

Tao of the Naga

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

by Rob Hobart

As war wracks the Dragon Clan, a senior member of the Mirumoto family sends you on a desperate quest to find a missing nobleman. Your path will take you to one of the darkest and strangest parts of the Empire. What will you discover beneath the eaves of the Shinomen Forest?

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

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

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

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

GM's Information

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

This adventure is a Low/Mid-Rank adventure. This means that only Rank 1 through 3 Characters should be allowed to play. This adventure was not written with Rank 4 or 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):

- Ss'lith the Abomination has Water of 3 and does not have Strength of the Earth.
- The TN for skill checks is 5 less (except where noted).
- Lower by 5 the TNs of the Willpower roll for the Test of the Akasha.

High End Party (most characters Rank Three):

- Ss'lith the Abomination has Quick, and his Strength of the Earth is at rank Two.
- The GM may selectively raise the TN of skill rolls by 5 (but not the rolls in the Test of the Akasha).

Adventure Summary and Background

Mirumoto Hitomi, the daimyo of the Mirumoto family, has been missing for almost a year, lost to her personal quest of vengeance. Her younger brother Daini, the rightful heir to her station, has been tricked into a pointless quest to the Shinomen Forest, where he has spent months learning the ways of the mysterious race known as the Naga.

The mastermind behind Daini's departure is Mirumoto Yukihera, a power-hungry bushi who dreams of seizing control of the Dragon Clan. Yukihera is the driving force behind the Dragon Clan's disastrous war with their former friends in the Phoenix Clan, using the hatreds and ambitions of lesser men in both Clans to provoke a conflict which has elevated him to leadership.

This adventure starts with the PCs receiving a letter from Mirumoto Sukune, Hitomi's uncle. Sukune suspects the truth of what is happening, but as a loyal member of his Clan and family, he cannot openly disobey Yukihera, who has been acknowledged as senior daimyo in Daini's absence. Instead, Sukune seeks to oppose Yukihera indirectly by bringing Daini back from the Shinomen Forest.

With the Dragon Clan at war with the Phoenix and their Lion allies, Sukune cannot take action himself – he is needed to lead on the battlefield. He hopes to use the PCs as his agents in this matter.

The PCs will travel to the Shinomen Forest, and enter the mysterious domain of the Naga. If they are fortunate, they will come away from the experience wiser and stronger, and have a chance to bring Daini back to save the Dragon Clan. If they are less fortunate, their bones will be lost to the Shinomen.

Note on Running This Adventure: This scenario involves extensive interaction with the race of the Naga, creatures whose nature, culture, and beliefs are very different from those of Rokugani. Enough material has been included in the adventure to enable the GM to run the Naga, but those seeking additional detail and role-playing flavor would be well-advised to read *Way of the Naga* (Alderac, 1999) and the L5R

novel "The Dragon" (Wizards of the Coast/Ree Soesbee, 2001).

Player's Introduction

The PCs each receive a letter (Player's Handout #1) and a set of travel papers from Mirumoto Sukune at the start of the adventure. If the PCs are ronin, the letter also contains two koku.

Any Mirumoto PC will recognize Sukune with a **Simple Intelligence** roll at TN 5 – he is the uncle of Mirumoto Hitomi, the family daimyo. Other PCs can recognize the name by rolling **Lore: Dragon Clan/Intelligence** at TN 10 or another related Lore skill (such as **Lore: Bushi**) at TN 15. PCs who have played the adventure *A Walk Through the Mountains* have met Sukune in person, albeit briefly.

Dragon PCs who ignore the letter will lose three points of Honor. Non-Dragon PCs will not suffer any penalty for ignoring Sukune's letter, but they will (of course) be unable to participate in the adventure.

Kyuden Tonbo and the lands of the Dragonfly Clan are located on the southeast border of Dragon territory, right in front of the Lion armies which are about to march against the Dragon. The Dragon and Phoenix are at war, and the Lion are allied to the Phoenix. Depending on where they travel from, some of the PCs may have to pass through the battle lines, either from Lion lands or those of the Phoenix.

The PCs' travel papers will be carefully scrutinized, but the Lion and Phoenix will have little choice but to allow the PCs to pass, since their mission has nothing to do with the war. Phoenix PCs will also be grilled at some length by Dragon border guards.

PCs approaching from most other directions will generally encounter fewer obstacles, although Clan affiliations (Lion and Phoenix in particular) may still raise questions.

Regardless of such obstacles and frustrations, it may be presumed that all the PCs will be able to reach Kyuden Tonbo before the deadline.

Part One: Kyuden Tonbo

The lands of the Dragonfly Clan are composed of low, rolling hills, lightly wooded on their peaks, with small streams and humble villages tucked into the valleys between. The peasants of these lands are hard-

working, but their crops are modest, and clearly the Dragonfly Clan does not export any food.

The capital of this modest Clan is little more than a collection of samurai residences and small temples, the latter housing the Tonbo shugenja school. The only thing resembling a “castle” is a tall, narrow tower, five stories high. It stands alone near the center of the town, its red pagoda roof-tiles and clean white walls a striking contrast to the greenery of the surrounding woods.

Approaching the tower, you pass the tents of a small Dragon army, no more than a few hundred bushi, camping beneath the trees. They regard you suspiciously, and after a few moments a squad approaches and asks for your papers and business.

Most of these troops are members of the Dragon’s Flame, the elite Mirumoto archery unit. Instead of yari or naginata, they carry yumi (bows) and quivers full of arrows. Their mission here is to delay and bleed the Lion army which is marching into Dragonfly territory. Needless to say, they will look askance at any Lion or Phoenix PCs here.

However, once the PCs explain their business, they will be politely escorted to a small paved square in front of the Dragonfly tower. They wait on the edge of the square while Mirumoto Sukune consults with his unit commanders and with Tonbo Toryu, the daimyo of the Dragonfly Clan. Toryu, a quiet and contemplative bushi whose usual expression is a placid smile, now looks haggard and anxious, and is clearly out of his depth in time of war. He listens attentively and anxiously as Sukune explains the strategy for fighting the Lion Clan. (PCs will not be able to overhear any of this strategizing unless they can Read Lips or cast a spell. Such spying on one’s host is dishonorable, of course.)

Eventually, Sukune dismisses the others and beckons the PCs to approach him.

Speaking with Sukune

Mirumoto Sukune is a grizzled, tired-looking samurai in his mid-forties. Although he keeps himself in good condition, his skin is seamed with age and he clearly has much weighing on his spirit as well.

Sukune hurriedly explains the situation. *“My niece, Mirumoto Hitomi, is the daimyo of our family – which means the leader of our Clan in most circumstances, for Lord Togashi Yokuni-sama seldom ventures far*

from his mountain home. But Hitomi-san has been... missing, for over a year.” If none of the PCs are Scorpions or Crabs, he will confess that Hitomi departed on a quest to confront the Crab heir, Hida Yakumo, but apparently never made it to Crab lands. Otherwise, he will hurry forward to discuss the rest of the problem. *“Hitomi’s younger brother, Mirumoto Daini-sama, by rights should be ruling in her absence. However, last autumn, our lord Togashi Yokuni-sama issued an order that someone from the Mirumoto should travel to the Shinomen Forest, to investigate certain... rumors, reports, of snake-like monsters appearing there. One of our senior daimyo, Mirumoto Yukihera... convinced... Daini-san to undertake the quest in person.”* Anyone rolling Simple Awareness at TN 10 can tell that by “convinced” Sukune actually means “maneuvered” or “tricked.”

“Daini-san has not returned. In his absence, Yukihera-san has assumed the leadership of our family and, for most things, our Clan. And it is by his orders that we have sought war with the Phoenix, rather than accepting a face-saving compromise.”

Sukune wants the PCs to go to the Shinomen Forest, try to find Mirumoto Daini, and convince him to return home. It should be obvious that his real goal is to depose Yukihera, but he will never say this openly to non-Dragon PCs. He will, however, remark that he views the current war as nothing but a disaster, not only for the Dragon, but for the Phoenix Clan as well. If the PCs question him directly about his view of Mirumoto Yukihera, he will only say, “Yukihera-san is a bold and ambitious man, and dreams of making the Dragon into a great military power, rivaling the Lion and Unicorn. But those who seek such extravagant dreams often do not realize how much damage they can do.”

If any PCs are themselves Dragons, Sukune will draw them aside and speak more plainly. *“The Dragon have been manipulated into this war by a dishonorable man. Now, because of this man’s influence, we now taint ourselves with alliances to Scorpions, while abandoning our old friends in the Phoenix Clan. If Daini-san can return, perhaps sanity can be restored before it is too late.”*

Sukune is well aware that he is asking the PCs to undertake a dangerous and potentially hopeless mission. He will repeatedly stress that the Dragon and Phoenix Clans may both be wrecked by this war. This could, in turn, endanger the entire Empire at a time when it is being shaken by many crises and disasters.

- If the PCs ask for more information about these rumors of snakelike creatures, Sukune has little to add. Such stories have been filtering through the Empire for years, but recently they have increased somewhat. Lord Togashi Yokuni did not explain himself, he simply ordered that someone from the Mirumoto travel to Shinomen and investigate.
- If any of the PCs ask why Sukune does not undertake the search himself, or send some of his troops to do so, he will point out wearily that he has been directly ordered by Yukihera to defend the Dragonfly lands. “I am a samurai. I cannot disobey an order from my superior, no matter what my personal feelings.”
- If the PCs ask for further information on Daini’s journey, Sukune will explain that Daini was accompanied by a yojimbo (Mirumoto Sakitomo) and an Ise Zumi, Togashi Bokkai. They planned to take a route upriver to Unicorn lands, then down through the Iuchi pass, through Ide lands, to reach the Shinomen.
- If the PCs ask about possibly searching for Hitomi instead, Sukune furrows his brow and sighs. “If I knew where to look for my niece, I would gladly send you there. But we have had no word, not even rumors, of her whereabouts. With Daini, at least, I know where to start.”

If the PCs do agree to go in search of Daini, Sukune will sigh deeply and thank them with quiet sincerity. He offers them additional travel papers for a trip via Unicorn lands to the Shinomen Forest (HANDOUT #2), and explains that he has arranged passage on the merchant ship “Rich Wood” to take them up the Drowned Merchant River to the Unicorn lands. From there they will be on their own. He will mention, if he has not already, that Daini took the same route.

Part Two: A Lengthy Journey

The “Rich Wood” is a large riverboat, heavily laden with bales of silk, barrels of sake, crates of luxury goods, and other such things. A tubby, pleasant-faced merchant named Daishiro is the master of the boat. He allows the PCs to stay in the boat’s cabin, while he joins his sixteen-man crew in sleeping on deck. The boat is normally driven by oars (two banks of eight), but hoists a square sail when the winds are favorable.

