

Flee From Tomorrow

**A One-Round Low-Rank Adventure for Heroes of
Rokugan: Spirit of Bushido**

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from a cert awarded to Brian Lee
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The mistakes of yesterday continue to haunt the promise of today, and shadow all hope for tomorrow.

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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 precedes 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 2.

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 high-end parties, as follows:

Low End Party (more than three PCs are Rank 1): There is only one Toichi no Kansen and three Moetechi no Kansen at the Nezumi Warren.

Adventure Summary and Background

Rokugan is an ancient land, and though the samurai of the Emerald Empire often choose to ignore them, it has been home to many non-human races over the course of its long history. Some of these creatures have been enemies, some have been allies, but rarely are they accepted by the Empire's rigid social structure. The Nezumi are perhaps the most numerous of these other races, but most samurai see them as little better than thieving vermin. Even the assistance that a few tribes of Nezumi provided the Empire during the Clan War and the War Against the Shadow has not significantly improved most of the Clan's perceptions of the "ratlings". The exception, of course, is the Crab Clan, who have developed a strong alliance with several different groups of Nezumi, using the creatures' innate resistance to the Taint to help their perennial war against the Shadowlands.

The Nezumi have more in common with the samurai of Rokugan than the latter are willing to admit. Beyond and above their mutual enemy of the Shadowlands, the tribes function in a role in Nezumi culture similar to the Clans, they are led by the canniest warriors with advice from advisors that fill positions similar to shugenja and courtiers, and conflicts can develop between the tribes much as between the Clans. The Nezumi do not typically fight amongst themselves, as survival is considered a greater priority than those things that drive samurai to war, but it is not uncommon for different tribes and individuals to have widely divergent agendas. And, of course, both humans and Nezumi have heroes and villains... and often, the line between the two can be blurred.

During the Clan Wars, the Dark Oracles created the Elemental Terrors, a group of unique oni with the

power of the elements themselves. The first major use these terrible creatures saw was against the Crippled Bone tribe, a brave band of Nezumi whose territory had been deep in the Shadowlands. Driven north toward the relative safety of the Crab Wall, the Crippled Bone settled in unused Hiruma lands, never knowing that the Terrors had been sent against them due to the actions of one of their own: Te'tik'kir, the Crippled Bone's most powerful shaman, had brought the Elemental Terrors down on his own tribe in an attempt to bring about his vision of uniting all Nezumi under the rule of the Cripple Bone. This failed, as Mat'tck, the chief, simply chose to relocate and try to recover as much as possible.

In the years that followed, the Crippled Bone came to an uneasy peace with the other Nezumi tribes in the area, despite Te'tik'kir's regular advice to subjugate them. During the War Against the Shadow, many Nezumi assisted the Empire on the March to Voltturnum, and the Crippled Bone gained much respect from the Crab for their prowess in battle. As the Crab have begun reclaiming the former Hiruma lands, they have developed a working relationship with the Crippled Bone – not close allies, but united against the Shadowlands nonetheless.

Unfortunately, the recent upheavals in the Heavens have prompted the Dark Oracles to action again, and they have chosen to eliminate the only mortal creature to have survived their wrath: Te'tik'kir. Earlier this year, the Elemental Terrors were sent to destroy his tribe and bring him back to the Dark Oracles, but the powerful shaman was able to escape with a remnant of his people. Te'tik'kir has fled north into Rokugan, seeking the largest Nezumi tribe, the Tattered Ear, at their immense burrow in the Shinomen Forest, and warded it with the immense power of his Name magic.

Two months ago, Crab Clan forces under the command of Hida Tsuneo recovered the ancient Armor of the Shadow Warrior, lost in the Shadowlands when Hida Yakamo was slain by Kuni Yori. The Bloodspeaker Jama Suru hid it in a cave, where it was found by a squad of Hiruma scouts and returned to the Crab. Hoping that Jade Champion Kuni Utagu might be able to find a way to cleanse it, the Armor has been sent to the capitol, along with a mysterious artifact located near the Shadow Coast and a set of Kuni crystal weapons. The PCs, sent to help escort this shipment without knowledge of what it contains, will find themselves called upon to recover the precious items and follow the trail of their thieves to the Shinomen Forest, where they will have a chance to thwart the Dark Oracles in their most recent attempt to kill the cursed shaman Te'tik'kir.

Character Notes

Check the PCs' character sheets and certs for the following:

- Warrior of the Wall
- Imperial Investigator
- Dark Fate

Introduction

Beiden Pass sits at the heart of the Empire, geographically, economically, and historically. It was here that the ronin Toturi began his rise to Emperor at the beginning of the Clan War, defeating the Crab army's march to the capital. Though travel and trade across the Spine of the World Mountains, Beiden Pass is the easiest and most reliable route. The Scorpion city of Beiden is, therefore, a major trade hub and a gathering-place for caravans crossing between the two halves of Rokugan. The mountains rise against the northeastern sky as if to challenge the Heavens, and the city waits below with open arms to welcome all those who wish to travel through the heart of Rokugan in peace.

The PCs find themselves in the Scorpion trade city of Beiden, awaiting a caravan from the Crab lands. (Crab PCs were sent here from their last mission, having been in the Empire already and therefore not part of the caravan.) Their daimyo have sent them to provide an escort for Miya Rintaro, a high-ranking Imperial courtier. An entire kaisha (around 150 troops) from the First Imperial Legion has been sent to provide an honor guard and protection, so the PCs are present to be traveling companions and more immediate guards for the herald.

Rintaro has arranged for rooms for everyone at the Inn of the Last Peak, a fabulous establishment with luxurious accommodations and amenities. The PCs are provided private rooms, and virtually any sorts of food or other refreshments they desire are readily available. Time is fairly short; when the PCs arrive, the Crab caravan is due to arrive the following day.

Meeting Rintaro

Meeting with Rintaro is fairly straight-forward. He is a well-dressed, dapper courtier of the Miya family, with a slight build and a weak chin, but he is fairly friendly and obviously quite open-handed with his Imperial funds. (PCs may have met him in SoB12, Ancestral Dictate, in which case he will remember to thank them for their previous assistance and claim to be looking forward to travelling with them now.) *“Welcome to Beiden, my friends! This should be a very simple*

matter, though I do thank your daimyo for their generosity in sending such noble samurai to accompany me. Winter is approaching quickly, and we have scheduled this trip accordingly; the Crab should be arriving tomorrow, and we will depart for Otsan Uchi on their arrival and transfer of their cargo to my custody. Murayasu-san and the Legion will provide for our safety, I am sure – not to insult your prowess as bushi, of course. You will ride with me, and provide a more distinguished honor guard for myself. In the meantime, I suggest you relax for the evening, and enjoy the hospitality the house has to offer – it may be the last chance to relax I can offer until we make our way to the capital.” His easy grin indicates clearly that he does not think the trip will be all that taxing. Rintaro will answer basic questions about the planned route (“Just north and east through the Crane lands. We won't be stopping there long; there's a tea house in Kosaten Shiro that serves the finest spiced noodles...”), but more specific information about the cargo will be met with courtly evasions. (“The Crab have requested assistance; it would be impolite to gossip about the matter.”) He will readily discuss the Legion troops, though he quite obviously takes them entirely for granted, and does not expect the Legion to be of any real significance to the mission.

