

The Ties That Bind

A One Round Low-Rank Living Rokugan Tournament

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Ryoko Owari: the City of Stories, also called the City of Lies. Otomo Keisuke, advisor to the Son of Heaven, has been accused of the murder of one of his closest friends. But Keisuke-san claims he has been framed by Maho cultists. At the request of your daimyo you have been assigned to investigate Keisuke's case... but investigating a murder in a Scorpion city is fraught with perils.

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This is a RPGA Network adventure game. A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing the game (or

this round of the game), but the actual playing time will be about three hours.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GM's Information

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

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

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

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

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

Scenario Background

Otomo Keisuke is a high-ranking member of the Otomo family (Glory Rank 9.6) and councilor to the Son of Heaven himself. The Emperor listens to Otomo Keisuke often and actually heeds some of his advice and council. Unfortunately, he is also an opium addict, a weakness which nearly destroyed him a few years ago. Stoned on opium, Keisuke made a public spectacle of himself. Only the intervention of a courtier friend, Bayushi Kugai, saved him from complete disgrace. Since then Keisuke has managed to be more circumspect in his use of the drug. Of course, Kugai's timely quashing of all rumors has left Keisuke in the Scorpion's debt...

Recently, however, things have become more complicated. A few months ago Otomo Keisuke met a charming and innocent young Crane artisan, Kakita

Seka. The two quickly became infatuated with each other and eventually, despite the prohibitions of honor and duty, became lovers. For a while Keisuke was able to forget about opium, finding love a far more potent drug.

But this brief and secret happiness was not to last. The Emperor ordered Keisuke to travel to the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari and investigate the recent series of disturbances commonly referred to as the “Opium War,” which had resulted in the deaths of numerous samurai and the assassination of the city’s resident Emerald Magistrate. Ironically, it was Keisuke’s apparent good relations with the Scorpion (actually the result of his own opium dependency) which prompted the Emperor to choose him for this mission.

Keisuke found his new mission a weighty trial. The mysteries of the Opium War seemed insoluble, and the separation from his lover Kakita Seka brought the opium craving roaring back. Living in the city which was the very heart of the opium trade, Keisuke quickly succumbed once more to the drug, and began to abandon his duties altogether, spending much of his time visiting geisha in the licensed district.

Back in the capital, Kakita Seka yearned for her absent lover, torn between her feelings for him and her sense of duty to her clan. When her younger sister Kakita Ayami arrived with news that Seka had been engaged to a Doji nobleman, she knew the time had come to make a final decision. Duty won out. Seka decided to travel at once to Ryoko Owari and say farewell to her lover. Unfortunately, her younger sister Ayami begged to accompany her to the fabled Scorpion city. Unable to admit the true reason for her journey, Seka was forced to agree.

The evening after the two Kakita ladies arrived in Ryoko Owari, the local Crane ambassador arranged a dinner in Seka’s honor, inviting many of the artisans and courtiers of the city. An hour before they were to leave for the dinner, Seka told her sister that she needed to pay a brief visit to a friend from the capital who was staying in the city: Otomo Keisuke. She promised to return quickly. Ayami never saw the tears that her older sister held back as she left.

Otomo Keisuke was in an opium delirium when Seka arrived at his residence. He was expecting a “friend” to arrive soon with fresh opium, and had dismissed his personal servant to avoid any personal embarrassment. When he answered the door, Seka was shocked at the disheveled condition of her lover, but tried to quietly explain the situation. In Keisuke’s opium-addled mind,

however, her explanation became a betrayal. Seka, the one true love of his life, the woman who made opium seem shallow and useless, was leaving him for some Doji courtier! Keisuke flew into a rage and his vision blurred red...

What brought him out of it was a scream. Kakita Ayami had come seeking her sister, concerned that they would be late for the dinner, and walked in on a scene of death and slaughter. Shrieking in terror, the young woman fled to the Governor’s mansion, seeking the city garrison, the famed Thunder Guard.

Her screams brought Keisuke back to himself. Stunned and horrified, the Otomo could not bring himself to admit what he had done. He wasn’t a criminal. It all had to be some terrible mistake. Bayushi Benkai would take care of things... Kugai said he was reliable.

He was right. By the time Ayami returned with the Thunder Guard, a cover story was already in place, claiming that a Maho cultist had impersonated Keisuke and murdered Kakita Seka. Confused and uncertain, the young Ayami nevertheless demanded a full investigation, and the resident Crane diplomats backed her up. A day later, a complicated negotiation between the Scorpion and Crane resulted in the investigation being placed in the hands of a group of newly arrived samurai: the player characters.

The Truth

There really is a small Maho cult in Ryoko Owari, although it had only a coincidental connection to these events: one of its members is a geisha who Keisuke has visited several times. The Scorpion Black Watch (their Maho-hunting organization) has been monitoring the cult for some time, waiting for the opportunity to use them as “fall guys” for something else. That opportunity has now arrived, in the form of a personal favor which will place Otomo Keisuke in their power forever.

The “official” story put together by the Scorpion is that Keisuke was ambushed in an alleyway (a place where the cult does, in fact, gather from time to time) by several Maho cultists, one of whom then used some unknown Maho spell to transform himself into Keisuke’s likeness. The timely arrival of a group of Bayushi samurai saved Keisuke from death, but not before his doppelganger escaped... and murdered Kakita Seka. It is all an elaborate lie, of course, but the PCs will have a hard time finding the truth. The odds are that the Maho cult gets the blame, Seka’s death goes unavenged, and Keisuke lives out his life as a

Scorpion puppet. The Black Watch will observe the PCs' investigations and will take steps to make sure they find the right "truth," supplying informants and clues as needed, and making sure none of the Maho cultists escape alive.

Player's Introduction

There are two different introductions to this adventure, one for Clan PCs and one for ronin. The GM should read the appropriate introductions to the players and provide them with the handouts (Handout #1 for Clan PCs and Handout #2 for ronin PCs).

Clan PC Introduction:

Just yesterday, the 20th day of the Horse (May), you arrived in the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari on an errand for your daimyo, submitting your lord's the annual request for medicinal opium. Your visit to the governor's residence was brief, for Governor Shosuro Hyobu's could give you but a few moments of her valuable time to present your lord's request. Still, you believe she was favorably impressed with you. Now you have only to wait until you receive her reply.

The next morning, however, you receive an unexpected visitor. A courier delivers a letter, accompanied by the request that you visit the resident Emerald Magistrate at the beginning of the Hour of Hantei (11 a.m. gaijin time).

(Give the player Handout #1).

Ronin Introduction:

The city of Ryoko Owari has always been friendly to ronin, and you arrived just a few days ago in search of opportunities. Unfortunately, the city government had no interest in hiring ronin just now, despite the recent loss of life in the Opium War. Still, you're sure something will turn up in this city, most corrupt and treacherous of all cities in the Empire.

Sure enough, this morning a samurai in the colors of the Scorpion delivered a letter to you, accompanied by a curt order: "Ronin-kun, the city Emerald Magistrate has seen fit to find a use for you. Report to his residence at midmorning, on the Hour of Hantei. Remember to be prompt."

(Give the player Handout #2).

The Magistrate's Residence

The PCs will be escorted one-by-one to a small, elegant waiting room and told "Shiba Tachinaba-sama will see you shortly." They will be left to wait for a short time, while an attentive servant brings tea and rice cakes. This is an opportunity for each player to describe and introduce their character. Once they have had a chance to get to know each other (or not, as their characters dictate), Shiba Tachinaba arrives.

The new Emerald Magistrate of Ryoko Owari is a quiet, pleasant-faced man from the Phoenix Clan. He is clearly a bit over his head in Ryoko Owari's turbulent waters, but is doing his best to carry out his duties, and should strike the PCs as an honorable, well-intentioned man. After briefly introducing himself and apologizing for interrupting the PCs' normal affairs, he explains the situation:

"A remarkable case has presented itself, involving not only the Scorpion and Crane Clans, but the Imperial line itself. At the request of representatives from both the Crane and the Scorpion, I have been asked to conduct the investigation with samurai found acceptable to both Clans. They have apparently settled upon you as meeting those criteria...perhaps because your lords owe them favors. Will you assist me?"

If any ronin are present, Tachinaba explains that since the two Clans could not agree on a sufficient number of investigators, he took it upon himself to round out the team with wave-men, who would offend neither side unduly.

Refusing the request of an Emerald Magistrate is more than a little dishonorable, particularly since the favor of their lords has apparently been invoked (3 point Honor and 2 point Glory loss for anyone but a ronin). Ronin who turn down the job are simply thrown out.

