

Crossroads of Destiny, Part One: The Nightmare Begins

**A 1-Round Low-Rank Adventure for
Heroes of Rokugan: The Nightmare War**

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The end of the world is just the beginning of the nightmare.
This mod, and all mods in Nightmare War, should be played in order if at all possible.

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This module is written for the Legend of the Five Rings: Fourth Edition, published by Alderac Entertainment.

GM's Information

THIS SCENARIO SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD!

Please read the scenario thoroughly before attempting to run it.

A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing this game. The actual playing time should be about three and a half hours.

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

Some of the text in this scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in *bold italics*. It is strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters. All bulleted information is just that, pure information. Feed it to the players through an NPC when appropriate, as sometimes reading it straight just doesn't sound right.

Players will have Module Tracking Sheets that need to be filled out at the end of the game, which is to keep track of certain circumstances and events for future GM's to create a better roleplaying experience for the player. Important information to be included in the game will be listed at the beginning of the module, and information that needs to be recorded will be listed at the end of the module. Please fill out the GM tracking sheet attached to the end of this module and return it to the Campaign Coordinator. If you need an electronic version of the form, please contact the Campaign Administrator or Campaign Coordinator (e-mail addresses are available on the website).

Rokugan has a complex and rich culture that is different in many ways from modern Western civilization. The Legend of the Five Rings book details these numerous differences, but it is suggested that GMs keep a few specifics in mind.

- Family name preceds personal name for all characters; Akodo Toturi was a member of the Akodo family with the personal name of Toturi.

- Samurai do not commonly concern themselves with money or commerce; exchanges between samurai are treated as gifts, and payments are made to peasants as though humoring the lower orders petty ways.
- An event is not truly considered to have happened without samurai witness; even criminal investigations rely entirely upon eyewitness testimony.

Some events that occur within this module affect the storyline and may need to be reported by the Campaign Administrators. This module has an effective 'active' period which is 3 months after its release, and these events (listed at the end of the module) **MUST** be reported by the GM to the campaign administration before the end of the active period for them to take effect.

Glory and Honor Awards and Penalties

This adventure contains suggested Glory and Honor awards (and penalties) for dealing with the challenges presented herein. However, at times the players may take extra actions which the GM judges worthy of additional reward or punishment. **Please consult the Honor table on page 91 and the Glory table on page 93** of the Legend of the Five Rings Fourth Edition core sourcebook for more specific guidelines for Honor and Glory gains and losses. Specifically, be mindful of the performing PC's current Honor, Glory, and Infamy when meting out rewards and punishments.

Reminder

This module is intended for entertainment purposes; this means that the goal is to provide an enjoyable playing experience for the players. The events of the module should be challenging, so as to ensure the players have a sense of accomplishment, but the mechanics presented here are, ultimately, guidelines. If adjustments are necessary to adapt to the specific group of players, it is suggested that care should be taken to ensure the player characters do have a reasonable chance of achieving their goals (or at least of achieving an entertaining failure). Remember that the GM has the final word at the table, and use that power with both discretion and consideration.

Adjusting for Party Strength

This is a Low Rank adventure, and thus can involve parties of widely varying capabilities. The encounters have been optimized for a party of average Rank Two.

Although most of the challenges here are role-play oriented and thus not terribly dependent on party strength, a few changes can be made to adjust the adventure difficulty for low-end parties, as follows:

Low End Party (most/all characters Rank One): Reduce most skill TNs by 5-10 points. Gohei loses his ability to make Simple Action attacks; the Obsidian Magistrate's Arm of Shadow is a Simple Action and does not steal Void Points on a hit.

Adventure Summary and Background

The world is ending. In fact, *every* world is ending.

In the depths of the Spirit Realm of Yume-do, where millions upon millions of dreams of Rokugan are born and destroyed each night, a terrible nightmare has begun to grow, out of control. It destroys worlds, consumes universes, unravels time from both the future and the past, and while some might say that these are merely dreams and have no substance, others have come to believe that what we dream as fiction may actually be a truth in some other place, that the many Rokugans that exist in Yume-do are in fact as real as the one we know as home, that there is not one Ningen-do but an infinity, and asking which is real and which is a dream is like the old koan: "Am I a man who dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly who dreams he is a man?"

Before the nightmare storm can destroy all the Rokugans that ever were and ever might be, one being from one of them – a Fortune of Death and Destiny who was once a mortal soul named Sezarū – gave up his power, his position, and his divine insight to take on a mortal existence once more. Working from a plan he created when he was still a Fortune, he now seeks to gather heroes from across the many worlds of Yume-do together, to build a fortress that can withstand the storm long enough to find the source of the disruption and cure it.

To do so, he needs bridges across the worlds, and so he sends his heroes, the PCs, from one reality to the next, the future and the past and places that are only barely recognizable as Rokugan, in search of these bridges. The PCs have to adjust, adapt, and stay focused on their missions – or everything they have ever known will be destroyed before it ever had a chance to be.

Introduction

As the adventure begins, the PCs are wherever they would normally be, doing whatever they would normally do. Get a basic description of their typical activities from each player before reading them the following.

A strange sense of tension suddenly pervades the air, making your skin crawl. You look up toward the horizon and see massive storm sweeping down on you, from seemingly every direction. It is moving impossibly fast, and you soon realize it in fact is not a storm at all – what looks at first like clouds is a surging, amorphous darkness, crackling with energy (bursts of flame, bolts of lightning, mini-tornadoes, and more) racing toward you, and what you might have first taken for rain is in fact the earth itself, and all the things on it, tearing away from the world and being violently pulled up through the air to disappear into the darkness.

(Characters in space see the same energy racing toward them or their ship, and stars and planets being boiled away as it approaches.) If there are other people around, many start screaming and trying to flee, but the storm is approaching from every direction and moving far faster than anyone could hope to escape anyway. The PCs have a bare few seconds to decide how they wish to respond to what is clearly the end of the world.

However, no matter what they do, just before the storm engulfs them too, time itself seems to stop. The storm stops approaching, other people around freeze into paralysis, the trees and houses hanging motionless in the air just feet from oblivion. Only the PC appears unaffected. Just as they realize this is occurring, a purple rectangle, just higher and wider than a person, appears in the air next to them, then slides sideways like a paper screen door.

Through the opening in the air you can see a castle in the middle of a forest clearing for just an instant before your view is blocked by a man who steps into view and through the "doorway." The opening closes behind him. The new arrival is tall and sharp-featured, with green-gold eyes and pure white hair; he wears the robes of a shugenja and you see both a scroll satchel and a mask, white with a large red circle on the forehead, on his belt. "I am Sezarū," he says simply, in a voice used to command, to power. "Your world is ending, swallowed into the darkness of nonexistence. In seconds, none of this will have ever existed, and all you care about and have worked for will not even be a memory. If you would stop this, come with me."

If the PC refuses, Sezarū makes a second attempt to persuade them: *"I realize you have little reason to trust me, but you also have little choice. You can see for yourself what is happening here. I can give you a*

chance to undo it, to restore the world you know as if all this destruction never happened. But if you refuse, you will be swallowed too, consumed by an annihilation so complete that you will have simply never been. That is your choice – act to save your existence and all that for which you have lived, or join them in oblivion.” A second refusal means the death of the PC as Sezaru opens his “doorway” again, steps through, and time resumes for the split second it takes for the character to also be destroyed. (The doorway does not allow anyone to pass through it without Sezaru’s will – last second attempts to sneak in or jump through fail, as though the character had tried to pass through a solid wall.) Attacking PCs find themselves paralyzed before they can complete any assault while Sezaru makes his second pitch. He then releases them, but if they try to attack again, he treats that as a second refusal and leaves them behind.

Assuming the PC agrees, Sezaru leads them through the doorway, which opens this time to a darkened room that the PC can see almost none of.