Rintaro knows what the cargo is, but considers it very important to be discrete about the contents. The Crab Clan is sending a batch of recently-fashioned Kuni crystal weapons to the Jade Champion Kuni Utagu to help him with his ongoing mission of rooting out the Taint in the Empire. A mysterious artifact was recently discovered near the coast in the Shadowlands, and is being delivered to Kuni Utagu in the hopes that he can identify it, having exhausted the Kuni's normal resources. (Unknown to anyone, this is the Dark Covenant of Water.) Finally, and most importantly as far as Rintaro is concerned, a group of Hiruma scouts under the command of Hida Tsuneo recovered Ketsuen, the Armor of the Shadow Warrior, the traditional armor worn by the Crab Clan Champion and lost when Kuni Yori killed Hida Yakamo during the War Against the Shadow. PCs with the “Warriors of the Wall” cert may have heard of the recovery of Ketsuen independently; they may make a **Courtier (Gossip) / Awareness** roll at TN 20 to have caught wind of this. At the GM's discretion, they may substitute the **Battle** or **Lore: Shadowlands** Skill for this roll. It is suggested that this information (and the below information, for Imperial Investigators) be passed along to the player privately.

If a PC has the Imperial Investigator cert (and thus under Rintaro's direct command), he will tell them that one of the items is an ancient artifact of the Hida family,

and claim that the Crab have asked him to arrange for it to be cleansed of its Taint. (This is a slight exaggeration, as he is actually a middle-man in the arrangement, but he will not speak of any other parties involved.) He is somewhat dismissive of the other items, as they are not related to his own advancement or goals, and will not identify the item.

Otherwise, a PC must make a **Courtier / Awareness** roll at a TN of 30 to get any more information out of him; even at that, he will simply hint about a “recovered artifact of historical significance” that he is taking to the capital for the Imperial families.

Miya Rintaro will dismiss the PCs to prepare for the journey as they see fit, while he meets with a local Scorpion samurai by the name of Yogo Tosoko. She is one of the Imperial Investigators that deliver information to him about the doings of the Empire, and if any PC who is not themselves an Imperial Investigator attempts to speak with her, they will find her taciturn and uncooperative. Even with other Imperial Investigators, she is not particularly forthcoming, claiming only to be bringing Rintaro information about local trade as a matter of interest to the Imperial families.

Fifth Kaisha, First Imperial Legion

The Legion escort consists of a single kaisha (company) of troops from the First Imperial Legion, roughly 150 samurai from every Great Clan (with a large number of Seppun) and normally assigned tasks involving security for Otosan Uchi or members of the Imperial Families. They are camped outside the city; while Rintaro arranged for the taisei, Seppun Murayasu, to have a room at the inn, he has evidently chosen instead to stay with his troops. The troops themselves are quite welcoming toward any PC who chooses to approach them; their morale is very high and they are looking forward to an easy mission. While many of them wish for a greater challenge, none of them will take this minor frustration out on the PCs.

Seppun Murayasu is a returned spirit, and one of the few Seppun who chose to remain in Ningen-do after passing through Oblivion’s Gate. His dedication to the Empire is the driving force behind everything he does, and he . As a taisei, his normal command is somewhat larger than a single kaisha, but he was requested specifically for this mission. If the PCs make a significant effort to speak with him, they will find that he is very polite and proper, though somewhat busy with seeing to the welfare of his troops. Murayasu has the soft glow of a returned spirit, and though his face and hair show the signs of significant age, he does not move like an old man.

Murayasu will not speak of his past, other than that which may be necessary for genial small-talk. His troops, on the other hand, are very proud of their commander, and will gladly tell any interested PCs of Murayasu’s history – a low-ranked samurai of little consequence, he lived as a wave-man for many years and sold his services to the most honorable lords he could find. In his old age, he was hired to serve on the walls of Otosan Uchi alongside the Imperial Guard. This brought him to the attention of the Scorpion Champion, who objected to a ronin having such a prestigious duty. The Scorpion arranged for the Emperor (Hantei Fujiwa) to witness the ronin being bribed by the Scorpion, and when no reward the Scorpion Champion could offer would sway him, the Emperor granted Murayasu the Seppun name and brought him to serve in the Imperial Palace. After Murayasu returned through Oblivion’s Gate, he was one of several spirits who were asked directly by Emperor Toturi I to remain and assist in rebuilding the Imperial Guard and Imperial Legions to better serve the Empire.

Beiden

Despite its proximity to the Lion lands and the important pass, the city of Beiden is not particularly defensible; the Scorpion Clan has evidently traditionally had other priorities when it comes to defending their lands against Lion incursions. Beiden is a small city, focused primarily on trade and commerce – nearly anything that is bought or sold in the Empire can be found here (at the price listed in the book). There are several shrines, with an emphasis on ancestral or those Fortunes most popular in the Scorpion lands (Jurojin, Benten, and Tengen, the Fortune of Literature). The local residents are welcoming enough, though given that most of the population is transitory, it is obvious that they expect the part to be passing through soon enough.

Rumors

PCs who wish to take advantage of the crossroads to learn some of the doings of the Empire may make a **Courtier (Gossip) / Awareness** roll at a TN of 10; a successful roll learns one of the following rumors at random, plus one extra rumor for every 5 points by which the roll beats the TN. The rumors include:

- There are reports of bandits in the Crab lands, as the majority of the Crab forces are busy dealing with the aftermath of the summer’s conflict with the Crane, and most of their armies are (as always) tied up along the Wall. The Scorpion believe that the criminals

besetting the Crab Clan are particularly bad along the coast, as evidenced from the many green-clad brigands to be found in Crab ports lately. (This is a dig at the Mantis/Crab alliance, and is not likely to be told directly to a Mantis PC.)

- There have been several peasant uprisings in the southern Dragon lands, as many of the more devout of the Dragon's heimin have objected to the mountain Clan's assault upon the peaceful Phoenix. (Dragon PCs will know that there has been some unrest, though it has not been attributed to anything as specific as the conflict with the Phoenix; this may be something the Scorpion present in support of their allies.)
- The Ikoma family daimyo, Ikoma Kaoku, is making preparations for his imminent retirement with as much dignity as he can muster given the unpleasant manner of the end of his tenure. Lion Clan Champion Kitsu Motso has yet to announce a decision on who will follow Kaoku, but it is believed he will make his will known at Winter Court.
- Mantis Clan Champion Yoritomo Aramasu has not been seen by anyone in the Empire for most of the year, and there are rumors that he has actually died. The death of Yoritomo at Oblivion's Gate left the leadership of the fledging Clan in doubt, and without a clear line of succession, it is hard to see how the Mantis will be able to maintain their hard-won status as a Great Clan. (Again, this rumor is not likely to be spread in the hearing of a Mantis samurai...)
- Trade along the Phoenix coast has experienced some difficulties from piracy of late. Garbled reports of a vicious ship known as the "Death Blossom" are circulating, making sea-trade a less appealing option than overland routes. It is believed that this floral nightmare is even more dangerous than the infamous Rolling Wave wako.

The PCs have a pleasant evening, in whatever fashion they choose, and when the next day arrives, they are told by Rintaro to make their preparations for travel. Unfortunately, the expected Crab caravan does not arrive the next day, and as the hours pass, Rintaro grows ever more impatient. Finally, at sundown, he dismisses the PCs to find their own entertainment once again.

Shortly after dawn on the third day, a messenger arrives from Garaseki Mura with word that the Crab caravan was attacked on the road, and the majority of the guards

were slain. Rintaro, awakened earlier than his usual wont, will react to the news with shock. ***"Who would dare to assault a heavily-armed group of Crab samurai on the Imperial roads? I must return to Ootosan Uchi; I want you to accompany Murayasu-san and do what you must to recover these items. I will take three squads with me for security, but that should still leave you with better than a hundred troops. If the matter requires more than that, I will arrange for a full Legion to handle it. But your priority needs to be finding that shipment!"***

Rintaro will not answer more questions about the cargo unless the PCs succeed at a **Courtier / Awareness** roll at a TN of 25. Even so, he believes that the security measures in place should have been sufficient to keep the shipment from being in danger (hence, his not wishing to speak of the cargo in the first place). He will still not identify the Armor of the Shadow Warrior, using the same line as earlier about an "item of great historical significance", though he will specify that it is one of the ancient artifacts of the Crab Clan. He has less qualms about the Kuni crystal or the mysterious item that has yet to be identified, as those are not the focus of his concern.

