

# **Return of Thunder**

**A One-Round High-Rank Adventure for  
Heroes of Rokugan: Spirit of Bushido  
Month of Shinjo, 1143 (Late Autumn)**

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A decade ago, the Empire was forever changed when Oblivion's Gate opened. Though it was destroyed, it may still have the power to alter Rokugan's fate...

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

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 4 and there are no shugenja at the table): Reduce the TNs of the Social Rolls in Shinsei's Last Hope by 5. Reduce the TNs of the Shadowlands March rolls by 10. Reduce the Armor TN of the Goblin Warmongers by 10

**High End Party** (most/all characters Rank 6, there are more than two shugenja, or at least half of the table has a ready means of ignoring Invulnerability): Increase Nashiko's Armor TN to 60 and Wounds to 150.

## Adventure Summary and Background

When the spirits of Rokugan's ancestors returned to the mortal Realm through Oblivion's Gate, they helped to save the Empire. Over the last decade, however, it has become increasingly more evident that their presence in Ningen-do has caused several unintended consequences, ranging from political issues as samurai dead for centuries have tried to claim positions of authority that they held in their first lives, to the spiritual, as their return through the Gate seemingly has divorced them from the forces of Fate and Destiny. A new Spirit Realm, Kosoku no Chigiri (the Realm of Thwarted Destiny), has come into being and those who have experienced it report it to be a hellish place full of torment for those souls prevented from fulfilling their own karma by the actions of returned spirits.

Isawa Ume, one of the samurai touched by the Realm in its first throes, has spent the last several years studying the returned spirits and their effects on Ningen-do. With support from several powerful and spiritually-inclined samurai, she has risen to the rank of Acolyte of the Void and has begun to understand the nature of the problems caused by the returned spirits. Specifically, she has nearly all of the pieces of the puzzle and lacks only one final thing to fully develop a method of fully reintegrating a returned spirit to the mortal Realm: she

must study the cause of their return, Oblivion's Gate itself.

The PCs will be asked to provide their assistance in getting her safely to and from the ancient troll city of Voltturnum, lost deep in the Shadowlands. This will put them in place to be part of an event that will shape the future of the Empire, for forces of both the Heavens and Jigoku will each have a part in Ume's efforts.

The creature once known as Doji Nashiko, now referred to as the Demon Bride of Fu Leng, has been gathering information on the Crab Clan's efforts in the area of Shinsei's Last Hope. She will take note of the party's expedition, and realizing that their efforts could be a threat to the forces of Jigoku, will replace a member of the group so that she can lure them into the Shadowlands and eliminate them all.

However, the Empire is watched over by the Heavens, and Kisada, the Fortune of Persistence, has not forgotten the mission his life was devoted to before his ascension to Tengoku. As Hida Kisada, the Great Bear and Champion of the Crab, he fought against the Shadowlands his entire life; while becoming a Fortune has limited the direct action he can take against the forces of darkness, he can still help the mortal realm by offering guidance and showing the path. He will help lead the PCs to Oblivion's Gate, where he can open the Gate itself to allow heroes from the Empire's past to step forward once again. It will be up to them, however, to determine what happens once he does...

Ume's ritual will have profound effects on the future of the Empire, beyond even those she intends.

## Character Notes

Check the PCs' character sheets for the following:

- Returned Spirit
- Shadowlands Taint
- Haunted
- Any Advantage or Disadvantage that has a source of a Spirit Realm other than Ningen-do, Tengoku, or Kousoku no Chigiri (the Realm of Thwarted Destiny); Touched by the Realm or Cursed by the Realm are the most obvious

## Introduction

Each PC receives a letter from Isawa Ume, asking them to meet her at the Shrine of the Sun on the Dragon Heart Plain to help her with a mission "critical to the fate of the Empire." The Dragon Heart Plain is currently contested

between the Dragon and Phoenix Clans, and the Shrine itself (as the stated focus of the conflict) is known to be under siege. The travel papers that accompany the letter are authorized by both Isawa Tomo, the Phoenix Master of Water, and Togashi Hoshi, the Dragon Clan Champion.

*A cold wind blows across the Dragon Heart Plain as winter threatens the Empire. The banners of the army besieging the Shrine of the Sun snap in the breeze; a mixed force comprising Phoenix and Crab, with Mantis and Crane auxiliaries, their camp completely surrounds the fortified temple compound. The allied encampment is itself well-defended, showing as many signs of the siege that has gone on for four months now as the walls of the defenders.*

The PCs are met by a patrol of bushi from the Phoenix and Crab, who direct them to a parlay tent erected on the field before the gates of the Shrine. An Imperial banner hangs above it as a flag of truce, with two Phoenix pennants displayed opposite a Dragon. The PCs may roll **Lore: Heraldry / Intelligence** (TN 30; they receive two Free Raises to recognize a mon from their own clan) to recognize official mon of high-ranking individuals from each clan: the Master of Water, the Master of Earth, and the Dragon Clan Champion. The Master of Earth's is obviously more battered, having been borne in combat (even fairly recently).

Beyond the parlay tent, the Shrine itself is a massive, fortified structure surrounding a settlement of several buildings arranged around a hill. Though it started as a single building, a humble shrine built into the side of a hill (as PCs who visited it during SoB44: *Winter Court: Shiro Chuda* will recall), it has since been expanded into a sizable complex, with a larger temple over the altar blessed by the Celestial Heaven, a barracks housing a full legion, and even a small village. Shiro Chuda is about twelve miles away, much less than a day's ride, and trade between the community here and the provincial seat led to prosperity for the locals – at least until the Phoenix and Crab invaded.

*You can clearly hear a raised woman's voice as you approach the tent, though it breaks off when the guards pass word of your arrival to those within. A long table has been set up inside, and when you step in, the samurai seated at it turn to face you. One end is surrounded by a sea of red and orange: nearly a dozen grim Shiba yojimbo guard the three shugenja seated there. Isawa Taeruko sits at the head, with Isawa Tomo on her right and Isawa Ume slightly hunched to his side (as though hoping to avoid the Master of Earth's attention). Three Mirumoto bushi stand at attention at the other end, behind the massive seated form of*

*Togashi Hoshi, clad in his golden armor and idly resting a hand on the helm sitting on the table. (If there are no returned spirits among the PCs): A lone Lion bushi, glowing softly with the touch of another Realm, sits at his right hand: Akodo Moretsu, a taisa in the Lion armies. Her stern features relax somewhat on seeing you enter.*

If there are any returned spirit PCs, there is no reason for Moretsu to accompany the group, but if there are none, it is important that they have a returned spirit along.

