

# **The Killing Grounds**

**A One-Round Mid-Rank Adventure for  
Heroes of Rokugan: Spirit of Bushido  
Month of Shiba, 1140 (Late Summer)**

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The Hungry Dead roam Dragon Heart Plain. Will you put them to rest, or will you be what they feed upon?

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

## GM's Information

### **THIS SCENARIO SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD!**

Please read the scenario thoroughly before attempting to run it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Glory and Honor Awards and Penalties**

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

### **Reminder**

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

## Adjusting for Party Strength

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

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

**Low End Party** (most/all characters Rank Two): The GM may lower the TNs on the Social Rolls with the Dragon by 5, at their discretion. Reduce Asako Tomoyuki's Earth by 1 (and adjust his Wounds accordingly). Reduce Gotaro no Gaki's Armor TN by 10 and remove the Rank 5 Mirumoto Technique.

**High End Party** (most/all characters Rank Four): Gotaro no Gaki may summon Shozai-Gaki as a Simple Action.

Also note that there are two ronin NPCs available to accompany the PCs, should they be underprepared for combat.

## Adventure Summary and Background

When the spirits of Rokugan's ancestors returned through Oblivion's Gate to help defeat the Lying Darkness at Voltturnum, they saved the Empire. Recently, however, a few of the Empire's scholars have begun to suspect that there were unanticipated effects from their return; more than the social and political difficulties caused by their return to Ningen-do, it appears as though the returned spirits do not readily fit in the weave of fate. This led directly to the tragedy that claimed the life of the Oracle of the Void and created a new Spirit Realm. One of the other victims of that event, the young ishiken Isawa Ume, has been working with Master of Water Isawa Tomo (himself a returned spirit) to try to help the returned spirits return to the flow of destiny. This research requires things beyond the normal, partially because they're trying to ascertain the true nature of the spirits as well as the mysteries of Destiny.

Recently, rumors of a portal to Gaki-do on the Dragon Heart Plain have spread through the Empire. Though the effects have been noted by many as the Dragon Clan seek to lay claim to the region, having taken it from the Phoenix by force of arms, no one knows the

true nature of the disturbance: this portal was opened in the ruins of Shiro Chuda by Asako Tomoyuki, a descendant of the Snake Clan who infiltrated the Phoenix when they opened their doors to ronin shugenja following the Clan Wars. Seeking to increase his power, he returned to his ancestral lands and enacted a ritual that took advantage of the weakened barriers between the mortal Realm and the Realm of Hungry Dead caused by the numerous gaki who crossed over to kill Shiba Tansaku (as mentioned in SoB21: "A Time for Vengeance"). Forcing most of the gaki that come through the portal into servitude, Tomoyuki hopes to reclaim the lands of the Chuda for himself and his son.

While Ume's research has been progressing, few in the Empire truly understand the relationship between Ningen-do and more than one other Realm. To that end, she has studied every returned spirit she could and now seeks a greater understanding of their Realms of origin. While few spirits consigned to Gaki-do were able to escape through Oblivion's Gate, the reports of the portal on the Dragon Heart Plain are reliable enough to indicate a stable portal, so it is there that she will ask certain of her trustworthy allies to begin.

The PCs, tasked with finding a sample of Gaki-do's essence, will find themselves confronting the renegade shugenja, as well as other characters from their pasts. The fate of the Dragon Heart Plains may well rest in their hands.

## Character Notes

Check the PCs' character sheets for the following:

- Returned spirits from the era when the Snake Clan existed. Returned spirit PCs from Gaki-do are extremely rare, but possible: however, they are not at liberty to provide the depth of research Ume wishes.
- Mod certs for "New Beginnings", "Personal Sacrifice", or "Twisted Fate" are relevant to determine the PCs' relationship with Isawa Ume. A mod cert from "Bonds of Fate" should indicate any relationship with Mirumoto Takejiro.
- PCs who have the ability to write their own travel papers may be able to lessen some of the issues normally stemming from traveling through Dragon lands with Phoenix papers. There is nothing wrong with this, but it is something to bear in mind. (Such PCs include magistrates, members of the Imperial Owls, or any character with a cert granting this power.)
- PCs who have "Mark of the Cat" from SoB21: "A Time for Vengeance."

## Introduction

The summer months have passed in their usual way; the PCs may have found themselves fighting for their Clan or furthering their daimyo's goals in court, but little of major note has occurred in the Empire. Several months have passed between the preceding module and this one, therefore at the beginning of this module, each PC should lose a Rank of Glory for inactivity. This loss cannot reduce their Ranks of Glory to less than their Insight Rank (and is somewhat less than half of the rule-book's recommended loss for a comparable time-frame). Players who wish to detail their characters' actions during this time are encouraged to submit fictions to the Campaign Admin.

The various conflicts that grip the Empire have changed slightly over the year. The following information is freely available, particularly to members of the involved Clans or factions:

- The Dragon Clan has continued its assaults upon the Phoenix lands throughout the year. Unlike two years ago, the Dragon armies have focused their attention on the southern front, making certain of every holding they claim and advancing in a methodical, inexorable fashion. Honored Steps Village remains firmly in their control, and serves as the Mirumoto army's principle headquarters across the Drowned Merchant River. Honored Treaty City is under siege, and the Dragon have taken a dozen lesser holdings, forcing the Shiba army to maintain a defensive perimeter around Nikesake. The Dragon have taken the watchtower of Zumiki-mihari and are poised to press through the Mountains of Regret, undoubtedly in order to advance on Kyuden Agasha. Though the Phoenix Clan's military is hard-pressed, the Dragon are increasingly coming under fire in the courts; while even the Phoenix's allies in the Scorpion have yet to render any substantive military assistance, none of the other Clans (save the Dragon's political allies in the Lion) have shown anything but concern over the Dragon's unaccustomed aggression. It is unlikely the Dragon will be able to continue their invasion without running afoul of the Imperial laws governing wars between the Clans, if they have not already done so.
- Fighting between the Crab and Crane is dying down; with the disgrace in Crane leadership, their taste for continuing the conflict appears to be waning. No significant territory has changed hands for two years (and even that has been traded back through political channels), and though the two Clans are both maintaining heavy defenses along their shared border,

there have been relatively few incidents between them this year.

- The skirmishes along the border between the Lion and Unicorn lands is taking on an almost ritualized air. Neither side is attacking significant holdings or seeking to claim territory; instead, they seem almost to be fighting for the sake of fighting rather than for any real gain from their opposite. The fighting seems to be focused on the Ikoma plains to the north of Shiranai Toshi, as both Clans are evidently going out of their way to avoid the newly-granted Frog Clan's minuscule holdings.
- Though the Scorpion and Mantis remain vociferously at odds in the courts, open fighting between the Clans has largely ceased. The Scorpion retain several holdings they claimed in battle over the last two years, but have returned most of their other military gains for significant ransoms. Speculation runs rampant that the absence of Yoritomo Aramasu from the Empire has reduced the Scorpion Clan's motivation for their conflict with the Mantis.
- Imperial General Seppun Murayasu has been leading the Imperial Legions in the field, diligently tracking down and eliminating the survivors of the peasant army that assaulted Otsan Uchi last year, and dealing firmly with any other potential uprisings. As commander of the Imperial Legions, Murayasu theoretically holds more military power than any single Clan Champion, but so far has assiduously avoided any political intrigue save for enforcing his decree of peace between the feuding Imperial Regent and Emerald Champion.

The PCs have received letters asking for help from Isawa Ume, who they likely have as an Ally. If they do not already have her as an Ally, then her appeal went directly to their lords, and the PCs have been sent to see what assistance they can lend to the protégé of one of the Elemental Masters. Even Dragon PCs are welcome, despite the current situation between the Clans – politics continue even during war, and most daimyo are willing to prepare for all contingencies. Ume will have sent travel papers along with the letter, authorized by Isawa Tomo (the Master of Water), which are more than sufficient to convince even the staunchest Phoenix bushi to allow the PCs through.

*Summer, the season of war, has spread once more across the Empire. Skirmishes blossom along the borders between most Clans, and the Imperial Legions are engaged in rooting out the peasant rebels that marched on Otsan Uchi last year. Nowhere is the fighting as intense, however, as between the Dragon and Phoenix. The sun is beginning its descent to the west as you arrive at your destination: Nikesake, once a city of peace dedicated to the long-standing alliance*

*between the Crane and Phoenix, has had to ready itself for war as the Mirumoto armies press their advance. The Shiba troops stationed here are on edge, but after carefully examining your papers, you are directed to the Blossoms of Four Seasons Inn, where you are to meet with Isawa Ume, a young ishiken and scholar that has asked for your assistance.*

*The Blossoms of Four Seasons Inn sits atop a small hill, surrounded by mulberry grove. A well-tended garden and bathhouse can be easily seen from the yard, and the servants bustle about in a satisfactory manner, doing everything they can to make you feel welcome. Though it may not compare to the finest inns of Otosan Uchi or Kyuden Doji, the Blossoms of Four Seasons has a charm all its own, and the rooms provided are comfortable if not luxurious. After resting from the road, you are led to a private dining room for an early dinner and to meet with the young ishiken that brought you here.*

Isawa Ume is a slight young woman who presents the typical manner of a studious Phoenix shugenja. Reserved, though prone to occasionally murmuring quietly under her breath, she will greet the PCs properly and share tea while engaging in polite small talk before getting to the matter that brought her to ask for their assistance.