Seppun Murayasu accepts the situation with equanimity, and dispatches the requested guntai to see to Rintaro's escort. The taisei will give orders to his troops for them to prepare to move out immediately, but will request the PCs attend him as soon as they are ready to depart.

The Seppun spirit meets you outside the city at his company's campsite. He regards each of you momentarily with a grave, searching look. "I do not know what we may find, samurai, but I hope you have more experience than I with puzzles of this nature. I am a soldier, not a magistrate. You are not members of the Legion, so I can only ask your assistance, but I do not think you relish the thought of returning without completing our task any more than I do."

Murayasu does not know what the Crab were sending to Ootosan Uchi, but has some serious concerns – he knows that the Crab had sent twenty samurai as an escort, and the Seppun does not think that many bandits would casually assault heavy infantry. Murayasu will ride with the PCs, at the head of the Legion column. If the PCs do not have horses, they will be provided. Their superior training and discipline will allow the Legion to cover more ground than might otherwise be expected for a group their size, and the troops are looking forward to their mission. "One last party before winter" is the joke that the Legion passes among themselves.

Part One: Share Cunning

The messenger, a Scorpion samurai-ko by the name of Bayushi Hitoki, will tell the PCs what little she knows of the incident as they travel east along the Imperial road: her patrol was on its way back toward Kyuden Bayushi as part of their standard circuit the day before when they came across the aftermath of a bandit attack. In recent years, such things have been more and more common, but this is the first instance Hitoki recalls of such violence against a solid Clan military group. She reports four survivors, though she thinks two of them are likely to succumb to their wounds. The survivors were taken to the nearest village, Garaseki Mura. As they had Imperial travel papers, her commander dispatched her to deliver the news to Rintaro. She heard that someone found tracks heading off the road, but she doesn't know anything else. If asked what the Scorpion intend to do, she will shrug uncomfortably. *"You'd have to ask the daimyo of the province, Yogo Tobusa-sama. All I know is what I was told..."* A vassal of Yogo Tobusa can get a little more information out of her: she believes that the Scorpion Clan as a whole are not terribly interested in spending resources to avenge the Crab (an ally of the Scorpion's enemy in the Mantis Clan), though they will not do anything to interfere with the PCs' mission.

The site of the attack is about six hours travel from Beiden, and only one hour from the nearest village. The PCs will pass through Garaseki Mura on the way to the site of the attack, and Bayushi Hitoki will leave them there to deal with the matter on their own. Seppun Murayasu will delegate dealing with the local authorities to the PCs and see to his troops outside the village.

Garaseki Mura

A small village along road between Kyuden Bayushi and Beiden, Garaseki Mura is a simple waypost on the main Imperial road. It actually serves as one of several points of defense along the road for the Scorpion Clan, though all signs of that are quite well hidden (requiring a **Battle / Perception** roll at a TN of 30); in theory, an invading army would be under continuous attack as it marched along the road from forces supplied from and hidden in villages like this one.

The survivors of the Crab escort have been given rooms at the house of the local gokenin (samurai overseer). The servants will show the PCs in, serve them refreshments, and send word to their host. Bayushi Muraisan, the gokenin, will meet with the PCs almost immediately upon their arrival. He is a reserved

samurai in his late twenties, who would be handsome save for his chalk-white skin and utterly black eyes. The PCs may roll **Lore: Shadowlands / Perception** at a TN of 10 to recognize these as signs of the Shadowlands Taint, though he wears a green armband with the mon of the Kuni to indicate his Taint has been reported and is being treated appropriately.

Bayushi Muraisan bows politely upon entering the room, with only a slight amount of hesitation. "Welcome to Garaseki Mura, samurai. I might prefer your visit to be under other circumstances, but please be assured that whatever assistance I can offer is yours. Do I understand correctly that you will be investigating the unfortunate attack on the Crab that took place nearby?"

Muraisan was Tainted during the March to Voltturnum, and has no qualms about sharing that information if asked. In fact, if the PCs do not bring the subject up, he will do so on his own.

"Before this matter is brought up in another fashion, I ask that you allow me to address my unfortunate affliction. Like many others, I was touched by Jigoku during the War Against the Shadow when I fought at Oblivion's Gate. I have reported my situation to my superiors and to certain experts among the Kuni family, and I am careful to follow all the precautions they command, but I have no illusions about my situation. Should you request it, I am prepared to offer my life to atone for this incident." He bows his head nearly to the ground.

Muraisan is utterly sincere – as a samurai known to be Tainted, he is fully aware that he is a ready-made scapegoat for anything that goes wrong in the area, and has long since come to terms with that fact. His current position is far less than what he once was trained for, but was granted to him in recognition of his valor. The regular Bayushi patrols also are certain to keep an eye on him, another fact that he is aware of the nuances of.

The PCs may agree to recommend his seppuku, and he will go through with it immediately – his lord has granted him permission for this very act, should any question of his loyalty ever be brought up. (He has also prepared as safe a method of performing the three cuts as can be managed, arranging for his remains to be burnt immediately upon completing the ceremony.) If the PCs choose to request his seppuku, he will ask one of them to stand as his second – a Scorpion bushi by preference, a Bayushi with the highest Kenjutsu Skill if there is more than one. A Crab would be the next choice; otherwise, he is most interested in the character

that seems most likely to be able to perform the final stroke (his beheading) appropriately.

This is purely a roleplaying exercise for the players; there is no “right” answer. Muraisan does not wish to die, but knows that as long as he lives, he will be regarded with suspicion and his life is easily forfeit whenever something untoward happens and he is in the area. Should the PCs attempt to pass the question on to Seppun Murayasu, he will require them to make the decision. Muraisan’s servants will assist the PCs as much as possible, they will still have access to the surviving Crab, and there will be no long-term consequence from the Scorpion for making the judgment either direction. In fact, the PC who stands as Muraisan’s second will gain a Scorpion Clan Favor if they perform the ritual correctly (**Kenjutsu / Void** roll at a TN of 20).

In either case, three Crab bushi survived the bandit attack: the squad’s second in command Hida Hio, a scout by the name of Hiruma Mei, and a promising young nikutai by the name of Hida Takumi (who the PCs may have met at the last Test of the Topaz Champion as the Crab contestant – see SoB00, “New Beginnings”). A fourth, Hida Komachi, died from the wounds he sustained. The bodies have been tended by the local eta, though the funeral rites for seventeen samurai will take some time to enact properly.

Speaking with the survivors is simple enough to arrange; they have been offered rooms in Muraisan’s house, and the servants who have been tending the Crab samurai will show the PCs to them (regardless of Muraisan’s fate).

Hida Takumi is largely unchanged from any previous meeting with the PCs – he has filled out some, acquired a few more scars, but remains at heart a brash, cocky Hida bushi who is perhaps a bit too clever for his own good. His wounds, while severe, are not terribly life-threatening. Takumi, as the least injured and more outgoing, will introduce Hida Hio and Hiruma Mei. Hio is somewhat bulkier than Takumi, though perhaps an inch shorter, and obviously the more experienced warrior. His long, dark hair is kept unbound, he sports a thin moustache, and he wears armbands that bear strange markings (Nezumi fetishes, in fact). On the whole, Hio appears much like a stereotypical brutish Crab: far more suited to life on the Wall than in court. Hiruma Mei, in contrast, is small, petite, and contained. Her hair is short, her clothing practical, and like many Hiruma scouts, she makes a habit of not attracting attention.