Taeruko is making little effort to hide her irritation with Tomo, though Tomo and Ume are doing their best to maintain proper face. The PCs may roll **Investigation / Awareness** to get a sense of the “mood of the room”: success with a 20 informs them that Taeruko disapproves of the current mission, preferring to focus the Council's efforts on securing the Dragon Heart Plain and is suspicious of Tomo's motivations, while Tomo is trying to be patient with his younger cousin, but is simply not as concerned about avenging the clan's honor against the Dragon and far more worried about the overarching spiritual concerns of the Empire. Ume is quite intimidated by the Masters, though somewhat outraged by Taeruko's haranguing Tomo (who has been acting as a mentor to her, despite their entirely different magical approach). The Shiba guards, of course, are wishing they were anywhere else. Rolling a 30 or higher will allow them to determine that Hoshi is quietly amused by Taeruko's antics, though he is avoiding causing further friction. And Moretsu, if present, almost appears to be barely paying attention; whether she is ignoring the display or simply emotionally distant is impossible to determine.

*Taeruko rises and brushes away any attempts at pleasantries impatiently. “Finally. I would prefer to waste as little time as possible on this matter. Your presence has been requested by one of my clan's ishiken, to assist her with her researches. I trust that you will appreciate the import of being asked to take part in such an undertaking, and more significantly, the importance of her security.” She gives you a stern look, and then abruptly gestures for Ume to rise. “Explain your intent, and let us return to our own affairs.”*

*Ume's dark eyes widen in surprise and a certain amount of panic, but at a comforting nod from Tomo, she stands and clears her throat. Her voice begins hesitantly as she explains her project, but grows steadier as she gains confidence in her subject. “Thank you all for coming, all this way, to, to help. I, um, have been studying the new Spirit Realm created on the death of the Empress for, well, some time now,*

*and as you may know, it has been discovered that the actions of returned spirits have been responsible for its continued growth. I've been looking for a way to return the spirits to the cycle of destiny, and I believe that I am very close to a solution." Her voice falters again, as she finishes. "Uh, it just, uh, requires examining the source, the thing that all of the returned spirits have in common. Oblivion's Gate itself. Which was broken, but still stands. In, well, Volturnum. In the- the far South."*

The PCs should recognize events described from several previous modules (New Beginnings, Twisted Fate, Killing Grounds, A Glimpse Beyond), and Ume will be certain to remember any previous interactions they may have had with her. However, since she is basically asking them to escort her into the Shadowlands, it is understandable if they have a few questions for her.

Questions for Ume:

- Study of spirits? "I have examined returned spirits from all of the Realms that came through Oblivion's Gate, and have come to an understanding of the effects Oblivion's Gate has had on them. Now, I need to study the Gate itself in order to understand how it did what it did to them."
- Effects on spirits? "I believe that I can develop a ritual that will allow the spirits of Ningen-do to reintegrate the returned spirits with the mortal Realm. This will restore them to the proper path of destiny, and prevent further expansion of the Realm of Thwarted Destiny..."
- The Gate? "I understand that it was created by the trolls before their destruction by Hida Osano-wo during the Dawn of the Empire. It was destroyed by the Master of Fire, Isawa Hochiu, ten years ago."
- Volturnum? "It was the capital of the troll empire, I believe, but they were destroyed by Hida Osano-wo a thousand years ago. The ruins lie far to the south." Though she obviously wants to avoid saying the word, she forces it out: "In the Shadowlands."
- Shadowlands? "Travel in the twisted lands is obviously very dangerous, though there is an additional peril inherent in an ishiken becoming touched by that darkness. It is a risk, but the reward will be well worth it."
- Courtiers? Tomo will answer this issue. "Though our allies in the Crab have pledged a certain amount of support, I have a feeling it may prove useful to have someone along who may be able to persuade them to give more freely..."
- Tainted PCs? "Your condition may be a danger, but it is nothing we will not be facing already. I am certain that our Crab allies will help keep it from becoming a problem."

- Practical considerations/equipment? "Togashi Hoshi-sama has been kind enough to make some arrangements in this regard."

Togashi Hoshi will involve himself in the discussion when the subject of practical considerations comes up (or when the PCs run out of other questions to ask). *The deep rumble of the Dragon Champion's voice is heard for the first time. "I have arranged for some material assistance to be provided for you by the Imperial Chancellor. Our plan is to have to travel to Otosan Uchi, where you will take ship to Shinsei's Last Hope, the Crab's southernmost outpost. That should provide the best place to launch your expedition from."* If asked what the Dragon's interest in the mission or Ume's studies are, Hoshi will smile enigmatically. "I believe Ume-san's research will be of importance to the Empire, and in fact have supported her efforts for several years now, since before the current difficulties between our clans." Taeruko breaks in with a sharp retort. "Though not before the Dragon attacked the Phoenix and claimed these lands, which you are patently incapable of tending properly!" Hoshi, however, refuses to rise to her baiting, calmly continuing, "Ume-san should be able to gain enough information from her study of the Gate to help stabilize the spiritual imbalances the Empire is facing. I ask that you keep her safe, and return safely yourselves."

If she is present (which is to say, if there are no returned spirit PCs), Hoshi will introduce Akodo Moretsu as a "valiant member of the Lion Clan who has volunteered to accompany your group so that a returned spirit will be close at hand should Ume-san have need." Moretsu is polite, though distant, which should not be a surprise to those who have encountered her before (Personal Sacrifice, All That Will Be Lost).

Ume will meditate at the Shrine, using it to help understand the separation of the Realms. The blessing of Tengoku on the Shrine of the Sun prevents any other Realm from having an impact on Ningen-do, suppressing the Taint and silencing haunting spirits. PCs who wish to meditate at the Shrine will be allowed to do so as well, which lets them experience the peace and serenity the Shrine provides.

## Part One: Otosan Uchi

The journey from the Shrine of the Sun to the Imperial Capital takes roughly four days. When the PCs arrive in Otosan Uchi, the guards at the gate inform them that their arrival has been anticipated by the Imperial Chancellor, who has arranged rooms for them at the *Thousand Story Inn* in the Inner City. The message also asks them to

meet them there for dinner so that he may speak with them concerning their mission.

The *Thousand Story Inn* is a famous establishment in the capital, just across the river from the Forbidden City and affording many of its guests a phenomenal view of the Imperial Palace. It was founded by an Ikoma bard (hence, the “stories” refer not to its height but the many tales brought by those who have stayed here), and boasts exceptional meals and drinks as well as its luxurious accommodations. (The Chancellor is not pinching pennies with the PCs.)

The PCs should have time to ask around town or attempt to make arrangements of their own before dinner. Any reasonable equipment can be purchased, and even illegal goods are attainable (if very expensive) with a **Lore: Underworld / Intelligence** (TN 30) roll. Note that most of these goods are significantly inflated in cost: at least 10% more expensive than their prices listed in the rulebook, with harder to obtain items potentially costing as much as five times more.

