

A traditional Chinese temple at night, illuminated by a soft blue light. The temple has a dark, multi-tiered roof with upturned eaves. In the foreground, there are stone steps leading up to the entrance, flanked by two large, ornate stone lion statues. A large, glowing red pillar stands on the right side of the temple. The sky is dark with some clouds.

Legend
of the
Five Rings
ROLEPLAYING



THE HIGHWAYMAN

THE LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS 2019 GEN CON ADVENTURE

The Highwayman

GAIJIN IN ROKUGAN

Rokugan has a long and complicated history with gaijin that has resulted in the courts of samurai being, on the whole, closed to those who are not from the Empire. However, since Rokugan is not ethnically homogenous, few people outside of the samurai courts are able to identify a gaijin when they see one. For a peasant, a gaijin very well might be a strange samurai from some far-off corner of Rokugan.

Because it's difficult to distinguish a gaijin from just another Rokugani based on appearance alone, most peasants' reactions will be similar to how they might react to a samurai—with nervousness and politeness. However, when a gaijin speaks, or depending on how they dress, the peasant might realize that the individual is not of the samurai caste, and may proceed to treat them more flippantly, with offhand comments and prolonged stares. Doing anything more than that in a public setting would be inappropriate.

As you facilitate this experience, remember that systemic racism is a reality for many people, and negative stereotypes do not need to enter into what should be a fun, safe gaming space.

Deep in the mysterious Shinomen Forest, the Shadowlands Taint has taken root. Legends of a brutal Highwayman have spread amongst local peasants and farmers, passing in drunken whispers in the smoky light of the evening. Bloody sigils carved into trees and marked on doors are whispered to plague those brave enough to pass through the Shinomen.

In *The Highwayman*, the PCs investigate the disappearance of a missing shipment of sake on behalf of the merchant Ito Moronoka [Mo-ROW-no-ka]. What starts out as a straightforward search for some missing goods spirals into a deadly otherworldly fight for their lives against the dreaded Highwayman.

The adventure begins when the PCs arrive at a small town outside of the Shinomen in search of the missing courier Hidetaka Nori and, more importantly, the exorbitantly expensive sake he was supposed to deliver to Moronoka. What they learn points to darker implications in the Shinomen itself.

Following a lead to Nori's whereabouts, the PCs find a lavish estate deep in the Shinomen. They are invited by Lady Yukiko (who is actually the fabled Highwayman) to sit down to a decadent banquet with her two guests, who are *oni* in disguise. Lady Yukiko herself is a shape-shifting, reality-bending rakshasa with a taste for human flesh. PCs must exercise wisdom and careful judgment to escape intact, and to prevent the growing power of Lady Yukiko spreading across Rokugan.

ABOUT THE JOB

The player characters know the following information about the job:

- ⊗ When the group arrives in Kawacho, Nori is nearly four days late delivering the six crates of sake to Moronoka. It normally takes a day and a half to get from Kawacho to Moronoka's shop.
- ⊗ Nori, a peasant, has delivered reliably to Moronoka for nearly six months and no goods have ever been missing before.
- ⊗ Moronoka needs the sake soon, as a wealthy Scorpion samurai has ordered it for an upcoming wedding. Without the sake, Moronoka and Kawacho may have to face the wrath of an angry lord.
- ⊗ The PCs have never met Nori before or been to Kawacho.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

This adventure is an introductory scenario for the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*. To play, you will need to have a copy of the *Legend of the Five Rings Core Rulebook*.

The Highwayman allows players to play as *gaijin* (foreigner), *rōnin* (lordless samurai), and peasant characters. These new character types offer a different roleplaying experience than the honor-bound samurai. Through their relationship with the tenets of Bushidō and their varied character backgrounds, PCs will be able to experience a new facet of Rokugan: as the outsiders, the unknown, and the outcasts.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Shinomen Forest is a mysterious, sprawling tangle of ancient trees that dwarfs most Great Clan castles and holdings. It has endured long before the establishment of the Chrysanthemum Throne and will continue long after Rokugan has fallen. Under its shadowy boughs, the air is still and windless, and the spirits and wildlife exist, unconcerned with the world outside. Under cover of darkness, the wicked creatures who seek destruction have crept into the heart of the Shinomen where they wait patiently. One such creature—the rakshasa who masquerades as the Highwayman—has invited two *oni* to be her honored guests at a final banquet before they sow discord in the rest of Rokugan.

Act 1: The Missing Courier

Before starting play, welcome the players! Help them pick characters, answer questions about the *L5R* system and the world of Rokugan and note to yourself which players might need encouragement to get involved in play and which have stronger personalities. Once every player has picked a pre-generated character, ask them to read their *ninjō* and *past* privately. After giving them a chance to ask any last-minute questions, make sure the play area is ready and begin the scenario by reading the following aloud:

In Rokugan, everyone has to make a living. You are a ragtag group of outsiders: *gaijin* from far lands with strange customs and dress, *rōnin*, lordless samurai destined to wander, and peasants, born to live out life on the fringes: unseen and unheard by the greater political players who dictate how life is lived in the Emerald Empire.

For several months you have worked small jobs for Ito Moronoka, an honest—if overly busy—merchant, who has a history of paying generously for simple work. They now offer you six koku apiece—enough money to feed you each comfortably for several years—to track down a courier and bring back a sake shipment. The offer was one you couldn't afford to pass up, so you trekked out to the courier's small town, Kawacho, to investigate.

Take a minute and encourage players to introduce their characters one at a time, understanding that their characters have worked together in the game for a couple of months. Ask them to describe their appearance, any interesting traits (such as any glaringly obvious advantages or disadvantages), and what their character thinks of this job. If player characters are more stone-faced or laid back, encourage them to describe their character's body language or internal monologue. Then, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

You stand on a small hill overlooking the town, about to begin the search for the missing shipment. You have the location of the Hidetaka household, or you could inquire at the sake distillery where Nori occasionally worked. You could even pay a visit to the sake house and question the local farmers and traders.

LEADS IN KAWACHO

The following sections describe optional leads for PCs in Kawacho. Ask players where they would like to begin their investigation.

THE HIDETAKA FAMILY

When the PCs arrive at the Hidetaka household, read or paraphrase the following:

The Hidetaka residence is an old building with a newly thatched roof, and as you arrive you see at least six young children running around the front of the house. Near the door sits an older peasant woman and a young woman with her foot wrapped in a thick cloth.

If the PCs attempt to interact with the children they scatter, giggling and squealing. They may question the older woman, Sazuko, and her daughter, Sasami. The following are possible responses the two can provide:

Who are you?

The older woman sets down the basket she was weaving and stands to bow. "My name is Hidetaka Sazuko and this is my daughter, Sasami. I am the head of this household."

A GUIDE TO THE NPCS

Ito Moronoka, Busy Merchant: A sultry smooth-talking merchant in their fifties. Moronoka regards everyone with an amused and controlled air. Whenever tensions are high, they retreat into sarcasm and nervous laughter.

Hidetaka Nori, Unlucky Courier: A gangling, friendly young man who always means well. Although he is not particularly smart, Nori works hard to support his family and is kind to everyone he meets.

Hidetaka Sasami, Nori's Sister: A spry, airy young woman with a mischievous affect. Sasami will say anything to get out of a pinch, and is full of inventive, overwhelming energy.

Hidetaka Sasuke, Nori's Brother: A large, barrel-chested peasant bartender with an eye for drink and fine-featured men. Sasuke is fiercely protective of his family and would do anything to help the ones he cares for.

Hidetaka Sazuko, Nori's Mother: An aging woman who is quick to defend her son, but weary of angering anyone with a weapon. She speaks softly and is a keen observer.

Sayaka, Curious Trader: Sayaka is a traveler from the Burning Sands who spends her time exploring the world and looking for new experiences. She is friendly to those who pay her in kind, and could prove to be a valuable ally.

Lady Yukiko, Nefarious Rakshasa: A petite, beautiful woman in a crimson red dress with long flowing dark hair. Her face is painted white, and she maintains a sweet affect. Under her gorgeous guise, she is a fearsome fanged rakshasa.

Lady Atsuko, Sharp-Tongued Oni: An elderly oni who alternates between extreme kindness and disgust for those around her. Her wrinkled face is scored with heavy dark bags under her eyes. She hides under the guise of an elderly woman.