*“Word has come to me of your various deeds, my friends, and I hope that you do not find it untoward that I ask for your help in my research. You see, I have been studying the nature of those spirits who returned to the Empire through Oblivion’s Gate, after several incidents have given me cause for some... concern... over their place in Ningen-do, in the Celestial Order, even within the bounds of Fate itself. I have been fortunate in that Isawa Tomo-sama has seen fit to support my research, but there are always more questions to ask and more that needs to be learned.” She shakes her head briefly and takes a sip of tea, murmuring something quietly. (PCs who are curious may roll Investigation / Perception at a TN of 20 to hear her words: “Yes, but that’s not the point.”) “Ah, I am sorry. I do not mean to lecture, but I have been dealing with this issue for some time and it is often easiest to frame it in that form. To be brief, I believe that the returned spirits have been separated from the forces of Destiny by their passage through Oblivion’s Gate. Anything that a mortal agency can accomplish ought to be undone, with a sufficient understanding of the principles, and I would ask you to assist me in gathering some relevant material.”*

Rather than continue her lecturing, Ume would prefer to answer whatever questions the PCs have and engage in a more natural conversation (though if the PCs are unresponsive, she will sigh and continue lecturing until they have a basic understanding of the mission).

- What do you mean by ‘relevant material?’ *“I have had the opportunity to examine returned spirits from Meido, Yomi, and Toshigoku, the three most common Realms, and have some theories based off those observations. There are a very few spirit who returned from Jigoku, fortunately, as most of them presumably returned to the behaviors they had in life that caused them to be claimed by the Realm of Evil. Almost as rare were those who returned from Gaki-do; the Realm of the Hungry Dead is somewhat more ambiguous, but not much more pleasant. Regardless, I would prefer to learn more of the nature of that Realm, and Tomo-sama has received reports of a portal to Gaki-do on the Dragon Heart Plain.”*
- What is the relevance of the portal? *“A passage between the Realms represents a stable, known quantity that can be studied. I witnessed the closing of a portal some time ago; it should have four anchors, representing each of the physical elements.”* She will give a nod to any PCs who played through “Twisted Fate” and the event she’s referring to. *“If you bring at least one of these objects to my library at Kyuden Asako, it should have enough resonance of Gaki-do for me to learn something. Additionally, it would close the portal to a dangerous Realm – a service to the Empire as a whole if nothing else.”*
- Where exactly is the portal? *Ume sighs regretfully. “Gomen. I do not know. The reports that the Elemental Masters received indicate clearly that it is in the northern part of the Dragon Heart Plain. However, I have been corresponding with a knowledgeable monk who seems to have some interest in my project. Suisei is expecting you at the Temple to Ebisu in Nanashi Mura, and he should be able to assist you in finding the portal.”*
- What do you know about this monk? *“Suisei is a learned scholar, from my correspondence with him. I have never met him, but his writings would indicate to me that he is a retired samurai. He is not a shugenja, but he has a keen intellect regardless and has given me some useful insights into the nature of the Realms.”*
- Are the Dragon really going to allow a group of samurai to wander across the Plain? (This may be of more importance if the group is predominantly made up of Phoenix PCs.) *Ume shrugs, somewhat nonplussed. “This is not a political matter, nor a military one. Isawa Tomo-sama has provided travel*

*papers for you; I should hope that sufficient even for the Dragon. You will obviously not be there to attack, and I cannot think they would risk their standing by grossly flouting Tomo-sama's authority as one of the pre-eminent shugenja of the Empire."*

- Why have you turned to us? *"Well, even were the relations between my Clan and the Dragon more stable than they are, the last few years have convinced me that my calling is research, not action. I am no coward, and fully expect that I will have to examine the source of the returned spirits at some point, but in the meantime, it seems best to leave this matter to those better suited to the task."*
- When should we leave? *"I have taken the liberty of securing rooms for you tonight in this inn; it has something of an interesting history. But I should prefer if you left in the morning – there is no particular hurry, but I do not doubt that your lords will want you to return as soon as you can."*
- How dangerous is this likely to be? *"I do not know. I understand that there are a wide variety of gaki, and that they are generally not terribly pleasant. Their focus is on feeding their various hungers, hoping to return to their next turn on the Celestial Wheel as human. But I am certain you have faced worse, based off what I have heard of your deeds."*
- Can we wear armor? *"That is certainly not my decision to make, samurai. The Dragon may look upon it poorly, but I cannot tell you how to face your task and would not dream of instructing you in how to go about providing assistance to me."*

Ume has little more concrete information for the PCs, but she will provide them with traveling papers, a letter of introduction to Suisei, and a carrying-case specially designed to contain any residual essence of Gaki-do. (It is about the size of a box for carrying armor, made of wood with several warding symbols burned into it and lined with crystal.)

Afterwards, Ume will be happy to chat pleasantly with the PCs for the evening, but will not be offended if they choose to explore the city. Should any PC directly address her tendency to speaking to herself, she will flush but deny any importance to the matter. "Just a habit, probably from spending too much time alone in research." She will change the subject, and if pressed will retire to her rooms. Otherwise, she will spend a cordial evening with whoever remains at the inn with her, though they may be put off a bit by her habit.

## Nikesake

The city of Nikesake was originally formed as an armed camp, though in recent centuries it has become more of a trade hub and political meeting-place due to its

relative proximity to Otosan Uchi. All of the Clans maintain embassies here, though the Dragon have recently closed theirs. The city shows major influences from the Clan's long-standing allies in the Crane, and boasts a pair of renowned shrines dedicated to peace and the founder of the Asahina family (who was born here). Unfortunately, the Dragon advance has required them to prepare for war – though the Dragon armies are mostly passing to the south of the city, the Shiba are using the city as a place to coordinate their defenses. Once surrounded by nothing more threatening than mulberry groves (necessary for the production of silk and paper), Nikesake now has a sizable encampment of Shiba troops prepared to defend it.

PCs who wish to hunt for rumors may do so; the rumors in the next section are applicable, though the information most related to the Dragon Heart Plain will require extra effort to uncover at this remove (increasing the TN to learn of them by 5).

There are a few locations of interest in the city that the PCs may wish to look into (though they only have a few hours if they wish to depart the next day):

- **Blossoms of Four Seasons Inn:** The inn the PCs are staying at is actually somewhat famous through the Empire for providing the setting for several tragic romance stories and plays. Some say the gardens are haunted by the spirits of forlorn lovers of various Clans. Whether in spite of these rumors or because of them, the inn is a popular place for travelers to stop and lovers to meet. The PCs will encounter nothing untoward in the gardens save for Phoenix couple walking quietly in the company of a chaperone.
- **Crane's Gift Shrine:** A traditional, though still beautiful, complex with shrines to each of the Seven Fortunes as well as smaller alcoves for offerings to the lesser Fortunes and ancestors. A fine ancestral shrine to Asahina, the founder of the Crane family who was born in Nikesake, is particularly popular.
- **Phoenix Blessing Shrine:** Built by the Crane, this is an elegant example of artistry and piety. An extensive garden surrounds shrines to lesser Fortunes and ancestors of particular reverence to the Phoenix, which in turn circles larger shrines to the Seven Fortunes. Traditionally, shugenja and monks travelling into the Phoenix lands stop here for blessings, but due to the fighting to the west and south, there are few meditating figures present.
- **Street of Scrolls:** The "merchant district" of Nikesake specializes, as one might expect, in knowledge. Specifically, much of the paper manufactured locally is used for scrolls, maps, or prints of artwork, and a large variety of such works are available. There are, unfortunately, no maps of

the Dragon Heart Plain, though if asked, the merchants will note that an Imperial Cartographer led an expedition to the northern borders a few years ago (PCs who played “Undefended Border” should recall doing so, and may have some maps of the area as a result of that module).

Though the PCs should not spend too much time in Nikesake, more information on the city can be found in Strongholds of the Empire.

## Part One: Naming Anonymous Village

The PCs should depart the next morning, at whatever schedule they wish. Unless they have gone out of their way to alienate her, Isawa Ume will see them off and offer her blessing and thanks.