## Rumors

PCs asking around the capital for word of the Empire may make 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. (Imperial samurai receive a Free Raise for this roll.) The rumors include:

- New Imperial claimant Toturi Daio is gathering support across the Empire. New daimyo take up his standard every month, and even some of the highest ranking lords of the land have been heard to debate the merit of his claim. Having taken Toshi Ranbo after he was driven off the Dragon Heart Plain, the Son of the Black Lion shows every sign of having decided to winter in the contested city and build up his forces there.
- Following the military alliance between the Phoenix, Crane, Mantis, and Crab, trade along the coast has been extremely lucrative of late. The Mantis in particular are pleased at their prospects with the opening of Phoenix ports to their ships; Mantis Champion Yoritomo Aramasu is in Otosan Uchi making arrangements that will profit the maritime clan immensely.
- Fighting has broken out in the in the Lion lands, between daimyo who have come out in support of the Black Lion and daimyo who have proclaimed their support for the Emerald Champion or the Imperial Regent. Matsu Ketsui, daimyo of the Matsu family, is one of the highest-ranking samurai in the Empire fighting for Toturi Daio, and this large

base of support is attributed as the reason that the Army of the Black Lion was able to take Toshi Ranbo with relatively little fighting.

- Despite massive damage to their lands, the Fox Clan is likely to survive. There are enough different parties interested in their future that some think that the Kitsune family may wind up becoming part of another clan (as happened with the Falcon Clan after they were similarly devastated); rejoining the Unicorn is spoken of as having historical precedent, though the Scorpion may be owed some consideration for their current generosity in taking in the Kitsune refugees.
- Emerald Champion Kakita Toshiken has held formal talks with Imperial Regent Hantei Okucho; though nothing has been confirmed as yet, there are rumors of an alliance between them to deal with Toturi Daio come spring. The Empress had accompanied Toshiken to Otosan Uchi, but left last week (under close guard by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Imperial Legion) to head to Pale Oak Castle for Winter Court.
- Hida Yasamura has continued to march south along the Wall, and has claimed the 12<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Watchtowers. The 11<sup>th</sup> tower fell after heavy fighting, though the Wall itself stands strong, and the 10<sup>th</sup> was surrendered to him almost immediately. Whether or not he will stop for the coming winter season remains to be seen.
- Rumors abound that Seppun Murayasu will be starting an 11<sup>th</sup> Legion dedicated to improving the morale of the Empire’s fighting forces.

The PCs may wish to gather information on Shinsei’s Last Hope before they travel south. This can be accomplished with a **Courtier (Gossip) / Awareness** roll, or a **Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence** roll. In either case, they gain the following information:

- 15: Shinsei’s Last Hope is a village in the Shadowlands, beyond the Wall. It was blessed by Shinsei himself before the Day of Thunder, and has remained untouched by the darkness ever since.
- 20: The military governor of the village, Hida Jirochi, holds the rank of shireikan, as three full legions of the Crab army are stationed there at all times.
- 25: The village is being expanded and its fortifications built up, as the Crab have heard rumors concerning visions of a major assault upon it by an organized armor of Lost samurai.
- 30: Jirochi is a grim, dedicated samurai who has no room in his life for frivolities. The scarcity of jade in the Empire following the March to Volturnum a decade ago concerns him greatly, as the blessed stone is a resource his command goes through on a daily basis.

PCs who wish to find some way to positively influence the Crab commander may roll **Commerce / Awareness** (TN 30) or **Courtier / Awareness** (TN 40) and spend a Favor (of any type) to locate a small shipment of jade to bring with them to Shinsei's Last Hope.

### Dinner with the Chancellor

Imperial Chancellor Otomo Mitsuhide is not yet convinced that the rumors of spiritual problems are of concern to the Empire, but he has chosen to support this mission because the risk. He has arranged some support at the request of the Phoenix (and the second letter he's ever received from Togashi Hoshi); Mantis are sending vessels in abundance south to the Crab lands, so he's gotten passage on the fastest vessel in port – *Spray*, captained by Yoritomo Hiseki. He also will provide whatever mundane equipment the PCs request; jade fingers are also provided, but jade powder or special weapons such as nemuranai are not.

Mitsuhide does ask for the PCs to bring back a piece of Oblivion's Gate as a display item for the Imperial Museum of Antiquity. There may be pieces already in the Empire, but there isn't a memorial of this very important event in Rokugan's history apart from the spirits themselves.

### The Spray

At the docks, PCs will prepare to board; Mantis Champion is in town: Aramasu is sending aid to the crab; will talk with any Mantis PCs who seek him out, and will be waiting for them at the ship if they don't.

Aramasu wants the Mantis to pay attention to the Crab forces in Shinsei's Last Hope; he has arranged for Mantis troops to reinforce the Crab outpost in addition to the large amount of supplies being sent there. Volunteers for that duty are welcome, but Aramasu is concerned about the rumors of a possible attack on Shinsei's Last Hope by the Lost and wants to strengthen the Crab/Mantis alliance.

The *Spray* is a sleek, well-cared-for vessel, one of the fastest the Mantis fleet has to offer. Yoritomo Hiseki, her captain, is a lean, weathered sea-captain with a strong sense of duty to his clan and crew. He gained some fame during the Battle of Balishnimpur a few years ago by running his ship up the river after the cavalry charge. Hiseki sees himself as a daimyo on his own ship, though he is polite enough to his passengers.

The PCs are not the only passengers headed south; a band of six ronin heading to seek a 20 Goblin Winter

from the Crab. They will try their best to avoid the PCs, as the presence of several renowned clan samurai on the same vessel is unnerving to a group of ronin. If pressed, their leader, an older man using the name "Ichiro", will speak with the PC in question, explaining his group's presence and trying to smooth over any problems. Suspicious PCs may wish to roll **Investigation / Awareness**, but Ichiro is not lying when he says that he and his men wish to hunt down Shadowlands monsters, and have no desire to be involved with the PCs' business. They will not accept a contract working for the PCs, as they intend to seek a place in a clan (something rather more valuable than a PC can reasonably offer). In fact, they have been contracted already to hunt down a specific Shadowlands enemy, and do not wish to be distracted by trying to accomplish another mission.

The journey south is largely uneventful. The ship puts in at three ports along the way, simply to lay in fresh supplies, but the *Spray* does prove to be an extremely fast vessel and it is barely more than a week before the PCs find themselves in the Sea of Shadows.

## **Part Two: Shinsei's Last Hope & the Second March**

The ship passes a sizable sea-wall covered in Kuni warding symbols and jade chains, that opens into a large bay. Several ships are in dock, and new construction is everywhere – visible both in the new piers being built as well as in sight in the village itself. New walls are going up beyond the existing ones

Shinsei's Last Hope is not a place that the Crab use to try to impress anyone. A squad of Hida bushi are sent to greet the PCs on the docks, and a young Hiruma offers something similar to the typical Crab welcoming lecture, if far more restrained. The danger of the Shadowlands is frankly discussed, but the assumption is that if a samurai comes here, they should already know what they're getting in for. There will be no hesitation about putting down anyone who acts erratically or presents a danger, and that is made clear.

The PCs are expected, and the leader of the squad – a very young Hiruma samurai by the name of Todoru – will be extremely polite, offering a tour of the village and doing his best to answer any questions they may have. He will show the PCs around, help them with equipment recommendations, take them to the houses they will be quartered in (sturdily-built, plain structures meant for visiting officers), and generally prove to be a pleasant liaison, if one without significant importance in the outpost.

