

Tear Away the Darkness

**A One-Round Mid-Rank Adventure for Heroes of
Rokugan: Spirit of Bushido
Month of the Hare, 1139 (Spring)**

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Nowhere can truly be called “safe” once you are in the Shadowlands.

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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 Mid Rank adventure, and thus can involve parties of widely varying capabilities. The encounters

have been optimized for a party of average Rank Three. **Note that this module is rated “Mid-Rank” (PCs of Ranks 2, 3, or 4) because the Shadowlands is, quite simply, not a place Rank One characters should enter casually and expect to leave alive.** It is a force that has threatened and driven back the combined might of the Empire for more than a thousand years. Barring unusual circumstances or the specialized training undergone by some Crab samurai, inexperienced samurai have no business confronting it directly.

If the PCs are not mostly Rank Three, some modifications for higher- and lower-Rank parties follow:

Low End Party (most/all characters Rank Two):

There is only a single *ashi no oni* during No Rest for the Wicked.

Reduce the TNs for tracking the attackers, avoiding the acid rain and spotting the various Shadowlands dangers during The Long Walk by -5 each.

Hidoi has Fire 3 and Air 3, reducing appropriate rolls by -1k1 and also depriving him of his Corruption Rewards Technique.

High End Party (most/all characters Rank Four):

There are two mountain goblins for every PC during No Rest for the Wicked.

Hidoi’s Limited Invulnerability protects him from the first two attacks directed against him each Turn. He also has Earth 5, increasing his Wounds to: 25 (+0), 35 (+3), 45 (+5), 55 (+10), 65 (+15), 75 (+20), 85 (Down, +40), 95 (Dead)

Adventure Summary and Background

The eternal war between the Empire and the Shadowlands has been a long stretch of slow, painful losses across more than a millennium of history. Though the Crab have held back the tide for generation upon generation, they have, ever so slowly, been pushed back by the unending horde of goblins, oni, undead and other horrors spawned by the Festering Pit of Fu Leng. The creation of the Kaiu Kabe, the Carpenter Wall, during the Battle of the Last Stand finally put a stop to the unending series of losses, but not until all the lands of the Hiruma family had fallen to darkness.

Now, however, for the first time since the dawn of the Empire, the Crab have managed to reverse their retreat, pushing the forces of the Shadowlands back and reclaiming three provinces of Hiruma territory south of the Wall. These lands have been “cleansed” in the same sense that the Kuni lands have been: the corrupting *kansen* have been driven out, but so have the natural *kami*, leaving the territory barren and lifeless, but habitable. The Hiruma of those lands have extremely difficult lives, dealing with the absence of the protection of the Wall and an unending need to import food and resources from the north, but for the sake of having reclaimed the lands that they once called their own, most would endure far worse with no hesitation.

For all that the returned spirits have proven something of a mixed blessing to the rest of the Empire, in the Crab lands, they have been an almost unalloyed blessing. The reinforcements that replaced Crab losses taken during the March to Voltturnum made sure the Empire’s defenses did not weaken after the battle; once the Crab were back on their feet, the returned warriors have helped reinforce and secure the reclaimed Hiruma lands, continuing what Hida Yakamo began after the Day of Thunder. One of these returned spirits, Hida Tsuneo – called by some the “Stone Crab” – has been at the forefront of these efforts, building a coalition of allies across the Empire to drive the Shadowlands entirely out of Kinbou, the southernmost Hiruma province and home to Shinsei’s Last Hope. This focus on protecting the Empire has earned him the respect of many throughout Rokugan.

In recognition of his successes, Miya Rintaro, a Miya *shisha* recently risen to some prominence in the courts of the Empire, has chosen Tsuneo to be the bearer of Ketsuen, the famed Armor of the Shadow Warrior, once worn by Hida-kami himself. Ketsuen was lost in the Shadowlands when Hida Yakamo died trying to reclaim Shiro Hiruma, but a squad of spirit samurai recently recovered the armor and returned it to the Empire. It had become corrupted by its time in the Shadowlands, but Rintaro arranged for a cadre of Kuni, Seppun and Isawa *shugenja*, working together, to cleanse it once more. Now Rintaro is journeying to Lone Candle Keep, one of the northernmost castles in the Hiruma lands (considered the safest and the only one where non-Crab are allowed to visit regularly), to meet with Tsuneo and Crab Champion Hida O-Ushi to hand Ketsuen back to the Crab. It is in this task that he has called for allies – in this case, the PCs – to aid him.

Unfortunately for Rintaro’s plans, others are also interested in the fate of Ketsuen, and have made arrangements to see the Armor of the Shadow Warrior

fall once again into Shadowlands hands. The Lost warrior calling herself among other things “Hida Chie” has successfully seduced and manipulated the daimyo of Lone Candle Keep, Hiruma Chijin, into weakening the castle’s defenses. It will be up to the PCs to stop her forces from reclaiming Ketsuen and then, once the initial threat is passed, to either rescue or punish Chijin and to defend Lone Candle Keep against the forces of Fu Leng who want to see the restored castle lost once more to the darkness.

Character Notes

Check the PCs’ character sheets for the following:

- Characters with the “Eyes of the Miya” cert should be given an opportunity to gain some additional attention from Miya Rintaro, as he is their direct superior.
- Similarly, characters with the “Warriors of the Wall” cert should be granted some recognition from Hida Tsuneo, who commanded them during their service on the Wall.
- Crab PCs who have “Oath of Fealty” to either Hiruma Meru or Hiruma Iwae will be expected to provide direct service for their daimyo, though the daimyo in question will grant Rintaro the PC’s continued assistance without hesitation.

Introduction

Each of the PCs has been assigned to the entourage of Miya Rintaro, an up and coming courtier, as he travels south of the Wall to deliver Ketsuen, the Armor of the Shadow Warrior, to the Crab Clan. Clan samurai have been given this duty by their daimyo, in response to a request for aid from Rintaro, while ronin have been hired for the duty, with an initial payment of 2 koku and an additional 2 koku to be given when Rintaro returns to the Empire. Although Lone Candle Keep stands only five miles south of the Wall and is considered safe enough to have non-Crab visitors on a semi-regular basis, it is still beyond the sheltering protection of the Kaiu Kabe, and therefore Rintaro has asked for samurai who have proven themselves in service to their lords. Some of the PCs may have worked with Rintaro before (most notably in the adventures “Ancestral Dictate” and “Flee From Tomorrow”), in which case Rintaro requested their presence specifically; otherwise, word of the PCs’ deeds brought them to Rintaro’s attention.

The massive bulk of the Carpenter Wall is still faintly visible on the northern horizon when you catch your first glimpse of Lone Candle Keep. A fairly small

castle by Crab standards, the keep still covers the entirety of the small hill upon which it is built, its stair-stepped levels spilling down the slope toward you. Named for the Hiruma family motto (“A single fire against the darkness always burns brightest”), the castle’s name is also a more literal reference to the massive bonfire-sized blaze atop its central tower. Visible across the bare, dusty plain that surrounds the keep for miles, the fire seems to be the only living thing in the barren Hiruma territory through which your party is traveling.

The sight of the castle ahead of you seems to hearten Miya Rintaro, the only mounted member of your party. The well-manicured shisha has already commented several times on the depressing nature of the Hiruma landscape just in the three miles you’ve covered since passing through the Kaiu Kabe, each time sounding gloomier than the time before. Rintaro rides surrounded by a unit of Seppun miharu, three ranks deep all around him, and another two hundred or so trail after you in steady, even lines. Striding at Rintaro’s side is the commander of his honor guard, Seppun Biransei, a grey-haired and hawk-nosed bushi whose stony countenance looks as though he last managed a smile sometime long before his gempukku. Biransei barely glances at the distant castle, instead focusing his attention in turn on the dusty plains around you, the position of his men, and your own smaller group, marching between Rintaro’s party and the larger squad of Seppun bushi. Biransei is not concerned with you so much, however, as he is with the massive crate you are supporting between you on long poles, the crate you have been specifically tasked with protecting – the crate that contains Ketsuen, the Armor of the Shadow Warrior.

If any PCs want to have brought their horses, they are doomed to disappointment: the Crab do not generally permit horses south of the Wall, and only Rintaro’s high Status has allowed him to bring one. Even he would not be permitted to take one beyond Lone Candle Keep, and the PCs are not that fortunate. For the same reason, they have not been allowed to bring any pets, servants or other noncombatants with them, and there are no peasants available to carry Ketsuen; in truth, though, bearing a nemuranai of such power and history would not be shameful for any but the most arrogant samurai.

It takes 4 samurai to carry Ketsuen’s crate; if there are more PCs than that, the rest can take up defensive positions around the crate. The box is made of thick, sturdy cherry wood, bound with iron and covered in ornate carvings that celebrate the armor’s storied history; it is about two feet high, three feet wide and

four feet long and weighs about a hundred pounds all together, including its contents. As with most Rokugani chests, it is unlocked; only the PCs and Ketsuen's own reputation as a holy item protect it. If a PC has at least one Rank in Craft: Armorsmithing and Lore: Theology, they may perform basic care for the armor's physical and spiritual requirements while they travel, and gain 1 point of Honor for doing so. (Multiple PCs may gain this bonus, but the skill requirements must be met by each PC individually.) Regardless, as with any item bearing an awakened kami within it, carrying Ketsuen is a holy act; the PCs should be made aware that they are being honored, not demeaned, by this activity.

If any PC wishes more information about Ketsuen or Lone Candle Keep, they may make a **Lore: History**, **Lore: Shadowlands** or **Lore: Crab / Intelligence** roll for each; they gain information as follows:

Ketsuen

- TN 10: Ketsuen is a suit of heavy armor, worn by the Crab Champion since the time of Hida himself. It is called the Armor of the Shadow Warrior because of its unusual matte black color.
- TN 15: The armor was lost in the Shadowlands seven years ago when Hida Yakamo fell attempting to retake Hiruma Castle. When the Crab and Lion eventually reclaimed the castle some months later, they recovered Yakamo's body but not the armor.
- TN 20: Ketsuen was originally forged for Hida-kami by Kaiu, and gained its unusual black coloring though the stains of Fu Leng's blood during the Fallen Kami's battles with Hida during the first war against the Shadowlands. Despite the armor's close association with the Crab Champion, it is *not* the Ancestral Armor of the Crab Clan; that armor, Fukutsu, is the armor the current Champion, Hida O-Ushi, now wears.
- TN 25: Ketsuen's massive size requires it to be worn by a samurai more than six feet tall; while this is not often a problem for the Champion of the Crab, Hida O-Ushi is much shorter than her brother and father were when they were Champion, and could not wear Ketsuen even if it had not been lost with Yakamo's death.

Lone Candle Keep

- TN 10: Lone Candle Keep was completed just three years ago, the first structure built in the reclaimed Hiruma provinces after initial repairs were completed on Shiro Hiruma.

- TN 15: Lone Candle Keep is the Hiruma family's designated meeting point for contact with important samurai from the rest of the Empire. Close enough to the Wall to be considered reasonably secure, high Status visitors who wish to come to the Hiruma (rather than having the Hiruma come to them) are inevitable directed to Lone Candle Keep for their own protection. As such, Lone Candle Keep has been outfitted for its secondary role as a diplomatic hub, and the Crab samurai stationed there are usually more comfortable in social situations than most of their cousins.
- TN 20: The bonfire that continually burns atop Lone Candle Keep's highest tower is actually a powerful bound kami, placed there by Osano-Wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, on the day the castle was completed in recognition of the Crab Clan's success in retaking the Hiruma lands from the Shadowlands. "As long as the Hiruma burn away the darkness, so shall this fire light their way," the Fortune is said to have promised when he appeared.