The Imperial roads do not directly link Nanashi Mura to Nikesake, but there are smaller, generally less-travelled highways that pass between the two. Both the Dragon and Phoenix Clan have recently sent engineers to ensure their troops could use this route, so the way is relatively clear. The only issues the PCs encounter are the patrols – Shiba bushi on the first day, then Mirumoto. As the PCs are obviously not a war-party, unless they are wearing armor or are obviously prepared for violence, the patrols carefully examine their travel papers (with great respect from the Shiba and some trepidation from the Mirumoto) and allowed to go on their way. If the PCs are wearing armor, they will lose Honor as though performing a Major Breach of Etiquette (-2 points unless their Honor Rank is 7 or higher, in which case it is 6 points, or 0, who do not lose any).

After three days of relatively easy travel, staying at small wayside inns or camping as they choose, the PCs will cover the sixty miles between Nikesake and Nanashi Mura. A small bridge over the Drowned Merchant River is particularly well-guarded, and the Dragon are overseeing the construction of a larger crossing. Eventually, the PCs will come in sight of the former ronin village of Nanashi Mura in the afternoon of the third day.

*Nanashi Mura was once a small village populated almost entirely by ronin. Now, the land around it has been cleared for farming, new houses spread to the north, and walls are being built to surround the burgeoning city. New construction is everywhere, and the growing community bustles with activity. Ramshackle huts are being demolished to make room*

*for sturdy houses, though the Dragon military camp visible on the plain just outside of town gives no doubt as to the reason behind the expansion. The fortified mansion once occupied by the magistrate responsible for the village has been expanded; its roof, and that of a large temple, rise above the walls in mute declaration of the Dragon’s dual nature.*

The Dragon Clan has annexed Nanashi Mura, claiming it as part of their expansion into the Dragon Heart Plain and turning the village into a military base for their efforts against the Phoenix. There are a large number of Dragon samurai present, as they work to expand the settlement into a full city. Many of the local ronin are less than pleased by this turn of events; they are not foolish enough to cause problems, but a sizable percentage of them have departed for opportunities elsewhere.

The Dragon bushi on guard at the gate (the southeastern wall having been the first completed) predictably examine the PCs’ travel papers carefully, but will allow them entry with very little delay. Though they will be very polite, they make a point of saying that they will inform their commander, Mirumoto Takejiro (the de facto daimyo of the city), of the presence of visiting samurai.

There are two inns in the city, with three more being built. The highest-quality is **The Path to Justice**, a recently-opened establishment catering principally to the influx of Dragon, though it does have comfortable rooms available. The other inn is **The Silent Garden**, a large, surprisingly elegant place with a beautifully maintained story garden in the back (and a well-hidden private gambling room in the basement). The monk the PCs are in town to meet is staying at the Temple of Ebisu, but if they wish to explore the city, they are free to do so.

### Temple of Ebisu

The second-largest structure in the city after the daimyo’s manor (though some of the buildings that are being worked on will undoubtedly surpass it), the Temple is within the walls but remains isolated from most of the rest of the city by a tall wooden fence and several ancient cherry trees. The gates are shut, though a silent monk will emerge upon the PCs knocking. He will not allow them entry (no one may enter but members of their Order), but does send a message to Suisei about his visitors.

*After a few minutes wait, the gates open once more and a stooped, weathered monk steps through. He bows with a small smile, carefully avoiding eye contact, and murmurs, “Blessings of the Fortunes be*

*upon you this day, noble samurai. I hope the humble brothers here did not offend; they are sworn to a vow of silence. I am called Suisei. It is an honor to meet you. Would you care to accompany me to a comfortable place to talk?"*

Suisei appears to be an older man, in his late fifties, with the shaven head of a member of the Brotherhood and the somewhat threadbare saffron robes of a wandering monk. He is somewhat under average height, and though his hands shake slightly, he is still fairly fit. Suisei is always careful to maintain appropriate courtesy toward the samurai (never meeting their eyes, referring to them as "sama", etc.), not because of fear but simply because that's how one is supposed to act. He is most cautious around Dragon or Scorpion PCs. Curious PCs may roll  **Lore: Heraldry / Intelligence**  at a TN of 40 to recognize him (other Lore Skills may apply at the GM's discretion, such as Lore: Scorpion, or History with a focus on the Clan Wars). Suisei earned some renown during the Clan Wars by assisting a number of former Scorpion ronin in dealing with the Shadowlands creatures that were threatening their lands. Presumably a retired Scorpion samurai himself, he was instrumental in training a group of hunters that reclaimed a great deal of their territory before the Second Day of Thunder, including Bayushi Tage (who destroyed the undead abomination made from the deceased Bayushi Shoji). More information **FOR THE GM** can be found in the Appendix.

Suisei will lead the PCs to the **Tempered Jade** tea house, making an effort to be polite and friendly. He will get their names and inquire as to their travels, indicating some familiarity with their deeds if they have more than five Ranks of Glory, and essentially get the "small talk" portion of the conversation done before settling in at the tea house.

### Tempered Jade

The quiet tea house is doing brisk trade with several Dragon, though a pair of ronin sit incongruously in one corner. The proprietor is a middle-aged man by the name of Yuchiro, who greets all of his guests with a pleasant smile and a dazzling assortment of blends. The menu includes nearly every sort of tea that can be found in Rokugan, and Yuchiro serves them all without judgment and discreetly. (PCs who inquire after Jade Petal Tea will be ushered into a private conference with Yuchiro, who will be happy to provide it for them. Of course, they may also roll **Investigation / Awareness** at a TN of 35 to realize that he is almost certainly going to inform someone in authority about their purchase...)

*Suisei takes a place at the table with a sort of rough grace, nodding briefly to the ronin in the corner.*

*"Well, to waste no more time: Ume-sama informed me that you would be coming. How can I assist you?"*

Suisei is quite familiar with the Dragon Heart Plain, but his preference is to let the PCs make the decisions about how to go about the matter. He will answer most of the PCs questions to the best of his abilities.

- Where is the portal? *"I have nothing but suspicions, at this point. But... well, there are reports of creatures to the north, and the ruins of Shiro Chuda have always had an unpleasant reputation. Few go there, and fewer return, but it may be the best lead we have."*
- Can you lead us there? *"I have a only a rough idea where the lands of the Snake Clan once were, but I will do my best. Few records of their holdings remain, and no maps indicate where their lands are. The entire province is cursed."*
- What sort of creatures? *"Gaki come in many forms, sama. From the formless muzai-gaki that cannot find what they need, to the ubume that feed on human suffering, each has its own hunger and powers. Most appear as little more than insects when present in Ningen-do, but the more powerful can be quite dangerous indeed."*
- What if the portal is not at Shiro Chuda? *"If not, then there are a few options. If we can find the trail of a gaki, it may be possible to backtrack it to its origin. That is unlikely, but were one of these creatures wounded badly enough, it may seek to flee back to its native Realm. Alternately, the Dragon samurai in town may know more of the situation; asking carefully among them may yield some news."* If there are any shugenja, he will note: *"And, of course, it may be possible to ask the local spirits directly what they may know. It could prove difficult, but potentially valuable."*
- Can we wear armor? *"I believe the Dragon would object to our wandering this unsettled province in such a warlike aspect. Perhaps something could be arranged if you have influence among the Clan, but I would otherwise advise against it."*

Suisei will be as helpful as the PCs like, though he will be somewhat evasive if directly asked about his own background (claiming to simply be a wandering monk, now, though admittedly a well-read one). When the PCs are done asking questions and begin to prepare their plans, he will rise and bow.

*"I do not mean to offend, samurai, but I have sometimes found it beneficial to have the services of ronin for additional strength at arms. I have already spoken to a pair of wave-men I consider to be*

*trustworthy; it is your decision whether to bring them along or not, but they may be useful.”*

Assuming the PCs do not disagree, he will wave to the ronin in the corner, who will rise and approach. A man and a woman, they are both clad in rough, sturdy garb (although hers is a good deal cleaner than his) and bow with at least the minimum of respect (again, hers is much deeper than his). PCs may recognize Kanjin from previous modules (“Bonds of Fate”, “Flee From Tomorrow”, or “The Price of Weakness”), and he will give them a relaxed, impertinent wink. Suisei will introduce them – the woman’s name is Furukizu – but the decision whether to bring them along is entirely the PCs’.

Kanjin is a shabby, slovenly ronin somewhat shorter than average, who could use a shave and is probably in desperate need of a bath. He is often disrespectful to Clan samurai, though he takes care not to cross the line into anything that would initiate a challenge. Despite this, he is honest in his own way, and once hired, will obey orders with little more than a comment. Furukizu, by contrast, is quietly professional and manages a certain exotic dignity. Slender and tall for a woman (a couple of inches taller than Kanjin, in fact), she is quite respectful and it is apparent she has worked for Clan samurai often in the past. Her appearance is somewhat unique, in that she has several visible tattoos – including a Scorpion’s stinger curving around her left temple and a Lion’s claw tearing at her throat from under her kimono. (Close observation, and an **Investigation / Perception** roll at a TN of 20, will show that both incorporate and somewhat conceal scars.) Kanjin will ask for 5 koku for each of them, cheerfully pointing out that there are many other samurai hiring ronin these days (“*Think it’s what the Yasuki call a ‘seller’s market’...*”), but can be talked down. If the PCs simply do not wish to pay, Suisei will cover the cost, but if the PCs do not wish the ronin to accompany them, the pair will bow with only a little disappointment and depart.