The village is being turned into a city; walls are being built to expand the area of the outpost, and an elevated road (built along the same lines as the main Imperial roads, though fortified) has been started heading back toward Kyuden Hida. It is anticipated that this new “Jade Road” will allow the outpost to be reinforced even if under assault by Shadowlands forces. Kuni Tansho, the wife of the Jade Champion and the acting Kuni family daimyo, is in town leading the shugenja cleansing the ground outside the current walls; this land will be infertile and devoid of spirits, but the extra area will allow them to convert the entirety of the pure soil into farmland to support the incipient city.

The PCs will wish present their petition to commander Hida Jirochi; unfortunately, the military governor is less than enthusiastic about their mission. Meeting with him immediately requires an **Etiquette (Bureaucracy) / Awareness** roll (TN 40), otherwise he puts them off for at least two days. (If the PCs acquired jade in the capitol, they can force a meeting with the governor by making a public proclamation that they intend to present it to him personally.) When the PCs eventually meet with Jirochi, they find him to be a grim warrior, rough around the edges but dedicated to his troop. Jirochi (who has Status 6 as a shireikan) will be blunt and to the point: he is absolutely unwilling to order any of his men on a mission that he sees as outside his clan’s mandate, but is willing to allow the PCs to ask for volunteers and will give any such volunteers leave to go with the PCs. “I discussed this... ‘request’ with my officers when it was made, and few of them see any point to it. Hida Kumo, an experienced gunso, volunteered to lead your squad, but it is up to you to find troops willing to go with you.” Jirochi will provide treated rations, but no other assistance unless the PCs prove their competence (see “Rounding Out the Squad” below).

### The Gunso, the Scout, and the Priest

Finding Kumo is extremely easy, as he is quite distinctive and somewhat infamous at the outpost. Todoriki will be more than happy to tell the PCs everything he knows: Kumo was a gunso at the 10<sup>th</sup> Watchtower, but when it fell to Yasamura he left and came to Shinsei’s Last Hope. He has not yet been assigned leadership of a squad but is widely acknowledged as a mighty warrior, possibly the best personal combatant in town, and is known to be a veteran of the first march to Volturum. (In actuality, he is nothing more than a form taken by the Fortune Kisada, here to help guide his former Clan in a trying time; as a Fortune, he is sharply limited in the actions he can take even against the Shadowlands, but by providing wisdom and experience he can still help with the fight.)

Physically, Kumo is quite probably one of the largest men the PCs have ever seen: nearly six and a half feet tall, easily three hundred pounds of muscle and wild, unruly beard, he appears in many ways as a quintessential Crab sergeant. He is, however, quite eager to help the PCs on their mission and has already secured the services of one scout and one shugenja. After that, he suggests the PCs speak to troops around town to round out the squad. “We don’t want to take more than twenty, maybe twenty-five troops with us. It’ll keep us from attracting too much attention, and we’ll be able to make better time with a single squad. The troops here are well-trained, they should be able to work together no matter who we get. You should go see who you can impress.” (Again, see “Rounding Out the Squad” below.)

The scout Kumo has already recruited is Hiruma Mei, who the PCs may remember from previous modules (Flee from Tomorrow, Tear Away the Darkness). She is widely acknowledged as one of the best scouts in town, and having seen first-hand some of the things the PCs are capable of, is more willing to trust in the mission than most of the Crab troops. She remains quiet and competent, and is even more confident with a couple of years’ experience in the Shadowlands behind her.

The third person Kumo has arranged to accompany the group is Kuni Terao, one of Kuni Tansho’s apprentices. He is fairly powerful, though inexperienced, and will be able to handle a wide range of threats that the group may find difficult without a shugenja. Even if there is a PC shugenja, taking a Kuni with recent experience in the Shadowlands along is a good idea, as Kumo will point out.

### Rounding Out the Squad

Gathering troops to head into Shadowlands requires some form of direct recruitment; the PCs are allowed to ask for volunteers, but the quality of troops they get depends on how well they present their case. This can be done in any number of ways, but all are resolved mechanically with a Social Roll of some sort.

- A basic attempt at manipulation or subtle recruitment: **Courtier (Manipulation) / Awareness** (TN 40)
- Trying to impress the Crab with tales of glory or the like: **Perform: Oratory / Awareness** (TN 30)
- A blunt, tactical description of potential gains and a reasonable evaluation of the risk: **Battle / Awareness** (TN 35)
- Trying to taunt the Crab or shame them with potential consequences for their inaction: **Intimidation (Control) / Awareness** (TN 25)



(The GM may allow other Skills to be used for specific tactics the PCs wish to take, but it is fundamentally a social roll of some kind and will always use Awareness as the Trait.) Each PC that succeeds at a roll can convince a higher quality of troops to their side. Mechanically, this gives the group one Free Raise that can be spent on any Hunting, Lore: Shadowlands, or attack roll through the rest of the module. Once used, these Free Raises are gone, but as many as wished can be spent on any roll. Each PC may attempt the recruiting roll once, and any Raises they call on their roll grant an additional Free Raise.

Additionally, the PCs may spend Free Raises to gain extra equipment for use on their mission. Specifically, one Free Raise can be exchanged for one jar of jade powder. (Jade powder is an oily mixture that can treat bladed weapons to allow them to ignore the Invulnerability of most Shadowlands creatures. It takes one Complex Action to apply to Small or Medium-sized weapon, two for a Large weapon. The first successful attack against a creature then ignores their Invulnerability, the second does half damage, and the third quarter damage, at which point it is considered to be gone.) Any other equipment the PCs request can be provided by spending Free Raises (though it is worth note that the Crab do not have nemuranai just sitting around waiting to be checked out.)

### Information in Town

Proactive PCs may attempt to learn what they can before heading into the Shadowlands. Basic information (such as the effects of the Shadowlands, detailed in the “Second March to Volturum” section) is easily obtainable. More specific information on Volturum itself requires a **Courtier (Gossip)** or **Lore: Shadowlands / Awareness** roll (TN 25). Even a success will gain relatively little in the way of concrete data as the Crab do not have many records on the troll city. They do know that it was destroyed by Hida Osano-Wo during his war against the trolls while he was Crab Champion in the first century, and that the Shadowlands creatures tend to avoid the place (not enough to make it worth trying to build an outpost there, but it is usually safe enough for a squad in the area to rest there for a night or two). After the Battle of Oblivion’s Gate, the Oracle of Thunder took up residence there as the guardian of the city, though Oracles are not terribly reliable allies against the darkness as they cannot act unless they are threatened. There are tales from some scouts that spirits still haunt the ruins, left over from the battle perhaps or due to the area still having a connection to the Spirit Realms – no one knows for certain.

