

To Start a Dark Path

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

Month of Bayushi, 1343 (Late Fall)

Module Number: CIT64
Release Date: 03/09/2022

Travel, Investigation, Combat
[Part Two of **Preparing the Way**]

“Powerful fortifications can protect a stronghold from attack. How well will those barricades work if your enemy chooses another target?” - *Akodo's Leadership*

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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

In 1338, a woman calling herself Kamiko duped a young Crane artisan into smuggling herself and two Pekkles no Oni past the defenses of the Crab Clan and into Rokugan. (A third Pekkles was destroyed by heroic samurai in the right place at the right time.) Kamiko's orders were simple: travel the Empire, observe the fissures that form between the clans and prepare to exploit them. For there would come a time that the forces of her master would assault Rokugan again, and an Empire weakened by internal strife and turmoil would make for easier prey.

With the help of her shapeshifting spies, Kamiko was able to locate the Spider's Biwa, and under orders from the Dark Lord, had one of the Pekkles no Oni summon the Great Sea Spider to attack the Rokugani coastline. Although that Pekkles was killed and the Great Sea Spider banished back into the depths of the ocean, the ensuing chaos after the attack further weakened an already fracturing Empire.

Now the Dark Lord has returned with a massive Shadowlands army, and while the forces of the Empire hold off the dark advance in Lion and Scorpion lands, Kamiko and the remaining Pekkles no Oni act to open a second front from behind. The Pekkles no Oni has replaced the hatamoto of Shimomura (or Frost Village) and has used the position to cover for its mistress Kamiko (who is not in the village). When the PC's arrive at Shimomura the Pekkles will attempt to blame the governor for the problems occurring in the area and usurp his position. Provided the players see through the subterfuge they will find evidence as to Kamiko's location in a nearby forest and what she is planning: opening a new passage to Jigoku to assault the defenders of Rokugan from behind.

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 time between modules. At the beginning of the module, several things will need to take place (though some are obviously dependent on the actual needs of the PCs at the table).

Character Notes

The GM should take a few minutes to examine the players' character sheets in order to have an idea of the nature of the PCs at the table. It is frequently helpful to have a list of specific mechanics that come up in the course of the module determined at the start of the module so the GM does not have to slow down play to check and see which parts apply to which PC. These can be Advantages, Disadvantages, Schools, Skills, or any other particularly relevant mechanics.

- Way of the Land: Chuuou Province (Scorpion)
- member of the Kuroiban
- Shadowlands Taint (1.0+)
- Cursed by the Realm: Yume-do

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 player base 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

All PCs lose 1 pip 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 **25**. 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

Two centuries ago, the city of Mikui Toshi was the site of one of the larger battles seen in the northern part of the Empire. Forces of the Crab and Phoenix Clans assaulted the Dragon Clan here and were on the verge of seizing the city when a third army (led by the Kolat) attempted to claim the city for its own. Shocked into temporary co-operation, the Crab, Dragon, and Phoenix united to drive away these invaders.

Now Mikui Toshi is again besieged by different forces, although at least hostilities have not broken out. First came the bureaucrats and functionaries of all the Great Clans that have converged in the city to prepare for the upcoming Imperial Winter Court. Then came the refugees fleeing eastward to avoid the onrushing Shadowlands invasion.

However neither of those reasons are why the PC's have come to Phoenix lands. Instead, they received a

summons stamped with the seal of the Imperial Herald to come meet at a teahouse within the city.

Nestled on the main thoroughfare between the Noble District and Marketplace, The Delighted Carp is a well-kept three-story building with a sign outside depicting a smiling fish circling a tea cup. As the PCs enter the door, a short-statured, jolly heimen will greet them with a deep bow. ***“Honorable samurai, welcome to the Delighted Carp, where we cater to those with a refined taste in tea. I am Haku, my family and I are at your disposal... within reason of course.”*** He gives a playful wink then laughs heartily before motioning to a fidgety young lad just behind him. ***“My son will ensure that your swords are polished while you enjoy our hospitality.”*** Next to the boy is a weapon rack where samurai are expected to leave their weapons (with the exception of their wakizashi). Haku glances at the boy for a moment then coughs, prompting the boy to bow deeply. ***“You are expected, my lords. Please come in and let me escort you to the meeting room.”***

As Haku leads the players through the common room, they notice a mix of samurai and merchants sitting at various tables while two teenage girls scurry about taking and serving orders, with an older peasant woman supervising the organized chaos. As the PC's pass beside a counter near the back wall she gives a respectful bow before returning to the preparation of drinks and trays of snacks.

Once seated inside the room, the older of the two serving girls will enter with a parchment listing a wide selection of teas from across the Empire, as well as a few blends imported from Balishnimpur. (There is no sake or other alcoholic drinks listed for those curious. ***“Alcohol has its place, but that is not here”*** the server will say with a practiced tone if asked.) If players ask about prices, the server will say it has already been taken care of. After orders have been placed, it is only a short wait before drinks arrive along with a tray of finger foods. Astute palettes will notice that the snacks provided are a perfect compliment to the drinks ordered, and that the pairing of snack to drink was not by accident.

