

Hida Sukune, Crab general and youngest son of Hida Kisada

FIRE 3 Intelligence 4	AIR 2 Awareness 3
EARTH 2 Willpower 3	WATER 3 Perception 4
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 10 (22 in Heavy Armor)

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 2

Honor/Glory: 2.0/6.0

Skills: Battle 4, Defense 3, Etiquette 1, Hand-to-Hand (Kobo) 3, Heraldry 2, Katana 3, Kenjutsu 3, Kyujutsu 4, Lore (Shadowlands) 4, Tanto 3, Tessen 2, Tetsubo 3

Advantages/Disadvantages: Great Destiny, Social Position (daimyo's son)/Low Pain Threshold, Weakness (Stamina).

Appearance: Hida Sukune is a slim young man with a pale face and sunken eyes. Although he is a capable warrior, he is of only average height and does share the heavy, muscular look of most Hida bushi. He usually has a slightly worried or pensive expression on his face. He prefers to dress in a special suit of heavy armor, whose elaborate decorations and crustacean-like design makes him appear far larger and more fearsome than he is.

Personality/Background: Sukune is the youngest child of Hida Kisada, the Crab Clan Champion. His mother died birthing him, and he was a very sickly child who frequently lingered on the brink of death. As he grew up, Sukune struggled to become physically fit and strong, to become the mighty bushi his father expected. The example of his older brother, Hida Yakamo, was always before him – Yakamo was everything he was not, strong, powerful, unstoppable. Although Sukune has made himself a capable warrior and a brilliant general, he always feels himself to be in Yakamo's shadow, and struggles to make himself worthy of his brother and father.

Goals: You are confused about this Winter Court. Your father seems to believe that the time has come for the Crab to strike for the Emerald Throne. Although you agree that the Hantei line has become corrupt and must be replaced, you wonder how your father can imagine that the Crab have the strength to try for the Throne. Almost all of the Crab army is needed on the Wall, where the assaults have been worse than ever. Your father knows this. What could make him believe that the Crab can afford to detach the strength which would be needed to overcome the other Clans and take Otosan Uchi?

Your suspicions have come to focus on Kuni Yori, the daimyo of the Kuni family and your father's most trusted advisor. Lately, Yori has been spending many days closeted with your father, especially since that battle in the Weeping Tree Sector last summer. But you also know that Yori has been going into the Shadowlands more than ever before. Even during this Winter Court, he has been making occasional trips into the Dark Land. You have begun to suspect that there is a connection between Yori's behavior and your father's sudden rush of ambition. What is Yori up to?

You must recruit a group of samurai to follow Yori into the Shadowlands and learn what he is planning. You cannot use Crab for this – they might simply report your suspicions to Yori. No, you will have to rely on other samurai – men and women of circumspection and skill – to carry out this task. Perhaps even Scorpions.

[In game terms, you must recruit at least 4, but no more than 6, samurai from other Clans (or ronin). You should try to choose samurai with at least some experience (rank 2 or higher), although you can take Rank 1 samurai if no-one else is available. Once you have accumulated at least 4 samurai for your mission, notify the chief judge.]

Into the Darkness

This is a mini-adventure which will run once (only) over the course of the evening, assuming Hida Sukune manages to accumulate at least four PCs willing to perform the task

Background

Hida Sukune is deeply suspicious of his father Hida Kisada's sudden surge of ambition toward the Emerald Throne. He is even more suspicious of Kuni Yori, daimyo of the Kuni family, who has been spending many hours in secret consultation with Kisada. Sukune knows that Yori has also been taking repeated trips into the Shadowlands, and he has begun to suspect that there may be a sinister connection between these trips and Kisada's new plans for war.

Sukune is right. Kuni Yori is negotiating with the forces of the Shadowlands, enlisting them to support the Crab plans to conquer the rest of the Empire. In the process, he is himself sinking into corruption and evil, although his own arrogance does not allow him to recognize that he has been seduced by Fu Leng.

