

Occult Murders

Chapter 2 of "The Soul of Juchiban"

*A One Round Low-Rank
Living Rokugan Tournament*

by Robert Hobart

A rash of murders and disappearances plague the lands of the Miya, the Emperor's peacemakers and heralds. You have been summoned to bring an end to the problem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In addition to the text of the adventure below, you will need to be familiar with the Legend of the Five Rings rulebook.

GM's Information

This adventure should not be run cold!!!

This adventure is a Low Rank 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 what these characters may bring to the table.

(Low Rank is characters of Ranks 1 or 2, Mid Rank is characters of Ranks 2 or 3, and High Rank is characters of Ranks 3 to 5. There will also be Low-Mid Rank adventures.)

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

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

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

Adventure Background

This adventure is the second chapter of the "Soul of Iuchiban" story arc which began at GenCon 2001 with "The Falling Darkness" and concludes at GenCon 2002 with "Fate of a Hantei." Although it is not necessary for the players to have participated in other events of the story arc in order to play this one, their enjoyment will probably be enhanced if they have done so.

The Bloodspeaker Cult is on the move. Scrolls stolen a few months ago from the strongholds of the Phoenix have proven that Iuchiban's soul can, in fact, be freed from the tomb where he has been imprisoned for so long. Now the Cult is gathering all its strength in preparation for an attempt to do just that.

In the lands of the Miya family, the smallest of the three Imperial families, the Cult's local cell has been particularly active. The cult leader, Chio, possesses an Obsidian Amulet whose divinatory powers can be enhanced with blood sacrifice. The amulet was originally the property of the Scorpion Clan, but a Yogo shugenja named Aguchi betrayed his oaths, joined the Bloodspeakers, and brought the amulet here. He still lives here, in the guise of a monk, at the local monastery.

The cult has been using the Amulet to learn both the location of Iuchiban's tomb and the defenses of Otosan Uchi, the imperial capital. In the process they have made numerous human sacrifices, a rash of murders and disappearances that is terrifying the local peasants.

Because these are the lands of the Miya, an almost completely non-militaristic family, the local authorities lack the strength to deal with the problem. (It doesn't help that one of the Miya samurai is himself a cultist.) The Miya have requested help from the rest of the Empire, and their call has brought the PCs. Few Clans, after all, would willingly refuse the needs of the Emperor's heralds and peacemakers.

Part 1: Arrival at Kyuden Miya

It is the twenty-eighth day of the Month of Bayushi (the Month of the Hare, February, in the common usage). The fading end of winter, snowflakes still blowing from skies the color of dirty silk. Snow dapples the manes of your shaggy Rokugani ponies as you ride through the lands of the Miya family, the Imperial heralds and peacemakers. Even on the pale, bitter end of a long winter, the Miya lands are beautiful; the effort which their peasants put into sculpting every slope, copse, and field into an aesthetically pleasing symmetry is clearly visible. Ahead lies the humble two-story castle of the Miya family daimyo. As you draw rein in the castle gates and shake the snow from your shoulders, you see that several other samurai are arriving, apparently joining you in answer to the Miya's summons.

Clan PCs have been sent here by their daimyo, and know only that their presence represents the repayment of a favor their lord owed to the Miya daimyo, Miya Yoto. Ronin PCs have come in response to an offer of employment – the Miya family are well known as good and generous patrons to Ronin.

If anyone asks where they are, the Miya lands are located on the southern slope of the Spine of the World Mountains, midway between the Scorpion Clan's Shiro no Soshi and the Unicorn Clan's Shiro Iuchi. To the south, beyond the small Miya territories, lies the vast storm-wracked expanse of the Plains of Thunder.

Allow the players a chance to introduce their characters and get into the spirit of things before proceeding to the next scene.

Servants take your mounts and lead you to a bathhouse, where you are able to cleanse the dirt of travel and change to fresh, clean garments before your audience. Finally you are led into the castle proper, a small but excellent place decorated with the artwork and remembrances of generations of Miya.

Miya Yoto, the aged daimyo of the Miya family, awaits you in a small audience chamber. The old man smiles through his thick white beard and nods politely to acknowledge your bows. Seated behind him is a much younger man, handsome in a fierce, intent way, his eyes glittering brightly as he greets you with a ready smile that somehow seems cold.

PCs can roll Intelligence+Heraldry (or an appropriate Lore skill, such as Miya or Imperial Families) at TN 20 to recognize Miya Yoto's son Satoshi, who was fostered to the Matsu family and has only recently returned to Miya lands. He spends most of the conversation sitting silently, observing the PCs with carefully concealed hostility.

Yoto explains the situation. "In the last few months, beginning in the autumn, a rash of murders and disappearances has plagued our family's lands. So severe has the problem become that I was forced to cut short my sojourn at the Emperor's Winter Court and return here to see to the protection of my subjects. Thankfully, the Son of Heaven was most understanding." He inclines his head at the mention of the beloved Emperor, Hantei XXXVIII. "Unfortunately, our family has never been one for fighting or enforcing the law. Peace and spreading the Emperor's word is our task." At this point, PCs who roll Simple Perception at TN 15 notice a scowl briefly cross the face of Miya Satoshi, although it passes so quickly they cannot be sure they really saw it. "I have asked those daimyo who are my friends to dispatch trusted samurai to assist my poor family in rooting out the criminals responsible for these atrocities. I am glad you have arrived so quickly."

Yoto can impart the following information:

- In the last four months, there have been six murders and at least fifteen disappearances in the Miya lands. This is unprecedented – in the past it was a rare year when even a single murder tainted the peace.
- Most of the victims were peasants. However, last month a samurai’s child was abducted. It was news of this crime that prompted Yoto to break short his stay at Winter Court and return.
- Most of the murders took place in one incident about twenty days ago, which was the event that finally prompted Yoto to seek help. Four people, including a doshin (armed peasant, charged with law enforcement) were murdered in a single assault, and several others vanished.
- The four murders were committed with great violence, the victims stabbed and beaten to death in a most brutal fashion. It appears the victims were killed trying to stop the kidnappers.
- The other two murders were isolated incidents, but again, great violence was used. Yoto is sure the crimes are all connected.
- The Miya have no shugenja, and have been unable to investigate the crime scenes in that fashion. Normally Yoto would rely on his friend Koan, a ronin shugenja of great power, but Koan is absent on a pilgrimage of learning and may not return for some time.
- The handful of Miya samurai have tried to search for the killers, but have had no luck. “They are greatly unaccustomed to such things,” Yoto explains regretfully.
- Many of the peasants are terrified, and some from Tenraku Village have even fled the region despite the laws against their travel. Yoto fears next year’s harvest is in danger, not to mention the humiliation and dishonor in failing to fulfill his duty to protect his subjects.
- The incidents have been scattered throughout the small territories of the Miya. Yoto will provide a map showing the locations of the worst crimes, along with a guide, Miya Kotomi, to lead the PCs around the area and show them the various crime scenes.

The MAP of Miya lands is located in the back of the scenario (Map #1). It has been marked in those locations where crimes have been worst, but Yoto will caution the PCs that other villages have also reported incidents, and there may be still more which have not been reported, out of fear or error.

Miya Kotomi

The proffered guide is a small, deceptively delicate young woman with a plain face and intent, penetrating

eyes. She dresses in a practical traveling kimono inscribed with the Miya mon, and carries no weapons, only a fan and a small pouch of money and personal belongings.

Kotomi is a woman fiercely dedicated to the traditional Miya goals of peace and harmony. She is a trained Shisha, from the Miya school of peacemakers who travel the Empire spreading the Emperor’s word and bringing an end to conflicts and violence. Kotomi turns a disapproving eye on those who promote or condone violence (especially Matsu and Crab) and will try to enlighten them about their misguided ways. On the other hand, she gets along famously with peaceful clans such as Phoenix, Crane, and Sparrow. If inter-party conflict ever threatens to disrupt the investigation, Kotomi will immediately step in and try to end such foolishness, berating the PCs for letting their tempers interfere with their mission.