As you step through the doorway, you are suddenly caught, suspended in midair, paralyzed – and almost immediately unconscious. Some time later, you awaken, still paralyzed, but able to move your mouth and speak. In your peripheral vision, you can barely make out others in the dark, similarly suspended, but nothing more. Sezaru stands in front of you, illuminated by a fire he has conjured into his palm. “I apologize for your circumstances,” he begins, looking at each of you in turn, “but I need to make certain you fully grasp your situation and what I am going to ask you to do before I free you. There are too many possibilities for... misunderstandings... otherwise. I have gathered you from worlds across the spectrum of possibilities to serve as my agents in an attempt to prevent at least one world from being destroyed, as all of yours have been. Once we have established this reality as a stronghold that can withstand the storm, we will begin the work of seeking out its cause and undoing it, so that what has been destroyed can be recovered. Each of you has already agreed to aid me individually, but now you must agree to work together as a group. That may be a more... difficult burden to bear.” He gestures, and the fire in his palm leaps out in multiple directions, lighting lanterns around the room. It turns out to be fairly small, a handful of paces across, with brick walls and corridors – tunnels, really – leading out in several directions. At the same time, each of you finds that you can now move your heads and eyes, allowing you to finally see one another. You can also see glowing circles drawn in soft chalk on the floor beneath you as you float in midair; each other floating figure has a similar circle beneath it as well.

Part One: There Must Be Some Kinda Way Outta Here

At this point, Sezaru introduces the PCs to one another, and explains a little bit about where and when they came from. In many cases, this may result in PCs who rather emphatically do not wish to work together. For this, Sezaru has no patience. He interrupts anyone insulting or threatening another PC with a sharp, “Silence! You are all here because you are all needed. Whether you serve the Empire, your daimyo or even Jigoku itself, none of you, none of your people, and none of your masters will survive without cooperation with one another. We do not have time for your battles right now! Once we have completed our work here, you can return to your own worlds and kill each other with my blessing. If you try to do so now, however, I will send you back to where and when I found you, and the winds of oblivion will deal with you. I will not risk our mission for your disputes.” Sezaru backs up his threat with a brief prayer, and a snowflake-like lattice suddenly appears in glowing blue-green light, touching each PC and Sezaru across the room’s cramped space. “We are all bound now. While you aid and serve me in this endeavor, the kami will maintain the spell that keeps you in this world. If you break my trust, or offer violence directly or indirectly to someone else in this room without their express permission, the kami will withdraw their efforts, and you will instantly return to your world, at the moment I took you out of it. I imagine you can picture for yourself the result of that.”

Once the message has sunk in, Sezaru gestures, and the PCs are able to move, floating to the floor as the circles beneath them cease glowing. Sezaru’s threat is not empty; from this point forward, any PC who offers violence to another PC without receiving permission to do so (such as for a duel) is instantly thrown out of the campaign and destroyed along with their home world. This includes any sort of physical or magical attack, whether directed specifically at a target or merely including a PC in an area of effect, and is not limited solely to actual damage – inflicting penalties, trying to spread Taint, and similar effects would also qualify.

Assuming they don’t immediately attempt to kill one another and suffer the appropriate penalties, Sezaru is willing to answer the PCs’ questions as best he can. Some likely questions and his answers are given below.

- **Where are we?** “This is Rokugan, in the year 1302 by the Isawa calendar. It is also the eighth year of the reign of Iweko VII. As for where we are

specifically, this is a cave network located beneath a temple; it is a locus of spiritual energy, and served as the easiest place I could build a portal to bring you here. It will also be useful for our next steps, as we begin the process of building a bulwark here.”

- **What’s causing the destruction of our worlds?** “At this point, I truly don’t know. There is some kind of disturbance in the Spirit Realms, and it is tearing apart every reflection of reality that exists, ever has existed or ever will exist. It is tearing away at time itself.” At this point, Sezaru’s eyes briefly turn black, but filled with stars, and his voice becomes brittle. “I knew more once, but... I had to give the knowledge up in order to be able to fight against it.” His expression suggests that he gave up quite a bit more than that, but he does not explain further.
- **Why have you brought us here?** “This shard of reality is closely linked to many very similar mirrors of it in Yume-do; you might think of them as a stack of papers, with a watercolor on top whose inks have seeped through and copied the image onto the pages below. I can use that similarity to stack these mirror-worlds together, making them strong enough to resist whatever force it is that is consuming the rest of your worlds, just as sticks bound into a bundle are far harder to break than each one is individually. We need someplace to establish as a refuge, a bulwark against the nightmare storm, before we can take the offensive against it. This world shall serve that purpose.”
- **What do you plan to do?** “In order to perform the ritual I have designed to strengthen this Rokugan, I need sources of elemental power from elsewhere in the Realm of Dreams to lend their power to my prayers. These will be bound to objects that can be found in other Rokugans now adrift in Yume-do. I intend to open a portal to each of these worlds and send you through it, together, to locate and acquire each object, while I remain here to maintain the link between the worlds.”
- **What objects?** “The rite I have designed requires six in all: a castle of earth, an echo of wind, a soul of void, a sword of flame, a mirror of water, and a hand of corruption. How they might manifest in another world, though... that I don’t truly know.”
- **How are we supposed to find them?** “I have a jade fragment, brought here from my... from the world I once called home. I have enchanted it so that it will do three things: guide you to within a few hundred paces of a suitable object and give you a direction to continue, recognize a suitable object when touched to it, and signal me here to open a return portal for you. Beyond this, however, I must rely on your wisdom to recognize the signs of what you seek.” The jade fragment is a broken shard, roughly the

size and shape of an arrowhead; it looks as though it were once part of a larger statue or similar, but there’s no way to tell what it might have been.

The PCs have little chance to prepare for their trip – Sezaru is in a hurry, and does not want to waste time – and have only the resources Sezaru brought for them (their starting Outfit, in other words), but they can make a few preparations if they wish while Sezaru begins the process of opening the portal. The ritual he performs cannot be aided by a PC (performing it requires having part of the soul of the Void Dragon) and only takes about ten minutes to do. The rite involves Sezaru sitting in the center of the chamber, legs crossed in the lotus position, and chanting a series of sutras the PCs have never before heard.

After a few minutes of this, six circles about the size of a jingasa’s brim appear in the dirt of the cavern floor, spaced evenly around Sezaru’s seated form. Suddenly, a line of flickering red flame begins to trace an arc between two of the circles; when it reaches the edge of the next circle it disappears, leaving a black scorch mark behind it, and at the same time a new flame flares to life on the opposite side, this time a brilliant emerald green, continuing the arc toward the next circle. The flame marches its way around the complete circuit, linking all the smaller circles into one larger one, while the fire itself keeps shifting colors, from green to sapphire blue, then bright white, twilight purple and finally a strange, flickering shadow of black flames. Once the larger circle is complete, there is a stir of motion within each smaller circle, as finer lines begin to twist and writhe across their surfaces, drawing small images. Sezaru’s chanting grows louder and louder, until at last he throws back his head and shouts a last syllable, his eyes ablaze like small suns and his body rigid with unimaginable strain. When he finishes his chant, he abruptly collapses, his eyes returning to their usual golden color, no longer glowing.

The six smaller circles now hold six images within them. One is a rat, very similar to the ratling “mon” the Crab have sometimes used for their Nezumi allies in battles against the Shadowlands from time to time. Next to it is a geometric design of small lines, twisting and turning among one another at very precise angles without ever crossing; if one of them reaches an end within the image, it does so with a small circular cap of sorts. (PCs from most “modern” or “futuristic” worlds recognize it as a circuit board.) The next after that is a human face divided down the middle, one side drawn in outline while the other half is shaded in. Then comes a full moon, then an image divided into five parts, showing a humanoid figure made of fire, a bird’s wing, a lizard head with a gemstone eye, a serpentine figure made of water, and the

silhouette of a lion's head. The last image, back next to the ratlike one, shows a featureless human face save for the chrysanthemum drawn on each cheek.