Less than a half an hour later a side panel slides open and a single man of just below average height enters. He is dressed in a green kimono with golden trim that displays the mon of the Seppun Family on his chest. He has a lean, athletic build and long black hair tied in a perfect top-knot. With a deep bow, he addresses the group. ***“Thank you for coming on such short notice. Allow me to present the Imperial Herald, Mirumoto Kasei.”***

Dressed in a kimono of similar coloring to that of the Seppun, Mirumoto Kasei enters, eyeing those assembled with slate gray eyes that smolder from beneath his trademark jingasa. The shugenja bows before taking a seat on an empty cushion. **“Greetings. I hope your journey here was not too unpleasant.”** As he adjusts on his seat, a servant brings in a steaming cup of tea. Once she leaves, the Seppun steps outside and slides the screen closed behind him. Kasei sips the drink, savoring it for a moment before setting the cup on the table. **“I know that you have recently returned from Balishnimpur. Allow me to update you on the current situation in the Empire.”** His tone is matter-of-fact, more that of a military commander than a courtier. **“The army that was in Unicorn lands has been pushing eastward. We have lost contact with the City of the Rich Frog and the lands of the Lion are in danger. The Crab Clan is facing an increase in enemy activity along the Wall, and yet are still sending what they can spare northward to assist.”** Kasei pauses briefly, his tone darkening. **“Unfortunately some of the Crab’s caravans have disappeared en route. We do not know what is causing this: bandits, or something else.”** The fire in Kasei’s eyes is clear. **“In this dire hour, the last thing the Empire needs is such a complication. I want you to head south and investigate this matter. You will first head to the city of Beiden. There, a representative of the Scorpion Clan, will meet you with updated information. Questions?”**

Kasei acknowledges that what information they have is sparse, but what they know is as follows:

- The players will be meeting Yogo Azakeri, a shugenja and advisor to the Yogo Family Daimyo.
- The Crab Clan says that they have so far dispatched five caravans overland to assist the northern Empire, but only two made it. The Crab have provided itineraries and manifests for all five caravans.
- The list shows that the first and fourth caravans arrived in Lion lands, but the other three did not.
- All the caravans included soldiers, weapons, and supplies, including jade, and were (supposedly) well defended.
- Shipments from Crab lands would normally trade through the lands of the Hare and Scorpion Clans before reaching Beiden Pass.
- The third caravan on the list (one of the missing ones) included a contingent of Kaiu engineers and their siege weapons.

Some PC’s may ask whether or not the Crab are lying and have only sent two caravans. Kasei frowns slowly, saying that **“A samurai’s word is their bond.”** (But an **Investigation (Interrogation) /Awareness TN 25** roll reveals that Kasei has not discounted that possibility.)

Some players may ask why the Imperial Herald is involved in this matter, since it would fall under the jurisdiction of other offices (i.e. the Emerald Magistrates). Kasei will nod stiffly before replying. **“The Imperial Heralds are responsible for the dissemination of news and such across Rokugan. One of my heralds brought this matter to my attention and I have chosen to act on it. If there are any political ramifications in the future, then I will deal with those once the Empire is safe.”**

Before departing Kasei will ensure that the PC’s will have travel papers providing clearance for the group to make it all the way to Crab Lands if necessary.

Part One: Crossroads of the Empire

As the party leaves Mikui Toshi, the tension in the air is palpable. Regardless of class or station, everyone moves with hurried steps lest they be caught by some unseen enemy. The road leaving Phoenix lands is congested with foot traffic from the west. The situation does not improve as the group heads south through Owl Lands.

Once in Lion Lands traffic is more manageable. The roads are patrolled by cavalry forces bearing the mon of the Ikoma family (and the Lion having the reputation of being “harsh” with their peasantry probably doesn’t hurt efforts). As the PC’s pass by Shiro Matsu before entering Beiden Pass, they notice the fortress is on full alert and the banners of several Lion units are preparing to depart.

Passage through the mountain pass is relatively easy as patrols from both the Lion and Scorpion clans ensure that the major land route between the northern and southern Empire remains open. As you approach the city of Beiden, the shadows grow long as Lord Sun sets over the horizon.

Entering the city you are met by a squad of Scorpion bushi that request your travel papers. The young gunso looks them over, his eyes widening as he sees the affixed seal, before directing you to a nearby barracks. **“Yogo-sama is waiting for you. Allow me to escort you,”** the Soshi says with a deep bow.

Even though the Scorpion are allied with the Lion (and the Dragon), it is clear that recent expansions have been made to fortify this side of Beiden Pass against an attack from the north. The gunso knocks quickly on a large door before sliding it open and entering. Only a few minutes pass before the samurai returns with an older man wearing a scroll satchel. **“This is Yogo Azakeri, an advisor to the Yogo Family Daimyo,”** the young man says with a bow.

Players may remember Yogo Azakeri from Yasuki Yashiki and the dedication of the Shrine to the Fortune of Protection (in CIT02 Distracted Sentries). Azakeri is a wiry man in his mid-thirties with hair that is beginning to gray along his temples. His mask is polished lacquer with a depiction of an open scroll painted across his right cheek. Both sockets are open, allowing his brilliant green eyes to shine through.

*GM Note: Yogo Azakeri is Status 5.5. Anyone who wants to check to see if he is lying at any point requires a contested **Investigation (Interrogation) /Awareness roll** against the Yogo’s Sincerity roll of 10k6+5 with emphasis (he has both Honesty and Deceit). Success will show that Azakeri is being truthful but is not telling them everything (he is a Scorpion after all). Also he is a member of the Kuroiban, using his station as a cover. Only PC’s that are also members of the organization would know about his posting, and Azakeri will never admit to his membership in the group.*

Yogo Azakeri bows deeply, then motions with his arm. **“Please come with me,”** he says, walking toward the city. **“Accommodations have been made for you to spend the night and I trust you will want to be well rested for the days to come.”**

The streets of Beiden are busy as people head home for the evening. Although the pace here is not quite as hectic as it was in Mikui Toshi, there is a general sense of unease and concern among the populace. As he walks with you, the shugenja will make polite conversation about your travels, the weather... anything but the matter at hand. His tone remains trivial until you reach the inn that is your destination.