The PC's Mission

The PCs are enlisted by Hida Sukune to follow Kuni Yori into the Shadowlands and find out what he is up to. Sukune will select PCs who are not Crabs, and who have the skills and practicality to survive a covert mission into the Shadowlands – Scorpions will be his first choice.

The mission begins when Sukune informs the PCs that Kuni Yori has just headed for the basement tunnels below Shiro no Kaiu – the tunnels which lead into the Shadowlands. Sukune urges the PCs to follow quickly, and gives them a pass to present to the guards who control access to the tunnels. He also gives each of them a finger of jade to protect them from the Taint. Finally, he warns them not to tell the guards the true reason for their trip into the Shadowlands. “Make up some tale that seems likely – I am sure you can conceive of one.”

Through the Tunnels

The guards will look the pass over, then shrug. “No skin off our noses if you want to die,” they mutter, and step aside, leaving the PCs free to descend into the dark tunnels beneath the castle.

Once down the stairs into the tunnels, the PCs can faintly hear Kuni Yori's footsteps ahead of them, echoing off the stone walls. In order to follow Yori safely through the tunnels, the PCs must roll **Hunting/Perception** at TN 20 or **Simple Perception** at TN 25.

If none of the PCs can make the roll, they will need to find their way through the tunnels on their own. This will require an **Investigation/Intelligence** roll at TN 20, **Hunting/Intelligence** at TN 25, **Nazado/Awareness** at TN 15, **Traps/Intelligence** at TN 15, or **Simple Intelligence** at TN 30. Failure means the PCs have stumbled into one of the notorious traps beneath the Kaiu Wall. Run through the traps below in sequence – after each trap, the PCs can roll again to see if they can find their way through the tunnels.

1. Iron portcullis clangs down from the ceiling, trapping the PCs on opposite sides. One random PC must roll **Simple Reflexes** at TN 15 to leap out of the way – otherwise that PC takes 3k2 damage and is pinned beneath the portcullis. No more than four PCs (two on each side) can attempt to lift the portcullis, and it requires a **Simple Strength** roll at TN 30 to lift it high enough for people to get under. (Alternatively, PCs can look for a counterweight lever to reset the trap – this will require an **Investigation/Perception** roll at TN 25, **Engineering/Perception** at TN 20, or **Traps/Perception** at TN 15.
2. Spiked pit opens underneath the lead PC. The victim must roll **Defense/Reflexes** at TN 15 or **Simple Reflexes** at TN 25 to avoid falling in. The fall onto sharp spikes inflicts 4k2 damage.
3. Flaming pitch sprays out of a hole in the ceiling. The first three PCs must roll Simple Reflexes at TN 25 (or Defense/Reflexes at TN 20) to dive out of the way, suffering only superficial burns (1k1 damage). PCs who fail to dodge suffer 4k2 damage on the first round and 3k1 damage for two additional rounds, unless the flames are smothered or doused.
4. Huge spinning razor-sharp blades slice out of both walls, intersecting on one random PC (or a rank of PCs, if multiple PCs are walking side-by-side). The razor sharp blades inflict 4k3 damage on unarmored PCs, 3k2 on PCs in light armor, and 2k1 on PCs in heavy armor.
5. A massive stone slab drops from the ceiling. The second and third PCs in line are under it. They must roll **Simple Reflexes** at TN 20 or be brutally crushed, taking 6k4 points of damage. Survivors will have at least one (randomly chosen) limb trapped beneath the

stone, and cannot move unless the limb is amputated (or the PCs can find some way of moving a half-ton rock).

6. A huge pit opens and drops the entire party down a fifty foot shaft that ends in jagged rocks. PCs can leap off the opening pit by rolling **Simple Agility** at TN 30 or **Athletics/Agility** at TN 20. Failure means a fall for 8k8 damage (and two broken legs, if the PC somehow survives the fall).