Sezaru slowly picks himself back up the floor, unsteadily moving out of the large circle. ***"There," he says finally. "There is your portal to the other Rokugans, where the elemental objects can be found. The kami have forged a link to these broken shards of time, each one containing at least one of the needed objects. Touch one of the smaller circles, and the jade guide I've given you will assure that you arrive close to where you need to be, both in terms of place and of opportunity. Events should guide you to where you need to go to some extent. Find the object, touch the jade token to it, and I will bring you home again."*** If the PCs ask about the iconography in the circles, Sezaru shakes his head. "The kami chose those images to represent the worlds they link to. The only way to learn their meaning is to use the portals to arrive there." He does not mention it on his own, but if asked, Sezaru does admit that he is not sure how many suitable objects can be found in each world – he is sure there is at least one in each, and probably no more than two or three, but he cannot be certain of the total count.

Finally, before the PCs leave, Sezaru tells them that time should not be a factor; the portal will return them to this world just a breath or two after they leave it, so the only deadline is how long the other worlds will last before they reach the end of their existences and the dimensional storm swallows them up as well. He also mentions that they will not be able to return with anything from the worlds they visit save the elemental objects they find.

To open the portal, one of the PCs must simply touch one of the images. The image chosen corresponds to the world it links the portal to: the rat connects to **After Tomorrow**, the circuit board to **Chrome and Honor**, the divided face to **Dark Mirrors**, the moon to **Lady Moon's Dynasty**, the five elemental figures to the **Empire of the Five Races**, and the featureless face to the **Twilight Empire**.

When the portal opens, it looks like a shimmering pool of liquid silver, a mirror that rolls and ripples in the cave's firelight. To enter, the PCs must merely jump in. Any who are hesitant get one brusque warning from Sezaru before he casts Gust of Wind and knocks them in himself. The transition is almost instantaneous, with the PCs dropping out of the empty air just a few feet over the ground. However, two sensations do seem to happen in the "moment" of non-time during the journey – a pair of clues as to which items the PCs may be able to find in the world they are traveling to. If the world has the castle

of earth, they feel a deep vibration as though something were shaking their very bones; if it has the echo of air, there is a rush of wind in their ears; if it has the soul of void, they see a vision of an infinite star-filled darkness; if it has the sword of flame, they experience a rush of heat on their skin; the mirror of water produces a sudden, desperate tightness in their lungs, as though they were drowning; and the hand of corruption makes the PCs feel as though millions of tiny insects are crawling over their skin. These sensations happen simultaneously (so, for example, traveling to the world of After Tomorrow produces a deep vibration and a rush of wind in the ears).

It is recommended that the GM not emphasize these experiences at first, simply presenting them as part of the portal travel, until the PCs recognize them as the clues that they are.

The PCs may explore the worlds in any order they like, but they cannot return to Sezaru until they have found at least one of the needed items in that world, and once they leave a world the link is broken – they cannot return to it. (The jade token does not instantly return the PCs to the cave when they locate an object by touching the token to it – they must make a separate mental action to do so.) Unless the PCs have any final questions, there's nothing left but to go for it.

Part Two: After Tomorrow

Possible acquisitions: Castle of earth (tea pot), echo of wind (wind chime)

This world is a Rokugan where all but one of the Nine Kami fell into Jigoku, becoming the corrupted Champions of that Realm. Only Fu Leng remained pure, and he retreated to the mountains of the north to watch over the grave of Ryoshun. However, Rokugan was not without heroes – instead of humans, though, the tribes of the Nezumi forged an Emerald Empire, and the Seven Names of Thunder met the armies of the Taint on the First Day of Thunder. Humans now serve the rattlings as peasants, though some follow the Tao as created when Shinsei spoke with the first Kan'ok'ticheck and Fu Leng recorded the conversation; these humans join with retired nezumi as monks. The nezumi, however, fill the role of samurai in this world, following a code of bushido that would be very familiar to the most upright of Lion.

When the world returns after passing through the ratlike portal, you find yourselves dropping a few feet to a broad road, raised slightly over the surrounding rice paddies, while ahead a small village shelters behind a rough wooden wall; the jade token Sezaru gave you is already floating into the air, pointing right

toward the gate in the village wall. Peasants work in the fields beneath a fresh spring sky, and banners hanging from the walls around the village flutter slightly in the gentle breeze. With just a second look, though, oddities appear: the image on the banners is no mon you recognize, that of a skeletal leg, one of the bones snapped just below the knee; beyond the village's open gates, the houses visible on either side of the dusty street are not of Rokugani design, being shorter and wider, with several seemingly stacked atop one another in uneven vertical piles much higher than most Rokugani dwellings go; and perhaps most significantly, the two armed and armored figures approaching from within the village gates bear samurai-style equipment, but their hunched posture and fast-moving, waddling gate makes it clear they are not human.

As the two figures approach the group, their nature becomes clear: they are human-sized rodents, "ratlings" in the Rokugani argot, nezumi if given their proper name. Each bears a mon on their armor and back banners that matches the broken bone image on the walls, and when they get close enough to see the PCs clearly, they draw their katana and move forward purposefully.

If there is a nezumi in the party, the two approaching warriors come to a wary halt a few steps away from the group, and address the nezumi in their own language, tails lashing in dismay. "Greetings, stranger. We require your sticks, please, and some explanation as to why you have armed and armored humans traveling with you. Why would you allow them to dress and arm themselves like samurai?" (Nezumi do not write or use paper; information storage occurs on carefully gnawed sticks instead. Literate humans make the same marks with utility knives.)

If there is no nezumi in the group, the two warriors stop short, their weapons drawn, and snarl in bokrne Rokugani, "Halt, humans! Kneel to samurai! Your weapons – drop-drop them! Your sticks! Now-now, or face Tomorrow!"

Whether or not the PCs include a nezumi or if they even understood the commands being shouted at the by the guards, they will not have their identity sticks to present for examination by the warriors. These nezumi believe that humans are only spiritually equal to heimin or hinin in traditional Rokugan, and thus unworthy to hold weapons like katana or to travel in full armor. Thus, they react to the human PCs exactly as the PCs would likely respond to a known peasant wearing Clan equipment and carrying the daisho. On the other hand, they are aware they are outnumbered, and aren't interested in getting

themselves killed, so despite their threats they will not attack unless the PCs do.

If the PCs attempt to talk their way out of the confrontation, they automatically succeed: as long as they don't try to attack the nezumi, any version of their story they offer is weird enough that the warriors decide that dealing with them is above their Name, and command (in the form of a request, if to a fellow nezumi, or without such niceties if not) that the PCs accompany them to the village's Rememberer to explain themselves.

If they don't do it peacefully, they can fairly quickly knock out or kill the two warriors, but the other guards inside the village quickly muster, bringing blunted arrows and weighted nets to bear to capture the PCs and drag them before the Rememberer instead.

The Rememberer's home looks like a cross between a library and a woodcutter's shop. Instead of scroll racks, the walls are lined with open-topped boxes that have carefully laid out bundles of sticks, from the floor to the ceiling. An open porch holds a reclining couch next to a warming brazier and a workbench, where a set of sticks have been individually tied to a circle about a palm's-width across, on the low table. In the Rememberer's central study, a similar couch sits in front of a low table, where a ceramic tea set and a go set flank another small pile of sticks, each carefully notched and gnawed. There are two nezumi seated in the study, one on the couch and the other on a cushion to one side of it, their dark grey fur marked with white on their nose and around their eyes as badges of their great age. Fine kimono, altered from the traditional style to accommodate the specifics of ratling body shapes, adorn each of them. Neither rises as you enter, but your escorts offer low bows. The two nezumi elders eye you with guarded interest, their noses and whiskers twitching slightly as they look you over.

Rememberer Nesh-tch'tch and Shaman An'chu'kir introduce themselves; to humans, this is a brusque statement of name and title, while with nezumi they more politely touch noses and exchange sniffs of ears along with their names. For humans, the only way most of them can tell nezumi sexes apart is when a female is nursing, but nezumi can easily smell that Nes-tch'tch is male and An'chu'kir is female. Regardless, once the introductions are done, Nesh-tch'tch demands that the PCs tell their story.