It takes another thirty minutes or so of marching through the dust and occasional sharp blast of wind to reach Lone Castle Keep itself. It is clear that Rintaro is expected – he is met at the gates by Hiruma Chijin, the daimyo of the castle. Chijin is tall for a Hiruma, though still fairly lean, handsome but for a sharply broken nose; he is surrounded by the glow of a returned spirit, and he and Rintaro greet each other like old friends. The daimyo is a gregarious man, surprisingly cheerful for the normally dour Hiruma – Rintaro even comments on it, mentioning that Chijin seems to be "in quite the good mood." Chijin laughs the comment off, replying, "It is a good time to be a Hiruma, my friend."

After a brief, formal statement of welcome, Chijin escorts Rintaro, Biransei and the PCs into the keep, while the rest of the Seppun bushi set up a camp in one of the inner courtyards. Within, Lone Candle Keep is surprisingly opulent for a Crab castle, especially one south of the Wall – the rich furnishings and decorations would not be out of place for a wealthy daimyo's castle in the Lion or Dragon lands. The castle's small complement of servants is also extremely well-trained in proper etiquette and comfort; all in all, Lone Candle Keep is a beacon of normalcy, even grace, in the harsh, brutal and unforgiving Hiruma provinces.

The PCs are given rooms in a guest wing of the castle, where they may rest and freshen up before the formal welcoming feast for Rintaro and the castle's other high-

ranking guests that night. The rooms are directly across the hall from the rooms given to Rintaro and Biransei respectively; Ketsuen itself is stored in the Miya's quarters until its formal presentation tomorrow morning.

As Chijin shows his guests to their rooms, he pauses in the hallway and delivers a short speech to them all. *“My friends, you are welcome here, and I hope you will not find the hospitality of the Hiruma lacking in any way. Nonetheless, we are also on the front lines of a war, against an enemy that knows no depths to its cunning or brutality. As such, I must insist on your acceptance of certain rules while you are in our lands. Those of you with armor will be expected to wear it at all times; likewise, you will be expected to be armed at all times. Do not leave the castle walls without an escort, and return to your rooms here at night without fail. Anyone who does not follow these requirements will be assumed to be Tainted, with consequences up to and including death. If you hear a warning gong, the castle is under attack; return to your rooms and wait there. The all-clear will be indicated with a yellow signal arrow. If you instead see a blue signal arrow, the castle itself has been breached, so commit your souls to Yomi and join the fighting. Do you have any questions?”* Chijin is not harsh, but his tone is grave and no-nonsense, and Rintaro and Biransei both nod in simple acceptance of the restrictions. (PCs who played in “Winter Court: Kyuden Hida” received a much more abrasive version of this speech when they arrived for that court; Chijin’s different approach is one of the reasons he was given command of this pseudo-diplomatic posting.)

Part One: Feast of Ashes

The formal welcoming feast occurs shortly after sunset. If the PCs have attended a similar social event in the Crab lands before (such as the one in “Winter Court: Kyuden Hida”), it will be immediately apparent to them that Chijin and his staff have tried to hew more closely to the expectations of the wider Empire, but the Crab remain fundamentally the Crab, and the dinner is far more boisterous and earthy than the same experience would be in any other castle.

All around you, the main hall of Lone Candle Keep bustles with noise and activity, as row upon row of low tables have been crammed into the space, each surrounded by feasting Crab and Seppun samurai. On a low dais near the far wall, Hiruma Chijin hosts the numerous important guests who are visiting his castle – these include not only Miya Rintaro and

Seppun Biransei, but also Kaiu Utsu, the daimyo of the Kaiu family; Hiruma Meru, who lead the Crab forces at the Battle of Asahina no Shi Seido the previous summer; Hiruma Iwae, daimyo of Hissori Province; and most importantly, Hida O-Ushi, the Champion of the Crab, and Hida Tsuneo, the so-called “Stone Crab,” a returned spirit whose leadership has been widely credited with securing the southernmost Hiruma province of Kinbou over the last several months. It is in recognition of Tsuneo’s efforts that Rintaro has selected him to bear Ketsuen, and both O-Ushi and Utsu are on hand to observe and give their blessing to the transfer. It is clear that O-Ushi and Tsuneo are extremely close, talking and laughing together; similarly, observing Rintaro and Chijin makes the depth of their friendship clear as well. By contrast, Seppun Biransei seems uninterested in speaking to anyone, observing the room with an expression of vague disapproval, and Kaiu Utsu appears absorbed in his own thoughts, picking idly at his food. Hiruma Meru and Hiruma Iwae are engaged in a heated, if whispered, argument of some kind.

Rumors

During the feast, it is possible for the PCs to hear a fair amount of information about goings-on around the Empire; a **Courtier (Gossip) / Awareness** roll, TN 10; a successful roll learns one rumor at random, plus one extra rumor for every 5 points by which the roll beats the TN. (Samurai with Oath of Fealty: Hiruma Iwae receive a Free Raise on this roll.) The rumors include:

- The “close friendship” between Hida O-Ushi and Hida Tsuneo may be something more; O-Ushi’s marriage to Hida Yasamura is known to be experiencing “difficulties,” and a number of gossips whisper that the Crab Champion has turned to the Stone Crab for comfort – or at least entertainment. It is definitely true that O-Ushi has been spending a great deal of time in Kinbou province, fighting alongside Tsuneo’s forces as they work to drive the Shadowlands further back.
- Chijin’s boisterous mood, as the PCs might have noticed during his greeting at the gate, has struck several of the samurai in Lone Candle Keep as odd as well. Though normally more outgoing than most Hiruma samurai, in recent weeks the returned spirit has seemed downright chipper. By and large, the Crab seem to approve of their lord’s demeanor, as it has meant fewer and less severe punishments for minor infractions of discipline.

- As more and more returned spirits come to prominence through the Empire, the Miya Archives have begun the task of collecting a census of those who returned through Oblivion's Gate. A young courtier by the name of Miya Heikichi is leading the effort, though the scope of the task will likely prove daunting. Initial estimates indicate that somewhere between ten and fifty thousand samurai spirits may have returned to Rokugan, but the Imperial archivists seem interested in discovering something closer to the exact number.
- Around the Empire, the samurai of the Clans are once more preparing to march to battle. The fighting has been relatively contained, so far, with only the Scorpion and Mantis Clans showing signs of engaging in broader hostilities. The Lion have vowed to retake Toshi Meiyō from the Unicorn, and the Khan has indicated that he welcomes the challenge. The Crab have a stranglehold on the Asahina provinces, a situation that the Crane seem divided on how to deal with. However, the Dragon and Phoenix are rumored to be seeking a peaceful resolution to their conflict, and it is possible that the two northern Clans will not engage in further fighting this year.
- Imperial Regent Miya Mashigai is pleased to announce that her Imperial Majesty has already begun to demonstrate great promise with the martial arts. A child's practice blade has been forged for her by the Tsi family daimyō, Tsi Xing Guo, and was presented to her during Winter Court; practicing with it has since become her favorite pastime.

Once the room is filled, Chijin stands to address his samurai, and the crowd quiets enough to hear his words:

“My friends! My thanks to you all for joining us tonight. We are honored beyond words to have such auspicious and renowned guests among us; the very strength of the Crab sits alongside us tonight, in the form of our Champion, Hida O-Ushi, and her hammer against the Taint, Hida Tsuneo, the Stone Crab! It is for their sake that I welcome Miya Rintaro, my great friend, and Kaiu Utsu, our finest siege master, to my home as well! Tomorrow, Miyasama and Kaiu-sama together will return to the Hida family one of their greatest treasures – the son of Kaiu will once more give Ketsuen, the Armor of the Shadow Warrior, to the son of Hida, and the Empress' own representative will bestow her divine blessing upon the gift.”

“Ketsuen was lost in the Shadowlands for years, until it was found and cleansed of the Taint that had infected it. As such, it is only right that we, the Hiruma family, host the return of this sacred artifact to our Clan, for none know more than we of how best to appreciate what was lost to the darkness, but has since been reclaimed. For tonight, I ask only that you enjoy our food, our drink, and our company, in celebration of all that we have redeemed, all that we have torn from the grip of Fu Leng and restored to righteousness. Let us remember our fallen and honor our heroes, and most of all, let us swear once more that we will never rest until all of the lands the Hiruma once claimed as theirs are at last free of the Taint, once and for all. For the Crab! Utz!” The castle's very walls seem to rattle and shake with the cry of *“BANZAI!”* that roars forth from the throats of every Crab in the room.

Chijin seats himself, and the feast begins in earnest. While this is a Crab feast, PCs expecting drunken revelry are doomed to disappointment – south of the wall, sake is all but forbidden, and the Hiruma samurai stick exclusively to tea. PCs who wish to do so may speak, at least briefly, with all of the NPCs in the room – see Appendix II for their general dispositions. If a PC speaks to Hiruma Meru or Hiruma Iwae about what they were arguing over earlier, both samurai initially refuse to discuss it – a **Courtier (Manipulation) / Awareness** roll, TN 25, is necessary to get them to change their minds. (Vassals of either daimyō will receive two Free Raises on this roll, though they will obviously be expected to support their lord's respective viewpoint.) If successful, however, the samurai in question will admit the argument was over whether to pursue renewed advances against the Shadowlands in the northernmost Hiruma province, much as Tsuneo has managed in the south; Meru believes such an advance would likely cost the Hiruma valuable lives and resources with little hope of accomplishment, while Iwae thinks Tsuneo's successes prove the goal is achievable. Both are willing to listen to the input of outsiders on the matter, but will not change their positions.

If any PC chooses to speak with Hiruma Chijin (or with Miya Rintaro, as the two men are deeply involved in conversation), that PC may make an **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** roll, TN 30, to spot an unusual netsuke on Chijin's obi, a tiny figurine of a salamander climbing over a rock. Unlike most netsuke, which are carved from wood, this one is a polished stone, blood-red and veined with dark black lines. The Crab commander will absently touch it from time to time, and a small smile will crease his face when he does. If

a PC notices the item, Chijin quickly attempts to hide it; asking him about it produces an awkward, “It was a gift from an old friend,” which an **Investigation (Interrogation) / Awareness** roll, TN 20, confirms is a lie. The netsuke was a gift from Hida Chie (who he knows as “Hida Mebae”), but Chijin will not under any circumstances admit that fact. Rintaro also notices the lie, but the experienced courtier does not allow his surprise to show on his face, and quickly cuts off any attempts to further press Chijin on the matter.

After the meal has gone on for a time, a harried-looking Hiruma guard slips into the room from a side door and makes her way quickly to the high table, where she speaks in fierce whispers with Chijin. He looks surprised at her news, then glances with concern at O-Ushi, still laughing with Hida Tsuneo; the concern switches to resignation, however, and he merely nods and whispers what looks like an acknowledgement before the guard leaves again. Chijin watches her go, looks helplessly at Rintaro, then back to O-Ushi once again. He seems to be trying to make a decision, but before he reaches it, the main doors to the audience hall slide open, and the herald cries, “Rikugunshokan of the Reserve Army and Consort of our Clan Champion, Hida Yasamura!” as a new arrival steps into the room.

Hida Yasamura is strikingly handsome, strong and fit, with a casual grace to his movements despite the bowlegged gait that speaks to his many years on horseback. More than one usually-reserved Crab maiden has suddenly found herself giggling or sighing in his presence, but tonight, the only reaction he seems to provoke is shock. His eyes are fixed on Hida O-Ushi and Hida Tsuneo, and his expression could be carved from a block of ice. O-Ushi, for her part, turns to look back at him with narrowed, tight eyes.