All three are in need of medical attention, and eager to join the PCs to find some measure of vengeance for their failure. Takumi has 30 Wounds (placing him in the +10 Wound Level), while Hio is at 52 (+15) and Mei is at 44 (+20). They will gladly accept any healing offered by the PCs. Regardless of whether they are healed or not, Takumi and Hio will wish to accompany the group on their hunt for the bandits responsible. Mei will join if she is healed for at least 11 Wounds (taking her to the +10 Wound Level). Takumi will ask politely to join the PCs, and if they do not seem willing, Hio will be somewhat more blunt, demanding a place as the ranking Crab officer from the patrol. Murayasu will accede to this request, as it is his right.

Takumi will describe the attack fairly clearly, though he admits that it happened very suddenly. *“We had a scout out in front, but the attackers were too well-hidden. Crafty bastards. They had set up on opposite sides of the road and hit us with massed arrow-fire. Our armor held up to most of it, but they just kept firing. Hio-sama rallied us to charge the group to the south when Chirodai-sama – our gunso – fell, but I’d say more than half of us were down before we were able to close with them. They were human, lightly armored, and they had a back rank with spears that hit us when we got within range. We took out a few of them, but I’d say there were at least sixty. They knew what they were doing. Three-to-one odds, taken by surprise... We just didn’t have a hope in Jigoku.”* Hio confirms Takumi’s story, and none of the Crab were able to identify any mon or banners; were it not for the viciousness of the attack and the precision of their tactics, they would just call them bandits. The Crab are more than a little confounded, though, as this is somewhat beyond the scope of what most bandits would consider an acceptable risk.

If asked about the cargo, the Crab have little more information than the PCs already possess. They do not know what the actual items are, though Hio will reluctantly disclose that two of the packages are guarded by the Kuni. *“Whether to keep the Taint in or to keep it out, though... well, I just don’t know.”*

Bayushi Muraisan (or his servants) will give whatever assistance is requested of them, providing additional rations, medical supplies, and the like, and then Murayasu will lead the group west along the Imperial road to the site of the attack.

Scene of the Crime

The Crab were attacked a little less than an hour west of Garaseki Mura. Though the bodies have been attended to by the eta, and most of the signs of the attack have been removed, there are still things to be found for

those who know how to look. The PCs may roll one of several Skills in order to gain some information about the assault and the perpetrators.

Investigation (Search) / Perception:

- TN 10: There are signs in the stands of trees on either side of the road that many people gathered in them and waited for some time.
- TN 20: The PC finds several armor-piercing arrows, both broken ones and a few that were set in the ground to be ready for quick firing.
- TN 30: An empty feed-bag was trampled into the muck underneath one of the trees. It is a filthy mess, but there are barely legible characters inked on the rough burlap identifying it as coming from a stable in the village of Shutai.

Battle / Perception:

- TN 10: The Crab squad was attacked from both sides of the road by archers. The attack came without warning, but was obviously coordinated somehow. (This merely confirms Takumi's story if the PCs have heard it.)
- TN 20: There were thirty men on either side of the road, and once the targets selected a group to attack, the "squad" on the other side of the road was able to move closer to focus their fire with less fear of retribution – evidently they also did not worry about friendly fire, as they continued to rain arrows down on the Crab while they were engaged with their comrades.
- TN 30: While effective, these tactics do not match any normal military doctrine for any of the Clans; in particular, the lack of concern for their fellows argues for bandits, though the ruthlessness and precision are unsettling.

Hunting (Tracking) / Perception:

- TN 10: There are tracks of many people around the site, and several piles of horse dung – indicating that the attackers were mounted, if not for the attack, then for their departure.
- TN 20: The PC can find tracks heading south from the site of the attack, and will be able to follow them.
- TN 30: The attackers numbered sixty before the assault, and at least ten of them were killed. They fled on rough-shod ponies, and they took the Crab's pack horse with them in the interest of getting away from the site of the attack as soon as possible.

If none of the PCs are able to do so, it can be assumed that Hida Takumi will succeed at the Hunting roll with a 20, allowing the group to follow the bandits cross-country.

Attempting to Commune with the spirits in the area will give essentially the same information. No magic was used, though if the PC calls three Raises for clarity, the spirits will volunteer that the items that were taken were spiritually powerful in some fashion.

The trail leads south, off of the Imperial road. After a few hours ride cross-country, the PCs will come upon the first camp the bandits made after the attack – far enough to put them away from any immediate response, but within the range of what wounded men could reach without danger. The PCs may roll **Investigation (Search) / Perception** if they wish to search for clues – rolling a 20 will allow them to find a shallow mass grave with eleven bodies, stripped of all equipment or identifying marks. If they roll a 25, they will find the gutted corpse of the Crab pack animal and the shattered crates that the cargo was being transported in. (It is telling that the bandits spent more effort hiding the evidence of the theft than their comrade's remains.)

The PCs will follow the bandits' trail south-by-southwest for several days; while it crosses the Imperial roads twice, it does not follow them, and after crossing the second Imperial road, it bears more to the west (heading toward the village of Shutai). For the most part, the bandits seem to take care to avoid any settlements and likely scouted out their route to assist this. The Legion and the PCs are able to make good time, and seem to be keeping pace with their prey, when the trail passes close to a small village perhaps forty miles southwest of Kyuden Bayushi.

The trail initially leads toward the village rather than skirting around it, but the character following the tracks will discover signs of a fight. The PCs may roll **Investigation (Search) / Perception** at a TN of 20 to note that a small group of people came from the village, met the bandits, and apparently drove them off (killing at least three of them). The bandits' tracks then lead around the village, continuing further to the southwest.

Isarai Kiyoi Mura

If the PCs are curious about the village, Seppun Murayasu will dispatch them to investigate, as he thinks the Legion may intimidate the locals and make it more difficult to get any useful information. As they approach, the PCs will see that it is a very small hamlet, with no resident samurai gokenin and a population of probably less than two hundred. However, as they near,

they will discover that the village itself is surrounded by a wooden palisade. The outlying fields have peasants working in them, preparing them for winter. The PCs may roll **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** at a TN of 20 to spot several weapons (spears, parangu, other peasant weapons) close to hand for all of the farmers in sight. The farmers themselves seem very nervous as the samurai approach the village, and a bustle of activity is audible on the other side of the wall when the PCs get to the gate.

A bent, withered form hobbles painfully to the gate, and prostrates itself in a deep bow of greeting. Straightening, it is revealed as a woman of advanced age. She speaks in a dry, creaky voice, "Isarai Kiyoi Mura is honored to have such guests. How may we be of service?" This is Sadamae, the elder of the village. Like the other peasants, she is very nervous around the PCs, but is somewhat better at hiding it. She will answer any questions the PCs have very vaguely, claiming that the bandits approached and then left without going into specifics if possible. An **Awareness** roll at a TN of 15 will allow the PC to note that she keeps glancing toward the inn at the center of the village, though she assures them that there is nothing of interest to "such worthy samurai" to be found in the village. Sadamae is worried that the samurai will react poorly to the village's arrangement with Chiang-Tsu, but will not attempt to prevent them from looking around.

The inn is an almost pitiful establishment, bearing the name of the "Clear Water Inn." It is principally a gathering-place for the local farmers, someplace for them to get a drink in the evening. Inside, the plain common room is empty save for a ronin sitting at a corner table, sharpening his sword. (There is a dusty weapon-rack by the door to the inn, though the village likely sees so few samurai that it has not been used in quite some time.) The innkeeper will provide the PCs with their choice of weak tea or strong sake, and otherwise try to avoid them as much as possible.