Assuming the PCs agree to help Tachinaba, he explains his difficulties further. *"This case is an investigation of a member of the Imperial family, Otomo Keisuke-sama, an advisor to our most serene Emperor Hantei XXXVIII, who is here to investigate the recent Opium War incidents on behalf of the Shining Prince. The Crane complainants against him have demanded that he be investigated only by those who have had no previous dealings with him, so as to prevent any suspicion of bias. Are you free of any previous contact with Otomo Keisuke-sama?"*

Unless the PCs have specifically played in another Living Rokugan event in which Keisuke appears, their

only honest answer to this question is “Yes.” If a PC claims (honestly or otherwise) previous contact with Keisuke, Tachinaba reluctantly drops them from the investigation.

PCs can, if they wish, roll Intelligence+Lore (Imperial Family), or another suitable Lore skill, at TN 20 to have heard of Keisuke as one of the Emperor’s more favored advisors. Imperial Family PCs have automatically heard of him.

Once he has established to his satisfaction that the PCs meet the required criteria for impartiality, Tachinaba goes on to explain the situation: *“Last night, a promising young Crane poet, Kakita Seka, was brutally murdered while visiting the house of Otomo Keisuke-sama, a man who was apparently her friend when they were both assigned to the capital of Otosan Uchi. Kakita Seka-san’s younger sister, Kakita Ayami, caught the assailant in the act. By her account the murderer was none other than Otomo Keisuke-sama himself! A shocking claim indeed. However,” Tachinaba’s face tightens with suppressed frustration, “here matters become most extraordinary. Otomo Keisuke has submitted a report of an assault on his person by unknown commoners, apparently Maho cultists. Here are the two reports as submitted to my office last night.”* Give the players Handouts #3 and #4. After they have a chance to read them, continue. *“As you can see, the possibility exists for both reports to be true, in which case Otomo Keisuke-sama is innocent. What Kakita Ayami-san saw would have been the transformed cultist, caught in the act of murdering one of Keisuke-sama’s closest friends. Perhaps because she had seen through his imposture.”*

The PCs are to investigate the crime and determine whether Keisuke’s claim of a Maho-Tsukai imposter are true. The two crime reports contain full lists of all witnesses involved. The PCs are also free to visit and investigate both crime scenes, as well as anywhere else the investigation may take them. Tachinaba supplies them with a writ of authority (Handout #5) to conduct the investigation. He also offers the services of his yoriki (assistant) Isawa Mokichi, a young Phoenix shugenja.

Tachinaba will answer any PC questions to the best of his ability (due to the political ramifications of the investigation, he has made no inquiries of his own, and knows no more than what is on the two reports). If the PCs try to divine his motives (by rolling Contested Awareness) they can learn that he is genuinely interested in learning the truth of the case and is

frustrated by the political interventions. Tachinaba closes the interview by urging the PCs to “let Shinsei be your guide.”

Ronin PCs are paid half their wages at the conclusion of this interview. Also, any Scorpion PCs find Handout #6 hidden on their person shortly after the interview.

Investigations: Personal Interviews

Scorpion Contacts or Allies

Any PC with contacts or allies in the Scorpion Clan (including, obviously, any Scorpion PCs) can learn the following “clues” with a few hours of work.

- Otomo Keisuke is a useful ally to the Scorpion Clan, and often receives gifts from them. An invitation to the famed “House of Foreign Stories” in the Licensed Quarter, for example, which he visits frequently. He also frequently gets opium from the Scorpion to feed his secret habit.
- Otomo Keisuke arrived in the city three months ago to investigate the collection of violent incidents and disruptions from last winter, collectively known as the Opium War. He didn’t spend all that much time investigating, however; the Licensed Quarter seemed to have more appeal to him.
- Keisuke’s limited investigations focused heavily on the dockside areas of the Fisherman’s and Merchant’s Quarters. There have been rumors for some time of an unholy cult working in those areas. “Perhaps Otomo-sama found out more than was safe for him.”

Otomo Keisuke

Otomo Keisuke lives in a fine private house in a secluded corner of the Noble Quarter. The building is now guarded at all times by four tough-looking Thunder Guards (rank 3 Bayushi bushi); however, the PCs’ writ of investigation will grant them access at any reasonable hour. Physical clues in the house are listed in the “Investigations: Locations” section.

Keisuke will agree to an interview any time the PCs request it. His servant Izo welcomes the PCs and leads them to one of several airy, well-lit rooms, where Keisuke greets them politely and elegantly. He will

focus most of his attention on Great Clan samurai, largely ignoring Minor Clan and ronin PCs except when they address him directly.

“Welcome, noble samurai. I am Otomo Keisuke. As you have already heard, a dear friend of mine has been brutally murdered by a Maho cultist wearing my guise. Thanks to the blessings of the Fortunes, I am still alive to warn everyone of this cult and avenge the loss of Kakita Seka-san. Please, ask whatever you wish – I would aid your investigation any way I can.”

The PCs can ask whatever questions they wish. However, it should be remembered that Keisuke is an Otomo and an Imperial Advisor. As such, he expects (and deserves) great deference from lower-ranking samurai such as the PCs. A PC who is failing to show such respect can roll Awareness+Etiquette at TN 15 to remember in time; if they fail the roll, or deliberately ignore it, Keisuke will berate them for their poor manners and have them thrown out of his house.

Otomo Keisuke is in a fragile mental state: he has convinced himself (with the help of plenty of opium) that the Scorpion cover story is true, that he is an innocent victim of Maho. The true incident is some horrible nightmare that lurks behind closed eyes. But for now, Keisuke will be confident and clear in his answers, projecting innocence and genuine sorrow for the death of Kakita Seka. If the PCs try to determine if he is lying (by making Contested Perception vs. Awareness rolls), their TNs are increased by 15.

Otomo Keisuke can supply the following information (most of it lies and delusions, to be sure):

- “Yesterday, while I was conducting my investigation into the recent disturbances of Ryoko Owari’s medical opium exports, I was accosted by a stranger accompanied by two dirty ronin. I was in the Merchant Quarter, near the docks. The two ronin seized by without warning and dragged me into a nearby alleyway. Then the stranger spoke strange mystic words, and his eyes glinted red. Most unnatural! Then he drew a tanto and cut me across the arm. My blood evaporated as it flowed out of the wound, and the stranger transformed into an exact copy of me! He said, “Thank you for your life,” and then turned and walked out of the alley. The two ronin dragged me back into the alley and beat me to unconsciousness – I suppose they intended to kill me. But the Fortunes watched over me – it seems some loyal Bayushi samurai stumbled across the incident and saved my life.”
- The “stranger” was a well-dressed commoner in a blue kimono, perhaps a merchant, although he bore

himself with a noble’s confidence. He wore no Clan symbol or color.

- The two ronin stank of fish and were unnaturally strong and quick. Keisuke observes mournfully that if he had a chance to draw his katana, the outcome would have been very different.
- Keisuke expresses outrage that none of the peasants or merchants in the dock district came to help him. They didn’t even raise the alarm! If he could find out who was there at the time, they would pay dearly for their cowardice.
- Keisuke will claim that during his investigations, he heard of an illegal cult working out of the Fishermen’s Quarter. He planned to seek out the local Black Watch officials and ask for more information and assistance, but the assault has put his plans on hold.
- If the PCs ever ask him about the Licensed Quarter on Teardrop Island, Keisuke will freely admit to visiting there and frequenting the House of Foreign Stories. If the PCs demand details, Keisuke frowns at their prying rudeness, but admits that his favorite there is a young woman named Hisae. (He does not know that Hisae is a cultist. Keisuke’s relationship with Hisae is part of the reason why the Scorpion chose to concoct the Maho cover story.)
- If the PCs ask about the Scorpion guards out front, Keisuke explains that since the Maho “copy” of himself is still at large, he requested protection from the city governor.
- If the PCs ask to see the injury he describes, Keisuke is insulted that they do not simply take his word, but finally rolls up the sleeve of his kimono and shows a freshly-stitched cut. Any PC who rolls **Perception+Medicine** at TN 15 (or **Perception+Investigation** at TN 20) also notices several small cuts and bruises on the arm.
- A similar roll will notice some scratches and bruises on Keisuke’s face, partly concealed with cosmetics. Keisuke will explain away all these injuries as resulting from the ronin’s beating.

Keisuke’s Personal Servant

Keisuke is served by Izo, a quiet, reserved commoner who knows his place and never leaves it. He will not volunteer any information on his own, nor will Keisuke encourage the PCs to question him; they must make that decision themselves. In Keisuke’s presence Izo will make only the briefest and most uninformative of replies; if he is questioned away from his master he will be more informative, but will not betray his master under any circumstances (even if the PCs know he is

lying). Remember that, while Izo is a mere commoner, as the servant of Otomo Keisuke he has his master's protection; the PCs cannot threaten or abuse him without severe consequences.