Part 2: Locations and Investigations

This section describes the various villages on the map of Miya lands, outlines the crimes committed in each village and the clues which can be found with each one, and describes the cultists located at the various villages. (A master list of all the cultists may be found on Handout #2.) The subsequent section (“Consequences and Confrontations”) describes some possible results of the PCs’ investigations.

Mujitsu Village:

The House of Miya Takozawa

The missing samurai child was taken from the residence of Miya Takozawa, a young samurai of the Miya family, who resides on the edge of Mujitsu Village. His house is a typical samurai dwelling, a large one-story building of a half-dozen rooms, a garden, servants’ quarters, and a small stable. A low wall with two gates (a front “public” gate and a smaller side gate for servants) surrounds the entire complex. A polite middle-aged servant named Goshu meets PCs at the front door and takes their names and business; after a wait of a few minutes, they are admitted to the house.

Miya Takozawa is a pleasant-faced young man, trained as a Shisha (Herald), who has only recently become master of this household (his father having retired to a monastery). A gentle fellow, he is clearly still shaken by the loss of his child, and answers questions in a soft voice while his young wife sits red-eyed and silent

behind him. He will rely on Goshu, his major-domo and head servant, to answer many of the PCs questions, which may encourage the PCs to suspect Goshu is involved in the crime. (In fact, he isn't; none of the servants here are part of the cult, and the actual kidnapper was the samurai-hating Yuri of Jouzousho Village)

The following information is available from Takozawa, Goshu, and the other servants:

- The child was named Urashii (Happy), and was three years old.
- He was last seen playing in the house garden. When his mother went to fetch him for dinner, he was gone. No one heard him cry out.
- If the PCs ask whether anything was happening that day, or whether there were any visitors, Goshu recalls that a delivery of foodstuffs came from the village earlier that day, and later in the afternoon a small shipment of silk came in from Jouzousho Village (which has the local silk works).
- If the PCs specifically ask the regular servants or the local peasants (not the samurai or Goshu) whether they noticed anyone lurking around or behaving suspiciously, a few of them will recall seeing a strange peasant maiden (“a real pretty one, that she was, the sort as usually gets sold to a geisha house”) in the area a couple of times prior to the abduction. If a PC mentions the silk deliveries on the day of the abduction, one of the house servants blinks in remembrance. “That’s right, she was here that day too. She must work for the silk weavery.”
- If the PCs ask Goshu about the specifics of the deliveries that day, and mention a pretty young maiden, he vaguely recalls seeing one. “Mm, yes, there was a young woman with them. I’m past the age where I notice such things, noble samurai. No, I don’t think she’d been here before.”

Interrogating the Elements: If the PCs have a shugenja, they can question the elements in the garden about the boy’s disappearance. This will require two successful Raises (since the event was some time ago). There are Earth, Air, and Water elements present in the garden in abundance. All the elements can report that “a boy” was playing in the garden, and “a woman” gave the boy something and then led him out the servant’s gate. If the PCs interrogate the Water spirits, they can get a visual image of a pretty young woman in a quality kimono (the garment of a successful commoner) offering the boy a piece of candy and then leading him out by the hand. If they have seen Yuri before, they can roll Intelligence+Investigation at TN 10 to recognize her; if they see her after this, the roll to identify her from their memories of the spirit’s image is TN 15.

Mikaihatsu Village

This is clearly a tiny, backwater village, a place where few travelers ever come. The peasants look startled and alarmed at a visit from strange samurai, and many of them hurry inside their huts. The surrounding rice fields, while sculpted artistically into the hills, are clearly meager, barely enough to support this place.

Mikaihatsu has barely fifty residents. Order is maintained by a single doshin (armed peasant), a thickheaded but well-meaning young man named Gobo. Gobo and the headman, Toku, will cooperate with the PCs, looking quite alarmed that their humble village has attracted such attention from samurai.

The two peasants explain that the sole mystery here was the disappearance three months ago of an old farmer named Yopparai (“Drunkard”) who was a notorious souse; he simply didn’t come out to the fields to work one morning. His family (which includes his son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren) assumed he was sleeping it off in a ditch, but he never came back. The village chalked it up to fate (an old drunkard couldn’t expect to cheat the Fortunes forever) until they heard rumors of disappearances in other, larger villages.

If the PCs question Yopparai’s family, they will get the same story in a longer, more roundabout version, complete with many tales of Yopparai’s drunken habits and his irresponsible behavior. “We can barely pay our taxes as it is, great samurai, and then he would waste all our money on cheap shochu.” No one in the village really misses Yopparai – if all the cult’s victims were these sorts of people, they might never have been discovered.

If the PCs search the area for signs of Yopparai or his abduction, they of course find nothing – it was two months ago, after all. However, if they interrogate the Air spirits of the area with two successful Raises, they get a brief account of a “man” set upon, beaten, and dragged away by “two men.” The direction he was taken (if the PCs think to ask) was southwest. Only the Air spirits can provide this information (Earth and Water spirits are too localized for the PCs to find the correct ones).

Danshou Village

A medium-sized village of about 150 residents, Danshou is a cheerful place, full of friendly conversation. Even the recent crime wave has done little to suppress the light-hearted spirits of the peasants

here, who welcome the PCs with smiles and offers of help. Danshou's upbeat nature stems in part from a local legend. Any of the villagers will be eager to recount the tale:

Once, great samurai, a strange monk came to our humble village. He had traveled long, and the stains of the road covered his robes. He had stopped at many other villages, but everywhere he was turned away as an untrustworthy vagabond. Finally, when he reached our village – which had a different name then, great samurai, although no one recalls it now – he was so weary and cold that all he desired was a place to shelter from the rain while he slept. As it happened, our village had just finished the rice harvest, and it had been a poor one. He knocked on the door of a hut, and the family there admitted him. They had little food, for the tax collectors had taken much of the modest crop, but they shared their food with him nonetheless, heated water for him to bathe, and gave him a warm place to sleep by the fire. The monk was amazed to see how happy the family was, despite their poor harvest, and asked why they kept such good cheer. The husband explained that his wife and children were all alive and healthy, despite many illnesses and injuries which had plagued them through the year, and while the harvest was poor there was enough food to see them all through the winter, even if only just. “What more can we ask for?” the wise peasant said. “Why should we not be happy? None can desire more than that their loved ones be safe and well. All else is distraction.” The monk was deeply impressed by their good spirits, and when he departed the next morning, he placed a blessing upon the village: “So long as you meet all the Fortunes present you with good cheer, the blessing of Unari will be upon this place, and your harvest will never falter.” And it never has, great samurai, not from that day to this.

As one might expect, in this happy place the Bloodspeaker Cult has made no inroads, and none of the locals are even aware that a cult exists. There are not even any doshin (armed peasants) here, so peaceful is the village. There have, however, been two disappearances in Danshou Village, and discussing them is just about the only thing that can bring the locals down from their cheerful nature.

The first victim was a child, a five-year-old named Chiisai who vanished when he ran off in the fields during the rice harvest last autumn. At the time, the villagers searched for the child but could find no sign of him, and assumed he had either gotten lost or been taken by a wild animal. If the PCs speak with Chiisai's large family, they will mention that he always carried a small statuette of Inari that was given to him by a monk

passing through the village (probably a monk visiting the local monastery).

The other disappearance, much more recent (less than three weeks ago) was Jakunen, a kindly old man who lived alone in a small hut on the village's edge. Jakunen's wife died long ago, and his children were all daughters who married into other families – rather than be a burden on them, he chose to stay in his own hut alone. His absence was noticed when he failed to show up for the festival of the New Year on the fourth day of this month. Investigation of his hut showed signs of struggle, so the villagers reported the crime to the authorities.

If the PCs search Jakunen's hut, they do indeed find evidence of a struggle, including overturned furnishings and broken pottery – Jakunen did not go quietly, despite his age. Tracks have been obliterated by time, but if the PCs search carefully (and make a Perception+ Investigation roll at TN 15) they notice a broken jitte lying half-covered by an overturned basket. This was Bondo's weapon, which he lost during the struggle.