Neither ronin has a great deal to add to the planning, but will follow any instructions given or provide some basic guidance around town. They are not capable of getting the PCs in to see the Dragon, but they are both well acquainted with the village and its ronin residents. (They are also both comfortable in the wilderness, if none of the PCs have the Hunting Skill.)

Suisei will let the PCs make whatever preparations they deem necessary, and only ask a few leading questions to make certain the group has whatever supplies they require for the journey if it appears as though the PCs

are ignoring practical matters. Apart from that, the PCs have as much time as they wish to take to make ready.

## Rumors

PCs who wish to learn what the local situation is like may roll **Courtier (Gossip) / Awareness** roll at a TN of 10; a successful roll learns one of the following rumors at random, plus one extra rumor for every 5 points by which the roll beats the TN. (Dragon PCs receive a Free Raise for this roll.) The rumors include:

- Emerald Champion Kakita Toshiken has announced that the Imperial Winter Court will take place in Kyuden Tonbo. Obviously, this will provide a chance for the samurai of Rokugan to demonstrate their loyalty to the Empress, but many are concerned about the possibility of opposing the Imperial Regent directly. Additionally, the Emerald Champion’s reputation is not particularly good; while few directly blame him for the death of the Emperor or his wife, most samurai have difficulty regarding him as the sort of example necessary for leadership in the Empire.
- Imperial Regent Hantei Okucho has announced that the Imperial Winter Court will remain in Otosan Uchi. Obviously, this will provide a chance for the samurai of Rokugan to demonstrate their loyalty to the Empress, but many are concerned about the possibility of opposing the Emerald Champion directly. Okucho has publicly stated his intention to set the Empire’s concerns to rest, though he has steadfastly denied the myriad “wild rumors” that have come to light surrounding his former life.
- The Phoenix Clan has recently made public overtures of alliance toward the Crane Clan. Though relations between the Clans have been strained of late, they are traditional allies in the face of Lion aggression. Given the Dragon Clan’s political ties to the Lion, it is thought that the Phoenix could greatly benefit from having more help in the courts to bring censure upon their invaders.
- Isawa Taeruko, the Master of Earth, has been assisting the fortification of several prominent Phoenix holdings along the border with the Dragon. This may have something to do with the Dragon’s focus on the southern front – the blessings of the kami have combined in a truly intimidating fashion with the northern forts designed by the Kaiu two years ago for defense against the Yobanjin barbarians
- Speculation that Mirumoto Takejiro, the Dragon general commanding their military offensive, will be named daimyo of the new Dragon Province. Though the Dragon Heart Plain has required more effort to consolidate it than thought, his military efforts against

the Phoenix have brought him, and the Clan, much Glory.

- There is some unrest among the ronin who lived in the city prior to the Dragon annexation. Most are being hired by the Dragon Clan, and rumors of offers of fealty for their service abound, but roughly a quarter of Nanashi Mura's former denizens have departed rather than live under the Dragon. The previous magistrate the Dragon had assigned here, Mirumoto Taki, fell during the Race to Voltturnum, and many of the locals regret the loss of their "good old days."
- The Dragon Clan announced plans to build a grand Shrine of the Sun on the Dragon Heart Plain over a year ago, but work has yet to begin. Most blame the difficulties in the province, though some whisper that Takejiro was ordered to delay the construction by his superiors in the Clan for some mysterious purpose.
- Additionally, any of the points in the Introduction concerning the summer's conflicts in the Empire can be learned here if that information had not already been shared.

The following rumors are only available to Dragon PCs or to PCs who roll more than 30 on their Gossip roll (25 for Lion PCs, at the GM's discretion; the two Clans are political allies but the Dragon are notably reticent with outsiders – Lion who go out of their way to make a good impression or trade off the Clan's relationship may benefit):

- Mirumoto Kyuujo, the son of Takejiro, has risen rapidly through the ranks over the last year. There are whispers of preferential treatment, but even his few detractors admit he is a skilled and dedicated bushi; his youth is the primary objection to his advancement.
- The Dragon Heart Plain is beset by troubles. Reports of a variety of issues have spread through the soldiers stationed here: bandits are a serious problem with the Dragon's military might focused on the Phoenix; there have been numerous sightings of monsters or malevolent spirits; major issues with the Dragon supply lines have been attributed to the Phoenix Clan's Scorpion allies (though, of course, no one has seen any saboteurs in action – they're Scorpion); and plague has been reported in three separate villages on the Plain.
- Though several Dragon patrols have been sent to find Shiro Chuda, whether to use as a secure location or to deal with its antagonistic spirits, all have returned with reports of failure. Despite occasional sightings by scouts, none of the substantial forces deployed to deal with the matter have been able to find the ruins.

If the PCs seek any more detail on the above, they can spend some time asking around town (likely reducing the amount of other things they can do before leaving) or ask Takejiro himself if they seek an audience. This will inform them of the following additional details:

- Mirumoto Kyuujo has recently been given the rank of gunso, and has led his patrol out onto the northern plains under the command of Mirumoto Songui, one of the most experienced chui in the Mirumoto army.
- The three plague-ridden village are small farming communities with fewer than fifty people in each. They are Iwakage Mura, Bonbori Mura, and Kanki Mura, and have been quarantined and ordered destroyed by Takejiro to avoid spreading the disease. (Their locations are readily available if the PCs mention they're heading north, as the Dragon don't want the illness to get out.)
- There is no reliable information in the city on the location of Shiro Chuda. The old records are evidently inaccurate, the scouts who claimed to have seen the ruins are on assignment elsewhere, and all that can be stated with certainty is that the northern part of the Dragon Heart Plains are rightfully thought to be cursed and haunted.

### Nanashi Mura

The city of Nanashi Mura is in flux, with the Dragon annexation and military action against the Phoenix. The ronin residents are adjusting as best they can, but the prosperity the Dragon are bringing is a difficult trade for the independence they had become accustomed to over the years.

The budding market has nearly any legal equipment or supplies the PCs may wish to purchase, at the prices listed in the book, but any questionable purchases (like large numbers of weapons) may attract attention from the Dragon authorities and require explanations.

If the PCs wish to explore a bit, they will discover that most of the sake houses are occupied by the construction crews in the evenings, but that the pace of the work has left few of them with enough energy to cause trouble. The city's night is fairly quiet, despite the mix of Dragon soldiers, ronin, and peasant laborers. If they are interested in illicit entertainment, a **Lore: Underworld / Perception** (TN 20) roll will allow them to find the gambling dens (one hidden in the Silent Garden inn, the other in a recently-renamed restaurant called the "Joyous Frog", owned and operated by a Kaeru named Hayashi). The soldiers are well-disciplined, and as Takejiro has them patrol the city regularly, crime is almost non-existent. (And as he has them pay for any damages done while they are on duty

out of their own pocket, any boisterous displays are stopped immediately.)

The Temple of Ebisu is closed to all but the members of their order (and evidently Suisei), but there is an ancestral shrine to the founder of the town, a ronin named Fuyari, and a small temple to Fukurokujin, the Fortune of Wisdom, which is still being built but is open to those who wish to pray at the altar. The city also has a small park surrounding a grove of ancient oaks, called the Itode Grove. A small sign near the entrance declares it a “testament to the honor and resolve of the city’s original inhabitants.”

### The Manor House

If the PCs present themselves at the manor house, whether to formally declare their presence in the city or to request an audience with Takejiro, the guards will politely turn them away. No is intended in this, but the military commander of the Dragon’s forces is a very busy man. Getting in to see Takejiro requires one of the following:

- Having Mirumoto Takejiro as an Ally,
- Spending one Dragon Clan Favor, or
- Spending three Favors from any single other Clan.

If the PCs have none of the above, they may roll **Etiquette (Bureaucracy) / Awareness** at a TN of 30. Failure means that the PCs will be politely invited to return “tomorrow” – standard Rokugani refusal.

If the PCs make their way in to speak with Takejiro, it will take some time before they manage to have an audience – thus making it likely they will not have time for doing much else in the city that night. Servants will escort them to a simply-decorated waiting room, where they will be served tea and rice cakes and wait for roughly forty-five minutes before Takejiro enters.