### Dinner with the Kuni

If any PC succeeds with a 60 or higher on a recruitment roll, they will be invited to dinner with Kuni Tansho. Alternately, if a PC is interested in trying to directly petition her, they may do so with a successful **Etiquette (Bureaucracy)** / **Awareness** roll (TN 35).

Kuni Tansho is a handsome woman just entering her middle years. She is supremely confident and utterly dedicated to her family’s mission of studying and destroying the Shadowlands. Upon hearing of the PCs’ mission, she has developed an interest in it (if the PCs are petitioning her, they have to inform her of it first, of course), but she is eager to be a part of such an important matter. She suspects that any ritual designed to reduce the influence of other Spirit Realms may be of use against the Shadowlands, though she will be quite circumspect with that speculation.

Tansho will offer to accompany the PC on their mission, though she will make it clear that it is their choice. She is effectively a family daimyo and as such outranks everyone else in the group, and will make no bones about the fact that she will have no problem pulling rank on the PCs if things appear to be too dangerous. “Our priorities may not align perfectly, and knowing that ahead of time, it is up to you if you wish to have me accompany you.” Additionally, of course, the PCs may not wish to be responsible for the protection of the Jade Champion’s wife in the Shadowlands. She is one of the most powerful Earth shugenja in the Empire, and her abilities and knowledge would be of great use, but it will be entirely the players’ decision whether or not they wish to have the other consequences of bringing her along.

### Second March to Volturum

It will likely take the PCs a couple of days to make arrangements for their support squad and their final preparations for their expedition into the Shadowlands. When this is done, the group will leave Shinsei’s Last Hope at dawn.

*Near the gates to the outpost is a Shrine to the Divine Hida, where the majority of your escort stops to leave offerings. Hida-no-Kami, founder of the Crab; Osano-wo, Fortune of Fire and Thunder; Kisada, Fortune of Persistence, and Yakamo, the Jade Sun; above any other divine figures, these are trusted by the Crab to protect them in the Shadowlands, as each spent their lives in the fight against the darkness. Stepping out into the blasted wastelands, it is apparent why even the most hardened of Crab bushi would wish some comfort on your mission.*

The journey will take the PCs through the Shadowlands, though the presence of the Fortune does smooth the way considerably. The dangers of the Shadowlands are not generally overestimated, however, and there are several negative effects that apply to the PCs during the journey. 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.

On the first night out, Nashiko, the Demon Bride of Fu Leng (attracted to the area by the recent building and curious about the PCs' mission) will kill and replace Hiruma Mei. If Kuni Tansho is along, Nashiko will instead select her as the target. In any event, the PCs should roll **Investigation / Awareness** at a TN of 60 to realize through the journey that something is wrong. Even if they succeed, they will have nothing more concrete than a feeling that the character in question is

acting differently once they've passed into the Shadowlands proper – easily explained as the tension of being on a mission in such a dangerous area. If she replaces Tansho, she will delegate all spell casting to her assistants, for example.

The Shadowlands presents any number of hazards, though the PCs do have a full squad of trained Crab along with them, there are still a few things that might threaten them directly. The journey itself will take a week, and three times (on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> days) the PCs must make **Hunting** or **Lore: Shadowlands / Perception** (TN 40) to avoid certain dangers. Each PC must make this detection roll separately, but only one character has to succeed in order to avoid the encounter entirely.

### Field of Hands

*You are crossing a relatively clear field, covered with short, scrub-like bushes that shudder in the breeze. Suddenly, it strikes you that the air is still... Black hands emerge from the ground under the bushes, and jagged, filthy claws snatch at your legs.*

If no one succeeds at the detection roll, all of the PCs must roll **Defense / Reflexes** (TN 35) or be grabbed. It requires a successful roll of **Jiu-jitsu** or **Athletics / Strength** (TN 30) to escape. Every time a character fails their Strength roll, they take 1k1 damage and must make an **Earth** roll (TN 25) or gain .1 Taint. A freed character may give a bonus of +1k1 by assisting in addition to the normal Cooperative Skill rules.

### Blood Forest

*The Hiruma lead you cautiously along a path through a bleak forest, the dark red leaves on the trees an eerie reminder of the season. The trees are far enough apart to avoid most of them, but if you stray too close you hear a buzzing shudder. With a pop, the nearest leaves that explode into a bloody mist...*

The PC who rolled the lowest on the first detection roll may roll **Lore: Shadowlands / Perception** (TN 30) to notice the leaves before they burst, but if they fail this roll, they gain 1k1 points of Taint as bloody mist envelopes their face. (Wiping it off will prevent the primary effect, which is to attract predators to the target, but the Taint is not resistible.)

### Flock of Nairu

*The terrain has become rockier and more spare as you continue southwest. Ahead, the wind howls across the opening of caves in the cliffside. Suddenly, winged creatures burst from the cave mouths, adding their shrieks to the keening cry of the wind.*

Each PC must roll **Defense / Agility** (TN 60); they take a number of Wounds equal to the amount they fail this roll by. Anyone damaged by the Nairu no Oni must make an Earth roll to resist .3 Taint, at a TN equal to the Wounds taken. After the first attack, the flock will scatter to seek easier prey.

If the PCs do not succeed at two of the three detection rolls, then Isawa Ume will gain two points of Taint. This will not be immediately obvious, as her general demeanor is already somewhat odd, but concerned PCs may roll **Investigation / Perception** to note that her eyes have taken a darker hue...

## Part Three: Volturum

After roughly a week's worth of travel, following landmarks recognized by the scouts and Kumo, the PCs will run across the remains of an old stone road that Kumo will identify as having led to the troll city of Volturum. The scouts will be somewhat nervous, as the journey has been much easier than expected (even with the potential threats above), but Kumo will point out if the PCs do not that they have a mission, and their only alternative is to abandon it. He does, of course, suggest that everyone be on their guard, "though that should go without saying in this place."

### Volturum

The ruins of the troll city look more like they were smashed by a natural disaster like a storm or tsunami than an army. Nonetheless, most of the buildings remain standing more than a thousand years later, and it is obvious that the trolls once had a powerful civilization, no matter their current squalid conditions.

Once the group enters the city, Kumo will organize the troops into search parties, while starting to establish a fortified camp. Finding the gate requires an **Investigation (Search) / Void** roll – the PC who rolls the highest encounters Toryu, the Oracle of Thunder (see below).

The PC who rolls the second-highest finds the coliseum that contains the gate in a square slightly off the center of the city; the shattered arc of Oblivion's Gate is visible from the square atop a dais scattered with stones of various sizes. The Crab will relocate their base camp to the Gate itself, and Kumo will lead them in setting up temporary fortifications, a palisade along the perimeter, about thirty feet away from the dais that the Gate is on.

Ume will immediately involve herself in a study of the gate; this essentially involves directly Communing with the spirits in the area and is not something that anyone can really help her with. She will tune out the rest of the world with the single-minded determination and practice of an ishiken. If she is present, Akodo Moretsu will stand as a guard near the young shugenja.