The jitte is a peasant weapon and is habitually used by doshin (peasant law-enforcement) as a way of non-lethally disarming samurai. If a PC interrogates the spirits in the jitte (it contains only Earth spirits) they can learn that it belongs to an “older man” with no hair on his head, a man who lives in a village to the east of here. In any case, discovering the jitte will give the PCs a reason to interrogate all the local doshin.

If the PCs question the spirits in and around the hut, they can get descriptions (and visuals, if they question the Water spirits in the damp earth) of three cultists (Bondo, Miya Kuboti, and Nigai from Aian village) abducting poor old Jakunen. It will be clear from the visuals, or from descriptions that the spirits provide, that two of the abductors were peasants while the third was a samurai (or at least looked like one). If the PCs ask, Jakunen was taken away to the southeast.

Aian Village

This is a large village, probably over 200 people, and you spot two samurai residences on the outskirts as you approach. The center of the town boasts a black smithy, a tea house, and a merchant's shop, all advertised with crude but vigorous signs. However, despite the appearance of prosperity, an aura of fear and unease seems to hang over this place. As you walk up the main street you glimpse tense peasant faces peering from shuttered windows. Two anxious-looking peasants, clutching jo staffs and jitte, approach and prostrate themselves before you.

The two men are Kozo and Mukitsu, the village doshin (armed peasants). Aian village lives in a state of fear – there has been one murder here, and four disappearances, among which was the local headman and his family. The doshin are the only remaining local authority (the outlying samurai, busy with their own affairs, have largely ignored the problem). Kozo and Mukitsu are obviously frightened by the situation, and practically fall all over themselves in their haste to hand the problem over to “brave, noble samurai.” Neither of them has ever had to deal with anything worse than the occasional peasant family quarrel or drunken samurai.

The doshin can provide the following information:

- The headman Shidou, his wife, and their young daughter all vanished on the same night fifteen days ago.
- There were obvious signs of struggle in their house. The doshin will show the PCs to the house if they wish.
- Strangely, no one heard or saw anything strange the night of the disappearances. (The cultists used magic to cloak themselves.)
- The murder took place on the same night as the assault on the headman’s house. The victim was an employee at the black smithy, a tough young man named Kou who was coming home late from the teahouse. His body was found in a ditch on the outskirts of the village, covered in strange burn marks. The doshin describe them as “unnatural, great samurai, as though his whole body was bathed in flame at once. It must have been magic.”
- If the PCs ask what Kou was doing earlier in the evening, the doshin say that he was drinking at the teahouse, probably trying to sweet-talk the serving maids (a frequent activity).
- There has been one other disappearance in the village. It happened two months ago, and was a young man returning from a visit to a neighboring farm where he was courting a maiden. He never made it home. When the doshin searched the route between the two huts, they found a place torn up by a struggle, and some scraps of cloth. They still have the cloth.

Other clues and information that the PCs can learn here are as follows:

- The headman’s hut contains tumbled furnishings, scuff marks, and other signs of struggle. No one has visited the hut in the time since the abductions (the villagers regard it as cursed). If the PCs search the ground around the hut, they can roll Perception+Hunting at TN 15, or Perception+Investigation at TN 20, to notice some

footprints in the frozen mud around the hut (the weather was warmer on the night of the abduction). Most of the prints are barefoot, but two sets are in sandals. One of the bare prints came from a man who was missing his left big toe.

- If the PCs interrogate the spirits in and around the hut, they can get descriptions of an assault on the hut by six people: their descriptions match Miya Kuboti, Nigai the laborer, Bondo the doshin, Asai the monk, Yuri from the sake works, and Chu the carpenter (see Handout #2 for physical descriptions of these NPCs). The Air spirits can report that they were forced by magic to dampen the sounds around the hut. The Water spirits, which are imprisoned in the frozen mud, can be invoked with two Raises, and will provide a dark, blurry image of the assault. PCs who roll Perception+Investigation at TN 25 can catch recognizable glimpses of Nigai and Miya Kuboti.
- If the PCs ask about Kou’s last night at the teahouse, the tearful maids remark that he usually didn’t stay that late, but he had come alone instead of with his friend Nigai, who usually could talk him into going home at a more reasonable hour.
- Kou’s body was cremated and the ashes placed in an urn behind his house. There is nothing obviously strange about the ashes (if the PCs examine them) but they do carry some residual Taint from the spell used to kill Kou; if the PCs can detect Taint (e.g. Witch Hunters, Moto bushi), they will sense a very faint residue of it in the ashes.
- If the PCs examine the place where Kou’s body was found, they discover the ground is scorched and that snow melts upon it. There is some Taint here as well. If the PCs invoke the Air or Earth spirits here, they can learn that Kou was walking that night when he stopped, shouted (in the direction of the headman’s hut), and then was struck down by “dirty fire.” The Water spirits here arrived after the incident. There are residual Fire spirits on the site as well, but they are Tainted kansen and will not willingly cooperate with the PCs; a shugenja who can manage a Commune spell with four Raises will be able to force them to admit that they were invoked by “the shaven-headed man.”
- The cloth, which was found in Kou’s hand, was torn from a good quality kimono, dyed in a flower pattern. This suggests a woman’s kimono, either a samurai or a non-peasant commoner (it is from one of Yuri’s kimono). The spirits in the cloth can identify their owner as “a woman” who lives in the “place of rotting rice.”

The Cultist:

There is a cultist in Aian Village, a bristly-haired, slightly stupid man named Nigai who works days at the teahouse as a handy man and general laborer. Nigai has always envied the samurai who visit the teahouse, and was recruited by the cult with promises of power and glory. Since joining, however, he has developed doubts and fears about the cult, doubts made worse by the crimes he has committed. The slaughter of the family in Tenraku Village last month, followed by the abduction of the headman's family in his own village, and the murder of his friend Kou, has shaken Nigai's dedication to the Bloodspeaker cause. He is now seriously considering trying to leave the cult, but fears he will be found out and killed if he does so.

PCs who have seen Nigai in Water-spirit visions (here, at Danshou village, etc.) can recognize him with a Simple Intelligence roll at TN 10. If they have only verbal descriptions from other (non-Water) spirits, they will need to roll TN 20.

If the PCs speak to Nigai about the death of his friend Kou, about why he wasn't with Kou that night, or about the disappearance of the headman's family, he will become very anxious and nervous, loudly declaring his innocence, insisting he was home sleeping that night (he lives alone, in a small hut near the teahouse), and so forth. If the PCs press him closely he will try to bolt, or failing that, breaks down and confesses.

What Nigai knows:

- There are cultists in Aian Village (himself), Jouzousho Village, Koujou Village, and Tenraku Village. He thinks there is also a cultist in the monastery, because when they abducted the headman's family a man helped them who looked like a monk.
- He knows only a few names: Bondo, Yuri, and Chu. He thinks Bondo must be a doshin, because he carried jitte (peasant weapons).
- There is a samurai in the cult as well, and he has worked with the samurai twice (to abduct Jakunen and to assault the headman's hut). He does not know the samurai's name, but guesses he is a Miya – at least he dresses like them.
- The cult meets in the mill in Koujou Village. He has never been allowed to attend the meetings – they don't trust him that much. Nigai resents this – he thinks (rightly) that the rest of the cult regards him as stupid and unreliable.
- Last year the cult only made two sacrifices, but this winter they've suddenly been making many, many more. He doesn't know why.

Jouzousho Village

This large, prosperous-looking village is located squarely on the road to Kyuden Miya, and you can easily spot both an inn and a geisha house to cater to the needs of visiting samurai. There is also another large structure, clearly a business of some sort. You can see a large samurai dwelling on the far side of the place. Three doshin (armed peasants), one a young man and the other two well into middle age, cautiously approach and bow to you.

Jouzousho has over 200 residents, and the town's sake brewery supplies much of the sake for the Miya lands. Law is enforced by a trio of doshin (armed peasants) who report to a samurai, Miya Zusan, who lives in the large house outside the village.

Miya Zusan is a dissolute man who spends his time in his residence drinking, reading poetry, and indulging himself with his geisha concubine. His actual wife, Sabishii, is a cold, aloof woman trapped in the classic loveless political marriage that is the norm for Rokugan. Zusan generally ignores the village and allows the three doshin to handle any problems.