Entering the modest building players notice that no one is inside the common room, not even an innkeeper. There are several tables present: the largest has a huge collection of unsealed scrolls (at least a hundred) on it while another table has a simple evening meal including tea and sake for everyone present. The area is clean and well cared for, just devoid of any living creature. Yogo Azakeri enters the inn last, closing the

door behind him and placing his hand on it. Muttering under his breath, players can make a **Spellcasting (or Lore: Shugenja) /Intelligence roll TN 25** to realize that he is placing a magical ward on the doorway. (A roll of 40 or higher will realize that he cast a modified version of *Symbol of Earth*.)

*GM note: Any player that wants to mess with the ward can certainly try. Any attempt to remove it will require a **Spellcraft/Intelligence roll TN 60**. Failure will cause the ward to be triggered, resulting in the player to be knocked back Prone and take 2k2 wounds (4k4 if Tainted). Also an audible alarm will sound and Scorpion troops will converge on the building.*

“Sorry for the precaution, but these are dangerous times,” the Yogo says without any hint of levity. **“You are here to investigate the claim that several caravans from Crab lands have gone missing. I have been gathering reports from across Scorpion lands in preparation for your arrival.”** Azakeri speaks with a well-cultured voice as he moves toward the table with the scrolls. **“I suggest we review these reports and look for anything unusual so we have a place to begin. We have a lot to go through, so let’s get started”** The Yogo seats himself on one of the cushions and motions for everyone to join him.

Players can review the correspondences using different skills (all using Intelligence) to gather the following information:

Calligraphy/Intelligence:

- 10: The collection of reports span the last few months, starting just before the Shadowlands invaded Unicorn lands.
- 20: The Hiruma Family daimyo and her husband stopped in Kyuden Bayushi briefly before continuing north to Beiden Pass.
- 30: Missives from the western parts of Scorpion lands have become sparse, most likely lost due to the invasion.

Battle/Intelligence:

- 10: The collection of reports span the last few months, starting just before the Shadowlands invaded Unicorn lands..
- 20: There are several reports concerning troop movements within Scorpion lands. Every able samurai has been sent westward to hold the line against the invading Shadowlands forces.
- 25: Tainted scouts have been spotted in several places east of the River of Gold, but none have made it as far as Kyuden Bayushi.

- 30: A report lists that the garrison forces from Shimomura did not report at Kyuden Bayushi as scheduled.
- 40: A follow-up report shows that the forces from Shimomura had been redirected to Shiro no Shosuro, and that is why they did not report at Kyuden Bayushi. However the player can roll **Investigation (Notice) / Perception TN 35** (to compare the seal to previous missives). Success means they realize the seal is a forgery.

Commerce/Intelligence:

- 10: The collection of reports span the last few months, starting just before the Shadowlands invaded Unicorn lands..
- 20: The harvest was brought in a few weeks ahead of schedule throughout the Scorpion provinces.
- 25: A report from Kyuden Bayushi shows that trade from lands to the south has been rerouted away from the River of Gold and to points further east.
- 30: Most trade from the south is now entering Scorpion lands through Shimomura (or Frost Village).
- 40: The lumber production coming out of Shimomura exceeded its quota for the season. However the player can roll **Investigation (Notice)/Perception TN 35** (to compare the seal to previous missives). Success means they realize the seal is a forgery.

Lore: Underworld/Intelligence:

- 10: The collection of reports span the last few months, starting just before the Shadowlands invaded Unicorn lands.
- 25: Smuggling is at an all high-time as the lure of quick koku is overwhelming people's common sense.
- 30: Some Firemen gangs have been pressed into service as doshin and other law enforcement roles to free up more samurai and ashigaru for the front lines.

Investigation (Search)/Intelligence:

- 10: The collection of reports span the last few months, starting just before the Shadowlands invaded Unicorn lands.
- Rolls can be used to find information under the other skills listed at TN +5. (So for example, a roll of 35 can be used to learn the information from using the Battle skill at TN 30.)

The two forgeries (under Battle and Commerce) depict the official seal of the governor's office in Shimomura with a slight error. If a player shows either

correspondence to Yogo Azakeri he will confirm that they are forgeries.

Players may want to cast *Reflections of Pan-Ku* on the forgeries to determine who created them. On a successful casting, the shugenja will learn that the scroll was made in Shimomura by a member of the Scorpion Clan.

If no one makes the connection concerning Shimomura, then Azakeri will eventually find it (with a muttered comment about having to do everything himself).

“I suggest we travel to Shimomura at first light in order to investigate this matter further,” Azakeri concludes before opening the floor for questions.

- *What can you tell us about Shimomura?* **“Shimomura (or Frost Village) sits on a plateau overlooking the Three Man Alliance Plain. It is on the border of Tsuruchi lands and just north of Gateway Village.”**
- *Why is it called Frost Village?* **“Due to its elevation it receives the first frost in the southern Empire Also it has some of the harshest winters in Scorpion lands.”**
- *Who is in charge there?* **“The governor is Bayushi Chudoku. He was assigned there about two years ago after serving in the courts under Bayushi Akanishin.”**
- *You're coming with us?* **“Hai. We will leave at first light. Although I am more courtier than anything else, I am certain that I can assist you in this endeavor.”**

Once the meeting concludes, Azakeri will suggest that everyone get some sleep. Each PC will have their own room (if they wish) since Yogo Azakeri has reserved the entire building for the night. The Scorpion says he will remove the ward on the door in the morning before they depart.

Part Two: The Road Less Traveled

Lord Sun has just begun to peek over the mountains as the group sets out from the city of Beiden on horseback. (If a player does not have a mount, the Scorpion Clan will provide a Rokugani pony for this mission.) Although the main road heads westward, Yogo Azakeri directs the PC's overland in a southerly direction, if asked, he will comment that this is a shortcut. He sets a blistering pace over the foothills

that gradually flattens out the further the group gets from the Spine of the World Mountains.