- Izo states that he was dismissed from his duties early on the night of the incident. This was not an uncommon occurrence here in Ryoko Owari, for Otomo Keisuke-sama frequented the "House of Foreign Stories," a geisha house in the Licensed Quarter.
- Otomo Keisuke-sama received frequent visits from local nobles and officials, often bearing gifts. Hardly surprising, given his station.
- The night of the incident, Otomo Keisuke-sama seemed different somehow. He returned from his afternoon investigations in a happy mood, almost giddy. He was like a completely different person compared to the serious, stern, quiet man Izo has served for over ten years. (This is a lie, if the PCs can overcome Izo's Awareness of 2 in a Contested Roll.)
- The night of the incident, Otomo Keisuke-sama was wearing a fine blue kimono without a mon (matching the one at the murder scene, see "Investigations: Locations" below). Izo claims never to have seen that particular kimono before (another lie). Keisuke's daisho set was left on its stand as usual.
- There was a peculiar odor of fish around Otomo Keisuke-sama that night. Izo says he was not so uncouth as to mention this to his master. (Again, this is all a lie.)
- If the PCs ask about Keisuke's signet ring, Izo will hesitate a moment and then claim Keisuke was not wearing it that night (a lie, since he knows Keisuke still has the ring and therefore the "double" could not have worn it). If the PCs show Izo the impressions left on Seka's body, he will claim (falsely) that he cannot tell if they match the ring or not.

Kakita Ayami

Ayami (and her sister, while she lived) resides at the house of the Crane Clan ambassador, a large and elegant house in the Noble Quarter. A pair of Daidoji bushi stand guard at the gates, and reluctantly admit the PCs after examining their writ of authority. They will be friendly to Isawa Mokichi and to any Crane PCs; all others are treated with cold politeness.

Kakita Ayami will meet the PCs in the small, precisely arranged garden in the back of the residence. She is

hiding behind walls of strict self-control, and speaks in a carefully controlled voice as she greets them.

"Honorable samurai, welcome. I am very glad to see you, and I am sure my sister watches you with approval as well. Let us go inside...there are some things which should not be discussed under Mother Sun's light." She leads you inside the house and slides a shoji screen closed, shutting out the garden. "Now. Permit me to tell you what I know."

Kakita Ayami will normally keep strict control of herself, walling her grief and horror away behind duty and etiquette. Her control is delicate, however; if any of the PCs are unnecessarily crude, blunt, or excessively descriptive about her sister's fate, Ayami must roll Simple Willpower at TN 10 to keep from breaking down into a shameful, uncontrollable fit of crying and weeping. Proper Rokugani will avert their eyes and give her time to compose herself again before asking further questions (a PC who fails to show a proper response to this situation loses 1 point of Honor).

Kakita Ayami knows the following:

- "Last night, my sister went to visit an old friend from the capital, Otomo Keisuke. She said she would be back in time for the dinner which Doji-sama planned in our honor, so when she was late, I became concerned and went in search of her. No one answered the door at Otomo Keisuke-sama's residence, but then I heard a terrible crashing and howling from within. I rushed inside to see what was the matter..." Ayami hesitates a moment, visibly gathering her strength before she continues. "It was a sight from nightmare. My sister lay broken on the floor with a monster standing over her body. The monster...the monster looked like a man who could be Otomo Keisuke-sama, but he was covered in blood. The whole room, everything, soaked in blood. I screamed and ran. When I could think again I rushed to the Governor's house to ask for the Thunder Guard. The captain of the evening watch most honorably agreed to send a squad back with me, but when we returned the monster, the blood, it was gone. Only the body of my poor sister remained."
- If the PCs ask for a more detailed description of the murderer, Ayami shivers in horror. She recalls mostly the blood and the terrible madness and fury in his contorted face. If the PCs ask specifically about his clothing, she recalls (with effort) that his garment was torn and blood-soaked, but might have been blue in color.

- If the PCs ask about the planned dinner, Ayami explains that the Crane ambassador, Doji Toyoaki, was holding a dinner in honor of their arrival in the city. Seka planned to recite several new poems at the affair.
- If the PCs ask why Seka and Ayami came to Ryoko Owari, Ayami says that her sister had just been betrothed to Doji Daisetsu, a promising young courtier in Otosan Uchi, and wanted to travel once more before entering her new married life. She had planned to go alone, but Ayami was eager to see Ryoko Owari, the famed City of Stories, and prevailed on her sister to let her join the trip.
- If the PCs look at Seka's poems (which are kept in her personal quarters), the poems are several short but exquisite pieces about snowflakes. Any PC who rolls **Awareness+Poetry** at TN 15 (or **Awareness+Courtier** or **Manipulation** at TN 20) can deduce that Seka's theme of brief, ephemeral beauty reflected something significant in her own life.
- Ayami met Otomo Keisuke-sama once or twice in Otosan Uchi. He was a close friend to Seka. Ayami has no idea the two were lovers, and will be shocked if a PC makes such a dishonorable suggestion.
- Ayami has nothing but good things to say about her older sister. Kakita Seka was a noble and dutiful woman who served her family and Emperor with honor. Her poems were much admired in Otosan Uchi, and she had no enemies or rivals.
- Ayami is half-prepared to believe Otomo Keisuke's story of a transformed Maho cultist. After all, no member of the Emperor's noble house could do such a terrible thing, could they? Only a devotee of Maho could commit such a vile, horrific crime. If there are Maho-users, she hopes and prays that the PCs will uncover and punish them quickly.

The Bayushi Rescuers

The four Bayushi bushi who supposedly "rescued" Otomo Keisuke from his ronin assailants are posted in an unmarked barracks in the Merchant Quarter. Isawa Mokichi knows the location and can lead the PCs there. The commander of the barracks will allow the PCs to interview the four bushi in his private quarters (of course, only a paper door separates the room from the rest of the barracks, but in Rokugan that is privacy enough).

The leader of the four witnesses is Bayushi Hoshiko, a shapely and charming woman in her twenties with the rank of gunso (sergeant). The other three witnesses (Bayushi Tabito, Yosai, and Daisu), all men, will defer to her in any discussion. All four are accomplished liars, although Contested rolls can still expose their deception. They will of course insist they are telling the truth, and grow insulted if the PCs repeatedly "question their honor," as Hoshiko puts it.

- The four bushi claim to have been out patrolling the warehouse area when they heard a disturbance from an alleyway. Within they found two dirty ronin, apparently about to kill an unconscious man (who later proved to be Otomo Keisuke). The Bayushi immediately attacked, and the offending ronin fled like the cowards they were. The Bayushi would have pursued, but they recognized the nobility of the battered victim, and decided it was more important to bring him immediately to the Noble Quarter for treatment. When he had recovered enough to explain the truth of what happened, they filed a report with the Emerald Magistrate (who has jurisdiction over Maho crimes).
- The Bayushi never saw the supposed "double," but the copied Otomo could easily have left out of the other end of the alley while they were approaching.
- If the PCs ask what Keisuke was wearing, they say he had on a pale golden kimono with the Otomo mon. If the PCs ask about Keisuke's ring, the Bayushi claim not to remember (they don't know how they should answer to support their story).
- The two ronin have been identified as musclemen who were known to work in the Fisherman's Quarter, probably as enforcers for one of the Firemen Gangs. Word has it they sometimes hang around a teahouse by the name of "The Carp Cup." The Bayushi have not searched for them because they were told the Emerald Magistrate had taken over the investigation.
- If the PCs mention Otomo Keisuke's claim that the ronin moved with unnatural speed and strength, the Bayushi shrug and say they seemed normal enough. Depending on the attitudes the PCs have displayed, Hoshiko may slyly suggest that the Otomo was embarrassed by falling victim to such an ambush.
- If the PCs ask about the Firemen Gangs, the bushi explain that each district of the city has a local organization of Firemen to deal with accidental conflagrations (which, left unfought, could destroy the whole city). However, in the poorer districts the Firemen are really just criminal gangs (yakuza).

- If the PCs ask about Maho, the bushi say there have been rumors of a cult working out of the Fishermen's Quarter.

Ayami's Thunder Guards

The squad of Thunder Guards who accompanied Kakita Ayami back to Otomo Keisuke's residence are posted in a large barracks attached to the Shosuro Palace, the residence of Ryoko Owari's Governor. Again, Isawa Mokichi knows where they are and can lead the PCs there quickly.

