

# Fool's Harvest

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

Month of Bayushi, 1343 (Late Fall)

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[Combat, Investigation, Travel, Supernatural]  
Part Three of *Shadow on the Shinomen*

Every hunter knows that the most dangerous beast is one that has been driven to its den...

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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 Shadowlands Horde is attacking the Empire, but criminals must still be brought to justice. After two years of hunting, Seppun Yataro has driven Gekido, the vicious leader of the Forest Killers, to the gang's final bastion. A sizable force of Imperial Legion troops, with allied forces from several clans and even some ronin, have tracked the brutal jizumai to their true hideout in the southern Shinomen. Unfortunately for all involved, the Shadowlands have a plan to recruit the human monsters...

The Imperial forces wish to resolve the situation with the Forest Killers as expeditiously as possible, to deploy those troops to more pressing duties against the Horde. There are those, like Yataro's yoriki Usagi Nozomi, who feel that even the Forest Killers could be a potential asset; some may be idealistic enough to believe no human can be as bad as the Shadowlands forces, while others would be happy to let those who have earned death for their crimes give their lives in a manner that serves the Empire. Yataro does not believe any of these justifications, wishing to see the Forest Killers destroyed root and branch (partially, though not entirely, motivated by vengeance for his personal losses to the gang), but it may be possible for PCs to convince him otherwise.

The PCs will have to contend with the Forest Killers, who do not wish to be brought to justice, the Shadowlands forces under the command of Mozu the Shrike, a powerful Tainted shugenja who wishes to bind the bandits in service to the Dark Lord, and even Seppun Yataro, who will initially prove resistant to changing his plans even in the face of the Shadowlands. Additionally, they will find themselves confronting the force behind the most infamous bandit gang in Rokugan's history, and the reason it always returns when destroyed...

## 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. Any PC with the following mechanics should be noted:

- Sworn Enemy: Gekido
- Forest Killers Ronin Path
- PCs with mechanics related to animals; this includes most Unicorn Schools, Techniques that revolve around animal companions, or magic that involves animal spirits
- Cursed by Chikushudo or Sakkaku
- Ranks in the Lore: Spirit Realms or Lore: Nonhumans Skills

### 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. At the start of the module, each PC loses **2 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 **30**. 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.

### Preparation Techniques

Techniques like the Agasha Shugenja or Yogo Wards do not quite fall under Crafting, but still can benefit from pre-planning and the Upkeep is a good opportunity. However, unlike Crafting, this is not the only time these Techniques may be used during a module – this is just a chance for the GM to remind the players and get it out of the way.

### 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, any ronin PCs lose half of their koku. This cannot reduce their accumulated wealth below an amount of bu equal to their highest Skill.

### 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 assist Seppun Yataro, the senior Emerald Magistrate who has been hunting the Forest Killer bandit gang for the last two years. They may have worked with him the past (in mods CIT29: *Bloodstained Forest* or CIT44: *Primal Rage*), but the hope is that this mission will see the end of the bandit gang once and for all.

For ease of play, it is the basic assumption that the PCs are traveling together and have the opportunity to introduce themselves on the journey to the south of the Shinomen.

The rolling hills of the Crab Kuda Province have seen more than their share of turmoil in recent years: between the climax of the Lion/Crab war that claimed

the lives of both Clan Champions at Kuda Mura, and the ill-fated city of Maemikake, the normally-quiet agricultural region has begun to develop an uneasy reputation in the wider Empire. The sprawling military camp that is your destination does little to dispell the concerns that samurai have begun to have upon hearing the name of the province, and the dark green line of the Shinomen Mori visible to the north merely serves to underscore this apprehension.

There are around three thousand troops gathered under the banner of the First Imperial Legion. As the First Imperial Legion is actually mostly deployed to Ootosan Uchi, this is almost entirely a formality. While a few hundred samurai from the First are here, the bulk of these forces are from the Crab, Crane, and Mantis Clans, with a significant number of Minor Clan and ronin bushi.

As the PCs approach the camp around mid-day, they are hailed by guards who direct them to the command center in the middle of the tents. It is obvious to anyone with any experience with warfare that the troops here have recently seen combat, but appear to be in good spirits and predominantly in fighting shape. There are a few wounded, and eta can be seen at the edge of camp dealing with bodies, but morale seems high and most of the soldiers are going about their business preparing to move out.

A closer look at the camp will let the PCs determine that there are basically four legions present, of the standard clan military size (rather than the larger forces that use that term for the Imperial Legions). This is around 750 troops each, from the Crab, Crane, and Mantis Clans, and another legion made up of samurai from the Imperial Legion, Minor Clans, and ronin. The four units are camped together, but there are clear delineations between the groups, as each has an entirely different set of military traditions from the others.

The command tent for the unusual joint operation is at the center of the camp. Banners are proudly displayed in front of it, with mon emblazoned for each legion, the personal mon of the commanders of the units, and an insignia for the overall mission. All of these are flown under a green and gold pennant with the crest of the Emerald Champion, clearly showing the lawful intent and under whose authority these troops have marshalled.

PCs with Lore: Heraldry may roll that Skill (with Intelligence) to gather information about the samurai they are about to meet, if they wish. Doing so grants

them a Free Raise on any Social Rolls made during this first scene, as they can earn appreciation by recognizing the commanders. The information that they receive depends on how well they roll (these TNs are based largely on the Glory of the individuals in question):

- 15: [Glory 7] The military commander of the combat forces is Ujina Gatsu, a Hare Clan gunso (which is a very low rank for that position, but he is also known to have earned Imperial favor by defending the Emperor and Emerald Champion during the Phoenix Coup)
- 20: [Glory 6] The overall commander of the mission is Seppun Yataro, the Emerald Magistrate with jurisdiction over the Shinomen Forest
- 25: [Glory 5] The commander of the Crane legion is Daidoji Otoe, a cunning taisa who first came to prominence fighting against the Crab eight years ago; she has a reputation for hit and run tactics, and has shown no remorse for taking advantage of traps in her military engagements
- 30: [Glory 4] The commander of the Mantis legion is Tsuruchi Masahiro, an older taisa who has largely been in charge of the defense of some of the Tsuruchi's southern holdings, though he was active as a bounty hunter twenty years ago
- 35: [Glory 3] The commander of the Crab legion is Toritaka Itsuki, a quiet taisa who has very rarely been out of his family's provinces; he is, however, quite familiar with the Shinomen Mori and considered something of an expert on the spirits that make the haunted forest their home

The guards at the entrance to the tent recognize you immediately, and bow deeply before opening the tent flaps to allow you entry. Inside, the leaders of the assembled force are conferring over a table laden with maps and notes. Seppun Yataro and his yoriki, Usagi Nozomi, are perhaps familiar to you. Yataro is a tall, handsome man in his early thirties, clad in bright emerald-green armor and with an eyepatch over his left eye. Nozomi is still a slender, energetic young woman, prone to fidgeting but with a genuine smile for you. The other four samurai present offer polite nods as Yataro straightens from the table.

There is a lessening of tension in his stern face as the Emerald Magistrate greets you. "Excellent. You are here." He does not quite smile, but he appears sincerely relieved. "Your other duties have been of great importance, but I am most grateful for your assistance here. A terrible blight upon the Empire will finally be dealt with, once and for all."

Yataro is nearing the end of his quest to destroy the Forest Killers, and has been driving the joint force as hard as he can to achieve his goal. He does, however, remain an honorable and proper samurai, and will introduce the PCs to the other samurai present:

**Ujina Gatsu** is a large man in his early twenties; clad in heavy armor and covered in scars, he looks far more like a typical Hida heavy infantry officer than the more typical Hare skirmisher. Yataro calls him the "commander of the combined military forces", with only the slightest hesitation. (Note that Ujina Gatsu is an active PC in the campaign, so the player characters may have encountered him in the past; in the current situation, Gatsu is even more reserved than usual as he feels pressure from the demands of his current Imperial appointment and the problem with giving orders to samurai who have higher Status.)

**Daidoji Otoe** is a stocky, plain-faced woman in her mid-thirties. As the commander of the Crane forces, she is used to asymmetrical warfare (though usually from the other direction). Apart from having no patience for any disparaging commentary regarding the Daidoji family's irregular military units (perhaps going so far as to "arrange an introduction to one of my Kakita cousins, should you desire to speak further on this matter" – a relatively nuanced threat to resolve the matter with a duel), Otoe is generally content to follow Yataro's lead even if she is less than impressed with Gatsu's credentials. She intends to do her job as efficiently as possible, with as little loss of her troops as she can arrange. She is, however, less than enthused about the prospect of expending resources fighting bandits while the Shadowlands is attacking the Empire. Yataro describes her troops as "Daidoji scouts and archers" which is accurate but somewhat incomplete. (They are a mix of Iron Warrior- and Scout-trained light infantry and archers, with a few Harriers as gunso.)

**Tsuruchi Masahiro** is the oldest samurai present, being in his late forties, a grizzled and graying man with the powerful arms and calloused hands of a lifelong archer. Still hale, though perhaps slowing slightly, he has a vast trove of general military and law enforcement experience he is quite happy to share when asked. His troops are almost entirely Tsuruchi-trained archers, with a handful of Yoritomo and Moshi shugenja providing magical assistance. Masahiro is almost as invested in the mission as Yataro, having seen the Forest Killers in action himself on a number of occasions.

**Toritaka Itsuki** is slender and distant in his demeanor, though when his attention is caught, his gaze sharpens

to a razor intensity. His legion is mostly made up of rangers and woodsmen from the Toritaka family, all of whom have a great deal of familiarity with the Shinomen, though there are also a decent number of Kaiu engineers present to assist with siegework. While it might be assumed that a Crab samurai would be far more concerned with the Shadowlands invasion to the north, Itsuki views the mission against the Forest Killers as an opportunity to cleanse the forest of a man-made threat.

Yataro should definitely show respect for the PCs and their reputations. He probably has worked with them in the past, and their general competence is assumed (as this is a High-Rank module). He is not inclined to cast aspersions on the PCs for their other duties, recognizing that the things they have been doing is of importance to the Empire as a whole, and appreciates that they are here to help.

Introductions done, Yataro moves to the head of the table and indicates the map. “The situation is not terribly complex. Having captured one of the Forest Killers’ higher-ranked members, one responsible for helping to outfit the gang and expand their recruiting efforts, we were able to interrogate him to learn of the gang’s bases of operations. It took a great deal of effort, most of which I will not burden you with, but we were eventually able to learn where their primary stronghold and several other bases are located.” The magistrate taps a long finger on the map, indicating your present location just south of the forest. “This first part of the operation was aimed at a secret cache, a vault known only to a few of the most trusted members of the band and only lightly defended as a result. It is our belief that this hidden cavern, holding treasure and weapons, helped the Forest Killers rebuild in the past, when they have been thought destroyed. That option is no longer available to them.”