Although the party can see a city in the distance the Yogo insisting on pushing on until dark. **“If we stop in Kagoki, we will be hard pressed to make Shimomura tomorrow before nightfall,”** he says, **“and I would rather not arrive exhausted.”**

When the group finally stops, a concerned PC may roll **Battle or Hunting** using either **Intelligence or Perception TN 30** to find a reasonably defensible position on the plain. Even if such a location is not found, the night passes peacefully for all involved.

After a quick breakfast of rations (or whatever the players brought with them) the party continues their journey. As Lord Sun reaches his highest point in the sky, players roll **Investigation (Notice)/Perception TN 25** (The Wary Advantage does NOT apply to this roll.). Success allows the players to see a flock of birds circling a location to the southwest. Provided they look into this matter, the party comes across a grizzly sight.

The battlefield lay quiet, for it was now a graveyard of the unburied. Their corpses lay among the tall grass and the trampled flowers. Their eyes were as immobile as their limbs, and their souls had long departed to walk with their ancestors. These men that served together since their gempukku were now meat for the birds.

GM Note: This is the missing detachment from Shimomura. They were ambushed by a force of Shadowlands marauders during the night six days earlier and wiped out.

Players can make different rolls to figure out what happened here:

Battle/Perception

- 15: Most of the soldiers are not wearing any armor. Those that do are found on the edges of the battlefield. (The armor is crimson with black and gold accents.)
- 20: Weapons are scattered across the field, as if people were trying to grab them in a panic.
- 25: Although some attempt was made to rally the defenders it was haphazard and ultimately futile.

Hunting (Tracking)/Perception

- 20: Footfalls show that the camp was attacked from both the south and east.
- 25: The attackers originally approached on foot from the south and then moved to flank the site.

- 30: The majority of the footfalls are smaller than a human's would be. A **Lore: Shadowlands/Intelligence TN 25** is needed to determine that the tracks are from goblins.
- 40: After the battle, the attackers started to go back the way they came then suddenly split off into smaller groups and scattered.

Medicine/Intelligence

- 15: The samurai have been dead for several days, maybe a week at most.
- 20: Strangely none of them were shot by arrows (given the proximity to Tsuruchi lands).
- 25: The victims display a variety of wounds: some from knives or other sharp implements, others from blunt objects.
- 30: Some of them have missing flesh, as if it was bitten off.
- 35: The bite marks do not look like they came from any bird. In fact, the teeth marks look humanoid.

Investigation (Search)/Perception:

- 15: There is what remains of a small campfire in the center, although it has long since gone cold.
- 20: One of the deceased is a monk, a smile on his face.
- 25: One of the dead soldiers has on his chest a mon depicting a scorpion standing in the snow. If the mon is shown to the Yogo, he will say it is from Shimomura.
- 30: Pinned under one of the dead samurai is the carcass of a goblin.

Yogo Azakeri will look dismayed. **“Goblins, this far away from the front? Things are more serious than I suspected. We must hurry.”**

Despite his haste Azakeri will insist on performing last rites for his fallen clansmen (and he will accept the assistance of any shugenja PC that offers). Afterward he wants to get moving so they can still arrive at Shimomura before dark.

Part Three: Shimomura

Located on a high plateau, Shimomura sits on the major trade route leading to Mantis and southern Crane lands. With a small forest resting just east of the city, it appears to have been spared the troubles that plague other parts of Rokugan.

Entering the city is easy after Yogo Azakeri produces his chop to the lone guard at the northern gate. After a

few hushed words she bows deeply and allows the group to pass without any sort of inspection.

The city has several high-quality inns and tea houses on both sides of the main thoroughfare, bustling with activity as Lord Yakamo descends in the west.

Saying they can eat after presenting themselves to the governor, Yogo Azakeri stalks toward a building in the heart of the city surrounded by a low palisade. The governor's mansion is three-stories tall in the center, with wings on either side of two-stories each. A pair of Scorpion bushi in heavy armor snap to attention as the group approaches.

"Yogo-sama," the one on the right stammers. **"We were not told to expect you. Bayushi-sama has already closed court for the day."**

"Nevertheless I need to speak with the governor as soon as possible," Azakeri declares, authority ringing in his tone. **"Please make the appropriate announcement."**

The guards look at each other for a moment before the silent one opens the gate and quickly walks toward the mansion. After glaring at the retreating guard, Yogo Azakeri turns to the players. **"I will make arrangements to speak with the governor,"** he says to the players. **"Wait at the Ochiba, Falling Leaf Tea House; we passed it on the way in. I will send someone to get you when we have an audience. In the meantime see if you can learn anything about affairs here in the city from the local populace."**

If a player asks to stay behind with Azakeri, he will wave them off politely, saying that standing around and waiting would be a waste of their abilities. (Anyone wanting to question him on this will require a contested roll against his Sincerity of 10k6+5. Success reveals that Azakeri doesn't want the PC's around for some reason.)

The Ochiba, Falling Leaf Tea House is a peaceful tea house set back half over a pond so the visitors are surrounded by the quiet sounds of water and the frogs that reside in the reeds of the pond. It has recently been expanded to also serve as an inn and also has a peace garden on the side with a dueling circle.

Being so close to dinner time the place is crowded and the arrival of a new group of samurai does not cause a stir. Conversation is rampant, and players that make a **Courtier (Gossip) / Awareness roll** can overhear the following rumors:

- 10: The harvest wasn't too bad. Not as good as last year but I cannot complain.
- 15: Business has been up with all the trade caravans passing through lately. I hope it continues.
- 20: It was sad to see my son leave with most of the garrison last week. I hope they are safe.
- 25: I am still learning the new patrol routes. I understand we are making up for the reduction in manpower but we could still handle the old ones.
- 30: Business is good for some, but what about me? None of the loggers will enter the forest anymore. I am almost out of money.
- 50: I thought I saw smoke rising from the forest yesterday. Perhaps it was just my imagination though, I didn't see any today.