### Oracle of Thunder

The PC who rolled the highest on the Void roll will encounter a strange, slender man with white hair and skin of an almost golden hue. Dressed in a tattered red kimono and barefoot, he presents a somewhat unsettling image, but there is nothing overtly threatening about him. "I am the guardian of this place, samurai. I request that you ask me no questions, but I can tell you that the Enemy knows you are here. They approach, thinking that they have lured you into a trap." If the PC can think of a way to request an introduction without phrasing it as a question, he will introduce himself as "Toryu" – if the player does not recognize the name, they may roll **Lore: Theology / Intelligence** (TN 25) to realize this is the Oracle of Thunder.

*He lifts his head, as if at a sound you cannot hear. "They are growing more clever. They know I cannot attack them unless they threaten me first. I can delay them, but they will be upon you soon. Finish your errand, but be cautious. One of the Enemy is among you already." With that, he takes a few steps away and disappears in a peal of thunder that echoes over the city.*

### Attack on the Gate

A Shadowlands force under the domination of the Demon Bride attacks. The first wave consists of a horde of goblins under the command of two Warmongers, plus the Generalissimo. The horde attack all PCs on the perimeter with swarm rules during Reactions Phase: 10k5 base attack, 4k2 base damage but +1k1 to each roll for each leader still standing (10k9 starting attack, 7k5 starting damage). PCs may reduce the number of goblins directly on them by making attacks; this reduces the number of attack dice they roll (not keep) by one with an attack success at TN 10, plus one for every Raise called.

Whoever she is disguised as, Nashiko will remain with Ume as the ishiken meditates, "guarding" the group's charge (in reality, trying to figure out what the girl is doing and how to disrupt it – fortunately, Void magic is entirely outside of Nashiko's expertise and there is nothing she can do short of an overt attack). If present, Akodo Moretsu will do the same, though with sincerity.

During this scene, any mechanic that would normally prevent the PC's death (including Great Destiny, Dark Fate, or Touch of Destiny but not temporary spell effects like Force of Will) has no effect. Any PC who dies during this encounter (either this part or the next) will find themselves on the flat, featureless plain of Meido. A bulky, long-haired man in loose robes grabs them roughly and spins them to face a flickering archway. "Your work is not done, samurai. But you need not face it alone." If they have not gone through yet, the PC(s) will wait at the Gate next to two samurai, – Doji Hoturi and Isawa Tadaka. Alongside them is either Hiruma Mei or Kuni Tansho, depending on which Nashiko has replaced.

### Goblin Warmonger

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

**Initiative:** 7k4      **Attack:** 8k4 (crude blade, Simple)      **Damage:** 7k3

**Armor TN:** 35 (light armor)

**Reduction:** 7 (natural, plus armor)

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

**Taint Rank:** 4

**Skills:** Athletics 3, Battle 3, Defense 3, Engineering 2, Intimidation (Bullying) 4, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Kenjutsu 4, Stealth 3

**Special Abilities:**

- *Swift 2*

### Goblin Generalissimo

Air 3	Earth 4	Fire 3	Water 3
Reflexes 5		Agility 5	Strength 5

**Initiative:** 8k5      **Attack:** 10k5 (crude blade, Simple)      **Damage:** 8k3

**Armor TN:** 45 (heavy armor)

**Reduction:** 10 (natural and armor)

**Wounds:** 20 (+5), 40 (+10), 80 (Dead)

**Taint Rank:** 5

**Skills:** Athletics 4, Battle 4, Defense 5, Engineering 3, Intimidation (Bullying) 5, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Kenjutsu 5, Stealth 3

**Special Abilities:**

- *Swift 2*
- *Invulnerability*

When the first PC falls, or after the goblins have been pushed back, Hida Kumo (who has been exhorting the Crab bushi but remaining apart from the fighting) steps to the Gate and lays his hands on it. As he does, his hair lightens to gray, his armor shifts to resemble something more like the Crab Champion's Armor of the Shadow Warrior, and he stands taller. The PCs will easily

recognize him as one of the figures from the Shrine to the Divine Hida: Kisada, Fortune of Persistence.

*"Samurai, keep fighting! As long as one samurai continues to fight, continues to struggle, continues to persist against the darkness, you will never be alone!" Light flickers within the gate, and two forms surrounded in a golden aura step through: a tall man with white hair in feathery blue armor, and a broad-shouldered shugenja with a jingasa low over his face and glowing green eyes. The armored bushi steps forward with a smile and draws his sword before charging the enemy. Jade fire bursts from the other's hands, and Lost samurai begin to fall before them.*

These are Doji Hoturi and Isawa Tadaka, the two Thunders residing in Yomi (the others are in Tengoku); they can be recognized with a roll of **Lore: Heraldry** or **History / Intelligence** at TN 20. Any PCs who have fallen at this point will step through with them, as will either Hiruma Mei or Kuni Nashiko. This should be a clue to the PCs that something is wrong, particularly if they have been concerned about Toryu's warning.

*With the appearance of the other woman, the imposter throws her head back and laughs. Her features ripple, one half of her face becoming that of a sultry, beautiful courtier while the other half twists into a dark mockery of humanity with a bulging yellow eye. As her mad laughter echoes from the ruined walls, the horns of the Lost samurai ring out in answer, and a squad of horsemen leap the palisade and engage the Crab bushi.*

The distraction may still allow Nashiko to strike against Ume; the PCs may roll **Investigation / Reflexes** at a TN of 40 to prevent this. If they fail, Nashiko slices into the ishiken's arm with her black claws, Tainting Ume though the shugenja will not stir from her meditations. Success means they prevent Nashiko's attack from landing, though the mechanics move to normal skirmish at this point, with Initiative rolls as normal.

This encounter meant to be epic in scale, and it suggested that the GM try to put as much pressure on the PCs as possible – note that Oblivion's Gate is still being held open by Kisada, so any PCs who are killed can return within a round. narrative in nature. Hoturi and Tadaka will keep the Lost samurai at bay, ideally allowing the PCs to deal with Nashiko.

PCs who are not engaged with Nashiko may fight as many of the Lost Bushi as they wish; there are three dozen of the Tainted warriors, so there will certainly be enough targets to go around...

## Lost Samurai

Air 3    Earth 3    Fire 3    Water 4    Void 2\*  
Reflexes 4    Agility 4  
Honor 1.5    Status -10.0    Glory 0

**Initiative:** 8k4

**Attack:** 10k7e (Full  
Attack, Mounted;  
Katana, Simple)

**Armor TN:** 35 (heavy  
armor)

**Damage:** 10k3m+1  
(Katana)

**Reduction:** 5

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

**Shadowlands Taint Rank:** 5

**School/Rank:** Matsu Bushi 2/Maho-Bujin 2

**Techniques:** *The Lion's Roar:* +1 to damage. +5' movement per Turn in Full Attack Stance

*Matsu's Fury:* When taking Full Attack Stance, choose an opponent within 30'. If you successfully hit him this Turn, the target is frozen with fear and cannot take Move Actions to move from their current position. During the Reactions Stage, they may make a Willpower roll against a TN equal to the amount of damage dealt from your latest attack to negate this (the opponent does not suffer Wound Penalties for this roll). If they fail, the effects of this Technique end during the next Reactions Stage. Enemies who are immune to Fear cannot be affected by this Technique.