The doshin, Shin, Matsui, and Bondo, all appear to be dedicated men who are well over their heads trying to deal with the Bloodspeaker cult. Shin is a young man, barely old enough to be considered an adult. Matsui and Bondo are both older, Bondo balding as well, and have a world-weary air about them of men who have "seen it all" – the Rokugani equivalent of career beat cops. In the case of Matsui, this is genuine; Bondo, however, is a clever cultist.

If the PCs ask about jitte, Shin and Matsui carry a pair of the disarming weapons, while Bondo carries only one and a tonfa (club). He claims, if asked, that his other jitte was stolen and lost by a neighbor child (a lie). (If the PCs ask the child, he sincerely denies it, and his mother says he was playing in the house that day and never left her sight.)

Besides Bondo, there are two other cultists here: Yuri, a beautiful young woman working at the sake brewery, and Ota, a thirteen-year-old boy who also works there and is secretly Yuri's lover. If the PCs have been keeping an eye out for beautiful peasant girls (as a result of the evidence they gained in Mujitsu Village or elsewhere) they can roll Perception+Hunting at TN 20 to notice Yuri at the brewery.

There have been three disappearances here, and one murder. Depending on how the PCs choose to investigate, they can potentially learn a great deal.

The first disappearance: The victim was Noroi, a somewhat clueless young peasant who left his house to go for a walk one night last autumn and never came back. Bondo was on duty that night, and searched for the man, but found nothing. (A lie; he actually helped abduct him.)

- If the PCs speak with Noroi's family, his younger sister will tell them she thinks Noroi's "walk" was actually supposed to be a visit to a woman. Questioned further on this, she remarks angrily that Noroi was "mooning over that little doxy at the sake brewery," then remembers she is speaking to samurai and cringes in terrified embarrassment.
- Noroi was trying to court Yuri at the sake works. If the PCs question Yuri about this, she admits that Noroi was pursuing her, but claims she wasn't encouraging him. She has no idea where he was going that night, and says she never saw him. This is all lies, as the PCs can determine with a Contested roll of Perception vs. Awareness+Acting.
- If the PCs question Yuri about Noroi, have them roll Perception+Investigation at TN 15 to notice the thirteen-year-old boy Ota listening in with an angry expression on his face. Spotted, he will try to run away, then denies everything if caught.

The second disappearance: The victim this time was a geisha, Hana ("Flower"), who disappeared from the local geisha house seven weeks ago. Bondo and Matsui investigated the report, but could learn nothing conclusive.

- The madam of the geisha house, Sui, is a sour old woman who believes that Hana ran away, probably to live with some samurai lover. Bondo (of course) supports this theory; Matsui is inclined to as well, but isn't quite so sure.
- The madam will admit that Hana took nothing with her, not even her treasured personal belongings.
- Matsui will mention that Hana was friends with Ota, the boy who delivers sake to the house from the brewery, but the boy said she told him nothing about her intentions. If the PCs question Ota themselves, he claims to know nothing about Hana's disappearance. (A lie.)
- If the PCs ask to search Hana's room, Sui will grumble but eventually show them to the small chamber (she has not yet purchased a replacement for Hana). The PCs can roll Perception+Investigation at TN 20 to find a letter folded and hidden away beneath Hana's spare

garments. It is an anonymous love-letter asking her to meet the writer at midnight. The letter purports to be from a samurai, but any PC who rolls Intelligence+Calligraphy at TN 15, or a suitable Lore skill at TN 20, can tell that the writing is too plain and direct for any samurai (save perhaps a Crab).

- If the PCs interrogate the spirits in the letter (Earth spirits only), they can learn it was written by "a woman" (Yuri) and was brought to the geisha house by "a boy" (Ota).
- If the PCs go to the rendezvous site mentioned in the letter (under a tree at the edge of the village), they find no physical evidence. However, if they interrogate the spirits here (Air, Earth, and Water spirits are available) with at least two Raises, they can gain a description of Hana being ambushed and carried off by two men (Chu and Asai). If they get visual images from the Water spirits, they will be able to see the two attackers clearly with a Simple Perception roll at TN 20.

The murder: A sake brewery employee, Joufu, was found in the building stabbed to death one morning thirty-three days ago. The manager of the brewery, a pudgy merchant named Akogi, speaks in distressed tones about the expense of having his business cleansed and purified after the incident. Shin investigated this crime.

- Shin found the murder weapon, a cooking knife, tossed in a corner of the sake works. He still has it.
- If the PCs Commune with the spirits in the knife (Earth only), they learn it belonged to "a woman" who used it to cut vegetables. Then a "boy" took it and used it to kill "the man."
- If the PCs question the locals about the knife, they will eventually be able to track it to Ota's mother, an ordinary peasant woman. She confesses that the knife disappeared at around the same time as the murder, but she didn't make the connection.
- Ota will angrily deny any involvement in the murder, but the PCs can easily see through his lies with a Contested roll (Perception vs. Awareness).
- If the PCs question Ota's family, they admit that their son has changed, become sullen and strange, since he started working at the sake works last year.
- If the PCs question other employees at the brewery, they will mention that Joufu often spoke with Yuri, telling her she should marry him rather than continuing to work here. He was quite aggressive in his actions; one worker shakes his head and remarks, "Joufu never did have any tact with women." If the PCs have not already questioned Ota, they can roll Perception+Investigation at TN

15 to notice him listening to their conversation with an angry expression.

The third disappearance: The most recent crime, this one took place just 20 days ago. A peasant boy named Mattou vanished one evening while carrying a meal from his family's hut to that of another family (relatives) who were sick. The boy never arrived. Bondo searched for him, but found only the meal, spilled in the street.

- Bondo can point out where he found the spilled meal, but he is lying (Bondo himself seized the boy, twenty feet away from the false location). If the PCs interrogate the spirits in the false location, they learn that no struggle or incident took place there.
- If the PCs look all along the route between the two huts, they find no clues. Exceptionally stubborn PCs who interrogate spirits all along the route, and ask the right questions, can eventually find Air and Earth spirits who report "a man" (matching Bondo's description) stopping "a boy," then picking him up and carrying him away.

Investigating Yuri, Ota, and Bondo:

Yuri is Chio's deputy and a capable Maho-Tsukai. She lives with her aged mother (too old to labor in the fields anymore) and supports her with her job at the sake brewery. She hates samurai (she is herself the bastard child of a Miya samurai who forced his attentions on her mother, a fact which is common knowledge in the village). Her mother has no idea of her true nature.

- If the PCs question Yuri, she will stonewall them to the best of her ability. She denies any involvement with any of the crimes, claims complete innocence, and insists that she was home with her family on each and every night that a crime took place.
- If the PCs question her mother, the old peasant woman (who was once very pretty) speaks well of her daughter, who has foregone marriage in order to stay and care for her. But any PC rolling Simple Awareness at TN 15 can tell that she has reservations. If she can be persuaded to speak, she confesses that in recent years her daughter has become cold and remote, and she worries about her. She has also noticed (unknown to Yuri) that her daughter seems to spend a lot of time with the boy Ota.
- If the PCs search Yuri's room (which comprises one half of the hut she shares with her mother), they find three good quality flower-woven kimonos, one of them a torn and damaged garment that matches the shreds of cloth taken from Kou in Aian Village. They will also find (with a

Perception+Investigation roll at TN 15) a small statuette of Inari (fortune of rice) which matches the one carried by Chiisai at Danshou Village.

Yuri is a fanatic. If the PCs accuse her or attempt to arrest her, she will flee to Chio if possible, fight to the death if not. If she is somehow taken alive, she will bite off her own tongue to kill herself.

Ota will fight to defend Yuri, but lacks her fanaticism. If she is killed, his will breaks and he stops fighting, telling everything he knows in a dull, listless voice. So long as Yuri lives, however, he will never crack.

Bondo will try to bluff his way past any accusations, calling on his fellow doshin Matsui and Shin to speak for his innocence. If there seems no chance of avoiding arrest he will try to flee to Chio. If captured, Bondo will put up a brave front until tortured, then cracks and tells all he knows.

