

Legend
of the
Five Rings[™]
ROLEPLAYING



MASK OF THE ONI

AN ADVENTURE IN THE SHADOWLANDS

Mask of the Oni

Mask of the Oni is an adventure for the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*. During the course of this adventure, the player characters leave the relative security of the Emerald Empire and pass through the lands and defenses of the Crab Clan to the Shadowlands. This perilous journey takes them to the ruins of Shiro Hiruma, the once-proud stronghold of the Hiruma family of the Crab. There, the characters must face dangerous opponents, stark horror, and their deepest fears if they wish to succeed in stopping a powerful blood magic practitioner, a *mahō-tsukai*, from achieving her nefarious goals.

It is strongly recommended that the game master read through *Mask of the Oni* in its entirety to become familiar with it before running it with a group of PCs.

Part One: Adventure Background

The events of *Mask of the Oni*, which are assumed to take place in the year 1123, are heavily influenced by the history of Rokugan, particularly the fate of Shiro Hiruma during the eighth century. It is important, therefore, for the GM and players to have an understanding of these tumultuous historical events in order to appreciate what is at stake during the course of the adventure.

The following sections are labeled as being either for the GM only, or for both the GM and players. The story of Shiro Hiruma's fall is not secret, and any of the PCs might know it, particularly those with ties to the Crab Clan. The GM can brief players in advance or, to maintain a greater air of mystery, reveal this history as it becomes relevant, such as through the character of Kaiu Riko (see page 8). However, certain details of the event, including the fate of its defenders and the oni who led the attack, are unknown even to the Crab. In addition, the involvement of the *mahō-tsukai* Kitsu Sokori is an important part of the adventure story, which the PCs must discover for themselves.

THE FALL OF DAYLIGHT CASTLE (PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE)

Although many outside the Crab Clan forget this, there once was a time when the great fortification known as the Kaiu Wall, Carpenter Wall, or simply "the Wall," didn't exist to guard the southern border of Rokugan against incursions from the Shadowlands. In the earliest days of the Empire, the border was located farther south, protected by a series of individual towers and defensive works that made it impossible for all but small forces of Shadowlands

creatures to enter the Empire. Many of these fortifications were maintained by the Hiruma family of the Crab, and foremost among them was that family's ancestral seat of power, Daylight Castle, known also simply as Shiro Hiruma. While not as imposing as the mighty fortresses of Kyūden Hida or Shiro Kaiu, Shiro Hiruma was built not only to withstand determined attacks, but also to stand for long periods under siege. Deep wells and large storehouses allowed it to survive many months of isolation, while numerous tunnels and cunning traps surrounding it made any assaults upon it extremely difficult and costly.

In the eighth century, however, a new threat rose from the Shadowlands. An oni now referred to as The Maw beat the squabbling lieutenants of Fu Leng of the Shadowlands into submission, raising an army of unprecedented size and power under its cunning and ruthless leadership. If anyone ever knew its true name, it is lost to history. What is known is that the Hiruma were attacked by the Maw's horde before they could realize how grave a threat they were facing.

Their smaller fortifications quickly fell to the Maw's vast army, forcing them to marshal their remaining troops at Shiro Hiruma in a desperate, last-ditch defense. Through an unspeakable ritual that sent sickening cracks through reality itself, The Maw called numerous oni directly from the depths of Jigoku, including the dreaded Atsumari no Oni, a demon skilled the sorcery of snaring the souls of the dead. Faced with such foes, swarming hordes of undead, and their own mounting casualties, the Hiruma knew it was only a matter of time before Daylight Castle fell to the Maw.

The Maw then went on to attack the rest of the Crab Clan. For a time, it seemed that the clan would fail in its ancestral mission to protect the Empire from the Shadowlands, and Rokugan would be lost to darkness. Only the courage and sacrifice of a Crab shugenja named Kuni Osaku, who used a powerful invocation to turn the River of the Last Stand into a wall of raging waters, kept the forces of the Maw at bay. For over two months Osaku maintained the flood waters, giving the Crab time to construct the core of what would become the Kaiu Wall. The exertion eventually killed Osaku, ending her ritual. When the waters finally receded, the Maw's horde crashed against the newly constructed Wall. The fortification held, and the Crab struck back, unleashing a powerful counterattack through tunnels they had dug beneath it. In what would become known as the Battle of the Cresting Wave, the Maw was destroyed and its forces dispersed, ending the threat to the Empire.

In the aftermath, the Crab consolidated and rebuilt their forces. However, although enough members of the Hiruma family survived that their numbers would recover

over time, their lands were lost, becoming yet another corrupted region of the Shadowlands. The loss of their ancestral home, Shiro Hiruma, remains a burning shame in the hearts of the Hiruma to this day. Many attempts have been made to recover the ruins of the castle since, but none have been successful.

THE FATE OF THE HIRUMA (GM ONLY)

While instrumental in conquering Shiro Hiruma, Atsumari no Oni was never again seen after the castle's fall, due to a ritual performed by a shugenja whose name has been lost to history—Hiruma Masami. Masami was born a member of the Kaikoga family of the Moth Clan, a Minor Clan focused on studying the nature of Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams. She subsequently married into the Hiruma family and dutifully assisted in the care of the temple located within Shiro Hiruma—a devoted, if otherwise seemingly unremarkable priest of little importance.

This changed, however, when Atsumari no Oni used its corrupt powers of resurrection to attack the castle. Hiruma Masami realized the very souls of the family were in existential danger. Determined to do something to counter the demon's vile influence, she performed a complex ritual that ensured that the souls of the last Hiruma to perish would be sent to Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams, rather than become corrupted by Atsumari no Oni. The ritual was insufficient to save the castle, but it greatly reduced the power of Atsumari no Oni and saved the souls of hundreds of Hiruma samurai.

Incensed at being thwarted, the oni turned its rage on Masami. She had planned for this as well, however, and sacrificed her life to send the oni back to Jigoku and herself to Yume-dō. She remains there to this day. Although she and the Hiruma she saved have never moved on to be judged in Meido, the Realm of Waiting, Masami has kept them safe from the corruption of Atsumari no Oni, who has not yet found a way to reach into the Realm of Dreams.

Every dream, however, must come to an end. Masami knew she could not make the outcome of her ritual permanent, for that would effectively halt the Karmic Wheel for the souls in question, a profoundly blasphemous act. Instead, she used three keys to enact the ritual. These same three keys could, in turn, also unravel the ritual and end its effects. The keys are:

- ✿ The final passage of Masami's ritual, spoken aloud, representing the thwarting of the oni's terrible assault upon the Hiruma.
- ✿ The *wakizashi* of the Hiruma family *daimyō*, representing the honor of the Hiruma samurai who defended the castle to the last.

- ✿ Masami's name, which she surrendered to empower the ritual, representing not only her sacrifice, but that of all the Hiruma who fell in defense of their ancestral home, their clan, and the Empire. The only recorded instance of her name is on a scroll hidden in the library in Shiro Hiruma (see page 19). **The GM should ensure that her name is not revealed to the PCs except in that scroll.**

Masami designed the ritual such that someone with the intent to end it could bring these three keys together within Shiro Hiruma to release the souls from Yume-dō and allow them to pass on to their judgment in Meido. She had faith that someday the Fortunes would guide someone of pure intent to Shiro Hiruma to do so.

Unfortunately, much more sinister forces also look forward to the ending of Masami's ritual. Atsumari no Oni has been waiting throughout the ensuing centuries to return from Jigoku and claim the souls it was denied. With the souls of those final and bravest defenders of Shiro Hiruma at its command, Atsumari no Oni could begin to raise an army: one that would only grow in power as it killed those facing it, gathering yet more souls in the process. This would not only let it avenge itself against Hiruma Masami, but allow it to resume pursuing its unholy goal of eventually subverting the Crab to its will, turning them against Rokugan in a grotesque perversion of their sacred duty and opening the way for the Shadowlands to finally overrun the Empire. It is this baleful possibility that the mahō-tsukai Kitsu Sokori seeks to exploit.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF KITSU SOKORI (GM ONLY)

The daughter of a minor lord of the Kitsu family of the Lion Clan, Kitsu Sokori was a talented and ambitious samurai who took to her studies as a shugenja with great eagerness. She performed admirably, and she showed great talent with her family's unique method of speaking with ancestors. Despite her abilities, her father

FREE SUPPLEMENTAL CONTENT

Mask of the Oni includes free downloadable content available at [FantasyFlightGames.com/en/Legend-of-the-Five-Rings-Roleplaying-Game](https://www.fantasyflightgames.com/en/Legend-of-the-Five-Rings-Roleplaying-Game) that offers GMs a way to bring the dark and twisted Shadowlands to life as the PCs are introduced to the nezumi of the Knotted Tails tribe.

While the PCs travel to Daylight Castle, they discover that something lurking in the wastes is on the hunt for nezumi blood, and whatever it is may just catch the PCs scent.



avored her older brother, who was not only his firstborn, but also the child with whom he felt the greater affinity. However, Sokori believed it was *her* right to be named her father's heir, due to her superior talent and intellect.

Eventually, Sokori decided to discreetly dispose of her brother. She delved into increasingly obscure and esoteric research until she stumbled upon an ancient mahō scroll in a small and forgotten temple. She used its blood magic to inflict a slow wasting disease on her brother, which finally killed him. This didn't have the effect she'd intended or hoped for, however, as her heartbroken father retired and named a distant cousin as his heir. Enraged, Sokori left her family's lands, secretly vowing to acquire more power until she could take what was rightfully hers by guile, force, or any other means necessary.

In the years since that time, Sokori has developed her blood sorcery to become a powerful mahō-tsukai. For most of those years, she avoided drawing attention to herself by quietly focusing on forbidden research and the accumulation of power, eschewing any overt actions toward her goals. This changed when she arrived in Slow Tide Harbor, a small town governed by the Tortoise Clan's Kasuga family. There, opportunists acting in league with Sokori abducted samurai in order to provide blood to fuel her magic. This

led to a series of events that ultimately forced Sokori to flee Slow Tide Harbor to avoid exposure, capture, and death.

DARK TIDES AND MASK OF THE ONI

Kitsu Sokori is introduced in the **Dark Tides** adventure included in the *Legend of the Five Rings Game Master's Kit*. If the PCs participated in that adventure, then *Mask of the Oni* provides a natural continuation of their involvement with Sokori and her evil schemes. This is not necessary to play *Mask of the Oni*, however, which can form the start of a new campaign or be integrated into an ongoing one.

IF THE PCs HAVE PLAYED DARK TIDES

If the characters played **Dark Tides**, it is likely that as a result of its events, they want to bring Sokori to justice. That said, *Mask of the Oni* doesn't necessarily immediately follow **Dark Tides**, since the characters didn't have any leads regarding Sokori at the end of that adventure. Accordingly, the GM can readily run one or more intervening adventures prior to starting *Mask of the Oni*.

DARK TIDES

Sokori's flight from Slow Tide Harbor forced her to accelerate her plans. She began focusing her malign attention on samurai of the Crab Clan, reasoning that they, of all Rokugani samurai, would be the most likely to have useful knowledge of blood magic.

In Soft Breeze Village, a rather grubby coastal town in the Crane lands, she happened upon a washed-up rōnin named Hozumi, who had once belonged to the Hiruma family. She abducted and proceeded to torture him, using a perverse combination of mahō and the ancestor-speaking of the Kitsu family. This enabled her to summon and question his ancestors, thereby learning a great deal about the Shadowlands. Eventually, she managed to summon the spirit of a Hiruma samurai who not only had survived the fall of Shiro Hiruma, but had also witnessed the start of the ritual performed by Hiruma Masami to counter the insidious power of Atsumari no Oni. Sokori realized that the souls of the last samurai to fall defending Shiro Hiruma might have avoided corruption, and she became certain of this when she couldn't summon the spirit of any of those samurai. From this, she recognized an opportunity to achieve her ultimate goal of claiming her birthright among the Lion Clan.

Sokori carried on sailing south until she reached the lands of the Crab Clan. She was far more careful there, knowing only too well that the Crab are supremely skilled at ferreting out mahō-tsukai. She used blood taken from Crab samurai only through indirect means, such as by employing bandits and rōnin to do her foul bidding. Slowly, she pieced together information on Shiro Hiruma, Atsumari no Oni, and Masami's ritual, both from the spirits of the ancestors of those whose blood she acquired, and through more conventional means such as by delving into ancient scrolls and archives. She now travels to Shiro Hiruma, where she plans to assemble and use the three keys specified by Hiruma Masami to end her ritual, release the souls of the fallen Hiruma samurai from Yume-dō, and cause Atsumari no Oni to return to Ningen-dō, the Realm of Mortals. By striking a deal with the oni, she hopes to gain power over the Hiruma who fell defending Daylight Castle by allowing the oni to corrupt them. This would turn them into her personal army, granting her the kind of power and prestige among the minions of Fu Leng that she was denied in Rokugan—and the power to take revenge upon that family she has grown to detest!

At the outset of *Mask of the Oni*, a contact of the PCs—a fellow magistrate, an NPC from *Dark Tides*, or any other appropriate source of information—relays to them news of the murder of the rōnin Hozumi in Soft Breeze Village. The report includes details of Hozumi's shockingly bloody torture and killing, the details of which are consistent with victims recovered after the defeat of the rōnin Gaku. The witnesses' descriptions of the woman match descriptions the PCs have obtained of Kitsu Sokori. Hozumi was last seen alive speaking with a mysterious woman matching descriptions of Kitsu Sokori (obtained from witnesses in Slow Tide Harbor either by the PCs or other investigators). Shortly before the discovery of Hozumi's body, the woman obtained passage on a *kobune* ship heading south, bound initially for Broken Rocks Village.