Once the PCs explain themselves however they wish to, Nesh-tch'tch and An'chu'kir debate with each other about the truth of what they have heard. Nesh-tch'tch recognizes their iconography as that of the Seven Dark Kami (the Beast Hida, the Maiden of Goblins Doji, the

Shadow-Who-Is-Two Bayushiba, the Huntress Shinjo, the Serpent Seer Togashi, the Butcher Akodo, and the Undying Hantei), but An'chu'kir notes that none have been lost to the Dark or the Foul, so something else must be going on. She also notes the “smell of Yume-do” on them, “of Tomorrow and Yesterday together.” This discussion occurs in Nezumi – they do not bother translating if none of the PCs speak the language, but they are likewise unconcerned if one of the PCs can understand them, and make no objection if a PC translates for the rest of the group. Both have gained the wisdom and experience of age, and are not inclined to rushed judgment; their relationship is that of a scholarly daimyo (Nesh-tch'tch) and a trusted spiritual advisor (An'chu'kir), and their innate curiosity and desire for knowledge plays to the PCs' benefit.

Finally, Nesh-tch'tch concludes that Yume-do might in fact hold a dream of samurai who were humans instead of nezumi, and An'chu'kir's testimony increases that probability. He does not wish to assume that weapons and armor alone make samurai, however. He decides to test these new arrivals to see if they are worthy of their claims to be samurai. After summoning a human servant they name “Seppun Toshiaki” to act as translator, Nesh-tch'tch and An'chu'kir ask the PCs about various aspects of bushido to determine their worthiness.

- **Why and under what circumstances would a true samurai practice deceit?** Lying to protect the honor of your daimyo or your family at the cost of your own reputation is extremely honorable.
- **Why is fear failure to a samurai?** Because a samurai has nothing of his or her own; everything he or she has or is belongs to his or her sworn lord. Fear is based in losing something one possesses – property, reputation, life – but a samurai should have room in their mind only for their duty.
- **Is the hiding of emotion proper for a sincere samurai?** Any display of emotion a samurai makes should be true to his or her feelings. It is generally considered improper to display any emotion, however, and sincerity is an active virtue – a samurai's actions are always in line with his or her words, but no samurai is obligated to express emotions continually.
- **What is the difference between an ally and an enemy when seated at tea?** There should be none – except that, for highest honor, one should perhaps offer greater courtesy to one's enemies than one's allies.
- **Can one disobey one's lord in the service of one's lord? Why would a samurai do such a thing?** To disobey one's lord is extremely dishonorable – but one's honor is only one more

sacrifice to be made to duty if it is required. If a samurai believes his or her lord's situation will be improved through disobedience, then that samurai is obligated to disobey, and afterward cleanse the shame through seppuku.

- **Should a samurai show mercy to the defeated enemies of his or her lord?** There is no right answer to this question – it is a test of whether the PC can demonstrate consideration for the many factors that would go into the decision, including the virtue of compassion, the potential future threat to one's lord, the possible insult offered to the enemy, and so on.

Lore: Bushido / Intelligence rolls can be used here, at TNs between 15 and 25, but this should be primarily a roleplaying challenge. Be sure to emphasize that the PCs are proving their knowledge of bushido to a judging panel of rattlings.

If at least half of the PCs can successfully answer the question via either rolls or replies that satisfy the GM, An'chu'kir and Nesh-tch'tch agree to aid the PCs' mission. Nezumi pass automatically, naga and characters with at least 1 Rank of Taint are not allowed to participate. If the PCs fail, they can use violence instead, but they must kill An'chu'kir before she can take an action, because on her action, she banishes them back to Sezaru. An'chu'kir rolls 8k3 for initiative, has an Armor TN of 35 and 75 Wounds.

If the PCs need to, they may make **Investigation (Search) / Perception** rolls, TN 25, to notice the castle image embossed on the ceramic tea set. If they ask, and have earned the nezumi's cooperation, they can take it. Confirmation is as simple as touching the jade token to the tea set, which confirms its nature. The wind chime on the workbench outside also works, but requires the PCs recognizing it for what it is and then testing it on their own. Brute force searching, touching the token to everything in the room, also discovers the tea set. Once the PCs have the tea set, the wind chime, or both, they can signal Sezaru for a return portal to be opened for them.

Part Three: Honor and Chrome

Possible acquisitions: hand of corruption (cyberarm), soul of void (Shinsei AI).

This is Rokugan in the year 2085, a dark, dystopian future where supercorporations have become the dominant forces of society, displacing the Clans as

primary sources of identity and culture, and most “samurai” are simply career bureaucrats or managers in the massive corporate enclaves. Technology has allowed many to exchange their physical body parts for mechanical equivalents, at the cost of their innate humanity and the spiritual connection that permits the true use of Techniques, the communion with kami or the manipulation of elements via kiho. The naga have been wiped out, the nezumi made into slaves and test subjects. In the shadowy alleys between the towering skyscrapers, ronin operate alone or in small groups, scraping out survival from the crumbs the corporations leave them. (Note that all spell TNs are increased by +10, due to the difficulties of contacting the kami in this spiritually bereft era.)

When the PCs jump through the portal to this world, read the following to any PCs who are from “classic,” feudal-era historical Rokugans.

You fall a few feet to the ground, which you discover to your surprise is a slightly-sticky black substance, like volcanic pumice covered in a thin layer of glue. Even before you can take a look around, the fetid air assaults you – the wind is thick with stench, dirt and dust and unwashed humanity and other odors you can neither name nor readily stomach. Breathing is caustic, the sharp metallic atmosphere leaving a faint trail of acidic burning all the way down to your lungs. As you finally orient yourself and look around, you realize you are standing on a broad plateau, perfectly flat except for a single small building a few paces away. The plateau is easily three or four dozen paces across, sharply rectangular, and metal railing has been placed around the edges. The small building is just tall for a human to step into, is about two paces deep, and has what looks like a hinged door on the front as though it were a very tiny castle.

Beyond the plateau’s edge, other massive shapes – the size of small mountains, but all very straight-edged and sharp-cornered, clearly not natural – loom in the semi-darkness. Most are decorated by square lights in rows and patterns across their surface. From somewhere below, a ceaseless cacophony of deep rumbling, faint metallic screeches, and occasional short, loud bangs drifts up to you. The night sky overhead is hidden behind thick clouds; strangely colored lights – pinks, blues, greens – reflect off of them from somewhere below, turning the heavens into a madhouse of clashing illumination. In two or three places, all fairly distant, a circle of white light, about the size and shape of a full moon, races along the bottom of the clouds in broad, circular patterns.

Sezaru’s token lifts into the air and points toward the gigantic edifice directly across from where you are standing, separated by perhaps 35 paces of open air. The token tilts upward at a moderate angle, and looking that direction, you see what looks like a small garden that has been built onto a platform partway up the monolithic structure. Near the garden’s edge, a shape like a hanging gallows but sized for giants the size of castles, looms over the space between the place where you stand and the garden; you could use it as a bridge, if you could climb up to it. On your side of the gap, you see what looks like construction scaffolding – although made not of bamboo but some substance you don’t recognize – climbing into the air above you, offering possible access to the “gallows-bridge,” although at no small risk of falling.

Read the following to any PC who is from a more modern Rokugan, especially anyone from technology equivalent to the 20th century or later:

You fall a few feet to the ground – but you realize at once it is actually a rooftop, several dozen stories above the street. A stairway access and the rooftop’s railing around the edges are the only items that break up the wide, flat space. Huge skyscrapers loom all around you, and the jade token indicates the object is in the even taller building across the street, five or ten stories above. There is a construction crane and some scaffolding nearby that will allow access to a rooftop garden on the other building, but would definitely require some climbing and careful balancing. It is nighttime, but as is often the case in a large city like this, it is neither truly dark nor quiet; street lights and neon signs reflect off the clouds above, along with the occasional searchlight, and you can hear machinery, vehicle noises and a bit of random gunfire echoing up from the streets below.