The riverboat departs from a small village a day’s travel south from Kyuden Tonbo. From there, it is five days upriver to the City of the Rich Frog. The journey is uneventful, and the road which parallels the river shows much merchant traffic.

The City of the Rich Frog

This ronin city has recently been occupied by the Unicorn Clan, and the place is tense, with Unicorn troops frequently clashing with the local ronin otokodate, the Machi Kanshisha, easily identified by the long, heavy iron smoking pipes they carry. (The pipes double as weapons, and the Machi-Kanshisha are skilled at using them to disarm their opponents or knock them senseless.)

Both Daishiro and the PCs will be carefully questioned, and their papers and cargo inspected, by a group of Unicorn bushi led by a magistrate named Shinjo Sanetama. A serious and dedicated man, Sanetama listens carefully to the PCs’ story and inspects their papers minutely before approving them to journey on up the river. If the PCs inquire as to the reason for his care, he explains stiffly that “this city is a den of criminality, a hub for the filthy opium trade,” He adds that there are still some bandit problems on the road between here and the rest of the Unicorn lands, although they have hired some ronin to deal with the problem.

A Journey Upriver

From the City of the Rich Frog, it is three more days upriver to the next major Unicorn stronghold, Toshi no Aida ni Kawa (the City Between the Rivers). The lands alongside the river were, until recently, unclaimed by any Clan, and they are only sparsely settled by occasional small villages. The Rich Wood stops each night at a small riverside village, tying up alongside the local fishing boats to spend a safe night’s rest.

On the evening of the third day, the boat comes in sight of the City Between the Rivers, a large and prosperous settlement which thrives on the river trade. About 3,000 people live here, busily working in trade and commerce, and the city is watched over by a large fortified castle which commands the river and the two forks which run north from here.

When the PCs arrive, the city is feverish with excitement. Tales have reached the population of a mysterious Unicorn woman was recently brought out of the Burning Sands – a woman who, rumor suggests, might be none other than the Kami Shinjo herself, returned to her Clan at long last. All the inns and

teahouses of the city are full of gossip and speculation about this story, with little energy to spare for anything else. Some rumors say that Otaku Kamoko herself, daimyo of the Kamoko family, went to her knees before the strange woman. Many Unicorn samurai have left the city in recent days, heading northwest toward Shiro Shinjo, where the mystery woman has supposedly been taken.

If the PCs ask around the city about Mirumoto Daini, they can find someone who remembers a trio of visiting Dragons by rolling **Courtier/Awareness** (if speaking with samurai) or **Keunai/Awareness** (if speaking with commoners) at TN 15. Nobody remembers anything notable about the Dragons other than that they passed through the city last autumn.

If the PCs ask in the castle, they will have to spend several hours waiting before a minor functionary (an Ide courtier) can meet with them. With some consulting of records, he can confirm that Daini and his two traveling companions went through the city last fall and headed south toward the Iuchi pass.

Going to Iuchi Pass

Daishiro the merchant is stopping here, changing cargos before heading back downriver to Lion lands. If the PCs mention the need to reach the Iuchi pass, he will suggest that they take passage on another boat and go down the Firefly River to White Shore Lake and the Village on its far side. From there it will be only a short overland journey to Shiro Iuchi and the pass.

Booking passage will cost 2 koku per PC, and the river trip will take two days, followed by another two days overland to Shiro Iuchi. If they travel overland the entire route, it takes six days total.

Either way, the PCs finally arrive at Shiro Iuchi. They may have been here before – the adventure *A Foreign Legacy* took place here.

The strange, onion-shaped spires of Shiro Iuchi blaze golden in the afternoon sunlight. The castle of the Unicorn Clan's shugenja family is perched above the Iuchi pass, a deep cleft in the Spine of the World Mountains. A narrow road winds down into the pass, and beyond you can see rolling grassy plains. At the very limit of the horizon, you catch your first glimpse of your final destination: the dark mass of Shinomen Forest.

If the PCs head directly for the pass, they will encounter a small mounted patrol (three Shinjo bushi

and an Iuchi shugenja) which intercepts them and asks their business. The PCs' travel papers will be sufficient to get the PCs past this obstacle, however. The patrol is clearly distracted, and if any PCs ask about current events or the rumors of Shinjo's return, the guards confess that their daimyo, Iuchi Daiyu, is preparing to depart for Shiro Shinjo to look into the matter for himself.

If the PCs pay their respects at the castle, they will find it in ferment – even the servants are excited and distracted by the rumors. The PCs will be admitted to the castle but will not get a chance to pay their respects until the next morning. Then, they will be permitted a few minutes to speak with Iuchi Daiyu while he is preparing to depart the castle:

The courtyard of Shiro Iuchi is in a state of controlled chaos, as servants and samurai alike hurry to saddle mounts, ready palanquins, and load supply wagons. A middle-aged man with long loose hair and a goatee detaches himself from the crowd and comes toward you with a dignified stride, then bows politely. "Greetings, samurai. I am Iuchi Daiyu, daimyo of this castle. I must apologize for meeting you in these unusual circumstances – I fear our Clan's famous hospitality has been remiss. How may I assist you?"

Some of the PCs may have made favorable impressions on Daiyu during *A Foreign Legacy*, and if so, he will remember them and address them by name. Daiyu will be as polite and helpful as he can, but he has only a few minutes to spare for the PCs – he and his entire family are about to depart for Shiro Shinjo.

- If the PCs ask about Mirumoto Daini, the Iuchi daimyo will nod. "Yes, the young Dragon and his companions came through here. We offered him hospitality for the night. Quite an honorable and charming young man."
- If the PCs ask about Daini's plans or destination, Daiyu nods thoughtfully. "Yes, he said his ultimate goal was the Shinomen, to investigate the strange rumors of snake-men. But I believe he planned to stop at Shiro Ide to gather supplies before he entered the forest."
- Daiyu does not know anything about the snake-men rumors himself. "We have not troubled much with the Shinomen forest since our return to the Empire. Our horses do not like it under those trees."

- If the PCs ask about the rumors of Shinjo's return, Daiyu is carefully noncommittal. "I cannot confirm any such rumors. It is to learn the truth of this matter that I must travel now to Shiro Shinjo."

Through the Pass and Onward

It takes about six Rokugani hours – the better part of a day – for the PCs to go through the Spine of the World Mountains. The road snakes back and forth down the steep, narrow pass, often so steep that it actually has stairs (which slows any mounts considerably). At the bottom of the pass is a small village with an Inn, serving those who must brave the long passage.

From here, the PCs' route moves out across the grassy plains of the southern Unicorn territories. The road itself heads southwest toward Chrysanthemum Petal Lake and Shiro Ide. It takes four more days for the PCs to reach that destination.

Shiro Ide

The castle of the Ide family was the first stronghold the Unicorn built after their arrival in Rokugan, and they strove to make it as beautiful as possible. It is a splendid sight, standing above the blue expanse of Chrysanthemum Petal Lake and blending seamlessly into the mountains behind it. The castle easily ranks alongside Kyuden Doji as one of the most magnificent in all the Empire. Several large villages dot the surrounding lands or perch on the shores of the mighty lake.

The PCs can stop at Shiro Ide to pay their respects, or bypass the castle and push straight on for the Shinomen. However, if they have been asking questions as they travel, they will be aware that Mirumoto Daini stopped here on his way to the forest.

Currently, with daimyo Ide Tadaji in the Imperial capital, the castle's senior resident is a mid-ranking daimyo named Ide Kujito. A charming man (like most Ide diplomats), Kujito will be happy to welcome guests from other Clans and eager to offer hospitality and help. If the PCs explain their reason for visiting, Kujito will have useful information to share:

"Ah, I remember that young Dragon! A well-mannered samurai, although skilled with the sword from the way he carried himself. Yes, he said he was traveling to the Shinomen to look into the rumors of snake-people there. I told him of a story I heard from my grandfather, from the days when our Clan first came to Rokugan. They found a pair of small villages on the northern edge of the Shinomen, villages which

had stood there unnoticed for many centuries. The inhabitants were barely aware of the rest of the Empire at all. There was some talk of annexing them, but in the tumult of our arrival in the Empire they were all but forgotten. In truth, I am not sure if these villages even exist... but if they do, I imagine their inhabitants would know more about the Shinomen than most."

Whether or not the PCs stop at the castle, they will be free to stock up on supplies, travel rations, and so forth before venturing to the Shinomen. If they speak with the locals (either commoners or samurai), they can pick up the following general information:

- A handsome young Dragon samurai did indeed come through here last autumn. He was accompanied by another, slightly older bushi, and one of the strange tattooed men.
- The young Dragon asked many questions about the Shinomen Forest. He seemed especially interested in the stories about "snake-men."
- He also asked whether there were any humans living near the forest, who might know more about it. Some of the locals told him stories about the pair of small villages which are supposedly found at the very edge of the Shinomen. Nobody has ever actually seen these villages, but there have been stories circulating about them for as long as anyone can remember.
- The young Dragon left the area after a few days, heading south toward the Shinomen, apparently hoping to find the legendary villages. Nobody has seen him since.
- A few of the local peasants claim to have seen the tattooed man a few weeks later, running northward at a speed so fast he almost blurred.

On to the Shinomen

From Chrysanthemum Petal Lake, it is only a couple of days overland across the Plains of Thunder to the edge of the Shinomen Forest. The Plains are a vast open land of rolling grasslands, peaceful except for the frequent sudden thunderstorms which brew up without warning. There are no actual inhabitants, although the PCs might encounter a small group of monks traveling to or from the Shrine of Osano-Wo (which lies about a week's travel to the southeast).

Alternate Routes

Some PCs may decide to try for a shorter or more direct route to Shinomen, such as by heading there directly from the pass through the Spine of the World rather than going to Shiro Ide. This will definitely reduce the information they gain before reaching the forest, but will not otherwise change the course of the adventure.

Part Three: Arrival in Shinomen

The southern horizon is covered in an ominous dark line. As the day wears on, this line grows until it becomes discernable as the mighty trees of the great forest. The tallest of them reach over two hundred feet into the air, pillars of some vast castle, and the thick roof of foliage tosses in the wind like waves of the ocean. Smaller plants and trees cluster thickly around the edges of the forest, and within is visible only a dark green gloom.

As you push through the brush and pass beneath the arching branches of Shinomen, you cannot help but feel as though you are intruding on a place where you are neither welcomed nor wanted. The air beneath the great trees is heavy and still, and the distant sounds of wildlife seem strange and alien, different somehow from the normal woodland sounds you are accustomed to. [If any PCs have mounts:] Your horses seem to catch your unease, and snort irritably, shying away from any noise or movement.