From then on, the characters are able to follow the trail of clues Sokori leaves behind her as she sails south along the coast of Rokugan. Unless the GM has reason to expand this portion of the adventure, it is suggested it be summarized for the players as follows:

- ✿ In Broken Rocks Village, a small Crane Clan fishing community, a Crane samurai named Daidōji Hideaki was attacked by unknown assailants. Strangely, whoever perpetrated the attack—Hideaki was blindfolded, so he couldn't identify them—seemed intent on collecting his blood, but they were stopped by the timely arrival of a group of fisherfolk. Just as strangely, after Hideaki had been subdued but before the assailants attempted to collect his blood, a woman demanded to know if Hideaki's grandmother had been a Hiruma, which she had been.
- ✿ Farther south, in Sunrise Village, another remote Crane fishing community, a Mantis samurai reported seeing a woman standing over a body on a beach, apparently speaking to a ghostly figure. The village head initially discounted the story because the Mantis had been drunk, but two days later, the body of a minor Yasuki merchant was discovered near the same beach, her throat cut.
- ✿ In Wall above the Ocean Village, a larger and more prosperous Crane holding, magistrates investigated reports from anxious *heimin* of mahō rituals being conducted in a nearby forest. Commoners turned over a peasant, a man named One Thumb, to the magistrates, ostensibly for being involved in those blasphemous practices. The magistrates were skeptical; it isn't uncommon for peasants to accuse one another of all sorts of heinous things because of grievances among them. Upon questioning One Thumb, however, it became clear that he had been involved in something blasphemous;

he was genuinely frightened of a woman he knew only as "Spirit Caller," who could summon the spirits of the dead and question them. He claimed she used threats of evil magic to coerce him into helping her kidnap the young son of a Hiruma samurai stationed in the town as a Crab liaison to the Crane. The child had, indeed, gone missing and was never found. One Thumb was subsequently executed.

In each case, a woman matching Sokori's description was noted to be seeking passage farther south. As a final clue, Crab magistrates in Clear Water Village report the theft of ancient maps from a samurai named Yasuki Keiji. These maps depict the Hiruma lands in general, and the estate of Shiro Hiruma in particular, before they fell to the Shadowlands. Keiji, a middle-aged merchant of moderate influence in the Yasuki family, was robbed of the maps after Sokori drugged him during a night of drinking. Although he has little use for the maps himself, they are a family heirloom, and he's worried about the consequences of his actions. He can't provide much more help without revealing his failure to his family, which he wants to avoid, but he can at least help the characters reach the Kaiu Wall without any trouble.

IF THE PCs HAVEN'T PLAYED DARK TIDES

If the PCs haven't played through *Dark Tides*, then, in addition to the character goals described on page 6, another reason they might become involved in tracking down Sokori is provided by Yasuki Keiji, the samurai from whom the maps of the Hiruma lands were stolen (see above). Through nurturing a variety of political and commercial contacts, Keiji has established considerable influence among the clans. He could use that influence to persuade the lords of a group of samurai (the PCs) to recover the stolen maps. The PCs will probably never know their respective lords' reasons for delegating this task to them, nor is it their business; they simply need to obey. Alternatively, the GM could work with the players to develop reasons for each of their characters to assist Keiji. What is important is that the PCs have a clear and compelling reason to help the Yasuki recover his property.

Regardless, not having encountered the events of *Dark Tides*, the PCs likely lack any particular knowledge of Kitsu Sokori and her plans. Instead, the PCs meet with Yasuki Keiji in Clear Water Village. He relates that a servant noticed an unknown woman near his house at about the time the maps went missing from it. Even the most cursory investigation reveals the murder of the rōnin Hozumi (which, in this case, has occurred in Clear Water Village). This leads the PCs to the rest of the anecdotes describing Sokori's trail of mayhem. (See **If the**



PCs Have Played *Dark Tides*, on page 4). However, instead of taking place in Crane villages, the events occur in the following Crab locations: Black Tree Village (where timber is the primary industry), Burning Rocks Village (where wood is made into charcoal, used by the Crab for blacksmithing), and Crossroads Village (a place where important Crab communication and supply lines for the Wall intersect). This information gives the PCs at least some insight into Sokori's schemes. Crossroads Village is the last village where the PCs find information before they arrive at the Wall.

CHARACTER GOALS

While *Mask of the Oni* contains plenty of action and combat, the most dangerous aspect of the Shadowlands is an insidious and intimate evil, one that targets the fundamental flaws and weakness of samurai in order to tempt them into surrendering to the allure of its baleful power. In order to ensure that the characters have a deep and personal stake in this adventure, each player should work with the GM to choose one of the following goals or to invent one based on their character's background:

- ✦ The character had an ancestor who fell while defending Shiro Hiruma, and the PC wants to redeem them by achieving a great victory there. While this is obviously appropriate for any Crab character, interclan marriages are common, so any samurai could have had an ancestor who was part of the Hiruma family. This is particularly

appropriate for clans that aren't known for their overt political power, such as the Dragon, the Unicorn, or any Minor Clan. Preventing Kitsu Sokori from achieving her appalling objectives at the site of the PC's ancestor's defeat would go a long way toward redeeming them.

- ✦ The character seeks to retrieve an ancestral heirloom from the ruins of the castle. Again, through interclan marriage among their ancestors, this can apply to characters of any clan. It is also possible the heirloom originally belonged to another clan but was in the possession of the Crab at the time of Shiro Hiruma's fall. As the Crab generally have less consideration for the arts than the other clans, the type of heirloom most likely to be found in the ruins is a martial one, such as a weapon or armor, but other items are certainly possible. The character should seek not only to retrieve the heirloom, but also to ensure it hasn't been Tainted and to see to its destruction if it has.
- ✦ A Lion Clan character has been approached by a higher-status member of their clan, who instructs them to kill Sokori—in as discreet a manner as possible, of course. The particular abilities of the Kitsu

family are not well known throughout the Empire, so seeing them used for such corrupted purposes as Sokori's stands to bring great shame upon the Lion Clan. While every Lion samurai is expected to act honorably, it is also made clear to the character that Sokori must die, and that they must take particular care to eliminate all evidence of her actions.

- ✳ When Shiro Hiruma fell, many records were lost, including some of the earliest—and most reliable—depictions of the Shadowlands. Those included descriptions of ruins that belonged to nonhuman species such as nezumi, trolls, and even stranger beings. A character who retrieves such records could bring great glory to their clan.

Part Two: Arriving at the Kaiu Wall

Once the PCs arrive at the Kaiu Wall, read or paraphrase the following text aloud:

The Kaiu Wall looms over you, one hundred feet of dark stone battlements, redoubts, and watchtowers standing between Rokugan and the Shadowlands beyond. You pass by signs of a recent battle as you approach: wounded Crab bushi being tended by healers and shugenja, *burakumin* carrying off the dead to be cremated, and yet more warriors cleaning and repairing armor and weapons. More troops stand guard atop the Wall, as the vigil of the Crab against the darkness never ends. Suspicious stares follow you as you pass by, until a sentinel close to the Wall turns to you and barks, "What is your business here?"

Having arrived at the Wall, the PCs now encounter several NPCs who may be able to aid them in their journey—though it may be for a price.

HIDA HACHIRŌ, TAISA OF THE WALL

The sentinel leads the PCs to the *taisa* commanding the Spear of Dawn Watchtower, which is the one closest to Shiro Hiruma. The *taisa*, a samurai named Hida Hachirō, is tall, handsome, and surprisingly young, a very different picture from the usual Hida brute many imagine when they think of the Crab. He has been thrust into his position due to recent losses suffered by the Crab, and although he is polite and even charming at times, his loyalty to the Crab is absolute. He is

suspicious of any request to pass beyond the Wall, politely but firmly explaining that not only could any injury or death be seen as the responsibility of the Crab, but also that samurai lost to the Taint would just mean more enemies for his clan to face. He is dubious about the possibility that a lone mahō-tsukai could slip through their guard. With a successful **TN 2 Seafaring (Water) check**, a character can point out that an experienced sailing crew could have navigated their way to the Shadowlands by sea.

A successful **TN 3 Courtesy check (Earth 2, Air 4,)** can convince Hachirō to let the characters venture into the Shadowlands. A PC may spend ✳ from this check to obtain a squad of Crab samurai as support (see **A Crab Escort** sidebar on page 8). Regardless of whether Hachirō allows the characters through or provides support, he warns them that he believes another attack on the Wall is imminent, and he says they must stay on the Rokugani side of the Wall until his scouts return. This gives the characters time to prepare for their journey and gather information on the Shadowlands and Shiro Hiruma.

BAYUSHI TSUBASA, OPPORTUNISTIC SCORPION

Should the characters fail in their attempts to convince Hida Hachirō to allow them to pass beyond the Wall, they have another recourse. As they make their case to Hachirō, they note that his staff rather oddly includes a Scorpion samurai, a lean, wiry man with dark, knowing eyes. At a discreet and opportune moment, this samurai, Bayushi Tsubasa, introduces himself and offers to assist the characters in surreptitiously entering the Shadowlands. Tsubasa's motivation for this is simple: he has been posted to the Wall as punishment for a court scandal, the details of which he doesn't reveal, and he sees the party's journey as an opportunity. He wants the characters' assurance that, should they succeed, he will receive a reasonable share of the credit. He hopes to use this as leverage to end his posting and return to the relative comfort and safety of a samurai's life in "proper" Rokugan. If the PCs are forced to rely on Tsubasa's aid, they receive no support from the Crab and must make the journey on their own. Note that entering the Shadowlands without the permission of the Crab could be considered a trivial breach of the Bushidō tenet of Chūgi (Duty and Loyalty), requiring the PCs to forfeit 1 honor. It could even result in incurring the enmity of the Crab, although this could be mitigated if the PCs are successful in their quest to stop Sokori.

A NOTE ABOUT TOKENS.

Included with this adventure is a punchboard sheet featuring many of the monsters and characters noted in this adventure. When determining how many tokens are needed to represent the appropriate challenge level for a number of PCs, keep in mind that one token could represent a squad of enemies instead of just one.

An example is using one goblin token to represent a group of three or more goblins. This is a suggestion, and the GM should feel empowered to use the tokens provided however they see fit!

SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

As the party travels in the Shadowlands, the GM should seize opportunities to demonstrate its perversely fluid nature, making the inconstant landscape a continuing presence in their journey. The objective is to make the players tense and uncomfortable, perhaps making them wonder if their PCs are lost and simply wandering in circles, even if the PCs believe they're not. Of course, tension is also about moderation—remember that the ultimate point is for the PCs to arrive at Shiro Hiruma, not to spend an inordinate amount of play time simply wandering aimlessly through the Shadowlands.

A CRAB ESCORT

If the PCs convince Hachirō that their mission is important and he should let them venture into the Shadowlands, he seeks to provide whatever help he can. He has few resources available to spare, but he can offer a squad of samurai to accompany the party into the Shadowlands.

This presents opportunities for you to demonstrate the horrors and dangers of the Shadowlands without overwhelming the PCs early in the adventure. The Crab NPCs can experience horrific Shadowlands effects, such as grievous injuries and death, exposure to the Taint, and madness, reinforcing these threats in the minds of the players. The NPCs can also serve as extra warriors in combat scenes, as a way to present the characters with basic information regarding the Shadowlands, and as a means of creating opportunities for social interaction on the way.

However, you should ensure that the NPCs do not overshadow the characters. In battle, you can handle their activities (and horrible deaths) largely narratively, with the PCs' actions dictating the outcome of the fight. You could also represent the Crab bushi's contributions using the rules for assistance on the PCs' checks.

The PCs should interact primarily with the gunsō leading the squad, Hida Nagahide, so that you do not need to manage names and personalities for each member. Nagahide is a veteran of more than a few expeditions into the Shadowlands. Her face and body bear numerous scars, and although she is a fierce warrior, she knows that caution and planning is what wins battles against the Shadowlands. The bushi accompanying her are similar in outlook and attitude, but they defer to Nagahide due to her greater experience and position of command. They include a mix of Hida and Hiruma bushi.

If you need a game profile for Hida Nagahide and her squad, use the loyal bushi on page 312 of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Core Rulebook*. The number of bushi in the squad can vary depending on how greatly you want to highlight the fatal horrors of the Shadowlands, but twice the number of PCs is a good starting point.

YASUKI IPPEI,
CROOKED QUARTERMASTER

The PCs need supplies for a journey into the Shadowlands, particularly sufficient jade and food to last for several days. They may speak with the local quartermaster, Yasuki Ippei, a furtive man with oily skin, a scraggly beard, and staring eyes. Ippei immediately and loudly declares that, owing to the chronic shortages affecting the Crab, no such materials are available. However, in a lowered, conspiratorial tone, Ippei suggests that he is open to “nonstandard arrangements,” particularly if they help to advance his personal agenda to obtain a post at a court far from the austerity and danger of the Crab lands.

Ippei offers what he believes is sufficient food and jade to sustain the PCs for the duration of a journey to Shiro Hiruma and back again. He believes the trip from the Wall to Daylight Castle will take three days each way across the rough terrain—mindful of the fact that there hasn't been such a journey in two centuries—at least not that anyone returned from—so he is giving his best estimate, a risk he ensures the PCs understand. In exchange for favors, promises, or similar considerations to assist him in his goal. The player characters may attempt to convince Ippei to accept less, likely with a Commerce check; he is not, however, egregiously disloyal—merely selfish—and he won't simply give away these goods, which really are needed by the Crab. If the players are stymied and don't have sufficient resources to make the journey, then the GM can, once again, make use of Bayushi Tsubasa. In true Scorpion fashion, Tsubasa has incriminating information about Ippei's forged paperwork and embezzled funds and is willing to use them to coerce him into assisting the PCs. This, however, increases Tsubasa's expectations regarding what the PCs will do for him in the event they are successful (which could form the basis for a future adventure).

KAIU RIKO,
GRUFF ENGINEER

If the characters are already clear that Shiro Hiruma is their destination, they might want to learn more about the history of the castle and what they can expect there. If they ask around, they are directed to speak to Kaiu Riko, a sturdy, middle-aged engineer currently supervising repairs to a nearby section of the Wall. Riko has a reputation as an expert in ancient Crab fortifications, including the Hiruma castle. However, she is gruff and abrupt—she's always busy with her work—so the PCs must treat her respectfully in order to get her to assist them instead of simply dismissing them. A **TN 2 Command check (Fire 1, Water 4,)** can be made to determine if, and to what extent, she takes time from her busy schedule to help them. If she does, she can tell them about the Maw, its attack on Shiro Hiruma, and the



role that Atsumari no Oni played in the attack (essentially, what is described in the section **The Fall of Daylight Castle**, on page 2). In addition to this well-known history, she has heard stories that a heroic shugenja sacrificed herself for the good of her fellow samurai during the siege of Shiro Hiruma, but the details, including the heroic shugenja's name, have been lost to time. (In fact, these stories are based on the actions of Hiruma Masami, as described in **The Fate of the Hiruma**, on page 3.)

Finally, if Riko believes the PCs are on a particularly righteous undertaking, she tells them about the tunnels beneath Shiro Hiruma, but she has no detailed knowledge of their layout. This can come about as a result of roleplaying or if a PC achieved 2 or more bonus successes on their Command check.

If it isn't yet apparent to the characters that Shiro Hiruma is their destination, then Riko can make it clear that there simply is no other place of significance in the old Hiruma lands. All of the other buildings and fortifications are long gone. This should help focus the PCs on Shiro Hiruma.