Just over an hour later a young man in a Scorpion kimono enters the Ochiba, Falling Leaf Tea House. After looking about for a moment he heads over to where the PC's are.

With a deep bow he introduces himself. **"Greetings and welcome to Shimomura. My name is Bayushi Shudan, hatamoto to Bayushi Chudoku, the governor."** Shudan is just under average height with short jet black hair. His mask is that of a brown bird in flight with the beak on top and the tail coming down his nose, leaving his mouth and chin exposed. **"Yogo-sama said I could find you here. Unfortunately I must inform you that the governor will not be able to see you until the morning. I do apologize if this is an inconvenience."** He bows deeply before continuing. **"I have been sent here to make arrangements for your lodging here for the evening, since you are our guests. Yogo-sama will be staying at the mansion and then you will all meet the governor in the morning."**

"Before I make the arrangements, might I have a quick word with you?" Assuming the players do not decline, Shudan will take a seat. **"Domo arigato. Rumors swirl that things are quite dire further west. I would hear your appraisal of things, so I can properly advise my lord in the days to come."**

GM Note: Bayushi Shudan is the Pekkles no Oni in disguise. He has been impersonating the hatamoto for nearly a year and knows exactly how bad things are for the Empire. Still, he has to see if the players can be useful to him in supplanting the governor. Any attempt to determine if he is lying will require beating a Contested Roll against his Sincerity (Deceit) roll of 10k10+21 with emphasis. (Awareness 5, 5 ranks in Sincerity, and the Shadowlands power Father of Lies.) Assume anything Shudan answers short of "the sky is

blue is a lie. Also Pekkles no Oni cannot be detected unless directly targeted with a Jade spell or by being injured, which would reveal its inky black blood.

Bayushi Shudan listens intently, his face starting passive yet darkening as the players recount the tales of the Shadowlands invasion. **“I suspected things were bad when our meager garrison was reassigned to Kyuden Bayushi, but what you are describing... well let’s just say I have had more comfortable nightmares.”**

Shudan will elaborate that only four samurai of the original garrison in addition to only a quarter of their ashigaru were left behind in Shimomura. **“We had to pull in favors to keep what we have, and that only worked because of the influx of trade.”**

Shudan will answer any questions the PC’s have but will downplay talk about any problems in the forest, **“Silly peasant superstitions,”** he says. **“Lumber is the city’s main export and we have matched our quotas this year.”**

Once the conversation is done, Shudan will be cordial before departing. **“Well I thank you for your time. I shall see you in the morning.”**

The rooms granted to the PC’s in the inn border on luxurious. Servants are on call at all hours in case the player’s get any midnight cravings (within reason).

Part Four: The Game’s Afoot

Lord Sun has not yet risen when a servant comes to the players’ rooms with a polite yet urgent knock.

“Forgive me -sama but you are needed at the governor’s estate as soon as possible,” the servant says nervously.

Lady Moon hangs low in the western sky, your only companion as you journey back to the governor’s mansion. The air has chilled noticeably although not enough to leave frost on the ground. Upon arrival the players see the same two samurai on guard as the day before. They hold the gate open for you in silence.

The players enter a small antechamber where Bayushi Shudan is waiting. **“My lords, I must inform you that Yogo Azakeri-sama is dead. He was killed sometime during the night.”**

GM Note: Players have had enough time to recover Void Points unless they have the “Cursed by the Realm: Yume-do” Disadvantage.

The hatamoto will say that a servant discovered the body a little over an hour ago and reported it directly to him. **“Although this should be an intra-clan affair, there is currently no clan magistrate in the city. I would request that you look into this matter on behalf of the Scorpion Clan. Also the governor has been informed of this matter and will meet with you at your convenience.”**

Bayushi Shudan will also say that he has ordered the city sealed for the duration of the investigation. **“Someone has committed a heinous act against the Scorpion Clan and I would see the guilty brought to justice.”**

Meeting with the Governor

Bayushi Shudan escorts you to the second floor of the center building and into the main court chamber. Sitting on the dais along the back wall is a man of about 30 years old. At first glance it appears he does not have a mask, but as you approach you see that he is wearing a thin piece of translucent fabric across his nose and mouth. His red, loose-fitting kimono pools around his feet.

The hatamoto bows. **“Presenting Bayushi Chudoku, governor of Shimomura.”**

“Thank you Shudan-san, you are dismissed.” Chudoku says, which draws a confused glance from his hatamoto before he bows and complies.

“I am sorry to meet you until such circumstances,” the governor begins once Shudan has departed. **“I apologize for not speaking with you last night. I was... put off by the presumptive behavior of Yogo-san and his demands of an audience upon his arrival in the city. Despite him and I being of similar station, we are in Bayushi lands and not Yogo lands. I had hoped to teach him a lesson. Now it seems that he will have to learn it in his next life.”**

“I wish to know what originally brought you to Shimomura,” the governor continues. **“I can only surmise that it is related to his death.”**

Bayushi Chudoku is not aware of the garrison’s destruction, and the news of that fact will cause his *On* to temporarily slip. **“That is... unfortunate news samurai-san,”** he says before swallowing. **“I hope**

their souls find peace until their next turn on the wheel." (If players want to check to see if the governor is lying, he is not.)