The Shinomen Forest is distinct from every other forest in Rokugan, not only for its vastness, but also for its age and wildness. The forests within the Empire *feel* tamed, controlled, hemmed in by the fields and villages of civilization. Here, it is the opposite – it is the forest which dominates, and civilization is distant and forgotten. The GM should strive always to remind the PCs that this is an alien place, where powers they do not understand hold sway.

If the PCs are actively looking for the two villages which are said to lie on the northern edge of the Shinomen, they will find them within half a day of beginning to explore the forest. If they are not looking for the villages (such as if they didn't learn about Daini's intentions), they will find them after about two days of wandering through the northern Shinomen.

The Villages of Kuguro-Mushari and Tsuyoi Kokoro Mura

These two villages are actually located in clear land on the edge of the forest, but the narrow path which connects them passes through an outlying arm of the Shinomen. If the PCs are exploring the forest, they will first stumble across this path, which has been walked for so many years that it has sunk deep beneath the level of the surrounding ground, becoming more of a trench than a path. PCs who spend any length of time on this path will encounter a peasant carrying a load of wooden tools from one village to the other. The poor fellow will drop his bundle and flee, bleating in terror.

The two villages are effectively identical: small and decrepit places, with a couple of dozen family huts along with other basic structures such as carpenter's shops, animal pens, granaries, silk farms, and so forth. There are no Inns or other such businesses – what need for them, in villages forgotten and unvisited?

The inhabitants themselves are simple, inbred people, fearful and ignorant, who have been out of touch with the rest of the Empire for centuries. They will either flee in panic or fall to the ground prostrate at the sight of armed samurai. Many of them assume the PCs are here to claim their villages on behalf of one of the Clans – something Mirumoto Daini warned them might happen.

The PCs can calm the villagers down either by being friendly and gentle (and rolling a suitable skill, such as **Sincerity/Awareness**, **Kuenai/Awareness**, or **Oratory/Awareness** at TN 15), or by being so threatening that they terrify the villagers into silence (**Intimidation/Willpower** at TN 15, or any suitably powerful bit of role-playing). Once the villagers are quiet, the local headman (Genzo in one village, Tobuji in the other – both men are shriveled wrecks in late middle age) will eventually come forward, asking what the “mighty samurai” require.

Through careful and systematic questioning, the PCs can learn the following:

- A samurai came here last autumn. He was a handsome young man in green armor, and was very polite. He was accompanied by another, slightly older samurai in the same armor, and by a strange bald man who wore only pants, and had funny pictures painted on his skin.
- The handsome young samurai called himself “Daini.” He was very interested in the forest and

asked many questions about it. He left after one day, heading south into the forest. The villagers have never seen him again.

- A couple of villagers claim to have seen the bald man with the funny pictures, running north at an incredible pace (“faster than the wind!”). This was about a month after he left the village.
- The samurai “Daini” asked about the “snake-men” who live in the forest. The villagers told him everything they knew. He was especially interested in the tales of the snake-men having cities farther into the forest, to the south.
- Daini also warned the villagers that someday their village would probably be discovered and claimed by one of the samurai Clans. The villagers will ask fearfully whether the PCs are here to do that.
- The villagers’ knowledge of the “snake-men” is a mixture of four parts legend and one part experience. They know the “snake-men” live in the forest, mostly to the south. The villagers believe the snake-men are “forest spirits” and that something has caused them to become angry. In the past, they were hardly ever seen, but lately they have become much more frequent. Many villagers claim to have glimpsed them sliding through the forest, or watching them from between the trees. “Like they’re hunters, checking us out to see how we move, like.”
- There are legends that the snake-men have huge cities deep inside the forest, although no one has ever seen these. “There’s been stories, samurai-sama. They say the cities are all of old stone, older than anything, and full of snakes and wild beasts. And the snake-men, if they catch you there, they shoot you full of arrows and then eat you alive!”
- If the PCs ask whether the snake-men have ever attacked anyone, the headmen will offer this story: *“Used to be, sometimes young boys’d go into the forest, trying to see the snake-men. They’d come back, and sometimes they’d say as they’d seen a snake-man. Don’t know if they really did, might be they were telling stories. But lately, the last few times, the boys they haven’t come back. And when we gone into the woods to cut down some trees for lumber, arrows shoot out of nowhere at us, quicker’n anything. So we’s don’t go into the forest no more, samurai-sama, except on our path. They don’t bother us none on the path.”*

The GM can improvise other peasant rumors and ramblings, based on these clues. The villagers really know very little, and fill in the gaps in their knowledge with tales and legends.

If the PCs announce their intention of going deeper into the forest, the peasants will be alarmed, and plead with them not to go. *“That other samurai, he never come back, the snake-men ate him for sure, samurai-sama! They’ll eat you too! And they’ve been mighty stirred-up since then, hanging round here more and more – no telling what they’ll do if you bother them even more!”*

It should be remembered that these peasants are unfamiliar with samurai (who are, in some ways, more legendary to them than the Naga), and apt to deliver insults without intending it. If they are scolded or threatened, they lapse back into terror, some fleeing in panic while others prostrate themselves and grovel for mercy.

Smart PCs treat the villagers gently and respectfully. In such a case, they will be glad to share food and shelter, refilling the PCs’ supplies before they head deeper into the forest, and even caring for PCs’ horses if they are reluctant to take them into the Shinomen.

On into the Shinomen

From the villages, the PCs will have no firm directions other than to “head south” and look for the legendary Naga cities. Some pragmatic PCs may consider this to be too cold a path to follow, and abandon their quest – in which case the adventure is effectively over (go to “Returning Empty-Handed” in Part Five). Dedicated and inquisitive PCs, however, will press on.

Once the PCs head deeper into the Shinomen Forest, they will begin to have strange and unsettling encounters as they discover increasing signs of the forest’s true inhabitants. These should take place roughly once a day, although the GM can choose different times each day to enhance the dramatic effect.

1. The Statue. The PCs stumble across an ancient stone statue, encrusted with moss and wreathed in vines, beneath a tree. The statue depicts a snake with a man’s upper body, holding its hands together in front of its face in an attitude of prayer (the Naga namaste, or greeting). The style of the carving is alien and unsettling, but clearly of great skill and quality.

2. Tracks. Have the PCs roll **Simple Perception** at TN 15 each day. With a success, the PCs notice

strange tracks – the drag-marks of massive snakes. As the PCs move south day by day, these tracks become steadily more frequent.

3. Night Fears. At night, when the PCs make camp, they will be surrounded by the strange sounds of the Shinomen – rustling plants, unknown animal cries, and so forth. If they make a fire, the light from it will constantly be reflecting green and red in the eyes of forest creatures – especially snakes. If the PCs brought their mounts, the animals will be constantly ill-at-ease, shifting and whinnying throughout the night, unable to sleep well.

4. Dreams. The PC with the highest combined total of Void and Shintao begins having strange dreams. (In case of a tie, all the relevant PCs have the dreams.) In the dreams, the PC(s) seem to feel themselves surrounded by a vast invisible crowd, a crowd which speaks to them in soft hissing voices, words that can be almost understood. The PCs always awaken before they can decipher the words. The dream is not threatening, but it is certainly unsettling – the PC is feeling the spiritual influence of the Akasha, the Naga collective soul.

5. Stalker. Starting three days into the forest, the PCs will become the targets of a maddened Naga abomination, which will begin stalking them. The PCs can roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 15 or **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20 to gain the sense that something or someone is on their trail, watching them, testing their alertness. (Casting *By the Light of Lord Moon* will allow a brief glimpse of a grotesque serpentine form as it slithers quickly away.) The abomination, called Ss'lith, will stalk them for a full day, gauging their strength, before attacking. See “Ss'lith Attacks!” below.

6. The Grave. After several days, the PCs stumble across a pile of stones in a small clearing. The stones are arranged to roughly resemble a Rokugani family grave-site, and thrust down into the rocks is a sheathed daisho set (katana and wakizashi) in Dragon green-and-gold. If the PCs look the grave over carefully, they can discover (with a **Heraldry/Perception** roll at TN 10, **Calligraphy/Perception** at TN 15, or **Simple Perception** at TN 20) a personal chop scratched into one of the top stones: “Mirumoto Sakitomo.” If the PCs are bold and dishonorable enough to disturb the grave, they can find Sakitomo’s decomposing body (now little more than a skeleton).

Ss'lith Attacks!

The Naga abomination, Ss'lith, regards the PCs as a challenge which might earn him back a place in Naga society. He will stalk them for over a day, gauging their strength, before attacking. The PCs’ only warning will be a sudden cessation of the forest’s natural sounds (animal cries, etc) in the moments before the abomination strikes.

- If the PCs have noticed that something is stalking them (as described above under “Stalker”), they can notice the sudden silence with a **Hunting/Awareness** roll at TN 10, or **Simple Awareness** at TN 15. So long as at least one PC succeeds, they will all hear the sudden crackle of Ss'lith hurtling toward them, and will be able to roll initiative normally.
- If the PCs did not notice Ss'lith stalking them, they must roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 15 or **Simple Perception** at TN 20 to hear Ss'lith’s sudden onset. Only those PCs who succeed can roll initiative on the first round – all other PCs are caught by surprise and cannot take an action on the first round of combat.

The underbrush crashes open as a massive serpentine monster hurtles toward you! The thing is at least twenty feet long, but even more horrible than its size is the fact that its upper body is strangely human-like, sprouting two muscular arms from broad warrior’s shoulders. A massive, crude spear is clutched in the scaled hands. The head which surmounts that man-like upper body, however, is the head of a giant serpent, with glistening fangs and flickering tongue, and it hisses horribly as it charges you.

Ss'lith does not speak the Rokugani language, and does not try to communicate with the PCs in any way – it simply wants to slay them, dreaming of restoring its place in Naga society with a courageous victory. The PCs will have no choice but to fight to the death.

The City of the Cobra

When the fight with the abomination ends, the PCs will have a chance to look around themselves and catch their breath:

In the silence which follows the end of the battle, you become aware of the gentle roaring of waterfalls. Damp mist drifts through the trees, placing beads of moisture on your skin and clothing.

Parting the trees, you behold an amazing sight. The ground before you drops down into a deep, narrow valley, shrouded in mist. Steep cliffs surround the valley on three sides, and silvery waterfalls pour over all three, plunging into the valley in white sprays that spread and scatter like the finest of silk threads. Rising out of the fog and mist which shrouds the valley are the roofs of stone buildings, ancient and crumbling, built in an alien style of smooth domes and serpentine arches. The mist seems to cling to the buildings, as though held to them by invisible strands, making their outlines cloudy and uncertain. The only sound is the steady rushing of the waterfalls – the forest here is silent.