KUNI TAKEKO, ECCENTRIC SHUGENJA

After their interactions with the above NPCs, one of the PCs (ideally, one whose player was relatively unengaged in dealing with the others) is approached by a shugenja named Kuni Takeko. Takeko is an older woman with greying hair who wears the face paint typical of the Kuni, but in a strange and particularly off-putting way, the lurid colors lopsided and smeared. She shows obvious signs of

having lost her grip on reality, including momentary lapses into a staring fugue state or, conversely, abrupt bursts of rushed conversation completely irrelevant to the subject at hand. She sidles uncomfortably close to the PC, warning of dire portents she has perceived variously "in the stars," "in her dreams," and "from the kami." She has already tried to warn her fellow Crab, but they have perfunctorily dismissed her ominous predictions as the delusional ravings of one "touched by Lord Moon" or who has simply "seen too much." In fact, Takeko actually *does* have a degree of spiritual foresight regarding looming events. Read or paraphrase the following as part of Takeko's warnings:

The demon lurks ever closer to the fallen fortress, hungry for souls...it only awaits the keys, the three that she gathers...the dreamers will awaken, and then be saved or damned...from amid the ruined stone, the doom of the world will spread...!

Unfortunately, Takeko has no real understanding of what these words actually mean. If the PCs push her for more information, she simply repeats herself, perhaps restating things somewhat differently, but ultimately, she can offer nothing further. Eventually, she falls into incoherent rambling and simply wanders away.

If by this point, the PCs are still unclear on the significance of Shiro Hiruma or the fact that it should be their destination, then Takeko can refer specifically to "the fallen fortress of the Hiruma."

THE NECESSITY OF JADE

As will become clear, possession of jade is essential to protecting the PCs from the befouling Taint of the Shadowlands. Jade is scarce in the Empire, but you should ensure that each PC has at least one finger of jade each. Yasuki Ippei can provide them with it, whether under Hida Hachirō's orders or in exchange for a future favor. Even if the players don't yet realize the importance of jade in the Shadowlands, their characters do—so don't hesitate to tell them!

ADDITIONAL CONTENT

During *Mask of the Oni*, the PCs only dip their proverbial toe in the deep, dark waters of the hellscape that is the Shadowlands. GMs interested in expanding upon the treacherous journey to Daylight Castle can download a free supplemental side adventure at [FantasyFlightGames.com/en/legend-of-the-five-rings-roleplaying-game/](https://www.fantasyflightgames.com/en/legend-of-the-five-rings-roleplaying-game/), offering PCs a chance to meet the rat-like nezumi of the wastes and seek out the creature that hunts them.

GMs can find even more content in *Shadowlands*, the ultimate sourcebook that delves deep into the fortified lands of the Crab and the darkness and horror beyond the Wall.

Part Three: Into the Shadowlands

Eventually, either Hida Nagahide or Bayushi Tsubasa leads the PCs beyond the Wall so that they can begin their journey to Shiro Hiruma. Nagahide, having the authority to do so, simply takes them through a massive and heavily defended gate that opens on the Shadowlands. Tsubasa, on the other hand, waits for a quiet time—probably during the night at a time when the guards are being changed—and then proceeds to lead the PCs in a quick and furtive way through the warren of tunnels that pass beneath the Wall. In either case, the passage proceeds without incident, the objective being to get the party into the Shadowlands and on with the adventure. Nagahide and his squad continue into the Shadowlands with the PCs, but Tsubasa, of course, doesn't. The Scorpion simply wishes for "the Fortunes to watch over" the party, then quietly returns the way he came.

THE SHADOWLANDS

If there is a single word that can describe the Shadowlands, it is *wrongness*.

Their journey takes them barely a few days from the Wall, while the vast bulk of the accursed realm sprawls to the south, reaching as far as the haunted tropical forests that border the distant Ivory Kingdoms. Somewhere amid that huge expanse of blasted, twisted land is the Festering Pit, the place where Fu Leng, the Dark Kami, struck the Realm of Mortals as he fell from the Celestial Heavens. The wound his fall left in Ningen-dō is now a weeping sore, bleeding corruption and the spiritual affliction known as the Taint into the lands around it. This infusion of foul and twisted energy has warped everything it touches, making it *wrong*.

As the PCs travel away from the Wall toward Shiro Hiruma, the GM should try to communicate this pervasive *wrongness* to the players, while trying to hint that every step southward makes things even worse. The following sections describe situations and encounters that should drive home the sheer horror of the Shadowlands as the PCs make their way to the fallen fortress of the Hiruma.

Read or paraphrase the following:

As you emerge from the tunnels, you're greeted by a scene from a nightmare. The land before you is blasted, twisted, and wrong. Barren hills rise amid patches of fetid swamp and stands of gnarled, leafless trees. A dry, chill wind hisses around you, carrying

the mournful cry of a distant...something, a bird perhaps, but no bird you know utters a sound of such malice and misery. Even as you look toward the distant sound, some of the landscape ahead seems to shift and change...or you think it does, because the desolate hills and dead corpses now seem different. Worst of all, though, is your pervasive sense of being watched, as though something malign is waiting for you to begin venturing into this hellish place and away from the safety of the Wall.

CHARTING A COURSE

The story of *Mask of the Oni* hinges on the PCs making it to Daylight Castle. For this reason, successfully finding the castle should not depend on a roll of the dice. Old maps and other records of the Crab Clan show the location of Daylight Castle, and any of the NPCs who help the PCs prepare for their journey can help them to acquire maps and provide other guidance on traveling to the castle.

However, even beyond the changes to the landscape by the passage of centuries, the Shadowlands twist and conceal, making navigation difficult under any circumstances—the castle may not even seem to be where it should, according to the old maps. The terrain is rough, with impassable gorges and mountains that seem to never be in the same location twice. To represent this, you might require the PCs to make a check or series of checks to navigate to the ruins of Shiro Hiruma. The PCs should ultimately reach the castle regardless, but you can use the check outcome to decide how long the journey takes and how many challenges they must overcome along the way.

As a guideline, navigating to the castle based on stories or verbal directions requires a **TN 4 Survival check (Earth 2, Air 5)**, and following an old map requires a **TN 3 Culture check (Fire 1, Water 4)**. With a successful check, the journey takes three days, reduced by one day (to a minimum of one) for every two bonus successes. On a failed check, the trip takes additional days equal to the shortfall. To keep things interesting, the PCs should generally have at least one potentially dangerous encounter each day of their journey, whether with a creature or simply a "natural" hazard to overcome.

A JOURNEY THROUGH DARKNESS

Although the most malign influence of the Shadowlands is the contamination of human souls by the Taint (more on that shortly), the evil power of Jigoku is so profound that it warps the very soil itself. The landscape of the Shadowlands twists and reshapes itself, sometimes egregiously, and sometimes in subtle, discomfiting ways. As a result, no two journeys between the same two places are ever the same. Accordingly, the length of the journey to Shiro Hiruma is uncertain. The GM can adjust it however they wish, but for the purposes of this adventure, it should take at least two days, causing the PCs to spend a night in the Shadowlands. If Hida Nagahide and her squad are accompanying the party or at least one PC is from the Crab Clan, then some of the Shadowlands' effects could be mitigated, or at least minimized, thanks to their knowledge of its challenges. This could be achieved by having the Crab provide the PCs with pertinent information, resulting in a lower TN on relevant checks if the PCs heed their advice.

CORRUPTED ELEMENTS

More detailed and specific, the following sections can be used to showcase the repellent and otherworldly nature of the Shadowlands by describing the corrupted nature of the Five Elements south of the Wall and the effects each element can have there. Each section provides a narrative description of the effects the corrupted element can have on characters and a mechanical game effect a GM could apply as a result of the element's influence. Note, however, that the mechanical effects should be used sparingly, so as to not frustrate players with too many disadvantageous conditions and mechanical penalties. Again, the objective is to make the players uncomfortable as they navigate the horror of the Shadowlands, not to thwart them completely!

AIR

The air of the Shadowlands constantly shifts and changes, but never for the better. Sometimes it is stale and dry and stinks of burning metal. Then without warning, it becomes thick and sultry and reeks of decay, or suddenly fills with bitter, acrid fumes and smoke. Sounds echo and reverberate strangely: a comrade's footfalls might ring

SLEEPING IN THE SHADOWLANDS

The Shadowlands never relents in its assault on the PCs, even when they're asleep. If the GM wants to demonstrate some effect of the nightmares plaguing the PCs, each PC could simply accumulate 1 strife per night after their second and subsequent nights in the Shadowlands. PCs should not typically be so drained that it affects their performance at the castle.

However, if the PCs are sufficiently powerful or the players want a challenge, characters who sleep in the Shadowlands could be required to make a TN 2 Meditation check (Water 1, Fire 3) upon waking each day. If they fail, they gain the Exhausted condition. GMs may want to encourage the PCs to take time to sleep—perhaps by making it clear that they are going to gain the Exhausted condition if they don't—in order to allow them to interact with Masami in their dreams (see page 23).

MAKING THE SHADOWLANDS CREEPY

It doesn't take a lot of description to emphasize the disturbing nature of the Shadowlands. For example, you may describe a distinct feature, such as a hill or ravine, to the players. Later, you could entirely omit any reference to that feature and, should the players ask, explain that there is now no sign any such ravine ever existed. Similarly, the GM could describe distinctive landforms through which the party is passing, and then describe exactly the same features a short time later. Tricks like these can make the players uncomfortable without bogging the game down.

Additional flavor can be added through descriptions that speak to the players' senses. For example, besides the changing landscape, the GM could describe:

- ✧ **The sky and the light.** For example, the GM could describe the sky as being leaden grey and oppressively overcast; shot through with scudding clouds that take on grotesque shapes and move irrespective of the wind; illuminated by a sun that seems almost painfully bright; or awash in dim, watery, and iridescent light in lurid and perhaps even strangely unrecognizable colors.
- ✧ **The air and the wind.** Examples include dry, cold winds that hiss across the landscape; sudden gusts of hot, humid, and fetid air; areas that reek of decaying flesh, with no obvious source of the scent; and indistinct sounds like whispering voices, distant shouts and cries for help, or muffled children's laughter.
- ✧ **Forests and other vegetation.** Examples include dead, twisted, and stunted trees; areas that are lush in the extreme, with unfamiliar vegetation growing out of control; plants that seem to clutch, grab, and trip as a person walks through or near them; and diseased trees or plants covered with foul fungal growths.
- ✧ **Incidental animal life.** Creatures that are generally small and elusive, posing little threat to the PCs unless they allow themselves to be bitten or scratched. Examples include rodents, birds, and other small creatures that are misshapen or covered in foul growths or extra limbs; insects that plague the PCs with painful bites and stings; and burrowing creatures whose tunnels and lairs collapse under the PCs feet, possibly tripping or injuring them.

COMBAT: YES OR NO?

Combat is often considered a fundamental part of roleplaying games.

However, a GM should take some time to consider the impact of battles on the game before flinging enemies at the party. In particular, a GM should give thought to the players. Do they generally enjoy fighting battles? If not, then perhaps combat should be used sparingly. It is still possible to ramp up the dramatic tension by allowing the PCs to see their potential enemies before they are themselves detected, then use stealth, subterfuge, or other means to avoid them. This still “uses” the enemies presented below, without forcing the party to fight them.

If PCs enjoy combat, it is equally important not to inadvertently overwhelm them. Moreover, battles tend to take up considerable gaming time. The most dramatic and important parts of *Mask of the Oni* take place at Shiro Hiruma; everything else that occurs during the journey there and back should be focused on simply enhancing the players’ overall experience of the Shadowlands.

like deafening thunderclaps one moment, then furtively scratch like claws the next. Often, hints of voices carry on the wind, taunting the listener with a whispered litany of their personal failures, or the familiar sound of loved ones, but crying out in agony or hatred. The overall effect is disorienting, and sometimes leads those of weaker will to break down, cover their ears, and scream for it to stop.

Effect: The noxious air and incessant whispers grate on PCs. Whenever a character receives strife for any reason, they receive 1 additional strife.

EARTH

The Shadowlands landscape is shifting and inconstant. Even the ground immediately beneath travelers’ feet can betray them. Fine, gritty sand and razor-sharp pebbles manage to work their way into even the stoutest boots, tearing at the flesh of a samurai’s feet. Ground that appears perfectly solid sometimes proves to be vile, sucking mud, or cracks open in a way that resembles gaping mouths, before slamming shut again on the legs of those unfortunate enough to be caught. Jagged rocks suddenly fall from...nowhere, as far as anyone can tell, or smooth ground trips the unwary over obstacles that simply didn’t seem to be there just a moment before.

Effect: The treacherous ground is dangerous to those who do not remain constantly vigilant. PCs must succeed at a **TN 2 Survival (Earth) check** or suffer 2 fatigue.

FIRE

In the Shadowlands, fires are difficult to start and gutter with strange, jarring colors, giving off little heat or light, or they abruptly rage and flare out of control, threatening to sear those nearby with sudden, forge-hot flame. Using wood gathered in the Shadowlands for fuel only exacerbates these unpredictable phenomena, and could even intensify exposure to the Taint if the PCs breathe the resulting smoke. In any case, fires are often of little value for their normal uses of providing light and warmth and heating food and water.

Effect: Just as the fire dies to little more than embers, a sudden and intense chill fills the air and rimes the PCs and their belongings with frost. Each PC must succeed at a **TN 2 Fitness (Fire) check**, or temporarily reduce their endurance and composure by 2 as the cold sinks into their very being, dulling them both physically and mentally. This penalty ends when they are either subjected to a suitable mundane or supernatural warming effect, or when the scene ends.

SURVIVING IN THE SHADOWLANDS

The Shadowlands are a place not just of physical peril, but also of constant spiritual risks. While the PCs journey in the Shadowlands, the GM should make liberal use of several terrain qualities found on page 267 of the core rulebook to raise tension. Not every scene should include all of these terrain qualities, but the PCs should always fear that they might tread on Defiled or Dangerous terrain.

Dangerous: Even the parts of the Shadowlands that do not hunger for the souls of the PCs can still be deadly. Thickets of razor thorns, brackish waters filled with vicious creatures one might call fish, inclines that seem to crumble with malevolent intent—all of these can be Dangerous terrain in the Shadowlands.

Defiled: Much of the Shadowlands is Defiled terrain, suffused with the power of Jigoku. These are places where the PCs resist becoming Afflicted—leaving them at far greater risk of contracting the Taint if they do not undergo a cleansing rite. Sacred items (such as Jade) can protect characters from suffering the Afflicted condition, but remember that doing so damages the item—and when it is Destroyed, it provides no protection at all (see page 241 of the core rulebook)! Defiled places might include murky swamps, haunted hollows, and forests full of skull-strewn trees.

