



Legend of the Five Rings™

ROLEPLAYING



THE KNOTTED TAILS

A SUPPLEMENTAL STORYLINE FOR *MASK OF THE ONI*

The Knotted Tails

This is an optional bonus storyline that may be played within *Mask of the Oni*, an adventure for the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*. Encounters are designed for a party of four PCs of rank 2, though these can be adjusted for parties of any size and ranks by using **Gauging an Encounter** on page 310 of the core rulebook.

The Knotted Tails takes place before the PCs reach Shiro Hiruma, but after the optional encounter “The Lost” on page 15 of that adventure. Alternatively, it can be adapted for use within any campaign in the Shadowlands. Whether PCs are involved in *Mask of the Oni* or not, these encounters allow them to meet and learn about the human-sized, rat-like nezumi and discover what horror is stalking this tribe through the Shadowlands.

It is strongly recommended that the GM read through the following content in its entirety to become familiar with it before running it with a group of PCs. If used with *Mask of the Oni*, the GM should also read through that in its entirety. GMs can also see *Shadowlands*, the *Legend of the Five Rings* setting book all about the twisted domain of Fu Leng, for more information on different nezumi tribes and the corrupted lands beyond the Wall. The storyline is structured as follows:

- ✧ **Part 1: Storyline Background.** General information about the nezumi and how this adventure ties into *Mask of the Oni*.
- ✧ **Part 2: Being Watched.** The PCs encounter a nezumi patrol and must decide whether or not to help the tribe, which may lead the PCs closer to their goal in the Shadowlands.
- ✧ **Part 3: The Knotted Tails Village.** At the village, the PCs are introduced to the Knotted Tails leader, nezumi culture, and have the opportunity to investigate the disappearances.
- ✧ **Part 4: The Nezumi Graveyard.** The PCs face the final confrontation in the nezumi graveyard and must choose to jeopardize their mission in the Shadowlands to help creatures in need.
- ✧ **Part 5: Resolution.** The PCs either resolve the aftermath of the graveyard and depart the tribe, or face the consequences of killing the scouts or ignoring the nezumi’s requests for aid.



Part One: Storyline Background

If played during *Mask of the Oni*, the GM can use this as an opportunity to prepare the players for the dangers they will face once inside the castle. As the PCs piece together the Knotted Tails’ version of the past, they may uncover clues about the history of the Hiruma and their fate. If played during a different Shadowlands adventure, the PCs have an opportunity to make useful allies—if they can find and slay the threat that is on the hunt for nezumi blood. Either way, the PCs can rest in the relatively safe territory of the tribe and gain useful supplies, valuable information, and the promise of nezumi aid in the future. However, if the PCs see the nezumi as just another foe to fight, the PCs’ actions may add to their current problems.

THE KNOTTED TAILS (GM ONLY BEYOND THIS POINT)

The Knotted Tails, a nezumi tribe that prides itself on remembering the past, believe their ancestors were once close allies of the Hiruma family. Some of these ancestors are now Transcendents (see **Transcendents** on page 15 for more details). Whether real or fabricated, this history colors the tribe’s habits and traditions. Though they move their village periodically, as many tribes do, their shrinking territory still includes Shiro Hiruma and they remain protective of the ruins. They are too fearful to venture inside, however, and warn travelers of dangers like ghosts, goblins, and other evil beings. Their fear can add to the growing tension of *Mask of the Oni*.

The tribe’s fear of the castle is based in part on their history. The current Rememberer recalls the tribe’s history as follows:

“We became as close to the Hiruma as family and built our village in the shadow of their castle. We never had to move or run, because together we were strong and fought back the lands’ monsters. Our friends taught us their ways, and we showed them how to avoid roaming monsters and survive beyond the walls of their castle. Our scouts taught their new paths through dangerous territory, and in return the Hiruma made our leader, Silver Ears, an honorary samurai. It was like a second Golden Age! Until one day, their prosperity attracted a demon so terrible it consumed everything in its path, a vile creature spreading destruction and death. Worse, the samurai it defeated were spat back out, turned into soulless monsters that fought for the evil that created them! Though our warriors fought bravely, many perished, and we fled. We begged the surviving Hiruma to escape through the tunnels, but the proud samurai stayed to face their doom.”