Yataro nods grimly, almost to himself. “We have been pressing the bandits on all fronts for months, now. At their peak, the gang had around two thousand members, operating in a large swathe of the Empire. Many of these were just opportunists, working with the Forest Killers for profit, and fled when the Imperial investigation began hunting them down in earnest. The best intelligence indicates there are probably less than five hundred remaining, but we are certain that less than a thousand have retreated to their final strongholds. Given that we are attacking their citadel, in their territory, with a fortified position they have been able to prepare, I do not think that three thousand troops are an unreasonable number. We must anticipate losing some to ambushes before we get the opportunity for open battle. And then, we have no idea

what bringing this force through the Shinomen will entail...”

He points to five positions marked on the map, well into the Shinomen Mori. “There are four fortified camps in defensive positions around the main stronghold. We will surround them, eliminate the outer ring, and then move in on the last bastion, this ruin that has the grandiose name of ‘Shiro no Gekido’. We do not want to leave them any opening to slip through. Each of the four legions here will attack one of the outer camps. I would have you as part of my command staff, to assist in taking the southern-most location, which they call the ‘Leaves of the Tree Dojo’, as there may be intelligence to be gained there that your wider skillset could be of assistance with.” He raises a hand and clenches it into a fist. “Then, we move on to their so-called fortress, and draw our noose closed.”

Yataro raises his gaze to look you over. “We will destroy them utterly. Do you have any questions?”

The PCs may have questions about the mission or the general situation:

- *What opposition do you expect?* “The Forest Killers are honorless scum, willing to attack from surprise and retreat without shame to prevent counterattack. The density of the forest will likely prevent them from using horses as they frequently do on their raids, but their familiarity with the terrain cannot be underestimated.”
- *What about the Shinomen?* “It is thought to be haunted, and certainly there have been problems reported with it regularly, but the Toritaka have given us some guidance in the matter.”
- *Is this really as important as the Shadowlands?* “We cannot let the bandits escape now, when we are so close. If nothing else, removing them as a threat at our back will increase our ability to respond to the threat of the invasion.”
- *Are there any leaders that we need to focus on?* “Their leader is a brute named Gekido, who seems jealous of his position and does not allow any competition to develop in his command structure. It may be that Ishi the Hammer, who led the force that we first encountered, survived to plague us again.”
- *Why is this not just an Imperial Legion operation?* “The Imperial Legions are busy elsewhere; it took a great deal of effort to get even the three companies of the First Legion dispatched to this mission that we have. They had been assigned to other Imperial holdings, and will be sent to Otosan Uchi when we are done.” Yataro is

displeased that the authority of an Emerald Magistrate has had such difficulty in getting military support, but the overall strategic situation in the Empire has changed many peoples' priorities.

- *Why are there so many forces from different clans here?* “Gatsu-san had spent a significant amount of effort on securing assistance with this task before he was officially assigned to my operation, and I exerted all the political influence I could muster. As it is, some clans that had previously given assurances of support were unable to follow through, given the military situation they are currently facing.”
- *Why is Ujina Gatsu, a gunso, in command over taisa?* “Gatsu-san helped to defend the Emperor and the Emerald Champion during the Phoenix Coup; his role in my operation is a reward, of sorts.” Yataro is studiously neutral in regard to this matter.
- *What if the Forest Killers surrender/would be willing to fight the Shadowlands?* “They are criminals.” Yataro’s voice is iron. “Their fate has been determined, by their own actions. They. Will. Die.” This sentiment does not seem to have the full support of the other samurai, but none speak out at this point.
- *What resources can you provide/can you give me armor?* This is likely to come up from non-bushi in particular; the legions can provide ashigaru armor to anyone who does not have it, and they will provide a basic weapon from the following list: naginata, yari, yumi with 20 arrows (allowing the PC to add these items to their Outfit for 1 Favor each, if they wish to keep it past the end of the module)

The plan, if the PCs are curious (and they will discover shortly anyway) is to travel to the edge of the Shinomen Mori and make camp for the night. The force will split into five columns the next day: four to attack each of the outlying bandit camps, and a fifth with the support staff, supplies, and siege engines. The Crab will attack the bandit watchtower to the north, as they are the most familiar with the forest and will travel the furthest distance easiest; the Crane will attack the eastern camp on the river, that the bandits use to supplement their supplies with fish; the Mantis will attack the western clearing where the bandits keep their horses. The support column will head directly to the final stronghold, as they will be traveling the slowest. Timing will be critical; these attacks must happen at dawn of the second day in the forest, and then the forces must move to the final stronghold to attack the next day. Communication will be managed with mounted messengers and shugenja.

Once the PCs have asked their questions, Yataro will dismiss them to whatever preparations they need to make.

“We will move out in three hours. That should allow us to make camp just outside the Shinomen to make our final preparations.” He nods to the Crab taisa. “Toritaka-san has provided defensive wards that may provide us with some assistance in avoiding the attention of harmful spirits. I am not certain how necessary they will be, and we do not have enough to supply every soldier in our command, but at least the officer corps will benefit from the Toritaka family’s expertise.”

Toritaka Itsuki gives each of the PCs a scroll prepared in a similar fashion to the Toritaka Exorcism Wards; this can be activated simply by opening it and drives spiritual influences away from the PC. Mechanically, this means that a PC may use a Free Action to open the scroll to end all effects on them caused by any spirit. (This includes magic, either maho or shugenja effects.) Once used, however, it is expended. Additionally, it provides some protection from the unnatural Fear effects caused by the natural spirits of the Shinomen – for those Fear Rolls, if the PCs fails by less than 15, they suffer a static penalty to their rolls equal to the Fear Rating (instead of rolled dice), and do not become helpless if they do fail by 15 or more (though they do suffer the rolled dice penalty). If not used by the end of the module, they will be either returned to the Crab or will cease functioning.

The PCs presumably have little preparation to make, since they were already traveling and just arrived. They may wish to speak with the people they will be fighting alongside, though the actual commanders are going to be busy with planning operations. (PCs with 5 or more ranks in the Battle Skill would be welcome to offer their insight, though those with less logistical experience will be politely thanked and sent on their way.)

This type of joint military operation is unusual in Rokugan, but not unprecedented. It does not take a great deal of effort to learn some basic information regarding the composition of the forces. Each of the four legions that make up the collective force are essentially autonomous military units, with a support structure of their own. A few facts of relevance about the legions:

The Crab legion is one of two typically assigned to the Toritaka provinces, and therefore represents a significant contribution by the Crab Clan. This is, as

noted, primarily because the Toritaka family is concerned about the Forest Killers operating in the Shinomen Mori. While the bulk of the troops in the Crab legion are Toritaka-trained bushi (and thus, experienced woodsmen and knowledgeable about spirits), there are a decent amount of heavy infantry trained by the Hida, and Kaiu to operate the siege weapons necessary to attack fortified positions. There are a few Toritaka shugenja present, who are expected to defend the group from the inimical spirits of the forest.

The Crane legion is a highly mobile force generally meant to defend the Crane lands; as the Crane lands are relatively protected from the current situation (and with the Lion and Scorpion hard-pressed by the Horde), they are less critical in their typical role. Otoe's troops are mostly Daidoji-trained, in either the Iron Warrior or Scout Schools, but are all familiar with basic woodcraft. As a hit-and-run force, even the support company is expected to be able to move quickly, and the few shugenja the unit has are generally used to enhance their mobility.

The Mantis legion is primarily focused on ranged combat, as would be expected from a Tsuruchi force. They have more shugenja support than most equivalently-sized military units, but these are generally focused on intelligence gathering or artillery operations. Like the Crane force, they have primarily been a defensive force in the southern Tsuruchi provinces, but the military pressures of the Horde have given them greater leeway for this mission.

The mixed unit of Imperial Legion, Minor Clan, and ronin that the PCs will be traveling with are the most diverse, for obvious reasons. Most of the Minor Clan militaries are focused on the Shadowlands Horde, who have overrun the Badger, Frog and Hare lands, but there are a few that have been persuaded by Gatsu to join this operation. As a former ronin, Gatsu also had begun assembling an otokodate to combat the Forest Killers, and the majority of that group have joined forces with the official Emerald Magistrate mission. The troops from the First Imperial Legion are primarily Lion and Seppun, but do have representatives from every Great Clan. As a result, this group has the widest variety of potential response, giving it a versatility unusual in standard Rokugani military doctrine. The downside of this is that this unit has very little experience working together, however united they are in their current task.

If the PCs wish to get a sense of what the rank-and-file troops are thinking, they may attempt a modified Rumor roll.

## Rumors

The following information is available with a **Courtier (Gossip)** or **Battle / Awareness** roll. A PC with Status on a military track gains a Free Raise on this roll.

- 10: The troops' morale is high after the first engagement of the operation. There were almost no casualties among the legions, since there were only a few dozen bandits defending the cache, but the success has given the joint task force a sense of inevitable victory.
- 15: A few of the bandits tried to surrender, but were summarily executed by Yataro's order. Their ends were mercifully brief, but most samurai even in the legions have seen a public execution and the sight did bring home the seriousness of the mission.
- 20: There is some tension among the unit's commanders, likely due to the fact that three Great Clan taisa are taking orders from a Minor Clan gunso. Gatsu does seem to have more experience with the Forest Killers than anyone else in the force, though where he acquired it is unknown.
- 25: The magistrate's yorikit tried to argue for clemency for the Forest Killers who were willing to surrender, but Yataro shut her down. There is a lively debate about how effective the bandits could be as conscripts, but it is entirely hypothetical as no one in the camp thinks any of the Forest Killers will survive.
- 30: The legion taisa are concerned about the overall strategic picture of the Empire, and have been noted to be making recommendations to the unit leaders that are intended to minimize casualties. Everyone knows that the Shadowlands Horde will be the next priority, and while no one is particularly eager to fight literal monsters, there is a sense that the troops want to get this mission accomplished so they can fight "the real enemy".

Apart from that, the afternoon and evening will be spent in transit to the border of the Shinomen Forest. There are scouts sent ahead, but no problems present themselves in this first day's march.