Imbalanced: The kami themselves are twisted in the Shadowlands, and where they are not malevolent, they are often absent. Imbalanced terrain the PCs could encounter might include blasted wastes, ash-strewn volcanic ranges, and petrified forests where every sound echoes hollow.

Obscuring: Visibility is often compromised in the Shadowlands—lashing sandstorms, dense forests of blood-red bamboo, chilling rime that rises from the ground, choking clouds of gnats, malicious shadows—all of these might leave the scrambling in darkness.



WATER

Water in the Shadowlands is always contaminated: brackish, oily, and laden with putrid and decaying organic sludge, or apparently clear and clean but, in reality, polluted with deadly toxins or disease. The Crab report that deeper in the Shadowlands, water sometimes even assumes the characteristics of other liquids, such as sewage, saliva, or blood. These vile effects can permeate anything from the shallowest puddle to entire rivers.

Effect: Water in the Shadowlands carries the Taint, as described in the **Surviving in the Shadowlands** sidebar on page 12. Anyone who drinks is suffers the Afflicted condition, and if the water contacts any food or drinking water brought from outside the Shadowlands, it immediately contaminates it.

VOID

Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the Shadowlands is its corruptive effect on all things spiritual. This most obviously manifests in the corrupted elemental spirits known as kansen, as described in the sidebar **Surviving in the Shadowlands** on page 12. In addition, there are loci of malign power scattered throughout the Shadowlands: places where spiritual corruption is particularly acute, such as ancient shrines from the Empire's earliest days that have become Tainted and unholy, and sites of past battles and slaughter.

Effect: There are a number of places in this adventure where encounters with kansen and other types of spiritual corruption are likely, including Daylight Castle itself. Unless otherwise specified for a particular encounter or location, when a PC encounters spiritual corruption associated with a location, they must pass a **TN 3 Meditation (Void) check** or gain the Afflicted condition. If the character possesses jade, the TN is reduced by 1.

**ENCOUNTER
DIFFICULTIES**

To determine how many enemies to place in a given encounter, see *Gauging an Encounter* on page 310 of the core rulebook. If the PCs are traveling with Crab escorts, the escorts do not count when structuring the encounter if they are only being used narratively (see *A Crab Escort* on page 8). If you grant the PCs a bonus to checks based on the presence of the escorts or even allow them to take their own turns in combat, adjust the PCs' Group Rank by +6.

DANGEROUS DENIZENS

While the Shadowlands environment presents the PCs with a range of threats and challenges, in terms of raw danger, even those pale in comparison to the stark menace of the Tainted monstrosities that call the evil realm home. As the party makes its way to and from Shiro Hiruma, it is likely to encounter some of these vile creatures, which it must choose to either avoid (if desired and possible) or fight (if not). The encounters below are intended to be used during the course of the party's journey. It is up to the GM whether some, all, or none of them are used, and whether the creatures are encountered while the party approaches Shiro Hiruma or during their return to the Wall. They are not intended to occur in any particular order or location; rather, they can be introduced where the GM feels they most enhance the game.

THE GOBLIN PACK

As the party climbs a steep hill, they hear noises—harsh, guttural shouts and the scrape and clatter of rocks and gravel dislodged by many feet—rising from the other side. If they investigate, they see a large group of squat, bandy-legged figures milling about, apparently arguing among themselves about something, but the PCs aren't sure what, since they do not recognize the rasping, ear-scraping language. Any Crab PC (or any PC who passes a **TN 2 Survival (Water)** or **Theology (Water) check**) recognizes these as goblins. Like vermin, goblins are pervasive in the Shadowlands. They are small but savage brutes with rough, hairy hides, dressed in scraps of dirty cloth and cast-off bits of armor often arranged to make them resemble grotesque parodies of samurai. They are neither subtle nor especially intelligent, but they possess a ruthless cunning. As individuals, they are not particularly brave or imposing, but they can be dangerous in large packs like this one, putting aside their frequent squabbles and

EMBRACING CORRUPTION

Traveling beyond the Wall inevitably provides opportunities for characters to embrace the corrupt powers the Shadowlands offers. This is a pervasive aspect of Rokugani cosmology; many otherwise honorable samurai have succumbed to the insidious promises of Jigoku. This can be a very enjoyable story for some groups—but it can be equally frustrating for others, especially groups of players who want to minimize the possibility for conflict between PCs.

We recommend that you and the players discuss this before the PCs enter the Shadowlands. This will allow everyone to have a clear understanding of the ramifications if a PC becomes Tainted or, in the more extreme case, actually chooses to embrace the wicked powers it brings. What those ramifications are should be up to the group. Your group may be quite alright with having Tainted members of a party. On the other hand, becoming Tainted could allow for tragic samurai drama, as the afflicted individual commits seppuku or heroically sacrifices himself in battle. Finally, a Tainted PC even turn against the party covertly or retire and become a recurring enemy (whether under their original player's control when they return or as an NPC).

The one approach for which we do urge great caution is allowing PCs (Tainted or otherwise) to act as antagonists for other PCs. Tension between PCs is very much part of roleplaying in the Emerald Empire, but outright hostility and conflict is a different matter. Such an approach may work for some roleplaying groups, but the risk of real-life acrimony between players should be carefully weighed against any benefit to the game.

quickly uniting against a common foe—such as a party of Rokugani samurai.

This particular pack consists of:

- A number of Shadowlands goblins, as described on page 320 of the core rulebook. They fight as squads, as described on page 317 of the core rulebook. When determining how many squads to include see the **Encounter Difficulties** sidebar on page 14. Each squad generally attacks one PC or



Crab bushi, but if the goblins have an opportunity to gang up on an isolated or apparently weaker PC, they take it.

- At least one Shadowlands goblin leader (adversary); use the Shadowlands goblin profile with the Warrior template (see page 311 of the core rulebook). Note that, in accordance with the generally cowardly nature of their kind, a Shadowlands goblin leader usually tries to engage what it perceives as a weaker PC, such as a courtier, rather than a heavily armed and armored bushi.

It is possible for the PCs to avoid the goblin pack, rather than fighting it. Any reasonable degree of caution and stealth allows the party to circumvent the pack, which is currently caught up in one of many bouts of infighting. The PC leading the attempt to avoid detection must pass a **TN 2 Fitness (Air) or Survival (Air) check**. Alternatively, the players may wish to use this opportunity to set an ambush for the goblins or take them by surprise in some other fashion. If the goblins detect the party, they immediately attack. If the party attempts to flee, the goblins chase them until given reason not to.

If Hida Nagahide and the Crab squad are with the party, they go along with the party's plan to either attack or avoid the goblins, but they will not flee from them.

THE UNDEAD

Rokugani revere their ancestors, but they consider touching dead flesh to be spiritually impure. The very existence of the undead is anathema to loyal servants of the Empire. As the PCs pass by a murky pool of putrid-smelling sludge, one of many scattered along the length of a shallow valley, the muck suddenly sloshes and boils, disgorging grotesque, rotting corpses animated by the malign power of the Taint. These are zombie peasants, as described on page 321 of the core rulebook. To determine how many zombie peasants emerge, see the **Encounter Difficulties** sidebar on page 14.

There is no mundane way of detecting the zombie peasants while they are submerged, short of carefully inspecting the pool (which triggers the zombies to attack anyway). If the PCs have another way of detecting the zombie peasants before they attack, such as an invocation, they can easily be avoided, as they won't attack until their prey is within immediate reach.

If a zombie peasant hits a character with its grasping hands, then, in addition to dealing damage or other effects, it attempts to drag the character into the pool to drown. The character must pass a **TN 3 Fitness check (Water 1, Air 4)** or be pulled into the water and immediately begin suffocating (see page 269 in the core rulebook) until they either manage to break free and return to dry land by passing a **TN 3 Fitness check (Water 1, Air 4)** or are rescued

by other characters. If the GM wishes to make the encounter more dangerous, a character who is pulled into the sludgy water could also suffer the Afflicted condition.

THE LOST

While it is uncommon for a Rokugani samurai to fall so completely to the Taint of Jigoku that they become one of the Lost—a being with an intelligence that is still very human, but twisted to malign purpose by the power of the Shadowlands—it does happen. Crab samurai carrying out missions beyond the Wall are the most likely to be afflicted this way, but samurai from any clan who become Tainted can find themselves drawn to the Shadowlands, where they join forces with other such fallen souls.

As the party makes its way past a stand of twisted, stunted trees, they hear the cries and groans of someone in obvious distress. Should they investigate, they see a Crab bushi lying among the desiccated trees, badly wounded and in severe pain. However, this is a trap. A group of Lost samurai are hidden nearby, using the wounded Crab as bait. Once the PCs are engaged in dealing with the injured Crab, the Lost attack, intending to take the party by surprise.

The Crab bushi is named Hida Kurumi, and while he really is badly injured, he has also been forced to swallow a flesh-eating parasite by the Lost, which is the true source of his agony. (The PCs can only learn this by questioning Kurumi, which they can only do if they move into his immediate vicinity.) If the PCs begin talking to or helping Kurumi, the Lost spring their ambush. To determine the number of Lost (use the skillful rōnin profile on page 316 of the core rulebook, treating them as a Tainted being) see the **Encounter Difficulties** sidebar on page 14. The Lost fight aggressively, but if the battle is clearly turning against them (that is, if more than half their number have been defeated) they attempt to break away and retreat.

To ignore Kurumi and simply carry on (a major breach of Jin [Compassion]), the PCs must forfeit honor equal to their honor rank times 2. If Hida Nagahide



TO TAINT OR NOT TO TAINT?

Keep in mind that acquiring the Shadowlands Taint is a dire matter for Rokugan samurai. While its symptoms can be suppressed, there is no known way of removing it from an affected individual, and it can have disastrous consequences on a character's social prospects.

If a Tainted PC does not fit the game you or the player in question envision, remember to remind the players that their PCs becoming Afflicted isn't the same as contracting the Taint.

Afflicted characters can be cleansed with the proper ritual—although doing so in a defiled place like the Shadowlands is quite difficult, making a cleansing pilgrimage to a shrine upon their return to Rokugan would be standard.

If it's the most fun for people at the table, give the PCs plenty of opportunities to remove the Afflicted condition—showing how the Taint is always a risk in the Shadowlands, but the PCs are able to avoid it. On the other hand, if a particular character becoming Tainted is a story that their player and the GM both find interesting, the GM could let a player choose to have their PC acquire a Shadowlands Taint disadvantage even without being Afflicted to facilitate this story.

or members of her squad are present, they refuse to carry on any further without dealing with Kurumi.

If the PCs defeat the Lost, it is up to the GM whether Hida Kurumi can be saved, in which case he may be represented by the loyal bushi profile on page 312 of the core rulebook. Kurumi has suffered 15 fatigue, and so is suffering from the Incapacitated condition. He is also suffering the Afflicted condition.

Part Four: Shadow of Daylight

Daylight Castle, the ultimate destination of the PCs in *Mask of the Oni*, is an ancient castle that has suffered not only from the attack by the Maw that led to its downfall, but also from the corruption of the Shadowlands in the centuries since. The combined effects of battle damage, the passage of time, and the Taint of Jigoku have rendered the place ominous and confusing, even for Crab samurai.

As the PCs arrive at Shiro Hiruma, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

As you round a rocky spur that thrusts out from a line of jagged, barren hills, you see the walls and towers of a fortress looming ahead of you, dominating the blasted landscape around it. This is Shiro Hiruma, once the ancestral home and seat of power of the Hiruma family. Now, it is a bleak ruin, with gaping holes where walls have slumped and collapsed. The watchtowers and the great keep inside the walls claw at the darkening sky like ghastly fingers. A brooding stillness hangs over the place; the air is heavy with an oppressive sense of expectation, as though something cataclysmic could happen at any moment.

APPROACHING SHIRO HIRUMA

Shiro Hiruma was once the linchpin in a series of fortifications designed to hold the Shadowlands at bay. While it no longer serves its purpose, it is still an imposing fortress, built atop a low rise amid a flat plain so that no enemy could approach it undetected, and designed to offer no cover to a foe who nevertheless drew close. The immediate prospect of crossing the flat, intervening terrain should strike the PCs as correspondingly daunting!

As the PCs study the terrain more closely, however, they should note that erosion and upheavals in the ground that are a common occurrence in the Shadowlands have riddled the plains with craters and ravines. This means that they may make most of this final stage of their journey to Shiro Hiruma under at least some degree of cover. Even so, the GM should emphasize that from time to time, the PCs must move in full view of the fortress. This is an opportunity to further enhance the

sense of menace and potential danger by describing the castle as “looming ever closer, its windows like staring eyes, while distant, mournful wails and cries drift on the fitful, hissing wind,” and so on. In fact, Shiro Hiruma is virtually abandoned, so the party is able to approach the place without interference—but they don't know that.

ENTERING SHIRO HIRUMA

There are two ways for the PCs to enter Shiro Hiruma: by climbing over the walls or by using the tunnels that pass beneath them.

OVER THE WALLS

If the PCs want to scale the walls to enter the castle, it is relatively easy for them to do so, thanks to the numerous partially collapsed sections of the defenses. Since there really are no proper guards, they are able to navigate the rubble without being attacked. It is still recommended that the GM maintain an atmosphere of tension and impending danger, however. To heighten the players' paranoia about Shiro Hiruma, the GM could have them make a **TN 2 Fitness check** as they clamber over the fallen debris; those who fail receive 1 fatigue as broken rocks slam together on their leg or foot, almost like a biting mouth. This highlights the way in which the very substance of the old castle has been corrupted by the malignant blight of the Shadowlands and likely will make the players even more nervous and wary as they proceed.

SUBTERRANEAN APPROACH

The PCs may prefer to look for an alternative or more hidden method of entry, particularly if they learned about the old tunnels from Kaiu Riko. If the PCs search the area, they eventually find a tunnel entrance exposed in one of the craters or ravines. The tunnels are cramped and dangerous, their walls supported by a seemingly insufficient number of sagging wooden beams. They form a twisting labyrinth intended to confuse anyone who does not know their detailed layout, including the PCs, Hida Nagahide, and her squad, if any of the latter are still alive.