Using the scaffolding and the construction crane to cross the street to the other building will require three successful **Strength / Athletics** rolls, TN 20, to cross. Failure by at least 10 on any roll causes the character to fall; falling all the way to the street deals 10d10+100 Wounds. The fall takes a full Round, so PCs can attempt actions to try to save their fellow. If the PCs attempt the dangerous crossing, they can gain Free Raises by such things as tying off to one another or to the scaffolding or the use of personal equipment to aid in climbing; Cooperative rolls can also be used to aid weaker performers.

The other obvious option, especially to characters who have a good understanding of where they are, involves using the stairs down from the roof to reach the street level, crossing there and then ascending to the right floor

on the far side. (The garden visible on the other building is on the 42nd floor, which the PCs can determine through counting windows from outside or possibly by asking the guards inside the building.) Characters from Rokugans who aren't at least equivalent to modern-day technology and society must declare 3 Raises for no effect to make any rolls not involving combat when they take this option.

Reaching the street involves **Hunting (Trailblazing) / Perception** checks, TN 15, to navigate the stairs and elevators down the building the PCs are on, and **Stealth / Agility**, TN 10, to avoid meeting one of the very small number of patrolling rent-a-cops. When they reach the street, they can fairly easily cross the traffic (although characters with Epilepsy must make a roll, and failure could have disastrous consequences at the GM's discretion) and get to the building they want to enter. Once there, they must make **Sincerity (Deceit) / Awareness, Stealth / Agility** or **Electronics / Agility** rolls, TN 25, to either fast-talk or break their way in; again, failure means the PCs are accosted by a patrolling guard. (Guards are not getting paid enough to die, and will flee once they are in their +10 Wound Level.)

Rent-a-Cop

Air 2	Earth 2	Fire 2	Water 2	Void 2
Honor 3.5		Status 0.5	Glory 0.5	
Armor TN: 20 (armored vest)		Reduction: 3 (armored vest)		
Attack: taser (4k2, Complex), stun baton (4k2, Complex)		Damage: taser (Earth, TN 25, or Stunned), stun baton 2k3 plus Dazed		
Initiative: 3k2				
Wounds: 10 (+0), 14 (+3), 18 (+5), 22 (+10), 26 (+15), 30 (+20), 34 (Down, +40), 38 (Dead)				
School/Rank: None (Insight Rank 1)				
Special Abilities: <i>Cyberware</i>				
Cybereyes: The rent-a-cop can see perfectly in the dark, and gains +3k0 to Investigation rolls.				
Reduced Insight: The interference of the rent-a-cop's cyberware reduces his connection to the kami of the world. His Insight is only 100.				
Skills: Athletics 1, Computers 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms (Taser) 2, Investigation 1, Staves (Stun Baton) 2				

Regardless of how they cross, once the PCS reach the rooftop garden, they hear the sounds of combat from a nearby corridor, just beyond a pair of glass doors that lead back into the building. When they investigate, they find several dead monks, shaven-headed and wearing the saffron robes of the Shinsei orders, and hear a conversation coming from somewhere further ahead.

A calm, if winded, voice says, "You have lost your way. Your metal has corroded your spirit; you have abandoned your ancestors and their wisdom for the sake of impermanent flesh and steel. You disgrace yourself." Another voice, louder and angrier, replies, "If the old ways are so valuable, why are you and your brothers the last of your order? And why is it I have so easily defeated them?"

The voices are coming from beyond a pair of heavy double doors, over and around which a torii arch has been "sculpted" out of plastic and set into the wall. The doors are unlocked but heavy, requiring a strong effort to force aside. This turns out to be the result of several bodies lying against them inside the room.

The large space beyond the doors is decorated to resemble a Shinseist temple, centered on a small inner shrine where the statue of Shinsei would normally be placed. Windows on the far side of the room do not show the darkened city outside, but rather a placid sunlit lake with a snowcapped mountain peak beyond. The image is unsteady, though, flickering briefly and turning into a grey-white blizzard of static for a few seconds before reverting to the lake view once more. Standing just before the inner shrine is a bare-chested man with a katana that he is tearing from the chest of a last monk, spraying blood across the shrine. He is clearly not an ordinary human, for his entire right arm has been replaced with a metal duplicate, and his eyes glint with an odd, red glow deep in their pupils. Beyond him, the statue of Shinsei – not a solid statue, but a glowing blue-white image, three-dimensional and translucent. Its eyes move, watching the brutal slaughter of the monk, and it shakes its head very slightly. "You have come far for such a simple prize as myself, Gohei-san. I trust you will find the reward worth it, and the koku you earn will quiet the cries of your soul," the Shinsei image says. Its voice sounds oddly crystalline.

The "statue" is a hologram, and can be recognized as such by any PC with the proper background. (Other PCs will likely assume it is a magical projection using an Air illusion of some sort.) It is also the interface for the shrine's AI, and contains a number of rare commentaries and translations of the Tao that have been lost elsewhere in this world, making it extremely valuable to certain collectors. Gohei has been hired to steal the shrine's AI on behalf of one such collector, but has no interest in witnesses. He attacks at once.

Gohei, Chromed Street Samurai

Air 2	Earth 3	Fire 2	Water 3	Void 2
Reflexes 4		Agility 4		
Honor 0.4		Status 0.5		Glory 4.7

Armor TN: 25
Attack: Katana (Simple) 9k4; heavy pistol (Simple) 9k4
Reduction: 9
Damage: Katana 9k2, heavy pistol 6k3

Initiative: 6k4

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

School/Rank: None (Insight Rank 0)

Special Abilities: *Cyberware*

Enhanced Musculature: Gohei adds 3 dice to all Strength-based Skill rolls and melee damage rolls.

Wired Reflexes: Gohei adds 2 dice to initiative rolls and Reflexes-based Skill rolls and may make attacks as Simple Actions.

Subdermal Armor: Gohei has Reduction 9.

Articulated Joints: Gohei adds 3 dice to all Agility-based Skill rolls.

Cybereyes: Gohei can see perfectly in the dark, and gains +3k0 to Investigation rolls.

Reduced Insight: The interference of Gohei's cyberware reduces his connection to the kami of the world. His Insight is only 11, and he has gained both the Antisocial (2 Ranks) and Momoku Disadvantages.

Skills: Athletics 3, Computers 2, Firearms 3, Investigation 1, Kenjutsu 2, Stealth 2

Advantages/Disadvantages: Antisocial (2 Ranks), Momoku

Once the PCs have dealt with Gohei, they can access the shrine's neural core via the base on which the "statue" sits, simply by asking the AI to accompany them. It will open the appropriate access port and the core will partially slide out, allowing the PCs to take it with ease.

Part Four: Dark Mirrors

Possible acquisitions: sword of flame (scroll of Katana of Fire), mirror of water (scroll of Suitengu's Dominion)

This is a Rokugan both very similar and quite different from the one the PCs likely know. It is 1154 in the Agasha calendar, the 21st year of the reign of Yakamo I. At the dawn of the empire, the Dark Kami Hantei fell into Jigoku and became its champion, while the remaining Kami held their tournament to determine who would rule, choosing at last the most honorable and noble among them, Fu Leng. After Hantei's forces were defeated at the First Day of Thunder, the Kami Shinjo left the empire in a fleet of boats, to see what threats the world's seas might pose to the young nation, and did not return for almost 800 years. The rule of Fu Leng's line lasted for more than a thousand years; however, after Doji Satsume launched the infamous Crane Clan Coup and the Crane were banished from Rokugan, the young

Empress Fu Leng XXIX foolishly took the notorious seducer Doji Hoturi as her husband, and he poisoned her. Eventually the spirit of Hantei possessed the Empress, and the Second Day of Thunder saw her defeat. In the aftermath, the ronin Yakamo, Crab Clan Thunder, was acclaimed the new Emperor, and he recognized the master horsemen of the Mantis Clan as the newest Great Clan to join the Empire's ranks.

