

# Bloodstained Forest

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**A Mid-Rank Adventure for  
Heroes of Rokugan: Champions of the Ivory Throne**

Month of Shinjo, 1341 (Late Autumn)

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Travel, Investigation, Combat  
Part One of *Shadow on the Shinomen*

There are many predators within the haunted Shinomen Mori. It is a samurai's duty to defend the Empire against the lawless brigands that lurk amongst the forest's shadows. But is courage alone enough to prevail?

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This module is written for the Legends of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game Fourth Edition, originally published by Alderac Entertainment Group.

Please refer to the *Heroes of Rokugan 4: Champions of the Ivory Throne Campaign Primer* for information on how to run official campaign modules. In addition to the basic setting information and house rules for this campaign, it details the various administrative necessities of the living campaign. GM reporting is crucial to players' ability to engage with the setting and to increase their characters' influence.

## Adventure Background and Summary

The Forest Killers are a band of ruthless bandit that have plagued the Empire for years. In fact, there have been many groups to use the name, going back centuries, but the current incarnation of the gang has begun to expand their depredations at an unprecedented rate. Under the command of a brutal killer known as "Gekido", they have recruited a small army's worth of disaffected ronin and peasants and struck out from numerous hideouts scattered around the Shinomen Mori.

Because the Forest Killers are such a large group, they tend to organize in dispersed, individual bands. One such band has become active enough in its attacks on the rich caravans of the Unicorn that the Emerald Magistrates have taken notice. This particular band, after establishing a stronghold in the northeastern portion of the haunted forest at the start of the year, has taken in several promising recruits and made nearly a dozen major raids. Under the leadership of a few of Gekido's favored lieutenants, they have rapidly become a major force in the area.

As a result, Seppun Yataro, an ambitious young Emerald Magistrate, has begun looking into the group. While his initial investigations have borne fruit, they also warned the gang about his intentions. Though he had already used some of his political influence to gather a group of samurai to assist him, he and his usual yoriki were ambushed by the Forest Killer group and left for dead.

This group of samurai (the PCs) will be called upon to help Yataro complete his mission. As an Emerald Magistrate, he will attempt to call upon the local Hare lord for conscripted troops, but the local forces are seriously depleted. This will require the PCs to take action to recruit support themselves, and then to

pursue the bandits responsible for attacking Yataro (as well as several merchants through the year).

### Geographical Note:

Cartography in Rokugan is often a difficult thing to keep straight from year to year (or from sourcebook to sourcebook). While the *Atlas of Rokugan* is a fine book with many beautiful maps, it is worth noting that it generally depicts a Rokugan somewhat different from that of this campaign. The Hare lands were established in HoR3 as being across the River of Gold from Ryoko Owari Toshi, rather than the more southerly location given in the Atlas, and that location further north is what is used in this module.

## Upkeep

The events of the modules are certainly of primary importance in the lives of the characters, but many of them will have been working on a variety of tasks in the times between modules. At the beginning of the module, several things will need to take place (though some are obviously dependent on the actual needs of the PCs at the table).

### Character Notes

The GM should take a few minutes to examine the players' character sheets in order to have an idea of the nature of the PCs at the table. It should be noted if any of the PCs have/are:

- Status on the Magistrate track (association with an Imperial organization of magistrates is most relevant, though any law enforcement-based PCs should gain additional attention from Yataro)
- Sworn Enemy: Gekido

### News from the Empire

While the GM is looking over sheets, it's a good time to distribute the first player handout of most modules. The News of the Empire is an overview of the recent events of the Empire in a fashion that shares the ongoing story with the playerbase without requiring a Skill Roll or interfering with the actual plot of the module. Any plot-relevant Rumors will belong in the appropriate section of the module to be learned during play.

### Inactivity

Time passes, and though the PCs' deeds will earn them a reputation, the Empire is a large place and lasting fame is a long-term goal not easy to achieve. The time between modules has cost each PC **two points of Glory**. This cannot reduce a PC's Glory Rank to less

than their Insight Rank, and the Fame Advantage increases their Insight Rank by one for these purposes.

### Taint Progression

If a PC possesses the Shadowlands Taint, they will need to roll at the beginning of the module to see how much it has grown over the intervening time since the last module. The TN of this raw **Earth Roll** is **15**. Failure on this roll causes the PC to gain a point of the Shadowlands Taint. If a character is growing close to being Lost (Shadowlands Taint Rank 4.5+) , it is recommended that the player have another PC ready to replace them.

### Crafting

The Crafting rules are detailed in the Campaign Primer, based largely on the Crafting rules in the core book (page 258). Unless explicitly indicated otherwise, a PC may only make one Crafting Roll per module, and any Void Points or other character resources (spell slots, Luck, etc) spent on the roll do not refresh for the duration of the module. Any successful roll is noted on the provided sheet with the description.

### Ronin Survival

Life is difficult for ronin in the Empire at the best of times. PC ronin are no exception to this. At the start of the module, a PC ronin must roll **Hunting (Survival) / Stamina** at a TN of 20. Failure on this roll gives the ronin the Permanent Wound Disadvantage for the duration of the module. Koku may be spent on this roll to gain a Free Raise for every koku spent before the roll is made, or one Free Raise for every two koku spent after the roll is made.

### Experience Expenditure

Finally, the players should be given one last chance to spend any experience they wish before the module begins. Unless the module specifically allows it, experience may not be spent during the adventure.

## Introduction

The PCs have been sent to meet an Emerald Magistrate by the name of Seppun Yataro at Kazashimo Mura, a village in the western Hare lands near the Shinomen Forest. It is a moderately-sized town on the border of the Minor Clan's lands; roads (not Imperial) lead northwest to Kyuden Miya and the Unicorn lands, and northeast across the Hare province toward Ryoko Owari and the Scorpion lands. They are to provide Yataro with assistance on an investigation into bandit activity in the area. Magistrate-track PCs have

specifically been assigned to support Yataro (even if they somehow have full Status as an Emerald Magistrate, he is the magistrate in charge of the case and they are under his authority). Rooms have been arranged at the nicer of the two inns in the village, though the magistrate has not yet arrived when the PCs do.

Instead, the PCs are informed by the innkeeper that they have been invited to spend the evening at the local geisha house with the village's gokenin. Usagi Ennosuke is the samurai governor of Kazashimo Mura, and very eager to speak with guests in his clan's lands. If they are curious, the innkeeper can tell them that the village sees few samurai from other clans and that the gokenin no doubt wants to take the chance for more refined company. If a PC wishes to refuse this invitation they may do so, but the needless insult will cause them to have difficulties in their dealings with the village (reduce the total of any Social Skill roll they make in the village by 10).

The village is a minor trade hub, but only about two dozen samurai are in residence (with around three hundred peasants, a pair of monks, and a relatively small eta family). Kazashimo Mura is a fairly comfortable little community, and provides the Hare Clan with goods from the rich markets of the Unicorn. The village does have a large shrine, a thriving rural market, and a geisha house that enjoys the patronage of the village samurai as well as the merchants that pass through on their way to or from Ryoko Owari.

Though far from the most elegant or luxurious establishment, Sakura's Smile does provide a relaxing atmosphere. The geisha are pretty, if somewhat reserved around samurai from other clans, and while the music lacks the precision of a true master it is still pleasant. Usagi Ennosuke proves to be a man in his late forties, his hair mostly gray and a certain stiffness in his movements. Though somewhat disappointed that the Imperial magistrate has still not arrived, he greets you in good spirits. "Welcome to Kazashimo Mura! Please allow me to provide what hospitality I can, though I know it pales in comparison to the sights you have no doubt seen in your own journeys..."