Lord Kenta, Brutish Oni: A wolfish oni, Kenta has an endless appetite and very poor manners. He speaks in a low, gravelly voice and keeps his large belly exposed through his robes. He hides under the guise of a large samurai.

FAMILY NAMES

In Rokugan, as in many places in the world, family names are used to identify individuals by their familial connections. All castes, from noble samurai to lowly hinin, have family names they use to organize themselves and keep track of bloodlines.

To most samurai, however, peasants may as well have no family names, as their position is so low on the Celestial hierarchy that those names aren't recognized as valid.

ABOUT KAWACHO

Kawacho is a small town controlled by the Soshi through a vassal family. The town is built near an area of very fertile land, producing notably abundant rice yields each year. The town is known for their excellent sake produced by their small distillery on the river.

THE TIMELINE

Hidetaka Nori was meant to leave about five-and-a-half days before the PCs arrive in Kawacho.

Traveling to Moronoka's takes about a day and a half.

Nori left a half a day late, so took a short-cut through the Shinomen to make up the time.

He was last seen leaving the village by his brother, Sasuke, five days ago.

Where is Hidetaka Nori?

"My son left to deliver sake to his employer several days ago. I imagined he became caught up while he was there, is something wrong?"

If the PCs tell her that Nori and the shipment is missing, read or paraphrase the following:

"Oh, oh, no." Sazuko covers her face as her lips tremble, "I am sure he was just caught up sight-seeing, that is all. He would not steal from Moronoka. My son is a good man."

The young woman straightens up and says to her mother, "Mother, please, I worry this is my fault."

If prodded, Sasami explains in **What happened to your foot?**

What happened to your foot?

"I injured myself as I was gathering water from the river several days ago. Nori was meant to leave to deliver the sake that day, but he took the time to gather herbs for a poultice for my leg. He is a good brother, but he lost half a day doing this for me. I worry he took a shortcut through the Shinomen, but I cannot say for sure. You should speak with our brother, Sasuke, at the sake house. Nori tells him everything."

If PCs offer to help, one PC can make a **TN 2 Medicine (Air 1, Fire 1, Void 3) check** using a Medicine as an Artisan skill. If they succeed, they are able to fashion a splint that will drastically increase Sasami's recovery time. The PC who made the check and each PC who gave assistance each gains 1 honor for upholding the Bushidō tenet of Compassion. Sasami's mother is grateful, and offers the PCs some hot tea. Any PC who consumes the tea removes 3 strife.

THE SAKE DISTILLERY

When the PCs approach the sake distillery, they notice several workers taking a break under the shade of a nearby tree. They eye the outsiders suspiciously, and give limited answers unless a PC succeeds at a **TN 2 Sentiment check (Earth 1, Air 4)** to persuade them to be more open. If the PCs attempt to intimidate the workers, they will curse and tell the PCs that they don't know anything. The following are possible answers the workers may give:



THE HIGHWAYMAN

Local legends of a brutal Highwayman live on in the imaginations of the locals, who throw out successively more ridiculous claims at the sake house. Draw from the following list to build foreboding in the PCs:

- ☼ "If one travels after dark, the Highwayman shall surely devour them. Do not travel at night through the Shinomen."
- ☼ "Everywhere he goes, he leaves his mark. It looks like a crescent moon."
- ☼ "I heard the Highwayman is a wolf, perhaps a deer, possessed by the spirit of a lovelorn samurai."
- ☼ "It is said he eats the hearts of his victims to remain strong forever."
- ☼ "Folks believe the Highwayman is some mythical monster, but the truth is it is just a bunch of bandits hiding behind a legend."

Where is Hidetaka Nori?

"Nori left about five days ago, and took six crates of the good sake in his blue cart with him."

What route did he usually take?

"Nori was usually smart, took the main road to wherever he was going. He talked about how the Shinomen would cut travel, but we told him that the Highwayman would not be so forgiving if he were to enter the forest."

Who is the Highwayman?

The workers stare at you in disbelief before saying, "You do not know? The Highwayman is the bane of trader's existence here on the edges of the Shinomen."

The workers then include various rumors about the Highwayman (see **The Highwayman** for more information).

How much for some sake?

"A bottle of the good sake is two bu, the less refined brew is only a one bu. If you want the excellent things like Moronoka orders, that'll cost you a koku."

What does the sake look like?

“The good stuff? Like what Nori took with him? It’s got a white and blue label on it, sealed with the symbol of Kawacho, a frog. It brings good luck for our couriers, or so it’s supposed to.”

What path would one take through the Shinomen?

“If you were wise you would not take any path through that treacherous forest, especially at night. If the Highwayman were not bad enough, many bad spirits make their home there. Fickle and cruel, stepping foot in the forest at night is sure to give you bad luck for four years.”

After a while the workers indicate they need to get back to work, but tell the PCs they may be able to learn more from Nori’s mother at their home or his brother at the sake house.

THE LOCAL SAKE HOUSE

The local sake house is filled with laughter and delicious sake from the local distillery. It is staffed by a burly, thick-chested bartender with a low, gravelly voice. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The thick-armed bartender smiles jovially at you. “I am Hidetaka Sasuke, owner of this sake house,” he thumbs his chest proudly. “Let me know how I can help make your time in Kawacho something you will remember—or not.” He grins as he points at the row of sake behind him.

Sasuke is suspicious of strangers asking about his family and it takes a **TN 3 Courtesy check (Water 1, Fire 5)** to get him to trust them an answer more than superficially. The TN is reduced by 1 (to a minimum of 1) if the PCs mention Sasami sent them. If the PCs ask him where Nori went, read or paraphrase the following:

“Nori is always worried about being on time to things, and he was late leaving for this latest job. He came in like a whirlwind about five days ago, stressing out about his boss being angry. Something about a wedding?” Sasuke frowns, then continues,

“I told him to calm himself, he could afford to be a bit late. He didn’t like that, and said he was going to take the shorter path through the Shinomen, foolish man.”

Several townspeople hear what Sasuke says and start mumbling about bad luck and the Highwayman (see **The Highwayman** on page 4 for possible whispers).

If the PCs suggest Nori is in trouble, Sasuke may be convinced to join their group with a **TN 2 Social check (Water 1, Fire 4)**.

If the PCs ask about the Highwayman, read or paraphrase the following:

“Old legends to keep children out of the forest, friends, maybe some bandits causing trouble where they shouldn’t. If I could get my hands on them, I would put an end to the tale.”

GLORY AND NON-SAMURAI

For non-samurai, in the simplest terms, glory acts as a measurable value of their reputation, rather than a measure of how well they are being a samurai in others’ eyes (because they aren’t samurai!). Glory as reputation is just as important, if not moreso, because a non-samurai’s glory indicates what types of jobs they can get and how willing others are to work with that individual, among other things.

HIDETAKA SASUKE

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 2

A large, barrel-chested peasant bartender with an eye for drink and fine-featured men. Sasuke is fiercely protective of his family and would do anything to help the ones he cares for.

SOCIETAL			PERSONAL	
40 HONOR	20 GLORY		ENDURANCE 12	COMPOSURE 10
20 STATUS	+2, -2 DEMEANOR · AMBITIOUS		FOCUS 5	VIGILANCE 2
ARTISAN 1 MARTIAL 2 SCHOLAR 0 SOCIAL 2 TRADE 2				

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Natural Strength: Martial; <i>Physical</i>	Soft-hearted: Social; <i>Interpersonal, Mental</i>
Endearing Face: Social; <i>Interpersonal</i>	

FAVORED WEAPONS

Rusty Blade: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 4/6

Gear (equipped): Two bottles of sake, record book, pouch of 5 bu and 12 zeni

ABILITIES

BEARISH STRENGTH

Once per scene, as a Movement action, Sasuke may receive 3 fatigue. If he does, he treats his Earth Ring as 5 until the end of his next turn and reduces the TN of Attack action checks he makes by 1 (minimum 1).

OPTIONAL: TODAY I AM SAYAKA

If you are running behind on time, feel free to skip the following encounter.