In the sudden silence that chills the room, Hiruma Chijin stands up and approaches Yasamura, bowing deeply. “Hida-sama,” he begins carefully, speaking low in an attempt to maintain the appearance of privacy, “Lone Candle Keep is honored to have you visit us! Please, my lord, allow me to show you to rooms suitable for your worth-”

Yasamura cuts him off with a sharp movement of his hand. “That won’t be necessary,” the former Unicorn says in a tight voice. Unlike Chijin’s, Yasamura’s words are pitched to carry across the room. “I am certain that the rooms you’ve supplied my wife with are more than adequate for the both of us.” Rintaro raises his fan, looking away from the scene, as do many of the Seppun samurai in the room, but their display of courtly reproach is not echoed by the Crab

around you. Most look anxiously between their Champion and her husband, waiting for her response.

O-Ushi stands up, and for all that Yasamura is a head taller than she, the Champion of the Crab still seems to loom over him as their gazes lock. “Of course they are,” O-Ushi says flatly. “So go there now, husband, and wait for me. I will join you when I see fit.” Yasamura’s expression darkens even further, and he turns his glare on Tsuneo for a long moment. At last, though, he bows sharply, turns on his heel and marches out, leaving Chijin standing awkwardly in the middle of the room. After a short pause, the low hum of conversation picks up around the room again, only to be broken again moments later when O-Ushi and Tsuneo stand up from their table, make brief goodbyes to Chijin and Rintaro, then together leave the room as well.

The feast does not last much longer after this scene; most of the Crab in the room seem subdued after witnessing the dispute between their Champion and her husband, and most retire for the night in short order afterward. Once Rintaro and Biransei depart for their chambers, the Seppun bushi leave as well, and the feast comes to an uncertain end.

Part Two: No Rest for the Wicked

The atmosphere in the keep is quite tense when the PCs head for their beds that night, but at first all is quiet. Properly paranoid PCs may choose to sleep in their armor – characters without the Way of the Crab Technique or similar effects are automatically Fatigued if they sleep in heavy or riding armor, and must make an **Earth Roll**, TN 15, or be Fatigued if they sleep in light armor. Characters may sleep in ashigaru armor without penalty.

Regardless, shortly after the start of the hour of Fu Leng (midnight), the PCs are awakened by the resonant boom of a gong, thundering through the keep not once but several times. (As they have likely gone to bed no more than a few hours previously, any spent Void or used spell slots have not yet returned.) As they rouse themselves from sleep, the PCs hear shouts, pounding feet in the corridors outside, and the clash of steel on steel – the castle is under attack!

Wise PCs will begin readying themselves for battle. If a PC begins donning ashigaru, light or riding armor as soon as they awake, they have time to finish putting it on before combat begins; heavy armor, however, takes

too long to don even if they hurry, and will not be available. If a PC starts donning heavy armor as soon as they awaken, they will be partially done when the combat begins – this grants them a +5 bonus to Armor TN and only 3 points of Reduction, with the usual +5 to all Agility- and Reflexes-based TNs for heavy armor (Techniques or other abilities that reduce or ignore the TN bonus for heavy armor affect this penalty as usual).

For several long moments, you sit tensely in your rooms, listening to the sounds of fighting outside while you wait for the all-clear signal. Suddenly, a signal arrow flashes – but it is blue, not yellow. There are Shadowlands creatures within the keep!

Presumably, the PCs step out into the corridor to join the fight. (Not doing so will entail substantial losses in Glory, Honor and Status, regardless of who the character is. Fighting the Shadowlands is one of the most basic duties of a samurai, and in many ways the justification for their very existence. This is not an optional thing.) As soon as they do, they see how deeply the attacking forces have penetrated: at the end of the corridor, a swarm of goblins, accompanied by two oni, are just finishing the disembowelment of the two Hiruma guards stationed there.

There is one goblin for each combat-capable PC, plus two oni. The goblins, carrying vicious-looking short blades and wearing cobbled-together armor, are of a heavier build than a typical goblin and have stony, slate-grey skin instead of the usual putrescent green; the oni, on the other hand, are massive, slug-like creatures whose length is twice the height of a man, their thick hides covered in sharp, spiky scales and their heads surrounded by a halo of eight thrashing tentacles. A **Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** roll, TN 15, identifies the goblins as mountain goblins, a reclusive variant on the usual species known for having minor regenerative capabilities. A separate **Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** roll, TN 30, recognizes the oni as ashi no oni, mountain-dwelling, territorial oni with a potent poison. Making either roll also reveals that each species is notoriously inclined toward solitude, and seeing them working together like this is essentially unheard-of (as oni, ashi no oni may be summoned, but mountain goblins are highly territorial and do not normally venture out of their homes).

The corridor itself is fairly narrow, but the oni and goblins will not allow little things like thin paper and wooden screens to stop them, so they will quickly tear through the keep's inner walls on their way toward Rintaro's room and their ultimate target: Ketsuen. Seppun Biransei will briefly appear in the hallway, but as soon as he sees the oncoming monstrosities, he cuts

his way through the wall and into Rintaro's room to defend the shisha – he will not join the fight unless the attackers manage to reach Rintaro's rooms.

During the fight, one of the ashi no oni will eschew combat and attempt to use the chaos of the fight and ensuing debris as cover for sneaking past the PCs, heading directly for Ketsuen. Despite their size, ashi no oni are surprisingly skilled at stealth – one of the reasons their master chose them for this mission to begin with, in fact. Have each PC make an **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** roll, TN 25, during each Reactions Stage – if successful, that PC may attack the sneaking ashi no oni with ranged attacks or spells during the following Round, or can move to directly engage it in melee. Unless the PC is in melee range of the ashi no oni, however, they risk losing sight of the oni for the next Round unless they make the same roll during the next Reactions Stage. The goblins and the other oni attempt to engage the PCs directly, trying to distract them from the feint. It takes the ashi no oni three Rounds of movement to reach Rintaro's rooms and claim the Armor of the Shadow Warrior, and another two Rounds to retreat with it. Obviously, any Rounds spent fighting the PCs do not count toward this total. If they are engaged in melee, they will prefer to eliminate a threat over retreating, using their poison to slow attackers or drop them outright.

Mountain Goblins

| | | | |
|------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Air 1 | Earth 3 | Fire 2 | Water 1 |
| Reflexes 3 | | Agility 3 | Strength 3 |

Armor TN: 10 (in Full Attack) **Reduction:** 5

Attack: 6k4 (claws, Complex, in Full Attack) or 8k4 (scrap-forged blade, Complex, in Full Attack) **Damage:** 4k2 (claws) or 6k2 (scrap-forged blade)

Initiative: 4k3

Taint Rank: 3

Powers/Weaknesses: *Skills:* Kenjutsu 3, Stealth 4

Night Vision: Mountain goblins can see equally well in near-darkness as in normal light

Regeneration: Mountain goblins heal 5 Wounds during the Reactions Stage of each Round, continuing to heal until they are killed. They can reattach a severed limb in two rounds, as long as the limb and the stump are held together continuously during that time.

Scrounged Weapons: The poorly-made blades the goblins carry are mechanically equivalent to parangu, including their frailty; the blades will break if they deal more than 30 Wounds in a single attack.

Swift 2

Wounds: 10: +5; 20: +10; 35: Dead

turns and walks out. Tsuneo looks after her, frowning, before turning quickly back to Rintaro and Utsu and saying, *“I am honored by this recognition. I do not accept it for myself, but as a tool to use in service to the Empire.”* Turning on his heel, he strides quickly after O-Ushi. Yasamura watches the two of them leave, then with a distracted bow, also departs through a different door.

Utsu just shakes his head at O-Ushi’s rudeness, but Rintaro looks furious. After a brief moment, though, the shisha masters his face and bows with great officiousness to Utsu. *“My thanks for your help in this matter, Kaiu-san,”* Rintaro says solicitously. *“I believe, however, that there is another issue that should be addressed? Might I and my associates”* – he gestures at the PCs – *“have a moment of your time today?”*

The siege master frowns, but nods after a moment’s consideration. *“Chijin’s office, in one hour.”*

Rintaro nods agreeably before turning to the PCs and instructing them, *“Join us there in an hour. Be prepared to travel.”*

A Simple Task

The meeting, when it occurs, involves Miya Rintaro, Kaiu Utsu, Seppun Biransei and the PCs. When they arrive, the PCs discover that Utsu has seated himself behind Chijin’s desk, his large frame dominating the space. Rintaro has commandeered a servant to bring a tea set, and wordlessly begins a ceremony for himself, Utsu and the PCs – Biransei demurs with courteous words that contrast with his impatient tone. Instead, while Rintaro carefully pours, Biransei paces restlessly, trying and failing to be unobtrusive. (Sadly, this means that the ceremony produces no meaningful mechanical benefits.)

Once the ceremony is done, Utsu nods his appreciation. “My thanks for that, Miya-san. But we must now turn our attention to your business. My time is likely to be extremely precious in the near future. What do you need of me?”

“Of course, Kaiu-sama,” Rintaro replies. “I wish to speak of my dear friend Hiruma Chijin, and his sorrowful fate last night.” Biransei looks as though he’s just bitten into a lemon, and Utsu shakes his head.

“Miya-san,” Utsu rumbles in reply, “Chijin’s disappearance is a terrible loss, but you’re going to

have to look long and hard to find a Crab who will feel any sorrow over it. I’ve looked at his room myself, and I can tell you he fought back against the monsters that took him. However, I’ve also seen yesterday’s patrol schedule. The single biggest reason your sleep last night was disrupted by oni and goblins rampaging through our halls was that Chijin altered two patrol schedules yesterday morning, opening a gap in our intelligence the Tainted creatures exploited. To me, that says Chijin was compromised, whether he knew it or not. Unfortunately, it says something else to the beasts of the Shadowlands: it says we are weak. It says we are vulnerable. I’ve already doubled the number of active scouts we have on patrol and expanded our perimeter. There’s almost certainly another force out there – the bastards can never resist an easy-looking target.”

Rintaro looks a little pale at this, but his response is smooth. “I understand your concerns, Kaiu-sama,” the Miya replies. “Your defensive skills are nothing short of legend. However, Chijin-san was an old and dear friend of mine, and a valuable asset to the Crab. Would it not be worth at least finding out why he was kidnapped rather than simply killed? Perhaps it might not even be too much to hope for a rescue?”

Biransei snorts, turning to cut in. “Miya-sama, please. The best we can say about Chijin right now is that he might have been a complete fool who left both his castle and himself open to assault and ruin. More likely, he’s a Tainted traitor. With luck, the idiot’s enjoying the view from inside an ogre’s belly. There’s nothing to be gained from a ‘rescue’ except the risk of more people dying to this man’s stupidity.”

Utsu looks annoyed by Biransei’s intrusion, but nods in agreement. “Your miharu is correct,” the Kaiu states bluntly. “We lack the resources and manpower to mount such a rescue even if it proved to be worthwhile. I will not allow this castle to fall. We must hold until O-Ushi and Tsuneo return with reinforcements.”

“I understand,” answers Rintaro easily. He seems unsurprised by the refusal, and Biransei, apparently aware of what is coming next, looks even more annoyed than he did before. “But the worthy samurai who defended myself and Ketsuen last night – they are no part of your plans, am I right? They could certainly undertake this task with no risk to the castle, and if I were to wait here until they returned, my own personal guard would naturally serve alongside your men if the castle were to be attacked.” Kaiu Utsu blinks in surprise, while Biransei – still pacing – visibly stifles an expression of outrage.

The PCs are free to comment at this point, but the conclusion of the discussion is essentially set: Rintaro orders them to follow the trail of the retreating Shadowlands creatures and locate Hiruma Chijin. ***“Bring him back if he is still alive, and recover his blades if he is not,”*** the Miya says. After a long pause and a significant look from Utsu, Rintaro adds, ***“Should you find that he has fallen to the Taint, see to it that he can threaten the Empire no longer.”*** The shisha clearly does not care for the thought, but Utsu looks much more satisfied.