Ennosuke is eager to make a good impression of his out-of-the-way holding. Unfamiliar with much of the larger Empire, he is curious about the things the PCs have seen and done, as well as simpler matters such as their clans' customs. (This is a good opportunity for players to introduce their characters to each other.) On the whole, the food and drink are good, the entertainment is competent, and the evening is fairly pleasant. However, things go awry in a few hours:

The sound of a raised male voice is not unknown in a geisha house, though usually ignored by the other guests. This proves impossible as it nears, accompanied by the sound of crashing wood and tearing paper. Ennosuke rises to his feet, trying to salvage the evening, when a haggard samurai bursts through the door. Blood covers his traveling clothes, his right arm is quite obviously broken in several places (though lashed to his chest by what appears to be his obi), and the stub of an arrow juts from his left eye socket. His remaining hand clutches at the seal of an Emerald Magistrate, which he raises toward the Hare governor. "Usagi Ennosuke. In the name of the Emperor, I command you to provide all due assistance to one of his magistrates in the furtherance of his duty. I need troops, to destroy an outpost of bandits." Though his voice started strong, he sags at the end, drained by his efforts. Under the gore staining his garb, the mon of the Seppun family is recognizable.

Shocked, Ennosuke turns to the PCs for assistance, clearly uncertain how to handle the matter, but trusting to their wider experience. (An ashigaru guard, who escorted the magistrate to the geisha house, cannot provide any real information, having been browbeaten by the Imperial's authority and frightened by his appearance.)

This is, of course, Seppun Yataro. He is a tall, lean samurai in his late twenties; beneath the wounds and clumsy bandages, he is moderately handsome though a dark scowl is likely to take up permanent residence on his features while those who killed his deputies are still free. The PCs can ask no more than three questions of the magistrate before he collapses from his extensive wounds. Any healing magic also saps his strength and knocks him out. (In game terms, he is at 68 Wounds out of Earth 4 and technically cannot take Actions in combat; his Great Destiny kept him alive when he should have died, but any further stress will incapacitate him.) A few possible answers for questions include:

- Yataro has been investigating a series of attacks against merchant caravans in the area that began seven months ago (at the start of spring).
- He believes that he has a lead on the bandit's fence – a merchant named Arinori in Iho Mura, a nearby village on the edge of the Shinomen Forest in the unaligned lands to the west.
- He and his three yoriki were ambushed on the way to Iho Mura, and though they killed a few of the bandits, they were vastly outnumbered and cut down.

- The bandits fought well, with brutal and ruthless tactics. There were at least a dozen, perhaps as many as twenty. Kitsu Taneyami, the group's shugenja, was their first target and fell almost immediately.
- Yataro wants to accomplish his mission, and will not stand down or take time to recover. More than simply his duty, now he has a personal stake in avenging his fallen deputies.

It is worth noting that Yataro does not currently know that the bandits are part of a larger organization, or that the Forest Killers are involved. The magistrate will not be able to provide clear direction without rest, and will eventually lapse into unconsciousness. As the evening was quite late when he finally arrived in town, there is little the PCs can do until the morning unless they wish to try to attend to the magistrate's wounds.

Once Yataro drops, Ennosuke will have servants carry him to the inn. The gokenin also asks that the PCs attend on him in the morning, to help him determine how best to respond to the magistrate's request. (Trying to push immediately will receive a polite, but firm, request that it wait until tomorrow.)

### Healing Yataro

PCs who wish to provide medical care should realize that between the gross trauma done to the magistrate and his exhaustion after having pushed himself for hours, he needs rest. Magic alone will not be able to fully heal him (at least, not magic that the PCs have access to). Path to Inner Peace can remove his Wounds, but will do nothing for his broken arm or his missing eye. Even more powerful magic such as Regrow the Wound will not restore full utility without proper medical treatment as well.

A **Medicine / Intelligence** roll (TN 25) can set his arm and will ensure that he will be able to keep it, however, unless the treating PC rolls a 35, he will never recover full use of it. (This is the difference between Missing Limb and Lame.) The TN of these rolls is 5 lower if combined with magical healing.

Yataro will, however, lose his left eye without significant intervention by both magic and medicine – this requires a separate **Medicine / Intelligence** roll at a TN of 40 and either Regrow the Wound or an Impartuned Water spell with a Mastery Level of 3.

These efforts do require several hours of work. If there are no PCs with any kind of medical ability, the village healer Fusae will be summoned. (She will ensure that Yataro keeps his arm, but will not be able to restore it to full function.)

## Part One: Recruiting Help

When Yataro wakes, late the next morning, he will still be groggy and disoriented but remains determined to follow through on his mission. Obviously, if he has received significant medical attention, he will be in better shape, but the damage and its effects on his spirit as well as his body will take time to fully heal.

The magistrate gingerly touches his left hand to his head. “Since this past spring, there has been an increase in the number of bandit attacks in this area. While there are no Imperial roads through the Hare lands, there is still a certain amount of trade that passes between the Unicorn and Scorpion lands, and the proximity of Kyuden Miya to the north also ensures that some attention is paid here. Caravans from both clans, as well as a few Crane- and Mantis-sponsored merchants, have come under attack by a particularly brutal group. Only a few survivors have ever escaped, and those only by virtue of either fleeing immediately or hiding through the battle. They report a well-armed group, striking with the advantage of surprise and mobility from horseback.”

Yataro shifts, still in pain from his wounds, though his face remains stoic. “As a matter involving criminal activity between clan borders, the Emerald Magistrates have jurisdiction. I have been looking into the matter for a few weeks now, and I believe that I have located an individual that may be able to guide us in the right direction. A merchant by the name of Arinori, in the town of Iho Mura, has seen a significant increase in his prosperity over the last few months. In fact, he has taken goods well above the quality of his previous wares to markets in the Unicorn village of Turo-Kojiri and Ryoko Owari – and these appearances happen with regularity following attacks from the bandits.”

He looks away, into the distance, the pain of his lost yoriki overtaking his physical wounds for a moment. “We – my yoriki and I – were headed to Iho Mura to confirm this lead, before our planned meeting with you. It had been my hope to have your assistance with locating and dealing with the bandits. I still intend that, though I am also invoking the Right of Conscription to gain troops from the local lord. While the Hare have not taken significant losses from these bandits yet, probably due to simply not having much worth stealing, it is only a matter of time before the bandits grow bold enough to move against them. It is my intent to hunt them down and kill all of them, so that this will not happen.”

Though he is not happy or eager to do so, if the PCs ask questions about the attack, Yataro will provide what answers he can. He and his yoriki spotted a small group of armed men on their way to Iho Mura, and stopped to question them. More than a dozen then attacked from hiding (a precise count of the numbers was not foremost in his mind), surrounding the mounted magistrate and his deputies. They recognized the threat that Kitsune Taneyami, the shugenja, presented and focused their efforts on him until he was slain. Though Shinjo Kiyomi and Bayushi Koriyama were able to kill a few of the enemy, and Yataro himself is sure he accounted for three himself, at least a dozen of the bandits likely survived. They were led by a large, hideously scarred ronin armed with a dai tsuchi, who was responsible for the breaking of Yataro’s arm, before he was cut down by another of the criminals.

Yataro is absolutely determined to fulfill his mission and get vengeance on the bandits, despite his wounds. However, he is aware that he is not at his best and fully intends to delegate the majority of the task to the PCs. This will start with securing assistance from Kazashimo Mura, in the form of ashigaru levies and any samurai competent to stand to battle. Supplies for the group will also be required, though this is a matter of logistics rather than resources (the local merchants will be expected to part with the necessary goods, but cannot tell the PCs what goods they should take).