## **Part One: Into the Woods... Again**

The joint force makes camp that night outside the Shinomen Mori, in a defensible position with guards and scouts posted to provide warning in case of danger. There is no problem in the night, however, so

they break camp the next morning without issue. Morale is high and the troops are confident – until they take their first steps into the forest.

Stepping into the shade of the forest is very like plunging into a cold mountain lake. The crisp autumn air, almost unseasonably warm in the bright morning sunlight, turns chill. A dark green light filters down from the canopy, and as the breeze shifts the branches, shadows seem to move furtively among the massive trunks that surround you. The low sounds of the forest are muffled by the dense undergrowth, but the hush is tense and threatening. Perhaps it is nothing more than imagination, but countless eyes seem to be watching your every move... eyes that are angry with what they see.

As they enter the Shinomen, the PCs must make rolls to resist **Fear 1** (TN 10); if they have “Cursed by the Realm: Chikushudo or Sakkaku”, this is increased to **Fear 2**. These TNs are deliberately low, and it is expected that the PCs should pass relatively easily, but this should set the mood for what they are getting into.

The PCs are not the only ones that feel this dread; any animals accompanying them must do so as well, though they may add unkept dice equal to their handler’s Animal Handling Skill Ranks (or Horsemanship, for steeds) to the roll. Most pet or non-combat animals only have a Willpower of 1, while horses have Willpower 3 (4 for Utaku Steeds), though they obviously have no Honor Rank to assist. Even the best-trained creature feels the threat of the forest on an instinctual level, and know that there are predators in the woods... (PCs with non-essential animals may wish to leave them with the support column.)

The NPCs with the group also feel these effects, though none lose face or are adversely affected mechanically.

At this point, any shugenja casting Commune to speak with the spirits in the Shinomen must make a Fear 4 Roll before rolling to cast the spell. The local spirits are hostile to humans; while they will perform tasks requested by appropriate prayers, they are less inclined to communicate directly with those they view as encroaching on their territory. (Only the Commune spell is affected by this.)

## Gates of Persistence

In a clearing just inside the edge of the forest stands a massive torii arch, carved from a single stone block.

Kanji for “Nothing, Tomorrow, Forever, Today” are etched into its face, as clear today as when they were cut hundreds of years ago. A small shrine to the Fortune of Persistence has been erected nearby, where offerings can be left by travelers who have made their way here. The weight of the forest’s attention seems to lessen slightly in the clearing, though the shadows in the trees remain waiting beyond.

This landmark has been selected as a rendezvous point for the military force, in the event of disaster. While the commanders are confident in their plan, the more experienced military leaders (Masahiro and Otoe) insisted on contingency planning. It is here that the force will divide into the five columns mentioned above.

The shrine to the Fortune of Persistence is maintained by a few Crab monks who come into the forest far enough to take care of it. It does not specify Kisada, though it does have some iconography related to him, as the shrine itself predates the elevation of Kisada to that role, when Sudaro was the Fortune of Persistence. Historical trivia aside, any PC who prays at the shrine may roll **Lore: Theology / Void** at a TN of 25. Doing so helps focus their mind for the trials ahead, and they may re-roll one Willpower-based roll. (This lasts until the end of the module.)

## The Leaves of the Tree Dojo

It takes the legion the PCs are traveling with most of the day to get into position to attack their target. Gatsu has sent scouts out to ensure that the bandits are where they are expected to be, and that there aren’t any traps waiting. Unfortunately, of the dozen scouts sent out (both riding ahead and watching the legion’s perimeter), three do not return. Rather than spending time and likely losing more troops searching for them, Yataro and Gatsu order the group to continue moving. “If they have fallen behind or gotten lost, they know to head back to the Gates of Persistence. If they were taken by the enemy... or anything worse... then there is little we can do but avenge them, or make sure their sacrifices were not in vain.”

As the rest of the scouts report that the target camp is empty, this causes some consternation at first. Yataro is angered by the losses, but each casualty or missing soldier bolsters his resolve. The rest of the force begins to show more caution, as the lack of information is more frightening than the actuality of a body would be.



As the sun begins to drop while the group nears their target, the scouts find their way back to report that the enemy camp appears to be empty. The plan had been to camp a short way off from the camp and attack in the morning, but with the new information, Yataro wants to investigate.

The fortified camp used by the Forest Killers as a training ground and dojo is a small complex with three low, crudely-constructed buildings surrounded by a wooden palisade. The gates are shattered, however, and there is an eerie silence even more forbidding than the previous hushed, hostile sounds of the forest. There is no sign of movement within the walls, and no one appears to notice your approach.

With no sign of the enemy, Yataro decides to surround the camp and prepare the troops in case of attack. He sends the PCs in to investigate the situation, with a squad of heavily-armored troops for protection if necessary. (But not so many as to get in the way of a search.)

Inside, the now-empty camp has quite clearly been attacked, but by what is rather less obvious. There is a great deal of blood everywhere, but no bodies. Arrows and broken spears litter the ground or are lodged in walls, some with burned or shattered hafts. The cleared training grounds has nine practice dummies, two of them broken, and the otherwise empty space also has four large thorn bushes scattered at what appears to be random spacing.

**What happened:** Muzo attacked the camp with some of his oni creations the day before. They slew around half of the thirty bandits present, and captured the rest for forced recruitment. The bodies were taken along to be used as spare part or fodder. One of Muzo's favored tactics is to create the thorn bushes using a modified version of the "Wooden Prison" spell, trapping the bodies of his victims, while he begins to warp their spirit with his twisted magic. A few of the bandits did flee, and there are tracks showing their retreat, but they were pursued by oni.

The PCs may roll **Investigation (Search) / Perception** to learn what they can about what happened here:

- 15: There was a fight with some unknown force. As most of the blood has dried, but is still recognizable, it took place within the last day.
- 20: Many of the bandits were killed, but their bodies were taken by whoever did this. Some may have escaped, though the ones that fled do appear to have been pursued.

- 25: There is no blood on the arrows or broken weapons to be found, despite signs that they were used.
- 30: There is blood inside the thorn bushes, and a few scraps of flesh. People were held inside them and tortured for at least a few hours.
- 35: The thorn bushes were created by magic, and appear to be in the process of dying.

The buildings are a barracks (with a wide variety of personal effects left behind in disarray), a disturbingly-well-stocked armory, and a large building clearly used as a meeting hall and kitchen. There is very little to be learned from the possessions of the bandits, save that they are mostly brutal men and women with a fondness for mood-altering substances, wealth, and weapons. Tattoo implements and pornography are the only art forms to be found, and what texts that might refer to their training are all pictorial (designed to be used by and for illiterate learners).

The tracks head to the north, in the general direction of the final stronghold. Each PC should roll **Investigation (Notice) / Void** at a TN of 30; the one who rolls the highest is the first to notice a faint wisp of smoke rising above the treetops (visible from the edge of the clearing the dojo complex is in), though all of those who succeed will take note of it. Something more than just the failing light of day does seem to make it hard to focus on, however. (A shugenja who succeeded at the first roll may roll **Spellcraft/ Perception** at TN 25 to realize that a spirit is hiding the source of the smoke, but what kind of spirit they will not know.)

Following the tracks requires a **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll; the TN for this roll is 25, but if no PC can make it, Nozomi will. Rolling 30 or higher allows them to recognize that the bandits were panicked in their flight, while the pursuers were far more controlled; additionally, while it initially appears as though the pursuers are wearing kegutsu riding boots, there are marks at the front of the tracks that almost appear to have been made by something sharp (yes, claws). Nozomi does not make this higher TN.

The tracks approach the source of the smoke and veer suddenly to the east as if to avoid the small clearing it is coming from. (If no PC succeeded at the earlier roll, they may roll again at the same TN, but in any event they notice the sudden change in direction.) This should prompt the PCs to investigate the clearing and the hut within it, but if it does not occur to them, one of the NPCs can point it out to them as a potential source of information. Following the tracks further is

possible, though it may be worth reminding the players that the tracks are more than a day old and that it will be dark soon.

A thin wisp of smoke rises from the chimney of a delapidated shack, covered in vines and mud and nestled among the massive roots of an ancient oak. Most of its structure seems to come from living plants, and it is impossible to tell where the walls end and the tree begins. A twisted, gnarled stump in front of the door suddenly turns, revealing itself to be the bent figure of an old woman. A long nose protrudes from matted gray hair that covers her face, and a single gleaming eye glares balefully at you from within the filthy mass. Her robes are so encrusted with mud as to resemble tree bark, and her withered fingers clutch at a crooked branch held as a cane.

She sniffs the air in your direction, and speaks in a creaky voice. “Pah! Samurai! This is not a place for samurai... Dangerous and deadly, the Shinomen Mori. Especially to hunters like you.” She sniffs again, and pauses. “But you have the stink of destiny. What do you think you seek in this forest? Tell Morinoroba, and she may help.” She gestures you closer, and cackles, “Or maybe help you feed the trees...”

The implied name “Morinoroba” just means “old woman of the forest”, which any suspicious PC may realize if they have ranks in Lore: Spirit Realms or Lore: Nonhumans (or, at the GM’s discretion, can make an **Intelligence** roll at a TN of 20). This is an old nature spirit manifesting in human shape; she sees some potential in the PCs as tools to rid the forest of the bandit gang and its patron, but is by no means friendly or happy to see them. She is, rather, marginally less hostile than the other spirits and willing to work with the mortals that the spirits of the forest generally view with contempt.

Morinoroba is not interested in the sort of reverence and appeasement that most spirits respond to. She is an ancient forest spirit who predates the advent of mortal beings in Ningen-do, and represents a wilder, untamed sort of spirit – one that would be much happier without mortals around. The spirit should be creepy and dismissive of the mortal PCs. Treating her with respect and caution is appreciated, but she wants them to prove that they know what they’re doing. Threats or attacks are met with derisive laughter, and her physical form simply melts into mud and vines – this laughter echoes in the PCs’ ears at inopportune times, increasing the Fear Rating of the forest by 2 each time they must roll to resist it. Her house vanishes as well, not to be seen again.

That said, PCs may convince her to give them some information by rolling Lore: Spirit Realms, Lore: Nonhumans, or Lore: Theology as a Social Skill (keeping Awareness). She will answer a question for each PC that succeeds at a TN of 30, though a PC may get an additional question by calling two Raises. Any PC that succeeded on the Void roll to notice the hut gains a Free Raise on this roll. (She sniffs, “Perhaps some of you have eyes to see what’s in front of you...”) She is not motivated to be particularly forthcoming, however, as if the PCs seem too stupid to ask the right questions, she doubts that they’ll be able to actually deal with the Forest Killer and its gang. Ideally, even if the PCs secure her cooperation, she will still make her general disdain for humanity clear while being cryptic and somewhat frustrating.