Even with that concession, however, Utsu refuses to allow a group of unprepared samurai to cross the Hiruma lands, let alone enter the Shadowlands proper, which he expects will be the end result of the quest. Utsu’s definition of “prepared” in this context is as follows: at least one PC must have 3 ranks in each of the following Skills – Lore: Shadowlands, Investigation, Hunting and Stealth. These Skills do not need to all be possessed by a single PC, but for each Skill, there must be at least one PC in the group that possesses it at the required rank. (Ranks from multiple PCs are not cumulative for this purpose.) If the group cannot meet the required minimums, Utsu assigns them a guide, a scout named Hiruma Mei. (The PCs may have met her previously in the adventure “Flee From Tomorrow;” if so, she nods a polite if distant greeting in recognition.) Mei is a competent scout; she will speak as little as possible and do her utmost to escort the PCs safely through the dangers of the Shadowlands.

In addition, the Crab give one finger of jade (enough for 7 days’ travel through the Shadowlands), one week’s worth of Shadowlands-ready rations, and one pouch of jade dust (applied to a melee weapon, it allows the first attack made after application to ignore or reduce the Reduction of a Shadowlands creature as though the weapon were made of jade; this requires a Complex Action) to any PC who does not already have such gear. Any PC who wishes may also requisition a mundane weapon or ashigaru or light armor from the Lone Candle armory; these items will need to be returned upon completion of the mission, as will any unused jade items the PCs take with them.

The Armor Lost

If the PCs could not keep the Shadowlands forces from capturing Ketsuen, then the morning’s events happen much differently. Obviously, there is no hand-over ceremony for the armor – instead, the PCs hear that Tsuneo and O-Ushi left to return to Kinbou province at dawn to gather a larger force for a counter-assault,

while Yasamura rode north toward the Wall and his post in the Shinomen Forest shortly afterward. They are then summoned to a meeting with Utsu, Biransei and Rintaro, where Rintaro argues for giving the PCs the chance to redeem themselves by recovering the armor and potentially rescuing Chijin as well. It is not clear which goal Rintaro is more set on accomplishing – clearly he wants both the armor and the Hiruma back if possible. The end result of the discussion is the same, however: the PCs are sent into the Shadowlands to retrieve what has been taken.

Part Four: The Long Walk

As their instructions were to “be prepared to travel,” Rintaro expects the PCs to leave as soon as they have been given their equipment by the Crab. Mei, if she is present, is also ready to go as soon as she appears, and has no interest in wasting time while the trail goes cold. The PCs should set out at once.

Following the trail of the retreating Shadowlands force is not difficult, at least to begin with. There were not a great many survivors, but the pale, lifeless dust of the Hiruma lands does little to hide the tracks of those that did retreat. Indeed, if it were not for the never-ceasing wind, it seems possible that the tracks might last months or even years in the dry earth. A **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** check, TN 10, is all that is needed to stay on course during the first day’s travel. (It can be assumed that Mei will succeed at this roll if the PCs somehow do not.)

After several long hours of fast-paced march, you finally see something ahead to break the monotony of endless chalk-grey hills and gritty, restless wind: a low line of scrub, interspersed with the occasional small, twisted tree. Beyond that line, thin stalks of sickly grass push up through the broken soil, and here and there hints of color, mostly dark greens, browns and yellows, appear in the landscape. The land ahead looks almost lush in comparison to the harsh drabness of the Hiruma provinces, but it is impossible to ignore a sense of wrongness about it as well, an eerie sensation that crawls over your skin, a whiff of something foul and decaying on the breeze.

The changed terrain ahead is, in fact, the beginning of the Shadowlands proper, and anyone with any Lore: Shadowlands recognizes that fact immediately. As Lord Sun has almost set, it would be wise for the PCs to make camp on this side of that uncertain line, and if Mei is present she argues in the strongest possible terms for such a decision. At this point, the PCs are likely about half a day’s travel behind the retreating forces – if

any PCs argue for pushing ahead, Mei will point out that the dangers of the Shadowlands rarely have qualms about turning on each other, so it's likely that the assault leaders are ordering camp be made at that same moment. If they insist on pressing on in the night, each PC must make an Earth Roll, TN 10, or become Fatigued. They will also suffer -3k3 to all Perception rolls made to track the Shadowlands force due to the darkness. This penalty can be reduced to -1k1 by carrying lanterns or torches, but the light of the flame will attract attention the same way that a failed Hunting roll does (see below).

Traveling Through the Shadowlands

Once the PCs enter the Shadowlands, they must deal with the many terrible effects of that corrupted land. While in the Shadowlands, characters do not naturally heal Wounds or recover Void Points, although Medicine and Meditation rolls work normally. Spellcasting is also more difficult, as the kami of the Empire are unwilling to expose themselves to the Taint; increase the TN of any spell cast within the Shadowlands by +10. On the other hand, it is extremely easy to contact a kansen here: any time a shugenja casts a spell, a kansen will appear and offer to assist the spellcasting. In exchange for 1 point of Taint per Raise, the kansen can and will supply Free Raises to the Spell Casting roll, up to a maximum number of Raises equal to the caster's relevant Ring. These Raises can be applied after the Spell Casting roll has been made, which can convert a failed roll into a successful one. Maho tsukai are made the same offer, of course, and most are more than willing to take the kansen up on their "generosity."

Finally, being so close to Jigoku's touch is inherently risky. Should a PC be within the Shadowlands without jade, they must make a TN 10 Earth Roll each day to avoid gaining 1 point of Taint. Similarly, eating or drinking any food or water found within the Shadowlands provokes an Earth Roll at TN 20; Crab rations have been specially prepared with trace amounts of jade dust to resist corruption, but other rations are corrupted and dangerous within a day of being brought into the Shadowlands. If a character is wounded within the Shadowlands, they must make a TN 10 Earth Roll to resist the Taint as well (the TN is 15 if it is a natural weapon, such as a claw or fang, of a Shadowlands creature); by pressing a finger of jade to the wound within a minute of taking it the character can receive a +10 bonus to the roll, but doing so counts as a day of exposure for the purposes of determining how long the jade finger protects its bearer against the Taint. Jade powder, such as the Crab use to strengthen their

weapons against oni and other powerful Shadowlands creatures, can be used to treat wounds the same way, but doing so renders the powder useless thereafter. Failing any of these rolls causes the character to gain 1 point of Taint.

Once the PCs enter the Shadowlands, they must make a TN 25 **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll to continue following the traces of the fleeing attackers. An **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** roll, TN 30, works as well, as Hiruma Chijin has contrived to drop pieces of his armor and some personal belongings along the way in hopes of aiding a rescue party. If she is present, Hiruma Mei can and will make these rolls on behalf of the group – that is, after all, why she is along. She will also point out the trail that Chijin is leaving, though she hesitates to speculate on its reason.

If the PCs fail the roll, they have encountered one of the many terrible threats of the Shadowlands as they wander through the territory. This could be a small tribe of goblins, a flock of hanemuri (flying lizards the size of crows), a stand of lava trees, a wandering minor oni or a stranger threat. Feel free to describe a suitable obstacle. Mechanically, the PCs must each make a **Defense / Reflexes** roll, TN 25 (remembering to apply the penalty from Fatigue, heavy armor, and so on); anyone who fails this roll suffers 2k2 Wounds. Reduction applies as usual to the damage, but anyone who fails will be potentially exposed to the Taint. It can be assumed that the PCs deal with the threat and move on, but they must make another Hunting or Investigation roll in order to pick up the trail, with the same consequences for failure.

A Hard Rain

The trail continues to head southeast, gaining height as it leads into one of the many small mountain ranges of the Shadowlands. Perhaps an hour before sunset, the sky begins to darken with unsettling rapidity, massive slate-grey clouds rushing over the peaks to the west as if blown by the fury of Fu Leng himself. Within five minutes, the light of Lord Sun has completely vanished, darkening the world as if it were the deepest twilight – but bright flashes of lightning halo the mountains, illuminating dark sheets of rain rushing toward the group, chased by ceaseless roars of thunder.

A **Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** roll, TN 15, is enough for any PC to know that being doused with Tainted water is extremely dangerous in terms of acquiring the Taint; moreover, water in the lands of the Ninth Kami is rarely clean and wholesome, and can often be dangerous in its own right. Mei, if she is

present, turns pale in the glow of the distant lightning, shouting, “We must find shelter at once, samurai! Hurry, for your souls!” The fast-moving rain will be on the PCs in mere minutes.

The craggy rocks around the PCs hold many spots that can shelter them – unfortunately, the abrupt gloom that has swallowed them makes finding such spots difficult. It requires a **Hunting (Survival) / Perception** roll, TN 15, to locate a suitable spot, but the darkness inflicts a -2k2 penalty on the roll. This penalty can be overcome with lanterns or torches, but unless they were already lit – perhaps in response to the first mention of the oncoming darkness – taking the time to light them increases the TN of the first Athletics roll by +5.

Once a suitable location, most likely a shallow cave, has been found, an **Athletics (Climbing or Running) / Water** roll, TN 15, is necessary to reach its shelter before the rains arrive. If at least one character finds a shelter on their first attempt and all the PCs make the Athletics roll, no one takes any damage or suffers any Taint. However, if it takes more than two rolls for the PCs to locate and reach the shelter, any PC who has not gotten under cover after the second roll suffers 1k1 Wounds from the first wash of rain, which turns out to be acidic. If they have not succeeded after the third roll, they suffer an additional 2k1 Wounds. If they have not succeeded after the fourth roll, they suffer 2k2 more Wounds and must resist acquiring the Taint with an Earth roll, TN 20. Every subsequent failure inflicts an additional 2k2 Wounds and provokes another Earth roll. (Assume Mei fails the first Hunting roll, makes the second if necessary – allowing the PCs to begin running for the cave – and succeeds on both her Athletics roll and her Earth roll to resist the Taint. She will take the 1k1 Wounds, though, if no one finds the cave on the first try.)

Characters who suffer the 2k2 Wounds might also suffer damage to fragile objects they are carrying and the GM’s discretion; hardy objects like steel and armor are safe, but paper or fine silk are not likely to survive. (Spell scrolls are usually stored in tightly-woven satchels, tough enough to withstand the rain for a few minutes with nothing more than cosmetic damage.) Similarly, using umbrellas or cloaks as improvised cover against the rain might, at the GM’s discretion, be worth 1-3 points of Reduction, but will result in the destruction of the item as well. Once everyone reaches the cave, they are safe – for the moment, anyway.

Outside, the rains hiss and splash, causing the stone itself to smoke slightly at the edges of the puddles that form. Even over the roar of the thunder and the hissing, pounding raindrops, you can hear the howls

of some Shadowlands creature burning in agony out in the storm.

There is little to do but make camp and wait out the storm. Fortunately, the PCs face almost no risk of intrusion on their camp while the rains fall – only the hardest of oni and Lost can face these acid rains with equanimity. At this point, anyone who took Wounds from the rain should roll to resist Taint with an Earth roll at TN 10 – though a PC who was forced to make one or more TN 20 rolls during the rain need not roll now. Otherwise, the night passes uneventfully, disturbed only by the hissing of the acid rain and uneasy dreams.

The Takesasu

The next morning dawns slowly, the heavy clouds overhead still reluctant to let any sunlight through, and samurai who might have been hoping for the refreshing feeling the air sometimes has after a heavy rain are in for a serious disappointment. The air is rank, filled with an acrid stench that burns the nose and eyes as it is breathed (this has no mechanical impact, but is decidedly uncomfortable). The PCs also discover that the rains have washed away or corroded many of the traces they were following – however, the tight mountain passages are such that there are fewer directions the attackers might have gone, and the net result is something of a wash. The PCs must still make a TN 25 **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** or a TN 30 **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** roll in order to proceed, and failure has the same consequence as before.