Though most of the responses about the Shinomen and the Highwayman are fairly insubstantial, there is one person in the sake house that could be of assistance to the PCs. As the PCs look around the sake house or as they are about to leave, read or paraphrase the following:

A cloaked, muscular woman motions for you to stop by her table. Her clothing suggests she is a merchant, but she looks out of place in Scorpion lands. She has skin the color of dark honey, hair manipulated into thick, dense braids, and hands so callused that they stand out even in the dim light of the sake house. She bears no Clan colors. She grins at you and says in a deep, rich voice, "I am called Sayaka, travelers. I can see some of your people are from lands afar? You are looking for my friend Nori?"

If the PCs treat Sayaka respectfully and succeed at a **TN 2 Sentiment** or **Courtesy check (Earth 4, Fire 1)**, she happily offers to share a bottle of sake with them. At this point she offers information to the group freely (see **A Curious Trader** on this page).

SAYAKA, CURIOUS TRADER


ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK:  2  3


Sayaka, originally named Bataar Badma, is from the Burning Sands. She lived most of her life in the shadow of Khanbulak, a Unicorn stronghold to Rokugan's far northwest. For the last several years she has traveled throughout Rokugan, experiencing all she can. While she has no issue with people assuming she is from the Unicorn, she will usually answer honestly if asked. She changes her name frequently, and often says, "Today I am suited by this name, but tomorrow I may take another."


SOCIETAL		PERSONAL
60 HONOR		ENDURANCE 10
50 GLORY		COMPOSURE 10
39 STATUS		FOCUS 6
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - ADVENTUROUS		VIGILANCE 3

ARTISAN 1 MARTIAL 2 SCHOLAR 2 SOCIAL 2 TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES





Worldly:
 Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

Blunt:
 Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*



A CURIOUS TRADER

Things Sayaka knows:

-  Sayaka has spent a decent amount of time exploring the outskirts of the Shinomen forest. She mentions small, shy spirits (kodama), and an area where a 'moaning tree' lives. She has not seen this tree, but warns the group against approaching it, saying, "*Such things can bring no luck, only misfortune.*"
-  She notes that there is a path of red markings on many trees, and this seems to be upsetting the spirits that live there. The PCs may attempt a **TN 2 Courtesy** or **Performance check (Earth 4, Fire 1)** to convince Sayaka to act as their guide.
-  She knows that a number of shipments of food and goods (barley, rice, sugar) have gone missing in recent months—and that the locals blame it on the Highwayman. "*The little spirits are shy, but they are tense also. The red marks on their homes are upsetting them.*"
-  Sayaka mentions red marks, shaped like the moon, have appeared on locals' doors and on the trees of the Shinomen.

FAVORED WEAPONS

Chain Whip: Range 1–2, Damage 3, Deadliness 5, Razor-Edged, Snaring

Gear (equipped): Hand-drawn maps of Rokugan, the Burning Sands, and other lands, four days' rations, various small trinkets and wonders, a pouch of 13 bu

ABILITIES

I LEARNED THIS ON MY TRAVELS

Once per scene, after Sayaka or an ally within range 0–2 of her rolls dice, but before they apply effects, Sayaka may have them reroll any number of those dice.



Act 2: Exploring the Shinomen

The following section is optional, and GMs can feel free to skip straight to Act 3 if pressed for time. In that case, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

You pass under a brief patch of light and see through the murk to a glint of blue tucked in some bushes on the side of the path. Several empty bottles of sake lie in the mud, along with the shattered leavings of several more. Just up ahead you can see a glow beyond the trees, and the luscious smell of sweet rolls fills your nose.

Otherwise, if the group is not pressed for time, feel free to read the rest of this section and let your players explore and experience the Shinomen in more detail, using whatever best fits the amount of time you have.

INTO THE SHINOMEN

Following Nori's trail into the Shinomen eventually leads to the courier's overturned, sky-blue wagon deep in the forest. The spiritual disturbances are strong here, alongside many threats of the ancient wood. Once PCs reach the forest, read or paraphrase the following out loud:

As you enter the sea of ancient trees, following the worn path, the foliage overhead grows denser and denser, letting in less and less light. Keeping to the path is difficult, and something feels off about how quiet the forest is. The trees seem to watch your every movement with palpable anticipation.

As players make their way through the Shinomen, the GM may incorporate any of the following descriptions:

- ⊗ **Mark of the Highwayman:** The Shinomen is marked up with numerous symbols of the Highwayman cut into trees and emblazoned on the ground. GMs are encouraged to tease the presence of the symbol to gradually increase the sense of dread as PCs explore the forest. The marks, all of a crescent moon, seem to be made with a sharp knife (or claw?) and filled with dried blood.
- ⊗ **Atmosphere/Smell:** The air is full of the scent of camphor and plum, then musky and sharp, as of animals. Earth and rotten leaves cover the forest floor, smelling sweetly of death. The wet, cloying pungency of moss and mildew rise as the lichens underfoot are disturbed.

- ⊗ **Spiritual Phenomena:** The forms of large, black hounds flit in and out of the shadows behind the party. A **TN 2 Theology check (Earth 1, Water 3)** reveals them to be *okuri-inu*, supernatural wolf-dogs that wait for travelers to lose their footing and then pounce on them. If you remain sure-footed, they are no threat. If a PC does lose their footing while followed by these creatures, they receive 3 strife as the presence of a wolf-dog is suddenly upon them, but then disappears.
- ⊗ **Trees / Vegetation:** Wide, leafy boughs stretch overhead like welcoming arms near the entrance. The vegetation seems to crowd in, smothering and close, and the branches tangle and blend into each other overhead. Brilliant green lichen and thick-capped mushrooms dot the loamy soil of the forest floor.
- ⊗ **Signs of Life:** Up ahead, a buck with a magnificent rack of antlers stops to drink from a still pool, then turns to regard you with a wide, plaintive face. If PCs leave the creature alone, they each remove 2 strife from the beautiful moment. If they attempt to harm it or get too close, the buck's face contorts into a horrid visage, causing everyone in the scene to receive 2 strife instead. Then the creature disappears deeper into the forest.

GUIDANCE IN THE SHINOMEN

The Shinomen Forest is a strange, ancient place that is not inherently hostile to outsiders, but does not accommodate them either. The ethereal nature of the Shinomen is mysterious and, rightly so, terrifies most people.

GMs can play an unreliable narrator, especially while in the thick of the woods. Describe a character or feature with specific details one moment, then describe the same feature differently the next. Portray lesser and then greater inconsistencies to unsettle the PCs.

KODAMA (FOREST SPIRITS)

Living largely unnoticed alongside humanity, kodama are one of many forest kami who dwell in the Shinomen's ancient trees. Under cover of darkness, these wispy, soft-hearted spirits emerge from their dwellings and play in the treetops, jumping between the topiaries. PCs may either encounter them watching from the branches alongside the path, mourning a tree marked with the **Mark of the Highwayman**, or as a helpful presence the players have lost their way in the Shinomen undergrowth. At the beginning of an encounter with the kodama, read or paraphrase the following:

Just overhead, perched on a gnarled branch, you see the forms of a small elderly man and woman, looking down at you under furrowed brows. Their faces are inscrutable, and their tiny hands run down the rough scales of tree bark that cover the trunk. "Oh my," says the woman. "We are being watched." Her words come out as barely a whisper.

The kodama are very concerned with keeping a tidy home. They are following the PCs to see if they are the ones carving the hideous, bloody moons into the surfaces of their trees. If the players wish to befriend the kodama, they may make a **TN 3 Games, Sentiment**, or

HELPFUL KODAMA

If you find yourself crunched for time with a group of wayward players, you can easily bring them to Act 3 by using the kodama in this manner.

Theology check (Earth 2, Fire 4) to appeal to the tiny spirits. If the PCs succeed, they can learn the following from questioning the kodama:

- ⊗ The kodama are upset that their precious trees are being butchered and covered in blood.
- ⊗ They have never seen the entity that is hurting the trees, but they say the area feels dirty after they have passed through.
- ⊗ The kodama have seen Nori's cart, and they offer to lead the way to it if the PCs will promise to look into the one hurting the trees. To accept their offer, one or more PCs must stake 5 honor. If they break their promise, they lose this honor.