The GM should handle the journey through the tunnels largely narratively, describing their twisting, confusing, and labyrinthine nature but eventually allowing the PCs to find their way through them and into the castle. Although the PCs should ultimately reach the castle so as to continue the adventure, the GM may call for a **TN 3 Survival (Fire) check** to navigate the labyrinthine tunnels. If the PC who elects to lead the way fails this check, the group becomes lost for a time, possibly leading to additional dangerous encounters or the depletion of valuable resources.

The GM can punctuate the PCs' journey through the ominous tunnels with encounters such as the following:

- ☸ Most of the many traps that the Hiruma set to protect the tunnels from intruders should have failed long ago. If the GM wants the PCs to encounter a trap that has nevertheless survived the years and remained active, then it is suggested that they be able to detect it with a successful **TN 2 Survival (Water) check**. On a successful **TN 3 Skulduggery check (Fire 1, Earth 4)**, they are able to circumvent or disarm it. If they fail either of these checks, then each PC must make a **TN 3 Fitness check (Water 1, Earth 4)** or suffer physical damage equal to 5 plus the shortfall on the Fitness check. The most likely type of trap to be encountered is a concealed pit or a rockfall trap.
- ☸ If the GM wants the party to encounter enemies in the tunnels, it is suggested that they have the PCs encounter zombie peasants (see page 321 of the core rulebook) or bushi skeleton (see page 318 of that book). The PCs notice faded fragments of Crab and Hiruma heraldry on the undead beings' tattered armor, hinting at the origin.

Regardless of what the PCs encounter in the tunnels, the GM should be wary of letting them accumulate too much fatigue or expend too many resources simply getting into Shiro Hiruma.

EXPLORING SHIRO HIRUMA

Daylight Castle is a substantial fortress, having been designed as the anchor point for nearly all of the original Imperial defenses against the Shadowlands. Moreover, it was constructed so that it could withstand both concerted attacks and a prolonged siege, so it needed to be able to house, protect, and sustain a large garrison. That said, most of the castle is currently empty and abandoned, consisting of gloomy, disused rooms, corridors, and stairways.

GENERAL LAYOUT OF SHIRO HIRUMA

Unlike most Rokugani castles, which combine the attributes of a fortification with a variety of nonmilitary components, such as political courts, elaborate gardens, and elegant, stylized architecture, Shiro Hiruma is strictly a fortress. Designed for the front line of the war against Fu Leng, its construction is stark and utilitarian. Little consideration was given to niceties such as visually pleasing architecture and creature comforts that didn't directly support its military purpose.

Accordingly, the layout of Shiro Hiruma is relatively simple: a large and imposing (albeit largely ruined) outer wall enclosing a series of inner subdivisions, themselves separated by lesser walls, defensive works, and gates—now almost entirely collapsed into ruin. The tattered innermost wall encloses the large, central, four-story keep. The keep, or *tenshukaku*, is the last bastion of defense and refuge within the castle. It once contained the residence of the Hiruma daimyō as well as quarters for much of the garrison and the main storerooms. Another half-dozen small buildings, which served as more accommodations for the garrison and as warehouses, smithies, stables, and so on, lie in ruins around the keep. Several towers surround the keep. They are in similarly crumbling disrepair, the northeast tower having completely collapsed into ruin.



**USING THE
CASTLE MAP**

Mask of the Oni includes a fold-out map of Daylight Castle. This illustration includes not only the important castle locations described in this adventure, but also a great deal of additional details showcasing the horrors and hazards of Shiro Hiruma. You can use these details as inspiration for additional encounters, particularly within the castle's basement levels and underground tunnels.

It is beyond the scope of *Mask of the Oni* to explain the many mysteries of this Tainted castle. What is the purpose of the blood pool in the basement? What power dwells in the hidden ritual chamber? Answering—or simply exploring—the questions raised by the map can form the basis of encounters or even entire additional adventures at the castle ruins.

DREADFUL ANTICIPATION

As when the PCs first glimpsed Shiro Hiruma, when they enter its interior, they should perceive the deep, brooding sense of silent anticipation that permeates the ruins. After the PCs climb over the walls or emerge from the tunnels, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Once you have passed the outer walls and the inner courtyards surrounding the great keep of Daylight Castle, you sense a dreadful anticipation thrumming in the still air like a storm about to break. As you gaze at the dreary ruin and its dilapidated walls and buildings, you can't help but feel that something is coming—something monstrous and dire.

The PCs can now explore Shiro Hiruma. The large and imposing edifice is mostly abandoned, but it contains lurking dangers, not the least of which are the Tainted stones and boards of the castle itself. The GM should present this area by describing the empty spaces in the castle. Most rooms are barren of everything but the dirt and debris that has accumulated over the many years of its abandonment. At best, the PCs find scraps of wood and rusted metal fittings that were once utensils, furniture, *shōji* screens, and similar day-to-day paraphernalia of a garrisoned castle. They also find rusted and broken weapons and scraps of armor and, here and there, a skull or some bones—mute testaments to the Crab who died defending the castle when it fell. The objective in describing these long-abandoned rooms is to heighten the tension as the PCs conduct their exploration.

The GM should also seize opportunities to punctuate the PCs' investigation with phenomena that not only drive home the ominous and dangerous nature of the place, but also hint at what happened there, and at what is yet to happen. The following are examples of the strange experiences that might unnerve the PCs:

- ⊗ A pervasive gloom permeates the castle, from the central keep through the surrounding courtyard and sublevels. It ranges from a wan, greyish light outside, to a dimmer and more dreary light inside near windows, to utter darkness almost everywhere else. The PCs aren't able to navigate the unlit areas at all unless they have their own source of light. Even then, candles, lanterns, and torches only provide about half the illumination they normally would, and the light they provide is shot through with shadows, including some that are cast by nothing the PCs can see, or that have uncanny shapes or move in disturbing ways.
- ⊗ Occasionally, the PCs disturb some sort of vermin or small beast, which quickly flees, skittering away with a chitinous scratch of claws on stone. They

are never quite able to get more than a glimpse of these creatures, of which some are furry, while others are scaled or even segmented like centipedes.

Depending on how much playtime the GM wants to devote to the exploration of the castle, PCs could have a number of additional horrific encounters. These should be used carefully to heighten tension and drive home the evil nature of the place, without slowing down the pace too much. The GM should let their imagination run free, drawing inspiration from the descriptions on the following pages. Details such as the following can achieve the desired effect whether used as the basis for a challenge to overcome or simply to set the scene:

- ⊗ Some of the skeletal remains are partially incorporated into the walls and floors, as though the stone itself had begun consuming them.
- ⊗ The decomposed remnants of some massive Shadowlands monstrosity show clear signs of having been recently killed and partly eaten (or even partly digested) by something apparently even more massive and dangerous.
- ⊗ Pieces of a shattered mirror show reflections of the PCs that are cadaverous, rotting, or severely Tainted.
- ⊗ A tapestry showing obscenely detailed scenes of the castle's fall or of terrible fates befalling the PCs' friends and loved ones, proves to be made of blood vessels "embroidered" into a sheet of human skin.

**SPECIFIC LOCATIONS IN
SHIRO HIRUMA**

The following locations within Shiro Hiruma are those that are large or accessible enough the PCs are likely to encounter them, or are important to the adventure's story. This is not an exhaustive list of locations or possible encounters within the castle, as the ruins conceal many mysteries and dangers (see the **Using the Castle Map** sidebar on page 18).

The Armory

While Shiro Hiruma has a number of armories, only the largest, located in the basement of the keep, contains any significant number of remaining weapons or armor. The vast majority of these are rusted or degraded, and have the Destroyed quality or, at best, the Damaged quality, but a few appear to be in good condition.

Further, a number have been infused with the Taint, resulting in their becoming cursed. If a PC chooses to handle any of the old weapons or armor, they must make a **TN 3 Meditation check (Earth 4, Fire 4, Void 1)** to safely

select an item. Failure means a kansen inhabits the item they've selected, and the PC gains the Afflicted condition. If the character fails the check or succeeds with no bonus successes, the weapon or armor in question has the Unholy quality. If the PC achieves three or more bonus successes on the check, then the weapon has the Sacred quality instead. Otherwise, the item is an ordinary one of its type.

If one of the PCs chose the goal involving the retrieval of an ancestral heirloom (see page 6), the heirloom could be located here, and it could have either the Sacred or the Unholy quality. This is one of the locations that the GM may choose for the ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma (see **The Samurai Quarters**, on page 21.)

The Dōjō

The dōjō, where many Crab warriors long ago trained to hone their martial skills, is located adjacent to the keep. It was the site of a major skirmish during the battle for the castle; many Crab fell here, along with their enemies. Not only would a significant vision of the battle be appropriate here, but many skeletal remains are scattered throughout this large space.

Touching any of these remains results in an intense vision of how that particular individual died (invariably in some horrible way). A PC who touches the remains receives 1 strife. Alternatively, if the GM feels the players could use some assistance, the PC could instead be inspired by the courage and tenacity of the Crab in the face of horrifying odds and regain 1 Void point as they resolve to emulate the valiant Crab defenders. If the PCs investigate this location, they find a scroll dropped here by Kitsu Sokori (see **On Kitsu Sokori's Trail**, on page 24).

The Court Chamber

Located on the main floor of the keep, the court chamber is small by Rokugani standards, but Shiro Hiruma didn't require a large or elaborate one. The chamber is strewn with debris and ruin, but the PCs experience another vision of the castle's fall here. This is a particularly disturbing vision, in which the few courtiers and other noncombatants present at the time of the castle's fall are wantonly slaughtered by the barely glimpsed horrors attacking them. If the PCs investigate this location, they find symbols related to a mahō rite performed here by Kitsu Sokori, marked on the floor in her own, relatively fresh blood (see **On Kitsu Sokori's Trail**, on page 24.) A successful **TN 3 Theology check (Fire 1, Earth 4)** reveals that the mahō was related to the foul practice of necromancy. A PC making this Theology check receives 1 strife from the discomfort of so closely examining the residue of such vile magic, whether the check is successful or not.

WHERE IS THE ANCESTRAL WAKIZASHI?

The ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma is an important artifact. Not only is it one of the keys used in Hiruma Masami's ritual (see **The Fate of the Hiruma** on page 3 and **Gathering the Keys** on page 25), but it is also a lost heirloom of the Hiruma family. As the GM, you should decide where the blade can be found; likely locations include the armory, the temple, or the daimyō's chambers. You could decide in advance or in response to the PCs' actions, to keep the adventure moving at a good pace.

The temple is a particularly easy location; further, placing the wakizashi there means that Kitsu Sokori has no chance of obtaining it, making it much more likely that the PCs will. The daimyō's chambers are a much more challenging location for the party. The GM should use one of these locations or another one that best suits their approach to the adventure. Wherever it is found, the wakizashi is recognizable because it is in pristine condition, being wholly unsullied by the Taint, owing to its Sacred quality.

The Library

The library is located on the second floor of the keep and little of value is evident: the scroll racks have collapsed into heaps of decayed wood and unreadable remnants of scrolls. Should the PCs search the room or use a technique like the *By the Light of the Lord Moon* invocation, they discover a cache of six intact scrolls hidden behind one of the stones in the wall, protected by a ward against harm. This ward does not affect the PCs in any way, unless one has the *Shadowlands Taint* adversity, in which case its fiery discharge inflicts 6 supernatural damage and prevents the character from touching the scrolls (but leaves the scrolls intact). Five of the six scrolls are of historical interest only: they describe the final weeks of Shiro Hiruma during its siege by an unnamed oni. The sixth, which was written by an archivist during the final hours before the castle's fall, notes that Hiruma Masami was planning to attempt a ritual to "save" the last of the Hiruma defenders. This is the only record of Masami's name, and it is one of the keys to ending her ritual that Kitsu Sokori is seeking.



The Barracks

There are several locations throughout the ruins that could be termed “barracks.” One of these, located on the main floor of the keep, has been used by a pack of goblins as their lair. Like most of the creatures that until recently were lurking about the ruins, the goblins have fled, driven away by the growing menace of Atsumari no Oni’s impending arrival.

If the GM wants to include an additional combat encounter, the goblins could still be here (see page 320 of the core rulebook). To determine the number of goblins, see the **Encounter Difficulties** sidebar on page 14. Whether or not goblins are present, the barracks are strewn with garbage and noisome filth, the air thick with a rank, bestial stink. There are also bits of rancid meat, some of which may be human flesh, and all of which are Tainted. Any PC who lingers here if the goblins are absent or after defeating them suffers 1 strife.

The Daimyō’s Chambers

Located in the uppermost floor of the keep, the daimyō’s chambers are the most heavily Tainted part of Shiro Hiruma, likely because these rooms at one time represented the very heart of the Hiruma family’s ancestral power. The effects of the Taint here range from the relatively subtle (such as intense feelings of dread; a certainty of being watched; or hearing incessant, disturbing whispers) to the grotesque (such as the walls or floor erupting into gaping, fanged maws; blood or bile dripping from the ceiling; or stonework morphing into decaying flesh).

Even worse, shugenja who enter the chambers soon become aware of the presence of numerous kan-sen within. These corrupted spirits make this area both Defiled and Imbalanced terrain.

PCs who spend more than a few moments exposed to such intense manifestations of the Taint must succeed on a **TN 4 Fitness** or **Meditation check (Void 2)** or gain the Afflicted condition.

At the GM’s discretion, the ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma may be found here, sitting on a daishō stand and apparently on display (see **The Samurai Quarters** on page 21).

The Samurai Quarters

The samurai quarters on the third floor of the keep are, like most other areas, derelict and empty. In one room, however, the PCs make a truly horrific discovery: a Crab samurai manacled within a cage of twisted stone, perpetually slick with blood. The PCs might believe this to be yet another echo of past atrocities, but the Crab is very much alive, albeit far beyond his normal lifespan. This is, in fact, Hiruma Tomoharu, the daimyō of the Hiruma family at the time of the castle's fall. He was taken alive by Atsumari no Oni, who, in a fit of rage over being stymied by Hiruma Masami, imprisoned and kept Tomoharu alive by means of the twisted sorcery of the iron cage. Tomoharu has remained here since, an unimaginably hideous ordeal that has left him utterly divorced from reality.

The oni was motivated by more than just sheer cruelty, however. Realizing that Hiruma Masami had begun a ritual to thwart it, Atsumari no Oni developed a failsafe, arranging to maintain an awareness of events transpiring in Shiro Hiruma through the imprisoned daimyō. Knowing a ritual to move the souls of the last Hiruma defenders into the Realm of Dreams couldn't persist forever, the oni maneuvered things such that it could be alerted when the ritual was coming to an end and act accordingly. Almost five centuries later, it is preparing to finally realize the triumph denied to it. The fact that the daimyō has suffered centuries of torment is merely a pleasing side effect. Moreover, that Tomoharu has remained utterly undisturbed by any other Shadowlands creature or power during his imprisonment is testament to the power of Atsumari no Oni; the GM could note for the PCs that there are signs of the passage of other creatures through this room (bloody claw prints, slime trails, and the like) but no sign that any of them have interfered with Tomoharu in any way.