You drop to the earth outside a large temple, in the marketplace of a bustling town. Looking around, you see you are surrounded by samurai, mostly Phoenix but also many Dragon, and a scattering of several other clans as well. In that glance, though, several things appear different. Many of the Phoenix sport shaved heads, and several are bare-chested or bare-armed, displayed brightly colored tattoos. By contrast, most of the Dragon are dressed somewhat conservatively, none are tattooed, and few carry the daisho – almost all have scroll satchels, however. Other oddities appear as well: the Scorpion and Crane having a casual conversation on one side of the market are remarkable in that the Scorpion is not wearing a mask, while the Crane appears to be wearing an ornate silken blindfold. A green and black-armored samurai guides a horse, also barded with green-lacquered armor, through the crowd, the Mantis mon clearly visible on her equipment.

The PCs may make a **Lore: Dragon, Lore: Phoenix or Lore: Geography / Intelligence** roll, TN 15, to recognize the village of Heibeisu, the home of the famous Izaku library, which is in fact the large temple ahead of them. The jade token indicates the object is inside the temple, and when the PCs enter they find an Asako functionary who controls access to the library's collection. She politely inquires as to their business; lying is exceedingly unwise, however, as the PC must attempt a **Sincerity (Deceit) / Awareness** roll against a TN of 30 to fool her; unless the PC also declares three Raises, however, the roll automatically fails. Simple approaches work better, such as merely asking for access to the scrolls. This is a very simple **Etiquette / Awareness** roll, TN 10, but suffers from a complication; if the PC is a Clan samurai or a nezumi, unless the PC attempting the roll makes a conscious effort to act in a way more appropriate to another Clan, they must make 2 Raises to succeed on the roll. The roles the PCs must attempt to take on are as given below:

Crane = Scorpion
Crab = Lion
Phoenix = Dragon
Mantis = Unicorn
Nezumi = Naga

An **Investigation (Interrogation) / Awareness** roll, TN 20, can guide the PC in the direction of the traits they need to try to emulate.

If the PCs succeed on the Etiquette roll, they can enter the public collection of scrolls. The two possible scrolls in the collection of use are Katana of Fire and Suitengu's Dominion. Making a TN 10 (Katana of Fire) or TN 25 (Suitengu's Dominion) **Spellcraft / Intelligence** roll allows the PC to think of these two scrolls as possible fits for the rite. Several other spells might also fit the bill, but are not suitable objects for Sezar's ritual in this universe.

Part Five: Lady Moon's Dynasty

Possible acquisitions: echo of wind (ceremonial bullroarer) and castle of earth (any one of four pieces of a crystal and obsidian chess set)

In this Rokugan, only two Thunders survived the Second Day of Thunder, and of those two, it was Mirumoto Hitomi who struck the killing blow against Fu Leng. The other, Hitomi's old nemesis Hida Yakamo, acknowledged her as the new Empress, and the line of Hitomi began. A few years later, though, the corruptive influence of the Obsidian Hand she bore began to affect her, as the Lying Darkness began to tighten its grasp on her soul; one of the first signs of her growing madness was a kind of paranoia, in which she demanded all the Imperial families swear fealty to her and accept the tattoos she could now grant via her blood. Those that refused were killed in a bloody purge, and afterward, only the Hitomi Order was allowed to serve the Empress directly. Seeing her madness, Togashi Hoshi met with her and attempted to bring her to reason – she dueled and defeated him, but the experience restored her to sanity before she killed him. In order to save her Empire, Hitomi challenged Onnatangu, Lord Moon, for his place in the Heavens; she defeated him as well, and ascended to become Lady Moon, although the conflict destroyed the palace – and in fact most of the city – in Otosan Uchi. At her will, Togashi Hoshi became her regent, the Voice of the Lady, and the Hoshi and Togashi Orders joined the Hitomi as Imperial families. Now the Hoshi serve as the Otomo and Miya once did, as the Empress' diplomats; the Hitomi are her yojimbo, as the Seppun once were; and the Togashi serve as advisors and warders against spiritual threats, much as the Hidden Guard did once; Togashi Hoshi also helped to design, construct and consecrate the new palace in the formerly contested city of Toshi Ranbo, now claimed in the name of Lady Moon to serve as her new capital. Since Hitomi's ascension,

both Togashi Hoshi and Hitomi Kageyora have served as the Voice of the Empress; now, in 1163, Hitomi Akuai serves in that position, but is considering retirement soon, knowing that the Lady will choose his successor. (Note that there are no Akodo, Seppun, Otomo or Miya families anymore; all such characters openly wearing mons and the like suffer a +10 TN penalty to all social rolls here. Likewise, the Agasha never left the Dragon, and there are no more Tattooed Monks in the Dragon Clan.)

You fall a few feet to the ground, then look around to see that you have landed in front of what is unmistakably the Imperial Palace in Toshi Ranbo. The steps leading up to the massive doors glitter in the late morning sunlight, and well-dressed courtiers from every Clan move gracefully into and out of the building, speaking quietly or gesturing with their fans to one another as they go. At the top of the stairs, stone-faced guards flank the entry – but they do not wear armor, instead going bare-armed or even bare-chested to display massive, colorful tattoos. Their eyes are a brilliant gold, their heads are shaven clean, and each looks as ready to lash out at enemies with their bare fists as with the large naginata that they keep ready to hand. The mon on their weapons and on what little clothing they wear marks them out as members of the Hitomi Order. Sezar's token rises into the air and points directly into the palace.

The PCs can freely enter the Palace if they wish – the Hitomi guards do not stop them, they only intercede long enough to ask that PCs entering the Lady's Presence set aside their weapons and spell scrolls in a small gatehouse to the side of the stairs, built for just such a purpose. Otherwise, however, they are free to come and go as they wish. Inside, the main court hall of the Palace is as splendid as ever, consisting primarily of a lengthy, high-ceilinged main chamber and several smaller private nooks created by folding screens, each of which is a masterpiece of art in its own right. At the room's far end, a dais holds an empty throne carved from volcanic obsidian – it seems like it would almost impossible to sit in comfortably, but no one ever does, so it really doesn't matter. Standing calmly next to the throne and overlooking the rest of the gathering is the current Voice of the Empress, Hitomi Akuai, a tall, broad-shouldered man of indeterminate age and many, many detailed tattoos. His glowing yellow eyes continually sweep the crowd, but few of the courtiers see fit to address him directly.

The PCs have the opportunity to mingle and interact with the courtiers here; feel free to make up social conflicts that might attract the PCs' attention, from the Crane and Crab squabbling over the Yasuki, to the military one-

upmanship occurring between Kitsu Motso of the Lion and Moto Gaheris of the Unicorn, to the Phoenix and Dragon issuing increasing threats to each other over Dragon Heart Plain. PCs who handle such encounters smoothly may gain a Free Raise on the subsequent Courtier/Etiquette roll, while those who do not suffer penalties from -5 to -10, depending on severity. After the PCs have had a chance to make friends and influence people, have them all make **Courtier (Manipulation)** or **Etiquette (Conversation) / Awareness** rolls, TN 20; as long as at least half the party succeeds (including bonuses or penalties from earlier roleplay), Hitomi Akuai sends a servant to ask each of them to join him for private conversation in his quarters.

“His quarters” turns out to be a strip of grass under an overhang outside the Palace itself, on the edge of the Imperial Garden – there is a woven reed sleeping mat, a pillow stone, a wooden bowl, and two game boards with pieces carved from volcanic obsidian and clear crystal. The roof overhang would keep off most of the rain, but only the two game boards are offered any additional protection, having been pushed under the nearby wooden walkway that circles the Garden’s perimeter. (If the PCs examine the game boards more closely, one is a go board, while the other is a gaijin game known as *chesu*.)