Option: Ratling Salvation

If the PCs seem to be facing certain death through no fault of their own (good choices but simple bad die-rolls), the GM can choose to have help show up after the PCs have triggered one or two traps. This help will be in the form of a ratling, Zrr'tik, from the Tattered Ear Tribe. The ratling will offer to guide the PCs through the tunnels in exchange for a gift – either food, a weapon, or something “shine-shiny” (jewelry, gems, polished stones – a coin will not suffice).

The ratling will lead the PCs safely out through the tunnels and then departs on his own business. He will not stay to help them follow Kuni Yori.

Into the Shadowlands

Assuming the PCs manage to not die in the tunnels, they emerge from the tunnels inside the Shadowlands. They each have a finger of jade to protect them from being Tainted, but do not have any other special equipment except what they may own themselves. A bleak, forbidding landscape of tangled, stunted trees empty

If the PCs managed to follow Kuni Yori's footsteps, they can catch a glimpse of him vanishing into the tangled, thorny forest. If the PCs got lost in the tunnels and had to find their way out, they will need to roll

Hunting/Perception at TN 15 or

Investigation/Perception at TN 20 to follow Yori's tracks. Magic can also be used to follow Yori, but remember the effects of the Shadowlands (all spellcasting is at +10 TN penalty).

Effects of the Shadowlands

Once the PCs depart the Wall, they will be in Fu Leng's deadly realm. The following effects will apply to the PCs while they are in the Shadowlands:

- Wood, cloth, and other flammables will not burn properly, emitting only a weak, sputtering blue flame which offers little or no heat (but does attract nocturnal predators). Dead bodies also are reluctant

to burn naturally, should the PCs need to perform an emergency cremation (the Crab usually use spells).

- Wounds will not heal naturally. Curative magics (such as *Path to Inner Peace*) and nemuranai (such as Crane fetishes or Dragon Clan potions) will work normally, however. Also, any time a PC is injured in the Shadowlands, they must roll **Simple Earth** at TN 10 or gain a point of Taint.
- All spells cast in the Shadowlands (except *maho* spells) are at +10 TN due to the unfriendly nature of the local spirits.
- Void points and spell rings do not recover naturally (e.g. through rest). The Meditation skill will still work for recovering both Void and spell rings. It is impossible to perform a Tea Ceremony in the Shadowlands.
- If the PCs should lose their jade fingers, they will be vulnerable to the Taint. They must roll **Simple Earth** for each day and each night they spend unprotected in the Shadowlands. The TN is 5 for the first roll, 10 for the second, 15 for the third, and so forth. If a roll is failed, the PC gains a point of Taint immediately, and one additional point each day and each night thereafter until they leave the Shadowlands.
- Food and water brought into the Shadowlands will quickly become Tainted and diseased unless it is stored in proximity to jade. Likewise, any food or water the PCs scrounge or hunt while in the Shadowlands (except food offered by ratlings) carries the Taint. Eating Tainted food or drinking Tainted water requires a **Simple Earth** roll at TN 15 to avoid getting 1-5 (1 die halved) points of Taint.

Through the Bitter Wood

The forest is a strange, unnatural place. The trees are twisted and warped, their branches reaching toward the sky like tormented clutching fingers. Thorny vines twist around and through them, and the dead brown leaves which cling to their branches have sharp, jagged edges. The ground beneath them is a mixture of iron-hard soil and bare rocks. Overhead, dark clouds fill the sky. A few flakes of snow drift through the cold, harsh air, but none make it to the ground.

As the PCs make their way through the forest, if they are following closely behind Yori, they will need to be careful not to be spotted. This will require three successive **Simple Perception** rolls at TN 10 to watch Yori and make sure to duck out of sight when he looks

back. Each PC who is trying to keep Yori in sight will have to make these rolls.