UNSETTLING THEMES

Yukiko and her companions have a penchant for eating humans and leaving grotesque scenes in their wake. Keep in mind that while playing this adventure in public spaces, with children, or in many other circumstances there are certain themes and descriptions that should be avoided. For example, Yukiko's feast could be construed as being comprised of human body parts, but this kind of description would be inappropriate in most convention settings, so it should be avoided.

If a PC is able to comfort the kodama, they gain 1 honor. Conversely, showing carelessness or disregard for the trees or the forest will repel the kodama and cause them to disappear. If a player proposes such an action, tell them that their character must forfeit 3 honor to do so.

If players are lost after wandering off the path, the GM may use the kodama to "help" them reach the path or the wagon, showing them the way by disappearing and reappearing in a nearby tree, cooing loudly.

NORI'S CART

After the players endure one or more of the Shinomen's hazards, read or paraphrase the following:

You pass under a brief patch of light and see through the murk to a glint of blue tucked in some bushes on the side of the path. Several empty bottles of sake lie in the mud, along with the shattered leavings of several more. On a nearby tree, the brilliant, blood-red sigil of the Highwayman stains the surface, glaring down at you.

This is Nori's sky-blue cart, overturned and battered. A **TN 2 Survival** or **Theology check (Earth 3, Void 3)** using a Scholar approach reveals that the scene likely happened only a few hours after Nori left Kawacho, which was the last time it rained. There are clear signs of two sets of footprints walking away from the scene, and the majority of the goods are missing. The footprints are from Lord Kenta and Lady Atsuko, who carried Nori and his goods back to the manor. One set of footprints are very large and set in deep, and the other pair is small and delicate.

If Sasuke or Sayaka (or both) are present, they will insist on continuing the search for Nori. Sayaka is an excellent tracker, and Sasuke is a bit bull-headed when it comes to his family. As the group proceeds, read or paraphrase the following:

As you travel deeper into the Shinomen, the carved signs of the Highwayman become more and more frequent. The sun becomes harder to see through the dense canopy, until you realize that the sun seems to be gone altogether. Time feels inconsistent here, and it seems as though night has fallen while you were walking.

LADY YUKIKO

Lady Yukiko appears as a short, beautifully-featured young woman with long, flowing hair. She wears thick white makeup and a pink kimono inlaid with gold thread-work depicting white lotuses. She is a pushy, kind host who will not take no for an answer. She claims she is a member of a small vassal family, the Kuriyama, of the (Scorpion) Soshi family.

Occasionally blunt, she will laugh a high, unseemly laugh if someone refuses her hospitality. GMs can tease her nature by playing her as seemingly uncomfortable, nervous, and very insistent that everyone enjoy themselves. Yukiko may occasionally stare too long at one PC and smile broadly as she imagines eating them.

Act 3: The Estate

Following the signs, the players arrive at a large estate in a clearing. This is all an illusion created by the rakshasa; in reality, the estate is built on a fetid marsh, and smells like bilious tar. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

As the trees break, you are greeted by a sprawling complex of ornately carved buildings of a grand estate. Overhead, the lidless eye of the moon casts the place in a ghostly pallor. A short walkway lit with braziers leads to the front entrance of the main hall. There are no gates or walls here.

Tranquil music streams out of an open door on the cool night breeze. The scent on the air, however, is that of a vile marsh.

At this point, the PCs may choose to either approach the main entrance or may scout out the rest of the estate.

APPROACHING THE ENTRANCE

If the PCs choose to approach the entrance, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the main door, a beautiful young woman in a lavish pink kimono emerges, attended by a train of servants.

"It appears we have more guests!" She clasps her hands together as a broad smile plays across her painted face. "Come in, come in! The night is cold and the forest is filled with ravenous beasts. But you are welcome in the estate of Lady Kuriyama Yukiko." She bows, "We were about to enjoy a grand feast!"

When the PCs meet Yukiko for the first time, her **Illusory Hunter** ability activates (see page 14). Should PCs refuse her invitation, Lady Yukiko will do her best to say what she thinks the PCs want to hear in order to get them to agree. If PCs continue to feel leery about her invitation, Yukiko will purse her lips and ask what has brought them into the forest. If Sasuke or Sayaka is in the party, both will note that they are looking for Nori. If they do, or the party explains their reason for being here, read or paraphrase the following:

"Then it is fate that brought you here," Yukiko says gravely. "For several days ago I found a man beaten and bloodied in the forest, and took him into my home to dress his wounds. I fear bandits attacked him. He had several creates of sake, as well, that were left by the thieves. Much too heavy for them, I suppose."

At this, Nori's brother agrees to enter the estate. The PCs may follow. Sayaka is more wary, however, and waits for the PCs to decide. If no NPC ally is present and the

THE ILLUSION

Yukiko's mute servants appear to be normal, living human servants dressed in ornate robes. Closer inspection with a **TN 3 (Water 2) Medicine** or **Theology** check may provide hints that they are actually undead servants. On a success, players may sense some spiritual ague, smell the servants' rotting flesh, or accidentally touch their decayed skin and bones. Also note that any clothing or gifts the PCs accept will turn into old withered rags, rotted wood, or other similarly worthless things with the illusion later when the estate vanishes!

Small descriptive details to undermine PCs' perception:

- ⊗ Constant gnats buzzing.
- ⊗ The smell of swamp water; smelling the servants' rotten flesh.
- ⊗ Intense cold and warm in places.
- ⊗ An occasional shimmer; seeing through the illusion to the reality around them.

party does not tell Yukiko that they are looking for Nori, read or paraphrase the following:

Lady Yukiko purses her delicate lips. "Are any of you from Kawacho? For I recently saved the life of a young man from that village, whom I found bloody and beaten on the path. He should be well enough to travel home soon, and I would be grateful for the assistance."

Refusing Yukiko at this point requires a forfeiture of honor equal to a PC's honor rank, as it is rude to refuse such generosity. If the PCs are not drawn to enter the estate even at this point, and attempt to return to the wagon they will be ambushed by Lord Kenta and challenged to a wrestling match (see **Atrium** on page 15 for information on this). If the PCs do enter the estate, proceed to the **Unholy Banquet** on page 10.

SCOUTING THE MANOR

If the PCs try to scout out or sneak into the estate, have each PC that is sneaking around make a **TN 2 (Air, Fire, or Void) Skulduggery** or **Survival** check. If two or more PCs fail, they stumble upon the banquet in progress, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Working your way around the main estate, you suddenly find yourselves stumbling into a vast banquet hall filled with lacquered statues of foreign origin,

A GHASTLY SIGHT

The eating of unprocessed red meat in this manner is an obscene act. Remind any rōnin and anyone familiar with the customs of polite society that the gross display of a whole cooked pig is insensitive and blasphemous.

Ahuja Mishti and Otgontogoch Turgen are both from cultures where the consumption of red meat is not taboo, unlike in Rokugani culture.

SHADOWLANDS TAINT

A detailed explanation of the Afflicted condition is included on page 271 of the core rulebook. If a player gains the Afflicted condition from dining at Yukiko's banquet, it is recommended GMs give them some variation on the Fire or Earth traits: instruct a PC they feel a sudden, insatiable hunger and that their mouth waters when they smell the feast (Fire), or that their pulse feels sluggish and they feel immeasurably sick to their stomachs (Earth).

including elephants, serpents, and depictions of deities both from the Ivory Kingdoms and Rokugan. Upon the low teak table in the center of the room is the massive cooked body of a pig filled with sweet candied meats and exotic delights, garnished with pale marsh-flowers. Piles of mouth-watering sweetcakes, gaudy fruits, and decadent salads cover every inch of the table, threatening to spill onto the floor.

An elegant young woman in a pink kimono is just taking her seat on a soft pillow between two guests. To her right is a spindly woman with long bags under her eyes, her silvery hair tied up in a bun. To her left is a burly samurai, his round belly flecked with grease-spots.

The young woman turns her soft eyes to you and exclaims, "Oh my! It seems we have more guests. I apologize for missing you at the front entrance. Please, my friends, sit with us and enjoy this fine meal. I would love to hear the story of how you came upon my home!"

When the PCs meet Yukiko for the first time, her **Illusory Hunter** ability activates (see page 14). Proceed to **The Unholy Banquet**, skipping the initial description. If the PCs succeed in sneaking around the building, proceed to **Exploring the Estate** on page 15.