Akuai greets them politely and says that he has heard of their experiences in the court; he asks what he or the Lady can do for them. Unlike everyone else who the PCs have encountered in these other worlds, though, Akuai knows exactly why they are here and what it is they need; he even knows what specific items might aid them. This knowledge was given to him by Hitomi, who is herself powerless to stop the threat. She has commanded Akuai not to save any other worlds if he cannot save Hers; as a result, he awaits the oncoming oblivion with a nihilistic serenity. No matter what the PCs ask of him, he will not aid them unless they promise Sezar’s ritual will protect his world from destruction. This the PCs cannot do honestly, but if they choose to lie, the sudden offer of hope is enough that Akuai will not see through the deception. (Honor losses apply as normal for lying.) Otherwise, he refuses to offer any direct aid, offering them only the hospitality of his court for the remainder of the evening, and telling the PCs that they must depart in the morning.

Akuai’s unhelpfulness is limited, though, because he cannot quite make himself accept destruction so easily. First, although he will not tell the PCs what it is they need, he will not prevent them from taking it, including one of the crystal or obsidian rooks from his chess set if they realize it. Second, the offer to stay in the court for the evening is a hint, however slight: he knows the bullroarer will shortly appear in the main court, and

harbors a tiny hope that the PCs will recognize it for what it is without his interference.

Once the PCs’ meeting with Akuai is over, or if they were unable to secure an audience with him to begin with, the court’s evening entertainment enters the main hall and begins to perform in the center.

The entertainers are all tattooed monks, and they are mostly doing fire dancing – juggling lit torches, swinging small round oil lamps tied to arm-length ropes around at dizzying speeds, even spinning a bo staff with lit pitch on both ends, all while performing ridiculously complex acrobatic leaps, tumbles and flips. Suddenly, a low, monstrous-sounded roar echoes through the court, and at the center of the monks’ formation a set of three musicians are now visible. Two have taiko drums on which they begin to beat, while the third, standing between them, is whirling a length of wood tied to a long rope around over his head. The wood has holes drilled into it, and it is somehow this device that is producing the inhuman, groaning roar.

The crowd shouts and applauds at the impressive display (characters with Epilepsy must roll to avoid being affected) as it continues and builds to a crescendo after about twenty minutes. The performing monks then all bow to the assembled courtiers and to Akuai, solemnly watching from the dais, before scattering about to mingle with the crowd.

If the PCs ask the monk with the bullroarer what it is, he explains easily enough; if they ask for it, he pauses consideringly, then replies, “Perhaps it is indeed time our paths separated. Take it with my blessings for you, samurai-sama.” No more effort to collect it is required.

Part Six: The Empire of Five Races

Possible acquisitions: sword of flame (the unquenchable gladius), soul of void (Nintai’s katana)

In this Rokugan, the kitsu never suffered the betrayal of Soli Xiaomin, and the City of Night was not destroyed in the conflict against the corruption of Jigoku. As a result, when the Kami fell, they chose their followers from among the Five Races, as well as the scattered tribes of humans and the naga. The humans were chosen by Hantei as his followers, the naga by Shinjo, the trolls by Shiba, the ningyo by Bayushi, the kitsu by Akodo, the kenku by Doji and the zokujin by Hida. Togashi claimed no followers, but eventually retired samurai from all of the six races joined him in his mountains, and the Order

of Togashi formed in the wake of Shinsei's teachings. Shinjo left with the naga across the northern deserts and has not been seen since; occasionally twisted monsters like deformed naga who claim the name Shinjo assault the northern mountains and are beaten back – the Empire prays that they are not all that is left of their lost sister. Now, human samurai from the Imperial Seppun, Otomo, and Miya families and are the only bearers of Hantei's blood worthy to be Emperor. The followers of Shiba are the Salamander Clan, Bayushi's ningyo are the Eel Clan, Akodo's kitsu are the Lion Clan, Doji's kenku form the Raven Clan, and Hida's Zokujin are the Ant Clan.

You fall to the ground and land on the edge of a bustling street in a vast metropolis. The city around you is decidedly bizarre; it is built almost entirely from grey and brown stone, and the "sky" overhead is nothing more than the roof of an impossibly-vast cave, with glittering fluorescent moss sparkling as though it were a night sky with thousands of stars. The inhabitants of the city are strange and bizarre as well, with massive humanoid figures as tall as some trees lumbering along, while around them smaller creatures, closer to human size, pass by as well. Some are large lions, as high at the shoulder as a human man, while others are much shorter, reptilian humanoids no taller than a human child, with skins like burnished copper, lizard-like heads, and pupilless white or gold eyes. In the center of the boulevard, dividing it into two lanes, there is a canal, where green-skinned figures with arms and heads but fish-like or eel-like tails swim along, and black-feathered humanoids with wings and crows' heads flap along overhead. There are, here and there, humans as well, all of whom move with unusually-large spaces around them, as though given deference by the crowd.

PCs may make suitable Lore rolls (Spirit Realms or History are most likely) to recognize trolls, kitsu, zokujin, ningyo and kenku, respectively; the TN is 20. Most wear well-made clothing of decent but not special cut, but some few carry weapons and wear kimono of much finer make, most of which bear mons that are unfamiliar. (The kitsu mon is immediately recognizable as the Lion Clan mon, but that's the only one the PCs are likely to know.) The jade token indicates a direction off to the left.

The PCs can explore the City of Night as they wish, but the token directs them toward the city's center square. As the PCs travel, any humans receive extremely deferential treatment, with the unarmed passersby prostrating themselves and the armed/armored ones bowing very deeply. Confused looks sometimes accompany these bows as the bowers note the PCs' mon.

The central "square" (it's actually a pentagon) is quite spacious, almost a quarter-mile across. At the entrance, an armored troll wearing a mon like a lizard or salamander approaches and bows quite low. "Noble bloods," she says to any humans, "you are welcome to the City of Night. I am Shiba Forju. Do you require any assistance from myself or my lords?"

The PCs can spin any tale they like, and Forju will help as best she can. If the PCs have no specific requests, Forju offers a tour of the central area. She points out several fine tea houses and inns, most of which are human-sized, several fine shops, and two large temples, one dedicated to the Eight Kami and one a Shinsei shrine. (The story of the choosing of the races to follow the Eight Kami is told in artworks on the temple's walls, if the PCs are curious.) She also points out the statue that towers over the nearest entrance to the plaza, where a lion-faced humanoid kneels and lifts a katana in offering to a stern-faced, one-eyed human in armor. The inscription on the base says "Nintai kneels to Akodo." If the PCs ask, Forju speaks proudly of the statue's artistry, but mentions in passing that Nintai was the hero who united the Five Races to save the City of Night before the Fall of the Kami, and that the blade the statue offers is actually Nintai's own katana. The PCs can note, if they look, that most of the nearby armed kitsu are not humanoid and therefore do not carry katana; instead, they have a set of gauntlet-like bladed extensions fitted over their forepaws.

Forju will not lead the tour into any of the businesses, but a simple request will free any PC who wishes to explore them to do so.

In a swordsmith's shop run by a troll named Sichi Matnu, you encounter a strange sight: a chanting troll, pulling a short, straight-bladed weapon like an oversized tanto. The blade is glowing red-hot as Matnu lifts it from his anvil and plunges it into the quenching water – which immediately begins to boil, and when Matnu removes it from the water again, it glows as brightly and warm as before. This process repeats two more times, and each time Matnu's smile grows. "The binding worked!" he crows at last, booming voice shaking the shop.

If asked, Matnu says he has been attempting to recreate a lost troll method of forging nemuranai, by accessing a set of unknown spirit realms consisting solely of elemental forces and channeling them into the item. It lacks finesse, but is nonetheless effective. If a human PC asks, Matnu is deeply honored to present his work to the Imperial families, bowing quite low. (If a PC uses the weapon, it has a DR of 2k2, and deals additional fire damage equal to the wielder's Fire Ring, but causes

Honor losses suitable for using gaijin weaponry – it looks much like a tanto in the troll’s hands, but it’s actually a gaijin-style gladius.)