Alternately, if a PC wants to know what a creature like her could possibly want, they may roll one of the above Lore Skills with Intelligence at a TN of 40 to recognize that her form is somewhat similar to a mikaribaba, a one-eyed spirit that has been known to take eyes from humans. Offering one of their own eyes of their own free will impresses the spirit, and she will provide them with as much information as she has. This gives the PC the “Bad Eyesight” Disadvantage, and it cannot be cured by any means short of the direct intervention of a Fortune.

Things that Morinoroba knows:

- The Forest Killers live in the Shinomen Mori. *“Unrestful neighbors. What do you seek of them?”*
- The Forest Killers have been a gang in the Shinomen Forest for centuries, and every time mortals have destroyed the gang, the gang returns. *“Mortal men. Always so quick to think they’ve got the job done.”*
- Tainted creatures are loose in the forest, but she is secure in the knowledge that the Shinomen can protect itself. (This may be somewhat underestimating the havoc that the Shadowlands could cause if they succeed at conquering the entire Empire, and have the resources and time to focus on attacking the forest...) *“Jigoku knows that it cannot have anything of the Shinomen. It learned that the hard way. But your prey... they live here, but they are not of the forest, neh?”*
- The Forest Killers are being attacked by the Shadowlands Horde. *“Monsters hunting monsters. Which are you?”*
- A few survivors from the dojo fled into the forest, heading for their final stronghold. *“Poor cubs, finding their strength insufficient. Finding something stronger than you when all you care*

*about is strength – that would be a true terror, wouldn't it?"*

- All of the Forest Killers have retreated to the ruined castle that is their final stronghold. *"All of the branded ones, fled to their den of stone."*
- There are only a few hundred of the Forest Killers left in the Shinomen (though spirits tend to be a bit inexact with numbers). *"They are fewer than you, but which will prove the stronger? Strength is their obsession... what is yours?"*
- The Horde wants to recruit the Forest Killers. *"When all they care about is taking and killing, what other use would they be put to? Mortal men never really change, only choose different ways to take... right?"*
- The Forest Killers have a spiritual patron, who has provided protection from the other forest spirits, and has rebuilt the gang whenever they've been destroyed. *"Not all of the spirits of the forest are the same. The Mad One, at least, is much like these mortals you are so worried about. Concerned only with strength, gaining power from those that bear its mark... Maybe they are more like you samurai than you want to admit?" She cackles with glee.*

When the PCs are done asking questions, she will bid them farewell with a creepy "Happy hunting!" and an evil cackle.

As long as the PCs do not make the mistake of reacting with hostility, they should at the least learn that the Forest Killers are being hunted by something other than the Empire's forces. This should give them some pause, though when they report what they find back to Seppun Yataro, he will take it more as a competition than a setback. "We cannot let the Forest Killers escape justice, no matter who or what else is out here."

## Part Two: Who Knows What May Be Lurking

The PCs' legion will make camp that night; whether they use the fortified camp that was the dojo is largely up to them – Yataro is inclined to make use of the walls, even if they demonstrably presented little hindrance to whatever attacked before, but can be convinced otherwise with relatively little effort. In any event, the military forces are on high alert and wherever they make camp, will establish some form of temporary palisade for defense.

While the PCs and other samurai have unrestful dreams that night, there is no overt attack or disturbance to prevent their rest.

When the group begins to move in the morning, the forest's aura of dread deepens. They must make a roll against **Fear 2** (TN15, with previously-mentioned modifiers applying). Again, this is largely to establish the tenor of the scene and demonstrate that it is increasing in severity. Again, animals must be controlled and the NPCs pass, though this time with a little more visible effort to maintain their samurai stoicism.

The PCs should also roll **Investigation (Notice) / Perception**, TN 30. The "Wary" Advantage applies, and starting with whoever rolls the highest, they will notice the moving shadows in the forest taking nearly defined forms a few times through the day. It frequently appears as though an animal is stalking the group (which makes no logical sense, as any wild animal should avoid a large party of humans); it appears in profile like a wolf, or bear, or large cat – always a predator of some sort, and always a large, clearly dangerous one – but it never remains long enough to get a clear view of it.

Around mid-day, a messenger from the Crab legion arrives with the news that the watchtower they were to attack was found empty. There was no sign of an attack, but none of the expected defenders were there. Through the day, other messengers arrive with similar news from the other two legions – the Forest Killers had abandoned their other camps. There are reports of missing troops from the other legions as well, though in all less than two dozen (far less than expected losses from combat). With this unsettling news, Yataro and Gatsu give orders for each of the legions to set up camp within striking distance of Shiro no Gekido, and to prepare for an assault in the morning.

With less than an hour before dark, your column meets up with the support group and makes ready to make camp. A pair of scouts runs into the camp, faces pale and eyes wide. They report immediately to the Emerald Magistrate, with you at his side. Gasping, they stammer out, "Sir! We found... something! Possibly enemy survivors? Maybe bodies?"

The scouts are entirely flustered by their discovery, as much as they'd expected to be dealing with bandits. What they found is a trio of thorn bushes, holding a pair of bandits each. At least one of them was moving, but they chose to report in case it was a trap by a spirit of some sort. They have few other details to report: one will mention that they saw a few weapons on the

ground, but that while the bandits in the bushes were wearing armor, they did not seem otherwise armed.

Yataro dispatches the PCs to investigate, as that is why they are with the group. A squad of heavy infantry, again, will provide protection.

Three large thorn bushes grow in a clearing ahead. Each of them has a pair of bandits trapped and bleeding inside. As you look closer, one of each of the pairs is moving, trying to escape with varying degrees of energy. The other lies motionless, unconscious perhaps or devoid of hope. Injuries are visible on each of the bandits, and a few weapons can be seen on the ground near the base of the bushes as if dropped suddenly by those trapped inside the plants' clutches.

These are a few of the survivors from the bandit camp that the PCs found earlier. Three of them were chased down and trapped here, while the other three were taken in the fight and are host to larval Chishio no Oni, a type of oni created by Muzo.

When the PCs close to within a few feet (to try to cut the bandits out, for example, or to talk with them without shouting), or if they cast a spell at the men trapped in the bush, the closest Chishio no Oni will burst from the body of the bandit:

The limp bandit moves suddenly, spasming in the thorn branches as if to stand. For the barest instant, you see movement under the man's skin, then a withered, vine-like limb tears its way out of the bandit's arm. Blood spatters as an emaciated, human-shaped form erupts out of the corpse. It rises to about seven feet high, with thin ropy tendrils giving the impression of a skinless man made out of vegetable matter. The ends of its limbs look more like tentacles, coming to vicious, sharp points, and the head lacks any feature save an enormous, leech-like mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth. The two other insensible bandits burst a bare second after the first, and all three creatures give voice to a weak hiss.

The PCs must roll to resist **Fear 3** (if they did not learn that there are Shadowlands creatures in the forest, this is increased to Fear 5). PCs who are hit by the blood and viscera of the sacrificed bandits will have to roll raw **Earth** rolls after the encounter to avoid gaining the Shadowlands Taint. The TN of this roll is 10 if they are uninjured, but rises to 20 if they have open wounds. (From, say, claws or the biting of insects.)

This should not be resolved with a standard combat, partially to save time by not requiring initiative tracking

and partly to allow the scene to do what it should (give the PCs warning about the Shadowlands, if they didn't previously have it, and establish the Shadowlands as a threat, and demonstrate that the forest can be an ally in this fight). Instead, each of the oni will take their action immediately – the one that emerged first will attack the closest PC with a bonus of +20 to their attack roll. The other two will attempt to flee, but when they reach the edge of the clearing, a pack of small white wolves will emerge from the shadows and growl at the monsters, holding them at bay and keeping them from escaping while the PCs deal with them.

The PCs may act in whatever turn order they wish at that point; if the oni are not destroyed by the time every PC has had an action, then they take another action. The PCs can be considered to have the initiative for any mechanic that references it. The larger danger of the Chishio no Oni is that they do damage to their attacker when struck by bladed weapons, but as the PCs will have the opportunity to heal after this fight and before the next one, lasting consequences are unlikely.

### Chishio no Oni

Air 3      Earth 3      Fire 3      Water 3

**Initiative:** 7k3

**Attack:** 8k4 (natural weapons, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 25

**Damage:** 6k3 (natural weapons)

**Reduction:** 0

**Wounds:** 25 (+5), 50 (+10), 75 (Dead)

**Taint Rank:** 5

**Special Abilities:**

- Fear 3
- *Corrupted Blood:* When damaged by an edged weapon (or anything else that draws blood), the enemy takes half the damage they deal in Wounds. (This cannot deal more than 37 Wounds from a killing blow.) This damage is automatic the first time a PC damages a chishio no oni, and may be avoided with a Defense / Reflexes roll at a TN of 20 afterwards. (A PC may roll Athletics / Reflexes instead, but this increases the TN by 5.) This damage varies between the types of oni; the earth-based types here spew forth a swarm of biting, stinging insects (centipedes, beetles, mosquitos) that tear into the attacker and then dissipate.

The spirit wolves do nothing to actually attack the oni, or the PCs, but once the PCs deal with the oni, will wait for a few minutes to see what the PCs do. If the

PCs attack, they howl in rage and disappointment, causing the PCs to roll against **Fear 8**, and flee into the forest.

If the PCs have more peaceful intentions in mind, they may recognize the wolves as okuriokami with a **Lore: Spirit Realms / Intelligence** (or other appropriate Skill) roll at TN 30; okuriokami are “escort wolves”, nature spirits that are not entirely inimical to mortals and have been known to provide protection to solitary humans. They additionally provide some measure of protection against animals that would damage crops, though this fact is more along the lines of folk wisdom than the sort of scholarly lore of interest to most samurai.

The PCs may attempt to communicate with the spirits, though this requires either being a shugenja or having actual ranks in the Lore: Theology Skill. Speaking with them is done with a **Lore: Theology / Awareness** roll at a TN of 30; PCs who succeeded in impressing Morinoroba with their resolve gain a Free Raise on this roll. If this is failed, the wolves will focus their attention and guidance on the PC they view as the best hunter – this is at the GM’s discretion, but they will be interested in the PC who dealt the most damage to the oni or took the most damage and continued to fight, or a PC with 5 or more Ranks in the Hunting Skill (or otherwise has a wilderness-themed concept for the character).