If the PCs question Tomoharu, he is able to relate only a few relevant pieces of information, all offered in a babbling, barely coherent way. These include:

- ⊗ His identity.
- ⊗ That “the beast watches through my eyes!” (alluding to the oni's awareness of Tomoharu's interactions and surroundings).
- ⊗ A description of a woman, similar to the description they have of Kitsu Sokori (see **On Kitsu Sokori's Trail**, on page 24).
- ⊗ That this woman questioned him about “his blade” (a reference to the ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma) and about “the demon that steals souls” (a reference to Atsumari no Oni).

Everything else he utters reflects his delusions and hallucinations. And yet, despite his long ordeal and the fact he is Tainted, hints remain of the man Tomoharu once was,

suggesting that some remote corner of his spirit endures and remains pure. The PCs see this as brief flickers of lucidity, a hint of pride in uttering his own name, and moments of deep hatred toward all things of the Shadowlands.

This presents the PCs with a significant dilemma: what will they do with Tomoharu? The most obvious thing to do is to kill him, ending his centuries of abject misery. He is more than willing to die. However, one of his very few lucid statements is his absolute insistence that he die at the blade of the ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma, an ancient weapon that can be found in one of the locations within the castle complex, as described in the sidebar **Where Is the Ancestral Wakizashi?** on page 19. Should the PCs retrieve the wakizashi and give it to Tomoharu, he emerges from his hallucinations long enough to offer the PCs his profound thanks, and then commits seppuku, releasing his soul from bondage. This represents a massive sacrifice associated with the Bushidō tenet of Jin (Compassion) on the part of the PCs, earning each 6 honor, or a massive sacrifice (9 honor) to any PC who suffered a critical strike during the retrieval of the wakizashi. Additionally, the PCs increase their composure and endurance by 2; this effect persists as long as they remain within the walls of Shiro Hiruma, as the Celestial Heavens themselves reward them for honorably rescuing Tomoharu's soul from its ordeal.

If the PCs kill Tomoharu in any other way, it is a minor sacrifice associated with Compassion, but they receive no other benefits, as they fail to fulfill the daimyō's wish to die by his own blade. To leave Tomoharu to his suffering, the PCs must forfeit honor (a massive breach of the Bushidō tenet of Jin [Compassion]). Additionally, any Crab PC who chooses to leave Tomoharu might be particularly affected by it—at their player's discretion and with the GM's approval, they may gain 1 Void point to receive the Haunting adversity (see page 122 of the core rulebook), with ancient and vengeful Hiruma spirits dogging their every step until they make this right.

The Oni's Gaze

Atsumari no Oni is aware of any interactions with Tomoharu that occur up to the moment of his death. This is how the oni knows that Sokori (and the PCs, if they enter the samurai quarters) is in Shiro Hiruma, that the end of Masami's ritual is imminent, and that the time of its own return and ultimate triumph is at hand. This is, in fact, what triggers the oni's return during **The Final Confrontation**, on page 26. It also means that the oni may learn things about the PCs it can exploit; the GM should carefully note any disagreements or tension displayed among the PCs, or anything else the oni could potentially use against them, while the PCs are in Tomoharu's presence. The oni will, if possible, make full use of these things if and when it confronts the PCs.

HORRID ECHOES

Perhaps most disturbingly, the terrifying final hours of Shiro Hiruma have imprinted themselves onto the very substance of the place. At some point, the PCs enter a room or a corridor and are surprised to see several Crab bushi apparently staring back at them, tense and ready to fight. After a moment, or when the PCs attempt to speak with the bushi, monstrous, shadowy figures appear and attack the Crab. The Crab fight back heroically, but they are soon overwhelmed and killed in particularly horrific, bloody fashion.

There is no way for the PCs to influence this, as it obviously isn't real; rather, it's an echo from the past, a glimpsed vignette from the time of Shiro Hiruma's fall. The traumatic horror of that time has embedded itself in the castle and now plays out over and over again. Similar phenomena should occur several times, including in some of the specific locations below, in ways that are appropriate for those locations (for example, see **The Court Chamber**, on page 19).

The Servants' Quarters

The servants' quarters, an unremarkable building adjoining the keep, appears as dilapidated and abandoned as any other. If the PCs investigate it, however, they'll make an appalling discovery: several of the barren, cell-like rooms are filled with an undifferentiated mass of heaving, pulsating flesh. If they examine this disgusting phenomenon more closely, they note that it appears that some of the substance of the building itself appears to have been changed into this fleshy mass. Bestowing a horrific semblance of life onto portions of Shiro Hiruma is yet another bizarre effect of the Taint.

The PCs are likely to choose to have nothing to do with the appalling organism or to attempt to destroy it—a futile effort, as it is simply too massive and has no vital organs. The structure around the mass is crumbling and unsound, and the bulk of flesh acts to support the walls. Removing it is likely to cause a collapse, something that any PC with a vigilance of 3 or greater notices.

As they approach it, however, the PCs discover that the mass has the ability to communicate, conversing through direct contact with their minds: a profoundly unpleasant experience, like slimy worms slithering under one's scalp. The mass knows a great deal about Shiro Hiruma but nothing about the world beyond the castle; it craves knowledge and experience from outside its lonely isolation and is eager to trade information with the PCs. That said, it possesses an insidious sort of cunning, and insinuates that it knows much more about virtually any subject the PCs might raise than it actually does. It does not hesitate to lie, if it believes

this will get it what it wants. It generally tries to portray itself as forlorn and miserable, having been given a lonely existence it never wanted, and to attempt to play on the PCs' sympathies. If and when this ceases to be effective, it resorts to threats, claiming that it is the only thing preventing this entire section of Shiro Hiruma from crashing down on the party and threatening to cease shoring it up if the PCs don't cooperate with it. This is a lie, which a PC can detect with a successful TN 3 Sentiment check.

If any of the PCs choose to negotiate or bargain with it, they are knowingly interacting with the Taint and must receive 1 strife. To make such a bargain, a character would need to forfeit honor (a major breach of Chūgi [Duty and Loyalty] or Meiyo [honor], see page 300 of the core rulebook). However, they may learn useful information about Shiro Hiruma. The GM can use this as an opportunity to provide any information they deem appropriate to the PCs, being mindful of the fact that this being's knowledge is strictly confined to the castle. In particular, the GM could have it inform the PCs about one or more of the following points:

- ⊗ The ruined northeast tower was the location of the final confrontation between an oni and a Crab shugenja at the time of the castle's fall.
- ⊗ There is an uncorrupted chamber (the temple) on the main level of the keep. Note that this organism perceives and will describe this as a vile, hostile, and uninhabitable place—essentially, a glimpse into how Shadowlands creatures view uncorrupted and sanctified things!

SAVING HIRUMA TOMOHARU AND THE ANCESTRAL WAKIZASHI

The PCs may decide that they are going to attempt to save Tomoharu rather than allowing him to die. It is extremely unlikely that they would have, among them, the means of undoing the awful effect of his centuries of torment. That said, they may choose to return him to the Crab. This means an unstable samurai joins the party, which offers a variety of roleplaying opportunities as PCs interact with him. It also presents them with myriad challenges as they attempt to keep the delusional and disoriented samurai under control and safe as they journey back to the Wall or, if they are willing to take on some especially egregious risk, as they complete their mission before escorting him to the Wall. If they succeed in taking him to the Crab at the Wall, the Crab are deeply grateful as they take custody of their ancestor. What happens to him then is out of

the PCs' hands, but they can rest assured the Crab will see to his well-being (probably by helping him commit seppuku).

Likewise, returning the ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma to the Crab gains the PCs a great favor from that clan. PCs may also gain honor or glory for their deed, and perhaps even an advantage such as Support of the Crab or Ally [Crab]. On the other hand, keeping the wakizashi would be a massive breach of Chūgi, as it truly is the rightful property of the Crab in general and the current Hiruma daimyō in particular. If the Crab learn the PCs have found the wakizashi and failed to return it to them, it would also gain those responsible the enmity of that clan, in the form of the disadvantage Scorn of the Crab or perhaps even Sworn Enemy of the Hiruma daimyō.

- ⊗ A cache of scrolls is hidden and protected in the library.
- ⊗ The fleshy mass only provides information in return for interesting facts about the world outside Shiro Hiruma. Providing such a fact with a successful **TN 2 Performance check (Air 4, Earth 1)** would be sufficient. However, if the fleshy mass catches the PC lying, it flies into a rage, makes additional (empty) threats about collapsing the castle on them, and otherwise refuses to have anything further to do with the PCs.

The Temple

The temple, located on the main level of the keep, is the only part of Shiro Hiruma that has remained untouched by the dark power of the Shadowlands, thanks to its sanctified nature. Like the rest of the castle, it is empty, but it shows no sign of the oppressive gloom pervading the rest of the complex; it is just an empty room with a few remnants of its past, primarily scraps of decayed wood, including the remnants of an altar. The only thing that appears untarnished is an *Ōnusa*, a purifying wand with paper streamers, resting in a stand atop what remains of the altar. Shadowlands creatures and manifestations of the Taint cannot easily enter this ground, meaning it's a safe place for the PCs to rest and recover. It is treated as Hallowed (Earth) Terrain (see page 267 of the core rulebook). Even so, the isolated nature of the temple means that the elemental kami are more spiritually remote, so the TN for all non-Earth invocations is increased by 1. The GM may also allow the PCs to heal more quickly here; for example, instead of removing fatigue equal to two times their Water Ring by sleeping here, they could remove fatigue equal to three times their Water Ring instead.

The Northeast Tower

The northeast tower is initially notable only because it is effectively gone; little remains except for the foundation. It is significant because this was where Hiruma Masami conducted her ritual to save the souls of the last defenders of the castle; in its rage at being foiled by Masami, Atsumari no Oni destroyed the tower. The PCs observe a specific echo of the past here: a group of Crab bushi desperately defending a lone woman bearing the Hiruma *mon* against a horde of Shadowlands monstrosities. If the PCs have encountered Masami in their dreams (see **Helpful Dreams**), they recognize her in this vision. She is kneeling, her eyes closed and her hands lifted in supplication, as she obviously conducts a ritual. The vision ends as the shadow of something monstrous falls over the bushi, who are clearly horrified by whatever is casting it. The woman, however, simply continues with her ritual.

The northeast tower is also significant because Kitsuru Sokori plans to use her powers to temporarily cause the tower to re-manifest from its echo. Then, here in the place of Masami's ritual, Sokori intends to conduct her own rite intended to return the Hiruma souls from Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams, and enslave them.

HELPFUL DREAMS

A potential source of assistance for the party is the spirit of Hiruma Masami, the shugenja who performed the ritual that moved the souls of the slain Hiruma into Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams. Because she is herself trapped in Yume-dō, she can only communicate with the PCs through their dreams. They otherwise catch glimpses of her as a ghostly presence in Shiro Hiruma, and in a more elaborate vision in the northeast tower. The PCs may believe her to just be another tragic echo from the past, but they may note that—unlike with the other echoes—they never see her die, and they see her in different locations in Shiro Hiruma instead of only in one. This may be enough to suggest to them that she is different from the slain bushi, but not until they sleep are they able to interact with her.



The first time one or more of the PCs sleep (or, if the GM desires, fall unconscious for some other reason) in Shiro Hiruma, Masami manifests in their dreams. If multiple PCs are sleeping, she is able to assemble them all into a common dream, so they can converse as a group. If this occurs anywhere but the temple (see page 23), she drives away the PCs' nightmares, at least while she's communicating with them.

Masami appears to be of middle age. She is extremely intelligent, and her demeanor is deliberate and analytical. She listens carefully while others speak, often looking into the distance as they do, as though deep in thought. Keen and insightful, she decisively challenges assertions she considers spurious or unsupported. She is particularly quick to call out anything she considers to be a lie.

Masami can provide information to the PCs, including:

- ✧ The nature of the ritual she performed and the location where she performed it (the northeast tower), the role of the three keys, and the effect the ritual had on the last Hiruma.
- ✧ The nature of Atsumari no Oni, including its power to corrupt and enslave the dead and the fact that this motivated her to conduct her ritual. She can also describe how she caused herself to be consigned to the Realm of Dreams in order to send Atsumari no Oni back to Jigoku.
- ✧ The last passage of her ritual. Knowledge of these words is one of the three keys needed to end the ritual.

Masami is willing to share this information with the PCs. However, in turn, she asks the PCs to undo her ritual in order to allow the souls of the Hiruma to finally pass into the afterlife and end the karmic limbo into which she's placed them. She can provide the key that comprises the last passage of her ritual to help them accomplish this. She also explains that they need the other two keys, and that they must undo her ritual where it was enacted: in the northeast tower of the castle. If the PCs are aware that the northeast tower has completely collapsed into ruin, Masami is dismayed; this may mean the ritual cannot be ended. Nevertheless, she asks them to try anyway on the ruined site of the tower.

Still, Masami is extremely wary of exposing the Hiruma to any risk of corruption, whether from the powers of Atsumari no Oni or from any other source. She seeks assurance that the PCs are able to protect them should the oni or anyone else try to interfere. If any of the PCs have the Shadowlands Taint adversity, she not only refuses to give them the ritual's last passage, but she won't even ask them to try to undo the ritual in the first place. Convincing her to help in spite of the Taint among the PCs should require good roleplaying and one or more Social Skill checks.

One piece of information that Masami is unable to provide to the PCs is her own name, which she surrendered as another key to her ritual. She only knows that she is a Hiruma, which is clear from her mon. If the PCs ask how they might uncover her name, she can suggest that the library might hold records (see page 19). If the PCs tell Masami her name, the name means nothing to her, and she instantly forgets it (until the ritual is undone, that is).

Finally, if the GM believes the PCs need additional information to move forward, Masami can offer hints or suggestions for how to proceed. The GM should be wary, however, about revealing too much to the PCs; they should have the opportunity to work out the most important parts of the puzzle regarding Sokori's actions for themselves!

ON KITSU SOKORI'S TRAIL

Shiro Hiruma is an imposing and dangerous yet interesting place for the PCs to explore. However, they do have an ultimate purpose for being here. Although their initial goal may have been only to recover the maps of Yasuki Keiji, it should become clear that the PCs must track down Kitsu Sokori and stop her from carrying out whatever nefarious plot she's pursuing. Accordingly, as the party explores Shiro Hiruma, they are able to gather some clues regarding her actions and schemes.