THE UNHOLY BANQUET

As the PCs enter the estate, six silent servants attend to the group and attempt to politely relieve the PCs of their weapons and offer them clean housecoats. Yukiko is not afraid of the PCs, and is more interested in getting them to eat, so will not press the issue if PCs do not relinquish them.

As the PCs walk through the estate they may attempt to ask Yukiko questions. She tells them that she is happy to answer their inquiries, but she simply must have a bite to eat first. Shortly after entering, the PCs are shown into a richly decorated hall. If the PCs already stumbled upon the banquet, proceed to the next paragraph, otherwise read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Through a narrow corridor that smells of marsh water, you find yourselves in a vast banquet hall with lacquered statues of foreign origin, including elephants, serpents, and depictions of deities both from the Ivory Kingdoms and Rokugan. Upon the low teak table in the center of the room is the massive cooked body of a pig filled with sweet candied meats and exotic delights, garnished with pale marsh-flowers. Piles of mouth-watering sweetcakes, gaudy fruits, and decadent salads cover every inch of the table, threatening to spill onto the floor.

If the PCs already stumbled upon the banquet, read:

Lady Yukiko takes her seat at the center on a soft pillow between two guests. To her right is a spindly

LADY ATSUKO

The wiry, willow Lady Atsuko is a purveyor of Taint who was born from a Tainted marsh in the Shinomen forest. She spreads Taint and sickness everywhere she goes, and swings wildly between responding with terse, one word replies and then sickly sweet compliments. Atsuko's voice is gentle and airy, full of feigned interest. She will greet the PCs with a friendly, bubbly affect as she picks at her food. In her oni form, she is a wiry, serpentine monstrosity with ghastly mandibles and many eyes. Some sample comments from Lady Atsuko:

- ☼ "I hear your homeland is sweltering at this time of year. I suppose that is why you under-dressed for Lady Yukiko's banquet?"
- ☼ "Your skin is so firm and springy. Such color!"
- ☼ "Red meat does wonders for the complexion. You have such redness of skin."
- ☼ "Please excuse Lord Kenta. He is...uneducated."

woman with long bags under her eyes, her silvery hair tied up in a bun. She clutches a small stone cup with her knotted hands and regards you with a withering glance before fixing her attention on the three delicate cuts of pork on her plate.

To Yukiko's left is a burly samurai, his round belly flecked with grease-spots. He strips the meat from a rack of ribs with one sweep of his teeth as rivulets of juice trace a path down his thick, dark beard. He looks at each of you with a blank stare. "Please, join us, will you?" Yukiko says in a dulcet tone.

After cheerily introducing her guests to Lady Atsuko and Lord Kenta, Lady Yukiko will beckon to her servants to offer everyone warm sake and plum wine (all lifted from local couriers). Anyone who eats or drinks from the table suffers the Afflicted condition, experiencing symptoms at the **Banquet's End** (see page 12 for the **Banquet's End** and the **Shadowlands Taint** margin sidebar on this page). Although she is quite dainty, Yukiko devours the feast with an unseemly appetite—though she will often stop to encourage her guests to eat.

PCs may make a **TN 2 Culture check (Earth 1, Water 1, Fire 3)** to recognize that the food offered are some of the goods stolen by the Highwayman, along with the some of the sake the PCs have been hired to find.

A PLEASANT CONVERSATION

Lady Yukiko begins the evening in high spirits, but gradually grows more and more irritable; if she is not putting anyone in immediate distress or corrupting them, she considers the energy spent a waste.

The banquet is an intrigue run over the course of 2 rounds, during which time characters may ask Yukiko additional questions. To achieve any goal, a PC (or group of PCs) must accumulate 6 momentum points towards that goal. Possible objectives are here:

- ⊗ Discern Someone's Qualities
- ⊗ Appeal to a Person or Group (such as asking to be taken to Nori)
- ⊗ Other ideas the players' propose

At the same time, Yukiko is attempting to Discredit Someone, targeting PCs that are refusing to eat first, and choosing targets with the lowest vigilance of those individuals first. Her goal is to Compromise those characters. Characters who become Compromised during this intrigue may choose to unmask by eating the food in an unseemly manner.

Lady Atsuko is also trying to Discredit Someone, but she is targeting the most attractive PC, Hiyabayashi Kenshin, or Noboru, if Kenshin is not present. It is possible, then, that both Yukiko and Atsuko may be targeting the same character, in which case Atsuko just provides assistance to Yukiko. Lord Kenta focuses on eating and does not participate in the intrigue unless someone provokes him.

At the end of the second round, the intrigue ends and Yukiko reacts based on whether all of the PCs have tasted the food (see **Banquet's End** on page 12).

Common Questions for Yukiko

The following are some common answers to PC questions during the banquet.

"Who are you?"

"I am Lady Kuriyama Yukiko of the vassal family Kuriyama of the Soshi. It is truly a pleasure to have visitors this deep in the forest. Please, tell me your names?"

"Where did you come from?"

"For a time when I was a child my mother took me traveling to all manner of places, but I was born to this house and have served here since my parents' passing."

LORD KENTA

Bullheaded and bearish, this oni has an endless appetite and very poor manners. Lord Kenta speaks in a low, gravelly voice, and often takes a moment to draw a long, gurgling breath before he speaks. He has a thick neck and oafish forehead, and he devours any food given to him at the banquet as soon as it is laid in front of him.

He mentions his love of wrestling and physical sport, but has little else to discuss. His true form is that of a massive, heavily muscled red oni with the head of a wolf. Ladies Yukiko and Atsuko appear to suffer his presence. Some sample comments from Lord Kenta:

- ⊗ "Are you going to eat that?"
- ⊗ "I do enjoy a good kick."
- ⊗ (Pointing to the large pig on the table) "This is some of the sweetest meat I've tasted in years."
- ⊗ (To the strongest-looking in the party) "I wager I could best you in a game of arm wrestling."
- ⊗ (Lord Kenta will burp loudly, then slap his chest).

"Who were your parents?"

"Ayumu was my father and my mother bore the name Tamiko. They perished only a few years ago, afflicted with a disease from outside of the forest. It took them quickly, though they suffered greatly."

"Where is Nori?"

"He is resting, presently. Lady Atsuko made me aware that she administered a sleeping medicine as he turned so fitfully in his rest. I shall show you to him after the banquet."

"Why is your estate so deep in the Shinomen?"

"My great-grandfather thought to leave the bustle of court life to pursue Enlightenment and quiet contemplation here. The forest provides all the food we

YUKIKO'S BEHAVIOR

Yukiko sees all humans as very similar, so has no qualms with interacting with gaijin like Ahuja Mishti and Otgontogoch Turgen, though she is aware of cultural differences (at least so far as she can comment on differences to make her guests uncomfortable or manipulate them).

Yukiko is also eager to accept any gifts offered to her, and will not try to decline such things like a Rokugani would.

WHAT ABOUT THE SERVANTS?

Yukiko's undead servants are little more than dolls, and quickly fall to the ground as grisley piles of rags and bone once Yukiko's illusion falls.

could ever need, and the spirits are pleased that we only used fallen wood for our lodgings.”

“What are you and your guests celebrating?”

“We are reflecting on our years of friendship, and the fruitful work we have ahead of us. I am offered the opportunity to receive very few guests all the way out here, so when I do so I ensure it is a proper celebration.”

“Who are your guests?”

“This dulcet flower is Lady Atsuko, who is a dear old friend. She specializes in herbal remedies and comes from a long line of healers.” Yukiko smiles, then looks to her left. “And then we have Lord Kenta, who is a distant relation of mine—and might I emphasize ‘distant’.” Lord Kenta erupts in a table-shaking belch.

“What are you eating?”

“The fruits of our harvest. Heaven itself has provided, and so we must celebrate.”

“Why don’t your servants speak?”

“This family of servants has been with my family for generations, but originate from some distant place. They have taken a vow of silence in service to their religious beliefs. I find the quietude peaceful, do you not?”

**“Where are these statues from?” or
“Why are they displayed?”**

“My grandfather and mother were avid travelers, though such indulgence is usually seen as taboo. They enjoyed learning of other places and taking mementos of their experiences.”