If the PCs approach the ronin, he will be very polite, introducing himself as "Chiang-Tsu", and initially claim to be simply passing through. (If curious, a PC may roll **Investigation / Awareness** at a TN of 20 to determine that he is not telling all of the truth.) In fact, he was hired by the village to teach them how to defend themselves, as Isarai Kiyoi Mura is too close to Shutai for comfort. If asked about the bandits, Chiang-Tsu will admit to having "assisted" the villagers in driving them off, but will be intentionally vague about the situation unless convinced that the PCs are not likely to object to his arrangement with the locals. He is not teaching them anything forbidden like how to use a

sword, but just basic tactics and combat skills; there are still samurai who would take offense at this, and he would prefer to avoid violence.

This is primarily a roleplaying challenge; the manner that the PCs choose to present themselves is somewhat more important than exact words. If necessary, a PC may roll **Courtier (Manipulation) / Awareness** at a TN of 20 to convince the ronin that the PCs are not going to cause a problem for the villagers. If they are successful in this (roll or no roll), Chiang-Tsu will give them what assistance he can. He recognized the bandits as belonging to the Forest Killers, one of the largest and most brutal bandit gangs in the Empire. The Forest Killers work throughout this area, but their base is located in the fabled Shinomen Mori, and Chiang-Tsu believes there are nearly two hundred members of the gang in total. He will also describe the situation in the nearby village of Shutai as "almost entirely lawless", with bandits, smugglers, and other criminals having essentially taken over the village as it is removed enough from the provincial daimyo's authority to provide them with a free hand. (He will moderate his description somewhat if there are Scorpion PCs present.) If asked, Chiang-Tsu expects to be staying in Isarai Kiyoi Mura through the end of winter (and, having taken a contract to do so, feels honor-bound to follow through).

If the PCs come across as antagonistic, Chiang-Tsu will remain polite, but he will not be as cooperative. While he absolutely will not begin any hostilities, he is a samurai and will not allow the PCs to run roughshod over him. He will accept a challenge if offered, and he is entirely prepared to defend himself if necessary. (Of course, he knows all too well what the likely results of defending himself from a group of Clan samurai will be, and will try to avoid it.)

through the town. The Red Knives are a much smaller group than the Forest Killers, but seem to have more allies among the other gangs, as well as significant resources, so there is significant concern among the locals that the rest of the Forest Killers will descend upon the village. Those few witnesses that can be located by the docks will corroborate Kanjin's assertion that some of the Forest Killers left that morning with several bundles.

If a PC with the "Lore: Underworld" Skill rolled a 25 or more on the above roll, they also learn that the "Red Knives" are a front for another, more sinister and better-funded group by the name of "the Sons of Blood." Though there are no local samurai, the Sons of Blood are known to have high-ranking allies in the nearby city of Zakyō Toshi.

With little option other than to follow the packages west or to step into the chaos that has claimed Shutai, Murayasu will prepare the Legion to cross the river. If the PCs wish to try to do something else in Shutai, the taisei will point out that the mission is to recover the missing cargo, not to bring law to a remote village. However, Murayasu has every intention of returning someday to see that Shutai is pacified.

Part Two: Set Aside Blood

Finding the tracks of the Forest Killers on the other side of the river is not particularly difficult. They are far more interested in speed than in secrecy, so even if none of the PCs can succeed at a **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll at a TN of 15, it can be assumed that Hida Takumi will. The tracks lead west, toward the Shinomen Forest.

The ancient Shinomen Mori looms ahead, blazing with autumnal colors that somehow deepen the shadows clinging to the bases of the trees. The largest forest in the Empire is widely known to be haunted, a refuge for monsters of all kinds; beasts of the Shadowlands and brutal bandits, sleeping Naga and restless ghosts, portals to other Realms and hidden horrors native to Ningen-do that no mortal has ever seen and lived to tell the tale.

As the group moves into the forest, Murayasu will dispatch outriders to move with greater caution. (He has no intention of being ambushed as the Crab were.) The tracks follow a set of small trails through the forest, impeding the Legion's progress somewhat, but the bandits appear to have been moving steadily north and

west. On the second day after entering the forest, however, the tracks abruptly change direction and appear to be moving much faster. A **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll at a TN of 20 will allow the PCs to find a set of tracks paralleling the bandits; this second set of tracks was made by a group of nonhuman creatures. They may roll **Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** (at TN 20) to identify the tracks as belonging to Nezumi. (If a PC has actual ranks of the Lore: Nezumi Skill, they recognize the tracks without a roll.) Rolling a 25 or higher on the Hunting roll will allow the PCs to realize that the bandits were being herded by the ratlings... and another hour of travel through the dense forest will bring them to the site the Nezumi chose to ambush the bandits.

A dozen bodies lie around the clearing, the bandits ambushed by a group with as few scruples as they had. Each of them has at least a half-dozen arrow wounds, though the arrows that could be recovered and reused were reclaimed by the victors. The corpses have been efficiently stripped of any valuables, particularly steel or other metal objects, and left for the scavengers, much as their own victims would have been.

There is no sign of the cargo, though a PC who searches the area and succeeds at an **Investigation (Search) / Perception** roll at a TN of 20 will find a broken piece of metal – the crossed claws of the Kuni family mon is barely recognizable.

Hida Hio squats down to peer at the tracks of the attackers and frowns. "Nezumi. Shinomen is home to a fair-sized pack of Tattered Ear, I think. I know the Nezumi – I've worked with them on the Wall, and across it, many times." He stands with a grunt and glances around. "They're different from Rokugani in a lot of ways, but they have their own kind of honor, and they fight the Shadowlands as fiercely as any samurai I've ever seen. Lot of people think they're little more than monsters, Tainted thieves, whatever stupid tale they can come up with to blame others for their misfortunes... all false. I'd trust Nezumi any day over some samurai I've met. I should be able to work out something with them."

Hio can give the PCs some forewarning of what to expect when dealing with the Nezumi – differences like the ratlings having no concept of personal space, or personal property, that they are immune to the Taint and that they rely as much upon smell as any other sense to get around. The smell in particular may stand out for some samurai, and Hio will warn the group that the scent of Nezumi enrages most horses.

The Nezumi took the cargo (and any other shiny items from the bandits) and headed north, further into the forest. However, as the Legion begins to make ready to move out, the outriders will report back to Murayasu that a sizable group of bandits is approaching from the south: Forest Killers, perhaps looking into their comrades' disappearance, perhaps moving to assist their fellows in Shutai. In either case, they are unaware of the Legion's presence, and Murayasu will give orders to prepare an ambush of his own. ***"But the mission remains. Whatever these creatures intend with our cargo, it will require either diplomacy or more force than I have at my disposal to reclaim it. And here is a foe I can do something about. Follow the ratlings to their lair and see what will be required to recover the Crab's shipment. I will deal with these brigands, hopefully once and for all."*** The Legion will send whatever supplies the PCs feel they need with them, and will take custody of horses or other things that they may wish to leave behind. Murayasu makes arrangements to rendezvous with the PCs once they have better information and the Forest Killers are dealt with.

The tracks of the Nezumi are somewhat harder to follow, but if no PC can succeed at a **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll at a TN of 25, then Hio will assist Takumi in doing so. The trail leads north, and the forest becomes darker as the group travels. Eventually, they will need to stop for the night – the Nezumi are only a few hours ahead of them, but tracking by night is essentially impossible in the thick forest.

Dreams of the Water Lion

That night, each PC must make a **Void** roll. PCs with Dark Fate must roll twice and take the lower result. Make note of those who fail a TN of 10. All PCs who roll less than 30 (including those who failed the 10) have the following dream, independently:

A voice speaks to you out of the darkness of your dreams, a voice that echoes with the soft roar of waves on the shore. "So close... you are almost here..." A faint blue glow gradually resolves itself to the figure of a crouched lion fashioned from a strange transparent material that gives the impression of flowing lines while remaining solid. In the manner of dreams, you cannot tell if it is a small carving that might fit in your hand or a towering statue the size of a mountain. The voice seems to come from it, though the lion's mouth does not move and its eyes stare blankly ahead. "Come, samurai. Recover me from these creatures, and whatever you wish shall be yours. What reward will you ask?"