The Emerald Magistrate can be used as a prod for the PCs, though the overall decisions should come from them. If they appear to be stalling on making those decisions, Yataro should order them to move forward. He will, however, stay back as much as possible, conserving his energy and strength for the confrontation with the bandits. The PCs should be encouraged to do most of the interacting with the locals, starting with their recruiting efforts.

### The Gokenin’s Cooperation

If the PCs forget about the governor’s request for a meeting in the morning, one of the local guards will deliver the request by noon. Ennosuke will receive them in his home, with none of the normal samurai guest-etiquette requiring them to wait (at Status 3, he does not likely have that much higher rank than the PCs and is far more worried about the situation than about his own ego).

Usagi Ennosuke is not as genial this morning as last night, though he greets you politely enough. He wastes no time in getting to the point, showing little concern for his face. “I understand that you have a

mission, and that the Emerald Magistrate has his duty, but I must ask you to understand that Kazashimo Muro is not prepared to offer unlimited support. I will not order my vassals to follow you into battle..." He sighs, looking harried. "...but I will not prevent them from doing so, if they volunteer."

Ennosuke is not as eager to help as might be expected. He is a dutiful samurai, and certainly no supporter of bandit activity on his borders, but his small fiefdom is, well, small. He does not have all that many troops to share out, and he is also certain that he needs to keep some home for defense. He will make his position clear, as he is concerned for his duties to his clan as well as the needs of the Empire, but it will ultimately be up to the PCs to speak with what few remaining resources the village has.

The gokenin will give the PCs basic information on the notable residents of his village, which is provided in Player Handout #2. If the PCs are aggressive or rude, he is likely to try to keep them away from his daughter (increasing the TN of recruiting her by 10). He is unlikely to share with Great Clan samurai the reason his forces are so depleted due to concern over their reaction, though he will discuss the matter with other Minor Clan samurai (see below). In any event, he will be polite but make it clear he has no wish to keep the PCs from their duty.

### Recruiting

Yataro is extremely eager to be on the move, but will give the PCs a day to supplement their group with local forces. He will also make arrangements for the local eta and monks to tend to his fallen yoriki, while the PCs are speaking with their potential recruits.

The reason that the border village is currently experiencing some staffing difficulties is simple, and only likely to matter if the players are specifically curious about the matter. A group of samurai representing the new Minor Clan Alliance have recently passed through, taking the bulk of the village's defenders with them. They are on the same mission as the magistrate, though with no coordination between the groups, are unaware of his involvement; they are also headed further into the Hare lands, on a more defensive plan, while Yataro's information directs the PCs toward the north and west.

Kazashimo Mura has a population of about thirty samurai, but most of those remaining are non-combatants. There are rather more peasant levies, (around 50 trained ashigaru remain, if only a dozen or so with actual experience). However, lack of discipline

on the battlefield is a major issue with conscripts; the PCs will have a difficult time keeping them under control without some familiar faces around.

There are three samurai of distinction in the village, besides the governor (who is not a combatant himself, having an old injury that prevents him using the majority of his training).

- **Usagi Nozomi**, (TN 15) the governor's daughter, is young and energetic, but barely past her gempukku and lacking in discipline. She has a lot of promise (Prodigy, high Traits), but has yet to see a lot of the world (low Skills) and is headstrong and undisciplined (Willpower 2 means Earth 2...). And, of course, Ennosuke does not want her in this much danger – though she would give other local forces a significant morale boost.
- **Usagi Shinobu**, (TN 30) the local law officer, is better suited to tax collection and adjudicating legal disputes than taking on large bandit gangs. She is a trained bushi, but has spent her career trying to prevent conflict. It's not that she abhors violence, she's just not particularly good at it, and is usually clever enough to find a different way.
- **Usagi Ieshige**, (TN 45) captain of the local guard, is an older Hare samurai, given this posting after two decades on the battlefield. It was supposed to be a quiet, pastoral post after some relatively impressive heroics. He is skilled and experienced, but reluctant to leave the village undefended (and, perhaps, not eager to kill again).

There is no local shugenja, as the affinity for speaking with the spirits is extremely rare among the Hare Clan, and no Hare shugenja would be posted in this minor holding. The only magic, including magical healing, that the PCs will have available is what they bring themselves.

There are also a few peasants worth consideration as more than just extra bodies; while obviously not samurai, they still have skills or abilities that are valuable. Ennosuke is less concerned about them – while the Hare have a decent relationship with the lower orders, he is still samurai and prone to some class-based blindness.

- **Akuro** (the Hunter) – A local orphan girl, who supports herself by bringing small game and herbs from the Forest and selling them at the market. In her late teens, she is not well-socialized but understands the woods better than most samurai.
- **Fusae** (the Healer) – A herbalist and practitioner of traditional medicine. She is known to be surprisingly well-versed in antidotes and familiar

enough with the forest to harvest her own materials, but she is by no means a combatant.

- **Josuke** (the Budoka) – A veteran ashigaru who has survived multiple battles. He is a decent fighter, and has experience on campaign, but is somewhat dismissive of the lower-ranked troops, and treats the other peasants poorly. He is respectful of samurai but basically no one else.
- **Kobo** (the Doshin) – The magistrate's deputy, he is essentially a big guy happy to act the thug to keep the peace, but not much more than a brawler. He has no real skill in the field, having never left the village in his life, but is loyal and capable of being more than a little intimidating.
- **Mitsunari** (the Forester) – The crew leader of the local woodcutters, he knows the area extremely well, but doesn't have much martial aptitude.
- **Hama** (the Messenger) - runner to other towns along road; fit and knows area pretty well, but she's not really a fighter

Each of these named NPCs will provide a mechanical bonus for the PCs for the duration of the module, as listed on the Player Handouts. These sheets should NOT be given to the players until after they are done recruiting.

Recruiting a samurai NPC requires a **Courtier (Manipulation)**, **Sincerity (Honesty)**, or **Perform: Oratory / Awareness** roll. (Other Skills may be substituted based on the PCs' approach, at the GM's discretion.) The TN for this roll depends on the NPC, and is noted above. Recruiting the peasant NPCs does not require this roll.

### Ashigaru Conscripts

The bulk of the troops that Ennosuke will be able to provide are basic ashigaru. They are trained spearmen, though largely inexperienced (as the experienced troops have largely already been sent on another assignment). They are organized into squads of 12, and there are four such squads left in the village. Recruiting one squad requires a roll as above at a TN of 15 – Yataro will demand that at least one squad be brought along, and if no PCs can succeed at the roll to do so somehow, will manage this much himself. Doing so will cost him a point of Force. (**Battle / Awareness** may be used instead.) Every additional squad requires two Raises be called on the roll. (This does mean that taking all of the village's defenders requires six Raises. There is a great deal of resistance to the idea of leaving the village defenseless.)

As an abstraction, the strength of the conscripted force that the PCs gather is referred to as their "Force"; this

will be compared to the enemy's during the confrontation at the end of the module. Each ashigaru squad has a Force of 2, providing the base that will be modified by certain factors – the named NPCs can provide a bonus to this rating, and other events through the module will also impact it.

It should be noted that conscripted troops are not as well-trained as the PCs may be accustomed to working with. As the unit's size increases, it will be more difficult to control and direct in battle. (More information on the Unit Force mechanic is in Appendix #2.)

### Equipment and Supplies

The village does have a fairly well-stocked market, and as the party's efforts are on behalf of official Emerald Magistrate business, there is no concern for payment. However, getting appropriate supplies (food, tents, replacement gear, pack animals or carts to carry it all) does require a **Battle** or **Commerce / Intelligence** roll to provide correct logistical support. The TN of this roll depends on how large a group is being taken along – 20 for one squad, plus 5 for each additional squad. Failure on this roll will reduce the party's Force rating by two.