Part Seven: Twilight Empire

Possible acquisitions: hand of corruption (Obsidian magistrate’s arm) and mirror of water (perma-frozen ice)

This Rokugan is one of the darkest in Yume-do. In this world, Toturi I was corrupted by the Lying Darkness in the fourth year of his reign – but he forged an odd partnership with it, taking on a role similar to that which the Thunder Shosuro had done centuries before. He did not accede to the Lying Darkness’ desire for utter destruction, but was twisted beyond recognition, turned to irredeemable evil. It is now 151 years later and Toturi still sits on the throne, although he has long since lost his face, and may one day finally lose his name to the Darkness – at which point Rokugan will at last be destroyed forever. The spiritual darkness that hangs over Rokugan manifests itself physically as well; there is never any sunlight, and during the day there is only an hours-long twilight before full night falls again. (Note: while the PCs are here, ranged attacks and Perception rolls suffer a -1k1 penalty, while Stealth checks gain a Free Raise.)

You fall to the ground in a forest, in the midst of what feels like a deep winter. Thick snow covers the forest floor, and deep chill immediately seeps through the PCs’ clothes and into their bones. The sky above is dark, and thick shadows wrap everything. There are no stars visible, but a large moon, deep blood red, hangs low and heavy over the scene. Sezar’s token points directly ahead, toward what looks like a small village in a forest clearing; in the opposite direction, though, just a handful of paces away, the snow cover comes to an abrupt stop, as though cut off with a knife edge. Stepping beyond that point is like stepping from winter into late spring, the temperature shooting up dozens of degrees in the space of a step.

When the PCs begin to move toward the village, they realize first that the village is actually built inside the ruins of an old castle. Phoenix characters from most Rokugans immediately recognize what was once Kyuden Isawa, likely decades or centuries before. As they reach the edge of the forest, they also see that the snowpack is limited left and right as well; on the left, maybe a dozen paces away, the snow ends and is replaced by a raging forest fire, although none of the heat reaches the PCs where they stand. On the right, the snow

stretches from some distance, but eventually ends as well, and beyond that is a dense, almost impenetrable fog. Beyond that, meeting both the fog and the fire on the opposite side of the clearing, the trees have all been petrified, a frozen copse of unmoving stone. A collection of rough, ramshackle huts huddle around the castle, mostly in the snow and stone areas, with a few in the fog. None are within the undying fire. The huts look to have been built inside the old castle’s rooms. The open space in the village’s center was once the castle’s main court chamber.

Getting closer still, you begin to hear shouts of fear or pain. You also see a stream rolling across the ancient flagstones of the once-great castle room, spilling from a large rock or piece of rubble right near the exact center of the village. The water bursts out of the rock, steaming with heat, before wending its way to the right, a slowly-deepening channel having been worn into the stones over time. A bridge has been built over the water (since going around it would involve going through the continual flames). A couple dozen peasants huddle on the near side of the bridge, but on the far side, an ominous figure all in black and mounted on a steed as black as shadow looms over a smaller group of peasants who kneel and cower in terror before it. The figure holds a black obsidian scimitar in its right hand, and where its left should be there is instead a bizarre, amorphous shadow, extruding and absorbing tentacles, bulbous protrusions, and indescribable shapes. Its voice is a hiss that echoes oddly, as though from the back of its helmet, and its face is hidden behind a featureless mempo. “You thought you could escape the will of Toturi the Faceless,” it sneers, voice carrying surprisingly far. “But you cannot hide from the Darkness. The grave of the Five Masters cannot shield you from the Shadow. You will bow to your masters and accept the touch of Toturi’s power. There is no other choice, and you were foolish to ever hope otherwise.”

Characters studying the scene spot something in the stream, very close to where the bridge is. Beneath the bridge’s shadow, the area of deep cold reaches the stream, and despite the steaming water all around it, there is a thick sheet of smooth ice. It would be possible, if not easy, to sneak close enough to the bridge to take part of the ice without being seen by anyone on the far side of the stream. An attempting PC must roll Stealth (Sneaking) / Agility, opposed by the Obsidian Magistrate’s Investigation / Perception; the PC gains a Free Raise due to cover from the bridge.

If the PCs are spotted or attack the Obsidian Magistrate, it turns to look at them and says, “You cannot stop us either, outsiders,” before removing its mempo and

revealing egg-smooth where its face should be. It then raises its blade and charges its mount forward.

Obsidian Magistrate

Air 4 Earth 3 Fire 4 Water 2

Honor N/A Status 3.5 Glory N/A

Armor TN: 25 **Reduction:** 10 (0 vs crystal)

Attack: Scimitar (Complex) 8k4, Arm of Shadow (Free) 8k4 **Damage:** Scimitar 7k2, Arm of Shadow 5k2 (plus 1 Void Point)

Initiative: 7k4

Wounds: 15 (+5), 30 (+10), 45 (+15), 60 (Dead)

School/Rank: None

Special: Shadow Taint: 4.0 (May Raise up to 4 times)

Arm of Shadow: The shadowy appendage that has replaced the Magistrate's left arm can essentially make attacks on its own. Attacks made with the arm never suffer Wound Penalties, and steal one Void Point in addition to dealing damage on any successful attack.

Skills: Athletics 4, Horsemanship 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 4, Stealth 5

After the Magistrate dies, the shadowy arm falls away from the body, leaving the stump visible where the arm was severed a long time before. The arm itself continues to writhe and wriggle, sending out small pseudopods as though scenting for prey. It wants a new host, but can be fairly easily scooped into a bag or sack for transport – it cannot force itself onto an unwilling host, one with less than 4 points of Shadow Points, or one with two arms still attached.

Conclusion

Once the PCs have collected all six items, Sezaru grabs them and shouts, "Come now! Follow!" as he races down one of the tunnels leading out of the room. After a short distance, he turns and climbs a set of steps that end at a board set horizontally over them. Sezaru gestures and the board explodes outward, a shower of grass and dirt tumbling down around it as open sky appears beyond. The PCs climb out into the Imperial gardens (very close to where Akuai may have met with them) with the roiling plains visible beyond – and on the horizon, a bubbling and roiling mass of darkness and surging energy races closer, absorbing the land as it comes. Sezaru turns and speeds into the palace, a sizzling outline appearing around him for a moment as he passes through the doorway; it does not stop him or injure him, and it does not reappear when the PCs pursue him through the door. In a few seconds, Sezaru has reached the main court, where dozens of shocked

courtiers turn to stare as Sezaru knocks the Seppun miharu aside with a wave of his hand.

Sezaru drops to the floor in the middle of the court; the six objects form a circle around him in the air, apparently of their own free will. He begins a simple chant, ten words repeating over and over, and gestures imperiously for you to join him in it. With each repetition, there is a massive red flash, temporarily blinding you; when you can see again, you see more people standing around, also chanting, and Sezaru appears to overlap himself for a split second, as though you are experiencing double vision. You keep chanting, and there is another flash, and another, and another, and another, and with each one the room fills with more and more people chanting alongside you. There is a sense of increasing pressure, the world itself pressing down, until it reaches a peak and the final chant ends. The room is now full of new arrivals, from Clans familiar and strange, many human but some not, and all glowing with a deep, radiant red aura.

On the dais, the young man wearing a brilliant jade green kimono and wearing golden laurels on his brow slowly rises to his feet.

"WHAT. IS. GOING. ON. HERE?"

The End

Rewards for Completing the Adventure

At the end of the scenario, any PCs with Shadowlands Taint must make a Raw Earth roll with a TN of 5 + (5 x Taint Rank). If the roll fails, the PC acquires one additional point of Taint.

Experience Points

Surviving the adventure:	1XP
Good roleplaying:	+1XP
Finding the Ritual Items:	+1XP/item

Total Possible Experience: 8XP

Honor

None beyond those listed in the text or based on PC behaviors

Glory

None beyond those listed in the text or based on PC behaviors

Other Awards/Penalties

None

Module Tracking Sheets

None

GM Reporting

None

GMs must report this information during MidWest Game Fest 2015 for it to have storyline effect