Bondo and Ota have the following information:

- Besides themselves and Yuri, there are Bloodspeaker cultists in Aian Village (Nigai), Koujou Village (Chio, her granddaughter Amiko, and Miya Kutobi), Tenraku Village (the carpenter Chu), and Yasuragi Monastery (the monk Asai).
- They know that Chio is their leader, and that she has a magic amulet made of some shiny black stone. She has been making sacrifices to it regularly, asking it questions.
- Chio asks it about the location of Iuchiban's tomb, and about the magical defenses of Otsan Uchi. They do not know what answers it gives her, but she says she has sent messages to the Bloodspeaker Cult's leaders.
- They do not know where Chio got the amulet – she never told them.
- Yuri is Chio's deputy. The other important member of the cult is the monk Asai, who has given all of them advice and leadership.

Koujou Village

A medium-sized village, probably a hundred or so people, perches on the banks of a small stream which cuts across the road to Kyuden Miya. An elegant arched bridge crosses the stream, one that has clearly seen the feet of many samurai visiting the Miya family. To one side of the bridge is a large building mounting a waterwheel, and as it slowly turns you can hear the heavy, laborious "thump, thump" of a mortar and pestle within – clearly a mill.

Besides the mill (which grinds rice, millet, wheat, and buckwheat for the local villages), the town also boasts a single inn/teahouse to serve the needs of samurai visiting the Miya.

The law here is enforced by a single doshin, Koto, a humble, gray-haired man who defers carefully to his betters. Koto was appointed fifteen years ago by Miya Kishin, an aging Shisha who resides in a large house on the edge of the village. Due to Kishin's age and growing infirmity, most of his actual duties have fallen to his sons, Takura and Kuboti. Takura, the eldest, is usually away in the courts of Rokugan, so local authority mostly falls on Kuboti. The PCs may occasionally see him striding through the village, a dark-browed young man with burning, feverish eyes and sallow skin.

Koujou Village is the current headquarters of the cult cell, and the home of its nominal leader, Chio. For this reason, it has been spared the worst of the current crime wave, with only one disappearance.

Crimes:

If the PCs ask about the one disappearance here, Koto will explain slowly that the victim was Higaisha, a young peasant boy of about fifteen who sometimes worked at the mill. He vanished one evening six weeks ago. He was on his way home from a day of work at the mill, where he was helping repair the water wheel. (Higaisha was not a carpenter by trade, but his grandmother, Chio, lives at the mill, and he often helps maintain it.) The other workers on the wheel were Chu (the carpenter from Tenraku village) and his apprentice Majime. Higaisha's older sister, Amiko, took dinner to him about an hour before he left work, and reports that nothing seemed amiss at the time.

In reality, of course, Amiko, Chu, and Chio are all cultists. Higaisha had begun to suspect that his sister was more than she seemed, and leveled accusations against her that evening. On his way home, Amiko ambushed him, killed him, and hid the body.

If the PCs try to retrace Higaisha's steps from the mill to his hut, they can roll Perception+Investigation (or Hunting) at TN 20 to discover a patch of ground discolored with old blood. Another roll (this time at TN 15) can trace some old drag marks leading from here to a ditch behind one of the village huts, where Higaisha's body has been concealed with heaped stones and earth. The corpse has decayed only a little in the cold winter weather, and anyone who looks at it (with the help of eta, since touching a dead body makes one unclean) can see that his throat was cut.

If the PCs interrogate the spirits in this area, they can learn that Higaisha was ambushed by "a girl," who run up behind him, then cut his throat and dragged his body into the ditch. If they summon Water spirits (there are some in the damp earth), they can show a visual image of Amiko killing Higaisha with a small knife.

Cultists:

The main cultist here is Chio, an old blind peasant woman who looks after the mill and lives in a small hut attached to the building. Chio measures out the grain and flour by hand for each person who uses the mill, and her measurements are never wrong. The whole village respects her and will tolerate no ill to be spoken of her without strong evidence.

Chio is the leader of the cult, and a Maho-Tsukai of some skill. She will try to put on the front of a kindly old woman, burdened with age and blindness but still carrying out her role in the Celestial Order. However, any PC who rolls Simple Awareness (+Ichi Miru, if available) at TN 20 after speaking to her senses that hatred and envy boil just beneath the surface. Chio will never tell the PCs anything, and will fight to the death rather than be taken prisoner.

If the PCs search Chio's hut, they will find a large, very sharp knife hidden under some baskets (unless she is currently using it for a ceremony). There are no other obvious clues (she always wears the Obsidian Amulet on a woven thong under her shapeless peasant garb). However, any PC who can sense Taint will pick up a very faint residual of it both in Chio's hut and within the mill itself.

The other cultists here are Chio's pretty granddaughter Amiko, and the samurai Miya Kuboti (who Amiko seduced into the cult).

If the PCs watch Amiko or Kuboti, they may be able to witness one of their clandestine meetings. Affairs between samurai and peasants are shocking enough, of course, but what is even more shocking is that Kuboti is clearly the weaker of the two, deferring to Amiko and referring to her as "Ojo-sama" ("mistress").

Miya Kuboti will try to stonewall any questions or investigations, relying on his status as a samurai and a Miya to protect himself. However, if the PCs saw the visions at the crime scenes in Aian Village or Danshou Village, they can identify Kuboti with a Simple Intelligence roll at TN 15. Nigai can also identify him, visually, as the "samurai cultist."

Kuboti lost his wakizashi during the battle at Tenraku Village. He still wears a daisho set, but any PC rolling

Perception+Kenjutsu (or Weaponsmith) at TN 10 can tell that the weapons do not match, the wakizashi being of cheaper quality. If the PCs found the lost wakizashi at the Tenraku crime scene, it matches Kuboti's katana. He gets quite agitated if the PCs mention his swords (for any reason) and will rush off afterwards to meet with Amiko.

Amiko is a sadistic and bloodthirsty girl who revels in the power she has over Miya Kuboti. She will do her best to rebuff any PC questions, perhaps flirting with them as a distraction, and professes shock and horror if the PCs name her as the murderer of her brother. If they mention her relationship with Miya Kuboti, she tries to claim that he seduced her. "What was I to do, samurai-sama? I am only a poor peasant girl." If the PCs try to arrest her, she will attempt to flee to her grandmother for help.

If the PCs capture Amiko, her will proves to be brittle, and she will quickly confess. She knows the following:

- Her grandmother Chio is the leader of the cult. Chio was recruited into the Bloodspeakers by the monk Asai, who gave her the Obsidian Amulet and taught her the ways of Maho.
- Besides Chio, Miya Kuboti, and Asai, the other members of the cult are the laborer Nigai (Aian Village), the sake-brewery workers Yuri and Ota (Jouzousho Village), the doshin Bondo (also from Jouzousho), and the carpenter Chu (Tenraku village).
- Yuri is Chio's deputy in the cult.
- Chio has been making many sacrifices to the Amulet to try and learn the location of Iuchiban's Tomb and the defenses of Otosan Uchi. The resurrection of Iuchiban must be near!

Accusing and arresting Miya Kuboti will be more problematic, since he is samurai. See "Consequences and Confrontations."

The Mill

The mill is where the cultists hold their meetings and make sacrifices. The endless "thump, thump" of the huge waterwheel-driven mortar-and-pestle is a constant backdrop any time the PCs are inside, and all surfaces are dusted with old flour.

Chio and her granddaughter are always careful to clean up any evidence of their crimes, but some residual Taint still remains, and can be detected by PCs with that ability. If the PCs actually interrogate the spirits inside the mill (there are plenty of Air and Earth spirits), they can learn that "many people" gather in the mill, and sometimes they bring other people and kill them with sharp knives. The spirits don't like talking about these

incidents, for whenever they happen "bad spirits" (kansens) come, often staying for days afterward.

If the PCs ask, the spirits can say that there are usually eight people at these gatherings (three women and five men) and can describe all the cultists except Nigai (who has never been allowed to attend).