Yataro's daisho was taken by the bandits, though he will requisition a wakizashi from the gokenin's army before the group departs. He does not have the patience or fortitude to sit for armor sizing, and unless the PCs have magically healed his arm, he will not attempt to use a katana in his off-hand.

### Rumors

If the PCs attempt to learn about local matters, the following information is available with a **Courtier (Gossip) / Awareness** roll. Any Minor Clan PC receives a Free Raise on this roll; Hare Clan PCs receive two Free Raises.

- 10: There have been some bandit attacks in the area, though none of the local merchants have been victimized. The attacks have largely taken place in the unaligned lands between the Shinomen Forest and the Unicorn lands.
- 15: There is some worry that the bandit attacks will reduce the amount of trade in the area. The locals can survive on the farms and forestry, but the resident samurai are accustomed to the fine goods that the caravans bring. (At this level, the PCs will also receive information on the NPCs in the village if the gokenin has not already given it to them.)

- 20: There has been some moderate tension between the Hare and the Scorpion in the last few months, possibly due to the bandit activity in the area. Some suspect that the Scorpion may have ties to the bandits, though that may simply be due to the Hare Clan's historic tendency toward paranoia.
- 25: A group of mixed Minor Clan samurai recently came through the village and recruited the bulk of the town's trained ashigaru as well as some of the more skilled samurai. Ennosuke's daughter was very disappointed that her father refused to allow her to leave with them.
- 30: The best-informed locals are aware that the bandit group operating in the area are part of a larger organization. While it has been confirmed that the Scorpion are not backing them, there is no consensus at this point of who is responsible.

If a PC specifically goes looking for information on the bandits among the lower orders, they may roll **Lore: Underworld / Awareness**. While the Hare get along well with their peasants, they have little patience for criminals, so there is not a large black market in the area. A few smugglers, who move goods that are relatively safe or benign, will specify to a PC who rolls a 25 or higher that they have tried to avoid the bandits because they're bad for business and likely to cause attention, but that the nearby village of Iho Mura has recently been taken over by them. If a PC rolls over 50, the smugglers will whisper the name "Forest Killers", quite obviously terrified of the bandit gang's reputation.

## Part Two: On the Hunt

After giving the PCs a day to make preparations and recruit what help they can, Yataro will order the group to depart the next day. (This will return another 8 Wounds to him, if he has not already been healed.) The first stop will be at the site of the ambush, as the eta and monks of the village will accompany the group so that Yataro's yoriki's remains can be attended to appropriately.

The late fall air is chilly in the early morning as you depart, though as the sun rises, your breath ceases steaming. After perhaps two hours of riding, your party departs the main road headed northwest toward Unicorn lands for a smaller track bearing west – ahead, the dark line of the Shinomen Mori looms on the horizon. Another hour through lightly wooded hills brings you to a clearing filled with a vast flock of crows. They boil up like black smoke at your approach, cawing in displeasure at the interruption of

their grisly feast. Eleven bodies lie on the ground, perhaps twenty yards off the road, thoroughly picked over by the carrion birds – though a glance is enough to tell that other scavengers have been here as well, for no weapons or other valuables remain. A final brave pair of crows ruffle their wings from atop the corpse of a gaijin riding horse.

Though Yataro brought the group to this gruesome scene in order to ensure that his yoriki's remains are dealt with in all possible honor, there are a few clues that the PCs can pick up on if they wish to examine the scene.

**Battle, Hunting (Tracking), or Investigation (Search) / Perception** rolls at a TN of 25 will confirm Yataro's description of the battle, and clarify that there were initially a full two dozen of the bandit attackers. Eight of them were killed, and the remaining sixteen left after looting the corpses (both the yoriki and their own). Their tracks head west, toward the Shinomen and Iho Mura. Yataro and his yoriki were all mounted; the Shinjo's steed was slain in the fighting, while the other yoriki's ponies fled during the melee. Yataro's horse, a particularly fine animal, was captured by the bandits and led away with them.

The bandit corpses have one distinguishing feature: most of them have a brand of three parallel claw marks somewhere on their body. Two of them also have a tattoo of a blasted, leafless tree inked in around the brand.

Yataro, of course, has little patience for lingering. A PC shugenja or monk who offers to perform the last rites for his deputies will be gruffly thanked, though he gives only the barest amount of time for the proper ritual before pressing on. After making sure that the eta and monks have the matter in hand, he bows his head for a brief moment and gathers the party up again.

### Iho Mura

The tiny village of Iho Mura stands in the shade of the Shinomen Mori, in the unaligned lands south of the Unicorn. It is not well-positioned for trade, though a few merchants that make the town their home do make a modest living selling wood from the local foresters. There are no resident samurai, and less than a hundred peasants who call it home.

Unfortunately for them, it is the closest village to the stronghold that the Forest Killers built when this band came into the area. With no samurai protectors, they were easily cowed by the bandits, and the few who



tried to stand up to the invaders were slain in particularly brutal fashions.

The group should arrive in the early evening, and Yataro will send the PCs into town to investigate while the troops set up of camp outside the village. (Unless specifically requested by the PCs, the named NPCs will stay with the unit.)

The locals are terrified by the prospect of the samurai causing problems with the bandits, and will do their best to avoid the PCs. Getting any meaningful information out of anyone but Hanogi, the owner of the Drowned Bear sake house, or the merchant Arinori is going to be extremely frustrating; no matter how intimidating or compassionate the samurai appear, the peasants are just too broken by the depredations of the bandits to be of use. Interactions with the locals should consist of nothing but apologies, as they are unable to provide any assistance (or are convinced of that fact, at least). A soft approach allows the PC to make a **Sincerity / Awareness** roll (TN 25); success does gain direction to Hanogi as a source of information and the general sense that the peasants think the samurai are doomed. A harder approach, with an **Intimidation / Willpower** roll (TN 20), will cause the peasants even greater fear, but directions to the merchant Arinori will come out amid the panicked blubbering.

### The Sake House

The bandits frequent a watering-hole/brothel called the Drowned Bear. The owner/proprietor/madam is a middle-aged, bitter woman named Hanogi, who is trying to survive the Forest Killers and profit from them as much as possible. With no faith in the samurai, she is difficult to convince to help, but she knows rather a lot about them from having overheard them in their cups. She has thrived on the bandit's business; though the decorations are tawdry, her large establishment is well-provisioned. Quiet music drifts down from the second floor, where the prostitutes (mainly female, though other genders are represented) wait despondently. (PCs should not be encouraged to provide patronage to this establishment.)

Simple bribery requires no roll – she will provide one answer to a question for every koku given her (the bandits are also extremely spendthrift, so her financial security makes her expensive to bribe). Gentler suasion will provide a few answers; this requires a TN 20 **Sincerity / Awareness** roll for one answer, plus one for every Raise called. Trying to browbeat her is extremely difficult, as she's seen what the Forest Killers do – **Intimidation / Willpower** can be used,

but the TN is increased to 40. She will tell the PCs the following:

- “These bastards are ruthless and cruel but not stupid; they only have the most basic loyalty to each other, and are willing to do whatever it takes to get away with their prizes. They hold nothing sacred, and I've heard them laughing about killing priests.”
- “They're a smaller part of a larger gang from further south, call themselves the Forest Killers. They've been building up in this area since the spring.”
- “Their leader is a big, ugly brute name of Ishi. Uses a giant hammer, but just as likely to kill someone with his bare hands. Enjoys it.”
- “There are a couple of others I've caught the names of – Koron, she's a cold piece of work. And Hisan. Hisan is just plain crazy. Even the other bandits are scared of him. Ishi keeps him out of here after he kept killing his bedmates. Not out of the goodness of his heart, but I think because he realized Hisan wouldn't ever stop killing and eventually we'd all be gone...”
- “I've overheard them talking about paying tribute to someone named Gekido, hiding out somewhere further south in the Shinomen. The gang has a bunch of hideouts, like the one near here. I don't know where it is exactly, just that it's about three hours' walk into the woods, near some caves to the southwest.” (The directions she can provide are very general, but with a difficult Hunting roll, can probably be used to locate the bandit camp.)