If the PCs succeed, the spirit wolves share information; though they don’t speak like humans, a faint voice can be heard on the wind behind them. *“The Mad One hides in their den, hunted by all. Rid the forest of their minions if you seek our aid...”* The okuriokami provide a little more in the way of context: the Mad One is the name much of the forest has for the spirit that has influenced the Forest Killers bandit gang. Even most of the gang is unaware that they have a spiritual patron of this nature, though Gekido and a few of his most useful (not “trusted”, for there is no trust in this group) lieutenants do know of it and call it “the Forest Killer”. The wolf-spirits don’t believe that the PCs can kill the spirit for good (doing so requires a more powerful spirit to get involved, and most of those have been driven away by the spiritual pollution of the Forest Killers gang) but will suggest shugenja give some effort to the issue. This does not lend itself to an immediate solution, but does give the party advance warning that the bandit leadership will be more significant than anticipated. Getting rid of the Forest Killers, however, will free the other spirits to contain their mad brethren.

After giving some useful exposition, the wolf spirits will depart – though if the PCs rolled 40+ on the roll to communicate with them, a wolf spirit will provide assistance in one of the following encounters (if necessary, at the GM’s discretion, to save a PC about to die, for example). The GM should take note of PCs who gain attention from the okuriokami.

The survivors are basically broken, and getting useful information out of them is more a matter of filtering through the babble. Questioning them requires rolling **Investigation (Interrogation) / Awareness** at a TN of 30; they’ve seen some terrible things and are not reliable sources of information, but they aren’t trying to hold back. They report that their camp was “attacked by monsters”, and while their descriptions are incoherent and rambling, succeeding on the roll lets the PCs determine that the enemy was a force of Lost samurai with a large number of oni. The communication among the attackers, the tactics that they displayed, and the fact that most of what is described could be explained by shugenja magic makes it clear to the PCs that the Horde is here, and the fact that they took prisoners means that they’re probably recruiting.

If the PCs make any kind of offer to the bandits that means they won’t be killed, they will accept with alacrity. They probably aren’t actually worth much in a fight, but are pathetically eager to leave the life of banditry behind them, even if it means fighting the Horde or some other less-than-comfortable fate. The bandits do not react to any test that checks for the Taint (they aren’t Tainted), but that doesn’t mean that they represent no threat. They bear the brand of the Forest Killer, indicating that they have killed in the name of the gang.

Yataro, of course, simply wants to execute them immediately upon the PCs’ return to camp. If a PC argues for clemency, they may be able to sway him with a **Courtier (Manipulation) or Sincerity (Honesty) / Awareness** roll at a TN of 50, but doing so requires both having a legitimate plan for what will happen with the bandits, and promising to pay for any misdeeds from the bandits with their own life. The GM provide Free Raises for a PC who makes arguments based on the law or honor, and avoids relying on compassion.

“Be it on your head, then. As far as the rest of them are concerned, we will see what tomorrow brings. There is courage in numbers, and I will be surprised if these scum are willing to recognize that they are doomed.” Yataro is obviously struggling with the

concept of mercy for the group that has caused him so much trouble and trauma.

Of course, if the PCs do not make any effort to spare the bandits, they are swiftly and efficiently put to death. Yataro does not stand as the headsman himself, but watches the executions with an impassive face after passing judgement.

## Part Three: The Time is Now

At this point, the PCs and the military force they are traveling with have made their way into some of the darkest parts of the Shinomen. They are able to set up a fortified camp, and continuing messages passed among the columns indicate that the other units are in position. That night, all of the samurai have unrestful dreams that prevent them from fully recovering from exertions of the day. They recover Wounds and spell slots as normal, but if spent Void does not fully recover from rest – all but one Void Point returns, but that last one will not (and a Meditation roll to recover it has its TN increased by 20; Tea Ceremony simply fails).

The rest of the camp appears to have been affected by the overall threat of the forest as well; the troops are grimly determined to follow their orders and accomplish the mission, but there is far less levity than there was at the start of the journey into the woods.

The forest has grown darker and colder as you travel in its depths. Broken, jagged hills hidden under the dense vegetation present another layer of threat, as even the ground beneath your feet seems eager to cause you harm.

As the PCs and the troops get moving, the deeper shadows and hostile growls barely perceptible on the wind causes the group to have to roll to resist **Fear 4** (TN 25). The greater spiritual pressure, some of which is caused by the Shadowlands presence having its own dark aura and some of it caused by the way the local spirits are reacting to the Horde, is extremely noticeable and causes more than a few of the troops to lose control. None break and flee, though some do seem to require the encouragement of their comrades to continue.

Yataro clenches his teeth in determination, and calls out to the soldiers who pause. “This place defends the filth who make their home here, but we will not be deterred! The spirit of samurai cannot be broken, when they march in the name of the Emperor’s Justice!” This sentiment, however factually accurate

it may or may not be, does encourage the faltering troops. More directly for you, he murmurs, “Remember the Toritaka’s blessings; if it should become too much to bear, it should help. I advise keeping it close to hand.”

Basically, this should help remind the players that the characters have a method of stopping the spiritual effects on them (in case of failing the Fear roll, or for further problems that might arise).

A few hours of marching through the dark forest brings the troop toward the positions that had been planned to launch their attack upon the bandit stronghold. However, as the group nears their destination, the scouts return with reports that the ruined castle is already under siege: by an army of monsters.

The colossal trees thin out somewhat over the rockier terrain in this section of the forest. Ahead, you see the broken and jagged stone walls of a ruined castle. A monstrous horde is gathered around the base of the hill it stands on, and spill over the wall in places. The dull roar of combat echoes off the trunks surrounding the clearing, and screams of pain, terror, and rage carry over the clash of arms. The Forest Killers fight with ferocity almost equal to the beasts that assail them, plying blade and bow in a desperate struggle.

There is no uniformity to their foe: samurai in dark armor ride around the perimeter of the fight, encouraging the beasts or commanding the undead that make up most of the force. A few massive, lumbering creatures seem to be acting as mobile, living (or in some cases, unliving) siege engines. A unit of troops mounted on some form of flying creature – oni or some other abomination – drop arrows and other missiles on the bandits atop the wall, and into the courtyard.

Messengers from the other columns find their way to the command staff, informing the leaders of the mission that they are in position and ready to attack when the signal is given. The players should be given a moment to realize what is in question when:

Yataro pauses, his gaze taking in the chaos of the battlefield impassively. “They are bandits. Judgment has been passed. Their deaths are merely a matter of ‘when’, not ‘if’. *How* they die is of no moment to me, either. I am just as pleased to allow these enemies of the Empire to fight among themselves, then defeat the victor after they are weakened.”

This is a somewhat dishonorable plan, though many pragmatic samurai (and players) may feel it the tactically prudent option. Doing so is a D4 Honor loss for all involved.

The bandits appear to be outnumbered by the Shadowlands forces, though judging how much of a threat the latter represent is difficult since the vast majority of their numbers are not human. A PC who succeeds at a **Battle (Mass Combat) / Perception** roll with a TN of 30 can estimate that there are between 500 and 750 bandits in the castle, though they are taking severe losses. There are around 1500 creatures in the Shadowlands army, so it is almost certainly only a matter of time before the Tainted monsters overwhelm the Forest Killers.

Arguing that the Forest Killers are not beyond redemption, or may be of use to the Empire against the Shadowlands, is a reasonable option that may occur to the players. If it does not, Nozomi will mention it.

The Hare yoriki speaks up, her voice shaking slightly but determined. “Seppun-sama, would it not be for the best to destroy the monsters now, while they are distracted? The bandits are, at least, human. Could they not help against-“

Yataro interrupts coldly, his hand on his sword. “I am unmoved by any argument for mercy toward those who have done so much against the well-being of the Empire. My steel stands ready to strike down Rokugan’s foes, and to ensure the judgment of the Heavens is seen through.”

This is a clear indication of Yataro’s opinion on the matter, but also opens him up to accepting a challenge over the issue if a PC is confident of their ability to prevail in an iaijutsu duel. As long as the matter is resolved with courtesy, Yataro will “allow the Heavens to determine which course of action is best” by a first-blood duel. If the PCs are rude or callous, he will refuse a duel, slapping the challenger down (and likely causing them to gain a point of Infamy in the process). If it goes to a duel, Yataro will not spend Void Points and will keep the absolute minimum amount of damage.

If there is no duelist comfortable with the challenge at the table, they can try to talk him out of the plan to wait and see which group of monsters they should attack. Any attempt to sway him requires some kind of roleplayed argument, and a **Courtier (Manipulation)** or **Sincerity (Honesty) / Awareness** roll at a TN of 60. The GM should grant Free Raises for arguments about saving Rokugani

lives or that reference the Emerald Magistrates’ duty to fight the enemies of the Empire. While focusing on either Compassion as a tenet of Bushido or arguing about the common humanity of the bandits are not effective tactics, they do not cause the TN to go up. Being actively rude or discourteous does, however, increasing it at least by +10.

If all else fails, a PC may offer their seppuku as proof of their dedication to the more merciful option; this dramatic gesture is of questionable validity since Yataro is not their actual lord, but it will break through his resolve. The PC making the offer should roll **Sincerity (Honesty) / Awareness** at a TN of 30. Success on this roll convinces him that the PC is sincere, and he will tell them to “save your blade for the enemies of the Empire; I will order the troops to attack the Horde”. If this roll is failed, he will watch without expression as the PC kills themselves, but then to honor their sacrifice will order the attack on the Shadowlands forces.

Success here leads to “The Path of Empathy”; failure or not attempting leads to “The Path of Ruthlessness”.

### The Path of Valor

Convincing Yataro to attack the Shadowlands leads to a small-scale mass combat situation for the PCs. The PCs should be assumed to be working together as a single unit, tasked by Yataro with finding the leader of the Shadowlands force and eliminating him.

The sound of horns blast out from the four corners of the clearing surrounding the ruined castle, and a mighty roar of challenge erupts from the throats of three thousand warriors eager to strike back against the darkness in the name of Rokugan. The monsters of the Shadowlands are taken by surprise, and the swords and spears of the Empire’s samurai defenders begin to pin the creatures against the stone walls of the bandit stronghold. The Forest Killers, who had started to flag under the assault, return to the fray with renewed fervor.