If the PCs fell behind in the tunnels, or if they decide to drop back and avoid risking being seen by Yori, they will have to make one more **Hunting/Perception** (TN 15) or **Investigation/Perception** (TN 20) roll to track Yori all the way through the forest.

Spotted?

If Yori spots the PCs following him, he does not appear to take any action. However, a couple of minutes later, the ground will suddenly erupt under the PCs as they are attacked by a monstrous Oni, a ghastly monstrosity which seems to be little more than a massive toothy maw with thickly muscled arms and legs – Oni no Kamu. (See the stats at the end of the adventure.)

If the PCs survive the battle with the Oni no Kamu, and wish to continue their pursuit of Yori, they will have to make the **Hunting/Perception** (TN 15) or **Investigation/Perception** (TN 20) roll again to pick up his trail.

A Dangerous Vine

While the PCs are following Yori through the forest (and assuming they are not spotted by him), have them all roll Simple Void. The PC with the lowest roll (GM's choice in case of ties) will suddenly find one of the spiky vines dropping down from a tree-branch, whip-like, attempting to lash the unfortunate PC across the face.

The PC can dodge the vine by rolling **Defense/Reflexes** at TN 15 or **Simple Reflexes** at TN 20. Failure means the PC suffers an agonizing facial injury (3k1 damage). The PC must roll **Simple Willpower** at TN 15 to keep from screaming out in pain.

Kuni Yori will hear the scream, and the Oni no Kamu will attack as above.

Past the Forest

The PCs follow Kuni Yori through the bleak, twisted forest for almost four hours, and evening is approaching before they come to a different landscape, a place of rugged boulders and jagged hills, of narrow, torturous valleys and tall, threatening spires of stone. Yori wends his way down into a deep narrow gulley, between tall irregular walls of rock. Below, a faint flicker of sickly greenish-yellow light can be seen.

If the PCs fell behind Yori, they will have to either guess that Yori has gone toward the sickly light, or roll another **Hunting/Perception** (TN 15) or **Investigation/Perception** (TN 20) check.

To follow Yori closely enough to learn what he is doing, the PCs have two options:

- Follow him into the gulley. To do this without being noticed, the PCs will need to either roll **Stealth/Agility** at TN 15, or **Simple Agility** at TN 20. Each PC who goes into the gulley will need to roll separately. Failure means the PCs are overheard (see “Caught in the Act” below).
- Creep their way along the rocks above, until they can peek over the edge at the flickering light below. This will require an **Athletics/Agility** roll at TN 15, **Mountaineering/Agility** at TN 10, or **Simple Agility** at TN 20. Failure means the PCs dislodge some rocks and are noticed by those below (again, see “Caught in the Act”).

An Unholy Meeting

In the gulley, three figures stand around an unnatural fire, yellow-green flames shooting up from a pile of desiccated human corpses. Yori walks up fearlessly and bows politely to the waiting trio.

One of the figures is a monstrous Oni, a creature with a serpentine lower body, four arms, and a torso and head vaguely resembling a human female – the Oni no Kyoso. Her eyes glow with a foul yellow light, a black fire trickles between her clawed fingers.

The second figure is outwardly human, but skeletally thin, with empty eye-sockets that glow with an eerie blue light. He wears armor in the purple colors of the Unicorn, with a blank white family mon. A monstrous horse-like creature waits behind him. This is one of the fearsome Dark Moto.

The third figure is a beautiful woman with pale, perfect skin and long lustrous black hair, dressed in a shimmering translucent sky-blue garment that barely clings to her shapely body. The only obviously unnatural thing about her is the open wound in her throat, which pulses with a ghastly golden light.

PCs who see these creatures can roll **Lore: Shadowlands/Intelligence** to identify them. TN 15 identifies the Kyoso no Oni, TN 20 identifies the Dark Moto. TN 20 will also bring the guess that the Oni is the true Kyoso no Oni, not one of her spawn. TN 25 will hazard the guess that the woman is one of the legendary akutenshi (evil angels), and TN 30 tentatively identifies her as the legendary seductress Doji Nashiko.