The path the PCs must follow climbs for most of the morning, then levels out as it reaches the first of a pair of narrow passes that cut through the range here. The terrain is rocky and uneven, and only low bushes and scraggly vines dig into the soil. On the far side of the range is the Black Finger River, and Mei comments, if present, that if the trail crosses the river there will be no chance to follow it – samurai who go beyond the Black Finger rarely return, and then only as powerful Lost.

As they begin making their way through the first pass, the PCs must make **Perception (Notice) / Investigation** rolls. If any PC makes a TN 40, they recognize the danger they are about to encounter before it can strike at them and can avoid it. If no one reaches that level of success, however, the PCs must deal with one of the most subtle threats in the Shadowlands: the takesasu bulb.

A takesasu bulb is a Shadowlands plant comprised of a single, dry stalk, about five feet high, with a dangling vine at the top that ends in a tightly-closed bulb. A single sharp thorn protrudes from the bulb. To the untrained eye, the takesasu looks like a dead or dying flower, its brittle petals curled up; in truth, though, the bulb holds a potent poison and vicious supply of digestive acids. The takesasu senses nearby prey, strikes out with its thorn and paralyzes its victim with its venom; once the victim is caught, the takesasu injects its digestive acids into its prey's body, which slowly dissolve it from the inside and allow the takesasu to absorb the nutrients.

Determine who the takesasu attacks randomly. If its victim reached a TN 25 on the initial roll to spot the takesasu, they recognize the danger in enough time to defend themselves normally; otherwise, however, they are considered unaware of the attack, and their Armor TN is just 5 + their armor bonus. If no PCs made the TN 40, they do not recognize the threat in time to take any actions or assume any Stance before the takesasu attacks. Assume that Mei misses the TN 40 but makes the TN 25 to spot the takesasu.

Takesasu

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|--|---------|
| Air 0 | Earth 1 | Fire 0 | Water 1 |
| Reflexes 1 | | Agility 3 | |
| Armor TN: 5 | | Reduction: 10 | |
| Attack: 4k3 (Thorn, Complex) | | Damage: 1k1 plus poison (thorn) | |
| Initiative: 2k1 | | | |
| Taint Rank: 5 | | | |
| Wounds: 5: Dead | | | |

Powers/Weaknesses: *Acid Blast:* When a takesasu is destroyed, its acid reservoir bursts explosively, showering everyone within 5 feet with acid that deals 2k2 Wounds.

Poison/Acid Attack: If its attack is successful, the takesasu's barbed thorn pierces the skin and becomes attached to the victim, dealing 1k1 Wounds and injecting its paralytic toxin. The victim must make an Earth roll, TN 25, or be paralyzed and completely unable to take actions of any kind. Each following Round, unless the stinger is removed (requiring a Contested Agility roll), the takesasu will continue to inject its acids into the victim's flesh, dealing 2k1 Wounds. Once the stinger has been removed, the paralysis will wear off in a few minutes (typically 10 – the target's Stamina Rank in minutes), but the victim will remain weak and shaky for an hour, suffering -1k1 to all rolls.

Vulnerability: The takesasu is easily burned, due to its dry composition. Any fire-based attack, whether mundane or magical, deals an extra 1k1 Wounds to it and ignore its Reduction.

This particular plant has been intentionally cultivated by the Shadowlands forces that have taken the fallen castle as their base. While it is by no means a reliable sentry, it has kept incidental minor creatures away and the survivors of the attack knew to avoid it. Should the PCs deal with the plant in a particularly spectacular fashion (a Fire spell with a great deal of violent fire, for example), the GM may give them a penalty to their Stealth Rolls to penetrate the camp in the following scene.

Act Five: The Lair of the Lost

About half an hour after the PCs move on after dealing with the takesasu (and, if it successfully poisoned anyone, while the victim is still dealing with the aftereffects of the toxin), they reach the second pass through the mountains, and their goal is suddenly in sight:

Ahead of you, the pass widens out into a broad bowl, nearly three miles long and half that wide, with sharp-edged mountains clawing at the sky on either side. At the far end of the pass, where the steep slopes come together again, the crumbling ruins of a fortress still keep broken guard over the passage. What was clearly once a Hiruma castle in the days before the Maw and the fall of the family's provinces has now become a den of corruption, for all around it, spilling down the slopes and across much of the pass, is camped a Shadowlands army, a roiling cauldron of goblins, Lost samurai, ogres and oni. Several thousand strong at the least, it is a force to hammer even the Wall itself, and it is evident from a moment's glance that it is preparing to march. Already a handful of units have formed up behind twisted, disturbing banners and are snaking their way across the floor of the pass toward your vantage, and more assemble every minute.

The slopes of the pass are boulder-strewn and covered with bushes and small trees – more than enough cover for the PCs to get within a few hundred yards of the camp without being seen by the largely-incompetent goblin sentries. While they skirt the floor of the valley, they see a continual stream of Shadowlands units making their way north; by the time they get close enough to the army to see what is happening within the camp, a majority of the force has already mobilized.

The best vantage spot is atop a small cliff on the western edge of the pass, screened by some thankfully harmless, if twisted and repulsive, trees. From that

spot, the PCs can easily make out the tent of the army commander, the largest of the tents used by the Lost bushi present, and another tent not far away that is guarded by two vigilant Lost warriors. It is the only tent with such protection, and a **Battle / Intelligence** roll, TN 15, confirms that it is in a traditional spot for a prisoner's tent – at least, if this were a Rokugani army camp. Even as they recognize it as such, a massive Lost bushi – larger even than most Crab – steps out of the commander's tent and pushes his way inside the holding tent. Even from where they watch, the PCs can hear the screaming begin. (Note: if the PCs failed to protect Ketsuen at Lone Candle Keep, the Lost bushi is wearing the Armor of the Shadow Warrior as well.)

At this point, the PCs have several options. Clearly, this is a force that threatens Rokugan and is already moving north – given that it is connected to the attack on Lone Candle Keep, the PCs will likely assume, quite correctly, that this army represents the “greater attack” Utsu warned them of before they left. Some will likely want to return to warn their superiors of the threat. However, their duty is to recover or kill Hiruma Chijin (and possibly reclaim the Armor of the Shadow Warrior as well); it is not to act as scouts for the Crab Clan. Characters who return to the Hiruma lands without attempting to complete their mission may suffer a loss of Honor for turning away from their Duty – characters of Honor Rank 6 or higher will lose 1 point of Honor for such a failure of duty, while Honor 8 characters will lose 3 points and Honor 10 characters will lose 5. If they choose to return, go ahead to “Part Six: The Candle in the Dark.”

On the other hand, if Hiruma Mei is present, she can and will return on her own to deliver the warning; as a Hiruma Scout, this is her duty, and she will volunteer to perform it without hesitation. This will allow the PCs to attempt their mission while knowing a warning is being delivered.

Finally, if the PCs wish, they can split up. This is an exceptionally dangerous course, as it will weaken them against their enemies within the army camp and also expose those returning ahead of the army to greater dangers – see “Divided We Fall” below for the possible consequences.

Into the Fire

If the PCs decide to attempt the rescue, they face two challenges: first, they must reach the prisoner tent, and second, they must battle the guards and Chijin's torturer in order actually free him. Obviously, the first step requires some stealth – a **Battle / Perception** roll, TN

20, determines that the total force assembled here is more than 4000 warriors, including 2500 goblins, 1500 Lost bushi, perhaps 100 ogres and about two dozen oni of varying types and potency. Even though half of these warriors are already moving, a frontal assault is simple suicide.

Reaching the tent requires a Cooperative Stealth Skill Roll; each PC must attempt a **Stealth (Sneaking) / Agility** roll, TN 20, to reach the tent unseen, but gains a bonus to the total of their roll equal to the highest Stealth Skill in the group. If the PCs wait until nightfall to attempt the infiltration, they gain two Free Raises on the roll (but remember that a character must still possess at least one Rank in the Skill to gain the benefits of a Free Raise, so spending Void to gain the Skill might be required). If all the PCs make the roll, they may either enter the tent unseen (perhaps by cutting through the silk wall on the opposite side from the door) or make an attack against the unaware guards; if the guards survive until their next action after the attacks begin, they raise the alarm, however.

If, on the other hand, at least one PC fails the roll or refuses to make it for the sake of Honor, the guards spot them just before they can reach the tent. They immediately raise the alarm and move to attack the PCs. If the alarm is raised, the three Lost bushi inside the tent immediately assume the Center Stance; they remain in that stance for three Rounds, before Hidoi sends the other two out to check on things during the Reactions Stage of Round Three. If the battle has not reached him by then, Hidoi exits the tent during the Reactions Stage of Round Five. Moreover, once the alarm has gone up, two more Lost soldiers appear during the Reactions Stage of Round Two, and an additional two bushi appear during every even-numbered Round that follows until the PCs flee the area.

Once the PCs enter the tent, they find a horrific scene: Hiruma Chijin has been tied, face-up, across an anvil, his arms and legs bent almost completely underneath him and his back arched painfully across the unyielding iron. Mercifully unconscious for the moment, he wears nothing but a loincloth, and every inch of visible skin is covered in fresh or dried blood, vicious cuts or blackened burns. He is the center of a circle cut into the bare earth floor of the tent, with foul sigils marked into it at various points. A character with 1 Rank in Lore: Maho or who makes a **Spellcraft or Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** roll, TN 30, recognizes the summoning circle for an oni – such a character can also tell that, thus far, the intended name for the oni has not been scribed into the ritual.

Powers/Weaknesses: *Lost:* Cannot spend Void Points, adds 5 to the total of all rolls using a physical Trait.

Blackened Claws: Gains claws with DR 2k3, but must make Willpower Roll, TN 10, to fight with anything but the claws.

Blessing of the Dark One: Adds +3 Wounds to each Wound Rank.

Skills: Athletics 1, Battle 1, Hunting 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Jiu-jitsu 1, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Kyujutsu 1, Lore: Shadowlands 1, Stealth 2.

Mastery Abilities: Adds +1k0 to damage with swords

Advantages/Disadvantages: n/a

Chijin's Fate

The bonds holding Chijin do not lend themselves well to easy removal in the middle of pitched combat, but a PC may take a Complex Action to remove his head (with an appropriate weapon).

If the PCs defeat Hidoi and his minions, it is a fairly simple matter to cut Chijin's bonds and escape with him – the camp is in an uproar at the death of its general, and while the army continues to march toward the north, it is suddenly much more disorganized and unfocused. Reaching the relative safety of their earlier hiding place is not difficult. Unfortunately, progress beyond that is more troubling; it is clear from the extent of his injuries that Chijin will be hard-pressed to travel far with any speed. He has suffered 67 Wounds and is Down; he must be healed at least 15 Wounds in order to be able to walk under his own power, but it is likely he won't be back to full health until he returns to the Empire – if indeed he ever does. There is also the matter of the Taint to consider. Though Chijin does not react to the touch of jade at the time he is rescued, it is possible, even likely, that the seeds of darkness have already been planted in him.

Regardless, a few minutes after the PCs escape the camp, Chijin regains consciousness. He groans and his eyes flutter open, but it takes a few moments for him to remember where he is and what he's been through. Eventually, though, he admits what happened.