This is Vyakarana, the city of the Cobra, the Naga jakla (spell-users). The city is protected by webs of powerful magic, and most of the Cobra bloodline still sleeps within the valley.

If the PCs try to descend into the valley, they will have to roll **Mountaineering/Perception** at TN 10, **Athletics/Perception** at TN 15, or **Simple Perception** at TN 20 to spot a safe place to descend the slope. Failure means the PCs cannot descend without a series of hazardous skill rolls (**Mountaineering/Agility** at TN 15 or **Athletics/Agility** at TN 20, three rolls). PCs who take careful precautions (using rope, for example) can gain a Free Raise on the rolls. If shugenja PCs try to use magic to descend into the valley (such as *Wings of Fire* or *Call Upon the Wind*), they will find the local spirits strangely resistant, adding +10 to their TN for casting such spells.

If some or all of the PCs do make it into the valley, they will have a short time to look around and view the sights. Seen up close, the buildings are covered in serpentine motifs and strange, alien writing. The style of construction is clearly not Rokugani, and the buildings are unimaginably ancient. The thick mist fills the valley, making everything more than a few paces away shadowy and indistinct.

Regardless of whether the PCs make it into the valley or not, they will soon encounter a large group of Asp warriors.

The Asp Arrive

Suddenly the air fills with a chorus of hissing sounds... sounds that seem eerily like speech. Out of the foggy trees come unnatural creatures, monsters with the lower torsos of snakes and the upper bodies of men, their skin covered in green and yellow scales, golden jewelry decorating their arms and heads.

Unlike the monster you fought earlier, their heads and faces seem mostly human. Some have thick hair of a dark green color, while others are bald. Every one of them carries a bow of strange design, and the heads of their arrows glitter and sparkle in the hazy, intermittent sunshine as they level them at you.

There are twenty-two Naga warriors, militant Asps, led by a Constrictor named the Oslykar. The Asp are eager for an excuse to attack. If the PCs draw weapons, ready spells, or otherwise prepare for battle, there is a loud rasp as twenty-two bows draw back, arrow shafts scraping.

Smart PCs will hesitate to initiate violence against such heavy odds, but whatever they do, further action will be forestalled as the Oslykar approaches them.

A single, exceptionally huge, snake-man slithers out in front of the others, hissing to them in rhythms which sound oddly like speech. The arrow-points dip just slightly, although the bow-strings are still held taut. The huge snake-man's body is patterned with dark diamond shapes, and his green eyes look at you with unsettling intelligence. He slithers forward slowly, watching your actions.

Assuming the PCs do not attack, the Oslykar begins to speak with them in their language. "Huuuu-mans," the Constrictor hisses. "You hafff... violated sssacred Vyakarana. For thisss you ssshould die. Thissss place sssacred... your word iss, forbidden, yesss."

The Oslykar has learned a little about humans from Mirumoto Daini and Mara. The PCs will have a few moments to explain themselves to him and/or ask for mercy. If they are violently belligerent or insulting (threatening the Naga, boasting of their own power, etc), the Oslykar will turn away in disgust, and the PCs will be facing a deadly battle against 22 Naga warriors and an angry Constrictor.

Assuming the PCs are smart enough to avoid this, the Constrictor listens to their words carefully. After the PCs finish, he rears up, fifteen feet above the ground, towering over them. "You are condemned... but sssso wass the other one. The Akasha sssspared him. Sssso... will you ssseek the judgment of the Akasha, huuu-mansss? Or die here, ass the Asssp demand?" Behind him, the Naga warriors hiss eagerly, pointing their bows at the PCs, obviously awaiting the chance to open fire and destroy these interlopers.

- If the PCs ask who or what the "Akasha" is, the Oslykar looks both sad and amused. "Huuuu-mans

cannot know the Akasha. They are alone, alwayssss.”

- If the PCs ask about “the other one,” the Constrictor says, “The Daini, he iss called. Livesss now in Sssiksa, with the Mara, teaching otherss of uss about huu-mansss. The Akasha sssspared him... but he did not violate sssacred Vyakarana.”
- If the PCs say they are here to find Daini, the Oslykar shrugs. “Perhapsss the Daini will ssspeak with you... if you survive the judgment of the Akasha.”
- If the PCs ask what this “judgment” will entail, the Oslykar smiles. “Shahadet will decide if you are worthy to face judgment. Tsssst of Akasga iss different, each time. Akasha will meassure you in itsss own way.”
- If the PCs ask who the “Shahadet” is, the Oslykar tries to explain. “Shahadet isssss... leader of Asssp. He isss guardian of sssacred River of Sssky, where the tsssst of Akasha happenss. You musstt convince him to let you take the tsssst, hu-manssss.”
- If the PCs ask about Ss’lith, the Oslykar looks sad. “Abominationsssss... sometimesss, the eggs do not hatch right. They are cassst out, to live or die in the foresst. Do not trouble yoursselves over that one.”

At this point, the PCs have little choice. They can agree to plead with the Shahadet and face the judgment of the Akasha, or they can fight the Naga. Given that the Constrictor’s words suggest that passing this test will get them to where Daini is, they should have no reason not to agree.

Fighting?

If the PCs do fight and survive, they have just made things much harder for themselves. The Naga will soon dispatch a much larger force (over a hundred warriors) to deal with these human interlopers. These Naga will be led by the Balash, the most aggressive of all Naga, and accompanied by the Mara. They arrive suddenly out of white glowing portals in the air – pearl magic.

The Mara will approach the PCs (in her two-legged form) and say one thing: “Tell us why we should not destroy you, humans.”

This will be the final chance for the PCs to apologize, express remorse, explain that the whole thing was a misunderstanding, and so forth. If they role-play well, Mara will (with great difficulty) convince the Balash to take the PCs back to Siksa as prisoners. Otherwise, the Naga attack, and the PCs almost certainly die.

Journey to Siksa

The Asp warriors will at first try to confiscate the PCs’ weapons and other equipment, such as spell-scrolls – if the PCs object strongly to this (as many undoubtedly will), the Constrictor will intervene: “Thessse thingsss are sspecial to huu-manssss... so the Mara saysss. Would be like sstealing our eggssss.” The Asp reluctantly back down, although not without much angry hissing and glaring.

(If the PCs fought the first group, and are now prisoners of the Balash, no choice will be allowed – they must surrender their weapons or die.)

The Naga will escort the PCs south to their city of Siksa, a journey which takes over a week. It will be a difficult experience for the PCs:

- The Asp watch them constantly, a dozen or more of the warriors constantly on the alert with bows ready. If any of the PCs object (for example, offering to give their word not to escape), the Naga hiss that “huuu-mansss” are liars and cannot be trusted.
- If any of the PCs have mounts, the poor animals will be deeply distressed and panicked by the scent of the Naga. Otaku warhorses will be able to endure the odor, but any other mounts must be constantly soothed (three rolls per day of **Horsemanship/Awareness** at TN 15) or they will throw their riders and bolt in terror.
- The Naga eat meat, which they hunt from the forest’s abundant wildlife. (They do cook it, at least.) Most of the PCs will no doubt find this disgusting in the extreme. The Naga, for their part, find some human dietary customs disgusting as well – such as drinking “spoiled rice” (sake) and eating eggs (which is deeply unsettling and horrifying to a race which is born from eggs).
- The Naga communicate with each other as much through the empathic link of the Akasha as through spoken words. The PCs will often encounter moments when the Naga seem to pass information

silently, sometimes not even while looking at each other.

- The Naga regard humans with a mixture of suspicion, disgust, curiosity, and pity. In particular, they look down on humans for their lack of anything like the Akashic link, which leaves them (to the Naga view) stunted, weak, and pitiable.

During the journey, the PCs will have to camp under the stars and subsist on their own supplies and whatever food they accept from the Naga (the snakemen do offer some fruits and vegetables in addition to meat). The GM can insert additional “atmospheric” moments during this journey, if they seem appropriate.

Part Four: The City of Siksa

This morning, you notice a different tone in your captors. Their inhuman faces seem to relax and smile more, and some of the razor-edged tension seems to go out of their postures – or at least it appears that way to you. It is impossible to be sure of anything with these creatures, despite their superficial partial resemblance to humans.

Ahead of you, the snakes slither over a low rise between the trees, uttering sounds which seem almost like happy cries. As you crest the same ridgeline, an astonishing sight greets your eyes: a vast city of strange and ancient design, its alien buildings interspersed with trees which seem to have grown up through them – meaning that the city is more ancient than the forest itself.

The buildings are all rounded-off, with none of the sharp edges and precise corners you are accustomed to from Rokugani architecture. Many of the structures are topped with strange domed roofs which remind you a little of some of the exotic designs which the Unicorn brought back from beyond the Burning Sands – but somehow purer, as if those gaijin designs were merely weak imitations of the true forms seen here. A sparkling blue river flows through the city, in some places actually passing through the larger buildings.

As the snake-men slide down the hillside into the city, they are greeted by hundreds of others, male and female alike, who emerge from the buildings. You are startled to see some of the females walking on two human-like

legs (albeit covered in scales), rather than sliding on a snake-like lower body.

If the PCs arrive with the Oslykar, the Naga of the city will crowd around, staring frankly and curiously, and hissing back and forth in their own language. Among them is a bald-headed male whose face snarls hatred: the Balash. He slithers forward, clutching his spear in an aggressive posture, and hisses right in the face of the PC who seems the most nervous and uneasy with the situation. If the PCs does not react, the Balash speaks in broken Rokugani: “Huuu-mans. Filthy beastssss... not even good food.”

The Balash is hoping to provoke the PC into violence, thereby “proving” that humans are nothing but thuggish beasts to be slain. If the PCs is Brash, Phobic about snakes, or suffers from any similar sort of disadvantage, an appropriate **Willpower** roll will be needed to avoid a fight/flight response to the Balash’s provocation. A player who role-plays well should get a Free Raise on the roll.

If the PCs does react violently, the Balash will eagerly lunge forward to skewer him/her with his spear (initiative roll), while the other Naga hiss in alarm and draw their bows. The other PCs will have to quickly intervene, control their companion, and apologize in order to avoid a deadly fight.

If the PCs do manage to avoid a confrontation, or to defuse one when it occurs, the Oslykar will intervene himself between them and the Balash, scolding the angry Asp for his provoking behavior. The Balash snarls and slithers back a bit, then hisses at the PCs from there. Clearly, this matter is not finished.

If the PCs show up as prisoners of the Balash, the crowd will be much more hostile, hissing and snarling at the PCs, pushing into their personal space, and making threatening gestures with their weapons. The PCs will have to restrain themselves totally – any violent or aggressive behavior will meet with swift death.