If the players tell Chudoku that the soldiers were killed by Shadowlands forces, he will be incredulous. **"Surely you must be mistaken,"** he says. **"I have received regular reports and have seen nothing to even suggest that any dark forces have gotten to Kyuden Bayushi, much less this far past it."** (Kyuden Bayushi is almost two days away on foot along the Summer's Kiss Road.)

Players that say *goblins* were involved will get a stern look from the governor. **"If you had uttered such a word in open court then I would have had you removed (Clan)-san."** Chudoku says coldly. **"Despite these dark times, such things are not said in polite company. Rokugan is a place of civility and nothing will change that. Is that clear?"** The offending player(s) takes a **L6 Glory** loss for a breach of etiquette.

If players mention that the hatamoto has sealed the city for the duration of the investigation, Chudan will twitch his lips. **"I suppose that is a sensible precaution. It is unlike him to have made such an order without consulting me first."**

Queries about Shudan will get honest answers. **"He became my hatamoto last fall, some months after I became governor. He does excellent work and I have never had any reason to doubt him."**

Yogo Azakeri's room

As players traverse to the east wing, they see a hallway with three doors both the left and right side with a seventh door at the end. A servant stands nervously by the last room on the right. Upon seeing the players he bows deeply before slowly sliding open the door.

Yogo Azakeri's body is lying on the floor perpendicular to the door. He is lying face up with his feet on a tatami mat that lays along the right wall while his head lays in the center of the room, blood pooling beneath it. He is still in the kimono that he was wearing when you arrived in the city. Also in the room is a small closed chest which sits under a closed window on the back wall.

The servant outside the door is the one that discovered the body. He says that he was nearby when thought that he heard something. Since Yogo-sama is the only guest in attendance currently, the servant assumed that the noise came from his room so he wanted to see if

anything was needed. After knocking on the door without a response, the servant peeked into the room and saw the body.

Looking over the room can provide the following details:

Investigation (Search)/Perception:

- 10: The room is clean and orderly... other than the dead body on the floor.
- 15: The chest contains a change of clothes in Scorpion colors and a few personal items.
- 20: There is a small smudge on the inside of the window, as if someone had leaned on it at some point.
- 30: There is no blood splatter anywhere in this room (even under the tatami mat).
- 40: Looking along the wall on the left side reveals a secret passage that is built in the stone work.
- 50: There is a piece of parchment barely sticking out of the sleeve of his kimono.

Medicine/Intelligence:

- 20: There is no obvious sign of injury on his front, so the body will have to be turned to see the back of the head (where it appears the blood is coming from).
- 30: It seems that he has been dead no more than two hours.
- 40: Something about the blood seems odd to you... then you realize that it would pool that way only if the body was already dead when the blood started leaking onto the floor.

Spellcraft/Intelligence:

- 10: There are no standing pools of water in the room. Although there is a teacup present, it is empty.
- 25: There is no sign of any magical wards in this room.

If the body is turned over, either by a servant or by a player (with a L3 Glory Loss), it is clear that the back side of Azakeri's head has been caved in. New rolls can be made to determine the following:

Investigation(Notice)/Perception:

- 20: There are streaks of dirt on the back of his kimono.
- 25: It looks like he was dragged along a dusty floor at some point.

Medicine/Intelligence

- 5: Someone hit him in the back of the head very hard.

- 15: The blow was done by a heavy object, like a tetsubo or piece of wood.
- 30: Pieces of his skull are missing, probably from the impact.
- 40: The injury was done post-mortem to cover up the actual cause of death.
- 50: It is hard to say, but it looks like multiple puncture wounds...

The Parchment in the Sleeve

If people examine the parchment found in Azakeri's sleeve, they find a list of the dates and brief descriptions of shipments. Rolling raw **Intelligence** TN 20 reveals the list matches up with the five Crab caravans that came through Shimomura. Slashes of ink are put through the second, third, and fifth shipments (which matches up with the missing ones). More interestingly is the realization that the first item on the list is circled and there is a handwritten note beside it that says "Do NOT touch!" The brush strokes do not match the rest of the parchment (and neither matches Azakeri's handwriting).

The Secret Passage

The passageway is only wide enough for one person to walk at a time. (Also a PC with the Large Advantage will have to duck slightly to not hit their head.) Upon entry, have players roll either **Investigation (Notice) or Hunting (Tracking) with Perception:**

- 10: It sure is dusty in here.
- 15: Oh look, there are footprints in the dust.
- 20: Something was either pushed or dragged through the dust.
- 30: There are smears of blood on the floor.
- 35: The blood smears are pointing toward Azakeri's room.

The secret passage is about as long as the room the players were just in. Following it takes the players to what looks to be a dead end, although a quick search reveals the means to open this section of "wall" into what looks to be a servant corridor.

The servant corridor goes to the left from here. (To be right quickly leads to a dead end.) It will intersect with other passageways (to the kitchen and the servants' quarters) but players can follow the blood trail down a set of stairs into the basement.

The stone floor of the basement expands before you as you enter the darkened space. An unlit lantern is present just on the players' right. Once lit, the light

shows wooden support pillars at regular intervals and three darkened doorways in the distance.

All three doorways lead to storerooms but only one has what the players are looking for.

This storeroom is a scene of chaos. Blood is splattered everywhere: the floor, the walls, a writing desk and the scrolls upon it... nothing has been spared.

An **Investigation (Search)/Perception roll** will reveal the following information:

- 15: A large pool of blood is on the floor near the writing desk.
- 20: There is a footprint in the blood. It was most likely made by a human-sized adult.
- 25: The desk appears to be that of a scribe copying various documents.
- 40: There is a hidden compartment in the writing desk. (It is located between the upper and lower drawers.)

Examining the scrolls on the desk requires a **Calligraphy/Intelligence roll TN 30**. Success reveals that the brush strokes are the same as the forged documents found earlier.