By default, the PC with the highest Status is the leader of the unit; they can cede this position to another PC, though doing so causes them to lose one point of Glory. Whoever is determined to be the leader must roll **Battle (Mass Combat) / Perception** at a TN of 50. This roll may be made Cooperative, letting other PCs add their Ranks in the Battle Skill to the total. Failure on the roll deals each of the PCs Wounds equal to the amount the roll was failed by; Reduction does apply but cannot eliminate all of the damage done

– the PCs must take a minimum of one Wound. If the roll is higher than 60, each of the PCs receive one Free Raise that can be used during the combat.

They will eventually find their way to a confrontation with the leader of the Shadowlands force, a Tainted shugenja a master of oni named Muzo, the Shrike.

You cut your way through monsters and nightmares, finding your way to the enemy command center. A stocky man in tattered brown robes and a wide straw hat turns from shouting instructions into the chaos, and snarls. His eyes blaze under the shadow of his jingasa with an unholy, sickly green light. He raises a fist, the flesh fading into a dull gray, and roars at you, “You face the power of darkness manifest in my will! I am Chosen of the True Emperor! I bear the Shroud of Souls, and demons leap to my command! Tremble before Muzo, the Shrike of Jigoku, and make peace with your feeble Fortunes before I claim your spirit and add it to the ranks of my oni!” Foot-long thorns sprout from thick vines that lace over his body, and a black cloud of bird-like creatures swirl around him while his monstrous guards move to his defense.

There are a number of Chishio no Oni equal to the number of PCs -2, the Lost yojimbo Kuroushi the Mad, and Muzo himself. The fight ends when Muzo is dropped to the Down or Out Wound Rank – his bound oni will slip their leash and finish the job.

This is intended to be a difficult fight. Muzo is a fallen Chuda shugenja, once a Jade Magistrate but now a champion of evil. Prepared for combat, he has cast “The Kami’s Strength” on himself, raising his Reflexes and Strength to 10 and giving him a Reduction of 30 for the first three Rounds of the combat. In addition, his yojimbo is a Lost Shiba Bushi in whom he has placed the spirit of an oni bound to his will; this allows him to shift Wounds to Kuroushi, or take Wounds delivered to the yojimbo himself (allowing his Reduction to apply to both, effectively). Finally, there are a number of Chishio no Oni equal to the number of PCs -2. It should take a great deal of effort to take Muzo down in the first three Rounds of the fight, though his spell effect’s duration lapses at the end of the third turn, which makes him significantly easier to deal with.

Muzo is meant to be a major challenge, and as a powerful shugenja with access to a wide range of spells, is capable of a variety of tactics. Unless the PCs are particularly powerful, it is recommended that he begin with lashing out with the thorns of the Shroud of Souls, and only start casting spells once the Kami’s Strength ends. For simplicity, he can default to casting

Earth Becomes Sky (for 6k6 damage) or his variation on Wooden Prison (which Entangles the target until their allies spend two Rounds cutting them free or they succeed at a Contested Strength Roll against the vines’ Strength roll of 7k4; this takes a Simple Action but the target takes 3k3 Wounds at the start of their Turn while they are Entangled).

The Chishio no Oni are not terribly clever combatants, and are designed to do as much damage as possible to their enemies by being expendible. Kuroushi should Guard Muzo and meddle with enemy shugenja where necessary, but stays close to his charge and only attacks when the PCs close. He can take 4 Wounds to gain the effect of spending Void Points, and while most of his abilities as a Shiba Bushi are difficult to use while Lost, he can get some effect out of them with that Shadowland Power.

The statblocks for this encounter are in Appendix #2.

When Muzo is killed:

A despairing scream rises from the throat of the Tainted shugenja. The cloud of black bird-like oni that had been defending the Shrike give voice to a shrill cry as he falls to the ground, and they dive suddenly at his body. Black blood flies as they rip into his flesh, tearing it from the bones with vicious glee. When the man’s cry finally ceases, the black cloud rises into the air and dissipates, leaving behind nothing but tattered robes, a few wilted vines, and a skeleton that appears made of obsidian.

Muzo cannot be captured alive; if the Chishio no Oni are still alive at this point, they will run. Kuroushi, if he is somehow still alive (since any Wounds that would kill Muzo would probably have been shifted to Kuroushi first), will flee, laughing in insane glee.

The Shadowlands army breaks up and flees, mostly in chaos – only a few elements, like the other Lost samurai and the flying cavalry troops, retreat in good order.

With the death of the Shadowlands commander, the horde breaks into a milling mass – without orders, they seem not to have a focused purpose, and they are put to flight in short order. Even those creatures that might still be a threat decide that easier prey can be found elsewhere. Only the few Lost samurai on the field, and the flying cavalry troops, retreat with any semblance of military discipline.



As the monsters flee into the forest, a great cry of victory goes up. Samurai and bandit alike share in the moment of triumph, if only for that moment.

After the warriors remaining on the field have a moment to catch their breath, Yataro turns to you. “I think I would have a difficult time negotiating with these men. If you believe they will surrender, now is the time to request it of them.”

Gekido is unwilling to surrender, and would rather fight to the death, but his men are far less willing after having just been saved by the soldiers of the Empire. This has shaken the Forest Killers’ faith in their wrathful leader, and weakened the spirit that possesses him. All that remains is one good push, and the other spirits of the forest will be able to capture their mad kindred.

When you approach the walls, the massive gates fling open. A bulky, brutish man strides forward, arrogant power in his every movement. “Samurai! You have done me a favor this day, and I will reward you with your lives. Depart now, and I shall not have my men scatter your bones with those of these monsters!”

This is Gekido, and his statement is mostly a bluff. He is certain that he could survive, even if the samurai kill all of his gang, but is too used to commanding through fear to even think of attempting a different negotiation tactic.

If there is a PC with “Sworn Enemy: Gekido”, immediately after that opening speech, he notices them, and roars:

“You! Coward! Weakling! I will have your skull for a sake cup!” Taking up an enormous war axe, he charges forward. The bandits behind him stare in shock at the sudden turn.

It is highly likely that the other PCs will wish to get involved in this, but before Initiative is rolled, Gekido closes with the Enemy. The PC should roll either an attack roll (using Techniques as the GM feels appropriate) or Defense / Reflexes in a Contested Roll with Gekido’s attack roll of 10k8 with the Emphasis.

If the PC succeeds, Gekido is struck by their attack or they dodge and his strike takes him off-balance – in either case, he falls to his knees from the force of his charge.

If the PC fails, Gekido strikes them with the full force of his axe, dealing 6k4+7 damage, with exploding 9s,

and +1k0 for every 5 he beats their roll by. At this point, his defense is entirely nonexistent, and the other PCs can make attack rolls against him (or just be assumed to strike him down, at the GM’s discretion).

When he falls to his knees, the spirit possessing him is weakened:

Suddenly, a howl rises from the forest. A small pack of white wolves, glowing with a faint spectral light, charge forward and fall upon the bandit leader. Their fangs and claws leave no mark on his flesh, but a thick, shadowy form peels away from him in their graps. The shadow’s outline blurs from bear to wolf to cat, always a predator, and it struggles silently to escape. But the wolves snarl and snap, driving it away from the humans and into the treeline. A last, faint howl echoes across the clearing, and Gekido draws one last, shuddering breath.

At this point, the remaining bandits have been attacked by an army of monsters, seen their indomitable leader taken down in front of them, and are facing a much larger force of samurai that completely surround them. All it takes is an offer to accept surrender on terms, and the bandits will fall over themselves to ask for mercy.

Go to the Conclusion

## The Path of Ruthlessness

If the PCs do not intervene and the legions do not attack, the battle will continue for several hours as the Horde works away at the bandits.

The screams and cries of terror that drift over the walls of the castle as the monstrous horde eventually makes its breakthrough are difficult to hear, even for most of the experienced bushi of the legions. Seppun Yataro watches it all with an expression of determination on his features, and does not waver in his course.

Suddenly, there is a breakthrough and a tight knot of men burst through the encircling horrors. Yataro draws in his breath in a hiss. “Gekido! That’s him!” He rises in his stirrups, and his voice rings out stridently. “Attack! The bandit leader is fleeing! After him, for your honor!” The Seppun levels his blade and spurs his horse forward madly, and the battle horns of the assembled force ring out raggedly, the troops trying to obey their orders but confused and moving with little cohesion.

Yataro orders the PCs to make sure Gekido does not escape, but the force will have to fight through some of the Shadowlands enemies in order to get to the bandit leader – the PCs have the first chance to confront Gekido, while the rest of the forces hold the enemy at bay.

This is much less organized than the other option, and there are fewer monsters in the way, but the PCs still need to have a unit leader make a **Battle (Mass Combat) / Perception** roll at a TN of 40. Again, failure deals some damage, but the overall confusion works more in the PCs' favor than against them. They do not gain a Free Raise for extra success, however.

When you close with Gekido, he is surrounded by a tight knot of bandits, and at first the pair of gray-skinned eight-foot-tall beasts seem like they are attacking the bandit leader as well. But when they turn, you can clearly see the brands of the Forest Killers on the chests of the ogres, and they lift their war-clubs in defense of the other bandits with a roar.

Gekido is accompanied by two Ogre Bandits, Ishi the Hammer, and a number of Forest Killer Officers equal to the number of PCs -4. His men are more afraid of Gekido than the Shadowlands, and far more eager to fight human samurai than the monsters. They are not particularly strategic enemies, but have a great deal of Wounds among them and this can be a very long fight.

A shugenja that can Banish an Earth spirit will be able to send this spirit away, but it is too powerful or does not qualify as a target for most of the binding spells (Earth 7, not Tainted, native to Ningen-do as a nature spirit). If a shugenja cannot Banish, they may still weaken it with a successful Commune – though this does require passing the Fear 4 check mentioned before. Every Raise on a Commune Earth reduces the spirit's effective Earth by 1 for the rest of the scene. If it is reduced to Earth 1, it is weak enough that the wolf spirits can drag it away without requiring Gekido be killed first.

If the spirit is Banished or dragged away by the spirits of the forest, Gekido is shattered on a spiritual level – he loses all of his Techniques (potentially killing him if his Wounds cannot be supported by his bare Earth alone) and is at -5k0 to all rolls he makes as though he had failed a Fear roll. At this point, the PCs might be able to force a surrender out of him (Intimidation / Willpower, TN 30) but he is a broken man.

The statblocks for this encounter are in Appendix #3.

When Gekido is slain:

As the leader of the Forest Killers drops to the ground, a shadowy form rises from his corpse. It appears to shift in outline from bear to wolf to cat, always a predator, always threatening. It shakes itself free of Gekido, then leaps toward one of the other combatants, seeking another host.