A Meeting with the Shahadet

Regardless of how the PCs arrive in Siksa, assuming they avoid violence, they are led to a meeting with the Shahadet.

The snake-men guide you into one of the largest buildings in the city, a vast low dome. Stepping through the entrance, you descend a sloping stone ramp into a large circular chamber, the floor several

feet below ground level. A river flows through the chamber in a stone-lined channel, its water seeming to glow faintly blue in the dim light. Near the river is a large stone dais, decorated with carvings and sculptures in the same serpentine motif you have come to recognize. Coiled in the platform is a large snake-man, his scales a mixture of green and rich gold, and a metal helmet resting on his bald head. A mighty bow and a huge spear rest in stone racks to either side of him.

The impressive Naga is the Shahadet, the commander of the Naga military. He regards the PCs with unsettling, alien calm.

Several other snake-men and women are arrayed to either side of the platform, and the one called the Oslykar slithers over to join them, as does the fierce bald-headed snake-man who tried to provoke you. Then you receive a shock: among the waiting creatures is another of the females with legs... and next to her is a young Rokugani man in green armor, the Dragon mon unmistakable on his chest.

If any PCs have met Mirumoto Daini before (in the adventure *Kuro's Fire*), they recognize him now. Otherwise, they can confirm his identity with a **Heraldry/Intelligence** roll at TN 10 (TN 5 for Dragon Clan PCs). Daini looks at the PCs with interest, then gestures minutely toward the Shahadet and mouths the word "Shogun-sama" (general).

After the PCs arrive, there is a long moment of silence, broken only by a few faint hisses – the Naga are communing through the Akasha. The PCs can say or do whatever seems appropriate to them – polite, friendly, or honestly curious words and behavior will make a positive impression, while bluster, aggression, or insult will go over poorly.

Eventually the Shahadet uncoils himself, rising to his full eight-foot height, and speaks. **"Humanss. I am the Shahadet, commander of the warriorss of the Naga people. You have come to our home, the great foresst, and intruded on Vyakarana, the home of our ssacred Cobra bloodline. Even our own folk are forbidden to go there without the permission of the Cobra. For this, my Asssp warriors demand your death. Otherss, Vedics and Greensnakes, assk that I present you to the judgment of the Akasha, as wass done with the one we call The Daini. What do you ssay?"**

Let the PCs make what pleas and statements they wish. Mirumoto Daini cannot help them, but will make small

encouraging gestures when the PCs speak well, and flinch when they do badly. This is a pure role-playing exercise, with no die-rolls involved – the PCs must convince the Naga not to execute them. As mentioned above, an approach that shows wisdom, calm, and intelligence will work best, as will a plea of ignorance ("we only sought our missing fellow, and meant to offense"). Aggressive or insulting behavior will be a bad idea.

The GM should give the PCs a chance to retract any poor statements, and in general encourage them to figure out the situation. Even the dimmest, most brutal Crab or Matsu should at least be able to figure out when to stay quiet and let the more diplomatic PCs talk.

In general, assuming the PCs make a solid effort and role-play well, they should succeed in convincing the Naga to spare their lives.

What Next?

Once the PCs have convinced the Shahadet not to have them executed, they must decide what to do next. If they want to remain in the city and speak with Mirumoto Daini (and complete their mission), the Shahadet will regard them gravely. **"Only one of your kind, The Daini, has been allowed to live among us, because the Akasha judged him worthy. He earned the chance to undergo such judgment. Why should we allow you thisss privilege? Better that you leave our forest now, humans."**

The PCs should, of course, plead for their own case. In addition, Daini and the Mara will step forward at this point, pleading on behalf of the PCs. (Daini speaks the Naga language quite well, although it is clearly an effort for him to make the strange sounds.) Assuming the PCs make a proper effort, the Shahadet will reluctantly permit them to undertake the test.

If the PCs refuse to seek the judgment of the Akasha, or fail to offer a good appeal for it, the Naga will immediately expel them from Shinomen Forest. A large troop of the snake-men escort them directly to the forest's edge and warn them never to return. "We forgive your ignorance this time, humanssss, but never again." The scenario is basically over at this point; go to "Returning Empty-Handed" in Part Five.

Preparing for the Test

After the PCs agree to undertake the judgment of the Akasha, there will be another exchange of hissing speech and mental communication among the Naga, while Mirumoto Daini tries to smile encouragingly at the PCs. Then the Oslykar slithers forward.

“I have been chosen to ssserve as your Shelahai, your... helper, on path of judgment. If you accept judgment of the Akasha, there are only two pathsss, humans... Successsss, or death. Do you accept?”

If the PCs killed the Oslykar earlier in the module, the Mara will assume his role. This will obviously distress Mirumoto Daini, who lifts a hand and then drops it, realizing he can do nothing to stop her.

Presumably the PCs accept the test. (What samurai fears death?) The Oslykar leads them away from the chamber, slithering across the city to a smaller building, his own residence. There, he coils himself around the support of a large, low stone table and begins to instruct the PCs:

- The Oslykar explains that the PCs will be bound with ropes and lowered into the River of the Sky, the river which flows through the city (and the Shahadet’s chamber). Sacred flames will surround them, and will burn them to death if they are found unworthy. “You mussst endure... whatever comessss. If you try to untie the ropesss before the ceremony endsss, you will fail. If you leave the circle of flamesss before the end, you will fail. And if the Akasha findsss you unworthy, the flamesss will consume you.”
- How will the PCs know when the ceremony is over? “You will know. We know, and The Daini knew.”
- When is the test? “Tomorrow, jussst before night, when the Bright Eye touchesss the edge of the world. You mussst be ready to ssspeak the ssacred wordssss by then.”
- If the PCs ask about Mirumoto Daini, the Oslykar explains that he came to the city eight cycles of the Pale Eye ago. “The Mara brought him, sssaying he held gatesss to the future. Many did not believe. But he passssed the test of the Akasha. Now the Mara teachesss him our waysss, our language.” He identifies “the Mara” as the female who stood next to Daini.
- If the PCs ask to speak with Daini of the Mara, the Oslykar explains that they cannot speak to any but their Shelahai until they pass the test.
- If the PCs ask about the Naga who tried to provoke them, the Oslykar will identify him as the Balash. “He hatessss... your people. Blamesss you for

destruction of our city of Nirukti. Wantsss to kill all of you.”

- The Oslykar will not mention it unless the PCs ask, but he will share their fate – if they fail the test, he as their Shelahai will also perish.

If the Mara is serving as the PCs’ Shelahai, she will be extremely cool and businesslike, trying not to show any emotions. She can share the same basic information as the Oslykar, and will also mention that she believes it is important for the Naga and humans to become friends and allies. If Mirumoto Daini comes up as a topic, she will speak quickly and briefly, then tries to move on to another topic. Any PC who rolls **Simple Awareness** at TN 20 suspects that Daini is very important to her, although her alien nature makes it difficult to be sure.

Regardless of who is teaching them, the PCs must memorize a set of phrases in the Naga language, accompanied by various ritual gestures. Their Shelahai will spend most of the next day drilling the PCs in these details, explaining that “the Akasha will not ...ssee you, unlesssss you ssspeak to it as we do.”

To successfully memorize the ritual will require either a **Research/Intelligence** roll at TN 15 or a **Simple Intelligence** roll at TN 20. PCs with Precise Memory get two Free Raises on these rolls.

The Spirits of Siksa

It is possible that shugenja PCs may decide to *Commune* with the spirits in the city at some point. (Since *Commune* is automatically an Innate Ability, the PCs will be able to cast it even without their scrolls.)

The spirits in the Naga cities are closely attuned to the Naga people and the Akasha collective soul. Although the PCs will be able to contact the spirits readily enough, their answers will be enigmatic and confusing, filtered through the influence of the Naga souls. This will be especially true of Water spirits, since the River of the Sky is directly linked to the Akasha and channels its power.

The GM should feel free to offer strange, bizarre, alien visions and information to any PC shugenja who *Communes* while inside the borders of Siksa.

The Test of the Akasha

As Mother Sun drops toward the horizon, the snake-man calling himself “the Oslykar” leads you back across the city to the domed chamber. Hundreds of other snake-men follow you, watching with obvious

interest, sometimes hissing softly among themselves. The bald snake-man called “the Balash” watches you with an avid expression, clearly hoping that he will witness your death.

Substitute the Mara if the PCs already slew the Oslykar.

As you descend again into the Shahadet’s domed chamber, you can see that the river flowing through the stone channel is glowing much more strongly than yesterday. Several lengths of heavy rope dangle from the ceiling above the river, and a flickering semi-circle of eerie white flames encloses them, leaving only a single gap through which to approach the ropes.

The PCs are led up to the edge of the river, where they must perform the ritual they were taught. If the PCs successfully memorized it earlier, they perform it without difficulty. If they were unable to memorize it before, they can make one last attempt to recall it now, rolling **Simple Intelligence** at TN 25 (TN 15 if they have Precise Memory). If at least half the PCs successfully perform the ritual, the party as a whole will be allowed to continue. Failure at this point means the entire party is immediately expelled from Shinomen Forest.

Once the rituals are completed, the Oslykar leads the PCs into the semi-circle of flames and binds their legs together to simulate a Naga’s tail. Then they are lifted up by the ropes and suspended from the ceiling, upside-down. The Oslykar solemnly addresses them: “Do not unbind yourselves before the ritual is over. Do not flinch from the flames. May you find the Akasha, hu-manss.” He retreats, and the circle of pale flames joins together behind him, imprisoning the PCs within.

Immediately, the fires begin to move closer as the PCs spin helplessly, their hands dangling. Then the Naga pull on the ropes, lowering the PCs toward the water.

In order to pass the test, the PCs must resist the urge to free themselves and escape the threat of burning and drowning. The flames cannot actually hurt them unless they fail the test, and the Naga will not leave their heads under water long enough to drown. To the PCs, however, the flames feel agonizingly hot, and their breath feels ready to run out and let the water rush into their lungs.