*Carve the Crimson Road:* max Raises limited by Taint Rank or Void, whichever is higher; gain unkept dice on damage equal to Taint Rank; may make Extra Attack Maneuver with 2 Raises

*Corruption Rewards:* increase Initiative Score by Taint Rank during Reactions every Round; Simple Action attacks

**Skills:** Athletics 4, Battle 3, Investigation 2, Jiu-jutsu 4, Ken-jutsu (Katana) 7, Horsemanship 5, Kyu-jutsu 4, Lore: History 3, Lore: Shadowlands 4

**Note:** GMs may replace the first two Rank Techniques with those of other Schools at their discretion, as the Lost Samurai do come from a wide variety of Clans. Suggested Schools would be Hida Bushi, Hiruma Bushi, Moto Bushi, Bayushi Bushi, or Kakita Bushi; the only real requirement is that the enemy remain mounted. Ranged attacks are not recommended as it would place a different set of pressures on the PCs than intended, but ultimately it depends on the GM's comfort with the rules and their players.

## Doji Nashiko, the Demon Bride of Fu Leng

Air 6    Earth 5    Fire 4    Water 4    Void 3  
Awareness 8    Willpower 7    Intelligence 6    Perception 5

**Initiative:** 10k9

**Attack:** 9k4+8  
(Blackened Claws,  
Simple)

**Armor TN:** 60

**Damage:** 10k5

**Reduction:** 20 (10 vs jade)

**Wounds:** 150 (Dead)

**Shadowlands Taint Rank:** 8

**School/Rank:** Doji Courtier 4/Maho-bujin 2

**Techniques:** *Carve the Crimson Road:* max Raises limited by Taint Rank or Void, whichever is higher; gain unkept dice on damage equal to Taint Rank; may make Extra Attack Maneuver with 2 Raises

*Corruption Rewards:* increase Initiative Score by Taint Rank during Reactions every Round; Simple Action attacks

**Skills:** Acting 8, Courtier 6, Defense 5, Etiquette 7, Intimidation (Control) 5, Investigation 4, Jiu-jutsu 5, Ken-jutsu 4, Knives 5, Lore (many) 3-6, Sincerity (Deceit) 8, Stealth 5, Temptation (Seduction) 10

**Shadowlands Powers:** Above the Elements, Blackened Claws, Blood Domination, Blood Knows Blood, Calligraphy of Thought, Child of Darkness, Father of Lies, Mind of Darkness, Undead Strength, Unholy Beauty

**Akutenshi Powers:** Body of Damned Time, Mastery of Darkness, Shapeshifting, Soul Drinking

**Special:** Invulnerability; immune to Feint (telepathy makes any attempted Feint simply miss); maho as wished, may cast elemental spells as maho

Nashiko has a wide range of abilities at her disposal, in addition to the raw power of her stats. After traveling with the PCs for several days, she should have a fairly accurate picture of which is the greatest threat, and the GM is encouraged to have her attempt to use the characters' insecurities and weaknesses against them. There are any number of tactics she can use, but her ability to understand her opponents' thought processes should not be ignored, and she has had ample opportunity to target the PCs for spells and her Shadowlands Powers.

If the PCs cannot stop Nashiko within three rounds, she will move to attack Ume and finish the matter. This threat to Ume triggers the fragment of the Void Dragon that resides in her soul. This gives her the power to release a "rough draft" of the ritual that she has been working on: a spell that will cleanse a target of all influence from other Spirit Realms (the exceptions being Tengoku, as beyond the reach of Oblivion's Gate, and the Realm of Thwarted Destiny, as too new to have a connection to Oblivion's Gate). In this instance, it will affect every character in the area, including all PCs.

If the PCs do drop Nashiko, she will not die from her Wounds immediately. Instead, Ume finds resolve from the PCs' victory and controls her nascent powers as a potential Oracle to the same result. (The difference here is primarily cosmetic, but it does impact on how Ume feels about the outcome...)

*Ume throws her head back and opens her eyes for the first time since she began studying the Gate, eyes now pools of blackness that open onto the vast depths of the starry heavens. She whispers a single word, and the spirits of Ningen-do respond.*

*Black ribbons stream away from the Demon Bride, her claws peeling off and turning into smoke that disperses as if in a howling wind. There is no sound, however, save her sudden scream of fear and denial. A dark shadow lifts away from her similarly, spreading away from Ume. Nashiko falls to the ground screaming, and as the inky cloak begins to separate from her, her grasping hand clutches at it desperately. With her final cry of “NO!” ringing off the ruined walls, her body blows away into the black shadow and dissipates on the spiritual gale.*

Tainted PCs will have a similar effect occur; they also take Wounds equal to the number of points of Taint they had (so 19 Wounds for 1.9 Ranks of the Shadowlands Taint), and this damage cannot be reduced by Void or Reduction. The golden glow will disappear from Akodo Moretsu, and all other returned spirits (including Hoturi and Tadaka). The mechanics are listed in detail in the Rewards section, but there is a burden laid upon returned spirits in addition to this effect.

When the enemies are dealt with, Kisada congratulates the PCs on their victory. Any characters who died and returned through the gate are returned to mortality by the spell, and the Fortune will explain that mortal will can still determine the fate of one who wishes to be tied to another Realm. Nashiko refused to give up the Taint, so she was banished to Jigoku personally, with uncertain effects on her soul – she may become a yokai, she may become an oni... Kisada will not remain long to answer questions, departing after encouraging the PCs to continue their good works. “As a Fortune, I can guide, I can open the door, and I can show you the way... but it is up to you to step through the door or walk the path. I am glad that there are samurai still willing to do so. Fare well, and know that you have Tengoku’s attention, however little it seems we do to support you.”

## Conclusion

After the Gate is closed once more, a man with white hair and nearly golden skin approaches the group. “Did you find what you needed?” This is Toryu, the Oracle of Thunder. He will confirm the origins of Oblivion’s Gate – it was created by the trolls to summon a fallen hero in times of crisis, who would then return when the crisis was over. No more than one spirit was intended to return

at a time, and they were not intended to remain in the mortal Realm – the issues the current spirits are causing with the creation of the Realm of Thwarted Destiny are a result of this imbalance.

Toryu will prefer not to answer any questions – he is the patron of heroes, and it frustrates him that he cannot provide the guidance he should to those he is intended by the Heavens to do so. He will, however, offer to take the group directly back to Shinsei’s Last Hope.

With a peal of thunder, the party is teleported back to the Crab outpost. This arrival will attract attention, obviously, and the locals will demand answers from the PCs. Ume, still shaken, will have the PCs explain what happened, though she is quietly certain she can now develop a ritual that will utterly remove the influence of any Realm (other than Tengoku or the Realm of Thwarted Destiny) from a mortal. As this includes the Shadowlands Taint, this is obviously going to have a major impact on the balance of power in the Empire in general and the Crab in specific.