The hidden compartment is thin, only holding two pieces of parchment. **Player's Handout #2** has the contents of both documents. These were NOT written by whoever was doing the forgeries, but were inked by another hand: the one that wrote "Do NOT touch!" on the note found in Azakeri's sleeve.

Part Five: Revelations

At this point in the investigation it should be clear that whomever forged the documents is also responsible for the missing caravans. Furthermore they are in league with another person.

"Bayushi Shudan" is doing all it can to point the blame at the governor. It has even planted a bloody tabi (sock) in the governor's quarters to insinuate that the governor has committed the murder.

Provided the players see through the deception and confront Bayushi Shudan, he will attempt to flee. Once the players have cornered Shudan (he should not be hard to track down), the following happens.

The air grows colder as a female voice echoes in everyone's ears. Only a single word is uttered: **"Failure."**

Bayushi Shudan flinches then he suddenly explodes in an inky black cloud that envelops all near it.

Everyone within 10 feet of “Bayushi Shudan” must make a raw **Earth roll TN 30**. (Having a jade finger has its normal effect of adding 10 to their total.) Anyone that fails will contract 1d10 (non-exploding) points of Taint.

Part Six: A Date with Darkness

Although not as large as the Shinomen Mori or even the Isawa Mori, the forest just outside Shimomura has stood since the dawn of time. Once a place of serenity, now centuries-old trees with sprawling limbs blot out any sunlight and guard the secrets within. Even worse, an acrid odor hangs off everything as you make your approach.

GM Note: Once players have entered the forest, make everyone roll raw Awareness. (This is a contested roll against Kamiko’s Shadowlands Power Sense Purity. Kamiko’s roll is 6k6 - 10.) If any player fails the roll, then Kamiko is alerted that people are approaching the area.

Players can make a **Hunting (Trailblazing) / Perception** roll TN 30 to push through the underbrush without injury. If no one succeeds everyone must make a **Raw Stamina roll TN25** or become Fatigued.

Eventually you push through the underbrush and into a clearing marked by sickly brown grass and the smell of burning leaves. At the center are two large forms that would resemble trees if not for the limb-like protrusions growing out of their upper torso and head. Flames flicker from their bark-like skin as their faces contort in obvious agony.

Despite their gruesome visages, your eyes are drawn to the space between them where the air seems to shimmer with a sickly green haze. Crossing into the once empty space between the “trees” is a pack of goblins that sniff the air and focus on your party.

“A moment, my minions.” A female voice silences the chattering goblins with her command, even though the source of the voice cannot be seen. **“Ah, the samurai have come. I smelled your stench when you entered my forest. It seems my pet failed, not that it matters. The Dark Lord has come home, and your Empire will crumble. Not that you will live to see it.”**

“Kill them.”

Roll initiative.

Players start at the edge of the clearing thirty feet away from the portal. There is 1 Goblin Warmonger and a number of goblins equals the number of PC’s. On its initiative in Turn 1, the Warmonger will use its Mob Leader ability to buff the rest of the goblins. The lesser goblins will always be in Full Attack Stance.

Kamiko starts the combat invisible, not revealing herself until her initiative on Turn 2. Upon turning visible her Silent Waters is triggered, which casts Armor of Obsidian on herself. This negates the first 2 Jade spells that target her in the next 10 minutes. She knows all maho spells and can choose to cast them without spilling blood. (If she does spill her blood, she gets 3 Free Raises.) Also she can cast any (non-secret) elemental spell as if it was maho by spilling blood (self-inflicting a number of wounds equal to the Master Level of the spell) but does not get the Free Raises. Also any (non-maho) spell cast against her is TN +10.

The two Daku no Oni cannot move: they have been bound in place as anchors for the portal. Due to their elongated limbs, they can make melee attacks against players up to 10 feet away. Both Daku no Oni must be destroyed for the portal to close.

In the Reactions Phase, everyone will hear a whistling sound, as if something was falling toward them. Have everyone roll **Defense / Reflexes TN 35**. Anyone that fails will take (**35 - their total**) in damage from the impact of a boulder fired from a catapult. (This is from one of the missing caravans and is located in the forest behind the portal.) This will continue once each Reaction Phase until Kamiko is killed (and her control over the goblins broken). Also more goblins will pass through the portal to replenish any that have been killed in that round (except the warmonger).

Kamiko

Air 6 Earth 5 Fire 5 Water 3
Willpower 6

Initiative: 10k6

Armor TN: 40

Damage: by spells

Reduction: Invulnerable (Jade, Crystal, nemuranai)

Wounds: 150 (Dead)

Regeneration: 9 wounds at start of her turn

Taint Rank: 9.0

Primary Skills: Knives 7, Spellcraft 5, Stealth 5, Temptation (Seduction) 7

Spellcasting: Air 10k7, Earth 10k6, Fire 10k6, Water 9k3

Favored Combat Spells:

- *No Pure Breaths* (Maho Air 4): Single target takes 6k6 wounds and +10 TN to all actions until magically healed.
- *Your Heart's Enemy* (Air 3): Target player must make Fear 4 (TN 25) check or be forced to attack an illusion of Kamiko's creation. (Other players only see a cloud.)
- *Slayer's Knives* (Air 5): Players within a 10 foot corridor take 8k6 damage and must make an **Earth Roll TN 20** or be knocked prone.

Special Abilities:

- **Disrupt the Chi:** As a Simple Action, make a Contested Willpower (Kamiko rolls 6k6 + 9) against a target within line-of-sight. The target adds their Honor Rank to the roll. If the target player fails, they must use their lowest Trait rank for all Skill and Trait rolls for next 5 rounds.
- **Evade the Unworthy:** As a Simple Action, Kamiko (and anything she is carrying) becomes completely invisible. This does not conceal noise or smell, and can be detected by magical effects (like *By the Light of the Moon*). The effect immediately ends after making an attack (including spells).