*Mirumoto Takejiro is a tall, distinguished samurai with a deep voice and a confident, commanding manner. “I bid you welcome to Nanashi Mura, samurai. I hope your journey was a pleasant one. Please forgive my abruptness, but my time is at a premium these days. How may I assist you in leaving the province as soon as possible?” As soon as the words out of his mouth, he winces and raises a weary hand to his forehead. “I apologize, again. It has been a difficult summer. I meant, what brings you before me?”*

The PCs are welcome to explain as much or as little of their mission to him as they wish. Unfortunately, Takejiro has no significant resources to assist them. As long as they are reasonably polite, Takejiro will thank

them for informing him of their intentions in his province. PCs who have heard some of the rumors around town can get some more information on them from him with little difficulty. Asking him for travel papers for the entire group requires simply burning a Dragon Clan Favor or succeeding on a **Sincerity / Awareness** roll at a TN of 20. Appealing to him for permission to bear arms and armor through the Plain, however, will be somewhat more difficult. *“It is not a question of trust... but my troops are already on edge in the region. I can understand your wishing to be prepared, but it may be for the best to avoid any unfortunate misunderstandings.”* Convincing Takejiro to give them permission to wear armor on their mission requires either a well-roleplayed appeal to their common interests and a promise to be exceedingly careful in dealing with his men (accompanied by a **Sincerity / Awareness** roll with a TN of 35) or reducing his Devotion by 1 if they have him as an Ally. (Essentially, they are reminding him of their previous service, which causes him to grant their desire but with somewhat less grace than if they had convinced him of the importance of their argument.)

In any event, Takejiro will take his leave of the PCs as soon as possible while providing proper courtesy.

## Part Two: Bug Hunt on the Plains

Eventually the PCs will finish their preparations and depart Nanashi Mura, most likely the morning after arriving. Characters who played through SoB02, “Undefended Border”, will have travelled along the northern edge of the Dragon Heart Plain, and if they have copies of the map made on that expedition, the southern portions they are to travel through are not marked in significant detail (but will still assist in getting to their intended destination). PCs who played through SoB21, “A Time for Vengeance”, actually have been to the southern parts of the former Snake Clan lands (whether they realize it or not), though their destination on this trip is further north.

The group’s first few days of travel will be easy enough; the southern portions of the Dragon Heart Plain are hilly and relatively dry, with rocky soil that does little to absorb water as it feeds down into the Drowned Merchant River. To the west lies the Great Climb, and the terrain in that direction grows noticeably more difficult as it becomes the foothills of the impregnable Dragon mountains. As the PCs head north, however, the landscape will gradually become greener and more fertile as the ground softens and the hills level out.

*The track you are following the connects the scattered villages on the Dragon Heart Plain barely qualifies as a road, but four days north of Nanashi Mura, the rolling hills are somewhat smoother and the journey becomes even easier. Though there are no convenient wayside inns, the weather remains clear, and this far north, summer's usual heat is less repressive. For these first few days, the only encounters of note are with Mirumoto patrols, who examine your papers closely before letting you go your way.*

If the PCs are wearing armor, these encounters are likely less pleasant, but the Dragon in the southern portions of the Plain are under less stress than those further north, and assume that they will be able to deal with a small party of samurai rather than reacting with hostility. The PCs' travel papers will only elicit comment if they still have those given to them by Ume, and even then, it will simply consist of a stern warning to be cautious. (Papers from Takejiro gain them respectful bows and no troubles.)

PCs who have been in the area before or with ranks in the Hunting Skill have little difficulty orienting themselves; even if none of them have, either Suisei or the ronin (if they are along) have enough experience with travelling in the hinterlands of the Empire to keep the group from getting lost..

The first signs of oddity will occur as the party passes into the northern section of the Plain. They may roll **Hunting** or **Lore: Nature / Intelligence** to determine when they notice that there are more insects (primarily ants and beetles) around than is usual even in the summer. The TN is 35 on the fourth day of the journey; if they fail, it will take one more day for every 5 points they rolled less than 35 to notice the gradually increasing amount of insect life. If they do so, they may roll **Lore: Spirits / Intelligence** (TN 15) to remember that minor gaki often take the form of insects. These usai-gaki are condemned to feed off the waste of human and animal life, and serve a useful purpose despite their impurity. Indeed, a samurai who provides such pitiful souls assistance in meeting their karma can sometimes impress the Fortunes with their compassion. In any event, PCs who render pious aid (by feeding them some trash, for example) in this instance will gain a point of Honor.

From this point on, any shugenja who attempt to Commune with the spirits will have to call one additional Raise – the influx of gaki have disturbed and frightened the elemental kami, and they are somewhat harder to reach. The earth kami, if successfully spoken to, are particularly perturbed but will not be able to give

any details until the PCs are much closer to Shiro Chuda.

### Fireflies

That night (the fourth after they depart Nanashi Mura), the PCs will be subjected to a strange sight:

*As the sun sets, your campfire merrily burns away the shadows cast across the Plain by the distant Dragon mountains. Before Lord Sun's light has fully faded from the sky, more points of light join the sparks rising from the blaze: what appear to be fireflies swarm to your fire. First a few, then a steady flood of glowing motes throw themselves into your midst, burning away in the flames.*

The sight of hundreds of bugs immolating themselves in front of them may be somewhat disturbing to the PCs, but there is no present danger. Any character who succeeds at a **Lore: Spirits / Intelligence** roll (TN 25) will recognize the bugs as jiki-kwa, a type of gaki that feeds on fire (souls who caused fires during their lives are bound to this fate; they will re-form in Gaki-do and have to go through the process again). Jiki-kwa have no real power, though the numbers are capable of snuffing the fire eventually. If the PCs seem likely to panic, Suisei will calmly take a few torches out away from the camp, clear some ground to prevent the fires from getting out of control, and set up a perimeter that will lure the hapless gaki away. While this event is minor, it does help establish the nature of the threat on the Plain.

### The Ox Caravan

Just before mid-day the next day, the party may catch a glimpse of another, larger group travelling across the plain. Any PC who succeeds at an **Investigation / Perception** roll at a TN of 20 will see a low dust-cloud on the horizon. Characters with ranks in Battle or Horsemanship will recognize the sign of a large party of riders traveling slowly. The other group will obviously pass a mile or so to their west, heading south, so the party can easily avoid them if they wish.

If they prefer, they can change their direction of travel to intercept or at least observe with only a small detour. Doing so will allow them to spot a small caravan – six ox-drawn wagons and about forty mounted ronin bushi. Another dozen are acting as outriders, and unless the PC make some effort to avoid notice, one of them will hail the group politely. PCs who played “Undefined Border”, or those who succeed at a **Lore: Heraldry / Intelligence** roll at a TN of 30, will recognize the symbol of the Band of the Ox on his armor and saddle.

*Managing his steed with respectable skill, the ronin approaches with a hand raised in greeting. “Konban-wa, samurai! What brings you to these benighted lands?”*

The ronin will introduce himself as Magobei. If asked, he will claim to be a member of the Band of the Ox, a ronin otokodate that follows Morito, a former Unicorn ronin and hero of the Clan War. He will invite the PCs to speak with his commander, Chalisa, who the PCs may have met during “Undefended Border.” Taking him up on this will cause a slight delay as the Ox offer some rough hospitality on the road (sharing some rough sake).

Whether they speak with Chalisa (who will be distant but polite) or not, the Ox are fairly open about their doings – recent events have convinced them to seek out a new place to call their own. The Dragon have claimed the Dragon Heart Plain, and the Ox have no wish to clash with a Great Clan. Additionally, the multitude of problems on the Plain have made living conditions difficult, so they are leaving. This caravan is only one of several that have been heading south and west. The Ox are heading first to Kaeru Toshi, to take temporary service with the new Frog Clan and build up a little more in the way of resources before they find a new home.

Questioning the Ox about the state of affairs on the plains will yield little in the way of new information – they describe fighting off increasing numbers of monsters (gaki, by their descriptions), finding several villages stricken by plague, and even a few skirmishes with bandits and barbarians from the north. *“It’s just not worth it anymore. The Dragon are here now; they’ll be able to defend the people better than we can, and there’s no point to fighting a Great Clan for the right to die for a place. We can find another place.”* Either Magobei or Chalisa will mention that the next village, Muda Muri Mura, seemed to be having problems when they were there a few days before. They will give directions to the village – it lies only a few miles to the northeast, not far from the PCs’ original line of march.

If the PCs are speaking with Chalisa, they may roll **Investigation / Awareness** (TN 25) to realize that there is something more to the Ox departure than she is admitting, but there is no way she will elaborate on the matter. Asking about it will only result in a flat denial, and pressing the issue will cause her to curtly order her men to get on the move again. If the PCs seem particularly nosy or refuse to take “no” for an answer, she will simply ride off – but she will remember them and report the incident to her superiors (earning them

“Sworn Enemy: Ox”). Combat is not in the PCs’ best interest – the numbers are simply not in their favor, and most of these veteran ronin are roughly as capable as the PCs.

Otherwise, the Ox caravan will bid the PCs a polite farewell and go on their way. Curious PCs may note that their wagons are laden, but do not have enough goods to account for an entire castle’s worth of possessions – they are obviously making multiple trips.

### Muda Muri Mura

As the PCs continue on their way, they will notice the ground becoming noticeably more fertile and bountiful, though largely uncultivated. Still, there are scattered villages on the plain, isolated from each other and living off the bounty of the land. The track the PCs are following heads close by one such village, though it has fallen afoul of the cursed spirits that haunt the plain.