Tenraku Village

This medium-sized village sits just to one side of the road to Kyuden Miya, and a large inn is positioned right on the roadside. You can also see a sprawling building which is clearly a carpenter's shop, with partially finished furniture, barrels, and wagons scattered about outside. The whole town seems strangely still, however, and as you look closer you can see that at least one of the huts looks abandoned. As you walk closer, a weary-looking old man emerges from the village and walks toward you with a careful, measured tread.

Tenraku has about 170 people. The villagers here live in fear, for this was the scene of the violent massacre last month, one of the incidents that finally brought the PCs to the area. A couple of families have even fled the area in defiance of the Empire's laws against unauthorized travel.

This village was the scene of the cult's greatest mistake. In answer to Chio's demands for ever more sacrifices, they attempted to abduct an entire family. Unfortunately, the family resisted fiercely, and the ensuing violence attracted one of the local doshin (armed peasants), who rushed in to attempt a rescue. The cultists wound up murdering the doshin and most of the family, securing only two sacrifices for Chio. When they struck in Aian two weeks later, they were better prepared, and took the entire family.

The village's one remaining doshin, Toshu, is an older man, weary-looking and balding. He has some actual experience with investigating crimes – he was involved in the investigation of a murdered samurai many years ago. He has kept the hut of the crime-scene untouched (except for removing and cremating the bodies) in the hope that magistrates or shugenja might be able to glean something from it, a decision he will explain to the PCs with quiet dignity while he leads them there.

If the PCs ask about jitte, Toshu still has both of his. He will be quietly offended if the PCs suggest he might have been involved in any crimes.

If the PCs ask how the victims died, Toshu explains that the peasants were stabbed and hacked to death, as

though with knives and blades, while his fellow doshin (whose name was Yujin) was burned to death. He did not look closer than that, fearing the uncleanness of the dead.

PCs may think of questioning the local eta about the conditions of the bodies they cremated. The eta (with much anxious, furtive behavior) explain that all the bodies were horribly killed, stabbed and hacked apart with great violence. Only one body was intact, and that one was terribly burned, the flesh blackened and flaking away, the hair coming out in great clumps when the body was moved. PCs may roll Intelligence+Shugenja Lore at TN 15 to realize that Fire spells usually do not have that severe an effect, unless they are cast by a high-ranking Adept. Any PC with knowledge of Maho (the Lore: Shadowlands or Lore: Maho-Tsukai skills) may roll Intelligence+Skill at TN 15 to realize that the spell was probably Elemental Maho (that is, a Maho version of a normal Fire spell).

If the PCs check the ashes (kept in urns at the local graveyard), those with the ability to detect Shadowlands Taint (Witch Hunters, Moto, etc.) will be able to sense a faint residual Taint in the ashes of the burning victim.

The crime scene itself is covered in dried blood, not yet rotting due to the cold weather. The scale of the violence here is obvious. Any PC who rolls Intelligence+Battle at TN 15 can surmise that there were at least four attackers, and that they fought with near-bestial ferocity.

If the PCs search the scene, they can roll Perception+Investigation at TN 20 to find a good-quality wakizashi, hilt wrapped in the colors of the Miya, buried under the wrecked furniture. The blade is still stained with dried blood.

This weapon belongs to Miya Kuboti. If the PCs invoke the spirits in the sword, they can easily speak to its Earth spirits. It also contains residual Fire and Water spirits from its forging, but these are harder to invoke (two Raises). All the spirits can loosely describe the blade's owner (Kuboti), and the Water spirits can picture him.

If the PCs Commune with the elements in the hut itself, they can speak with Air, Earth, or Water spirits (there are Water spirits in a kettle which was scheduled to be boiled for soup). The spirits can report that "three men and a woman" attacked the house, and that the woman "called bad fire" to kill the doshin. If the PCs invoke the Water spirits, they get a visual of Nigai, Miya Kuboti, Chu, and Yuri attacking the house. Yuri slashes

her arm to cast forth a bolt of black fire that incinerates the doshin.

Cultists

There is one cultist in Tenraku Village – Chu, one of the carpenters who works at the village shop. A muscular, heavy-set man with a drum-like belly, Chu's deep-set eyes burn with a life-long resentment against the samurai caste – his childhood sweetheart was sold off to a geisha house because her family could not afford to pay their Imperial taxes. He will speak to the PCs in a low, growling voice, offering the minimum politeness required; his apprentice Majime hovers nervously in the background.

Chu is missing his left big toe. He does not know he left tracks in Asai Village and, if asked about his foot, will admit that he lost the toe many years ago while cutting lumber.

If the PCs search Chu's room at the carpentry shop, they can roll Perception+Investigation at TN 15 to discover the simple white clothing of Etoku, the vanished monk. The garments are stained with both blood and, oddly, buckwheat flour (from the mill).

If the PCs make accusations against Chu, he stolidly denies them (while fingering his carpentry hammer). Faced with arrest, he fights or flees as seems appropriate. Captured, Chu will refuse to say anything; even under torture, he simply glares hatred at everyone.

Chu's apprentice Majime is a fearful, anxious young fellow. He realizes his master is up to no good (although he does not realize just how bad the situation is). If the PCs speak to him away from Chu, he can provide the following information:

- Chu often goes out late at night, not returning until the wee hours of the morning. He doesn't know where these nocturnal expeditions lead (too scared to follow).
- He's seen Chu speaking with the monk Asai, and with Yuri and Ota from Jouzousho Village.
- On the night Higaisha disappeared in Koujou Village, the young man had a strange confrontation with his sister Amiko. "Higaisha accused her of lechery, said he'd seen her go to the house of the local samurai," Majime explains. "She just laughed at him and told him he couldn't possibly understand what was happening. And my master just watched, didn't say a word."

Yasuragi Monestary

The monastery perches atop a low hill, surrounded by trees. A shallow stone staircase climbs the slope,

passing beneath seven Torii arches representing the seven Great Fortunes; the last and largest Torii is dedicated to Fukurokujin, the Fortune of Wisdom.

This monastery is home to many retired Miya samurai, as well as true monks who have spent their lives here in contemplation of Wisdom. It is also home to Asai, the founder of the Bloodspeaker cell.

If the PCs visit, they are conveyed immediately to meet the head abbot, Fukai, a heavy-set man with bushy eyebrows and a vague, distracted air about him. Fukai speaks sadly and with some embarrassment of the one disappearance here: a recently retired Miya who had taken the new name Etoku (“Perception”). Etoku arrived here last autumn and disappeared one afternoon less than a month later, while working alone in the garden. There was no sign of a struggle. His absence was noted that evening when he failed to appear for meditation.

If the PCs ask whether anyone visited the monastery that day, Fukai recalls that a carpenter from Tenraku village made a delivery of some furnishings that afternoon. He does not recall the name, but if the PCs ask for a description, he describes Chu.

Etoku had no visitors that day – in fact none since his retirement to the monastery the month before. If the PCs ask whether any monks in particular shared his company, Fukai thinks for a moment, then nods. “Asai was his friend. I suppose two retired samurai have some things in common.”

If the PCs ask the abbot about Asai, he seems vague. “Oh, no trouble from him, no trouble at all,” he says. PCs may suspect (accurately) that his mind has been magically clouded. If they question other monks, they learn that Asai sometimes goes out to visit the villages, perhaps to educate the villagers or teach the ways of Shinsei. He favors Koujou Village, and says there are people there “of great wisdom for their lowly station.”

If the PCs search Etoku’s room (it has not yet been assigned to a new monk), they can roll Perception+Investigation at TN 20 to find a piece of paper with a strange, unfinished poem. A roll of Intelligence+Poetry at TN 15 will perceive the meaning of the poem: Etoku was deeply suspicious of Asai, who he suspected of being someone other than who he claimed.

The Cultist:

Asai appears to be a normal monk, a shaven-headed man in white robes. He is a retired Scorpion. He will readily admit this, but will not reveal his old samurai

name, claiming he left that life behind when he retired. If pressed hard, he identifies himself falsely as Bayushi Uso (“Lie”).

Asai will smoothly deny any involvement with crimes, and will suggest that the PCs have been deceived by the Bloodspeakers. “There are many magics which can change appearances or create false clues. Perhaps you were meant to suspect me, rather than pursue the true criminals.” He will never crack, and the PCs are unlikely to see through his facade (which would require a Contested roll of Perception vs. Awareness+Acting). If the PCs seem to be about to arrest him, or if they have already shut down the rest of the cult, he will try to use his magic to escape.