Hanogi should be distant, but relatively polite. She is unlikely to think that the PCs are capable of dealing with the bandits, but is not concerned enough to try to stop them. With no local lord, she is resigned to trying to keep her business and employees thriving despite the Forest Killers' depredations and has no interest in attracting dangerous attention to herself.

### The Merchant

Yataro's lead is a merchant who has attracted the magistrate's attention due to his sudden and inexplicable success. Arinori has been helping the bandits fence their stolen goods. He has no concern whatsoever for the law or the Forest Killer's victims, and has been threatened enough by the bandits that he has moved past fear into a sort of numb resignation. He is not stupid by any means, but his focus on financial gain has made him short-sighted and in far over his head.

Yataro is inclined to approach with the full force of the law, threatening arrest and torture. However, he is

willing to let the PCs attempt more subtle means first, and if they have made any efforts to familiarize themselves with the village, they should realize the difficulty inherent in presenting a more frightening aspect than the bandits have already done.

The merchant has a sizable shop in the town's miniscule market. His wares tend toward a sort of "general store" variety; while recent months have seen an increase in his net worth, he has done little with the money other than hoard it. A brief examination of the building will also allow the PCs to spot a tired-looking, but astonishingly high-quality, riding horse tied up in back. This is Yataro's stolen horse, left with the fence after the attack on the Emerald Magistrate.

Arinori has, like Hanogi, profited greatly by his association with the bandits. Unlike her, he does not feel like he's been any more poorly treated by them than by samurai; convincing him to turn on them requires more than just paying him (at least in the kind of money the PCs are likely to have; if they can somehow come up with a hundred koku, he'll sell the Forest Killers out gladly). Getting useful information out of him (he's willing to babble on about the quality of goods he's been moving lately for hours) will require a combination of persuasion and intimidation. **Sincerity or Commerce / Awareness** (at a TN of 30) can help him realize that he is in an unsustainable situation and that the PCs can help him get out of it; **Intimidation (Control)** or **Lore: Law / Willpower** can point out all of the negative consequences that the law will bring down on him but he can avoid by cooperation. Success at either roll will get him to answer questions, but if both approaches are used, he will volunteer all of the information he has.

- Arinori knows the precise location of the Forest Killer's stronghold, having been there a few times on business with them – most recently, he delivered supplies to get them through the winter.
- He will describe the layout of the bandit camp in rough detail – a palisade built around a cave mouth with a spring, but does not know about the rear exit and does not consider the water gate to be of any significance.
- He knows the leader's name (Ishi) but can't give more than general descriptions of the rest.
- He knows there are two dozen of them after the most recent attack (though he does not know that was against an Emerald Magistrate)
- He knows they're part of a larger group that they pay tribute to, but doesn't know anything else about the wider organization. He has been

rebuffed (violently) when he attempted to learn more so he could get in with the larger crowd.

Arinori is a merchant first and foremost, and gives little thought to any goal other than acquiring goods for as low a price as possible and selling them for as high a price as possible. His high degree of focus on his role and his general lack of social prowess means that he can't relate well to most people, and the general abuse he already has suffered at the hands of the bandits leaves him less than impressed by PCs attempting to use their samurai status to overwhelm him.

Paranoid PCs (or players) may be concerned that the bandits are keeping watch on the town. The tracks that led from the site of the attack on Yataro do pass through town, but that was two days ago and there are no spies on alert. The bandits believe (justifiably) that the locals are too cowed to offer any resistance, and none of the locals are inclined to volunteer assistance to their victimizers – they may not believe that the PCs can prevail, but they will yet hope.

Though Yataro is driven to pursue the bandits, even he will balk at entering the Shinomen at night. The ashigaru are nearly panicking at the prospect of travel into the haunted forest at all, and will require encouragement. The PCs may roll **Battle / Awareness, Perform: Oratory** or **Storytelling / Awareness**, or **Intimidation / Willpower** at a base TN of 25 to calm them down. Failure reduces their Force total by three.

## Part Three: A Shadow on the Forest

The Shinomen Mori is the most haunted forest in the Empire. Even the most foolhardy of the locals, used to the dangers and threatening aura of the place, do not travel into it casually. The northern portion is somewhat less spiritually active, and the Shadowlands only has a few footholds in the south, but the spirits of the trees are active and frequently inimical to humanity. Navigating the forest requires a **Hunting (Trailblazing) / Perception** roll at a TN dependent on the directions the PCs received. Arinori's directions make the TN 30, while trying to rely on Hanogi's increases the TN to 40 (though bonuses from NPCs certainly apply). Failure on this roll does not cause the PCs to get lost, but means that the trip takes longer and increases the Fear level when the kodama show up.



for a determined individual. (It is also used as a sewer, taking waste away from the camp, so such a journey would be somewhat unpleasant.) An enormous oak tree rises atop the hill, with a large network of roots penetrating down into the cave; a small escape tunnel has been dug into the roots.

The bandits are not on high alert, though they do have a few men stationed at the large, open gate. Activity can be seen within the camp as the PCs approach. If the PCs wish to scout without provoking an immediate alarm and hostile response, they need to roll **Stealth (Sneaking) / Agility** at a TN of 20. Failure on this does not result in an attack, but the bandits will be warned that there are enemies in the area; they will close the gate and prepare themselves for battle. Success on the roll allows the PCs to determine that there are two dozen bandits in the camp, and the three avenues of entrance (main gate, water gate, cave tunnel).

Yataro wants to kill all of the bandits; cooler heads should realize this will be difficult, especially if they manage to scout out the fortress and find the exits. If the PCs can come up with a plan relatively quickly, Yataro can be convinced to allow them to implement something more complicated than a straight-forward attack on the front gate. (Given the length of time the combat can last, the players should not be allowed to over plan if there is a concern for time constraint.)

While there are many different ways this combat can proceed, in general the main differences are going to be determined by how the PCs approach.

- Attacking with surprise is possible, and Yataro's preference for an overwhelming assault will allow the group to be at the gates before enough of the bandits can form up there to stop them from entering the camp. In this instance, the bandit leaders will be located as indicated below. Note that this is a D8 Honor loss; even with bandits, the most proper thing to do would be to issue a challenge and allow them to surrender, but under the circumstances, only the most rigid adherent of Bushido would balk.
- If the bandits are alerted, whether due to the failure of a Stealth roll or because an honorable PC decides to present a formal challenge (gaining H9 in the process), they will close the gate and form up in rank. The gate requires 40 Wounds to destroy and has Reduction 5 (Heavy Weapons and Earth or Fire spells ignore this Reduction entirely). Once the gate is breached, the bandits on the other side will prevent any advance; a PC who wishes to break through the enemy line must clear a space by dropping two of the enemy. This

hole will allow one PC to move into the camp, but will close immediately after they do (requiring a new gap to be opened for another PC; the PCs should be allowed to work together on this but the NPCs will not have enough coordination to be of benefit). In this instance, Hisan will certainly seek out PCs who present themselves, though Koron should be more cautious and keep her distance, while Ishi is working his way out the back exit.