*As the sun is starting to set on the third day on the plain, you see a small village just off the path. The huts seem sturdy and well-maintained, but there is no sign of human habitation. There are two larger buildings visible – an inn and a granary. A slender stream of smoke rises fitfully from the former, as though someone has forgotten to tend to their fire.*

Muda Muri Mura seems at first glance to be abandoned. If the PCs choose to avoid the place, they will have no difficulty in just going around it. Investigating the village will provoke a reaction from the gaki that haunts it. As soon as the PCs enter the village, the doors of the inn will slam open.

*A sudden bang echoes across the silent village, and a lanky, slumped form shambles out of the inn. Hacking and wheezing, an obviously-ill peasant staggers toward you, eyes unfocused. Dripping fluid from multiple orifices, only his labored breathing prevents you from thinking him a zombie.*

The possessed peasant will lumber slowly towards the PC in the front. Any damage done to him will cause him to collapse, in which instance the shozai-gaki will raise from his unconscious form and attack. If the PC allows him to touch them, or attempts to make contact themselves (to shove him away or try to heal him, for example), the shozai-gaki will abruptly lunge out of the peasant, increasing its Fear Rank to 4. It will attempt to possess the PC it is in contact with, and failing that will simply attack with a hunger for flesh.

While unsettling, this combat should not be difficult. The shozai-gaki is not terribly clever, attacking in a fairly flailing fashion and trying to feed more than kill.

If the shozai-gaki takes 25 Wounds without being destroyed, it will attempt to flee, leaving a translucent, palely glowing ichor on the ground as it escapes to the north.

## Shozai-Gaki

A translucent humanoid with splayed claws and slightly insectoid features. Its legs trail away before touching the ground, and it floats forward in a lurching, jerky gait.

Air 2	Earth 2	Fire 2	Water 3
Reflexes 4		Agility 4	Strength 4
<b>Initiative:</b> 4k4		<b>Attack:</b> 4k4 (Claw, Complex, ignores physical armor)	<b>Damage:</b> 3k3

**Armor TN:** 25

**Reduction:** 5

**Wounds:** 12: +5; 24:+10; 36: Dead

### **Special Abilities:**

- *Blood Draining:* A gaki may forgo normal damage from a successful attack in order to drain the victim's blood, drawing it out through translucent fingers. This inflicts 12 Wounds on the victim and heals the gaki by the same amount.
- Fear 3.
- *Immortality:* Gaki cannot actually be killed, and if their physical form is destroyed, they reform within Gaki-do.
- *Invisibility:* A gaki can become invisible as a Free Action, and while invisible may pass through walls and other solid inanimate objects (though not living creatures).
- *Shapeshifting:* All gaki can take the form of a normal insect as a Complex Action. Regaining their true form is a Simple Action.
- *Spirit:* Takes half damage from anything that is not Jade or Crystal (or obsidian).
- *Special Invulnerability:* Immune to all illusion spells and to all spells, skills, and techniques which affect the mind or thoughts.
- *Possession:* A shozai-gaki can possess a mortal as a Complex Action by winning a Contested Willpower roll. This possession causes the victim to suffer high fever and wracking chills, losing 1k1 Wounds per day as the gaki feeds directly on their essence. The gaki can be driven out of its victim by the spells Ward of Purity or Bonds of Ningen-do.

If the gaki flees, it will leave a trail that is relatively easy to follow – a **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll at a TN of 15 will allow the PCs to pursue at their own pace as it heads toward the portal. If it is destroyed, Suisei will raise a hand. *“Ah. The essence of the spirit has fled back to Gaki-do. I think... yes, I believe I can follow the trail back to the portal.”* A

shugenja can confirm this with a Sense (Air) spell, though it requires two Raises for enough clarity.

There are another dozen or so living people remaining in the village, though all of them are in extremely bad condition. The PCs may wish to offer assistance, but they are not likely equipped to deal with so many cases of illness without exposing themselves. Suisei will suggest they finish their mission so that the Dragon can be informed of the plight of the peasantry, and will be eager to move on.

If the PCs completely bypass the village, they can still find signs of tracks heading to the north; the shikko-gaki that caused the plague was here only two days before, and though like all spirits, it had no legs, it was accompanied by a small horde of insects – enough that a **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll at a TN of 25 will find them and indicate a rough direction to the north. If none of the PCs (or either ronin, if there) can find a trail, then Suisei will reluctantly claim to see traces that may lead in the direction of the portal.

If, instead, a shugenja attempts to Commune with the kami, they may be able to get a sense of direction from the spirits. However, that much clarity will require two additional Raises (above the Raise required for the attempt due to the disturbance in the spirits in the area). Any attempt to Commune with Earth spirits will yield an additional clue – the spirit will claim that the “hungry one” went to the “place that is not there” to return home. Additional questions will indicate that another shugenja in the area has been exercising their will over the local earth kami, but little more concrete information.

## The Missing Man

As the PCs continue north, the next day they will be surrounded by a Dragon patrol around mid-day. They may roll **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** at a TN of 25 to spot the patrol's scouts several minutes before they are approached by the main body of troops, but four guntai consists of roughly eighty men, with a mounted chui in command, so it is unlikely the PCs will be entirely surprised by the patrol.

If the PCs are wearing armor, the Dragon will be very wary, almost hostile, in their attitude. Several of them will have weapons drawn and ready, even if there are Dragon PCs in the group. The officer will stay mounted on his hardy little pony and survey the group with a stony expression – a little harder if the PCs look like trouble – and command them to produce their travel papers in a no-nonsense tone.

If the PCs only have travel papers from Isawa Tomo, the chui will scowl and demand an explanation for their presence in the province. He will listen impatiently, obviously suspicious. (PCs may roll **Investigation / Awareness** at a TN of 20 to realize that there is something more bothering the officer than just their presence, though they have aggravated the issue.) If they respond in a rude or angry fashion, the chui will issue an order for their arrest – prompting Suisei to step forward. *“Your pardon, Mirumoto-sama. These samurai are assisting me; I apologize for their demeanor and beg your forgiveness. There are many concerns over the province. May I have your indulgence?”* He produces a tightly-bound scroll and hands it up to the chui. The officer snatches it and scans it, then his face pales and he clears his throat. *“Yes, of course, Suisei-sa... san. We will not impede your mission.”* With a curt nod and a frown for the PCs, he returns the scroll and orders his men to move out. *“We have our own problems. Carry the Fortunes, wise one.”* Suisei tucks the scroll away, bowing deeply. Curious PCs may roll **Investigation (Notice) / Perception** at a TN of a to catch a glimpse of a relatively uncommon mon – a dragon clutching a plum blossom. Non-Dragon must roll **Lore: Heraldry / Intelligence** (TN 20) to recognize the Togashi family mon.

If the PCs have travel papers from another source or are not wearing armor, the officer will relax only slightly and introduce himself as Mirumoto Songui, chui in the Eighth Mirumoto Legion. He will still ask after their business, but will simply shake his head. *“These lands are dangerous indeed, samurai. I wish you well in your endeavors, but I must return to my own mission. Be cautious; though it has not been found by any force large enough to deal with the matter, the ruins of Shiro Chuda are reported to be somewhere in this area.”*

If the PCs received permission to wear armor from Takejiro, or have travel papers from him and are not wearing armor, then Songui will be much more open and accommodating. He will signal his men to relax and dismount to speak with the group, bowing politely as he introduces himself. He will ask after the PCs’ mission, and shake his head with regret if they speak of it. *“I wish I could be of assistance, samurai, but one of my squads has gone missing. I need to find them if possible, and return their bodies for the appropriate ceremonies. I don’t want to think about leaving any man behind in these haunted lands.”* Songui’s concern is even greater than that – the gunso of the squad was none other than Mirumoto Kyuujo, Takejiro’s son on his first mission at his new rank. He will discuss it if the PCs are polite and open with him,

and ask them to keep an eye out for any sign of the missing patrol. Before he moves on, he will issue the same warning as above about the proximity of the ruins of Shiro Chuda.

## Part Three: Snake in the Grass

All the available signs should point the PCs northward, toward the ruins of Shiro Chuda. Following the trails of the gaki will bring them into the area, though they must make another **Hunting (Tracking) / Perception** roll at a TN of 20 to discern the way. (Again, if they cannot succeed, then Suisei will point out the way, though he is increasingly hesitant to stand out.) If the PCs speak with the spirits any closer to the ruins, they will discover that the earth spirits are entirely focused on another task. Two Raises are required simply to cast Commune with the earth spirits, and even at that, the only answer they will receive is *“quiet. busy. keeping armies away.”* The other elements are less effected, still requiring an additional Raise to speak with, but have little information that they are capable of imparting.