While the PCs are undergoing this ordeal, the Akasha will fill their minds and senses with powerful illusions, created by the weaknesses and fears within their own souls. The GM should take each player aside and run a brief private role-playing session, warning them not to

share their information (each PC perceives things differently, and they will not know what their companions saw until afterward). The exact nature of each illusion must be tailored to the PC in question, but should be designed to frighten the PC into giving up the test and attempting to free him/herself. Some suggested illusions follow:

- If the PC is extremely distrustful of the Naga, sees them as dangerous monsters, and so forth, the Akasha will create an illusion of the Naga hissing laughter as they prepare to slay and eat their hapless prisoners. Those Naga who helped the PCs (the Mara, the Oslykar) join with the rest in gloating over the foolish humans.
- If the PC is obsessed with the threat from the Shadowlands, the Akasha creates a vision in which the ceremony is suddenly interrupted by a horde of Shadowlands madmen and undead. The Naga fight back as best they can, but the monsters swiftly overwhelm them, ripping them apart with claws and teeth.
- If the PC has some special personal enemy (a rival samurai from another Clan, a brother who stole the family legacy, etc), that enemy suddenly storms into the city at the head of a small army, and begins slaughtering the Naga “monsters.” The samurai swiftly overwhelm the Naga defenders, leaving the PC to drown/burn.
- If the PC has a fear of fire or of drowning, the Akasha will intensify the sensations of the test until they become overwhelming. The PC is burning alive, his flesh blackening and falling away from the bones, or drowning in agony. The Naga take no action to help.
- If the PC has an unattained True Love, that person arrives at the head of a “rescue party,” and the Naga attack them for interrupting the sacred Test. As the PC watches, the Balash draws a bow with a vicious, sneering hiss, and lets fly a deadly shot at the PC’s beloved.

The GM can extrapolate other tests from those described above. In all cases, the PCs must refuse the urge to try to free themselves.

After all the individual role-play sessions are complete, each PC must roll **Simple Willpower** in order to fight off the urge to untie the ropes and escape the river. The base TN of this roll is 15. If the PC role-played a vivid and convincing resistance to the illusion, the TN is 10.

If the PC gave in to the illusion, the TN is 20. (These TNs are lowered by 5 for a low-rank party.) PCs would be wise to spend Void points, since the alternative to failure is likely to be death.

A Moment of Oneness

Those PCs who pass the Willpower roll suddenly achieve a moment of perfect clarity. The illusions vanish, and they see the chamber as it truly is, the Naga watching them attentively. The fire is not burning them, they are not drowning. The air seems to shimmer with colors they cannot name, and they hear uncountable voices in their minds, the voices of the Naga collective soul. The PCs' own weaknesses and failures are laid bare before them, the limitations and flaws of their own souls, their many failings of duty, honor, compassion, and honesty.

Allow each such PC to make a **Meditation/Void** or **Shintao/Void** roll at TN 20. (This TN is not modified by whether the party is Low-Rank or High-Rank.) With a success, the PC briefly merges his/her soul with the cleansing power of the Akasha, and removes either five points of Shadowlands Taint, or one Point of Shadow Corruption. For each Raise the PC makes, the same amount of Taint and/or Corruption may be removed.

After the Test: Failure?

If more than half the PCs fail to make the Willpower roll, the Akasha finds them wanting. All the failing PCs will suffer 7k7 Wounds as the flames roar with the Akasha's power and consume their bodies. (Shadow Corruption does not protect against the pure energy and power of the Akasha.) Those PCs slain by this damage are annihilated, their bodies shriveling away, consumed in the eerie blue flames, leaving nothing behind but a few flecks of ash.

The PCs' Shelahai (either the Oslykar or the Mara) is also consumed by the same fires. If the Mara dies, Mirumoto Daini cries out in agony and flees the building, never to be seen again.

Those PCs who passed the test are not burned, and find that the flames do no damage to them. They are helpless to save their companions, however.

The remaining PCs (those who passed the test, and those who survived the Akasha's flames) will be confronted by the Shahadet. "The Akasha has passed judgment on your companionss. Ass for you, since the Akasha spared you, we will not take your livess." There are exclamations of anger from some of the Asp,

especially the Balash. The Shahadet continues: "However, you cannot sstay here. You will leave the Shinomen, humansss, and not return."

The Shahadet and the other Naga will brook no argument, and will not allow the PCs to speak with Mirumoto Daini more than a few minutes, long enough to confirm that he is alive and healthy. (He will be confused if the PCs say they were sent here to find him by Mirumoto Sukune. "I sent my companion Togashi Bokkai back to say that I would be here for many months. How could my uncle not have received his message?")

The PCs will be escorted out of the Shinomen by a large force of Asp warriors, led by the Balash himself. The angry warrior sneers and hisses at the PCs, hoping to provoke them into attacking him. If the PCs avoid this, he leaves them at the edge of the forest with a hissing warning: "No return, huuu-manssss, or die from my arrowssss."

Regardless, at this point the surviving PCs will not be able to re-enter the Shinomen without being attacked by any Naga they encounter. They will have little choice but to confess failure and return to the Empire. If they decide to report back to the Dragon Clan, see "Returning Empty-Handed" under Part Five, below.

After the Test: Success!

If at least half the PCs pass the **Willpower** roll, the Akasha will accept them as a group. The flames and agony of drowning end, and the PCs find themselves being lifted out and freed. Those PCs who failed their rolls discover that they were just about to free themselves when the test ended.

As the PCs stand on wobbly legs, the Shahadet makes the Naga greeting gesture, the *namaste* (hands pressed together and a slight bow of the head). He smiles at the PCs. "After the Akasha accepted the Daini, we thought he must be a sspecial human, unique among your race. Now we ssee there are others of your kind who can win the approval of the Akasha. It iss good to know." He places the PCs into the care of Mirumoto Daini, and instructs them not to leave the city without the permission of the Naga.

Some of the Naga, especially the Asp, are clearly unhappy with this outcome. The one called the Balash in particular glares at the PCs, his slit-pupiled eyes promising bitter hatred.

Mirumoto Daini is delighted that the PCs survived the test. He and the Mara accompany the PCs back to a small domed building – Mara’s house, where Daini is staying as a guest.

Speaking with Daini

Daini and the Mara welcome the PCs and offer them food and drink (water – there is no tea or sake). The Mara, having lived with Daini for some months, will know better than to offer the PCs red meat. Daini will do most of the talking, with the Mara interjecting only an occasional cogent comment.

Daini and the Mara are lovers. Daini will make at least some effort to keep this concealed, knowing how badly it might be interpreted by other Rokugani (especially fellow Dragon, not to mention Crab or Scorpion). The Mara, however, will somewhat spoil the effort by always referring to Daini with the Rokugani word “Anata” (meaning, roughly, “dear” or “beloved”).

The following points represent most of what Daini will contribute to a conversation:

- **The Naga race:** Daini knows that the Naga are divided into several “bloodlines,” each of which has a different nature and talent. The Asp are warriors, fierce and aggressive; the Constrictors are *vedics* (scholars) who study the Akasha and the stars; the Greensnakes (such as Mara) are clever scouts and diplomats; and the Cobra are *jakla*, workers of magic. “I have only seen one or two of the Cobra. Their magic seems to be connected somehow to pearls. I have also heard that there is a fifth bloodline, Chameleons, who live underwater... but I have never seen them.” The Mara will confirm this, adding that the Chameleon city, Candas, is located far from the Shinomen, beneath the sea.
- **The Akasha:** Daini understands that the Naga are all emotionally and spiritually linked through the force of the Akasha, which he describes as the “combined spirits of all the Naga who have come before.” The Akasha guides the actions of every Naga, and allows them to communicate on a level deeper than any human can understand. Consequently, they are (according to Daini) incapable of harming each other or even lying to each other. “Can you imagine how different our own lives would be, if we could communicate with each other in this way, speaking directly from soul to soul? So much suffering and misery could be ended!”
- **Where the Naga have been, and why they are back now:** “As I understand it, a thousand years ago the Naga went into a deep sleep, so that they could awaken in this day and time to do battle with something they call ‘the Foul.’ I believe this so-called ‘Foul’ to be nothing less than Fu Leng and the Shadowlands, and the Naga have awakened now to fight it... which means that they should by rights be our allies, not our enemies.” The Mara will back this up: “We fought the Foul once before, long ago. We thought it destroyed, but our prophets saw that it would rise again, worse than ever, in the distant future. So we slept until that future could be now.”
- **Naga and Humans:** “The Naga are divided about us. Sadly, one of the Naga cities was destroyed, long ago, by the acts of our people.” The Mara supplies the name of the city: Nirukti, which means Joy, one of the six *vedangas* (ideals) of the Naga people. Daini nods sadly, and continues: “Between that and the tendency of our people to view the Naga as monsters, it is small wonder that they regard us with suspicion. Some of them indeed hate us, and would willingly make war on the Empire. I have tried, with Mara’s help, to convince them that humans should be allies against the forces of this ‘Foul’ they fear so much.”
- **Ss’lith:** Daini explains that the Naga who attacked the PCs was “a sort of... ronin, I suppose you could say.” Daini does not fully understand it, but he knows that some Naga are born deformed, and cast out of their community. “If they survive to adulthood, sometimes they are able to earn their way back into Naga society, much like a ronin earning admission to a Clan. That is probably what that poor creature was trying to accomplish by attacking you.” Mara looks sad, but confirms that the Abomination acted alone, and that the Naga do not hold his death against the PCs.
- **The fate of Daini’s companions:** Daini’s bodyguard, Mirumoto Sakitomo, was slain by accident when they first encountered the Naga. “He mistook the actions of a Constrictor for an attack, and drew his blade, causing the other Naga to strike him down with their arrows. A terrible tragedy, and I mourned his death.” Daini’s grief is sincere, and the Mara lays a comforting hand on his shoulder, breaking the Rokugani taboo on public touching. In embarrassment, Daini hurries on, explaining that the Ise Zumi who accompanied him (Togashi Bokkai) possessed the Centipede

Tattoo. “Once I realized I would be a... guest of the Naga for some time, I ordered Bokkai to return and inform the Clan.” Daini will be somewhat distressed to learn that Bokkai apparently never returned, and worries whether something befell the tattooed man during his journey.

If the PCs speak with the Mara directly, rather than with Daini, she can supply the following additional information:

- The “Foul” is a force which blights and destroys the land and everything living on it. It spawns not only foul monsters but also faceless things of shadow and darkness. If any PCs knows about, or has encountered, the Living Darkness, it will be clear to them from the Mara’s words that the Naga consider both the Darkness and the Shadowlands to be simply two different aspects of “the Foul.”
- If any PCs ask about religion or the spirits, the Mara explains that the Naga worship a power called Atman, which represents the ultimate state of purity to which all Naga souls will eventually ascend. (The Mara is unclear whether the Akasha and Atman are the same thing, or distinct – she complains that “human language does not have the right words” to express this.) Atman looks down on the world through two eyes, the Bright Eye (the Sun) of kindness and life, and the Pale Eye (the Moon) of judgment and death. The Naga respect and revere both eyes as aspects of Atman.
- If the PCs make any mention at all of the Emperor, diplomacy, or joining forces against the Foul, the Mara will immediately perk up and say that “the Dashmar” is very interested in meeting this “Emperor” and negotiate an alliance against the Foul. She will explain that the Dashmar is one of their oldest and wisest diplomats, as well as her blood-father. “We do not have these things you call families, for our eggs and hatchlings are guarded and raised by the entire community. But sometimes parents do keep track of which hatchlings spring from their line, as my father kept track of me.”