For any visiting PCs, this “history” may seem scandalous, but for the Knotted Tails the story is a sacred one, closely tied to their identity as a tribe. Though most Crab samurai have not heard of the Knotted Tails, the tribe has aided lost scouts in the past and those stationed at the Wall know nezumi have been helpful in maintaining the Wall’s security.

The Knotted Tails know that samurai wish to keep any dealings with them secret, but the nezumi do not believe this is necessary or just. As far as the Knotted Tails are concerned, they were once close allies of the Hiruma, and one day they will redeem themselves and foster such a relationship again. Until that day, each member of the tribe ties a knot in their tail, pulling it tight so that over time the tip dies and drops off. It is a reminder of both their past glory, and past mistakes. They still regret that their ancestors failed to save their Hiruma allies and fled, which motivates them to help any samurai they meet. Unfortunately for the PCs, the tribe’s current troubles make them unusually suspicious of outsiders.

WHAT STALKS THE TRIBE

As long-term residents of the Shadowlands, the Knotted Tails are used to the lurking dangers that surround them, but even so, something has them spooked. Some evil has been picking off lone scouts, wandering pups, and small groups of scavengers. Sometimes a scrap of fur, severed claw, or length of tail is left behind, while other times the nezumi just never returns home. Not knowing who the culprit is, what they do with those they take, and when they might strike again has the whole tribe on edge.

The truth is that an outcast nezumi known as Frayed Whisker has returned for revenge against the tribe that

exiled him. He bears seething grudges against the tribe’s leader, Lucky Silver, and his former master, the Dreamer known now as One Eye. Many years ago, Frayed Whisker was apprenticed to the Dreamer, and his attempts to travel to the Realm of Dreams during his training caused terrifying visions that plague him to this day.

Frayed Whisker became consumed with gaining enough power to fight back the horrible nightmares he was sure would come to destroy the tribe, but he was unable to distinguish between truth and the warped dreams that cursed his waking thoughts. Everywhere he looked, he began seeing enemies, even in his own people. The Dreamer, with the help of the tribe’s young leader Lucky Silver, attempted to mend Frayed Whisker’s mind and cut off his connection to the Realm of Dreams. Unfortunately, a confused Frayed Whisker flew into a violent rage and clawed out one of the Dreamer’s eyes, giving the Dreamer his new name. Lucky Silver saw no other choice but to cast Frayed Whisker out, exiling him to walk the Shadowlands alone.

For many years, Frayed Whisker spent his time in isolation, practicing the techniques he learned while apprenticed to the Dreamer, making him much more powerful than most outcast nezumi. By dreamdwelling, he prolongs his life, remaining young and strong even as the years pass by. Through dreamwalking, he causes his victims, both nezumi and other creatures, to dream while they stand, twisting their minds to do his bidding and forcing them to see their allies as foes. He is working to build an army large enough to wipe out the Knotted Tails completely and will soon launch an attack against any who stand in his way—including the PCs.

THE GOLDEN AGE

While many tribes tell the tale differently, what’s always clear is that at some point in the nezumi past, tragedy struck. Their once-flourishing civilization was destroyed, their home turned into a dangerous wasteland, and their people scattered.

There was no sanctuary for them in Rokugan, where people killed nezumi on sight, calling them monsters. Out of necessity, the nezumi eke out an existence in the Shadowlands, hiding from monsters, demons, and worse. They have adapted to life in the Shadowlands as best they can, but they are as repelled by the place as any human. This is why some tribes live under the Wall or dare to sneak into Crab territory. They would much rather make their home elsewhere.



NEZUMI NAMES

Nezumi names are fluid and change depending on major life events, physical attributes, accomplishments, and failures. One Eye the Dreamer, for example, was once named Twitching Tail, a moniker given to him when he was a young pup.