A Dark Alliance

If the PCs are able to listen to the conversation, it will proceed roughly as follows:

Kuni Yori: "Greetings. I am sorry to have kept you waiting – the demands of the court are most tiresome."

Doji Nashiko: (laughs, flutters her hand) "It is no matter, Kuni-sama. I am well familiar with the foolishness of courtiers."

Yori: (regards her measuringly for a moment) "Yes, you would be. So. What say you? Have you considered our offer?"

The Dark Moto shifts slightly, lifting his blade to rest it on his shoulder. His voice is like rocks dragged through mud. "Guard your tongue... Crab. You are in our land now."

Yori: (sighs, gathers jade magic between his hands) "Must we go through this again?"

A moment passes, and then the Moto lowers his sword. "No."

The Kyoso no Oni, which has watched silently up to know, slides forward. "I ssspeak for the oni, Crab. We agree to your... offer. We will... sssuply as many lesser creaturesss as you require."

**** (PCs who flub their rolls are overheard at this point)

Kuni Yori smiles. "Excellent. I trust there will be no difficulty in making these creatures serve under human masters?"

The oni smiles in turn, a terrible expression. "No... trouble. They ssserve... us. We will tell them... obey you... or wishhh for death."

Yori looks pleased, but still holds himself ready for further action. He looks at the other two. "And you? Do you stand with your... brethren... or otherwise?"

Nashiko simply smiles and says nothing. The Dark Moto hisses softly, and then growls: "The Dark Moto... also ride with you. For the price."

Yori nods. Any PCs watching can roll Simple Awareness at TN 20 to be able to tell that he is made uneasy by this mention of a "price," but conceals it as best he can. "Yes, of course. We shall not be ready to strike before spring, however. I trust you can wait until then?"

Nashiko finally speaks again, her voice soft and melodious. "Come now, Yori-sama. Surely you don't expect us to make this alliance with only promises? You have offered us the Fifth Tower. When it is delivered, the alliance will be sealed, and we will offer you all the help you can desire. But not until then."

Yori is silent for a time. Then he nods. "Very well. The tower is yours. The Crab pay their debts. See that you do the same." He bows shortly, turns, and strides quickly back up the valley, heading back toward Shiro no Kaiu. The monsters watch him depart, Nashiko waving her hand like a court lady and calling "Have a good trip!"

Caught in the Act

If the PCs flub one of their rolls and are detected by the Shadowlands creatures, it will happen after they have overheard some of the conversation (at the point marked with a row of asterisks). At that point, Doji Nashiko's head will snap around, her eyes blazing as she looks directly at the PCs. "I believe we have visitors," she smiles, gesturing with one delicate hand.

If the PCs are in the valley, the Dark Moto will immediately leap astride his onikage steed and charge. The PCs will have two rounds to launch spells and/or missile weapons; the Moto engages them on the third round. If the PCs start running immediately, it will take the Moto two additional rounds to reach them.

If the PCs survive the battle with the Moto, the other two evil creatures are still watching, but Kuni Yori has vanished in the interim. If the PCs hang around, the Kyoso no Oni will begin hurling black fire at them. If they retreat immediately, the villains will not pursue. The PCs will be free to make their way back to Shiro no Kaiu.

If the PCs are watching from overhead, the Kyoso no Oni will immediately begin hurling black fire at them, continuing to do so until the PCs retreat from the edge of the cliff. Meanwhile the Dark Moto will mount up and gallop up out of the valley. The Moto will be out of sight for three rounds, and then reappear advancing across the rocks toward the PCs for two more rounds. If the PCs flee IMMEDIATELY (while the Moto is still out of sight), they will be able to try and hide from the Moto (this will require beating the Moto's Hunting/Perception with either their Stealth/Intelligence or Hunting/Intelligence). Otherwise they will have to fight him.