At base, this can be one of the other Forest Killers present – it avoids the Ogres, and will seek a PC at this last extreme instead of the still-Tainted creatures.

When all of the human Forest Killers in this scene are killed, or if the spirit tries to possess a PC and fails, the okuriokami move in:

Suddenly, a howl rises from the forest. A pack of small white wolves, glowing with a faint spectral light, dart from the woods. They fluidly move around and through the forces on the field, and fall upon the current host of the twisted spirit of the woods. Passing through the flesh of the would-be victim, they peel the shadowy spirit form, thrashing and silently struggling, away from the host, then carry it into the trees. Another howl echoes over the field, and the remaining bandits all shudder, falling to their knees.

At this point, the remaining bandits have been attacked by an army of monsters, seen their indomitable leader taken down in front of them, and are facing a much larger force of samurai that completely surround them. All it takes is an offer to accept surrender on terms, and the bandits will fall over themselves to ask for mercy.

Go to the Conclusion

## Conclusion

If the PCs took the Path of Valor, there are around 500 surviving bandits. The joint military operation took relatively light casualties, losing about 150 troops with another thousand injured. This is a fairly successful mission, all things considered, though most of the troops will require the winter to recover before redeploying against the invading forces in spring.

Yataro is grateful for the PCs' help, and decides to turn the surviving bandits over to the Imperial Legions as conscripts. "I am aware that my impartiality is... in question when it comes to these men. Perhaps it is better that another takes responsibility for them. I am just as glad to put this behind me, now that the mission has been a success. And it is thanks to you; know that you have my eternal gratitude."

If the PCs took the Path of Ruthlessness, the assembled troops took fewer injuries, but lost more troops: there are only 500 or so wounded, but 200 dead due to the far more focused nature of the engagement. These dead are almost entirely from the legion the PCs traveled with, the First Imperial Legion, Minor Clan, and ronin troops.

Only a hundred or so of the bandits survived, and they are put to death after an extremely cursory judgment given by Yataro.

“You, who have done so much wrong to the Empire, and who have violated its laws for your own profit and pleasure, are condemned to death. May your soul find its proper place in the judgment of Emma-O.” Yataro’s voice is cold as steel, and the bandits sullenly go to their executions. The funeral pyres light the sky as you take your leave of the Shinomen Mori, leaving the spirits of the forest behind.

The PCs are sent back to their lords in either case with the gratitude of the Emerald Magistrates, and the hope that the surviving troops can be used to defend the Empire in the coming year.

**The End**

## Rewards for Completing the Adventure

Surviving the Module:	1 EXP
Good Roleplaying:	+1 EXP
Getting through the Shinomen:	+1 EXP
Defeating Gekido or Muzo:	+1 EXP
Total Possible Experience:	4 EXP

### Favors

Killing Muzo or defeating Gekido earns the PCs one Favor.

### Honor

If the PCs convince the magistrate to spare the lives of the Forest Killers, they gain H8 for their devotion to the tenet of Compassion.

### Glory

Helping to crush the infamous Forest Killers, and possibly defeating a powerful Tainted enemy in the process, earns the PCs G12 Glory.

### Allies and Enemies

If the PCs show no respect to Seppun Yataro in the process of dealing with the magistrate, they can gain him as a Sworn Enemy even if they had him as an Ally.

### Module Tracking Sheet

Any PC that gained specific attention from the okuriokami gains "Blessing of the Fortune: Hoori, Fortune of Hunters"; this grants a +1k0 bonus on Hunting Skill Rolls made in the wilderness.

### GM Reporting

There should be a few reporting questions for each module,

- 1) Were the Forest Killers spared?
- 2) Did the PCs kill Muzo the Shrike?
- 3) Did the PCs capture Gekido alive?

**GM must report this information BEFORE (6/11/2022) for it to /have storyline effect**

## Appendix #1: NPCs

### Seppun Yataro

A tall, lean samurai in his early thirties, 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. His fine, aristocratic features could be considered handsome, but he has a tendency to forget to smile, and the silk patch over his left eye often lends him a threatening air unintentionally.

Air 4      Earth 5      Fire 3      Water 4      Void 4

Honor 7.6      Agility 4      Status 6.0      Glory 7.8

**Initiative:** 9k4+5      **Attack:** 9k4e-5  
(Katana, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 35      **Damage:** 7k2 (Katana)

**Reduction:** 9 (heavy armor, Technique)

**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/Emerald Magistrate (Insight Rank 6)

**Skills:** Battle 5, Defense 4, Etiquette 5, Iaijutsu (Assessment, Focus) 5, Investigation (Interrogation) 6, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 4

Artisan: Poetry 4, Athletics 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 3, Horsemanship 4, Jiujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 2, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Law 5, Sincerity 3

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Great Destiny, Leadership, Paragon of Duty / Bad Eyesight (Missing Eye), Driven: Destroy the Forest Killers, Sworn Enemy: Gekido

### Usagi Nozomi

A lean young woman with a ready smile and a sharp wit, Nozomi has started to fulfill the promise of her youth and is growing into a hero for her Minor Clan. The current state of the Hare lands fills her with dread, but she is determined to overcome the shadow that has fallen on her home and people.

Air 3      Earth 3      Fire 4      Water 2      Void 3  
Reflexes 4      Perception 3

Honor 6.2      Status 2.5      Glory 5.3

**Initiative:** 7k4      **Attack:** 7k4e (Katana, Simple) or 9k4 (unarmed, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 30      **Damage:** 6k2 (Katana) or 3k1 (unarmed)

**Reduction:** 3 (light armor)

**Wounds:** 15 (+0), 21 (+3), 27 (+5), 33 (+10), 39 (+15), 45 (+20), 51 (Down, +40), 57 (Out), 58 (Dead)

**School/Rank:** Usagi Bushi 3

**Skills:** Athletics (Running) 4, Defense 2, Hunting (Tracking) 4, Investigation (Search) 4, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Lore: Maho 2

Battle 1, Calligraphy 1, Courtier 1, Etiquette 1, Horsemanship 1, Iaijutsu 1, Knives 3, Kyujutsu 1, Lore: Law 2, Lore: Shadowlands 1, Sincerity 1, Stealth 2

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Luck I, Prodigy, Quick / Idealistic, Overconfident

## Appendix #2: The Path of Valor

The statblocks for the fight with Muzo are here for convenience.

### Muzo

A stocky fellow wrapped in thorny vines, wearing tattered brown robes over them.

Air 4	Earth 6	Fire 4	Water 4	Void 4*
Reflexes 10**		Status 0	Strength 10**	Glory 0
Honor 1.2				

**Initiative:** 10k10+17

**Attack:** 9k4+7 (thorny vines, Complex)

**Armor TN:** 55 (start of combat), then 37 (Defense Stance) or 25 (Attack Stance)

**Damage:** 10k4m (thorns)

**Reduction:** 10 (thorn shroud), 30 (start of combat)

**Wounds:** 30 (+0), 42 (+3), 54 (+5), 66 (+10), 78 (+15), 90 (+20), 102 (Down, +40), 114 (Out), 115 (Dead)

**Taint Rank:** 7 – Muzo is Lost and cannot spend Void Points, but adds +7 to the total of all rolls using any Trait)

**School/Rank:** Chuda Shugenja 5

**Spells:** Air: 9k4, Earth: 10k7, Fire: 10k4, Water: 10k4

**Maho:** none; Muzo eschews commanding kansen in favor of calling upon the powers of the oni, though he will still cast normal elemental magic

**Skills:** Calligraphy (Cipher) 4, Defense 5, Etiquette 3, Investigation (Interrogation, Notice) 5, Lore: Maho 5, Lore: Shadowlands 6, Spellcraft 6

Athletics 3, Battle 5, Chain Weapons 5, Courtier 2, Heavy Weapons 4, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 4, Intimidation 3, Jiujutsu 2, Lore: Oni 7, Meditation 2, Sincerity 4

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Clear Thinker, Dark Paragon of Determination, Sage / Ascetic

**Shadowlands Powers:** Above the Elements (+10 to the TN of spells targeting him), Child of Darkness, Jade Sense, Mind of Darkness, Chosen of Fu Leng, Strength of Madness (may take 6 Wounds to gain the effect of a Void Point), Unearthly Regeneration (Heals 7 Wounds at the start of his Turn), Awe of the Dark One

#### **Special:**

**Thorn Shroud:** Muzo has an artifact called the Shroud of Souls that takes the form of vines with sharp thorns that he wears as a sort of robe; these help him bind oni to his will and obey his mental commands. He can attack with them as a Chain Weapon to a range of 10'. Additionally, they make him dangerous in close combat – if a PC tries to Grapple him, they must have 5 Ranks in the Jiujutsu Skill or they do not start with control of the Grapple. Anyone in a Grapple with him automatically takes the weapon damage every Round.

Any spell that targets Muzo is absorbed by the Shroud, as the thorns claim the spirit powering it. This returns a spell slot to Muzo, and he may negate spell effects on a target if he makes an attack against them.

**Murder of Minor Oni:** Muzo also has a flock of very weak oni fluttering around him. These intercept ranged attacks or any spell requiring an attack roll, destroying an oni in the process (a dozen such attacks can be intercepted before the swarm is depleted too much to do this again). He may also give them basic commands – they may attack, but doing so counts as his Complex Action. They roll 10k8 to hit and do Wounds equal to the amount they exceed the target's Armor TN by.

### Kuroushi the Mad

Lean, almost emaciated, with little regard for his (or anyone but Muzo's) safety. Dressed in heavy armor styled to make him appear like an oni himself.

Air 4	Earth 4	Fire 5	Water 4	Void 5*
Honor 2.1		Status 0		Glory 0

**Initiative:** 9k4

**Attack:** 10k6e+6 (Katana, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 35

**Damage:** 10k3m (Katana)

**Reduction:** 5 (heavy armor)

**Taint Rank:** 6 (cannot spend Void Points, but can take 4 Wounds to get the effect of a Void Point up to 4 times)

**Wounds:** 23 (+0), 34 (+3), 47 (+5), 58 (+10), 69 (+15), 80 (+20), 91 (Down, +40), 102 (Out), 103 (Dead)

**School/Rank:** Shiba Bushi 5/Maho-Bujin 2

**Techniques:** *The Way of the Phoenix:* When spending a Void Point to gain +1k1 on a roll, may choose to spend 2 Void Points (to gain +2k2) on the roll instead. May Guard as a Free Action; however, the target only adds +5 to his Armor TN instead of +10.