Though there is no way for the PCs to recognize it, this is the voice of Matsu Turi, the Dark Oracle of Water. The Dark Oracles have sent a group of Elemental Terrors to plague the Nezumi that the PCs are now tracking, and he sees the samurai as a potential avenue for penetrating the warding magic that Te'tik'kir has established around the Great Warren. Additionally, if he can tempt any of the PCs to take up the Dark Covenant of Water, he may be able to take actions against the Empire with greater freedom.

However, Turi is not a fool; he knows (all too well) that most samurai are not willing to sell themselves to an obviously sinister presence, and will present the entire matter as offering a reward to them for providing assistance. This is in addition to them doing their duty to their lords, and he will take care to avoid indicating that it might run counter to their duty at any point. As a Dark Oracle, there is actually very little that would be beyond his power if the PC takes the Covenant in hand to request his service for one task. He will present himself as the spirit of the statue, and if asked what it is, will respond with "a conduit to a greater power, a covenant between this world and another, a path to greatness for those that have the courage to take the first step." All of these things are true, though incomplete – Turi is a greater power, the other world happens to be Jigoku, and though it may be great evil, it can lead a samurai into greatness.

Ideally, this conversation ought to be between the GM and the players separately. There are no real mechanics involved in the temptation, as the Dark Oracle is predominantly placing the idea that the Covenant can grant a wish in the mind of the PC. Characters who have strong desires (and those with Dark Fate) should be required to come up with very solid reasons not to accept the offer, if not at face value, then at least with the intention of getting everything they can out of it. After establishing the presence of the Covenant and determining who is most susceptible to its power, Turi will allow the PCs to return to their dreams.

The next morning, Hida Hio is very eager to move on and recover the cargo. He is hopeful that the Nezumi can be reasoned with, and if his expertise has not been mentioned, he will do so now (Takumi or Mei can confirm his knowledge). Unfortunately, as the group begins to ready for travel, he has evidently developed a nasty, wet cough – if mentioned, he will blame it on his wounds, and is unwilling to rest or delay the mission, "especially not when we're this close!" If the PCs insist, diagnosing it with Medicine assessment will prove inconclusive.

The party will continue following the trail north as soon as there is enough light to see by. Within two hours, they will enter territory that the Tattered Ear Tribe has claimed. They may roll **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** at a TN of 25 to spot sentries before they appear out of the woods. Any horses in the group will give an angry whinny as they catch the scent of the Nezumi.

Six lean, furry forms step out of bushes and drop down out of trees. As tall as a human, their dark fur blends readily into the shadows, and their sharp, rat-like faces move constantly as they look you over carefully. They hold bows with arrows nocked, though they are not (yet) aiming at you. The largest one steps forward, and flickers his head down in an abbreviated bow or nod. Hida Hio steps forward and returns the gesture, then coughs horribly for a moment before issuing forth a chattering cacophony of sound. Though reading the expressions of the ratling's face is difficult, he appears surprised, and responds, though more fluidly, in the same language. Hio turns and says, "The Tattered Ear Tribe have a... 'great warren' nearby, he says. We'll need to talk to their, ah, Champion, and maybe their shugenja, to get the cargo back. But they'll lead us there."

The sentries will escort the group through the forest. Any horses with the party, even those normally gentle and placid, will react very aggressively to the smell of the Nezumi. An **Animal Handling / Awareness** roll at a TN of 20 is required to calm them; the Horsemanship Skill can be substituted, though it increases the TN by 5. Additionally, the GM may grant Free Raises for exceptionally intelligent horses (such as Utaku battle steeds). Failure to calm the horse will result in delaying the group, as the Nezumi are exceptionally wary of the animals, and they will insist that someone remain with the steeds when the rest of the group meets with the chief and the shaman.

After about two hours, the group enters a large clearing. A low hill rises ahead of them, and though it is covered in scrub and bushes, a number of small caves are visible. From the surface, the Tattered Ear tribes' Great Warren of M-atikf'chtr-foo does not appear to be all that significant, but a vast network of tunnels and burrows extend at least two hundred feet underground – thus the large clearing in the middle of the dense forest. A little over a hundred Nezumi make it their home, and many are poking their heads out in curiosity, but it has space for ten times that many when the entire tribe gathers here every three and a half years.

Three Nezumi wait near the base of the hill, though another dozen are visible nearby going about their

business. Tchickchuk, the chieftain, is a large specimen with black fur, a streak of white along his chin, and blood-red eyes. Gr'tik-er is a young female shaman, with light brown fur and clad in a tattered red silk robe. Finally, Te'tik'kir, a small, tan Nezumi with piercing dark eyes, leans on a warped stick carved with numerous symbols and bearing a strange metal blade crudely lashed to the end. The three ratlings each have a different reaction to the humans in their midst: the chief is curious, the young shaman wary, and Te'tik'kir is hostile.

The large warrior in the middle steps forward and inclines his upper body in a slight bow. He speaks in fluent Rokugani, though accented and with a strange inflection. "Greetings, samurai. Welcome to Great Warren. I am Tchickchuk, chief of Tattered Ear." Indicating the female shaman on his right, he continues. "This Gr'tik-er, shaman of Tattered Ear." He nods to the left slightly toward the small tan shaman, "And this Te'tik'kir, shaman of Crippled Bone." Te'tik'kir snarls slightly and mutters something under his breath, which Tchickchuk ignores as he turns back to you. "Who are you, and why are you here?"

Once the PCs have introduced themselves (Tchickchuk will calmly insist on learning the PCs' names), the chief will nod slightly, and suggest the group join him inside the warren before getting into too deep a discussion about the items.

If the PCs still have their horses, they will be safe enough tied up outside the warren, though if they are not calm, the Nezumi will insist that one of the samurai remain with them to keep the steeds from attacking.

The ratlings will lead them into the pungent tunnels, choosing a route that will not require the PCs to crawl. The room they wind up in is toward the top of the warren, with a relatively ready path back to the outside. There are a few reed mats on the dirt floor, and piles of various items lie around the cavern. Three boxes bearing the mon of the Crab Clan lie at the top of a pile toward the back. The largest appears to be a travel-box of the style used for carrying armor, though it is covered in wards and binding symbols used by the Kuni and has several worked pieces of jade strapped to the outside. The smallest box, a rough cube about eight inches on each side, is similarly bound and warded. The middle-sized box is about two feet long, a foot wide, and six inches deep. It is held closed with woven straps, though the buckle has broken off of one.

Before the group can make themselves comfortable (or as comfortable as possible, given the surroundings),

Te'tik'kir will immediately begin chattering angrily. ***"I summoned items of great Name, to help fight-fight the darkness! No give back! We need!"*** Tchickchuk will wave him down casually, but then turn to the PCs and explain some of the situation. ***"Te'tik'kir is Crippled Bone, tribe from far south. They were attacked by bad-bad things from Twisted Lands. Many Crippled Bone met Tomorrow. Te'tik'kir led survivors here, seeking help."*** The chief will pointedly stare down at the much smaller shaman. ***"Te'tik'kir sometimes needs reminding that he is a guest in this warren. But he has point-point. Why should we give up something we have need of?"***

Appeals to personal property are largely meaningless to Nezumi, and talking about the Emperor is equally empty ("If big-big chief wants, he can come try to take-take..."). Though Tchickchuk will consider trading them back, Te'tik'kir will be vocal in his insistence that "pinkskins with no Name" should not take the things he brought to the Clan with his magic. (If the PCs object to this explanation for the item's presence, Hio will quietly tell them that Nezumi shamans can essentially warp the world around them to bring things to them, even if it may require happenstance for more specific and powerful items.) During the arguments, Hida Hio will continue to cough intermittently, though he keeps up with the discussion fairly well.