Again, if the PCs manage to defeat the Moto, Kuni Yori has skulked off in the meantime. The battered PCs will be able to return to Shiro no Kaiu and make their report to Hida Sukune.

PCs who are foolish enough to fight Doji Nashiko and the Kyoso no Oni will surely meet the brutal death which they deserve.

Kuni Yori Returns

If the PCs are not overheard, they can follow Yori back to Shiro no Kaiu. They can also follow his tracks if they got slowed down fighting for their lives.

If they try to attack or otherwise intercept Kuni Yori during the return trip, he will immediately use the spell Embrace of Kenro-Jijin to vanish into the ground, making the rest of his return journey underground. It will be impossible for the PCs to catch him, although Communing with the Earth spirits can tell them that he has returned to Shiro no Kaiu.

Aftermath

Once the PCs make it back, the mini-mission will be over. (It will be up to the players what they do once they return to the Interactive, but the GM should remind them that Hida Sukune wanted them to be discreet.)

All surviving PCs get 1 XP for making it through the mini-mission. If they killed the Moto, the survivors gain 1 additional XP.

NPCs and Monsters

Oni no Kamu

FIRE 5	AIR 5
EARTH 4	WATER 4

TN to be Hit: 25

Attacks: 5k5

Damage: 7k4

Carapace Armor: 4

Wounds: 30: +5; 50: +10; 70: +15; 90: Dead.

Special Abilities: Fear 3, Partial Invulnerability (half damage from normal weapons). If the Oni beats the TN to hit an opponent by more than double, it has grabbed the victim. It will spend the next round lowering the victim into its mouth, automatically chomping the poor samurai for 9k4 damage (unless the victim escapes with a Hand-to-Hand or Wrestling roll at TN 30).

Dark Moto

FIRE 5	AIR 4
EARTH 5	WATER 4

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 6.4

TN to be Hit: 25 (20 without light armor)

School/Rank: Maho-Bujin 1

Rank One: *Carve the Crimson Road*. The Moto gains a number of additional attacks per round equal to the highest Honor rank among his opponents.

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 4, Defense 5, Jiu-jutsu 3, Iaijutsu 4, Kenjutsu 7, Horse Archery 5, Horsemanship 6, Hunting 4, Lore (Shadowlands) 4, Stealth 4, Yarijutsu 6.

Wounds: 90: Dead.

Special Abilities: Fear 3, Undead Strength (no wound penalties), Invulnerable.

Equipment: Light Armor, Katana (6k2), bow with 20 arrows (4k2), Yari (mounted 5k3, dismounted 5k2).

Onikage ("demon horse")

FIRE 2	AIR 3
EARTH 4	WATER 4 Strength 6

TN to be Hit: 15

Attacks: 5k3

Damage: 6k2 (claw-hoof) or 6k3 (bite)

Carapace Armor: 5

Wounds: 16: +5; 24: +10; 36: +15; 72: Down; 84: Dead

Kyoso no Oni

FIRE 5	AIR 5
Intelligence 6	Awareness 6
EARTH 5	WATER 5
Willpower 6	Perception 6

TN to be Hit: 25

Attacks: 7k5 (four attacks)

Damage: Hand-to-hand 3k2, black fire 4k3 (and see below)

Carapace Armor: 13

Wounds: 24: +5; 48: +15; 90: Dead.

Spells: Kyoso no Oni casts spells as a Rank 4 shugenja, with access to all four elements.

Special Abilities: Fear 4, Invulnerability, Multiple Attacks (4 per round), Dark Fire. Kyoso no Oni can hurl balls of dark fire from her hands. This fire burns the soul, not the body – it ignores armor. Anyone hit by the fire must roll Simple Void at TN 15 or lose a Void point. Those who lose their last Void point to this effect are knocked unconscious.