If the PCs get permission to search Asai’s room (this will require approval from the abbot, who won’t violate Asai’s privacy without good reason), they can roll Perception+Investigation at TN 25 to find a box hidden in the ceiling. The contents of this box will depend on whether Asai has tried to flee the area yet.

- If Asai has not fled, the box will contain a Scorpion kimono (Yogo mon), several spell scrolls containing Aguchi’s normal (non-Maho) spells, a personal chop with the name “Yogo Aguchi,” and a letter from Yajinden (Handout #1).
- If Asai has fled the monastery, the box contains only the chop and the letter.

Any PC who hears the name “Yogo Aguchi” can roll Intelligence+Shugenja Lore at TN 25 (or Scorpion Clan Lore at TN 20, or Yogo Family Lore at TN 15) to recall hearing about a Yogo shugenja by that name who was forced to retire about fourteen years ago due to some sort of hushed-up scandal. A Yogo or Soshi family PC will also know that the “scandal” involved an Obsidian nemuranai (magical item) that disappeared while under Aguchi’s protection.

The Other Villages

(Gaikou, Shinsaku, and Tabi)

There are three villages on the PCs’ map where no crimes have occurred. These villages have no significance to the scenario and are there as red herrings. No cultists are based at any of them, and the locals are only vaguely aware (through frightening but indistinct rumors) of the crime-wave afflicting their neighbors.

Part 3: Consequences and Confrontations

Once the PCs have begun uncovering cultists, the Bloodspeakers will react. Exactly how they react will

depend on how much the PCs have found and whether they seem to be on the trail of Chio and Asai.

If the PCs do not seem to be figuring out where the cult is based, the cultists will ignore these “foolish samurai” and attempt to continue their sacrifices, kidnapping some suitable victim (probably from Jouzousho Village) and preparing another ceremony in the Koujou Village mill. This will give the PCs another chance to track them down (the Hunting skill could be very useful here, along with spells).

If the PCs do begin to expose the cult, and show signs of tracking down its leadership, Chio will take alarm and try to summon all her minions for an all-out fight. It is up to the GM how many she manages to assemble, and whether they stand and fight or try to scatter and flee. Given Chio and Yuri’s toughness and magical abilities, this could be a rougher fight than the PCs expect. Outside help will not be available – the Miya are diplomats, not warriors, and peasant doshin will be too terrified of the Bloodspeakers to do more than cower in the background.

Asai, unlike Chio, will try to escape as soon as he realizes “the jig is up,” using his magic to best effect. He will try to take the Obsidian Amulet with him (this may provoke a conflict with Chio, who sees the amulet as the Cult’s property).

Arresting Miya Kuboti

If the PCs try to have Miya Kuboti arrested and questioned, they will have to apply to Miya Yoto for an Order of Appearance. Yoto will listen carefully to their reasons. Whether he acts on them depends on how much (and what sort of) evidence the PCs have accumulated. The claims of peasants are meaningless – the PCs must have personal or physical evidence, such as the missing wakizashi, or their own reports of tailing Kuboti to a rendezvous with other cultists (like Amiko).

If the PCs confront Kuboti himself with his crimes, he denies them heatedly. His father, a soft-hearted old fellow nearing the age of retirement, will back him up; his older brother Takeru, however, is only too ready to believe such things, having long suspected his sibling of being a dishonorable, jealous, deceitful dog.

If Kuboti is arrested, his weak spirit betrays him, and he confesses without being tortured. He can identify almost all of the cultists: Chio, Amiko, Yuri, Ota, Bondo, Nigai, and Chu. He knows that a monk at the monastery is a cultist, one of considerable importance and magical skill, but does not know his name (he can identify him by sight). He also knows about the Obsidian Amulet, and that the cult was trying very hard

to learn the location of Iuchiban’s Tomb and the defenses of Ootosan Uchi.

Aftermath

If and when the PCs unearth and destroy the cult, Miya Yoto congratulates them for proving his trust and fulfilling the task he asked of them. His son Satoshi joins in the praise, but in his case it is obviously false, and he follows up with a few cutting remarks about “how unfortunate it is that we did not have the resources to solve this problem for ourselves.” The PCs gain Minor Allies: Miya Family.

If the PCs capture the Obsidian Amulet, they must decide what to do with it. PCs who learned Yogo Aguchi’s true history will probably realize that the Amulet is the property of the Scorpion Clan, and should be returned. PCs who do not realize this (or who do not care) may instead decide to turn the Amulet over to the Miya authorities, or to keep the Amulet for themselves. In the latter case, give the appropriate PC the cert for the amulet.

Rewards and Consequences

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

Experience Points:

Playing through the scenario:	1 XP
Good role-playing:	1 XP
Finding and destroying the Bloodspeakers:	1 XP
Learning what they are plotting:	1 XP
TOTAL POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE:	4 XP

Honor:

PCs successfully stopped the Bloodspeaker murders: +1 Honor for helping the Miya family (+2 Honor if they are Crane, Emerald Magistrates, or Imperial Family).

PCs who keep the Obsidian Amulet after learning it comes from the Scorpion Clan: -1 Honor (-3 Honor for Scorpions) unless the PC is militantly anti-Scorpion.

Glory:

+1 point of Glory for fulfilling their mission to the Miya family by uncovering and destroying the Bloodspeaker infestation.

Other Consequences:

If the PCs succeed in unearthing and destroying the Bloodspeaker cell, they have the gratitude of Miya Yoto, and gain Minor Allies: Miya family.

Cert: Obsidian Amulet (see Handouts)

NPCs and Villains

Average Cultist:

(use interchangeably for Nigai, Ota, Amiko)

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

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.5

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Acting 1, Athletics 1, Craft (as appropriate) 1-2, Seduction 2 (Amiko only), Nofujutsu (peasant weapons) 1, Sincerity 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Equipment: sandals, jo stick (0k2) or knife (1k1)

Chu:

corrupt carpenter:

FIRE 2	AIR 2
Agility 3	
EARTH 3	WATER 2
	Strength 3
VOID 1	

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.8

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Athletics 2, Craft (Carpentry) 2, Nofujutsu (peasant weapons) 2, Stealth 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Large/Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (Heimin)

Equipment: Clothing, sandals, tonfa (1k2) or hammer (0k3)

Bondo:

corrupt Doshin

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

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 0.7

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Acting 2, Athletics 2, Defense 2, Investigation 2, Law 1, Nofujutsu 3, Sincerity 1, Stealth 2

Advantages/Disadvantages: Crafty, Strength of the Earth (rank 1)/Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Equipment: Clothing, sandles, jitte (1k1), tonfa (1k2)

Miya Kuboti:

corrupted Samurai

FIRE 2	AIR 2
EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 1	

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0.4/1.2

Skills: Archery 1, Athletics 1, Courtier 1, Defense 1, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 1, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 2, Law 1, Sincerity 2, Stealth 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Quick/Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Jealous (of his brother's inheritance), Weakness (Void)

Equipment: Daisho set, fine kimono, light armor

Yumi:

Cult Deputy

FIRE 1 Intelligence 2	AIR 2 Awareness 3
EARTH 3	WATER 1 Perception 2
VOID 1	

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 2.3

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Acting 2, Craft (sake brewing) 2, Knife 2, Lore (Bloodspeakers) 2, Seduction 2, Sincerity 2

Spells: *Fires of Corruption, Pain, Stealing the Soul*

Advantages/Disadvantages: Dangerous Beauty, Innate Abilities (all Maho spells)/Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Equipment: Kimono, sharp knife (1k2)

Chio:

Cult leader

FIRE 2 Intelligence 3	AIR 1 Awareness 3
EARTH 5	WATER 2
VOID 2	

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 3.4

TN to be Hit: 5

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Acting 1, Craft (tending the mill) 4, Etiquette 1, Knife 3, Lore (Bloodspeakers) 2, Meditation 2, Sincerity 2