The guards are plainspoken and direct. They are the elite of Ryoko Owari's armed troops, and they know it. They are also the only Scorpions involved who are telling the truth as far as they know it.

“Last night, around the Hour of the Tiger, we received a report of a murder at the residence of Otomo Keisuke. We accompanied the witness, Kakita Ayami, back to the scene and discovered the body of her sister, Kakita Seka. She had been beaten to death in an extremely violent manner, and the entire room was wrecked and bloodied. The murderer was not there, although there was evidence to suggest he had cleaned himself of blood before leaving. We posted guards, escorted Kakita Ayami back to her residence, and filed a report with both the city and resident Emerald magistrates.”

- The guards made a brief search for other clues, such as tracks or weapons, but found none.
- If the PCs ask about Otomo Keisuke's tale of a Maho impersonator, the guards make no comment except to say: “Governor Shosuro Hyobu-sama would never allow a Maho cult within Ryoko Owari.”

Investigations: Locations

Otomo Keisuke's Residence (the Murder Scene)

The room where the murder occurred has been sealed off until the investigation can begin, and an additional Thunder Guard stands watch at all times. Two eta also wait quietly outside the room, ready to search the body or remove it as required. Isawa Mokichi will explain that Otomo Keisuke wanted the body removed at once so that the room could be cleansed and purified, but Shiba Tachinaba-sama ordered it kept in place until a proper investigation could be made.

The room is a mess. Broken furniture (a low table, an armrest, and other such items) is tumbled about. The floor and walls are splattered and smeared with dried blood, mingled with bits of torn flesh and uprooted hair; the PCs will feel dirty and nauseated just standing here, and it will clearly require much prayer and cleansing to purify this place. A human form lies near the middle of the room, covered with a bloody cloth. The following clues are available from a general investigation of the room:

- If the PCs try to determine details of the assault, a **Perception+Investigation** (or **Hand-to-Hand**) roll at TN 15 can determine that Kakita Seka was violently beaten and flung around the room, a feat which would have required considerable strength (Strength 3 in game terms).
- **Perception+Investigation** (or **Hunting**) at TN 20 will discover several bloody handprints smeared on the floors and walls. If the PCs check, these match the general dimensions of Otomo Keisuke's hands.
- **Perception+Investigation** at TN 15, or recalling the report of the Thunder Guards, will locate the area where the assailant washed up after the murder. This is a tangled pile of bloody items which include a ripped blue kimono (the location where the mon would be is missing), a silk cloth, and a facial scrubber.
- **If the PCs try to interrogate the spirits in the room** (if they have no shugenja among them, Isawa Mokichi will cast the spell), they find that all the spirits in the area are freshly arrived and were not present at the time of the murder. This suggests that a skilled shugenja purged the previous spirits to silence their testimony. Also, due to this purging of spirits, spells like “The Ties That Bind” will not work on the items in this room.

Investigating Kakita Seka's body will require the assistance of the eta; any samurai who touches such things is made unclean, losing 3 points of Honor, and losing samurai status until they can visit a shrine and undergo a cleansing ritual. Enforce this rule strictly.

- The body has been brutally and savagely beaten, mostly on the face and upper torso, with many deep abrasions and tears. An **Intelligence+Medicine** (or **Hand-to-Hand**) roll at TN 15 can deduce that Seka was not only beaten but also bodily flung about the room, smashed into the furniture, and generally brutalized.
- If the PCs examine the injuries closely, a **Simple Perception** roll at TN 15 will notice that many of the blows were so fierce that they left the

impression of a ring worn on one finger. If the PCs later examine Otomo Keisuke's signet ring, they can match it to the injuries perfectly.

- A PC who specifically examines the body's hands sees that they are bruised from striking back at her assailant, and there is blood under the fingernails. The PC can also roll **Perception+Investigation** at TN 15 to notice a scrap of cloth clenched tightly in one death-spasmed hand. Pulled free by an eta, the cloth proves to be a piece of the blue kimono, embroidered with part of the Otomo mon. The rest of the mon cannot be found anywhere in the room (Keisuke's Scorpion buddies disposed of it).

The Dockside Alleyway

The PCs can find the alley where Otomo Keisuke was assaulted easily enough. Isawa Mokichi can lead them there, or they can find the location themselves by asking directions from the four Bayushi "witnesses."

The alley is a dark, dirty, trash-cluttered place, only a little sunlight sneaking in from outside. Searching it physically will reveal nothing of interest – it would seem the place is far too dirty and cluttered to leave evidence of a simple beating. If the PCs interrogate the spirits in the alley (Isawa Mokichi may suggest it if they don't think of it), they can learn the following:

- Earth and Air spirits are present in the alley in abundance, but there are no Fire spirits here. The Scorpion tried to carefully purge any Water spirits from the alley, since Water Spirits show visual images, but there are still a few lurking in a damp corner.
- The Earth and Air spirits can recount (in their own styles) an incident in which "a man" was dragged into the alley by "three other men." Then one of the men left. The other two began to strike the first man, but then four more men chased them away. They picked up the first man and carried him out.
- This incident was staged by the Scorpion to support their story. If the PCs try to get specific descriptions of the men, only the Air spirits can help: they can say that the victim was dressed in "colors of the sun," one of the other men wore "colors of the sky," and the four who came last had swords and armor.
- The PCs can question the Water spirits only if they search for them specifically, and they will need three Raises to invoke them successfully. The Water spirits show a visual image that more-or-less matches the incident described above, but any PC rolling **Intelligence+Investigation** (or **Acting**) at

TN 15 can tell that their actions and behavior seem faked. Any PC rolling **Perception+Investigation** at TN 25 can tell that the "victim" is not Otomo Keisuke.

- If the PCs ask the spirits about other visitors to the alley, the spirits will mention that "lots of men, and sometimes a woman" visit the alley from time to time. From the descriptions, these folk are commoners. (These are small gatherings of the Maho cult, and were the reason the Scorpion chose this alley to set their false incident.)
- The Air spirits mention that the woman "feels bad," although they cannot define how, exactly.
- If the PCs coax the Water spirits into showing one of these gatherings, they can see several surly peasant-types and a pretty young woman. (If they have met Hisae, they recognize her here.) They seem to be performing a short ritual or prayer of some sort.

Questioning the local commoners (merchants and their employees) about events in the alley can yield the following information:

- Fishermen from across the river (the Fishermen's District) sometimes congregate in the alley. They show up every couple of weeks; they were just there a few days ago. Perhaps they are yakuza meeting to gamble or plot crimes.
- Sometimes a pretty woman accompanies the fishermen. She doesn't seem to fit in with them, but they always treat her with respect. Strange.
- At least one of the locals the PCs speak with recognizes the woman as Hisae, a local who was sold to a geisha house on Teardrop Island after her family was killed in a fire several years ago. "I heard her father used to beat her frequently, and she tried to run away a couple of times. And then she wound up a geisha. Very tragic, samurai-sama, very tragic." If the PCs ask which geisha house, it is the House of Foreign Stories.
- No one witnessed or heard the supposed assault on Otomo Keisuke, but they did see several Scorpion bushi in the area yesterday evening (around the right time for the incident).
- If the PCs don't seem sufficiently interested in the reports of the fishermen, a Scorpion plant will come forward with the following information: ***"Loyal samurai, I must inform you of this, despite the risks. The truth is, those fishermen thugs are not welcome here. One of our neighbors asked them not to come around here anymore, and he fell down dead in the street a few days later. He just collapsed with blood flowing from his mouth***

and nose. It was horrible – his eyes were bulging like they wanted to escape his skull.” The story is true, although none of the “real” locals would have the nerve to mention it to strange samurai. Any PC rolling **Intelligence+Maho Lore** at TN 10 (or **Intelligence+Shadowlands Lore** at TN 15) recognizes the description as matching the effects of a known Maho spell, *No Pure Breaths*.

Investigations: The Licensed Quarter (Teardrop Island)

If the PCs have questioned the locals near the alleyway, they will know that a geisha named Hisae, from the House of Foreign Stories, was one of the suspicious characters who frequented that scene. They may also know that Otomo Keisuke frequented the House of Foreign Stories, depending on who they questioned. If they decide to visit the House of Foreign Stories, or any of the other establishments on the island, Isawa Mokichi respectfully suggests that he send a messenger ahead to speak with the madams of each house and arrange quiet interviews. “It wouldn’t do to disrupt the harmony of the Floating World,” he warns, delicately suggesting the Ryoko Owari’s rich and powerful won’t appreciate a few investigators tromping around the place. He also warns them that weapons are not permitted on the island: “There is a ronin named Kado (Gate) who collects all weapons from each vessel that docks on the island. Even Shosuro Jocho, the Governor’s son, leaves his weapons when he visits. A singular tradition of Ryoko Owari, honored samurai.”