Some of these have already been described. In addition to the various hints about Sokori's purposes they gathered while tracking her to the Kaiu Wall, they may have gained insight from the mass of flesh in the servants' quarters, from the dream ghost of Hiruma Masami, and from any other means the GM may have chosen for offering them information. There are also some specific clues scattered about Shiro Hiruma that the PCs may find:

- ✧ Sokori is just as susceptible as the PCs are to seeing the horrible echoes of Shiro Hiruma's past tragedies playing out throughout the castle. While investigating the dōjō, she was assailed by visions of the brutal death of a samurai whose remains she handled there. During the violent visitation, she dropped a scroll containing notes from her research regarding Atsumari no Oni and its powers. In particular, it describes how the oni has the ability to corrupt, and then seize control of, the soul of anyone who dies in its vicinity, compelling the corrupted soul to animate a body, creating an undead being under its control.
- ✧ Further, Sokori tried to use a mahō rite in the court chamber in an effort to compel information from the shades of the Crab who died there. She was unsuccessful, but evidence of her rite remains in the form of a series of profane sigils marked upon the floor in her own blood, which is still relatively fresh (see page 19).

- ✱ Sokori also found Hiruma Tomoharu locked in his agonizing bondage in the samurai quarters. She tried to question him, but believing him to be of no real use to her, and not wanting to interfere with who or what had imprisoned him, she did nothing for him and simply left him where he was—a testament to her selfish depravity. However, Tomoharu saw her, in turn. Among his babbling, he blurts out what seems to be a relatively clear description of her to the PCs, which should indicate that she either is somewhere in Shiro Hiruma or at least was there recently. He also provides some hints about what she might be up to, based on his hallucination-riddled recollection of her questions (see **The Samurai Quarters**, on page 21.) What the PCs should not know is that Atsumari no Oni also became aware of Sokori's presence in Shiro Hiruma through Tomoharu, and that now the oni is approaching the castle.

ENCOUNTERING SOKORI

Whether or not the PCs encounter Sokori in Shiro Hiruma before the final confrontation depends on the preferences of the GM and the particular PCs involved in their game. On the one hand, Shiro Hiruma is complicated and dangerous without having the PCs also confront a powerful mahō-tsukai not just once, but twice. GMs should remember that every encounter stands to inflict harm on the PCs, requiring them to take additional time to rest and heal. It also uses up resources that they may not be able to easily replace. If the PCs have had a difficult time or could otherwise find an encounter with Sokori too taxing, then it can be assumed that she is taking advantage of the sheer size of Shiro Hiruma to avoid the PCs, using her powers to remain hidden to the greatest extent possible.

On the other hand, if the PCs are able to endure an encounter with Sokori before their final battle with her, then her dangerous and powerful nature can be made abundantly clear at that time. Sokori has blended her abilities as a Kitsune shugenja with the evil power of mahō, turning her facility with interacting with ancestral spirits into an abomination. This could enable her to strike at the party in a more insidious and indirect way than simply by engaging in direct battle with them. How she does this is described in more detail in **Sokori's Tactics**, "" on page 28.

Whether the GM chooses to have the PCs encounter Sokori prior to their final confrontation with her or not, she needs access to the PCs' blood to make full use of her powers. At some point during their exploration of Shiro Hiruma (but prior to any confrontation with her), Sokori raises a group of bushi skeletons with an Encounter Rank equal to the Group Rank to attack the PCs. This should not be a long or complicated battle; Sokori's

purpose is simply to have the undead wound the party with their corroded weapons, then retrieve the blood from them afterward. Of course, if the party is particularly canny, they may recognize the peril of leaving their blood where a mahō-tsukai can get at it; if they realize this and deal with the blood, then they are to be congratulated on seeing through Sokori's evil scheme!

In any case, if the PCs encounter Sokori prior to the final confrontation, then no matter what else happens, she manages to get away. For the purposes of this adventure, Sokori uses her Walking the Way ability to pass through the Spirit Realms and escape the encounter.

GATHERING THE KEYS

Both Kitsune Sokori and the PCs—although they may not realize it, at least initially—are seeking to gather the three keys to end Hiruma Masami's ritual, by which she sent herself and the last Hiruma defenders of Shiro Hiruma into Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams. Again, these three keys are:

- ✱ Masami's own name, which she gave up to empower the ritual, and which is recorded on only a single scroll secreted away in the library.
- ✱ The ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma, which is located in one of several possible locations, according to the GM's preference (see the sidebar **Where Is the Ancestral Wakizashi?** "" on page 19).
- ✱ The final passage of Masami's ritual, which the PCs can learn from Masami herself if and when they speak to her in their dreams.

By default, all three of the keys are necessary to end Masami's ritual. However, Sokori has designed a ritual of her own that will allow her to end Masami's with only one or two keys—although the fewer keys she has, the longer it will take her to effect this.

If the PCs retrieve one of these keys, then it is in their possession and not Sokori's. However, if the PCs enter a location where a key is present but leave without retrieving it, then it is assumed to come into Sokori's possession and is no longer there if they return to that spot. The PCs still might be able to retrieve it from Sokori if and when they defeat her; this is particularly relevant for the wakizashi. Likewise, if they never visit a location that contains a key by the time Sokori is ready to begin her own ritual, then the key is assumed to have passed into Sokori's possession.

Regardless of the PCs' actions, Sokori must obtain at least one of the keys in order to bring Hiruma Masami's ritual to an end. If the PCs obtain two of the keys, then Sokori should possess the third. If the PCs obtain only one, or even none of the keys, then it is recommended that

Sokori obtain the ancestral wakizashi. That is because this is a potentially valuable physical item that the PCs can “win” from her after the final confrontation. However, if the GM prefers, Sokori can possess one of the other keys instead.

SOKORI’S OBJECTIVE

Through her own investigations, studies of ancient documents, and questioning those she took prisoner during her passage through Rokugan to the Wall, Sokori has learned much about the role played by Atsumari no Oni and about Hiruma Masami’s ritual during the fall of Shiro Hiruma. As a result, she has determined that she can use the keys to end Masami’s ritual and return the Hiruma souls from Yume-dō to the Realm of Mortals, making them vulnerable to corruption by her own mahō practices and the abilities of Atsumari no Oni. As a further surety of success, she has designed her own ritual, one that allows her to end Masami’s with only one or two of the keys, at the cost of it taking more time. Even so, merely releasing the souls doesn’t further her goal of gaining power and seizing control of her ancestral lands. This is where Atsumari no Oni comes in.

Using her ability to speak across the Spirit Realms, Sokori has been able to commune with Atsumari no Oni and strike a bargain. She will end Masami’s ritual and, in return, the oni will finally be able to corrupt the Hiruma souls that were denied to it at the time of the castle’s fall. The oni will use them as the beginning of an inexorably growing army with which it intends to invade Rokugan. As a reward for assisting it, the oni will name Sokori one of its chief vassals, with control over her ancestral lands and, eventually, perhaps even more of the Empire.

To end Masami’s ritual, Sokori intends to cause the lingering psychic echo of the ruined northeast tower, where Masami conducted her ritual, to physically manifest, at least temporarily. Once the tower has been recreated, she expects Atsumari no Oni to appear. Then, in the topmost level of this tower, she plans to use the keys she has obtained to unravel Hiruma Masami’s ritual.

Sokori should begin her ritual under one of two conditions, depending on the adventure progress:

- ❖ When the PCs have obtained two of the keys. Sokori is immediately assumed to have obtained the remaining key and will now begin her ritual;
- ❖ When the GM wants to bring the adventure to a climax. This shouldn’t happen, of course, until the PCs have had ample opportunity to explore Shiro Hiruma, including the locations where each of the three keys has been kept. Again, Sokori possesses at least one of the keys, and she may possess more if the PCs haven’t yet retrieved them.

The commencement of Sokori’s ritual is announced by a pervasive rumble that shakes Shiro Hiruma, caused by

the northeast tower temporarily returning to Ningen-dō. The PCs should be given time to learn what is happening; it should be clear to them that this is a momentous event. They see the newly reconstituted tower, and they might even see Kitsu Sokori entering it. This should be sufficient to alert the PCs to the necessity of entering the tower themselves to disrupt Sokori’s schemes. If it isn’t, and they choose not to investigate or pursue Sokori, then she succeeds: proceed to **Failure Is an Option**, on page 30.

Part 5: The Final Confrontation

The northeast tower appears just as it did immediately before its collapse—bearing clear signs of battle, such as damaged stonework and spattered blood, and long-dead corpses in decayed armor—but it is otherwise empty. When the PCs arrive at the topmost level, however, they find Sokori engaged in her ritual.

Intended for surveillance and battle, the top level of the tower is a single large, open space with thick walls pierced with numerous arrow slits, which are too narrow for anyone larger than a small child to get through. The stairs from below admit the PCs to one side of the tower level. Kitsu Sokori performs her ritual near the farthest wall, about thirty feet away.

To successfully navigate this confrontation, the PCs must deal with a number of elements: Kitsu Sokori and her undead minions, Atsumari no Oni, and the souls of the Hiruma fallen.

KITSU SOKORI

Sokori possesses at least one, and perhaps two or even all three of the keys to Masami’s ritual. A single key is sufficient for her to return the souls of the Hiruma to the Mortal Realm, but having fewer than all three of the keys means her own ritual will take more time.

If Sokori has all three keys, then when the PCs arrive, she has already ended Masami’s ritual. The souls of the Hiruma are in the process of returning from the Realm of Dreams.

If she has only one or two keys, then Sokori requires more time to end Masami’s ritual, and she sends her skeletal guardians to hold the PCs off until she finishes. With two keys, she requires two rounds to do so. With only one key, Masami’s ritual ends as soon as the PCs defeat Sokori’s skeletal guardians, at which point the next stage of the confrontation occurs. In either case, should Sokori be sufficiently interrupted prior to the completion of her own ritual, it is possible that her ritual fails entirely, as she must turn her attention to the PCs.

The GM may adjust these times to suit the circumstances of their particular game, keeping in mind that, while performing her own ritual, Sokori won't be doing anything else. Accordingly, making it too lengthy a process could result in a final confrontation that is too easy for the PCs. On her turn, Sokori makes progress in her ritual. If the PCs damage Sokori or otherwise take actions that may disrupt her concentration, she must pass a **TN 2 Meditation (Earth) check** (with her Indomitable Will distinction allowing her to reroll up to two of the dice) on her turn or delay the ritual's completion one additional round. If Sokori is knocked Unconscious or killed, her ritual immediately ends. At the GM's discretion, other conditions such as Silenced or Dying may delay the ritual or threaten to disrupt her concentration.

Sokori also draws upon her own powers during the confrontation, which are considerable but are not primarily damage-dealing effects. Her preferred approach to confrontation is a less direct one, using her enemies' flaws and weaknesses against them and sowing dissent and discord among them.

SOKORI'S UNDEAD SERVANTS

These are bushi skeletons, as described on page 318 of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Core Rulebook*. Their role is to protect Sokori by engaging anyone attempting to interfere with her ritual. To determine a good number of skeletal bushi for a given party see the **Encounter Difficulties** sidebar on page 14.

ATSUMARI NO ONI

Atsumari no Oni is a powerful and dangerous adversary, and the GM has options for its involvement in this final confrontation. The GM should decide whether the oni is present at the outset of the confrontation or arrives at some point during it—probably when it will have the greatest dramatic impact.

Whether Atsumari no Oni is present from the outset or arrives during the confrontation, the GM must also decide what role it will play. If it chooses to honor its bargain with Sokori, then the PCs face the combined might of Sokori and the oni—likely an extremely difficult undertaking for them! The GM should only have this be the case if the PCs are particularly powerful, or if the GM wants this to be a desperate battle with a decidedly uncertain outcome.

Alternatively, the oni may remain a distinct “third party” during the final confrontation, determined to seize the Hiruma souls for its own purposes while reneging on its bargain with Sokori. This may make things easier for the PCs, but it could also result in a complex, three-way conflict between the PCs, the oni, and Sokori.

THE SOULS OF THE FALLEN HIRUMA

If Sokori (or the PCs) end the effects of Hiruma Masami's ritual, the souls of the final Hiruma defenders of the castle return to the Mortal Realm from the Realm of Dreams. What happens then depends on whether Atsumari no Oni is present.

If the oni isn't present, then the souls, which appear as ghostly figures, “pass through” the Realm of Mortals and journey on to Meido (the Realm of Waiting) and the afterlife. As samurai who have been brought up in the spiritual culture of Rokugan, the PCs can presume that this is what is happening. The last soul to pass through is that of Masami herself, who pauses and gives the PCs a profoundly grateful look.

If the oni is present, it attempts to use its Corrupt the Fallen ability to inflict the Taint on the souls, cause them to enter a nearby corpse, and enslave them. It does this unless the PCs destroy it or otherwise engage its attention to such an extent it is unable to meddle with the souls before they pass on to Meido. If no one ends the effects of Masami's ritual, the Hiruma souls remain trapped in Yume-dō, at least for the time being.



THE PCS AND THE ONI

It may occur to one or more of the PCs to try to bargain with the oni, perhaps in an attempt to undercut Sokori. As they are samurai, the PCs know this would be a profoundly evil act. It might be beneficial in the short term, causing the oni to side with the PCs against Sokori (probably bringing her quick defeat), but the lasting implications would be profound.

Alternately, the PCs might try to convince Sokori to assist them in dispatching the oni. In either case, the GM should have the PCs make appropriate Social skill checks to manipulate their enemies—keeping in mind that any bargains they make in good faith with either of these evil beings would require forfeiting some amount of honor and glory!

THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE

The final battle should begin as a skirmish, although the conflict type may change depending on the PCs' actions. Upon their arrival, the PCs are immediately engaged by Sokori's undead servants. Depending on how many keys she possesses, Sokori has already ended Masami's ritual or is about to.

How the confrontation proceeds from this point depends on whether Sokori has ended Masami's ritual and the Hiruma souls are returning from the Realm of Dreams, if Atsumari no Oni is present (or arrives during the battle), and whether the oni chooses to ally with Sokori or not.

If Sokori has not yet undone Masami's ritual when the PCs arrive, then she uses the time provided by her undead servants' battle with the PCs to do so. However, if doggedly trying to end Masami's ritual is going to result in her death or defeat, Sokori gives up the attempt and focuses on defeating the PCs (she can always resume the ritual when they're dead or driven off, after all).