Nezumi rarely consider physical differences like the loss of an body part, a scar, or a birthmark as something to be ashamed of. Because most nezumi rely on an oral history, stories are celebrated, and anyone who bears such marks certainly has a story to tell.

Part 2: Being Watched

When the PCs move close to Shiro Hiruma, whether the castle is their destination or not, a patrol of nezumi warriors follows them through the Shadowlands, watching and waiting (see page 6 for the Knotted Tails warrior profile). For a group of four PCs of rank 2, two scouts are present. If the Crab Escort is travelling with the PCs, one additional scout is present. To adjust this encounter for a different group composition, GMs should add up the total ranks of the PCs and divide by 3, rounded down, and have that many scouts present. As the PCs travel, read or paraphrase the following:

As you walk, the air grows still and close. The only sound is that of your own hollow footfalls, the only movement the dust each step raises from the bone-dry ground. Barren grey rock stretches away in every direction, and the sky is like its pale reflection. Like scars, the landscape is covered in deep, dark fissures. Though the rifts are narrow enough not to impede your path, you cannot help but wonder what might lurk in the inky depths.

As you ponder, something suddenly skitters across the ground. You catch sight of something large and sinuous disappearing into a large fissure and hear the scrape of claws.

As the PCs become aware of being watched, they may make a **TN 2 Survival (Water) check**. If one or more PCs succeed, they catch sight of one or more large, rat-like creatures huddled in a nearby fissure, watching them. A PC may make a **TN 3 Culture (Earth) check** to identify the creatures as nezumi and recall that they are sentient denizens of the Shadowland who are free of Fu Leng's influence. A Crab PC automatically passes this check and recalls that there are nezumi that live beneath the Wall and assist in its defense off the record.

If the PCs catch sight of the nezumi, they may choose to confront them, and the nezumi freeze in fear when caught. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

There, huddled together inside the fissure, is a group of four-foot-tall, furry figures with rat-like features. As you approach you see they are armed: rusty spears and sharpened sticks. Their clawed paws and long whiskers shake with obvious fear, and their beady eyes follow you every move.

The PCs can question the nezumi, who nervously tell the PCs they are from the Knotted Tails tribe and that they are on patrol, as something has been attacking their people. One of the scouts, Nine Claws, straightens herself and squeaks out a request for the PCs to come to their village

NEZUMI LANGUAGE

The nezumi language is complicated and difficult for other species to learn, and not many samurai would ever attempt such a task. The difficulty is largely due to the way that their spoken language is often combined with scents, body language, and tail movements that can change meaning. Some nuances are virtually impossible for a human to detect, let alone translate. Different tribes also use different vernaculars, particularly regarding the spoken element of their conversations. So even if someone learns to converse with the Knotted Tails, they might still misunderstand the Tattered Ear or any of the numerous other tribes found throughout the Shadowlands.

Fortunately, the Knotted Tails can speak and understand Rokugani, for the most part. However, their knowledge of the language has been passed down through the generations, and the tribe has little opportunity to practice. Their conversations with PCs can be stilted and awkward, as they use odd phrases and misinterpret some words entirely. The GM can play this up if desired, either for humorous effect or if the GM does not want the PCs to learn the answer to a particular question. The Crab have had surreptitious dealings with various nezumi tribes intermittently throughout the history of Rokugan, clear evidence that the language barrier is surmountable. Nezumi are quite clever; they are certainly intelligent enough to make up for human limitations and can make themselves understood when necessary.

and speak to their leader. If the PCs are reluctant, the nezumi beg for help, claiming that their Dreamer foresaw a group of samurai who would help their tribe. If pressed, Nine Claws explains that their Dreamer can help the samurai in their journey, but he does not know anything else. See **The Patrol** on page 5 to continue the conversation.