*Dancing With the Elements:* When assuming Stance for the Round, may choose a target within 30'. Whenever the target casts or is the target of a spell, may choose to increase or decrease the TN of the spell by 5. Additionally, whenever you are the target of a spell, you may immediately choose to increase or decrease the TN of the spell by 5.

*One With the Void:* LOST

*Move With the World:* Simple Action attacks with Polearms, Spears, or Samurai weapons.

*Touch of the Void:* For every Void Point spent, gain the effects of spending two, when applicable. Additionally, may now spend Void Points on enhancements (as listed in the *Book of Earth*) twice in one Turn.

*Carve the Crimson Road:* Maximum Raises are now limited by your Taint Rank (6). +6k0 to all damage rolls. Extra Attack maneuver with only 2 Raises instead of 5.

*Corruption Rewards:* During each Reactions Stage of a skirmish, gain +6 Initiative; Simple Action attacks

**Skills:** Defense 5, Investigation (Notice) 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: Theology 2, Meditation (Void Recovery) 4, Spears 5

Athletics 3, Battle 2, Etiquette 3, Horsemanship 1, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 6, Intimidation 5, Jujutsu 3, Polearms 4, Sincerity 3

**Shadowlands Powers:** Blessing of the Dark One (+3 Wounds/rank), Strength of Madness (take 4 Wounds to get the effect of spending a Void Point)

## Chishio no Oni

Air 3

Earth 3

Fire 3

Water 3

**Initiative:** 7k3

**Armor TN:** 25

**Reduction:** 0

**Wounds:** 25 (+5), 50 (+10), 75 (Dead)

**Taint Rank:** 5

**Special Abilities:**

- Fear 3
- *Corrupted Blood:* When damaged by an edged weapon (or anything else that draws blood), the enemy takes half the damage they deal in Wounds from the “blood” that comes from the wound. (This cannot deal more than 37 Wounds from a killing blow.) This damage is automatic the first time a PC damages a chishio no oni, and may be avoided with a Defense / Reflexes roll at a TN of 20 afterwards. (A PC may roll Athletics / Reflexes instead, but this increases the TN by 5.) This damage varies between the types of oni; the earth-based types spew forth a swarm of biting, stinging insects (centipedes, beetles, mosquitos) that tear into the attacker and then dissipate, the fire-based types that look rather like samurai in armor erupt in flames, the water-based look like bipedal eels and ooze acid blood, the air-based resemble giant humanoid birds and “bleed” poisonous gas.

**Attack:** 8k4 (natural weapons, Simple)

**Damage:** 6k3 (natural weapons)

## Appendix #3: The Path of Ruthlessness

### Gekido

A powerfully-built, crude block of a man with absolutely no concerns for the appearance of anything but power. He stands only a little over average height, but his presence makes him seem to loom over even people much taller than him.

Air 3  
Reflexes 5  
Honor 0.3

Earth 7

Fire 5  
Status 0

Water 4  
Strength 6

Void 4

Infamy 6.5

**Initiative:** 10k6+6

**Attack:** 10k6e-5 (Ono, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 30

**Damage:** 6k4m+7 (Ono)

**Reduction:** 0

**Wounds:** 42 (+0), 63 (+0), 84 (+2), 105 (+7), 126 (+12), 147 (+17), 168 (Down, +37), 189 (Out), 190 (Dead)

**School/Rank:** Forest Killer (Insight Rank 8)

**Technique:** *Strength of the Forest:* additional Wounds per Wound Rank equal to Stamina, +Stamina to melee damage  
*The Predator's Strike:* May make attacks with an ono as a Simple Action

*Touch of the Forest Killer:* Once per skirmish, as a Simple Action, may cause a Fear 7 effect; instead of the usual effects, this prevents anyone who fails from exploding on dice against him, and he gains +7k0 on attack rolls against those targets (to 10k10e)

**Skills:** Athletics 5, Defense 4, Heavy Weapons (Masakari, Ono) 8, Hunting (Survival, Tracking) 7, Kenjutsu (Katana, No-Dachi) 7, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 6, Stealth (Ambush) 7

Battle 6, Commerce 4, Engineering 5, Etiquette 3, Games: Fortunes & Winds 4, Horsemanship 5, Intimidation 6, Investigation 4, Jujutsu 5, Knives 6, Lore: Underworld 6, Medicine 3, Sincerity 3, Spears 4

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Absolute Direction, Crab Hands, Crafty, Dark Paragon of Strength, Heartless, Leadership, Luck, Strength of the Earth, Way of the Land (Shinomen) / Brash, Driven: Gain Power

**Special:** Gekido is possessed by the Forest Killer, the mad spirit of the forest that acts as spiritual patron to the bandit gang; this gives him access to the Touch of the Forest Killer Technique and allows him to ignore Wound Penalties for up to 7 rolls per combat. Additionally, he is largely immune to magic that would impede him – direct damage works, but anything that has a duration longer than “instantaneous” fails immediately as the spirit powering the spell is driven away.

When he is killed, the spirit will attempt to possess either one of his minions, or at the GM's discretion, a particularly powerful PC – this requires a Contested Willpower Roll every Round until one side gains three successes, and the spirit rolls 7k7. If the PC fails, they lose their action in the mental struggle. A PC can be assisted by another PC taking a Complex Action to encourage them – this gives them one Free Raise, plus one for each Raise made on a TN 10 Sincerity / Awareness roll (or other Skill at the GM's discretion, based on the nature of the encouragement). Note that a shugenja can reduce this dice pool with the Commune option mentioned in the text. If the spirit gains three successes before the PC, it attempts to flee with the new body but will be stopped by the other forest spirits.

The spirit can peel the Technique away from a rebellious Forest Killer, at least temporarily. If Gekido strikes a PC with the Forest Killer Technique, the PC must make a raw Void roll with a TN equal to the damage taken. If they fail this roll, they lose their Technique for the rest of the combat.

Finally, Gekido gains +1k1 to all attack rolls and Reduction 10 against anyone with Sworn Enemy: Gekido.

### Ishi, the Hammer

A massive, heavily scarred brute that barely survived his first encounter with the Emerald Magistrate and his assistants, Ishi has little interest in repeating the experience.

Air 2  
Reflexes 3  
Honor 1.4

Earth 4  
Stamina 5

Fire 3  
Agility 4  
Status 0

Water 3  
Strength 5

Void 3

Glory 0

**Initiative:** 7k3

**Attack:** 10k4e (Simple, Dai Tsuchi)

**Armor TN:** 25 (light armor)

**Damage:** 10k2m+5 (Dai Tsuchi) (11k2+5 base before Raises)

**Reduction:** 3



**Wounds:** 25 (+0), 38 (+3), 51 (+5), 64 (+10), 77 (+15), 90 (+20), 103 (Down, +40), 104 (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) 5, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 3, Stealth 3; Battle 4, Investigation 2, Jiujutsu 4, Lore: Underworld 5

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

## Ogre Bandits

Eight-foot-tall vicious monsters, these brutes have been dominated by the spirit of the Forest Killers.

Air 2  
Reflexes 4

Earth 3  
Stamina 6

Fire 3  
Agility 4

Water 2  
Strength 6

**Initiative:** 8k4

**Armor TN:** 25

**Reduction:** 10

**Wounds:** 26 (+5), 52 (+10), 78 (+15), 104 (Dead)

**Taint Rank:** 3.0

**Skills:** Battle 3, Defense 2, Jiujutsu 4, Heavy Weapons (Tetsubo), Hunting 1, Intimidation (Bullying) 2, Stealth 1

**Special Abilities:**

- *Fear 3*
- *Huge*
- Forest Killer Training: they have access to the basic Technique of the Forest Killers, taken into consideration above

**Attack:** 10k4e (tetsubo, Complex)

**Damage:** 10k3m+6 (tetsubo)

## Forest Killer Officers

A ragged band of Gekido's favored, mostly chosen for their loyalty rather than any brilliance or skill.

Air 2  
Reflexes 3  
Honor 1.5

Earth 3  
Stamina 4

Fire 2  
Agility 4  
Status 0

Water 3  
Strength 4

Void 2  
Glory 0

**Initiative:** 6k3

**Armor TN:** 25

**Reduction:** 3 (light armor)

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

**School/Rank:** Forest Killer/Insight Rank 3

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

**Skills:** Athletics 3, Defense 3, Heavy Weapons 5, Hunting 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 5, Stealth 4; Battle 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Lore: Underworld 3

**Attack:** 9k4e (Katana, Complex)

**Damage:** 8k2+4 (Masakari)

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

Honored Samurai,

Never has the news I share been so disastrous and bleak.

The forces that shall not sully our courts with their descriptions have moved with unholy speed across the plains, and though the Clan of Shinjo fights alongside the Imperial Legions for every inch of territory, the Unicorn lands have fallen. The Minor Clans of the north are likewise over-run. The Badger, Frog, and Hare Clans have either left their provinces behind or been slain by the invaders. Refugees from the territories beset by war are seeking protection from their neighbors and allies.

The battle-lines have moved as far south as the Lion and Scorpion lands. This division in the enemy's forces is perhaps the only good news, for if they were concentrated, who knows how long even the stalwart samurai of either clan could stand? Reports indicate that Shiro Soshi and Ryoko Owari are under seige, while the main force of the enemy closes on Shiro no Shosuro. Likewise, the Lion have been forced to give ground to a line between Shiro sano Ken Hayai and Kyuden Ikoma. These two strongholds serve as anchors for the Lion defense, but the Clan of Akodo has so far been unable to mount an effective counterattack – though thousands have gone to their ancestors in honor.

There are signs that the foe does not seek indiscriminate destruction. While all military forces arrayed against them have met with an utter lack of mercy, cities of political or economic value have only been raided and abandoned. Little effort is being spent to hold these places, unless they hold a position of strategic importance. What this portends is surely unspeakable.

Even the East, the direction of the Sun's Blessings, presents difficulties to overcome. There have been reports of raiders striking at smaller Mantis holdings. The source of this is unclear so far, but it is difficult to imagine it is entirely unrelated to the other issues the Empire faces.

The matter of the Phoenix rebellion is much on peoples' minds, even in the press of these other concerns. The actual fate of the clan will likely be determined by the Imperial Winter Court, to be held in the Phoenix city of Mikui Toshi. While both the Clan Champion and the Master of Water were killed, most of their military was able to retreat and are now under the command of the new Champion.

Darkness threatens our glorious land once again. Now is truly the time for heroes to step forward, to keep the light of honor shining bright for all of Rokugan to see!

With Hope in Honor, my Friends and Comrades in Arms.

Otomo Yusuke