**Have you noticed the marks
on the trees in the area?**

“Oh, of course. The spirits leave such marks from time to time to scare off trespassers. What is more natural than the shape of the moon?”

Yukiko will dog the players with constant questions, diverting their attention from the moment, all while trying to push them to taste some of her profane feast. Her annoyance grows as the evening wears on. The following are examples of how she reacts to different levels of irritation:

- ⊗ **[2 strife]:** “The delightful scent in the air is this roast pig. Would you like some?”
- ⊗ **[4 strife]:** “Juro [point to a servant] prepared these rice balls himself. He would be quite hurt if you didn’t so much as taste them.”
- ⊗ **[6 strife]:** “Is the feast not to your liking?”
- ⊗ **[8 strife]:** “You look so very thin. Do you realize that you will never be married if you don’t put on some weight?”
- ⊗ **[10 strife]:** “I was under the impression that the people of [Gaijin PC’s homeland] were quite hospitable. What do your people do if an honored guest does not eat the food that is offered?”

BANQUET’S END

The results of the banquet depend upon the PCs’ actions. If a PC has succeeded in the Appeal to a Person or Group and chose Yukiko, she may be rather calm. If no one succeeded in calming her down, she will react purely based on whether everyone has eaten her feast. A few possible outcomes are described below, though the PCs’ unique interactions may spur a different result, as determined by the GM.

APPEALING TO YUKIKO

If a PC is able to Appeal to a Person or Group and chose Yukiko, their attempts have amused her. Because they have entertained her, she acquiesces in to their requests in one way or another. At this point, Yukiko has decided that she will not eat them, and would rather let her guests enjoy the PCs.

Examples of rewards for their success are below, though the GM should adjust these to fit the specific way PCs succeeded:

- ⊗ Yukiko admits that some of the sake is from Nori’s shipment, and claims he gave her permission to indulge. She tells the PCs that the rest is in the kitchen and they are welcome to it (see page 16).
- ⊗ She admits that Nori is not as well as she previously led them to believe, and asks Lady Atsuko to guide the PCs to where he is (though the truth is he is dead). See **Atsuko’s Guidance** on page 14 for further details.

REFUSING THE FEAST

If one or more PCs has still refused to eat by the end of the intrigue, and no PC succeeded in appealing to Yukiko to take them to Nori, her restraint finally wanes and she erupts into an outburst of emotion. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Lady Yukiko stands abruptly, brushing out the pleats in her kimono in one harsh movement. She surveys those of you who have not touched your food and scowls. "This is no good. To receive you in my own home, to offer you the fruits of my labors: for you to reject my hospitality like this?" Her eyes narrow.

"I will not suffer this dishonor." She seethes, her delicate white hands balled into fists at her side. Still seated, Lady Atsuko sips her tea delicately and regards you all with a look of utter disdain. Lord Kenta munches thoughtfully on a knob of cartilage, oblivious to Yukiko's apparent anger.

Give the PCs a moment to respond. If those that have not eaten continue to refuse, read or paraphrase the following:

"Never mind," Yukiko says, lushly. "I know you have been waiting to meet with the man from Kawacho. I think it's time you had that chance. He's staying in a building just outside the garden, come."

If the PCs choose to go with Yukiko, proceed to **Trusting Yukiko** on page 14. If they try to leave, Yukiko does not attempt to stop them (proceed to **Fleeing the Manor** on page 17 or **Exploring the Estate** on page 15). If they attempt to attack or continue to irritate Yukiko, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The air begins to swirl around you, flickering and fading. The sturdy wooden beams and paper walls of the manor seem to shimmer, like seeing a hole burn through parchment paper. Suddenly Lady Atsuko and Lord Kenta are gone, as if erased with the manor. Standing in the place of Lady Yukiko stands a nightmare. Moonlight glints off of a sleek, scaled torso, matted with dark blood, supported by black sinewy legs. The creature has lanky, spindly arms and yellowed claws; rather than a face, its head is dominated with a large, fang-ridden mouth. Yellow, slitted eyes stare down at you.

"My honored guests," the creature coos in Yukiko's pleasant voice, "Allow me to show you where your lost friend has gone."

Players should now make a **TN 1 Tactics check**, using focus, to determine initiative for the upcoming skirmish (see page 262 of the core rulebook).

PARTAKING IN THE FEAST

If all of the PCs indulge in Yukiko's feast and they did not succeed in convincing her to take them to Nori, she will watch them sample her table with a satisfied smile. She will heap praises on them and compliment their appearance, their propriety, their dress, and their manners. After the meal has concluded, Lady Yukiko rises. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

As the banquet concludes, Yukiko pushes back the sleeves of her kimono, with a look to Lord Kenta and Lady Atsuko. She stretches one delicate hand into the roast pig's open belly and grabs its boiled heart, coated in a rich red sauce. "You have been such lovely guests, so I have saved the best part of the feast for you."

Yukiko offers the heart to whichever guest was the most reluctant to eat. If the PC accepts, Yukiko is overjoyed and the PC receives 4 strife. Read or paraphrase the following:

Yukiko laughs with delight. "Oh what excellent guests you have been! What fun it has been to have you. Lady Atsuko, would you be so kind as to take our guests to their friend?"

See **Atsuko's Guidance** on page 14 for the result of this choice. If the PC refuses the heart, read or paraphrase the following:

Yukiko's face contorts at your refusal. The air begins to swirl around you, flickering and fading. The sturdy wooden beams and paper walls of the manor seem to shimmer, like seeing a hole burn through parchment paper. Suddenly Lady Atsuko and Lord Kenta are gone, as if erased with the manor. Standing in the place of Lady Yukiko stands a nightmare. Moonlight glints off of a sleek, scaled torso, matted with dark blood, supported by black sinewy legs. The creature has lanky, spindly arms and yellowed claws; rather than a face, its head is dominated with a large, fang-ridden mouth. Yellow, slitted eyes stare down at you.

The creature coos in Yukiko's pleasant voice, "Allow me to show you what happens to rude guests in the house of Lady Yukiko."

Players should now make a **TN 1 Tactics check**, using vigilance, to determine initiative for the upcoming skirmish (see page 262 of the core rulebook).

Trusting Yukiko

If the players put their trust in Yukiko, she leads them through the estate grounds to an extravagant, lush garden. She turns to the PCs and smiles at them, beaming. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

“You have been such wonderful guests, and I know you have been waiting to meet with the man from Kawacho. I think it’s time you had that chance.” Suddenly, the air swirls around you, flickering and eroding. The beautiful garden melts before your eyes into a fetid marsh. You turn to Yukiko and are greeted by a creature that towers a full head taller than you. Moonlight glints on a sleek, scaled torso, matted with dark blood, supported by black sinewy legs. It has lanky, spindly arms and yellowed claws; rather than a face, her head is dominated with a large, fang-ridden mouth. Yellow, slitted eyes stare down at you, “Prepare to meet Nori, children.”

Players should now make a **TN 1 Tactics check**, using focus, to determine initiative (see page 262 of the core rulebook). The marshy place they are in is both Dangerous and Defiled (see page 267 of the core rulebook). Yukiko ignores these terrain effects.

LADY YUKIKO, CUNNING RAKSHASA

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 8 8

Yukiko is a rakshasa of Ghostlands that plague the Ivory Kingdoms. Yukiko easily becomes bored and restless, and so longs to be entertained. She values herself highly, and scoffs at the thought of being seriously hurt by such lowly creatures as the PCs. She is arrogant, has a short temper, and can come across as painfully sweet.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
00 HONOR		ENDURANCE 20	
05 GLORY		COMPOSURE 18	
00 STATUS		FOCUS 8	
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - ARROGANT		VIGILANCE 5	
ARTISAN 1		MARTIAL 3	SCHOLAR 2
		SOCIAL 4	TRADE 2
ADVANTAGES		DISADVANTAGES	

Devious Cunning:
 Scholar; Mental

Arrogant:
 Social; Interpersonal, Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS

Claws: Range 1–2, Damage 6, Deadliness 5, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Scaled hide (Physical 3, Supernatural 3)

ABILITIES

ILLUSORY HUNTER

Lady Yukiko is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 3 that can change her form to appear as a creature of silhouette 2–4. At the start of a scene characters must make a **TN 6 Survival** or **Theology check (Air 8, Void 4)** to attempt to see through her illusionary form. If they fail, they cannot attempt see through the illusion for the remainder of the scene.