Teardrop Island, like any Licensed District in Rokugan, only comes alive at night, when it bustles with geisha, servants, and the visiting samurai and merchants. During the day the island is quiet, with only a few laborers awake bringing over food and supplies from the city. The PCs will have a difficult time finding anyone to question during the day (although a Scorpion plant or two will eventually show up).

There is only one access to Teardrop Island: a dock on the north end of the island, guarded by members of the Thunder Guard. From there, any visiting samurai will have to pass through “Swords Polished,” the establishment run by the ronin Kado (Gate), and surrender their weapons.

Swords Polished

This establishment is the domain of Kado (Gate), a tall, dignified, powerful-looking man in early middle age. He wears only a hakama (pants) and has several

tattoos on his torso. Gate is a former Akodo, and still believes firmly in bushido despite his disappointment in many of its supposed practitioners. He looks everyone directly in the eyes as he asks firmly but politely for their weapons. “They will be polished and returned to you when you leave the island, noble samurai. The charge is but a single silver *bu*.” Kado will brook no refusals, nor does he allow the PCs to keep daggers or other minor weapons; anyone who refuses to give up their weapons is politely escorted out. Kado has the protection of the Thunder Guard (not to mention a dozen burly assistants); picking a fight with him is a bad idea. Once the PCs surrender their weapons, Kado allows them through his establishment and onto the rest of the island.

If the PCs ask Kado about Otomo Keisuke, he smiles and replies, “Otomo Keisuke-sama is so pleased with the service I provide that he brings his katana in almost every day.” If the PCs ask about Hisae, he remarks that some of the geisha do leave the island from time to time, but he doesn’t recall any particular one.

The Island Garden

Just past “Swords Polished” is a large garden which covers the northern quarter of the island. A main street runs through the garden to the geisha houses and taverns beyond, while smaller paths wind away between the chaotic tangle of sculpted trees, shrubs, rocks, and fountains. At night this place is always full of activity, abuzz with samurai, opium smokers, secret lovers, and the like. During the day, on the other hand, it is quiet and a little forlorn.

General Questioning

If the PCs ask questions of random commoners on the island (servants, laborers, random geisha, etc.), they can learn the following information. Some of this will come from Scorpion plants who come forward to steer the PCs toward the Maho cult.

- If the PCs ask about Otomo Keisuke, they can learn that he visits the island frequently. He usually goes to the House of Foreign Stories, but sometimes visits the House of the Morning Star instead.
- Keisuke has been seen in the Island Garden with Hisae, a geisha from the House of Foreign Stories. (This is a Scorpion plant to make sure the PCs question Hisae.)
- If the PCs ask for information about Hisae, they can learn only that she is a locally born geisha from a now-deceased merchant family. A laborer (Scorpion plant) might mention that he often sees her at the docks speaking with fishermen

delivering supplies to the island. “Maybe she had a lover among them before she was sold.”

The House of the Morning Star

One of the two most popular houses on Teardrop Island, the House of the Morning Star is a “traditional” geisha house of the finest sort, a place of total peace, perfection, and harmony. It is a place of complete predictability in the best possible sense, where a samurai can forget the trials and misfortunes of the day. The madam of the place, an aging former geisha named “XXX” (Jewel), will speak with the PCs in a private room. She will cooperate fully, although if the PCs failed to send a messenger ahead (as Isawa Mokichi suggested) she will be rather vexed by their interruption of her day and makes them wait some time before she sees them.

Jewel knows the following:

- Otomo Keisuke-sama visits here every couple of weeks or so. He is a fine samurai and an excellent client.
- He does not have any particular favorite here.
- If the PCs mention the House of Foreign Stories, Jewel sniffs loudly and suggests that Keisuke-sama only goes there to indulge “idle curiosity.”
- Jewel knows nothing of Hisae.

The House of Foreign Stories

An odd-looking two-story structure whose windows are built of pieces of colored glass, put together to make images of foreign women. The place is owned by a Unicorn merchant family, who have used their contacts in foreign lands to create an establishment of exotic appeal. Within, the establishment offers odd foreign foods and drinks, strange music, and geisha of many different foreign races (resembling Arabs, Mongolians, Mediterranean-type folk and even the occasional caucasoid European type). Only a small minority of the geisha here are of Rokugani extraction. Only in the scandalous city of Ryoko Owari could such an unconventional geisha house thrive.

The proprietor of the house is Magda, a tall redheaded gaijin woman who flirts and teases with her customers in an almost child-like fashion. She speaks Rokugani quite well, although traces of her strange foreign accent remain. If the PCs explain why they are here, Magda will pout and try to encourage them to stay and enjoy an evening in her house. “Surely your dreary work can wait until tomorrow, samurai-san?”

Magda knows the following:

- Otomo Keisuke-sama is an excellent client, as one would expect of Royalty. He has visited other

geisha houses, but clearly prefers the exotic magnificence of the House of Foreign Stories.

- If the PCs ask about Hisae, she dithers and explains that Hisae is with a client, but eventually brings her out for questioning. In the meantime she remarks that Hisae is a fine geisha who has never given cause for complaint.
- If the PCs ask about Hisae’s trips off the island, Magda comments that she is happy to allow her girls a few indulgences. Besides, Hisae has never done anything to arouse her ire or mistrust.

Hisae

This geisha is a beautiful young woman with the classic looks favored by most Rokugani. She is also a member of the local Maho cult, a fact the Scorpion Black Watch knows full well. Whenever the PCs interview her, she will initially play an innocent and ignorant geisha, but grows more nervous and frightened the closer the PCs get to her secrets.

- If the PCs ask about Otomo Keisuke, she says he is one of her favored clients. He greatly admired her skills as a singer and dancer. If the PCs mention opium, she reluctantly admits that he sometimes partook of it.
- If the PCs mention Keisuke’s supposed investigations in the Fisherman’s Quarter, Hisae seems shaken, but says she knew nothing of such matters (the truth).
- If the PCs ask about her meetings with fishermen, Hisae becomes visibly agitated, and begins asking if she has done anything wrong. She claims the fishermen are just childhood friends who she sees from time to time (a half-truth at best).
- If the PCs question her about Maho, she claims to know nothing (lies), but becomes steadily more frightened and anxious.

If the PCs accuse Hisae of Maho, place her under arrest, or otherwise create a crisis, she leaps up in terror, screaming, “No! Who has been spreading these horrible lies! I am a loyal servant of the Empire!” If the PCs take her from the house, she will struggle and scream feebly, trying to invoke the power of the cult by babbling, “Gidayu, protect your daughter!”

Hisae is a fanatic and will not willingly betray her brethren in the cult. The only way to get any information on the cult from Hisae is to have her interrogated at the Governor’s residence (Isawa Mokichi will mention this if the PCs don’t think of it). In that case, a few hours with the official torturer Pitiful (assisted by a couple of Scorpion shugenja with the spell Dominate the Mind) reveals the following:

- Hisae is a member of a small Bloodspeaker cult based in the Fisherman's Quarter. The cult leader is Kingo, the boss of the Moment's Edge Firemen.
- The cult was small and weak until a few months ago, when a powerful spirit of the Air called Gidayu came to them. Gidayu told them he had once been a mortal man, but the power of the Bloodspeakers made him immortal, a god, an Oracle. (Any PC who hears this can roll **Intelligence+Phoenix Clan Lore** at TN 20, or **Intelligence+Shugenja Lore** at TN 25, to recall hearing a rumor last winter of an Isawa Gidayu who was expelled from the Phoenix Clan amid rumors of Maho. PCs who have played *Legacy of the Dark One* will have more direct knowledge of such matters, of course.)
- The cultists sometimes meet in an alleyway in the Merchant District. More commonly, they meet in a teahouse in the Fisherman's Quarter called the Carp Cup.
- Hisae knows that a large cult gathering is planned for tonight (or tomorrow night if it is night when she is questioned). She can give directions to the warehouse (in the Fisherman's Quarter) where the meeting will be held.

Investigations: The Fishermen Quarter Docks

The docks area is always busy, even at night, with peasants, laborers, and sailors bustling about on some business or another. Occasionally a squad of Thunder Guards saunter through, making sure nothing gets out of hand, but for the most part official presence in this area is minimal. If the PCs decide to question random locals, they can learn the following information (improvise suitable NPCs if none are suggested).