A day north of their encounter with the Mirumoto patrol, the PCs will enter the immediate area of Tomoyuki’s influence. All Earth spells have their casting TN increased by 5, and any Earth spell that has a direct effect upon the ground itself (Earth Becomes Sky, Embrace of Kenro-ji-jin, Earthquake, etc) will automatically fail without spending the spell slot – the local Earth kami are bound to Tomoyuki’s will and are busy guiding “the armies” away from the area. As there are only a few people in the PCs’ group, they will be ignored by the kami, but any group larger than a dozen has been unable to approach Shiro Chuda due to the spirits’ influence.

As they approach the castle, even if the PCs are not following a set of tracks to the ruins, they will most likely notice signs of a great deal of traffic. Insects do not commonly leave much in the way of a trail, but their sheer numbers, in addition to larger creatures like the feline o-toyo or ghoulish shikko, have left traces that any character with at least a passing familiarity with Hunting will pick up on.

*Seven centuries ago, the Phoenix destroyed the entire Snake Clan in five days of carnage. The Chuda family’s castle rested atop a hill providing a clear vantage point for miles around, but its walls were shattered and thrown down, leaving little more than weathered stones to mark where the foundations of the town once spread. A few rocks still rest in a low,*

*uneven wall circling the crest of the hill, and from the plain below, it appears as though they have had no companion for hundreds of years other than wind and rain. Nothing stirs save the breeze. Despite the bright mid-morning summer sunlight, you feel a brief chill.*

Even a cursory examination around the hill will allow the PCs to find a track worn by the passage of a large number of creatures, leading down from the top of the hill. Atop the hill, they will find a low structure formed from rough stone. Little more than a hut, there is nothing inside except for a straw cloak, a jingasa, sandals, and a walking staff leaning on one wall. A dark staircase takes up the middle of the floor, the entrance to what was once the castle's lower levels. The tracks all lead down the stone steps.

The trail leads down into a tight, almost claustrophobic stone corridor lit by a single dim lantern. Most of the doors are rotted away, but a few have been blocked off with rough, impromptu barriers and secured with wedges. A fitful light flickers from one of the doorways, a mixture of a lantern's warmth and something silvery and wavering. Voices hiss out from the doorway, one angry and peremptory, the other yowling with inhuman hunger.

Inside the room, the PCs will see a lean, saturnine figure in the orange and red robes of a Phoenix shugenja apparently engaged in conversation with a feral cat the size of a cougar. A translucent, ghastly form hovers behind them – a man in armor, with swords sheathed at his sides. Dominating the large room (likely once a storeroom for the castle) is a misty oval a little taller than a man – a weak silver light shimmers from it, though nothing is visible through it save occasional grasping claws.

The PCs do not have long to observe or make plans – as soon as any of them approach to the doorway, the o-toyo will raise its head and snarl. In a hissing, barely comprehensible voice, it says, "The stink of mortals. If I cannot feed on you, then I claim them." If any of the PCs have "Mark of the Cat", then she will snarl something incoherent about "child-killers" and leap to attack.

The room is roughly 30 feet long by 20 feet wide. Tomoyuki will bark out "Deal with any shugenja first!" and cast Embrace of Kenro-ji-jin on the first Round, in order to circle to the back of the group. Gotaro no Gaki will summon a sozai-gaki on the first Round, then alternate attacking on its own with summoning more unless it is being pressed by more than one PC. The o-toyo will preferentially attack PCs with "Mark of the Cat", as noted, ignoring any others, but will reluctantly

start attacking shugenja if there are no other immediate targets – it does not appreciate having to obey Tomoyuki's commands. If Tomoyuki is slain before the gaki, they may seek to retreat rather than fight against the odds. If he is placed in his last Wound Rank, Gotaro will duck back through the portal, sacrificing his minions to enable his escape. The o-toyo will not flee if there are any PCs with "Mark of the Cat", but will otherwise depart on reaching her last Wound Rank. It is worth note that the gaki are not Tainted; they are immune to things like Jade Strike. However, Tomoyuki is just Tainted enough to be damaged by such things.

This has the potential to be a dangerous fight; all three of the main enemies are very powerful individually, though they are obviously outnumbered. Susei acts during the Reactions Stage; he will prefer to avoid taking any direct action in the combat, pulling away fallen PCs for healing (he performs a kiho that heals them of 8 Wounds during the Reactions Stage of each Round until they are healed), but if the group is in serious danger from Tomoyuki, he will perform a single strike that prevents the shugenja from speaking. If the ronin are present, they will obey whatever orders the PCs issue; Furukizu is somewhat more aggressive, while Kanjin has a more defensive style and prefers to use grapples.

### "Asako" Tomoyuki

The descendant of one of the few surviving Chuda, his family has long since turned to maho to survive. Tomoyuki joined the Phoenix after living as a ronin for years, and has hidden his agenda since. Though he is an accomplished maho-tsukai, he avoids using blood magic in order to minimize the risk of losing himself to the Taint.

Air 2	Earth 5	Fire 3	Water 4	Void 4
Reflexes 3		Intelligence 4		
Honor 1.3		Status 2.0		Glory 1.9

**Initiative:** 7k3      **Attack:** 7k3 (knife)  
**Armor TN:** 20 (28 Defense Stance)      **Damage:** 4k1 (knife)  
**Reduction:** 9 (Armor of Earth)  
**Taint Rank:** 1.3  
**Wounds:** 25 (+0), 35 (+3), 45 (+5), 55 (+10), 65 (+15), 75 (+20), 85 (Down, +40), 95 (Dead)  
**School/Rank:** Chuda Shugenja 4  
**Techniques:** *Blood Like Water:* May call a Raise when casting a Maho spell to make it appear as typical elemental magic instead of Maho. May call an additional Raise or sacrifice a point of Honor to reduce all Taint gain from Maho spell to one point.  
**Affinity/Deficiency:** Maho spells/Air  
**Spells:** many, but the applicable ones are: Earth (10k5); Armor of Earth (ML1), Earth Becomes Sky (ML2),

Embrace of Kenro-ji-jin (ML2), Wall of Earth (ML4); Fire (8k3): Disrupt the Aura (ML2), Water (9k4): Path to Inner Peace (ML1), Silent Waters (ML3); Maho: Armor of Obsidian (Fire ML3); others at the GM's discretion, with an emphasis on indirect, subtle effects – Earth Becomes Sky is his primary offense

**Skills:** Acting 2, Athletics 1, Calligraphy (Cipher) 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 1, Hunting 4, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Knives (Tanto) 4, Lore: History 1, Lore: Maho 5, Lore: Shadowlands 2, Meditation 2, Spellcraft (Importune) 5, Stealth (Ambush) 3

**Mastery Abilities:** Defense 5 (may retain a Full Defense Roll in successive Rounds, +3 Armor TN while in Defense or Full Defense Stance); Knives 3 (off-hand penalties do not apply when using a knife); Spellcraft 5 (+1k0 to Spell Casting Rolls)

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Bland, Crafty, Luck I / Dark Secret (Chuda Bloodline), Overconfident

## Mother of O-toyo

Abandoning pretense, the ancient gaki that claims to be the “Mother of the O-toyo” appears to be a huge cat, the size of a lion but with the markings of a common feral housecat.

Air 2      Earth 4      Fire 3      Water 4  
Reflexes 4      Agility 4

**Initiative:** 7k4

**Attack:** 10k4 (Fangs, Complex) or 8k4 (Claws, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 30

**Damage:** 7k3 (Fangs) or 5k2 (Claws)

**Reduction:** 3

**Wounds:** 30 (+10), 60 (Dead)

### **Special Abilities:**

- *Deceptive Visage:* Appears as a common house cat unless a raw Perception Roll at TN 25 is passed.
- *Destroyer of Life:* Each successful attack by an O-toyo heals it by 5 Wounds.
- *Spirit:* Half damage from all weapons that are not Crystal or Jade.
- *Hunger for Vengeance:* The Mother of O-toyo thirsts for vengeance against those who slew her children. She attacks any PC with “Mark of the Cat” preferentially, generally Full Attacking, and gains an additional bonus of +2k0 damage against such PCs.

## Gotaro no Gaki

Once a samurai named Mirumoto Gotaro, this gaki is the cursed spirit of a daimyo who ignored the suffering of his vassals. Called a shikko, they feed on the flesh of humans and spread a noxious disease

Air 3      Earth 3      Fire 4      Water 4  
Reflexes 4      Stamina 5

**Initiative:** 9k4

**Attack:** 10k4 (Katana or Wakizashi, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 40

**Damage:** 8k2 (Katana) or 7k2 (Wakizashi)

**Reduction:** 5

**Wounds:** 15 (+0), 30 (+10), 50 (Dead)

**School/Rank:** Mirumoto Bushi 5

**Techniques:** *Way of the Dragon:* Suffers no penalties for dual wielding a katana a wakizashi, and gains +5 Armor TN. When targeted with a spell, may raise or lower the TN of that spell's Spell Casting Roll by 5.