- If the PCs have discovered the back exit, they may well split their group up. It is not recommended that the ashigaru troops be divided, and Yataro will lead them at a main assault on the gate, but in general PCs who go in through the hill should face Ishi, PCs who go in through the water gate should face Hisan, and PCs who go in through the main gate will have a shot at Koron.

There are three basic "levels" of enemy, based on their rank in the gang:

- Forest Killer Recruits do not have the Technique or the tattoo, but have been branded with three claw marks (a ritual undertaken after their first kill with the gang; the tattoo is given upon mastery of the Technique). Armed with katana, they have no armor or other weapons. They are eager to prove their worth to the gang, but will break if either Ishi or the two other leaders fall.
- Forest Killer Initiates have the basic Technique and a tattoo of a bare tree inked around the branded claw marks. Wearing ashigaru armor, they are armed with katana and yumi (using the former by preference and the latter only when necessary). They are more loyal than the recruits, though if Ishi is slain, they will prefer to survive and carry word to another band.
- Forest Killer Elites (Ishi, Koron, and Hisan) are Gekido's trusted lieutenants; their rank in the band is noted by elaboration on the tattoo of the tree – leaves have been added to the dead branches. Ishi, as the leader, has red blood streaking from the claw-brands as well. None of the leaders will have any hesitation at fleeing, seeing the significant tactical edge the PCs have at their disposal.

Ishi, the leader of the bandits, is in the cave. When the PCs attack, he will assess the strength of the opposition and choose to retreat through the tunnel. Koron is almost certain to be the first to react, and should hang back and pepper the attackers at the main gate with arrows. She will retreat as possible when the PCs enter melee range, and will try to escape by any available avenue. Hisan starts in the rude outhouse

and spends the first round preparing to emerge. If the PCs are at both the cave and the main gate when he comes out in the second round, he will head for the water gate to swim out. He will respond to any attacks with utter violence, and once engaged, is only likely to attempt retreat without killing someone if presented with overwhelming force.

The direct opposition the PCs face will depend on how much Force they brought with them. Rather than running the scene as a Mass Combat, it can be understood that the NPCs and the ashigaru conscripts are dealing with the majority of the enemy while the PCs focus on the foes directly in front of them. In addition to the Forest Killer Elites, the PCs should gain attention from a few of the lower-ranked bandits. At a standard table, this should be one Recruit and one Initiate for each PC in the camp. (If the PCs are largely only Rank 2, they should only have to deal with Recruits, while if the majority of the PCs are Rank 4, they should have at least two Initiates at the GM's discretion.)

If a PC has Gekido as a Sworn Enemy, the bandits recognize them as a target of priority. Every bandit gains a rank of Luck that can only be used on rolls against such a PC; this effect ends if the PC is reduced to the Crippled Wound Rank or otherwise severely handicapped.

Killing any of the Forest Killer leadership largely slakes Yataro's thirst for vengeance; any survivors who escape will presumably be retreating to the southern regions of the Shinomen, so the threat in the area will have been dealt with. The magistrate is not satisfied, but considers the mission to have been a success once this group is broken.

The NPC conscripts will provide assistance as listed on their handouts, but their specific action is intended to be abstracted. If the PCs have a Force rating of 10 or higher, they will only lose any named NPCs through sacrifice on their part to save a PC. As a general rule, the higher the PCs' Force rating, the better their group should be described as performing in the fight.

If the PCs have a Force rating lower than 10, one named NPC will die during the fighting for each point less. The order of loss is: Nozomi, Kobo, Shinobu, Josuke, Akuro, Mitsunari, Ieshige, Fusae, Hama, Yataro.

## Conclusion

Assuming Yataro survives, he will be very grateful for the assistance of the PCs. Any incapacitated bandits will be remanded to custody for questioning, and the Emerald Magistrate will promise to remember their valiant service in the future.

## The End

### Rewards for Completing the Adventure

Surviving the Module:	1 EXP
Good Roleplaying:	+1 EXP
Recruited at least one of the named locals:	+1 EXP
Defeated at least one of the Forest Killer Leaders:	+1 EXP
Total Possible Experience:	4 EXP

#### Favors

If the PCs defeated at least one of the Forest Killer Leaders and Seppun Yataro survived, they gain one Favor.

#### Honor

There are no specific Honor gains associated with this module. The GM may grant up to 2 extra points of Honor to a PC for actions not detailed in the module, though no PC should gain more than 2 points in this fashion.

#### Glory

Defeating one of the Forest Killer Leaders provides a G7 Glory gain. Defeating two increases this to G8, and defeating all three increases it to G10.

#### Other Rewards

If the PCs successfully deal with the Forest Killers, they gain Seppun Yataro as an Ally (Influence 2, Devotion 1 – if they saved his eye, the Devotion is increased to 2).

#### GM Reporting

- 1) Did Seppun Yataro survive?
- 2) Did Seppun Yataro lose his arm?
- 3) Did Usagi Nozomi survive?
- 4) Did Usagi Shinobu survive?
- 5) Did Usagi Ieshige survive?
- 6) Did Ishi survive?
- 7) Did Koron survive?
- 8) Did Hisan survive?

*The GM must report this information by (2/3/2019) for it to have storyline effect*

## Appendix #1: NPCs

### Seppun Yataro

A tall, lean samurai in his late twenties, Yataro is a skilled magistrate. He is both personally ambitious and sincerely devoted to his duty – he longs to become a magistrate of standing, perhaps even Emerald Champion himself someday. Under normal circumstances, his fine, aristocratic features would be considered handsome, but the current situation has left him with little regard for appearance.

Air 3    Earth 4    Fire 3    Water 3    Void 4  
Reflexes 4                      Agility 4  
Honor 7.4                      Status 4.5                      Glory 4.8

**Initiative:** 8k4                      **Attack:** 9k4e (Katana, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 25                      **Damage:** 7k2 (Katana)

**Reduction:** 0 (no armor)

**Wounds:** 20 (+0), 28 (+3), 36 (+5), 44 (+10), 52 (+15), 60 (+20), 68 (Down, +40), 76 (Out) 77 (Dead)

**School/Rank:** Seppun Guardsman 4

**Techniques:** *Never in Darkness:* +4k0 to resist Social Skill Roll to tempt away from duty; +1k1 to Investigation to detect ambush or surprise attack

*The Clouds Part:* may spend a Void Point to add (Honor Rank) to attack and damage rolls until next Turn

*Sun's Light Reveals:* may spend a Void Point as a Free Action to roll Investigation (Notice) / Perception at TN 25 to see through all illusions or disguises, whether magical or mundane. If in presence of Emperor, his immediate family, or high-ranking Imperial officer, do not need to spend the Void

*Speed of Heaven:* make attacks as a Simple Action when using weapons with the Samurai keyword

**Skills:** Battle 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 4, Iaijutsu (Assessment, Focus) 5, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3

Artisan: Poetry 4, Athletics 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 3, Horsemanship 4, Jujutsu 2, Sincerity 2

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Great Destiny, Leadership, Paragon of Duty / Can't Lie, and from his wounds: Bad Eyesight (Missing Eye), Lamé or Missing Limb

### Ishi, the Hammer

A hideous brute of a man, there are those who might confuse Ishi for an ogre or oni. He is more than happy to respond in kind. The leader by dint of ruthless cunning as well as overwhelming strength, Ishi is one of Gekido's most trusted lieutenants (though even he does not know where the bandit overlord can be found).