- The Fisherman's Quarter is a busy place, and sometimes unsafe. People sometimes disappear, depending on who they have offended.
- The Fire Eaters and the Moment's Edge are the two Fireman gangs in this district. They can make life difficult for you if you don't pay their fees.
- The Fire Eaters and the Moment's Edge Firemen are rivals, and often get into brawls. Things have gotten worse since the Moment's Edge gang got a new boss, a man named Kingo.
- A frightened merchant remarks (with an anxious glance around) that the Firemen are all good hard working fellows who provide many useful services. He's lying, of course.
- "I don't like the new boss of the Moment's Edge Firemen. The others were bad enough, and the old

one got what he deserved in that alley, but this new fellow, Kingo, just gives me the creeps!"

- No one here remembers seeing or hearing about Otomo Keisuke. "Never heard of him, samurai-sama."
- If the PCs ask specifically about Hisae, they will find at least one person who remembers seeing her at the Carp Cup Teahouse.

Investigations: The Carp Cup Teahouse

The teahouse is a weathered building located on a dirty side street near the riverside docks. A sign hangs over the door, showing a koi (carp) jumping out of a teacup. The front room is crowded and odorous, full of rough, tired-looking commoners eating, drinking, and chatting with each other. The noise level drops almost to nothing as you enter, and after a moment a matronly woman cautiously approaches you. "Noble samurai, you grace the Carp Cup with your presence. May I offer you a place to rest your swords while you rest yourselves?" She opens a weapons closet, one which is empty and clearly seldom used. Behind her, several commoners quickly get up and crowd in with their brethren, leaving a table clear for you.

The teahouse offers the simplest and most basic of fare: fish, rice, cheap tea, and cheaper sake. A full meal is only two copper zeni. The peasants and fishermen who crowd the place will do their best to avoid attracting the attention of these unexpected noble visitors, speaking in low tones and averting their eyes. If the PCs start asking questions, they answer reluctantly and with minimal cooperation, often darting anxious glances over their shoulders.

There are, however, a trio of Shosuro Actors here as plants to make sure the PCs learn the "correct" information.

- "There've always been disappearances around this district. If you don't cooperate with the Firemen, if you don't pay your bills, that's what happens."
- "The Firemen provide a valuable service to Ryoko Owari." (Said with an ironic smirk, or perhaps a fearful glance over the shoulder.)
- "Maho? Never heard of any in Ryoko Owari before. The Thunder Guard would take care of it."
- "Idiot. I've seen things at night, things that shouldn't be. If it wasn't Maho, I don't know what is." (Scorpion plant.)
- "I don't know about Maho, but the new boss of the Moment's Edge Firemen, Kingo, is a dangerous

man. The disappearances have increased since he took over.” (Scorpion plant.)

- “Something weird’s been going on at that empty warehouse two streets over. I hear strange noises there at night, sometimes.” (Scorpion plant.)

The Cultists

There are two cultists in the Carp Cup. They will try to unobtrusively overhear any questions the PCs are asking. (PCs should roll **Perception+Hunting** or **Investigation**, TN 15, to notice the attentive behavior of these two commoners.) Once the PCs notice them, or they overhear the PCs asking about Kingo, the cultists take action. One of them will shout out, “Fire!” Both then leap up and bolt for the door. The room will immediately explode into panic and chaos as the customers try to flee into the street (fire is a terrible threat in Rokugani cities).

In order to pursue the cultists through the sudden near-riot, the PCs will need to roll either **Strength+Athletics** or **Agility+Hand-to-Hand**. If they make TN 20, they are within reach of the cultists this round and can make an attack roll to grab them. If they fail to roll that, but make at least TN 15, they can stay close to the cultists and can try again next round. If they fail to make TN 15, they are entangled in the crowd and cannot catch the cultists. After three rounds the cultists burst out of the tea house and run for it; PCs who are still within one round of them can make a **Contested Stamina+Athletics** roll to chase them down. If they fail to catch them within another three rounds, the cultists escape.

However, oddly enough, if the PCs completely lose the cultists, they round a corner to find one of them lying in the street, having apparently tripped and stunned himself. Any PC who rolls **Simple Perception** at TN 30 catches a glimpse of a shadowy figure vanishing down a side street. The Black Watch has taken action.

If either of the two cultists is captured, they can be easily beaten into confession. They know the following:

- They are Bloodspeakers. The Celestial Order is a joke, a conspiracy to keep the commoners in misery and slavery. When their master Iuchiban returns all samurai will pay the price for a thousand years of oppression.
- The leader of their cult is Kingo, the boss of the Moment’s Edge Firemen. They took over the Moment’s Edge to enhance their power in the city.
- A powerful spirit called Gidayu has come to them recently. Soon everyone will know and fear his name. (Again, the PCs can roll

Intelligence+Phoenix Lore or **Shugenja Lore** to recognize Gidayu.)

- A cult meeting is planned for tonight (or tomorrow night, if the PCs already questioned Hisae tonight). The cultists can give directions to the appropriate nearby warehouse.
- The cultists don’t know who Otomo Keisuke is, and don’t care. “When Iuchiban returns your little Emperor and his family won’t matter as much as insects in the fields.”

Climax: A Meeting with the Dark Oracle of Air

The PCs may well decide to seek help from the local authorities before assaulting a suspected Maho gathering. In fact, Isawa Mokichi may suggest this if the PCs don’t think of it for themselves. If they do request help, they will be assigned six Thunder Guards, led by a thick-set gunso (sergeant) named Bayushi Kodei, a gruff, harsh-voiced man in late middle-age.

The warehouse is guarded by eight of the Moment’s Edge Firemen, left here by Kingo to discourage any interruptions. (They believe the activities within the warehouse are criminal, rather than occult, in nature.) These commoner thugs lounge around the entrance to the warehouse, joking, shoving each other, and sharing a large bottle of shochu. If the PCs come alone, the Firemen will try to intimidate them into leaving (“this ain’t none of your business, samurai”) or, failing that, beat them up with tonfa. (They will not actually kill any PCs, since murdering a samurai tends to bring grave repercussions.) If the PCs are accompanied by the Thunder Guard, however, the Firemen will grumblingly back off and retreat down the street.

As you step into the dark warehouse, you can dimly make out the forms of many peasants kneeling in a semicircle. Candles cast soft yellow light on their fanatical glaring faces. They murmur a low chant, led by a tough-looking peasant man who brandishes a knife. The air behind him seems to shimmer and flex, and then a pale shape takes form. A soft awed moan comes from the crowd and then, suddenly, everything seems to stop.

The air feels as though it has solidified around you, stifling your movements, freezing the breath in your throats. Only the shimmering white shape moves, as it glides toward you. You can see now that it is in the form of a man in a kimono, but you are horrified to

realize that the man has no skin! Translucent raw flesh and tendons glisten before you as the thing inspects each of you, the way a farmer might inspect his chickens before selecting one for slaughter.

“All meaningless, insignificant. Only pain matters, pain and power. The Eighth Kami will devour your feeble Empire and end the joke you call the Celestial Order.” The thing gestures at the frozen cultists. “Kill them. It matters not. There are more – there will always be more.” It laughs horribly.

If any of the PCs got “Sworn Enemy, Dark Oracle of Air” from a previous adventure, Gidayu takes particular note of them. *“You. I remember you. It is time for you to learn that the Dark Oracle of Air cannot be trifled with without cost.” The thing lays its fingers on your forehead, leaving bloody marks. “The Oracle Marks you. Cursed.” The thing fades away with its laughter echoing in your ears.*

Once the Oracle departs (with or without inflicting a curse) the “time-stop” comes to an end and both the PCs and cultists are free to act again. The cultists will be confused and disoriented by the sudden departure of their master, and the PCs (and any accompanying Thunder Guards) will be able to take one free action before the combat begins.

There are a total of twenty-four (24) cultists, of both genders and ranging in age from 14 to 32, plus their leader Kingo. Some of them will probably try to run (especially if the PCs brought Thunder Guards along) but most will fight, shrieking with fury and despair. Kingo himself will hide behind the other cultists and try to cast No Pure Breaths on whoever seems to be the greatest threat. (He will use the blood of a woman cultist first, wounding himself only as a last resort.)

If the Thunder Guard are here, presume that they will each kill one cultist per round. One Guard will be overwhelmed and killed on round three of the combat (if it lasts that long). If Isawa Mokichi accompanies the PCs (he will do so unless the PCs specifically tell him to remain behind) he will hang back and cast Path to Inner Peace on any injured PCs.