Getting Daini to Return

Daini, despite his honorable bloodline, good looks, and brilliant swordsmanship, has spent most of his life running away from responsibility, allowing his older sister (and before her, his now-dead older brother Satsu) to handle the difficulties of belonging to the Mirumoto ruling house. Here among the Naga, he has

finally found peace and happiness, and he fears to lose it by returning to the Empire. He will attempt to conceal this from himself, however, by pleading that he must learn more about the Naga. “It is vital to the future of the Empire, and the coming struggle against Fu Leng, that we learn more about these people. If we are to be allies, there must be men such as myself who understand the Naga and speak their language.”

In order to convince Daini to return to the Dragon Clan, the PCs will have to overcome both this argument and Daini’s inner fear. This is a pure role-playing challenge – the PCs must make convincing arguments which will sway Daini’s heart. The following is a good guideline to what sort of arguments will be persuasive:

- Citing the simple call of duty and honor will not be a good enough argument by itself. Daini is here in response to the order of Togashi Yokuni, the Clan Champion. “I am fulfilling my duty now, and if I return, I will be abandoning my task half-completed.”
- A better approach will be to point out the plight of the Dragon Clan under the leadership of Mirumoto Yukihera. Daini is the last surviving heir of the ruling house, and the Clan (and his uncle Sukune) are depending on him to return and set things to rights. This approach will clearly affect Daini, although he will still try to plead that if he was truly needed, “Lord Togashi-sama would send for me himself.”
- Some PCs may point out that Daini has an obligation to take up the burden of leadership left behind by his dead brother and missing sister. This will shake Daini more deeply than a general appeal of duty to Clan, although by itself it will probably still not be a conclusive argument – Daini will still try to wriggle out by citing his obedience of Lord Togashi’s orders.
- A PC who accuses Daini of cowardice, or of shirking his duty, will need to take a careful approach. Calm, subtle accusations (perhaps strengthened with citations from the Tao, the code of bushido, and so forth) will strike home, forcing Daini to bow his head in shame. Blunt, direct accusations, on the other hand, will arouse his anger – Daini will flush red, jump up and demand a duel (much to the Mara’s distress). A PC who remains calm at this point will shame Daini into apologizing, and perhaps into seeing the truth of the PC’s accusation. PCs who answer Daini’s aggression with their own will have to fight a duel,

although it should not be to the death. If Daini wins the duel, any further chance of convincing him to return will be lost. If he is defeated, however, he will be shamed into facing his own weakness.

- A PC who suggests that Daini's motives for staying may be personal and selfish (namely his love for the Mara), rather than duty-bound, will be striking a very sensitive nerve. Making the point subtly or politely, in such a way that Daini must confront his own conscience, will be very effective. Making it crudely ("you just want to stay so you can be with your snake-woman!") will backfire, as Daini becomes angry and defensive – with results similar to an accusation of cowardice, above.
- Finally, it is possible that some of the PCs may have played through the adventure *Kuro's Fire*, in which they joined him in facing the Test of the Elements (which Daini passed). A clever PC may cite the outcome of that test, in which Daini (and some PCs) were taken aside by Elemental Grand Master Naka Kuro and warned that they would have an important part to play in the coming struggle against the darkness. Asking something like "do you really think the Elements marked your destiny just so you could stay here in the Shinomen?" will be very effective.

Ultimately, these are guidelines. The GM must adjudicate whether the PCs offer a strong enough argument to convince Daini to return to the Empire.

Part Five: Return to the Empire

If the PCs convince Daini to return, he will not only agree but will become quite agitated, worrying about what may befall his Clan in the month or more it will take to get back to Dragon lands. The Mara will suggest that they seek help: "The wisdom of the Cobra may be able to assist us, if you are willing to seek it."

If the PCs decline this, or if they are unable to convince Daini to return, they will have to come back to the Empire on foot. If they ask politely, the Naga will allow them to leave, and escort them to the edge of the forest. If Daini returns, the Mara will accompany him, hoping to learn more about humans for her father the Dashmar. Either way, it will take over a month for them to get back to Dragon lands.

Help From the Cobra

If the PCs go along with seeking the help of the Cobra, the Mara will suggest that they gather all their equipment, since if the Cobra can offer help it will be immediate. Then she leads them to the quarters of the Ghedai, the local Cobra *jakla* (mystic):

The Mara leads you and Mirumoto Daini across the city to a low building constructed on the banks of the River of the Sky. She pauses at the entrance and speaks in the hissing language of the Naga. After a moment, a soft voice answers in the same tongue. The Mara nods to you, looking a little anxious, and leads you into the house.

Inside, much of the floor of the room is taken up by a stone-lined pool of water, the softly glowing blue-tinted river of the river. Coiled within the pool is a Naga who barely looks human at all. His skin, even on his face, is covered in huge, brightly iridescent scales, and a wide fleshy hood swells on the sides of his face, making him truly resemble the snake from the Burning Sands which is his namesake. He regards you with huge, unblinking orange eyes as the Mara and Daini speak to him in the Naga language.

Unless the PCs do something foolish or violent, they will be introduced to the Cobra, whose name is "the Ghedai." He regards them curiously for a time, then dives into the pool and comes back holding a single beautiful pearl. Holding it between thumb and forefinger, he hisses a long incantation, then crushes the pearl. A bubble of white light expands out from the broken pearl, engulfing the PCs. When it fades, they are somewhere else.

Pearl Magic: Arrival in Otosan Uchi

If the PCs travel via pearl magic, they emerge from the light (along with Daini and the Mara) in the streets of Otosan Uchi, the Imperial capital. The mighty walls of the Forbidden City stand less than a quarter-mile ahead. The crowds on the streets scatter away from the party with cries of surprise and horror, many of them naming the Mara as "a monster!"

Imperial guards quickly approach from the Forbidden City, weapons at ready. Mirumoto Daini will step forward to try to calm them. PCs with significant Glory should probably help, since the guards are quite alarmed at the presence of what they regard as a "Shadowlands demon" in the Imperial city.

Once the guards have been persuaded not to skewer the Mara where she stands, she will introduce herself,

explaining that she is here to arrange a meeting between “the Dashmar, representing the Naga people” and “the human leader called the Emperor.” Much confusion and delay follows, as representatives from the Imperial families emerge from the city and try to figure out how to deal with Mara’s request.

Regardless of what the PCs do, the Mara will eventually be allowed to stay in one of the city’s Inns while the Imperial city figures out how to deal with her.

Daini clearly would like to stay here with her, helping her to deal with the strangeness of the Empire. However, if any of the PCs remind him of his duty to the Dragon Clan, he will nod reluctantly. “You are right, of course,” he says, and requests a horse. Later that day he departs for the Dragon lands to confront Mirumoto Yukihera.

The outcome of Daini’s confrontation with Yukihera is beyond the scope of this adventure. The PCs have fulfilled their part in events by getting Daini back to the Empire and forcing him to accept his duty. The Mara will reward the PCs for their efforts with the gift of a Naga pearl (certed item).

On Foot: Arrival in Dragon Lands

If the PCs and Daini return on foot (due to not trusting in the power of the Naga pearl magic), it will take them over a month to make it back to where they began, the lands of the Dragonfly Clan. By then it is the beginning of the month of the Horse (June). The lands of the Dragonfly have suffered heavily from the Lion onslaught, but have not yet completely fallen – the Lion armies have been encountering numerous problems with supply and movement in the rolling, wooded hills.

The scene in the courtyard of Kyuden Tonbo is more than a little different from when the PCs were here before – the clearing around the small castle is covered in tents, and wounded bushi lie on every side, being tended by Tonbo shugenja and castle servants. After a few moments, unwounded samurai notice the presence of these strange new visitors, and shouts of alarm fill the air. Mirumoto Daini will quickly step forward, trying to bring calm.

After some time, Mirumoto Sukune will arrive at the head of a small column of Dragon’s Flame archers. He looks somewhat the worse for wear after two months of war, but his weathered face breaks into a smile at the sight of his nephew Daini.

At this point, Daini and the Mara will debate what they should do next. The Mara wishes to travel on to the capital and arrange ambassadorial status for her father the Dashmar. Daini wants to accompany her, but knows he must also confront Mirumoto Yukihera. So long as the PCs remind him of his duty, he will eventually agree that the Mara must go on alone while he deals with his Clan’s needs. He asks the PCs to escort the Mara safely to Otosan Uchi.

Once they reach the Imperial capital, events will proceed much as they did under the “Pearl Magic” option above, except for the absence of Daini. Again, the Mara will reward the PCs with the gift of a Naga pearl.

Returning Empty-Handed

If the PCs are forced to come back alone, either due to failing to find Daini, failing to pass the test of the Akasha, or failing to convince Daini to come back, things will be somewhat different. It is up to the PCs whether or not to go back and report their failure – Dragon PCs, Dragonfly PCs, and hired ronin will probably feel compelled to, but PCs from other Clans will be within their rights to wash their hands of the whole business and go home.

Either way, it is the beginning of the month of the Horse (June) before the PCs reach the territory of the Dragonfly Clan. As above, Mirumoto Sukune and his troops are still defending the region, although they have taken heavy losses.

Sukune will look grave and weary as he realizes the PCs have come back alone. He questions them about their trip. How he reacts depends on what the PCs did:

- If they found Daini, but were unable to bring him back (due to either failing the Test of the Akasha, or failing to convince Daini), Sukune will be sadly disappointed with his nephew. He thanks the PCs for their efforts and expresses deep regret if any of them lost their lives in a “futile quest I should never have undertaken.”
- If the PCs made it into the Shinomen, but turned back at some point (perhaps after a fight with the Naga), Sukune will be disappointed but understanding. “Perhaps it was a vain hope, to think you could find my nephew in that vast place.” He heaves a sigh. “Let us hope he or his sister returns soon, before the Dragon Clan pays too high a price.”

- If the PCs turned back early in their quest, Sukune will be quietly angry, and implies that they are cowards who abandoned their duty. “Perhaps the fault lies in me. I entrusted this task to others when I should have undertaken it myself.” He dismisses the PCs with a disgusted shake of his head.

What of Togashi Bokkai?

Some of the PCs may have realized that Togashi Bokkai, the Ise Zumi who accompanied Daini into the Shinomen, is “missing in action.” He did in fact make it back to Dragon lands, but ran afoul of Mirumoto Yukihera, who did not want anyone else learning of Daini’s location.