Before the discussion is resolved, however, a great cry will go up from outside. The screams of Nezumi echo through the tunnels, and Tchickchuk will leap to his people's defense. Te'tik'kir screeches, ***"No! Pinkskin fools! You brought darkness!"***

If any PCs remained outside (with the horses or for whatever reason), they will see the initial attack of the Elemental Terrors, and will be attacked immediately by a Moetechi no Kansen before the rest of the group arrives. If the PCs follow Tchickchuk, they may roll **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** to notice Te'tik'kir hanging back and dragging out a large net bag.

Part Three: Smite the Nameless

As you step out of the cavern, a horrible sight greets your eyes: a small army of twisted elemental creatures is engaged in battle against the Nezumi. A dozen hulking piles of animated stone and rock smash into the defenders, crushing them underfoot or simply grabbing them bodily and dragging them screaming into the ground; the rubble-creatures rise from the earth, laughing cruelly at the plight of their

abandoned victims. A larger number of burning humanoid forms flit about the battlefield, swooping down from the sky to kindle fires in the very flesh of the Nezumi. A noxious cloud of roiling smoke floats in the air, spreading madness and confusion with a touch.

The PCs may roll **Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** at a TN of 20 to identify the attackers as being Lesser Elemental Terrors, creatures given form by the Dark Oracles and made from twisting the very elements themselves.

There are two Toichi and five Moetechi within twenty feet of the cave entrance (unless the majority of the table is Rank One, in which case there is only one Toichi and three Moetechi). The rest of the Lesser Terrors will devote their attention to causing havoc among the Nezumi, while the smaller group approaches Te'tik'kir as a distraction.

The Toichi and Moetechi will advance, trying to draw the shaman out, while Akeru no Oni (and the Dark Oracle of Water) wait to strike. Any Void Points spent by the PCs are cancelled; the presence of Akeru no Oni prevents them from having any effect other than strengthening the Elemental Terror. Rather than have the PCs roll individual Fear Rolls, they should roll to resist Fear 3 (TN 20) against the entire group of Lesser Terrors. However, they gain a bonus of +1k1 to this roll due to the Nezumi warding magics on the warren.

Toichi no Kansen

Ten foot tall, hulking humanoid monstrosities formed of stone rubble, with silt sliding from their joints as they move.

Air 1	Earth 4	Fire 2	Water 2
Initiative: 3k1			Attack: 5k3
Armor TN: 10			Damage: 8k3
Reduction: 10 (5 against jade, crystal, or obsidian)			
Wounds: 16 (+0), 48 (+15), 80 (Dead)			
Taint Rank: 3			
Special Abilities:			

Stone Brotherhood: Toichi no Kansen may move through the earth at their normal movement rate.

Bury: If a Toichi is in control of a grapple at the start of its turn, it can move into the ground and leave the victim behind. This requires a Complex Action and will place the victim 10' underground; they may dig themselves out if they can succeed at three Strength Trait rolls at a TN of 20 as Complex Actions.

Moetechi no Kansen

Small, vaguely humanoid forms surrounded by fire, they flit about the battlefield taking glee in the flames ignited by their burning aura.

Air 2 Earth 2 Fire 4 Water 2
Initiative: 5k3 **Attack:** 7k4
Armor TN: 15 **Damage:** 2k1 (+1k1 fire)
Reduction: 3 (0 against jade, crystal, or obsidian)
Wounds: 10 (+0), 20 (+10), 30 (Dead)
Taint Rank: 3

Special Abilities:

Swift 2

Flight: Moetechi no Kansen may fly at their normal movement rate.

Burning Touch: Moetechi are surrounded by a burning aura that immolates any wooden or flammable object they touch (including arrows). Any character touched by one, including as part of an attack, takes 1k1 damage that armor Reduction does not affect.

Vulnerability: Suffers double damage from water-based attacks.

Yosuchi no Kansen

A billowing cloud of smoke eight feet in diameter, it floats through the air and moves distinctively against the wind.

Air 4 Earth 1 Fire 2 Water 2
Initiative: 6k4 **Attack:** 5k3
Armor TN: 25 **Damage:** madness
Reduction: 0
Wounds: 4 (+5), 12 (+20), 20 (Dead)
Taint Rank: 3

Special Abilities:

Flight: Yosuchi no Kansen may fly at their normal movement rate.

Invulnerability: Yosuchi are immune to any physical attack, save for jade or crystal weapons, which do half damage.

Touch of Madness: Does no damage with its attack; instead, if it hits, the target must make a Willpower Trait roll at a TN of 10. Failure means that the target goes mad for three rounds; success increases the TN to resist any future attacks by 5. The target loses control of their actions; they may randomly attack anyone nearby, stand still and babble, or flee in terror (GM's discretion, though it typically changes from round to round.)

Oyuchi no Kansen

A small, animate puddle of noxious water.

Air 2 Earth 2 Fire 1 Water 4
Initiative: 4k2 **Attack:** 5k3

Armor TN: 15 **Damage:** 4k2

Reduction: 5 (2 against jade, crystal or obsidian)

Wounds: 10 (+0), 20 (+10), 30 (Dead)

Taint Rank: 3

Special Abilities:

Aquatic: May enter a body of water and become essentially undetectable.

Possess Corpse: Oyuchi no Kansen may possess a corpse as a Complex Action, raising it as a zombie under its control.

The combat will continue until two of the following conditions are met:

- Akeru no Oni consumes three Void Points.
- Either of the Toichi no Kansen are destroyed.
- All of the Moetechi no Kansen are destroyed.
- Five rounds pass.

When these things happens, Te'tik'kir will drag the Crab treasures out of the cavern, at which point Akeru no Oni and the Dark Oracle will make their presence known.

A dark, hunched form shimmers into being atop the hill. It gives the impression of an enormous, lean insect that would be nearly twelve feet tall if it stood fully upright. A foul aura of black energies crackles over its chitinous form, though where the eyes should be, two clear blue points of light shine out to regard you with evil amusement. "Ah, and the little rat joins us at last..." The words echo in your minds without benefit of a physical voice. "I am only here for the shaman. Step aside, samurai, and I will claim my prize."

PCs who had the dream sent by the Dark Oracle recognize the voice. Any PC who can succeed at a **Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** roll at a TN of 25 will recognize the creature as Akeru no Oni, the Elemental Terror of Void, a profoundly horrible creature fashioned from corrupted Void by the Dark Oracles during the Clan War.

If any PC has the "Dark Fate" Disadvantage, when Te'tik'kir stops, the net bag falls apart, and the small box will tumble down the hill toward them, coming to a rest against their leg. As the confrontation with the Dark Oracle continues, they will hear the voice from their dream talking to them, telling them to take up the Covenant. They must roll **Willpower** at a TN of 20 to avoid opening the box.

Te'tik'kir lets out a fierce shriek. *"Leave-leave, Nameless thing! Dark Oracle, you cannot be here! Great Warren named safe-safe!"*

“It was not easy, little rat, but my servants go everywhere...” Hida Hio doubles over, coughing uncontrollably, and greenish water flows from his nose and mouth to puddle onto the ground. It forms up into a mostly-humanoid form and begins to slosh down the hill, looking for a corpse to animate.

With the above clues, and Te'tik'kir calling the creature a Dark Oracle, the PCs may roll **Lore: Theology** or **Lore: Shadowlands** at a TN of 20 to recognize the Dark Oracle of Water acting through the form of the Elemental Terror of Void. This also allows them to realize that the Dark Oracle cannot attack them unless they attack the Dark Oracle or involve themselves in its affairs. The Dark Oracle will suggest that the samurai choose not to involve themselves in the situation, claiming some gratitude for their assistance in locating the Nezumi's hiding place. *“The little rat thing made a deal with my predecessor, samurai. His life is forfeit, and my new siblings have decided to finish the matter. You have no place in this.”* If the PCs give any indication of concern for the Crab items, the Oracle will “generously” allow them to select one item that he will take, leaving them the rest – this is pure, petty malice on his part.