The Black Watch has two shugenja (protected with Know the Shadows) watching this fight. If the PCs seem to be losing badly, they will assist with a few judicious Jade Strikes or Fury of Osano-Wo’s, blasting dangerous cultists from hiding. They will also eliminate any cultists who manage to escape the building. The PCs will notice only a faint human shape that vanishes back into the shadows.

Aftermath: Interrogations and Confessions

Once the battle is over, the PCs must decide whether to try and preserve the lives of any wounded/unconscious cultists for later interrogation. Isawa Mokichi will argue for this, but any surviving Thunder Guards will prefer simply killing the “Bloodspeaker vermin.”

There is a captured eta tied up and gagged in one corner of the warehouse. He was slated for sacrifice later in the evening. He will be pathetically grateful for rescue, but can offer no information other than the account of his own abduction earlier in the day.

If the PCs look around for the mysterious spellcasters, they find nothing.

If the captured cultists are interrogated, they will at first claim to know nothing about Otomo Keisuke. However, once the Governor hands them over to the care of Pitiful the Torturer, they quickly confess to everything, naming Kingo as the one who “duplicated” Otomo Keisuke and murdered Kakita Seka.

If the PCs attend these interrogations, they can plainly see that the cultists are forced into these confessions by torture, and that their interrogators “coach” them to say the correct things. If the PCs question any of the cultists themselves, they can learn that Hisae regarded Otomo Keisuke as just another noble customer, a fool like all the others. He had no special significance. The cultists knew of no plan to replace Keisuke.

If the PCs actually capture Kingo himself, he will likewise deny and involvement in, or knowledge of, Otomo Keisuke and the murder of Kakita Seka. He will change his tune, of course, once Pitiful the Torturer works on him for a while.

Conclusion: Case Closed!

Once the PCs have concluded their investigation and destroyed the Maho cult, Shiba Tachinaba will ask for their final report. This will be presented in a formal hearing attended by Tachinaba, the Crane ambassador Doji Toyoaki, and a Scorpion emissary from the Governor, Shosuro Bakin. The PCs are asked to explain their conclusions about the case, presenting any evidence and testimony they have accumulated along the way.

It is important to remember that in Rokugan, the only conclusive evidence is personal testimony and direct physical clues. Thus, even if the PCs suspect that the whole thing was a Scorpion set-up to protect Otomo Keisuke, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to prove it. The only evidence for the “frame-up” is the partial mon in Kakita Seka’s hand, the false nature of the “ambush” in the alleyway (which can only be discovered if the PCs manage to invoke the Water spirits there) and the initial testimony of any captured cultists (before they are tortured, that is).

If the PCs argue for Otomo Keisuke’s innocence, Shiba Tachinaba will ask a few general questions, while Shosuro Bakin listens indifferently. Doji Toyoaki, however, will want to know several things before he is satisfied:

- Who was the Maho-Tsukai that copied the Otomo, and where is he now? (The tortured cultists will name Kingo as the culprit, and he will also confess if tortured. If Kingo survived, he is in the dungeons of the Shosuro Palace, awaiting execution.)
- What spell was used to copy the Otomo? (PCs who roll Intelligence+Shadowlands Lore or Maho-Tsukai Lore at TN 20 can reply that no such spell has been recorded, but there is so little known about Maho that it is impossible to answer definitively. A PC rolling Intelligence+Shugenja Lore at TN 25 recalls hearing of a rare Air spell, Reflecting Mirror, that could copy someone’s appearance.)
- What was the cult’s plan? What part did copying the Otomo play in it? (It is up to the PCs how they answer this. The “obvious” answer is that the cult wanted to infiltrate Otsan Uchi, since Keisuke is a trusted Imperial Advisor.)
- Why did the Maho-Tsukai “blow his cover” by killing Kakita Seka? (Again, it is up to the PCs how they answer.)

The GM must adjudicate how the PCs answer Toyoaki’s questions. If their remarks seem persuasive, Toyoaki bows and proclaims the Crane Clan to be satisfied of Keisuke’s innocence. If Toyoaki is left unconvinced, he is much colder and more reserved, and departs the hearing with a frown on his face.

If the PCs argue for Otomo Keisuke’s guilt, all three nobles present will question them in detail about their evidence. Shosuro Bakin in particular will find every weakness and flaw in their argument. Key questions the PCs must answer:

- Why did the cultists (if any survived to be questioned) confess to the crime? (The PCs will have to be careful in how they couch their answers,

since torture is considered a legitimate investigative tool in Rokugan.)

- How do you account for the reports of the spirits in the alleyway? (If the PCs did not find the Water spirits, this will be unanswerable.)
- Why would Keisuke-sama have murdered a close friend? (Here, the PCs must speculate based on what little they have learned. If their arguments are weak they will be dismissed out of hand.)

It is unlikely that the PCs can present a sufficiently strong and eloquent case, but clever and skilled role-players may be able to manage it. The GM must adjudicate. If the PCs present a strong enough case, Shiba Tachinaba may request an Order of Appearance for Otomo Keisuke. More likely, however, is that he concludes the PCs are in grave error, and dismisses them with a distant, chilly thanks for their efforts.

Consequences

If the PCs actually manage to get Otomo Keisuke arrested, his facade of control breaks down. Screaming and weeping uncontrollably, he confesses to all his crimes. The Governor, Shosuro Hyobu, expresses public (and well-feigned) shock and outrage that members of her Clan tried to subvert justice and protect a criminal, and Bayushi Benkai commits seppuku to atone for his actions. Any non-Scorpion PCs who have allies or contacts in the Scorpion Clan lose them as a result of this.

If (as is more likely) the PCs were either noncommittal, or confirmed the story of blaming the Bloodspeakers, then all charges against Otomo Keisuke are dropped. A few months later he returns to the capital and resumes his duties as an Imperial Advisor. PCs with contacts in the courts (e.g. courtiers, diplomatic types, Cranes) learn that his report on the Opium War seems to have laid most of the blame on the same cult which “subsequently tried to murder me.” All PCs receive a fine tea set from Otomo Keisuke in gratitude for their efforts on his behalf.

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 Point Awards

Playing through the event:	2 XP
Good role-playing:	1 XP
PCs tracked down the cult and defeated it:	1 XP
PCs “proved” Otomo Keisuke’s “innocence”	1 XP
OR	
PCs managed to arrest Keisuke for his crimes	1 XP

Total Possible Experience: 5 XP

Honor Awards

PCs track down and defeat the Bloodspeaker cult:	1 point
Clan PC refuses to take the case:	-3 points

Glory Awards

PCs successfully “proved” Otomo Keisuke innocent:	1 point
Clan PC refused to take the case:	-2 points

Special Awards/Penalties

If the PCs “proved” Otomo Keisuke innocent, he will reward each of them with a gift of a fine quality tea set. This grants a bonus of +1 skill die when using the Tea Ceremony skill.

If, on the other hand, the PCs argued for Otomo Keisuke’s guilt but failed to prove it, they all gain the disadvantage **Sworn Enemy: Otomo Keisuke**.

The Dark Oracle’s Gifts

If the PCs encountered the Dark Oracle, any PC who had not previously encountered the Oracle is now considered to have the disadvantage: **Sworn Enemy, Dark Oracle of Air**.

Any PC who already had the Dark Oracle as a sworn enemy now gains the Curse of the Dark Oracle of Air. The curse is described fully on the accompanying cert.

Non Player Characters

Otomo Keisuke

Keisuke is a handsome, elegant man in his mid-thirties. He dresses in the cleanest and finest of silk kimono, and wears a sash and a gold ring signifying his status as an Imperial Advisor.

FIRE 4	AIR 4
Agility 4	Reflexes 4
Intelligence 5	Awareness 6
EARTH 2	WATER 4
Stamina 4	Strength 4
Willpower 2	Perception 5
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Otomo Seiyaku 4

Honor/Glory: 1.7/8.6

Skills: Athletics 3, Courtier 5, Calligraphy 2, Etiquette 5, Kenjutsu 4, Manipulation 5, Law 3, Lore (Imperial families) 2, Heraldry 3, History 3, Iaijutsu 4, Investigation 2, Meditation 2, Shintao 3, Sincerity 5, and Theology 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Benten's Blessing, Ear of the Emperor, Gentry, Social Position (5 points)/Chemical Dependency (Opium), Compulsion (Geisha), Dark Secret (murderer, indebted to the Scorpion), True Love (Kakita Seka).

Equipment: Exquisite kimono, fine daisho set

Kakita Ayami

A very pretty young girl just past her gempukku, with pale blue eyes, long white hair, and a voice like delicate birdsong. There is a haunted look in her eyes, however, and her expression is usually set and cold. Any PC looking closely can see that she has been weeping, a fact barely concealed by her thick white makeup.