*The Calm In Midst of Thunder:* While in Center Stance, gains +7 to the total of Iaijutsu rolls.

*Strong and Swift:* Attacking is a Simple Action while using weapons with the Samurai keyword.

*Furious Retaliation:* During the Reactions Stage of Combat, may choose one opponent who made or attempted an attack against him this Round. During next Turn, gains +3k0 to all attack rolls against that target.

*Heart of the Dragon:* If attacks twice in the same Turn while wielding a katana in main hand and a wakizashi in off hand, may make one additional attack with off hand as a Free Action.

**Skills:** Athletics 5, Defense 5, Iaijutsu 4, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Lore: Shugenja 4, Lore: Theology 3, Meditation 2

**Mastery Abilities:** Athletics 5 (no movement penalties from Terrain); Defense 5 (may retain a Full Defense Roll in successive Rounds, +3 Armor TN while in Defense or Full Defense Stance); Kenjutsu 7 (+1k0 damage with swords, may ready a sword as a Free Action, 9s and 10s explode on damage with swords)

### **Special Abilities:**

- Fear 4.
- *Immortality:* Gaki cannot actually be killed, and if their physical form is destroyed, they reform within Gaki-do.
- *Spirit:* Takes half damage from anything that is not Jade or Crystal (or obsidian).
- *Special Invulnerability:* Immune to all illusion spells and to all spells, skills, and techniques which affect the mind or thoughts.
- *Spread Disease:* Shikko spread illness wherever they go. Any character wounded by the gaki must make an **Earth** roll at a TN equal to the total number of Wounds taken during the skirmish (whether healed or not) or take ill over the course of the next day. They will lose one point of Stamina a week unless they succeed at another **Earth** roll at a TN of 30 (if being treated, they gain a bonus to this roll equal to the Skill Roll of the character treating them) until they have succeeded twice in a row or they die from having their Stamina reduced to 0.
- *Summon Shozai-Gaki:* May summon a Shozai-Gaki (below) from the open portal as a Complex Action.

## Shozai-Gaki

A translucent humanoid with splayed claws and slightly insectoid features.

Air 2	Earth 2	Fire 2	Water 3
Reflexes 4		Agility 4	Strength 4

**Initiative:** 4k4      **Attack:** 4k4 (Claw, Complex, ignores physical armor)  
**Damage:** 3k3

**Armor TN:** 25

**Reduction:** 5

**Wounds:** 12: +5; 24:+10; 36: Dead

### Special Abilities:

- *Blood Draining:* A gaki may forgo normal damage from a successful attack in order to drain the victim's blood, drawing it out through translucent fingers. This inflicts 12 Wounds on the victim and heals the gaki by the same amount.
- Fear 3.
- *Immortality:* Gaki cannot actually be killed, and if their physical form is destroyed, they reform within Gaki-do.
- *Invisibility:* A gaki can become invisible as a Free Action, and while invisible may pass through walls and other solid inanimate objects (though not living creatures).
- *Shapeshifting:* All gaki can take the form of a normal insect as a Complex Action. Regaining their true form is a Simple Action.
- *Spirit:* Takes half damage from anything that is not Jade or Crystal (or obsidian).
- *Special Invulnerability:* Immune to all illusion spells and to all spells, skills, and techniques which affect the mind or thoughts.
- *Possession:* A shozai-gaki can possess a mortal as a Complex Action by winning a Contested Willpower roll. This possession causes the victim to suffer high fever and wracking chills, losing 1k1 Wounds per day as the gaki feeds directly on their essence. The gaki can be driven out of its victim by the spells Ward of Purity or Bonds of Ningen-do.

Once the PCs have defeated the guardians of the portal, they may search the ruins for the anchors to close the portal. The anchors are innocuous-looking items – a small stone tablet carved with the Snake Clan mon (Earth), a stick of sickly-sweet incense that is burning without being consumed (Air), a bowl filled with black, fetid water (Water), and the lantern illuminating the room (Fire). They are all within twenty feet of the portal, but are only recognizable by a shugenja casting Sense for each element or by Suisei. However, if they make an **Investigation (Search) / Perception** roll at TN of 25 they will find Tomoyuki's journal, which describes in detail the ritual he used to force open the portal to Gaki-do and control the denizens that came

through. This will allow them to find the anchors without casting any spells.

Tomoyuki took copious notes on his process, including the ritual he used to ensure Shiro Chuda remained hidden and the details of his torturing a squad of Dragon bushi that managed to penetrate his defenses and slay one of his strongest minions. The journal also speaks of his numerous plans for the conquest of the old lands of the Snake Clan and his intention to return his family to power. In his effects are several letters written to his young son in the Phoenix lands, speaking at length about the glories their family would one day know. There is no indication in the letters whether the boy or Tomoyuki's now-deceased wife knew of his heritage or true intentions.

If the PCs search the other rooms in the basement, they will find the dead bodies of nine Mirumoto bushi – and the barely-living Mirumoto Kyuujo. Tomoyuki took the surviving members of the patrol captive after they slew one of the most dangerous gaki let loose on the plain (a gakimushi, a Tainted monstrosity from the ranges of Gaki-do closest to Jigoku). Only Kyuujo's Great Destiny allowed him to survive the tortures the mad Chuda put them through, and if the PCs do not find him, that Destiny may take him in a darker direction...

If the PCs capture Tomoyuki, he can be tricked or tortured into revealing the above information, along with details concerning his plans for the restoration of the Chuda. Suffice to say, the descriptions will give the PCs unpleasant dreams for some nights to come.

## Conclusion

If the PCs cannot defeat Tomoyuki, then any survivors (those knocked to Down or Out) will wake up outside the ruins on the Plain. A battered Suisei will finish dressing their wounds and report in a tired voice that the shugenja was driven away. He will refuse to answer any questions as to how, but will note that the Dragon Armies will likely be able to deal with the situation themselves now, and depart. Any illness caused by Gotaro no Gaki will be cured, and their Wounds will all be healed, but their mission will have failed for now – they may be able to convince the Dragon to give them the anchors, but they will need to roll **Sincerity (Honesty) or Courtier (Manipulation) / Awareness** at a TN of 30 to manage it. If not, they will return to Ume empty-handed, and she will distantly thank them for the attempt. Unfortunately, by the time the Dragon arrive at the ruins, Mirumoto Kyuujo will have disappeared.

Assuming they slay or capture the maho-tsukai and gather the anchors, they will have little difficulty returning to Ume with them. Again, Suisei will treat any PC afflicted by Gotaro no Gaki's disease, and then he will offer to inform the Dragon of the situation with the castle (taking Mirumoto Kyuujo with him if the PCs found him). The PCs are free to return to Ume with the anchors, whereupon she will thank them profusely and eagerly begin her research.

## 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:	1XP
Good roleplaying:	+1XP
Finding the Portal:	+1XP
Rescuing Mirumoto Kyuujo:	+1XP

**Total Possible Experience: 4XP**

## Honor

Any PC who assisted a usai-gaki gains a point of Honor for their pious compassion. Any PC with less than five Ranks of Honor gains a point of Honor for successfully rescuing Mirumoto Kyuujo.

## Glory

Every PC loses a full Rank of Glory at the beginning of this module, due to the amount of time elapsed between this module and the previous.

Successfully completing the honorable quest earns the PCs ten points of Glory, minus one for their current Glory Rank. Rescuing Mirumoto Kyuujo gains them another point; if their Glory Rank is less than three, it gains them two points.

## Other Awards/Penalties

If the PCs did not force Suisei to lead them every step of the way (they were able to locate Shiro Chuda by using their own efforts, dealt with the Dragon patrol without his intervention, and killed Tomoyuki), they will gain him as an Ally with one point of Devotion and 0 points of Influence.

If the PCs rescued Mirumoto Kyuujo, they gain both him and his father as Allies. Kyuujo is Devotion 2 and Influence 1, and Takejiro is Devotion 1 and Influence 2. If the PCs already had Takejiro as an Ally, they gain an additional point of Devotion.

Successfully bringing the PCs back an anchor for Ume earns them her as an Ally (Devotion 1/Influence 1), or increases her Devotion by 1 if they already had her. Shugenja PCs may forgo this Influence and spend 1 point of experience to learn any non-Void spell of Mastery Level 1.

Closing the portal to Gaki-do on the Dragon Heart Plain earns the PCs a Dragon Clan Favor.

Any PCs who wish to make use of Tomoyuki's notes must contact the Campaign Admin for information on the results of doing so.

## Module Tracking Sheets

Any PC who killed the O-toyo gains "Mark of the Cat".

## GM Reporting

Did the PCs speak with the Ox samurai? Did any of them earn a Sworn Enemy?  
Was Tomoyuki killed?  
Did Gotaro no Gaki escape?  
Did the PCs close the portal?  
Did the PCs rescue Kyuujo?

**GM must report this information BEFORE (6/29/2013) for it to have storyline effect**