Air 2    Earth 4    Fire 3    Water 3    Void 3  
Reflexes    Stamina 5                      Strength  
3                      6  
Honor 1.4                      Status 0                      Glory 0

**Initiative:** 6k3+5                      **Attack:** 10k3e (Simple, Dai Tsuchi)

**Armor TN:** 25                      **Damage:** 10k3m+5 (modified armor) (Dai Tsuchi)

**Reduction:** 5

**Wounds:** 25 (+0), 38 (+3), 51 (+5), 64 (+10), 77 (+15), 90 (+20), 103 (Down, +40), 116 (Out) 117 (Dead)

**(High-Rank Table) Wounds:** 30 (+0), 45 (+3), 60 (+5), 75 (+10), 90 (+15), 105 (+20), 120 (Down, +40), 135 (Out) 136 (Dead)

**School/Rank:** Forest Killer/Chosen of the Shinomen (Insight Rank 3)

**Technique:** *Strength of the Forest:* additional Wounds per Wound Rank equal to Stamina, +Stamina to melee damage

*The Predator's Strike:* may select one weapon to make Simple Action attacks (Dai Tsuchi)

**Skills:** Athletics 4, Defense 3, Heavy Weapons (Dai Tsuchi) 7, Hunting (Survival) 4, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 3, Stealth 3; Battle 5, Investigation 2, Jujutsu 4, Lore: Underworld 4

**Mastery Abilities:** Heavy Weapons 7 (-2 enemy Reduction, Free Raise to Knockdown, 9s explode on damage); +1k0 damage with unarmed or swords

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Large / Disturbing Countenance

## Koron, the Archer

A rail-thin woman with a cold heart, Koron is only devoted to her own survival. She has risen to a high rank in the Forest Killers because of her skills and calculation, but her concern is for the profit to be made from raiding, unlike the joy in the slaughter that some of the other bandits exhibit.

Air 3    Earth 3    Fire 3    Water 3    Void 3  
Reflexes    Stamina 4  
5  
Honor 1.8                      Status 0                      Glory 0

**Initiative:** 8k5 (+5 per Turn if not going first)    **Attack:** 10k7e (Yumi, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 33    **Damage:** 6k2 (willow leaf) or 6k3 (fleshcutter)

### **Reduction: 1**

Wounds: 19 (+0), 29 (+3), 39 (+5), 49 (+10), 59 (+15), 69 (+20), 79 (Down, +40), 89 (Dead) 90

**School/Rank:** Forest Killer/Chosen of the Shinomen (Insight Rank 3)

**Technique:** *Strength of the Forest:* additional Wounds per Wound Rank equal to Stamina, +Stamina to melee damage

*The Predator's Strike:* may select one weapon to make Simple Action attacks (yumi)

**Skills:** Athletics 5, Defense 3, Hunting (Survival) 3, Kenjutsu 4, Knives 4, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 7, Stealth 6; Investigation 3, Lore: Underworld 3

**Mastery Abilities:** Kyujutsu 7 (ready bow as a Simple Action, +50% range, +1 Str with bow)

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Quick / Wrath of the Kami (Earth)

## Hisan, the Blade

All of the Forest Killers are ruthless, but Hisan is capable of terrifying even most of them. A vicious killer who enjoys taking lives like some men enjoy sake, he is not trusted with leadership because of his instability, but his brutality is viewed as tactically advantageous.

Air 2    Earth 3    Fire 3    Water 3    Void 4  
Reflexes    Stamina 4    Agility 4  
4  
Honor 0.6                      Status 0                      Glory 0

**Initiative:** 7k4    **Attack:** 10k4e (Katana, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 28    **Damage:** 7k2m (Katana)

### **Reduction: 3**

Wounds: 19 (+0), 29 (+3), 39 (+5), 49 (+10), 59 (+15), 69 (+20), 79 (Down, +40), 89 (Dead) 90

**School/Rank:** Forest Killer/Chosen of the Shinomen (Insight Rank 3)

**Technique:** *Strength of the Forest:* additional Wounds per Wound Rank equal to Stamina, +Stamina to melee damage

*The Predator's Strike:* may select one weapon to make Simple Action attacks (yumi)

**Skills:** Athletics 5, Defense 3, Hunting (Survival) 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 3, Spears 2, Stealth 4; Iaijutsu 5, Intimidation 6, Investigation 2, Jiujutsu 3, Lore: Underworld 3

**Mastery Abilities:** Kenjutsu 7 (+1k0 sword damage, ready sword as a Free Action, 9s explode on damage)

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Luck / Brash

## Forest Killer Initiate

Rank-and-file members of the gang that have made at least one kill for the group, and have been in long enough to learn the basic Technique.

Air 1    Earth 2    Fire 2    Water 2    Void 1  
Reflexes    Stamina 3    Agility 3    Strength  
2                      3  
Honor 1.5                      Status 0                      Glory 0

**Initiative:** 3k2    **Attack:** 7k3 (katana, Complex)

**Armor TN:** 18    **Damage:** 7k2+3 (ashigaru armor) (katana)

### **Reduction: 1**

Wounds: 13 (+0), 20 (+3), 27 (+5), 34 (+10), 43 (+15), 50 (+20), 57 (Down, +40), 64 (Dead) 65

**School/Rank:** Forest Killer (Insight Rank 1)

**Technique:** *Strength of the Forest:* additional Wounds per Wound Rank equal to Stamina, +Stamina to melee damage

**Skills:** Athletics 2, Defense 2, Hunting 3, Kenjutsu 4 (Katana), Kyujutsu 2, Spears 2, Stealth 2; Jiujutsu 1

## Forest Killer Recruit

New recruits who have not been in long enough to learn the Technique or any other secrets, but are eager to prove themselves.

Air 1    Earth 2    Fire 2    Water 2    Void 1  
Reflexes    Stamina 3    Agility 3    Strength  
2                      3  
Honor 1.5                      Status 0                      Glory 0

**Initiative:** 3k2    **Attack:** 6k3e (Katana, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 15    **Damage:** 7k2+3

### **Reduction: 0**

Wounds: 10 (+0), 14 (+3), 18 (+5), 22 (+10), 26 (+15), 30 (+20), 34 (Down, +40), 38 (Dead) 39

**School/Rank:** none (Insight Rank 1)

**Skills:** Athletics 2, Defense 1, Hunting 2, Kenjutsu 3 (Katana), Kyujutsu 2, Spears 2, Stealth 2; Jiujutsu 1

## Appendix #2: Force Management

For ease of play, the group of NPCs that accompany the PCs as support for the mission are represented by a set of mechanics more abstract than the usual character sheet. The party is a non-standard size for military engagements, being at least slightly larger than the usual 20-soldier guntai and significantly smaller than a seven-guntai company. Instead of attempting to implement the Mass Battle rules for a relatively small-scale conflict, this module abstracts the unit's combat efficacy to "Force", with a variety of factors providing an impact on it. Ultimately, the intention is to make the eventual combat less onerous on the GM than trying to track the individual actions of each NPC.

For the most part, as long as the PCs have done an adequate job of keeping the ashigaru in line and have at least one of the named NPCs along with them, the ashigaru should be capable of preventing the bandits from overwhelming the magistrate's party with sheer numbers. There are a few rolls called out in the module to prevent the loss of Force; these are the control rolls mentioned on the NPC sheets. Each of these rolls has a base TN, but this TN is increased by 5 for every additional squad past the first. (A base TN of 25 is increased to 30 if the PCs bring two squads and to 35 if they bring three.) The larger the group, the harder they are to control.