Spells: *Corruption of the Earth, No Pure Breaths, Pain, Stealing the Soul*

Advantages/Disadvantages: Innate Abilities (all Maho spells), Precise Memory, Strength of the Earth (rank 2)/Blind (-2 dice on any rolls involving vision), Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Social Disadvantage (heimin)

Equipment: Clothing, large knife (1k2)

Asai:

corrupted monk, Cult founder (formerly Yogo Aguchi)

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

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 3.7

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Yogo shugenja 3

Honor/Glory: 0/2

Skills: Acting 3, Bojutsu 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, Craft (gardening) 2, Defense 2, Etiquette 2, Kenjutsu 1, Knife 2, Lore (Shugenja) 2, Lore (Bloodspeakers) 3, Meditation 2, Sincerity 4, Stealth 3, Theology 2

Spells: *Sense, Commune, Summon, (Air) Essence of Air, Forgotten Murmurs, Know the Shadows, Secrets on the Wind, Tempest of Air, (Fire) Fury of Osano-Wo, Hurried Steps, Inflammation, (Water) Path to Inner Peace, Reversal of Fortunes, Ties that Bind, (Maho) Corruption of the Earth, Fires of Corruption, Heaven Has no Justice, No Pure Breaths, Pain, Stealing the Soul*

Advantages/Disadvantages: Benten's Blessing, Bland, Crafty, Heartless, Innate Abilities (Essence of Air, Know the Shadows, all Maho spells)/Bad Reputation (lost a nemuranai), Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker), Yogo Curse

Equipment: Robes, sandals, bo staff (2k2), knife (1k2)

GM's Note: Casting Maho Spells

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

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

Corruption of the Earth

Base TN: 15

Casting Time: 3 Actions

Duration: 4 rounds

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 8

Raises: Area (3 feet diameter per raise), Casting Time, Duration (4 more rounds per raise)

Effect: This spell causes the earth within three feet of the target to turn to mud and swallow them up at the rate of two feet per Action. PCs trying to escape must roll Simple Earth at TN 15 to move three feet. Each attempt to move (whether successful or not) requires a Simple Water roll at TN 10 to avoid sinking an additional foot into the mud. Pulling free of the mud requires a Simple Earth roll at a TN of 5 times the number of feet the victim has sunk into the mud.

Fires of Corruption

Base TN: 20

Casting Time: 3 Actions

Duration: Instantaneous

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 9

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

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

Heaven Has no Justice

Base TN: Target's Honor x 5

Casting Time: 5 rounds

Duration: Caster's Taint rank in hours

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 4

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

Effect: The caster knows that the Celestial Order is a joke, and uses the foolish beliefs of others to manipulate them. For the duration of the spell, the caster increases a mental Trait (caster's choice) by an amount equal to the victim's Honor rank while

interacting with the victim. This is the spell which Asai has used to keep the Abbott from suspecting him.

No Pure Breaths

Base TN: Target's Earth x 5

Casting Time: 2 Actions

Duration: Instantaneous

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 5

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

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

Pain

Base TN: 10

Casting Time: 1 Action

Duration: 1 Round

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 4

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

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

Stealing the Soul

Base TN: 15

Casting Time: 2 Actions

Duration: 8 rounds

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 8

Raises: Casting Time, Duration (4 more rounds per raise)

Effect: This spell is a ritual, and more than one Maho-Tsukai may participate in casting it. For each caster participating, the target of the spell loses one Rank from each Ring and Trait, down to a minimum Rank of one. Lost Ranks return when the spell expires.

Handout #1

Brother Aguchi:

The time draws nigh for the resurrection of our great lord Iuchiban. We have found the magic which can free his soul. Now we must learn the location of his lost Tomb, for we must have the jade from his coffin itself. We must also learn of the defenses of Ootosan Uchi, for only through the blood of the accursed Hantei will our lord be freed.

The amulet which you secured from the Yogo at such risk shall now prove its worth. Make as many sacrifices as you have to in order to divine these things for us. Once you have results, I may be reached through the usual methods.

The future will be ours.

Yajinden

Handout #2

Master List of Bloodspeaker Cultists

Nigai the doubter (Aian Village)

Nigai is a bristly-haired, slightly stupid man who works at the local teahouse as a handy man and general laborer. He has always envied the samurai who visit the teahouse, and was recruited by the cult with promises of power and glory. Since joining, however, he has developed doubts and fears about the cult, doubts made worse by the crimes he has committed. If confronted, he will break down and confess everything. Unfortunately, he knows less than the other cultists – the cult never fully trusted him, and he was not allowed to attend their ceremonies.

Bondo the false doshin (Jouzousho Village)

A balding, middle-aged man with a world-weary air. Bondo plays the role of a “tired cop who has seen it all” and uses his friendship with his fellow village doshin (Matsui and Shin) to cloak his activities. He has lost one of his jitte (disarming weapons) and replaced it with a tonfa (club). He is stubborn and wily, but if arrested and tortured will eventually confess.

Yuri from the sake works (Jouzousho Village)

A lovely young commoner maiden who works at the local sake brewery to support her aged mother. She always wears good-quality kimono woven with flower patterns. Yuri is the bastard child of a Miya samurai (common knowledge in her village) and hates the samurai caste in consequence. She is Chio’s deputy and will probably take over the cult cell after Chio dies of old age. She is a cruel, ruthless fanatic who will die before confessing anything. Her mother has no idea of her true nature.

Ota from the sake works (Jouzousho Village)

A sullen, angry 13-year-old boy who works at the sake brewery. Yuri recruited him by becoming his secret lover. Ota’s commitment to the cult is tied to Yuri. He murdered a fellow worker at the brewery for trying to force himself on Yuri (the murder weapon was his mother’s cooking knife). If Yuri dies, Ota will immediately give up and tell everything he knows.

Chu the carpenter (Tenraku Village)

Chu is a muscular, heavy-set man with a drum-like belly. His deep-set eyes burn with a life-long resentment against the samurai caste (his childhood sweetheart was sold off to a geisha house because her family could not afford to pay their Imperial taxes). He speaks to samurai in a low, growling voice, offering the minimum politeness required. His left big toe is missing. He will never confess anything to samurai, even under torture.

Chio the leader (Koujou Village)

An old, blind, toothless woman who takes care of the village mill (the only work she’s capable of) and measures out grain and flour by feel with pinpoint accuracy. Chio was Asai’s first recruit and is now the cult leader, a capable and dangerous Maho-Tsukai. She will play the role of a harmless old woman until she has no other choice, then fights to the death. She wears the Obsidian Amulet on a thong around her neck, concealed beneath her shapeless peasant garment.

Amiko the seductress (Koujou Village)

Chio’s pretty teenage granddaughter is a malicious and bloodthirsty cultist who killed her own brother to keep him from learning the truth about the cult. She seduced Miya Kuboti into the cult and meets with him secretly on a regular basis; their relationship is one of “mistress-to-slave.” If Amiko is arrested, she will quickly break and confess (she lacks her grandmother’s fanaticism).

Miya Kuboti, the fallen samurai (Koujou Village)

Kuboti is a dark-browed young man with burning, feverish eyes and sallow skin. He is the younger son of Miya Kishin, an aging Shisha. He bitterly resents his older brother, Takura, who stands to inherit; this anger made him a willing recruit when Amiko seduced him. Takura is usually away in the courts of Rokugan, so local authority mostly falls on Kuboti. He often meets secretly with Amiko. Kuboti will deny everything until arrested, then breaks down and confesses.

Asai the false monk (Yasuragi Monestary)

Superficially, Asai is a normal monk, a shaven-headed man in his forties or fifties, dressed in simple white robes. He is a retired Scorpion, and will readily admit this (but will not reveal his old samurai name, claiming he left that life behind when he retired.) If pressed, he gives a false name: Bayushi Uso. His actual name is Yogo Aguchi, and he stole the Obsidian Amulet from the Scorpion Clan. He founded this cell of the Bloodspeaker Cult when he retired to this monastery almost two decades ago. Asai will never break down or confess, and if threatened with arrest (or if the PCs have shattered the cult cell) will try to use his magic to escape.

Map #1