FIRE 4	AIR 2
Agility 4	
Intelligence 4	
EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: Kakita Artisan (Origami) 1

Honor/Glory: 3.5/2.1

Skills: Courtier 2, Etiquette 2, Origami 3, Calligraphy 2, Lore (Myth and Legend) 2, Lore (Shugenja) 1, Meditation 1, Shintao 1, Sincerity 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: None

Equipment: Fine kimono, tanto

Shiba Tachinaba

A quiet, restrained man with a pleasant face, Tachinaba has served as the Emerald Magistrate for Ryoko Owari for only a few months (since the unsolved murder of the previous magistrate) and is already beginning to sense that he is in way over his head. This latest case is just more proof of that, and he is very anxious to get it solved and put behind him.

Age: 22

FIRE 3	AIR 3
Agility 3	
Intelligence 5	
EARTH 2	WATER 3
	Strength 3
	Perception 4
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 2

Honor/Glory: 3.3/4.2

Skills: Archery 2, Defense 2, Heraldry 2, Iaijutsu 2, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu 3, Law 3, Meditation 2, Naginata 1, Shintao 2, and Tea Ceremony 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Quick, Social Position (Emerald Magistrate)

Equipment: Fine kimono, light armor, daisho set

Isawa Mokichi

FIRE 2	AIR 3
	Reflex 3
	Awareness 4
EARTH 2	WATER 2
	Strength 2
	Perception 3
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja 1

Honor/Glory: 2.6/1.7

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Cipher 2, Investigation 3, Law 2, Lore (Maho-Tsukai) 1, Lore (Shugenja) 2, Medicine 2, Meditation 2, Shintao 2, and Theology 1.

Spells: *Commune, Sense, Summon, (Air) By The Light of Lord Moon, Tempest of Air, Wind's Distractions, (Water) The Path to Inner Peace, Calm Mind, (Fire) Katana of Fire.*

Advantages/Disadvantages: Absolute Direction/Soft-Hearted

Equipment: Kimono, scroll satchel, wakizashi, tanto

Generic Thunder Guards

FIRE 3	AIR 3

EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 20 (15 without Light Armor)

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 1

Honor/Glory: 1.5/1.0

Skills: Archery 2, Bard 1, Courtier 1, Defense 1, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Poison 1, Sincerity 3, Stealth 1, and Yarijutsu 1.

Advantages/Disadvantages: None

Equipment: Light armor, daisho set, yari

Kingo

The leader of the local Bloodspeaker cult, and boss of the Moment's Edge Firemen, is a scowling thug of a commoner with thick vertical scars on his face, the result of a childhood encounter with an angry samurai.

FIRE 2	AIR 2
	Reflex 3 Awareness 2
EARTH 4	WATER 2
VOID 1	

Shadowlands Taint: 3.4

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Athletics 3, Craft: Firefighting 2, Intimidation 3, Lore (Bloodspeakers) 2, Tantojutsu 2, Tonfajutsu 3, Torture 2.

Spells: *(Maho) No Pure Breaths*

Advantages/Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Maho-Tsukai), Social Disadvantage (commoner)

Equipment: Clothing, Tanto(1k2), Tonfa (1k2) (was the handle of a millstone)

Kingo's Spell: No Pure Breaths

Casting time 2 actions, caster rolls Earth+Taint, keeps Earth, and spends 5 wounds (his own or others'). Base

TN is target's Earth x 5. Raises for damage, casting time, and number of targets.

Air in target's lungs is corrupted and explodes out of the body. DR for spell is equal to caster's Taint Rank. Victim is at +10 to all physical TNs until magically healed.

Fireman Thugs

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

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0.3/0

Skills: Athletics 1, Craft: Firefighting 2, Intimidation 3, Tonfajutsu 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Social Disadvantage (commoner)

Equipment: Tonfa (1k2)

Generic Bloodspeaker Cultists

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

Shadowlands Taint: 0.5

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

Skills: Craft (Profession) 2, Knife 1, Lore (Bloodspeakers) 1, Stealth 1, Sincerity 1, Tonfajutsu 1.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeakers)

Equipment: Clothing, knife (1k1) or tonfa (1k2)

Handout #1

Most Honorable Samurai,

In answer to a favor owed to the Crane Clan, you have been selected to assist me in an investigation of most extraordinary circumstances. This represents an important service to not only myself but the entire Empire. Please attend me in my residence on the Hour of the Hantei today.

*Shiba Tachinaba
Emerald Magistrate
Ryoko Owari*



Handout #2

Ronin,

There is a job that requires your services. You will be assisting me in an important investigation of most extraordinary circumstances. The job will pay one Koku and could also earn you much glory, possibly even a master if you perform well. If you agree, meet me at my quarters promptly on the Hour of Hantei today.

*Shiba Tachinaba
Emerald Magistrate
Ryoko Owari*



Handout #3

Complainant: Otomo Keisuke, Imperial Advisor to Hantei XXXVIII

Location: Merchant Quarter, alley near the dockside

Witnesses: Otomo Keisuke, Imperial Advisor to Hantei XXXVIII

Bayushi Hoshiko, Bayushi City Guard

Bayushi Tabito, Bayushi City Guard

Bayushi Yosai, Bayushi City Guard

Bayushi Daisetsu, Bayushi City Guard

Incident Report:

On this the 20th day of the Horse in the hour of the Tiger, the four city guards listed herein were patrolling the Merchant District when they heard a commotion from an ally. Investigating, they found two ronin assaulting a nobleman who proved to be Otomo Keisuke, Imperial Advisor to the most radiant Shining Prince Hantei XXXVIII. They attacked and drove the ronin away, then brought Otomo Keisuke in for medical treatment.

Otomo Keisuke made the following statement: while conducting investigations into the local disturbances of Ryoko Owari's export capability (the so-called "Opium War") he was approached by a stranger. Before the stranger could identify himself, two ronin seized Otomo Keisuke and pulled him into a nearby alley. While in the alley, the stranger spoke mystic words and then cut Otomo Keisuke with a knife. The stranger then transformed into an exact copy of Otomo Keisuke, and said, "Thank you for your life," before departing and leaving his ronin accomplices to kill Otomo Keisuke.

Transcribed by Soshi Makoto, official Recorder for the Emerald Magistrate, Ryoko Owari.

*Received by Shiba Tachinaba
Emerald Magistrate, Ryoko Owari*



Handout #4

Complainant: Kakita Ayami, Crane Clan
Location: Residence of Otomo Keisuke, Noble Quarter
Witnesses: Kakita Ayami, Crane Clan
Shosuro Akio, Thunder Guard
Bayushi Dayu, Thunder Guard
Bayushi Kaiti, Thunder Guard
Soshi Togaï, Thunder Guard

Incident Report:

Kakita Ayami reported that on this the 20th day of the Horse in the hour of the Tiger, she went to the residence of Otomo Keisuke, Imperial Advisor to our most radiant Shining Prince Hantei XXXVIII, in search of her older sister Kakita Seka. Kakita Seka had gone to visit Otomo Keisuke earlier and Kakita Ayami was apparently concerned that her sister would miss an evening engagement. When she arrived at Otomo Keisuke's quarters, she heard a loud noise from within and went to investigate. She reported finding a blood-soaked man resembling Otomo Keisuke standing over the body of her sister Kakita Seka. She fled immediately and came to the Governor's residence in search of help.

Four Thunder Guards accompanied Kakita Ayami back to the residence of Otomo Keisuke. They found the scene as described, but with no murderer at the location. The body was identified as Kakita Seka and was left until eta could arrive. They reported the incident to their superiors and then to this office.

Transcribed by Soshi Makoto, official Recorder of the Emerald Magistrate, Ryoko Owari

Recognized by Shiba Tachinaba
Emerald Magistrate, Ryoko Owari



Handout #5

Writ of Investigation

The bearers of this writ are granted access and authority in all areas of Ryoko Owari for the express purpose of investigating the murder of Kakita Seka and the reported Maho assault on Otomo Keisuke.

If need is shown for any equipment or personnel to aid in the investigation or apprehension of guilty persons, said aid shall be supplied by the local authorities, in keeping with the power of the Emerald Magistrate, Ryoko Owari.

*Shiba Tachinaba
Emerald Magistrate
Ryoko Owari*



Handout #6

Cousin,

The Clan has directed that you shall assist Otomo Keisuke with all your ability and hunt down the Maho Cult which assaulted him. We know that he is an innocent victim of these vile criminals and should be protected. No other outcome is acceptable.

The Black Watch will be observing your progress and will supply help if it is needed to make sure none of these cultists escape justice.

Bayushi Benkai