The locals have another major issue already; they will inform Mantis or Crab PCs that Yoritomo Aramasu’s ship sank in the Sea of Shadows a few days before. The Crab do not know what the Mantis will wish done, but their investigation is already unsettling. If a PC wishes to involve themselves in the process, they must make an **Investigation / Awareness** roll (TN 40); even this will only allow them to discover that Aramasu’s body was recovered from the wreckage of the ship and the defensive wounds on it indicate that the Mantis Champion was assassinated by unknown parties.

The PCs are now free to return to Otosan Uchi to deliver on their bargain with Otomo Mitsuhide. He will be impressed with their deeds, grateful for their following through on his request (if they do), and stunned at the implications of a potential cure for the Taint. (If asked, he will be uncertain about the ritual to bond returned spirits back to full mortality, but willing to look into the situation.)

**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 Voltturnum:	+1XP
Ume Survives Untainted:	+1XP
Helping to Defeat Nashiko:	+1XP

**Total Possible Experience: 5XP**

### **Honor**

PCs with less than 3 Ranks of Honor gain +0.5 Honor; PCs with between 3 and 6 Ranks of Honor gain +0.3 Honor; PCs with 7 or more Ranks of Honor gain +0.1 Honor.

### **Glory**

All PCs gain one Full Rank of Glory.

### **Other Awards/Penalties**

Returned Spirit PCs lost the Touched by the Realm Advantage or the Curse of the Realm Disadvantage. Characters with Touched by the Realm gain two experience points (three for Touched by Yomi). Characters with Curse of the Realm must pay two experience points. Additionally, the PC gains the “Curse of Mortality” Disadvantage: the player must select one Ring. They may not enhance any rolls using that Ring or its Traits with Void Points. Finally, they immediately age ten years – this is principally a cosmetic effect, though the Curse of Mortality reflects the issue as well.

PCs with any amount of the Shadowlands Taint lose all of it (taking Wounds when it is lost equal to the amount of points removed, though they will heal as normal).

If a PC has any Control from any other Spirit Realm, they likewise lose it all.

PCs who are Haunted lose that Disadvantage or the cert that provided it. PCs with a Honored Ancestor may recontact their Ancestor with a **Lore: Theology / Void** roll (TN 35); this roll may be attempted once per module until it is successful.

Any PC with the “Cursed by Tengoku” cert loses it: the intervention of an aspect of the Void Dragon causes the Celestial Heavens to extend their forgiveness.

Any Advantage or Disadvantage that stems from a Realm other than Ningen-do, Tengoku, or the Realm of Thwarted Destiny is lost. If there is any question, the player should contact the Campaign Admin.

PCs who help to bring a piece of Oblivion’s Gate back to Otomo Mitsuhide earn his gratitude and may take him as an Ally (with 1 Devotion and 4 Influence) or increase his Devotion as an Ally by 1 if they already have him.

### **Module Tracking Sheets**

Stuff for the Mod Cert

#### **GM Reporting**

Did the PCs take jade supplies to Shinsei’s Last Hope?

Was Ume Tainted?

Did Ume survive?

Did the PCs give a piece of Oblivion’s Gate to the Imperial Chancellor?

## **Player Handout #1: Letter from Isawa Ume**

My friend,

For the last several years, I have been working on a project critical to the fate of the Empire. I believe I may have come upon a solution of sorts, though it involves a great deal of peril. I would ask your assistance, for I know that you are undismayed by the thought of danger. All I can do is pledge to you that I believe the risk to both body and soul to be worth the potential benefit to the spirit of the Empire.

I will await you at the Shrine of the Sun on the Dragon Heart Plain in the first week of the Month of Shinjo. Travel papers have been provided by my patron Isawa Tomo, and it should carry some weight that the Champion of the Dragon has included his authorization despite the state of affairs between our clans. This matter takes importance over the political issues that beset Rokugan, I assure you.

Isawa Ume  
Acolyte of Void



## Player Handout #2: the New Ritual

The ritual developed by Isawa Ume will take some time to fully research, but the final form is included here for shugenja PCs who wish to learn it. It may be taken as a spell when ranking up, or a PC who played through this module may spend four experience points to learn it; obviously, the PC must be able to cast ML4 Earth spells in order to do so.

### **Embrace of Ningen-do**

Ring/Mastery: Earth 4

Range: 10'

Area of Effect: one human target

Duration: Instantaneous

Raises: none

This spell takes an hour to cast. Strengthening the power of the Mortal Realm on the selected target, this ritual removes the influence of most other Spirit Realms from a willing mortal. As long as the target is willing when the spell is cast, any effect stemming from the following Realms will be ended: Chikushudo, Gaki-do, Jigoku, Meido, Sakkaku, Toshigoku, Yomi, and Yume-do. This includes the Shadowlands Taint, as well as the Touch of the Realm Advantage or Cursed by the Realm Disadvantage. However, effects from Ningen-do (including other spells), Tengoku, or Kosoku no Chigiri are NOT affected by this ritual. As the Lying Darkness is a creature native to, if forgotten by, the mortal Realm, Shadow Taint is not affected by this ritual either.

Returned Spirits who are subject to this ritual age ten years (a mostly cosmetic effect) and gain the “Curse of Mortality” Disadvantage. Their closer connection to Ningen-do limits their ability to call upon the Void: they must select one Ring, and may not spend Void Points to enhance a roll using either that Ring or its Traits. (So selecting the Fire Ring means they cannot spend Void Points on Fire Ring Rolls, Spell Casting Rolls using Fire, Trait Rolls using Agility or Intelligence, or Skill Rolls using Agility or Intelligence as the Trait.) The Void Ring may be chosen. As fully mortal once more, the character is again bound to destiny.

Characters who are Tainted by the Shadowlands are subject to great pain when this spell is cast, and due to the physical effects the Taint has on their body, it may kill them. Essentially, the chance that this spell will cause the death of a Tainted character is equal to the amount of Taint they have. A character with 2.5 Ranks of Taint has a 25% chance of dying; a character with 1.8 Ranks of Taint has an 18% chance of dying. This chance is never less than 10%, even if the target has less than a Rank of the Shadowlands Taint. However, even if the spell proves lethal, the character’s spirit will be cleansed and they will pass on to Meido (and then any other afterlife) without hindrance.

Finally, under no circumstance will this spell cleanse an unwilling target. Any target who is unable to agree to the ritual (unconscious, compelled through magical means, etc.) will cause the failure of the spell when cast. Even if the target is deceived as to the nature of the spell, once it begins to take effect they will know what is happening to them. A Tainted target will be banished to Jigoku instead, as their will can maintain the connection between their soul and the Realm of Evil. What happens to them there is a question that is as yet unanswered. This makes any Lost character almost certain to be banished, though the hour that casting the ritual requires means that the spell is not useful for combat purposes.