JUST A TASTE

When Yukiko makes an Attack action check, she may spend in the following ways:

- : If she succeeds, the target suffers the Bleeding condition.
- : If she succeeds and the target is Bleeding, Yukiko removes 2 fatigue and 2 strife.
- : If she succeeds, she may choose one additional target within range 0–1 to suffer damage equal to the base damage of her weapon.

DARKER PURPOSE

If Yukiko would suffer a critical strike of severity 7 or higher, she explodes in a rain of blood with a menacing cackle. She is defeated.

Atsuko’s Guidance

If the PCs successfully appealed to Yukiko or otherwise managed to endear themselves, she will send them off with Lady Atsuko. Read or paraphrase the following:

Lady Atsuko quietly leads you out of the dining hall to the back of the estate. Situated between two guest-houses is a small shrine, and Atsuko pauses there as if to pray. A smile crosses her lips and she whispers to you, “Yukiko likes you. So what shall I do?” The older woman drops to the ground, smiling too widely for her small face, “Perhaps I will make a tea for her, a nice... blend.” Atsuko’s bones begin to snap and reform, and dozens of legs sprout from her mangled body.

Atsuko has transformed into her true, oni form, which is that of a woman on top and a centipede for a body. Her mouth has become a centipede’s pincers and they drip with an acidic fluid that burns the ground. The area is both Defiled and Imbalanced (Earth), which Atsuko ignores. The PCs should now make a **TN 1 Tactics check** to determine initiative for the upcoming skirmish (see page 262 of the core rulebook).

LADY ATSUKO, JEALOUS CENTIPEDE

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 7 8

Atsuko was born from the very marsh the estate is built on, made from the corrupting powers of the Taint mixed with the spiritual power of the Shinomen. Her true form is that of a giant, 15 foot long centipede with the body of an old woman on the top. She is intensely jealous of Yukiko's beauty, though whether she means Yukiko's illusory form or her real one, is unclear.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
00 HONOR		ENDURANCE 17	
06 GLORY		COMPOSURE 14	
00 STATUS		FOCUS 7	
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - JEALOUS		VIGILANCE 4	

ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 2 SCHOLAR 2 SOCIAL 4 TRADE 1

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Flexible: Martial, Social; Interpersonal, Physical, Mental	Jealousy: Social; Interpersonal, Mental Aversion to Fire: Martial, Social; Physical, Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS

Venomous Bite: Range 0, Damage 5, Deadliness 6, Unholy

Crushing Body: Range 0-3, Damage 6, Deadliness 5

Gear (equipped): Segmented hide (Physical 3, Supernatural 1)

ABILITIES

CONSTRICTING BODY

Atsuko is a Otherworldly, Tainted being of silhouette 3. When she makes an Attack action check using her Crushing Body, she may spend in the following ways:

- : If she succeeds, she may immediately make an Attack action check against the same target using her Venomous Bite.
- +: If she succeeds, the target suffers one of the following conditions for each spent this way: Dazed, Immobilized, Silenced.
- : If she succeeds, the target is Immobilized and the target begins to suffocate until they are no longer Immobilized (see page 269 of the core rulebook).

PAINTED WORDS

As a Scheme action, Atsuko may make a **Social (Fire) check** targeting one character within the scene, with a TN equal to the target's vigilance. If she succeeds, she influences the target's mind, causing them to receive 2 strife, plus 1 strife for every 2 bonus successes.

VENOMOUS STRIKE

When Atsuko makes an Attack action check using her Venomous Bite, she may spend in the following way:

- : The target becomes Disoriented and Intoxicated.

FURIOUS CHALLENGE

GMs can increase the tensions of the Atrium scene by having Sasuke or Sayaka brashly challenge Kenta.

EXPLORING THE ESTATE

After the banquet (or if the PCs sneak into the estate), the PCs may decide to explore the area. The following rooms, along with encounters, descriptions, and text, are provided depending on how much the PCs want to explore. Explain that players can explore the main building of Yukiko's estate, or they can proceed to the buildings back behind it. Almost all items and decorations are mere illusions, and will lose their form if PCs attempt to pick them up. If Yukiko's illusion has already dissipated, the buildings have changes to their descriptive elements, but still exist for the purposes of exploration.

THE MAIN ESTATE

The main estate of the manor filled with dozens of rooms. If the illusion has been dispelled, the manor is instead a large outcropping in the middle of a festering swamp. A rudimentary framework of gnarled branches separates the 'rooms.' Listed below are the main areas the PCs may find themselves in.

Banquet Hall

The PCs may fight Yukiko here, or they may instead fight her in the garden. If the illusion has fallen, this room is loosely bordered in the bones of dozens of creatures, many of which still have blood and flesh clinging to them. If the illusion has fallen, the terrain is Defiled and Entangling.

Atrium

Lord Kenta hungrily waits in the front room, rooting through any possessions the players may have relinquished to Lady Yukiko. If the illusion has fallen, this room is on a small, solid island in the swamp and is saturated in blood and trampled vegetation.

Kenta's illusion is broken when the PCs enter the room, revealing a massive, thickly muscled red oni with the head of a wolf. He will regard the PCs hungrily when they enter, but does not attack. Lord Kenta sizes up the

THE HIGHWAYMAN

brawniest of the group (Sasuke or Sayaka first, if they are part of the group, or Mishti, Turgen, or Maki Haruko). Read or paraphrase the following:

Kenta stands up, his dull yellow eyes glowing in the dimness. The moisture on his fangs glints in the low light. "I have not wrestled in some time," he growls. "I challenge one of you to a test of strength."

Kenta means to stake someone's arm or leg on the match. PCs may attempt a **TN 3 Games check (Earth 1, Water 5)** to negotiate the stakes. Lord Kenta is both stupid and fairly honorable, for an oni: if the PCs ask him to promise to go back to the Shadowlands if he loses, he will.

Kenta will readily jump into a wrestling match on the atrium's bamboo mat (or the bloody dirt, if the

illusion is broken). Sizing Kenta up beforehand shows he has a stiff knee, which may be exploited with a **TN 2 Fitness check** while wrestling him. ✎ may be spent to identify this weakness in the match as well. Kenta will readily submit after two or three successful wrestling moves against him (depending on time and excitement).

If an NPC is wrestling Kenta, they will only make one opposed roll. If Kenta wins, he bites off the arm of his competitor, messily devouring it. Unaware of his disgusting behavior, Kenta will happily challenge a PC. If the PC fails, they may receive critical injuries or scars, depending on what they have staked on the match. Regardless of the outcome, Kenta has no real desire to fight all of the PCs, and would rather wrestle or indulge in other activities.



LORD KENTA, WOLF-HEADED ONI

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 7 4

Kenta is a massive, muscular ogre-like creature with the head of a wolf. His skin is ruddy and covered in hair. His dim, silver eyes often stare blankly around him, as if his head were filled with nothing at all. Kenta originates from the vile pits of Jigoku, and made his way to Rokugan by way of the Shadowlands. Kenta is fairly easy to please, as his two pleasures are eating and wrestling. He is also strangely honest for an oni, and seems to have little desire to lie, and actually hates cheating.



ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 3 SCHOLAR 0 SOCIAL 1 TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Supernatural Strength:

Martial; *Physical*

Dim-witted:

Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

Old Wound (Knee):

Martial; *Physical*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Massive teeth: Range 0–1, Damage 5, Deadliness 7, Razor-Edged, Unholy

Clawed fists: Range 0–3, Damage 4, Deadliness 5

Gear (equipped): Bone armor (Physical 3)

ABILITIES

CRUSHING GRIP

Kenta is a Otherworldly, Tainted being of silhouette 4. At the end of Kenta's turn, he makes an additional Attack action check, if able.

When Kenta makes an Attack action check, he may spend in the following way:

: The attack gains the Snaring quality.

+: Increase the deadliness of the attack by 1 for each spent this way.

Kitchens

A grisly display of gore and meat cover this room. The viscera and meat are real human remains Lady Yukiko has put to disgusting use. Five crates of the missing sake are here, as well as other stolen goods, are stored. The terrain of this area is Defiled and Obscured. Anyone who sees the display suffers 3 strife.