At this point, the PCs must decide what they wish to do:

The simplest answer is probably not their first choice, but will resolve the situation with minimal risk to them. They may choose to hand Te'tik'kir over to the Dark Oracle. Unless they've indicated a concern over the items, the Oracle will simply take Te'tik'kir and leave; though the shaman will fight, his magic will not prevail against the Oracle supported by the Elemental Terrors. The Nezumi will turn against the PCs; though they will not attack, they will make it quite clear that the PCs are not welcome any more, and they will not return any of the items. The PCs will be forced to leave empty-handed, though they can tell Murayasu (and then, Rintaro) where the items are located, and the Imperial forces will make plans to deal with the situation in the spring.

They may also choose to kill Te'tik'kir themselves. As he is preparing to defend himself against the magic of the Oracle, and his attention is locked on his enemy, it would be a very simple matter to simply slay the Nezumi instantly. This will infuriate the Dark Oracle, but with little other option, he will depart, taking one of the items in spite (determined randomly if the PCs did not express a preference). The Nezumi react much as above, though they will turn over any remaining items as cursed.

Any PC who opens the smallest box must make an **Earth Ring** Roll at a TN of 20, or gain 1k1 points of Shadowlands Taint. The other characters will have one round to interfere should they choose, but otherwise the PC who takes up the Dark Covenant of Water can give one command to the Dark Oracle of Water. This command can take very nearly any form, but is tantamount to having one wish granted. However, after the command is fulfilled, the PC will be taken by the Dark Oracle. (The nature of this command is quite possibly beyond the scope of this module; the player will have to speak with the Campaign Admin to resolve the effects. In any case, however, taking up the Covenant will result in the loss of the PC. Depending on the command given, additional karma may be rewarded.)

Finally, the PCs may choose to stand against the Dark Oracle in Te'tik'kir's defense. Doing so will pull the shaman out of his blind anger, and he will turn to the most vocal PC and ask, simply, *“Why? Pinkskins kill Nezumi. You no stand with us. Why help now?”* If the PC can explain their reason for defending the shaman in terms that the Nezumi understands, then it will firm his resolve, and he will take action himself. (This is entirely at the GM's discretion. Wishing to stand against the darkness or refusing to allow anyone to be taken by the enemy are more readily grasped by Nezumi than complicated descriptions of Bushido, but as long as the PC can convince Te'tik'kir that they are acting to save the Nezumi for some reason other than to save their own skin, he will react as below.)

Te'tik'kir nods, his shoulders hunching as he prepares himself. Suddenly, he gives out a chattering screech, words in their language pouring from his mouth in a flood. This time, however, you clearly understand certain words: your names. The odd weapon he has been clutching spins in his paws, and a ripple in the air flows from each of you to pool around the shaman and the instrument he grasps in frenzied desperation. The oni takes a step away, instinctively, from this display of raw fury, and a bolt of clear crystalline energy erupts from the tip of the blade to strike the foul creature. It gives vent to a mind-shattering cry, and falls back, a hole gaping in its chest. The dark energy that surrounds the oni lashes out in a deadly counterstroke, smashing the Nezumi to the ground, but the hole in the demon's form begins to spread, pieces of chitin flaking away and dissipating into the air. The blue glow in its eyes blinks out, and the oni falls to the ground, shuddering, before vanishing entirely once more. On the death or departure of their leader, the Elemental Terrors disappear, fleeing into the sky or diving into the earth in their fright.

The rest of the tribe will cautiously approach, and as they do, a trio of glowing Nezumi (who curiously appear much as returned spirits do, apart from being ratlings) appear, standing over the mangled form of Te'tik'kir. The Tattered Ear whisper among themselves in awe, and Tchickchuk murmurs, "Transcendent." The luminous Nezumi speak softly, their voices echoing oddly, but without any trace of accent. *"We thank you, samurai, for helping to bring this one to peace. He betrayed his Tribe, and we cursed him, but your actions have helped bring him out of his unthinking rage. We will help him find peace with the rest of the fallen, and perhaps in time he will join our number."*

Tchickchuk will give the PCs the Crab's cargo, and wish them well.

Conclusion

The PCs will meet Murayasu at the rendezvous point. He reports that the company destroyed the entire Forest Killers gang; perhaps a dozen members of the gang may have escaped, but Murayasu's troops tracked the survivors from the initial combat back to their base and destroyed it. The core of the gang has been killed, along with all leaders. The few prisoners taken confirm that they were hired by the Red Knives, and claim that the other gang betrayed them when they returned with the commissions.

The group heads to the capitol with any items they recovered. Assuming they recovered any, Seppun Murayasu is profligate with his praise of the PCs in the Imperial Court, and even Miya Rintaro is notably grateful. Glad to have performed their duties, the PCs will likely take ship for Kyuden Gotei to represent their daimyo at the Mantis Winter Court (see SoB18).

The End

Rewards for Completing the Adventure

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

If a PC has a Crafting cert, they may make a Crafting roll at this time.

Experience Points

Surviving the adventure:	1XP
Good roleplaying:	+1XP
At least one piece of cargo recovered:	+1XP
Te'tik'kir was redeemed:	+1XP

Total Possible Experience: 4XP

Honor

If the PCs refuse to make a deal with the Dark Oracle, they will gain two points of Honor (if they have 8 Ranks or more of Honor, they only gain a single point).

Glory

Seppun Murayasu will speak well of the PCs to the Imperial Court, assuming that they recovered any of the missing items. Recovering all three will earn a full Rank of Glory (minus one point for each Rank of Glory they already have, so 9 points for a Glory 1 PC or 4 points for a PC with Glory 6, etc.). If the Dark Oracle takes one of the items, this Glory gain is halved (round up).

Other Awards/Penalties

If the PCs return any of the items, they gain a Crab Favor.

If they recover all of the items, they gain an Imperial Favor.

Any character with the Imperial Investigator cert gains +.2 Status (on that position's Status). However, if they do not return with all three items, they lose -.1 Status for each item lost.

Any PC who did not roll a 10 or higher on the Void roll when the Dark Oracle sent them the dream must make a **Earth Roll** at a TN of 15, or gain 1k1 points of the Shadowlands Taint. (This is done after the normal check to avoid increase in Taint at the end of the mod.)

Module Tracking Sheets

Did the PC cause an issue in Garaseki Mura over Muraisan's Taint?

Did the PC cause an issue in Isarai Kiyoi Mura over Chiang-Tsu training peasants?

What did the Dark Oracle offer the PC in the dream?

Did the PC step forward to defend Te'tik'kir from the Dark Oracle?

Did the PC kill Te'tik'kir?

Did Te'tik'kir drive away the Dark Oracle using the PC's Name?

GM Reporting

Did the Bayushi Muraisan commit seppuku? Which PC stood as his second?

Was Te'tik'kir taken by the Dark Oracle of Water?

Did the PCs recover all the items? If not, which was lost?

Did any of the PCs take up the Dark Covenant of Water?

Meta-Question for Year Two of the Campaign:

Do you want your PC's daimyo to support the Toturi Dynasty or the Hantei Dynasty?

This is not entirely an in-character question; the players are being given a chance to determine which daimyo support which side of the coming conflict. List the name of the daimyo and the side that each individual player chose for their answer in the reporting sheet. (More than one PC at a table sharing a daimyo each get their own, independent, vote.)

GM must report this information BEFORE (2/17/2012) for it to have storyline effect.