“I... I fell prey to the sin of desire. There was a woman, a samurai-ko named Hida Mebae, who came to the keep perhaps a month ago. She did not stay long, but in the time she was there she managed to capture my heart. We exchanged letters, and she sent me gifts... I spent three years in Meido, samuraisans, and it was a shock to me that I could feel anything like that again once I returned from the Realm of Waiting. The day before the attack, she wrote me, told me that she was bringing a supply of

earth from north of the Wall to a spot just out of sight of the castle; she wanted us to build a garden there where we could meet in private. She told me that it would be risky – that my scouts might find it – but that it would be worth it for the chance to have some beauty around us. Naturally, I changed my scouts' patrols without a second thought. It never occurred to me there would be another reason...”

“Even when she was in front of me, her monsters all around and her blade in her hand, I couldn't kill her. Instead, she struck me down and... Next I knew, I was being tortured by that Lost general, Hidoi; he kept switching between ranting about how I needed to surrender my will to Jigoku and grant his oni a name and demanding to know where Mebae was – although he called her 'Chie.' I think... I think I was not the only one she used and cast aside.”

Chijin's description of “Hida Mebae” exactly matches that of Hida Chie, a point that any PCs who met Chie during “Winter Court: Kyuden Hida” will recognize. Even if told about Chie's abilities as a seductress and manipulator, however, Chijin is fully aware of the depth of his failure. His preference is to commit seppuku at once, with the PC with the highest Honor Rank standing as his second. However, should a PC attempt to persuade him to live and continue aiding the Crab, they may do so with a **Sincerity / Awareness** roll, TN 25; at their discretion, the GM may grant Free Raises for particularly persuasive arguments, or increase the TN by up to 10 for counterproductive arguments.. (This is, of course, the outcome Rintaro specifically ordered.) Unless persuaded not to kill himself, Chijin is adamant that he not be a burden to the PCs while they return and insists on committing seppuku at once. Only if he is fully healed (perhaps through the Regrow the Wound spell) can he be convinced to wait; good roleplaying or a **Sincerity / Awareness** roll, TN 15, can allow this.

Unless the PCs talk him out of it, though, Chijin requests an hour to prepare himself, time he spends in prayer and meditation, before he performs the seppuku ritual. A pragmatic Crab to the end, he offers no final haiku, setting himself and undertaking the three cuts with a fixed, almost stoic expression. Unless substantially healed, Chijin is unable to finish the rite on his own, requiring his second to take his head; regardless, beheading is necessary to prevent him from rising from the dead afterward. The PCs can then collect his daisho and ready themselves to leave.

Back to the Empire

Once Chijin's life or death is settled, the PCs must return to the Empire, avoiding the dangers they overcame on the way in, as well as the army that is even now advancing ahead of them. Fortunately, as it is a route they already know, it is much easier. Have each PC make a TN 25 roll of **Hunting (Survival) / Perception, Stealth / Agility, Lore: Shadowlands Intelligence, and Investigation (Notice) / Perception**. (If Hiruma Mei is present when the PCs return, she can make the rolls as well.) As long as at least one PC makes each roll, there is no ill effect and the group returns safely to the Hiruma lands, two days after leaving the ruined Hiruma tower. If no one in the party manages to hit the TN of one of the rolls, though, everyone in the group suffers Wounds equal to the amount by which the person with the highest roll failed the TN (i.e., if the highest roll on the Stealth / Agility roll was 22, all the PCs would suffer 3 Wounds). Once all four rolls have been made, total the number of Wound Levels each PC suffered from failed rolls. For each Wound Level, that PC must roll their Earth Ring, TN 10, or suffer a point of Taint. (As before, a character can use 1 "day" of their jade finger to gain a +10 to this roll.)

As they travel, the PCs find evidence that the advancing horde is crumbling without Hidoi to hold it together – by the time it has crossed into the Hiruma provinces themselves, most of the goblins, roughly a third of the total force, have wandered off, turned to fighting among themselves, or otherwise been distracted from the task at hand. Once the PCs arrive at Lone Candle Keep, see the Conclusion for details of what they find.

Divided We Fall

Should the PCs choose to separate themselves in order to warn Kaiu Utsu about the attack, they run a greater risk of danger both in rescuing Chijin and in making their way back to the Empire. With fewer warriors, the battle against Hidoi will be even more difficult; with fewer people to aid one another in traveling across the Shadowlands, the risks are much greater. If the PCs cross the Shadowlands in more than one group, each separate group must roll as described above in "Back to the Empire;" rolls are not shared across the separate parties. If a PC makes it back to the Empire to warn Utsu while others remain to attempt the rescue of Chijin, assume that PC delivers their message and participates in the defense of Lone Candle Keep, but do not attempt to run the mass battle encounter unless time permits.

Act Six: The Candle in the Dark

If the PCs choose to leave Chijin to his fate when they discover what is coming for Lone Candle Keep, preferring instead to try to reach Lone Candle Keep before the Shadowlands army, they should be able to do so – if they leave as soon as they recognize the threat, they can stay ahead of the main body and even gain some distance against the slower-moving larger force. The PCs must make the same rolls listed above in "Back to the Empire," but as long as they survive them, the PCs reach Lone Candle Keep with perhaps two hours to spare before the horde arrives.

As soon as the PCs return, they are immediately summoned to speak with Kaiu Utsu and Miya Rintaro in the office that was once Chijin's. The usually-composed shisha looks much less in control of the situation than he usually does, while Utsu seems to fit the room much more than he did just a few days before. Though it is clear Rintaro would like to demand answers as soon as the PCs arrive, protocol requires that Utsu be given the first opportunity to speak. However, all the siege master says is, "Report, samurai-sans."

Hiruma Mei does not offer her version of events unless the PCs tell a lie that she recognizes as such; otherwise, she prefers to stay very much in the background. Once the PCs have told their story, Utsu nods, then turns to look at Rintaro. The Miya is clearly upset about Chijin's loss, though trying to hide it – even if the PCs have already explained why they chose to leave rather than attempt the rescue, he demands an explanation again. "Your instructions were clear, samurai – why did you simply ignore them?" There is really nothing the PCs can say to ameliorate Rintaro's frustration, particularly if the PCs also lost Ketsuen and chose not to recover it either.

Utsu, however, is more interested in the Crab as a whole than the fate of one samurai, and cuts Rintaro off after just a few moments. *"Miya-san, if we live to see the sunrise tomorrow, you may have these samurai to thank for it. Including the Seppun guard under the command of Biransei-san, we have roughly eight hundred bushi to hold this fortress against an army five times as large – and without dishonor meant to Biransei-san's forces, they are not Crab, and will not handle the battle as well as those who have trained their entire lives to face the horde of Fu Leng. There is no way we can hold this keep for longer than perhaps nine days under those circumstances."*

Suddenly, though, Utsu grins, rather unexpectedly. The scar on his cheek makes it look rather grim, but there is a dangerous spark in his eyes nonetheless. ***“It is fortunate for all of us, then, that we do not have to. O-Ushi-sama and Tsuneo-sama are gathering elements of the First Crab Army to bring to our aid. I have also sent for troops from the Third, as they are the closest force. A relief force should be here by noon tomorrow. We need only hold until then.”***

Rintaro looks suddenly nervous. ***“Kaiu-sama,”*** he begins, ***“This is a matter of Crab strength. I fear my presence might only be a distraction or an impediment to your plans. I think it would be best if I –”***

But Utsu cuts him off once more. ***“I am truly sorry, Miya-san, but I cannot let you leave,”*** the daimyo says firmly. ***“We have two hours, if that. You cannot reach the safety of the Wall in that time, and I will not allow such a respected guest of the Crab to be in such danger. Trust me, you will be safer here than you could ever hope to be, exposed in the midst of the Hiruma plains.”*** The siege master’s grin returns briefly, and this time its ghastly twist seems intentional. ***“Perhaps you will learn something to take back with you to the Imperial City when this is done.”***

With that, Utsu dismisses Rintaro to his rooms, noting that he likely has “a few things to say to Biransei-san,” before turning his attention to the PCs. ***“You have entered the Shadowlands, samurai, and returned with intelligence that might save this castle. You’ve earned your chance for glory in battle alongside the Crab. Will you take it?”***

Unless they are Crab or have the Warriors of the Wall cert, this is an invitation, not an order – they are guests of the Crab, and as such not required to defend the castle. However, most bushi should lose at least 1 point of Honor (per Rank of Honor) and 1 point of Glory (per Rank of Insight) for passing up the chance to fight the Empire’s single greatest foe; shugenja and courtiers, on the other hand, are not necessarily expected to do battle even under these circumstances, and may stand aside without penalty. Crab characters, of course, have no choice in the matter short of being made ronin, and characters with the Warriors of the Wall cert will be expected to stand alongside the Crab without hesitation or lose the benefits of the cert (they retain its penalties).

A Night of War

The two hours’ preparation seems to fly by. The PCs can meditate, use Medicine or magic to restore Wounds, and requisition any mundane weapons or

armor they wish from the supplies within the castle before the battle begins (this last applies only to those PCs actually participating in the fight). Hiruma runners set out for the Wall almost immediately, but the rest of the castle seems to draw in on itself, preparing for the oncoming siege. Biransei and Utsu have a brief but loud argument about whether Miya Rintaro should stay in the castle – Biransei believes Rintaro’s safety is at risk by staying, and indirectly accuses Utsu of making him remain in order to keep Biransei’s men available for the siege – but Utsu roundly denies both claims, ending the discussion with a flat, “He stays, Seppun-san, and so do you. Protect him however you see fit, but I will not let either of you die in Crab lands if I can prevent it.”

At last, though, the warning gong booms through the castle again, and the shouts of lookouts on the walls of the Keep echo through its many courtyards:

The blazing pyre atop Lone Candle Keep pushes back the darkness of night all around you, answered on the walls by torches and watch-fires tended by Crab samurai in the dozens. Above you, the night sky twinkles serenely, blocked occasionally by a fast-blown cloud, but across the dark plains, a new and ominous set of lights glimmers to life: the fires of an approaching army, seeming to outnumber the stars above and lit by a blood-red Moon as she climbs over the eastern horizon.

All around you, samurai ease weapons in their saya, test bowstrings, and shift uneasily in their armor. The Seppun warriors seem uncomfortable and out of place in their fine green and gold armor, but even the Crab cannot watch the oncoming foe with complete calm – the tension wraps itself around you, the smothering silence of waiting. As the army grows closer, you begin to make out individual silhouettes: the squat, twisted forms of goblins, shrieking and gibbering madly; the inhuman, bloated and monstrous shapes of oni; the lumbering, giant outlines of massive ogres; and the steady, military precision of Lost bushi. A relentless tide, the army marches closer.

“Samurai!” booms a voice, and you turn to see Kaiu Utsu, standing on a higher wall behind you, his words echoing throughout the fortress. “Look above us! See where the light of Osano-Wo himself burns against the night! For a thousand years, we have stood as the light against the darkness! We are, each and every one of us, the fires that burn clean the corruption, the pyres that sear our foe to ash! Ready yourselves once more, and prepare to light the heavens themselves with your fury! We are samurai!”

And tonight, we teach the horrors of Fu Leng what it truly means to be afraid! UTZ!”

The ramparts roar back “BANZAI!” once, twice, three times – and as the echoes fade, there is another roar from beyond the walls, and the Shadowlands army begins to charge.