Atsuko's Shrine

Note that this encounter is not possible if the PCs fought Atsuko earlier. Near the center of the estate is a small shrine set between two guesthouses. If the illusion has been broken, the shrine is made of two bent trees woven together, decorated with the innards of swamp creatures and surrounded by poisonous mushrooms.

At the center of the shrine, meditating, is Lady Atsuko. Even if the estate's illusion has been broken, she appears to still be a withered older woman. Unless PCs immediately attack, treat the encounter with Atsuko as an intrigue with an Appeal to a Person or Group objective. If PCs gain a collective 7 momentum points, they may be able to convince Atsuko to leave the Shinomen. During the intrigue, they can spend to reveal the following:

- Atsuko says something that suggests she is intensely jealous of Yukiko.
- PCs will see wicked burn scars on Atsuko's oni body, suggesting that she has a particular vulnerability and averse to fire.
- Atsuko is fond of beautiful things.

Atsuko's goal is to Discredit Someone [the PC she perceives to be the most attractive, Hiyabayashi Kenshin, or Noboru, if Kenshin is not being played]. If she succeeds in causing her target to unmask, read or paraphrase the following:

Atsuko grins at you [Kenshin or Noboru] and her mouth stretches wider than seems natural on her small face. Sharp teeth glint in the moonlight as she begins salivating, "Oh, what a beauty you are when you squirm. Your flesh will make such a fine tea." Atsuko's bones begin to snap and reform, and dozens of legs sprout from her mangled body.

At this point the PCs should make a **TN 1 Tactics check** to determine initiative. Atsuko's profile can be found on page 15.

If the PCs succeed in their objective, they may ask Atsuko to leave or otherwise come up with a creative solution to avoid fighting her. If they fail, or something they do makes the intrigue impossible to complete, Atsuko becomes angry. Read or paraphrase the following:

A smile crosses Atsuko's lips and she whispers to you, "What shall I do with such ugly creatures?" The older woman drops to the ground, smiling too widely for her small face, "Perhaps I will...make myself tea...from your blood." Atsuko's bones begin to snap and reform, and dozens of legs sprout forth from her mangled body.

Atsuko has transformed into her true, oni form, which is that of a woman on top and a centipede for a body. Her mouth has become a centipede's pincers and they drip with an acidic fluid that burns the ground. The PCs should now make a **TN 1 Tactics check** to determine initiative for the upcoming skirmish (see page 262 of the core rulebook).

FLEEING THE MANOR

At any point during their stay the PCs may choose to flee the manor. If the PCs have reason to believe at this point that Nori is possibly alive within the estate, each PC must forfeit 5 honor to do so. If Yukiko has not dispelled her illusion yet, fleeing PCs encounter either Lady Atsuko or Lord Kenta. This encounter plays out depending on which oni the GM chooses, for Lady Atsuko see **Atsuko's Shrine** on page 16, and for Lord Kenta see **Atrium** on page 15. If they defeat their opponent, the PCs can safely flee into the Shinomen and live to fight another day. If they instead decide to head back into the estate, they encounter Lady Yukiko in the garden (see **Trusting Yukiko** on page 14).

Act 4: Conclusion

Assuming the PCs are not all dead, a number of post-adventure scenes may play out, depending on time. Additionally, GMs might consider incorporating some of the supernatural Shinomen forest encounters if their players have managed to complete things quickly.

The PCs gain the following for their efforts:

- ⊗ 3 XP: For completing the adventure
- ⊗ 1 XP: For each intrigue, skirmish, or duel a PC completes
- ⊗ 4 Glory: For defeating each of the three major enemies; Lady Yukiko, Lady Atsuko, and Lord Kenta (a total of 12 glory possible)
- ⊗ 4 Honor: For wrestling Lord Kenta alone

KAWACHO

If the PCs return to Kawacho with stories of the macabre banquet, the villagers will be loathe to investigate the forest or any dwelling of the Highwayman. By succeeding at a **TN 4 Command check (Fire 2, Earth 3, Void 3)**, PCs may convince the villagers to rise up and strike out

against the rakshasa and her thralls. Anyone returning to the estate clearing will find it has vanished, leaving only a stinking, fetid marsh in its place.

If the PCs return to Nori's family and tell them what has happened, they may have a few different responses. If Sasuke either did not go with the PCs or lived, read or paraphrase the following:

Nori's mother covers her mouth with her hand and looks away, tears in her eyes. "My son...my poor son." As she cries softly, Sasami, Nori's sister, speaks up, "Thank you for telling us his fate. While it hurts, it would hurt more to not know what became of him. Let us thank you."

Sasami offers the PCs Nori's savings that he kept hidden in his sleeping mat, a total of 6 bu. So long as the PCs follow convention and try to say no to the gift, they can safely accept it after Sasami insists they take it. If one or more PCs attempt to take the money greedily, inform them that doing so requires them to forfeit 4 honor.

Additionally, each PC gains the **Support of [Kawacho]** distinction (see page 110 of the core rulebook).

MORONOKA'S SHOP

If the PCs decide to return to Moronoka, the merchant's response depends on whether the PCs return with some or all of the sake. At the beginning of this encounter, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach Moronoka's shop you see several individuals waiting outside of the shop, presumably waiting for their turn to speak to Moronoka.

If the PCs return with four to five crates of sake read or paraphrase the following:

Once you get to the door of the shop, Moronoka calls out for you to come inside. They light up as they see you, and then eyes what you've returned with. They tilt their head and ask, "This isn't all of the sake, but it is enough for the wedding. What happened to the rest?"

If the PCs tell Moronoka their story, they must make a **TN 1 Courtesy check (Air 2, Fire 3)**. If they succeed, Moronoka believes them and tells them that this information will be passed along to their superiors. The PCs are paid their full 6 koku a piece and gain the **Ally [Ito Moronoka]** distinction (see page 101 of the core rulebook).

If the PCs fail, Moronoka believe the PCs stole some of the sake for themselves, and only pays them 4 koku a piece and the PCs do not receive the distinction.

If the PCs return with less than four crates of sake read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the door of the shop, Moronoka calls you inside. They turn to you as you enter and frowns at the crates you bring. “Where is the rest? The lord will be cross if there is not enough for the wedding!”

If the PCs tell Moronoka their story, they must make a **TN 2 Courtesy check (Water 1, Air 3, Fire 4)**. If they succeed, Moronoka believes them and is sympathetic to their struggle and offers to report this information to their superiors. Each PC is paid 5 koku a piece, because they did not return with all of the sake.

If the PCs fail, Moronoka believes the PCs stole some of the sake, but doesn’t want to deal with them anymore and pays them 3 koku each. PCs can make a **TN 3 Command check (Water 2, Air 4, Fire 5)** to get Moronoka to pay more.

If the PCs do not have the sake, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the door of the shop, Moronoka calls you inside. They perk up when they see you enter the shop, but their shoulders slump when they see you don’t have the sake, “What happened? Where is the Lord’s sake?” they say, panic creeping into their voice.

If the PCs tell Moronoka their story, they must make a **TN 3 Courtesy check (Water 3, Air 4, Fire 5)**. If they succeed, Moronoka believes them, but is very worried about not having the sake in time. They recognize the work the PCs did, however, and offer 3 koku as compensation for it.

If the PCs fail, Moronoka thinks the PCs either stole the sake or didn’t actually attempt to do the job. In a mixture of panic and anger, Moronoka demands the PCs leave their shop immediately. If the PCs refuse or attempt to persuade Moronoka and fail (such as with a **TN 4 Command check (Water 3, Air 5, Fire 6)**), Moronoka calls out to the people who were milling about outside. Read or paraphrase the following:

“Asuka! I require your assistance!” One of the burly, more gruff individuals pokes their head in and asks if everything is okay.

If the PCs keep trying to get money out of Moronoka, tell them that it will require them to forfeit 6 honor for breaching the tenet of Courtesy. If they proceed, read or paraphrase the following:

As you press Moronoka further, they throw a small pouch containing 2 koku at you. “Get out of my shop and never return! The lord will hear of this!” Several more of Moronoka’s workers step into the small shop and look at you with leering expressions.



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