Daku no Oni, Scourge of the Forest

Air 3	Earth 4	Fire 3	Water 3
Reflexes 4		Agility 4	Strength 5
Initiative: 7k4		Simple Attack: 7k4	
Armor TN: 30		Damage: 5k2 (claws) + below	

Reduction: 8 (Jade, Crystal 3)

Wounds: 90 (Dead)

Taint Rank: 4.0

Special Abilities:

- **Eyeless:** Immune to blindness and sight-based effects (including illusions).
- **Magic Resistance:** +3 TN to spells targeting the Daku no Oni.
- **Wreathed in Flames:** Anything that attacks Daku no Oni with melee attacks (or anything that it attacks) takes an extra 3k2 Fire damage. If the flames are put out (by using the Extinguish spell or another means), the flames reignite during the Reactions stage of the same round.
- **Partial Invulnerability:** Immune to non-magical fire. Can be harmed by magical fire but will regenerate any such damage at the end of the turn (unless dead)

Goblin Warmonger

Air 2	Earth 3	Fire 2	Water 3
Reflexes 4		Agility 4	Strength 4
Initiative: 7k4		Simple Attack: 7ke4	(rusted katana)
Armor TN: 30		Damage: 7km2	

(Light armor)

Reduction: 7 (Jade 0)

Wounds: 60 (Dead)

Taint: 4

Special Abilities:

- **Mob Leader:** As a Complex Action, the Warmonger gives all other goblins +2k0 to both attack and damage rolls until the Warmonger's next Turn.

Goblins

Air 1	Earth 2	Fire 2	Water 2
Reflexes 3		Agility 3	
Initiative: 4k3+5		Simple Attack: 8k4	(Full Attack)
Armor TN: 10		Damage: 5k2 (Sharp stick)	

Reduction: 4 (Jade 0)

Wounds: 30 (Dead)

Taint: 4

Conclusion

As Kamiko falls and the portal collapses in on itself, the forest falls silent except for the sound of your breathing. For a moment peace has returned but you know that it is a fleeting thought.

Investigating the area behind where the portal stood reveals two operational catapults and the broken remains of several wagons. Weapons and armor are scattered throughout the underbrush; some are salvageable, while some are not. However there is no sign of the soldiers that guarded those caravans.

Returning to Shimomura, the governor Bayushi Chudoku thanks you for your service. **"I owe you my thanks for your service to the Empire. In these dark days to come, may your valor be a beckon that lights our way."**

The End

Rewards for Completing the Adventure

Surviving the Module:	1 EXP
Good Roleplaying:	+1 EXP
Exposing the Pekkle no Oni:	+1 EXP
Defeating Kamiko:	+1 EXP
Total Possible Experience:	4 EXP

Favors

For closing the portal to Jigoku and protecting the Empire's supply lines, gain 1 Favor.

Honor

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

Glory

For stopping the attacks on the caravans at the request of the Imperial Herald: G10

Allies and Enemies

None

Appendix #1: NPCs

“Bayushi Shudan” (Pekkle-no-Oni)

A handsome man in his mid-twenties, face covered by a mask.

Air 5 Earth 3 Fire 3 Water 2
(Willpower 6) (Intel 5) (Perception 5)
Honor 0.0 Status 0.0 (3.0) Glory -7.0 (2.4)
Initiative: 5k5 **Complex Attack:** 4k3
(obsidian claws) **Damage:** 4k3
Armor TN: 30

Reduction: 0

Taint: 6.0

Wounds: 20 (+5), 30 (+10), 40 (+15), 65 (Down, +40), 80 (Dead)

Skills: Acting (Scorpion Clan, Male) 6, Courtier (Manipulation) 3, Etiquette 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Temptation 4

Advantages: Perceived Honor

Shadowlands Powers:

- **Greater:** Father of Lies
- **Lesser:** Above the Elements, Blackened Claws, Jade Sense

Special Abilities:

- **Shapeshifting:** As a Complex Action, may change its form to that of a human being from an infant to young adult (~ 30 yrs old).
- **Retributive Taint:** When killed, the Pekkle no Oni explodes into an inky black cloud. All creatures within 10 ft must make an **Earth roll TN 30** or gain 1k1 (non-exploding) points of Taint.

Kamiko

An akutenshi sent into Rokugan to prepare the way for her master to make his move. Although mostly sent as a spy and seductress, she is “blessed” with an expansive knowledge of maho... and will not hesitate to use it.

Air 6 Earth 4 Fire 5 Water 3
(Willpower 6)

Initiative: 10k6

Armor TN: 40

Attack: by spells

Reduction: Invulnerable (can only be damaged by magic or jade, crystal, obsidian or nemuranai weapons)

Taint Rank: 9.0

Primary Skills: Knives 7, Spellcraft 5, Stealth 5, Temptation (Seduction) 7

Spellcasting: Air 10k7, Earth 10k4, Fire 10k5, Water 9k3

Spells Known: all non-secret spells

Shadowlands Powers:

- **Akutenshi:** Awe of the Dark One, Mastery of Darkness
- **Greater:** Disrupt the Chi, Evade the Unworthy, Protection of the Dark, Unearthly Regeneration, Unholy Beauty
- **Lesser:** Above the Elements, Blessing of the Dark One, Sense Purity

Player Handout #1: News From 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 siege, 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

Player Handout #2: Hidden Parchments

(The first document)

Keep me advised of any caravans coming from Crab lands and their timetables.

I will take care of the rest.

- K

(The second document)

Continue with the plan for replacing the governor.

The time of our ascension is nigh.

- K