If and when Atsumari no Oni arrives (or if the GM chooses to have it already present when the PCs arrive), the GM needs to determine if it is allied with Sokori or not. This determines whether the oni is a "third party" who is hostile to both Sokori and the PCs, or if the PCs must face the combined forces of it and Sokori. These are two very different situations, so the GM should choose the one that suits their game, and the particular party of PCs, the best.

If the PCs manage to defeat Sokori and, if it is present, Atsumari no Oni, then proceed to the **Winning the Day** section, on page 30. If they fail, however, by being killed, captured, or forced to retreat, then proceed to **Failure Is an Option**, on page 30.

KITSU SOKORI	
ADVERSARY	CONFLICT RANK: 8 6
SOCIETAL 01 HONOR 25 GLORY 05 STATUS -2, +2 DEMEANOR - SHREW	PERSONAL ENDURANCE 16 COMPOSURE 12 FOCUS 7 VIGILANCE 4
ARTISAN 0	MARTIAL 2 SCHOLAR 3 SOCIAL 3 TRADE 2
ADVANTAGES Sixth Sense: Scholar; <i>Spiritual</i> Indomitable Will: Scholar; <i>Interpersonal</i>	DISADVANTAGES Whispers of Cruelty: Social; <i>Infamy</i> Shadowlands Taint: Social; <i>Spiritual</i>

FAVORED WEAPONS

Corrupted Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged, Unholy

Sacrificial Knife: Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 4, Concealable, Mundane, Razor-Edged, Unholy

Gear (equipped): Profane robes (Physical 1, Supernatural 4), scroll satchel containing mahō scrolls and the stolen maps of Yasuki Keiji

ABILITIES

MAHŌ-SENSEI

Sokori can use any mahō technique in the core rulebook (beginning on page 224). She generally uses Unholy Feror to empower her minions and Grip of Anguish on any PCs attempt to engage her directly. At the GM's discretion, she may also have access to the new mahō techniques in *Shadowlands* (beginning on page 116).

WALKING THE WAY

Sokori can draw upon her Kitsu heritage to part the veil separating the Spirit Realms from Ningen-dō, then pass through to emerge in a new place. For the purposes of this adventure, Sokori is presumed to use this ability only once, the first time the PCs encounter her, to escape the confrontation. As a Movement and Support action, Sokori begins stepping out of the Realm of Mortals, her form shimmering slightly. At the start of her next turn, she vanishes and reappears in another location at range 0–6 of her prior location (including a location out of line of sight).

WHISPERS IN BLOOD

In a vile fusion of her Kitsu ancestor-speaking and mahō abilities, Sokori can use the blood of a mortal to perceive much about that mortal's flaws and weaknesses—and then use that information against them. Sokori must have access to the blood of a mortal; enough to coat the blade of a small knife is sufficient. As a downtime activity, she makes a **TN 2 Theology (Water) check**; if it is successful, she learns all of that mortal's advantages and disadvantages.

SOKORI'S TACTICS

Kitsu Sokori does not favor direct confrontation. Throughout her sordid history, she has focused on indirect and insidious ways of defeating her foes. This holds true during the final confrontation (and any prior confrontation with her, if there is one).

Although she has access to various mahō effects that can cause direct damage, Sokori generally relies on her undead servants to engage directly in combat. In the meantime, she exploits the PCs' flaws and weaknesses, and any potential conflict among them, to cause friction and dissent. That was why she had undead attack the PCs earlier, after all, in order to collect their blood and use it to

learn their secrets. If this was successful, Sokori knows each PC's disadvantages, and she uses these as much as possible. For example, by using an action, she can employ variants of the Incite Haunting or Sinful Whispers mahō techniques to torment the PCs, as in the following examples:

- ✱ If a PC has the Phobia anxiety, Sokori causes an illusory manifestation of the object of that phobia.
- ✱ If a PC has the Paranoia anxiety, Sokori silently whispers to them that the other PCs plan to sacrifice them to survive the confrontation.
- ✱ If two PCs are from clans that are currently hostile toward each other or at war, Sokori can sow discord between those PCs. If a target PC fails a **TN 3 Meditation check (Void 2)**, they suffer 3 strife.
- ✱ If a PC has the Dark Secret anxiety, Sokori speaks in the PC's mind, threatening to reveal it. Alternatively, she may do so out loud, thereby letting the other PCs know that the target may have a Dark Secret, but not what it is. If she believes it will cause more tension and dissent to do so, she might even reveal the PC's Dark Secret outright.

Notwithstanding the above, if the indirect approach fails, or if she has been unable to learn information about the PCs that can help her, Sokori resorts to using mahō to directly deal damage to her opponents.

Assuming that she doesn't actually defeat the PCs, it is expected that Sokori dies by the end of the confrontation. However, if the GM would prefer to have her survive and be a future antagonist in their campaign, she may escape.

ATSUMARI NO ONI	
ADVERSARY	CONFLICT RANK: 12 5
SOCIETAL	PERSONAL
00 HONOR	ENDURANCE 22
15 GLORY	COMPOSURE 14
00 STATUS	FOCUS 9
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - POWER-HUNGRY	VIGILANCE 4
ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 3 SCHOLAR 3 SOCIAL 1 TRADE 0	
ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Massive Stature: Martial; Physical Unholy Might: Martial; Physical, Spiritual	Horrifying Visage: Social; Interpersonal

FAVORED WEAPONS

Crushing Claws: Range 1-2, Damage 6, Deadliness 8, Razor-Edged, Unholy

Gear (equipped): Demonic hide and armor scraps (Physical 5, Spiritual 5, Unholy)

ABILITIES

HORROR OF JIGOKU

Atsumari no Oni is an Otherworldly, Tainted being of silhouette 4. After any character performs a successful Attack action that deals 0 damage to the oni (after resistance is applied), that character suffers 3 strife.

CORRUPT THE FALLEN

As an action, Atsumari no Oni may enslave the souls of the dead, which become Tainted. The souls of the deceased must be present, which is normally only true if they died during the current encounter. Additionally, once per round Atsumari no Oni may command any number of enslaved souls to possess an equal number of corpses within range 4. The corpses immediately rise as bushi skeletons (see page 318 of the core rulebook) or zombie peasants (see page 321 of the core rulebook), depending on the condition of the corpse, and they are under Atsumari no Oni's control. To ensure the battle is not impossible, see **Encounter Difficulties** on page 14 for help determining when and if the oni should use this ability.

AURA OF DREAD

Atsumari no Oni's malign ability to corrupt and enslave the souls of the fallen surrounds it with a chilling aura that saps the wills of those who would risk their lives to confront it in close melee combat. When a character within range 3 attempts to move closer to Atsumari no Oni, they must resist with a **TN 2 Meditation check (Earth 1, Air 4)** or suffer the Disoriented condition and remain at their current distance from the oni. Once a character succeeds on this check, they do not have to make it again during the current scene.

ATSUMARI NO ONI'S TACTICS

Atsumari no Oni's role in the confrontation is, as noted above, quite variable. The oni could be allied with Sokori or it could be hostile to both her and the PCs. This range of options for its involvement allows the GM considerable control over the difficulty of the final confrontation for the PCs.

The oni's preference is to rely on its Corrupt the Fallen ability to create undead servants for itself. This doesn't work on creatures that have already been undead, so it cannot reanimate Sokori's undead servants, nor can it seize control of them from her. It can, however, reanimate any mortal being who falls in its presence; this includes Sokori and the PCs, as well as any Crab samurai still accompanying them. Moreover, if it is present when

FREEDING THE SOULS OF HIRUMA

PCs who have assembled all three keys can attempt to undo Hiruma Masami's ritual. This requires a **TN 4 Theology check (Void 2)**. If Masami has instructed the character on how to perform the ritual, reduce the TN to 1. If the ritual succeeds, the souls of the Hiruma defenders are released as described on page 27. Of course, if the PCs have not slain or banished Atsumari no Oni for any reason, the souls may be in danger.

THE MAPS OF YUSUKI KEIJI

Although the larger threat is clear by this point, PCs who undertook the mission initially to retrieve Yasuki Keiji's stolen maps are nonetheless duty-bound to do so. If Sokori is slain, it is a simple matter to retrieve the stolen maps from her satchel. PCs who discern the satchel as the likely location of the maps might also attempt to get it away from her without damaging the contents during the battle. If Sokori should escape, you might allow the PCs to find the maps somewhere within the castle, left behind after Sokori was done with them. However, should she escape with the maps, the obligation to recover them might serve as an additional incentive to pursue the mahō-tsukai.

the Hiruma souls return from the Realm of Dreams, it can corrupt them and use them to reanimate their own long-dead bones, which rise, rattling, throughout the castle grounds and even from the floor of the chamber where the battle is taking place. If the GM desires, this could include up to dozens of skeletal remains in and around Shiro Hiruma, making even escape from the castle an uncertain proposition.

As noted in **The Samurai Quarters**, on page 21, Atsumari no Oni is also not above exploiting flaws, weakness, and tensions among the PCs. It does so in a manner similar to that described for Kitsu Sokori. It likely has less direct knowledge of the PCs' disadvantages and conflicts, but remember that it was observing the party through Hiruma Tomoharu and will have been taking careful note of such things!

That said, Atsumari no Oni, like all of its type, is a fearsome opponent in combat. If it suits the GM, the oni can engage directly in combat—although it continues to taunt and incite tension between the PCs while doing so. The GM simply needs to remain aware of the difficulty such an opponent stands to present to the PCs, particularly if it is allied with Sokori.

If the situation turns truly desperate, there is a final way in which the PCs can defeat the oni. One of their number can sacrifice themselves and cast it back into Jigoku—but their soul will accompany it. The PCs might learn this through a flash of insight provided by Hiruma Masami as her soul returns to the Mortal Realm, or as the result of a **TN 1 Theology (Void) check**. In the context of the setting's cosmology, this is a truly massive and supremely tragic sacrifice. That said, if the GM wants to provide an ultimately happy ending, the character's soul could be saved by the intercession of the Fortunes, who cause Kitsu Sokori's soul to be sacrificed to Jigoku instead. It is strongly recommended that this method of ultimate sacrifice be considered a last resort, used only if the confrontation is turning decisively against the PCs and the GM wants to give them a final, desperate chance.

WINNING THE DAY

If the PCs defeat Sokori and help the souls of the Hiruma to pass through the Mortal Realm and on to the afterlife unimpeded, they have clearly won the day. Each PC should be awarded 5 XP for overcoming such a difficult challenge.

In addition, the GM should award honor and glory to the PCs if the following events occur. These should also be awarded as appropriate for the tenets of Bushidō (such as three honor for standing against numerically superior forces as per the tenet of Yū, or Courage). See page 300 of the Core Rulebook for additional examples.

☸ Honor

- Award 6 honor for the tenet of Jin (Compassion): For defending and attempting to save Hida Hurumi.

☸ Glory

- Award 3 glory for returning Yusuki Keiji's scrolls.
- Award 6 glory for safely returning Hida Hirumi to the Wall.

It is possible that the PCs gain a "lesser win." For instance, they might distract Sokori and the oni such that the souls of the Hiruma are still able to pass into the afterlife, and then they might flee and try to escape their opponents. Or they might defeat Sokori, but be unable to prevent the oni from corrupting some or all of the Hiruma souls. In such cases, the GM should decide what the implications of such a "lesser win" are, and reward experience and play out the aftermath accordingly.

FAILURE IS AN OPTION

Mask of the Oni presents the PCs with many challenges, some of them potentially quite difficult. It is possible that the PCs fail to stop Sokori, Atsumari no Oni, or both from carrying out their foul schemes. In the process, some or even all of the PCs may die. If this suits the GM and players, then so be it!

However, even failure doesn't have to be irrevocable. PCs who are defeated but not killed could be taken prisoner by Sokori. Whatever vile things she intends for them could set up future adventures, as they seek to escape her clutches. Alternatively, she could simply abandon them in the Shadowlands, confident that they won't survive a return to the Wall. These dire situations provide opportunities for the PCs to make a comeback and confront Sokori at some future point. In such a case, the PCs should still be awarded some XP—3 XP is recommended—to acknowledge the things they learned, even in defeat.

In the meantime, Sokori is one step closer to her revenge against her family—she can bring to bear an army of corrupted souls any time, at any place she chooses, and will use this to hunt down those who have aggrieved her. With such power at her command, she might go on to threaten all of Rokugan. Alternatively, if Sokori never gains Atsumari no Oni as an ally, then the oni could be the one to unleash an attack on the Empire with an ever-growing army of undead. Again, these can set up future adventures for these PCs, or even for new ones.

Part Six: The Aftermath

As soon as Sokori is defeated or flees, the northeast tower of Shiro Hiruma once more falls into ruin. The GM could simply narrate the PCs' narrow, terrifying escape. Alternatively, a successful **TN 2 Fitness check (Air 1, Earth 3)** means a PC has escaped unharmed, while failure means the PC escapes but takes 1 (or more) fatigue. The GM should be extremely wary of making this too dangerous; winning through to this point only to be crushed to death can be an unsatisfying ending for most players!

Assuming that the PCs have survived and are not captives of Sokori or in some other situation that would prevent it, they must make their way back from Shiro Hiruma to the Wall. Unless there is a good reason to roleplay this journey in detail, it is recommended that the GM simply offer a quick narrative of their journey back to the Wall.

Upon arriving at the Kaiu Wall, the PCs are met by a Crab patrol and ushered to meet once more with Hida Hachirō. Their reception by the Crab depends on a number of things. These include whether they originally entered the Shadowlands with permission or not; if they

can testify that they helped the souls of the last defenders of Shiro Hiruma pass into the afterlife; if they defeated Kitsu Sokori, Atsumari no Oni, or both; if they return the ancestral wakizashi of the Hiruma to the Crab; if they can offer testimony regarding the fate of Hiruma Tomoharu; and if they were accompanied by Hida Nagahide's squad, and how many of them survived.

Taking all of this into account, the GM can determine what sort of reception the PCs find at the wall. The PCs should receive a chance to explain their actions, perhaps prompting an intrigue conflict scene if the situation is particularly tense. The PCs may earn a reputation as friends of the Crab, gaining advantages such as Support of the Crab or Ally [Crab]. However, if the PCs entered the Shadowlands without permission, failed to save the souls of the Hiruma, left Hiruma Tomoharu to suffer, or otherwise acted in such a way as to earn the ire of Hachirō and the other Crab, they may find themselves spurned by the Crab, gaining disadvantages such as Scorn of the Crab or perhaps even Sworn Enemy of Hida Hachirō or another Crab samurai. If the Crab feel sufficiently wronged, the PCs may even be barred from their lands.

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