At the GM's discretion, PCs who have an interest in tactics or strategy (those with high ranks of the Battle Skill, or the Tactician Advantage, for example) may offset the penalties incurred by overseeing drills on the journey. There is only one night of rest, so there is hardly time for much in-depth training, but such a PC may roll **Battle / Awareness** at a base TN of 20 (treated as a control roll) to prevent the loss of one Force from one failed control roll. Additionally, such a PC may provide direction or orders to the ashigaru during the fight to remove any previously-lost Force from a single source. Note that these options are provided for characters who are intended to be military leaders of some sort, and should only be allowed by the GM for PCs without that focus if the table is under strength in some fashion.

Ultimately, the Force mechanics used here are more for ease of play and to provide a narrative framework than to determine success or failure of the module. The major consequence of insufficient Force is the death of NPCs, not directly to the PCs. The GM is welcome to use their judgment if the actions of the players should have an impact on the way that events unfold, but the intent of this is to provide an example of an often-overlooked aspect of the setting (the magistrate's right to conscription) and to set a tone of a combat somewhat larger in scale than usual.



## **Player Handout #1: News of the Empire**

Honored Samurai!

Finally, war has come to an end and the Samurai of the Lion return home. The gambit to delay engagement to Kuda Mura where they could force the Crab to stand and fight was bold. And costly for both. But it was the Crab who stood firm, and though they gave up ground, it can still be said that Kuda Mura has never fallen to any enemy.

This victory came at high cost to both clans, though. One of course must note the heavy losses that both Crab and Lion alike took. But perhaps the worst losses for both was when Akodo Shakato and Hida Oturi met in personal combat. With their honor guard standing back, they each stood against each other... and both of their blows rang true.

The Lion have not announced, officially, who the new Clan Champion of the Lion will be, but one must presume that Akodo Shuhan, the son of Shakato, will take the mantle. On the side of the Crab, Hida Oturi's children are all too young to take the mantle, with but one old enough to even have started training in the Hida traditions. In the interim, the three daimyo of the Yasuki, Hiruma, and Kaiu have opted to split responsibilities as opposed to declaring a formal regent. Oturi's wife, Arumi, is also stepping up to assist where she can.

Of course, the war is not the only thing to have come out of this summer. I wish I could say that it was a joy to announce Toturi Kazetora as the Imperial Advisor... but there have been complications. Kazetora's first offer of advice, offered in the middle of open court, was that our Beloved Emperor, Toturi X retire and allow another to take the mantle of Regent. Such a suggestion borders on blasphemy, of course, but it is this one's concern that Toturi-dono might be taking Kazetora's suggestion seriously!

There is but one thing that is for certain. We now live in interesting times.

-Otomo Yusuke

## Player Handout #2: NPCs in Kazashimo Mura

The following are the samurai of distinction in the village:

- **Usagi Nozomi**, the governor's daughter. She is barely past her gempukku, though noted to be a very promising young bushi. She is very popular with the locals, praised for her generous attitude and willingness to jump in and help with any situation. It is widely thought that Ennosuke is waiting to retire until she has learned more about the world, but he has been training her for that task. (Nozomi herself seems to want to see more of the Empire before taking up such a restrictive role...)
- **Usagi Shinobu**, the local magistrate. While a trained bushi, she is seen as more of an administrator than a warrior. She is skilled at getting to the heart of things, and has been known to come up with clever solutions for conflicts rather than relying on brute force.
- **Usagi Ieshige**, the commander of the guard. He is an older Hare samurai, noted for two decades of service on the battlefield. A measured and thoughtful leader, he has a reputation as a skilled warrior though his current duty is thought to have caused him to go a little soft.

There are also a few peasants with potentially-valuable skills.

- **Akuro** (the Hunter) - orphan girl, supports herself by bringing small game and herbs from the Forest
- **Fusae** (the Healer) - not a shugenja, but skilled at practical medicine and surprisingly well-versed in antidotes
- **Josuke** (the Budoka) - veteran ashigaru, served with distinction in multiple battles
- **Kobo** (the Doshin) - magistrate's deputy and peacekeeper, a very large young man
- **Mitsunari** (the Forester) - crew leader of local woodcutters, knows forest extremely well
- **Hama** (the Messenger) – runs messages to other towns along road

## **Player Handout #3: Usagi Nozomi**

Nozomi is a friendly, energetic young samurai just past her gempukku. Her father is the gokenin of Kazashimo Mura, and she is quite popular with the people of the village. She is a prodigy of the Usagi Bushi School, though her youth does mean that she lacks experience.

Nozomi provides the following:

+3 Force

Any roll made to control the ashigaru receives a bonus of +10 to the total of the roll.

When a PC is about to take an attack in an encounter that Nozomi is present at, she may leap in the way to take the damage instead. Her Earth is 2, and she has Reduction 3 from her light armor.

## **Player Handout #4: Usagi Shinobu**

Shinobu is the local magistrate of Kazashimo Mura. She is a trained bushi, though her work as a magistrate is more in line as an administrator and adjudicator than a warrior. She is quite clever, however, and is an experienced investigator.

Shinobu provides:

+1 Force

Any Social Skill Rolls made during the course of any investigation gain +5 to the total

If engaged in a combat in the same encounter as a PC, she will provide them with the benefit of the Guard Maneuver (+10 Armor TN)

## **Player Handout #5: Usagi Ieshige**

Ieshige is in his mid-forties, and an experienced battlefield warrior. His position as commander of Kazashimo Mura's guards was likely intended as a relaxing, pastoral retreat before his official retirement, but he treats his duties seriously.

Ieshige provides:

+5 Force

Once during the module, any roll to maintain control over the ashigaru can be treated as an automatic success.

If a PC in an encounter that Ieshige is present at is about to take damage that will kill them, Ieshige can leap in the way and take the killing blow himself in their stead. This only triggers if the PC is about to die, and he will not survive.

## **Player Handout #6: Akuro (the Hunter)**

Akuro is an orphan in her late teens, and has survived on her own for several years. She travels through the Shinomen on her own, and is familiar with its dangers.

Akuro provides:

+6 to the total of Hunting rolls (this is Cooperative Skill use, and cannot apply to multiple PCs attempting the same task)

## **Player Handout #7: Fusae (the Healer)**

Fusae is the village healer. An herbalist and practitioner of traditional medicine, she does not have the sheer power of a shugenja but nonetheless is capable of helping the injured recover more quickly from their wounds.

Fusae provides:

Each PC (and Yataro) heals 8 additional Wounds per night of rest  
(this counts as a use of the Medicine Skill, so cannot be combined with a PC's use)

## **Player Handout #8: Josuke (the Budoka)**

Josuke is an experienced ashigaru, and a trusted leader for the conscripted ashigaru troops. He is a veteran of several battles, and maintains discipline among his men with a firm hand.

Josuke provides:

+2 Force

+5 to ashigaru control rolls



## **Player Handout #9: Kobo (the Doshin)**

Kobo is the local magistrate's peasant deputy. A very large and generally-easygoing young man, he is not unskilled in combat but is more used to keeping the peace by intimidation.

Kobo provides:

+1 Force

+5 to Intimidation rolls

## **Player Handout #10: Mitsunari (the Forester)**

Mitsunari is the leader of a crew of woodcutters, and as befits a man who earns a living out of the Shinomen Forest, is very familiar with the surrounding area. He is not a skilled fighter, but he is calm and remains unrattled by the dangers of the haunted forest.

Mitsunari provides:

Reduce TN of Trailblazing rolls by 10

## **Player Handout #11: Hama (the Messenger)**

Hama is a professional messenger, a long-distance runner that carries missives along the roads between settlements. She is capable of taking care of herself and familiar with the surrounding area.

Hama provides:

+1 Force

+1k0 on Hunting rolls