Utsu’s strategy is shaped by the numbers he faces and the timing of the reinforcements he believes are coming. Knowing that he only has to hold for about 15 hours but that his forces are vastly outmanned, he has chosen a risky but potentially greatly rewarding course. Like most Rokugani castles, Lone Candle Keep is built in a spiral pattern, with a series of small baileys and courtyards separated by high walls and gates, each overlooked by numerous positions from which archers and shugenja can rain down death on the tightly-constrained attackers. Though normally meant as defenses of last resort, Utsu has decided to take advantage of Lone Candle Keep’s “proven” weakness to do more than kill a few goblins or Lost. By letting the outermost gate fall after a token resistance, he plans to allow the Shadowlands army’s lead force into the castle, where the tight quarters will eliminate the advantage of numbers and give the Crab the chance to destroy the powerful Lost or oni that Utsu knows must be leading a force of this size. Doing so will also lure the besieging army as close to the castle walls as possible, increasing the odds of catching that army between the keep and the reinforcements when they arrive. It is not a risk he would normally take, but with help on the way, Utsu sees it as an opportunity not to be missed. The fiercest fighting will thus take place in the courtyards just inside the outer gate, and it is there that the PCs are assigned.

For long hours, the fighting rages along the walls, archers sending endless arrows toward the oncoming foes, while Crab and Seppun samurai use katana and tetsubo to beat back attempts to scale the wall itself. Finally, though, as the hours creep toward dawn, Utsu raises a signal fan and the rain of arrows slackens. A massive boom rattles the gate before you, and the Crab defenders shift their stances. Many murmur words of prayer, commending their souls to Yomi; others just shift their shoulders, spit into their palms, and lift their tetsubo grimly. Again and again, the impact of something heavy rattles the gate. Together, you wait. But you do not wait long.

When the massive ram, carried by a team of three ogres, finally manages to batter in the gate, a horde of Lost bushi pour through the hole. The PCs’ part in the battle has at last arrived. Compare the Status of the PCs. The character with the highest Status is the

“Table Commander,” in charge of the unit that is comprised of the PCs. (If there are any Crab PCs, they are automatically the Table Commander here – if there are multiple Crabs, compare Status among them.) This individual has the sole responsibility for determining the PCs’ position in the battle. When the battle begins, the Table Commander rolls a Battle Determination roll using **Battle (Mass Battle) / Perception**. If they so choose, the Table Commander may designate another PC to make this roll on their behalf. If the roller has the Tactician Advantage, they may add +5 or -5 to the total of the roll. If the Battle Determination roll makes a TN 10, the PCs face the Tier One encounter below. If the Battle Determination roll makes TN 20, the PCs face the Tier Two encounter below. If the Battle Determination roll makes a TN 30, the Table Commander decides whether the PCs face the Tier Three encounter (without knowing what it entails) or face the Tier One encounter but receive the rewards of Tier Two. If the Battle Determination roll does not even make TN 10, the PCs face the Tier Two encounter but only receive the rewards of Tier One.

At any point during this battle, a PC with the Tactician Advantage may add or subtract 5 from a single roll made by anyone at the table (including the enemies). This is separate from the benefit granted on the initial Battle Determination roll. If a PC has a cert or other benefit that applies to Battle Interactives, this battle is considered an Interactive for the purpose of those abilities.

Tier One

There are a number of Lost bushi equal to the number of PCs, plus the Chugo and Hayata (for more information on these two foes, see “Into the Fire,” above). As mentioned in that section, Chugo and Hayata are not interested in fighting to the death here, and will flee if Hidoi falls (see Tier Two) or if they reach the +10 or +20 Wound Levels, respectively.

Lost Bushi

| | | | | |
|------------|-----------|---------------|------------|--------|
| Air 2 | Earth 2 | Fire 2 | Water 2 | Void 2 |
| Reflexes 3 | Stamina 3 | Agility 3 | Strength 3 | |
| 3 | | | | |
| Honor 0.0 | | Status - 10.0 | Infamy 1.0 | |

Armor TN: 25 (Light Armor) **Reduction:** 3

Attack: 7k3+5 (katana, Complex) or 4k3+5 (claws, Complex) **Damage:** 7k2 (katana) or 5k3 (claws)

Initiative: 4k3

Taint Rank: Lost (rank 5)

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

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 3 / Maho-Bujin 2

Way of the Scorpion: Adds +5 to Armor TN against opponents with lower Initiative; adds +1k1 to Initiative rolls.

Pincers and Tail: Can Feint with one Raise rather than two.

Strike at the Tail: Can choose a target when he chooses his Stance for the turn – if successfully hits that target that turn, the target is Fatigued; victim can make Earth toll, TN 25, during Reactions Stage to end effect, otherwise ends during Reactions one Round later.

Carve the Crimson Road: Maximum Raises now limited by Taint Rank or Void, whichever is higher; can attempt Extra Attack Maneuver for only two Raises; adds unkept dice to damage equal to Taint Rank.

Corruption Rewards: Adds Taint Rank to initiative during every Reactions Stage; can make attacks as Simple Actions.

Powers/Weaknesses: *Lost:* Cannot spend Void Points, adds 5 to the total of all rolls using a physical Trait.

Child of Darkness: Shadowlands creatures will not attack unless attacked first. (This does not prevent Tainted PCs from attacking him.)

Limited Invulnerability: Can almost completely ignore the damage from one attack per round. This works like spending a Void Point to reduce damage, with the following differences: the damage is reduced to only 1 Wound, regardless of amount, and he cannot use this power against a jade, crystal or obsidian weapon or a spell or effect with the [Jade] or [Crystal] keywords.

Strength of Madness: Can suffer 4 Wounds to duplicate the effects of spending a Void Point, with the exception of reducing damage taken (but see Limited Invulnerability, above).

Unearthly Regeneration: Heals 5 Wounds every Round at the start of his Turn.

Unholy Stamina: Can go without rest or sleep for up to three days without penalty.

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 5, Courtier (Manipulation) 1, Defense 4, Etiquette 1, Iaijutsu 4, Intimidation (Torture) 4, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Maho 3, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Sincerity 2, Stealth 3

Mastery Abilities: Ignores movement penalties for Medium Terrain and treats Difficult Terrain as Medium; adds Battle Rank to initiative; adds +1k0 to unarmed damage; may ready a sword as a Free Action; adds +1k0 to damage with swords.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Large, Sacred Weapon (Kakita Blade) / Lost Love (Chie)

Note: Although Hidoi may wear Ketsuen if the PCs were unable to prevent the attackers from taking it, the

nemuranai refuses to provide him with any benefits beyond those of ordinary heavy armor. Should it once again become corrupted by its time in the Shadowlands, however, that could change...

Tier Three

As Tier Two, but Chijin no Oni is also present. Chijin no Oni is the first of its kind, summoned into existence through Hidoi's maho using the name of the tortured and broken Hiruma Chijin. It resembles a frog the size of a pony, its hide several clashing bright colors, with a pair of raven's wings too small to lift it. A long tongue, split in two about half way along its length, whips out at its enemies as it hops almost casually through the battle – where those tongues touch, samurai scream in horror and confusion, then turn on each other and the Lost alike, wielding their weapons with desperate fury against both their enemies and those they had moments before called friends. Atop its head is a small lump, like a polished red stone set into the thing's hide; crawling over the stone, yet also still somehow a part of it, is something that looks like a salamander with a human head. Anyone in melee combat with the oni can see that the head on the salamander is that of Hiruma Chijin, while anyone who spotted Chijin's netsuke during the feast recognizes the similarities between the figurine and the thing on top of the oni's skull.

Chijin no Oni

Air 4 Earth 3 Fire 3 Water 3
Strength 5

Armor TN: 25

Reduction: 5 (0 against jade, crystal or obsidian)

Attack: 8k3 (tongue, Simple)

Damage: 7k2 plus poison (tongue)

Initiative: 6k4

Taint Rank: 6

Powers/Weaknesses: *Confusing Venom:* Any character wounded by the tongue of Chijin no Oni is exposed to its vicious poison. The character must make an Earth roll, TN 20. On a failure, the character loses the ability to distinguish friend from foe. This does not change appearances or confuse them in any other way; they remain able to determine weak spots, recognize weapons and so forth. They simply cannot associate those near them with the concepts of "friend," "ally," "enemy" or "foe." Most victims, in the midst of a life or death struggle, lash out at random, but they may instead choose to act defensively. The effect lasts for 10 Rounds, minus 1 Round per Earth Rank of the target.

Fear 3

Swift 3

Wounds: 30: +10; 50: +20; 75: Dead

It is possible that the PCs may have slain Chijin without confronting Hidoi and his men; in this case, the oni will not be present, but unless the PCs were able to take Chijin's head, his corpse will have been raised as an abomination to demoralize the troops formerly under his command. GMs are encouraged to describe the horror that will afflict even the battle-hardened Crab defenders in this case, though unless the PCs are of particularly high Insight Rank, it is probably best to simply use stats for a basic zombie (found on page 331 of the Legend of the Five Rings Fourth Edition base book). High Rank tables will face an undead revenant (on the same page), with two additional Shadowlands Powers selected by the GM to provide a challenge to the party.

Conclusion

Once the battle concludes, the remaining Shadowlands forces break and begin to withdraw – but as they do so, a fast-moving force of Hida bushi, nearly two thousand strong, appears on the northern horizon. As the Tainted army turns to try to face them and organize a retreat, Utsu signals a countercharge from within the keep, and the Shadowlands horde is all but annihilated between the two Crab armies. If the PCs killed Hidoi and rescued Chijin in the Shadowlands, they watch the end of the battle from a small rise perhaps a mile south of the castle; it is clear that the lack of a strong leader has greatly weakened the attacking army, and Utsu has used that fact to decimate those who remained. The party has no difficulty avoiding or dealing with the few stragglers between them and Lone Candle Keep.

If the PCs recovered Ketsuen during their trip into the Shadowlands, Kaiu Utsu thanks them gravely for their service and claims the armor, assuring the PCs and Rintaro both that he will see that it reaches Hida Tsuneo as soon as possible. Regardless, the Hida reinforcements securing the area, Rintaro and Biransei make plans to leave the following morning, and the PCs are still required to escort them out of the Hiruma provinces and back to the north of the Wall.

The outcome of the module depends heavily on which course the PCs took and what they accomplished. If they managed to rescue Hiruma Chijin *and* persuade him not to commit seppuku, they receive a Favor from the Crab Clan and a Favor from the Imperial Families, as well as 5 points of Glory and Honor points based on their current Honor Rank: Ranks 0-3 get 4 points, Ranks 4-5 get 3 points, Ranks 6-8 get 2 points, and Ranks 9-10 get 1 point. Characters with the Eyes of the Miya or Imperial Investigator certs also gain 3 points of Status tied directly to their position.

If Chijin was rescued but committed seppuku, leaving the PCs with only his swords to return to the Empire, they gain a Favor from the Crab Clan, 4 points of Glory and Honor points based on their current Honor Rank: Ranks 0-3 get 4 points, Ranks 4-5 get 3 points, Ranks 6-8 get 2 points, and Ranks 9-10 get 1 point. The PC who stood has his second gains an additional 1 point of Glory, as well as 1 point of Honor if they are Honor 6 or below.

If, on the other hand, the PCs chose to return to Lone Candle Keep and fought in the battle, their rewards depend on the Tier they fought in (remembering that particularly good or particularly bad Battle Determination rolls can modify the “effective” Tier for this purpose):

- Tier One – Favor from the Crab, two points of Glory, 2 points of Honor if Honor Rank 2 or less, 1 point of Honor if Honor Rank 6 or less.
- Tier Two – Ally: Kaiu Utsu (3 Influence, 1 Devotion), 4 points of Glory, Honor points based on their current Honor Rank: Ranks 0-3 get 4 points, Ranks 4-5 get 3 points, Ranks 6-8 get 2 points, and Ranks 9-10 get 1 point.
- Tier Three – Ally: Kaiu Utsu (3 Influence, 2 Devotion), 5 points of Glory, 1 point of Status (3 points for Crab), Honor points based on their current Honor Rank: Ranks 0-3 get 4 points, Ranks 4-5 get 3 points, Ranks 6-8 get 2 points, and Ranks 9-10 get 1 point.

