshu tells me the peasants plan a festival for the first day of winter, to mark five years without hunger. If only Akitomo had lived to see...

...a samurai named Tojiro, said he saw strangers moving up the pass. He is from Lord Koru's castle, so I dispatched...

...same Scorpion bitch who killed my brother. If she ever dares show her face ...head on a pike... and our family will be avenged.

...Tojiro again with another report of strangers in the pass. I told him that no-one could climb the pass in the depths of winter, and not a single samurai had confirmed his stories, but he insisted he was telling the truth and claimed the others in his squad were conspiring against him. When I ordered him to forget the matter he became sullen and irritable, demanding to know what I held against his fine service, and so forth. Not at all his normal behavior. I sent a messenger to Koru-san suggesting that he investigate whether Tojiro was perhaps indulging in sake or opium.

...note back from Koru, accusing me of doubting his loyalty and demanding that I "prove" my accusations. Bewildering! Has the heavy snow driven everyone mad? I hear them whispering behind my back... like a pack of Scorpions, honeyed smiles while they raise knives over your throat...

...no word from Shiro Maruishi in eighteen days. I have dispatched a patrol to check... cannot believe that Koru might rebel, but this winter has been so full of madness that I no longer know who to trust...

...saw a man heading up the pass. One of the guards identified him as from Shiro Maruishi but then what happened to my patrol? And why was he here? I sent another patrol to find him...

...empty, the guards all clutching their weapons and shooting anxious looks as though we are under siege. When I spoke to them and invoked their courage, they stared at me as though I were a fool or a madman. I had no choice but to order the two worst offenders to commit seppuku...

...like the sun is mocking me, the light seems all wrong somehow and when I went to fetch the Ono, it was gone! The ancestral Ono wielded by our founder, Hida Ichiro! Some traitor... ...searched the castle, but the Scorpion dogs had gone. Traitors everywhere... can't trust... voices in the night, whispering to me, and when I ask the servants all look away as though ashamed...

...MONSTER! Twenty men dead, and our weapons no more bit upon it than if it were a mountain. Bodies... devour, screaming, and without the Ono we have nothing which can... sent for help, but none will come. We are doomed, and the Scorpion will dance on our corpses...

...daimyo of a dead land. Are any left?... take my own life and end it. The Badger have failed...