If the PCs tell Daini that Bokkai apparently did not make it back, he will be very concerned, and promises to look into the matter when he returns to Dragon lands.

The PCs themselves will not be able to follow up further on this matter unless they are of the Dragon Clan. In that case, they will be able to learn more by rolling **Investigation/Awareness** or **Courtier/Awareness** at TN 15. (Ise Zumi PCs can also roll **Simple Awareness** at TN 15.) A success determines that Bokkai did return, but was arrested and executed soon after on the charge of “disobeying the orders of the Mirumoto daimyo.”

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:	2 XP
Good role-playing:	+1 XP
PC passes the Test of the Akasha:	+1 XP
PCs convince Daini to return:	+1 XP

Total Possible Experience: 5 XP

Honor

At the GM’s discretion, the PCs may suffer Honor losses from their reactions to the Test of the Akasha.

Dragon PCs gain +1 Honor for successfully returning Daini to the Empire.

Glory

If Daini returns, all Dragon PCs receive 2 points of Glory, and all Dragonfly PCs (and other PCs will Allies in the Dragon Clan) gain 1 point of Glory.

Other Awards/Penalties

As mentioned, if the PCs bring Mara and the Dashmar to the capital, she will reward the PCs with a Naga pearl (certed item).

Appendix: NPCs and Naga

Note on Naga stats: the Naga “Akasha” ring functions in the same way as a human Void ring, and Akasha points may be spent in the same manner as Void points.

Mirumoto Daini, Destined Hero

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

TN to be Hit: 29 (34 in light armor)

School/Rank: Mirumoto Bushi 4

Honor/Glory: 3.4/7.5

Skills: Archery 4, Battle 3, Courtier 6, Defense 6, History 4, Heraldry 3, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 8, Lore: Naga Culture 3, Lore: Shugenja 3, Meditation 4, Shintao 4, Yarijutsu 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Allies (Kitsuki family, Naga), Ambidextrous, Benten’s Blessing, Great Destiny, Luck (rank one), Quick, Way of the Land (Dragon lands)/Brash, True Love (the Mara), Vain

Equipment: Fine kimono, fine daisho set, light armor.

Ss’lith, aggressive Naga Abomination

FIRE 3 Agility 5	AIR 3 Reflexes 5
EARTH 4 Stamina 5	WATER 4
AKASHA 2	

TN to be Hit: 25

School/Rank: Naga Warrior 3

First Lesson: Drawing From the Deep. The Naga may add his Akasha ring to the total of all attack and damage rolls.

Second Lesson: The Tides of War. Add or subtract School Rank to the total of any roll on the Battle Table.

Third Lesson: This Blood Shall Guide Me. Make two melee attacks per round.

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 2, Conceal 6, Defense 4, Hand-to-Hand 4, Hunting 6, Lore: Shinomen Forest 3, Spear 5, Stealth 5, Swordsmanship 6, Wrestling 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Abomination (Night Vision, Strength of the Earth rank one), Xenophobic (one extra unkept die against non-Naga)

Equipment: Spear (2k3).

Typical Naga Asp Warrior

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 2 Reflexes 3
EARTH 2	WATER 2 Strength 3
AKASHA 2	

[Wounds are treated as though Earth is 3 – benefit of Asp bloodline.]

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Naga Warrior 1

First Lesson: Drawing From the Deep. The Naga may add his Akasha ring to the total of all attack and damage rolls.

Skills: Archery 5, Athletics 3, Battle 2, Defense 3, Hand-to-Hand 3, Swordsmanship 4, Spear 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: None.

Equipment: Spear (2k3), bow with 40 arrows (1k2). Half the arrows are crystal-tipped.

Oslykar, Naga Constrictor Vedic

FIRE 3 Intelligence 4	AIR 3
EARTH 3	WATER 3 Strength 4
AKASHA 3	

[Wounds are figured at 3 x Earth per Rank – benefit of Constrictor bloodline.]

TN to be Hit: 10 (Constrictor penalty)

School/Rank: Naga Vedic 1

First Lesson: Willful Harmony. The Vedic has Rank One in all High Skills.

Skills: Advanced Medicine 4, Astronomy 4, Archery 3, Athletics 2, Calligraphy (Naga) 3, Defense 2, Hand-to-Hand 6, Law (Naga) 3, Lore (Rokugani culture) 2, Meditation 5, Rokugani Language 3, Spear 3, Theology (Naga) 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages:

Special Attack: The Constrictor can grab a human-sized opponent in its coils with a Hand-to-Hand attack at two Raises. With a success, the target is trapped and must make a Contested Hand-to-Hand/Strength roll. If the Constrictor wins, the target takes damage dice equal to (Constrictor’s Earth + number of rounds target has been constricted). If the target wins, s/he breaks free.

Equipment: Spear (2k3), bow with 40 arrows (1k2). Half the arrows are crystal-tipped.

The Balash, Angry Asp Warrior

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

[Wounds are treated as though Earth is 4 – benefit of Asp bloodline.]

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Naga Warrior 2

First Lesson: Drawing From the Deep. The Naga may add his Akasha ring to the total of all attack and damage rolls.

Second Lesson: The Tides of War. Add or subtract School Rank to the total of any roll on the Battle Table.

Skills: Archery 5, Athletics 4, Battle 4, Conceal 3, Defense 3, Hand-to-Hand 4, Hunting 5, Lore: Naga Ruins 3, Lore: Rokugani Culture 2, Moksha (Naga version of Shintao) 5, Rokugani Language 1, Spear 2, Stealth 4, Swordsmanship 5, Wrestling 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Acute Smell, Heart of Vengeance (humans), Heartless, Immune to Fear, Strength of the Earth (rank one), Venom (rank two), Way of the Land (Naga Ruins, Shinomen Forest), Xenophobic (one extra unkept die against non-Naga)/Brash, Cruel, Driven (“Kill all the humans!”).

Equipment: Sword (2k2), spear (2k3), bow with 40 arrows (1k2). Half the arrows are crystal-tipped.

The Shahadet, Naga Warlord

FIRE 3 Agility 5	AIR 3 Reflexes 5
EARTH 4	WATER 3 Strength 5
AKASHA 3	

[Wounds are treated as though Earth is 5 – benefit of Asp bloodline.]

TN to be Hit: 25

School/Rank: Naga Warrior 4

First Lesson: Drawing From the Deep. The Naga may add his Akasha ring to the total of all attack and damage rolls.

Second Lesson: The Tides of War. Add or subtract School Rank to the total of any roll on the Battle Table.

Third Lesson: This Blood Shall Guide Me.

Make two melee attacks per round.

Fourth Lesson: The Pillar of Blood. Ignore the penalties from a number of Wound Ranks equal to his Akasha, for a number of rounds equal to his Akasha.

Skills: Archery 6, Athletics 4, Battle 7, Conceal 5, Defense 6, Hand-to-Hand 5, Lore: Naga Civilization 5, Lore: Rokugani Culture 2, Meditation 4, Moksha 4, Rokugani Language 2, Sincerity 5, Spear 5, Stealth 6, Swordsmanship 6.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Acute Smell, Combat Reflexes, Immune to Fear, Large, Leadership, Precise Memory, Quick, Quick Healer, Strength of the Earth (rank two), Venom (rank two), Xenophobic (one extra unkept die against non-Naga)/Insensitive.

Equipment: Sword (2k2), spear (2k3), bow with 40 arrows (1k2). Half the arrows are crystal-tipped.

The Mara, female Naga diplomat

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

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: Naga Scout 3

First Lesson: The Isha's Gift. The Naga can see in the poorest of lighting as clearly as though in full daylight.

Second Lesson: Know Your Enemy. The Scout can detect the Shadowlands Taint in a living creature by rolling Lore (Shadowlands)/Perception at a TN of (25 minus 5 times the target's Taint rank).

Third Lesson: Blackened Sky. The Scout may make two attacks per round with a bow.

Skills (two-legged): Archery 2, Athletics 4, Defense 2, Etiquette (Rokugani) 5, Hand-to-Hand 1, Horsemanship 1, Hunting 2, Investigation 4, Lore (Bushido) 1, Lore (Naga Civilization) 6, Lore (Naga Myth) 4, Lore (Naga Religion) 3, Lore (Naga Ruins) 2, Lore (Pearl Magic) 2, Lore (Rokugani Civilization) 3, Meditation 6, Moksha 4, Pearl Carving 3, Rokugani Language 4, Spear 2, Swordsmanship 3.

Skills (serpent form): Archery 4, Athletics 2, Conceal 3, Defense 4, Hand-to-Hand 2, Hunting 4, Spear 2, Stealth 4, Swordsmanship 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Fertile, Immune to Fear, Venom (rank one), Xenophobic (one extra unkept die against non-Naga)/Insensitive, True Love (Mirumoto Daini).

Equipment: Spear (2k3), bow with 40 arrows (1k2). Half the arrows are crystal-tipped.

Player Handout #1: A Letter

Samurai-sama,

I write to you in the hope that you may be able to assist me in a most important matter, one which is best discussed only in person. I have been told, by those I trust, that you are an honorable samurai who will place the greater good above personal goals and ambitions. It may be that I have been misinformed, but if so, it will not be the first time someone has lied to me, and will certainly not be the last.

I am sure you find this letter mystifying, and may be tempted to dismiss it as another vagary of the “enigmatic Dragon.” Let me be plain, then. The fate of two Great Clans may rest on whether you answer my request.

I would ask you to meet with me in Kyuden Tonbo, the castle of the Dragonfly Clan, where my troops are gathered for war. I enclose travel papers approving your journey there. Please come swiftly if you are able, for I will not be able to remain there later than the tenth day of the month of Onnatongu, the month of the Dragon in the common usage.

Praying that you will be able to answer this request, I await your visit.

*Mirumoto Sukune
Governor of Shiro Mirumoto
Taisa of the Dragon's Flame Legion*

Player Handout #2: Travel Papers

By my authority, the samurai bearing this pass is authorized and directed to travel on the Drowned Merchant River and through the territory of the Unicorn Clan to the Plains of Thunder, for the purpose of exploring the Shinomen Forest.

This samurai is performing a personal mission on my behalf. I request the cooperation and approval of local authorities in facilitating this journey.

By order of

*Mirumoto Sukune
Governor of Shiro Mirumoto*



Critical Events Summary, Tao of the Naga

Please fill out and submit results to the campaign administrator (youta@rollanet.org) for all tables running at Origins 2004 and Konniption 2004.

Did the PCs bring Mirumoto Daini back from Shinomen Forest?

If not, did they at least report to Sukune that Daini is alive?

If Daini returned, did they remind him to confront Mirumoto Yukihera rather than staying with Mara?