However, Miya Rintaro's frustration means that any PC with the Imperial Investigator or Eyes of the Miya cert loses three points of Status from their Position.

Note that, if Ketsuen was taken by the Shadowlands and is not recovered, no PCs gain anything – they still lose Status if appropriate because of disappointing Rintaro, and will also gain 1 Rank of Infamy as the samurai who allowed Ketsuen to be stolen again.

Finally, if the PCs recovered Fuyumusha, they may return it to the Kakita family for a Crane Clan Favor. They may instead keep it if they choose; only one PC can do so, however, and that PC gains Dark Secret (Owns a Stolen Kakita Blade) while also losing 2 points of Honor for every Rank of Honor they currently possess. If anyone ever learns this fact – which will happen if the blade is ever used in a public duel, among other ways – the Dark Secret is immediately lost, replaced by two Ranks of Infamy and other possible consequences at the Campaign Admin's discretion.

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.

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

Experience Points

| | |
|--|------|
| Surviving the adventure: | 2XP |
| Good roleplaying: | +1XP |
| Killing Hidoi: | +1XP |
| Killing Chugo and Hayata <i>or</i> Killing Chijin no Oni: | +1XP |

Total Possible Experience: 5XP

Honor

See the Conclusion.

Glory

See the Conclusion.

Other Awards/Penalties

See the Conclusion.

Module Tracking Sheets

Note whether the PCs took part in the Battle of Lone Candle Keep

Note if any PC kept Fuyumusha

GM Reporting

- Did Ketsuen eventually make its way to Hida Tsuneo?
- Did Hidoi survive?
- Did Chugo survive?
- Did Hayata survive?

- Did Hiruma Chijin commit seppuku in the Shadowlands, return to the Empire, or sacrifice his name to the oni?

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 (Expiration date) for it to have storyline effect

Appendix #1: Allies

Hiruma Mei

Mei is a simple woman with a single goal: see everything in the Shadowlands destroyed. Born to a Hiruma scout who committed seppuku in protest of Kuni Yori's alliance with the Shadowlands during the Crab War, Mei spent most of her childhood at the Hiruma Scout dojo in the Shinjo lands, where she made a number of friends among the Moto's White Guard, bonding over the shared experience of a family with a legacy lost to Fu Leng's minions. She achieved her gempukku just days after the alliance of Ikoma Tsanuri and Hida O-Ushi retook Hiruma Castle once and for all; word reached the dojo the very day she was given her blades as an adult. She took that as a sign for her destiny, and has dedicated her life to finishing what Hida Yakamo, Hida O-Ushi and Ikoma Tsanuri began. Only once has she slipped from her single-minded focus – three years ago, she allowed herself to be distracted by the handsome face and honeyed words of an Utaku bushi, sent to study with the Hiruma by his mother. Though her lover was gone after just a few weeks' dalliance, his legacy remained in the form of a child. The scandal put a hard stop on Mei's previous meteoric rise through the ranks, and she has re-dedicated herself to her true goals, deliberately working to downplay her natural good looks and stay in the background, so no one notices her... until it is too late, anyway.

| | | | | |
|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|--------|
| Air 2 | Earth 3 | Fire 3 | Water 3 | Void 3 |
| Reflexes 4 | | Agility 4 | Perception 4 | |
| Honor 3.7 | Status 1.3 | | Glory 3.2 | |

Armor TN: 28 (ashigaru) **Reduction:** 1

armor)

Attack: 8k4

Damage: 7k2

Initiative: 7k4+5

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

School/Rank: Hiruma Scout 3

Dance the Razor's Edge: Adds Stealth Rank to Initiative (except when surprised); doubles the duration of rations and jade in the Shadowlands for up to 4 people; can always determine direction and distance back to Empire; adds +1k0 to Stealth rolls in Shadowlands.

Run Like the Wind: can make Free and Simple Move Actions in Full Defense; can run at high speed for Stamina + School Rank hours before needing to rest for at least an hour.

Veil of the Spirits: If silent and unmoving in some kind of cover, can spend Void Point to gain +3k3 to Stealth roll.

Skills: Athletics (Running) 5, Battle 3, Defense 4, Horsemanship 1, Hunting (Survival, Tracking) 4, Investigation (Notice) 4, Jujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Crab 2, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Lore: Unicorn 1, Perform: Singing 1, Stealth (Sneaking) 5

Mastery Abilities: Suffers no penalties for movement due to terrain; need not reroll a Full Defense roll if she maintains the Stance; can reroll a Search without increasing the TN; adds +1k0 to sword damage; can ready a bow as a Simple Action; Simple Move actions while sneaking are not impeded

Advantages/Disadvantages: Bland, Daredevil, Silent / Bente's Curse, Dependent

Appendix #2: Major NPCs

Hida O-Ushi

O-Ushi is not often renowned as one of the great beauties of Rokugan, although she certainly is stunning. Nonetheless, the woman who was once known as the “Crab Clan Bully” and who proudly bears the nickname “Great Cow” usually strikes those who meet her as something other than a delicate flower. She is fairly short, especially for a Crab, but shockingly strong for her size, and while she lacks the raw charisma her brother had when he was Crab Champion, she has found her own way to lead her Clan, using sheer stubbornness in lieu of tact to accomplish her goals. Rumors continue to swirl about her relationship with Hida Tsuneo; as she is still waiting for her husband Yasamura to apologize for questioning Tsuneo’s loyalty and her own judgment about the returned spirit, she has allowed those rumors to continue, hoping to make him jealous and to prod him to admit his mistakes. In truth (and an **Investigation (Interrogation) / Awareness** roll, TN 25, will confirm this), O-Ushi finds Tsuneo attractive but is not interested in a relationship with him – despite their abiding disagreements and to her own continual surprise, she is very much in love with her husband.

Hida Tsuneo

The samurai known as the “Stone Crab” is an enigma even to the bushi who work alongside him every day, but none question his prodigious talent for battle or relentless drive to see the Shadowlands driven back, all the way to the Festering Pit if possible. A returned spirit, Tsuneo is a taciturn man, rarely given to displays of emotion even among the normally-boisterous Crab; this has led most to believe he returned from the Spirit Realm known as Meido, the Realm of Waiting, although he has never said. In person, Tsuneo is calm and focused, smiling rarely, but compelling in his zeal to battle back the Tainted realm. He has shown great fury when the men under his command are threatened, though, which has earned him their loyalty, and when the battle is distant and he is among his Clan, he will relax – a little – and share a moment’s good humor before he returns to the fray.

Hiruma Chijin

Hiruma Chijin died during the first attempt to retake Hiruma Castle, and he holds it a matter of great pride even to this day. When he returned through Oblivion’s Gate to join the heroes of Rokugan, he defended Toturi himself from a twisted, Shadow-tainted oni, a second act of bravery that earned him the attention of his Champion and eventually led to his position as daimyo of Lone Candle Keep. Chijin is quite friendly and outgoing, particularly for a Crab, and his time in the emotion-draining Realm of Meido has seemingly done little to change that. He builds strong ties among his men and with the other Great Clans, and has more allies in the greater Empire than perhaps any other Crab not in the Yasuki family.

Hiruma Iwae

Hiruma Iwae is a younger man who remembers his Hiruma father and Moto-born mother well. His father was a critical leader in the retaking of these lands, and was rewarded with Hissori Province to direct. Alone among the three daimyo of the Hiruma, he is not content to consolidate their current gains, but instead wishes to press their lands forward and retake even more of what was once theirs. Hiruma Iwae’s “devil may care” attitude is renowned, but he always seems to get his men out of the scrapes just as well as he gets into them. Despite his barren land, and often difficult assignments that he gives to his vassals, he is cheerful and often smiles openly.

Hiruma Meru

Hiruma Meru is a contradiction: a skilled warrior who only wants peace, a hero of a war she tried very hard to prevent. Meru was a prodigy of her school, marked at an early age for great things by her teachers, but Meru realized just as early that she would never be the great samurai her teachers wanted her to be, because she absolutely loathed war. At the age of 12, not long before her gempukku, Meru watched from hiding as her entire family was slaughtered by Scorpion bushi in revenge for Hida Kisada’s betrayal of Bayushi Shoju during the Scorpion Coup. As they fled, she caught two of them and killed them with a blade she took from her father’s dead hand, but the act did not bring her peace – instead, it showed her the horror of killing. Once she became an adult, she requested and was given a teaching position at the Hiruma Academy, preferring to train others rather than use her skills herself. However, when the Crab marched on Asahina no Shi Seido during last summer’s conflict, Meru surprised her superiors by requesting a command – she hoped to protect a shrine dedicated to the memory of a man of peace, and perhaps avoid the conflict entirely. Unfortunately, she learned she was far less a diplomat than a warrior, and instead led her troops to victory over the Crane defenders. However, she was able to keep the Crab from razing the shrine, instead using control over the shrine to put political pressure on the Crane. Physically, Meru is a little taller

than average, with a slim build and more lines on her face than a woman her age ought to have. She is no nonsense and plain-spoken, but extremely patient with her students and those she thinks she can win over to her side.

Kaiu Utsu

Had he been born in another era, Kaiu Utsu would have been renowned as the greatest tactical mind of his generation. Unfortunately, the modern Empire has left him competing with the likes of Toturi, Kitsu Motso, and the Great Bear, so his abilities have largely gone unremarked by the rest of Rokugan. While some may have become bitter over this fact, Utsu instead believes that he is best suited to serve where he is. As his talents are predominantly aimed toward defense, he has had little to do with the Stone Crab's offensive in the Hiruma lands. Instead, he has turned his attention to the development and construction of fortresses to make certain that the Crab can hold the reclaimed lands, like Lone Candle Keep. He is calm and friendly, particularly for a Crab, with a quiet joy for life that is not what most would expect from the Master of Siege. Though his creations are meant for war, Utsu understands that they are intended to save lives more than take them, and this allows him to take pride in his service to the Empire and the Crab.

Miya Rintaro

A carefully ambitious courtier, Rintaro was an Imperial messenger during the War Against the Shadow, and only the fact that he had been sent out of the capitol on assignment saved him from the Shadow-ordered slaughter of the Imperial Court. When the War was over, Rintaro was one of the highest-ranking shisha left to the Miya family, and he has endeavored to further the cause of peace in the Empire by serving as a diplomat and courtier. With the aid of a network of allies, many of them returned spirits, he has risen to a fairly high rank in the Imperial Courts, and has begun establishing an even greater array of contacts through the Clans. He is clever and cautious, much preferring to use persuasion or rewards to sway others to his side, but understands that discipline is necessary, and while he is no more threatening than most Miya, he does know how to bring negative pressures to bear when needed. Small, with a slight frame, Rintaro dresses very well and is known for his fondness for creature comforts. However, he is far too wary to allow himself to be ruled by his pleasures, having seen many courtiers fall from grace for such weaknesses.

Seppun Biransei

Seppun Biransei was once doomed to obscurity; a skilled warrior and able duelist, he nonetheless proved incapable of rising through the ranks of the miharu because of his confrontational manner. While his ability with a sword is unquestionable, simply put, none of his peers could stand his company. However, after Seppun Murayasu was promoted, Rintaro came looking for the best bushi the Seppun could offer to lead his personal guard. Perhaps Rintaro found Biransei's attitude engaging, or perhaps he thought that the lonely, bitter warrior's loyalty would be easily won, but for whatever reason, the dapper little courtier chose Biransei to serve as his yojimbo. Biransei, in turn, is grateful for the chance to bring greater honor to his name, but has not substantially changed in the months since his promotion. He is devoted to his duty, but as he says, "Words are the contribution of courtiers like Rintaro-sama; I am a man of steel."