Alternatively, if the PCs fail to locate the nezumi, the patrol waits a little longer before carefully approaching. The nezumi surround the PCs, but do not attack unless the PCs react violently, instead hailing them and asking the PCs to accompany them to their village. Read or paraphrase the following:



Ahead of you, the earth itself seems to have been cleft in two, a valley-like crack the only way forward. The craggy rocks on either side look as sharp as a finely-honed blade. As you enter the crevice, rat-like figures appear in your path. Standing upright and about four feet tall, dressed in ragged clothes and makeshift armor, the creatures stand proudly with broken spears planted in the ground beside them, furred noses twitching, their beady eyes fixed on you. A glance behind reveals more of the creatures; you are surrounded.

"Strangers," one squeaks, "you must request permission to pass through our territory from our leader! Come!"

If the PCs choose to cooperate with the nezumi in either case, they must stake glory equal to their current glory rank, as their reputation is at risk if discovered. If played during *Mask of the Oni*, the Crab Escort will admit that sometimes scouts caught deep in the Shadowlands accept help from the nezumi (see **A Crab Escort** margin sidebar on this page for more information). They are therefore willing to hear the nezumi out, and will not fault the PCs for agreeing to help the nezumi, though will deny such an interaction back at the Wall.

Likewise, if the Crab Escort from *Mask of the Oni* is present they warn the PCs that the nezumi are not enemies, and the PCs must forfeit 4 glory to attack them. If the PCs are still determined to kill the nezumi, their deaths will bring a larger group of warriors seeking retribution. Though the goal of the encounter is to entice the PCs to enter the nezumi village, the PCs' choices may make enemies of the Knotted Tails instead. If this happens, skip to page 22 and begin reading the section **What If the PCs Just Kill or Ignore the Nezumi?**

THE PATROL

The PCs have the opportunity to learn several things from the nezumi if they choose to cooperate with them. Some of the scouts' comments throughout a conversation might be:

- ✱ "We are the Knotted Tails, see? We are like samurai, and we act like samurai—we are friends."
- ✱ "We only watched! In case you were blood painters, come to steal the pups!"
- ✱ "A thing comes in the night. We have lost scouts, it has stolen pups, and it will take you too, if you go on alone."
- ✱ "Speak to our leader, she loves samurai. She won't let it take you."

The nezumi warriors' fear of something unknown should be clear. They are self-proclaimed allies of most samurai, but unusually tense at the present time. The nezumi insist that, "We know the Crab. We are allies. Our families fought together." The Crab Escort from *Mask of the Oni* may not like this version of the past being brought up by outsiders, stating only that, "There is no record of such an alliance in our histories." Of course, the Crab know that any alliance with the nezumi is unofficial and kept deliberately out of the histories. They may not like the patrol's claims but will not stoop to arguing with them.

PCs may attempt a **TN 3 Culture (Air 2, Fire 2) check** to determine whether the nezumi are lying. If they succeed, they determine everything the scouts say is the

A CRAB ESCORT

If using the Crab Escort from *Mask of the Oni* (found on page 8 of that adventure) encounters should be adjusted accordingly. Recommendations for this can be found in each encounter description, but these suggestions are made with the caveat that the Crab escort is being used as a narrative device rather than additional group members.

If the GM chooses to run profiles for each member of the Crab escort, this will dramatically change the amount of enemies in each encounter and the GM should consult page 310 of the core rulebook for assistance in structuring each skirmish or intrigue.

HONOR AND GLORY IN THE KNOTTED TAILS

Leaders of the Knotted Tails tribe follow the way of the samurai, at least as much as they know how, and try to instill the core beliefs of samurai in their people. Though a proper samurai may be offended or even disgusted by what appears to be a mockery of Bushidō, the Knotted Tails consider themselves honorable and have honor scores reflecting this sense of loyalty to the samurai code.

As for glory, this particular tribe often helps lost Crab scouts wandering the seemingly endless Shadowlands. Though the Crab would rarely admit to it, this has given the Knotted Tails some recognition among the defenders of the Wall, which is reflected in their higher-than-typical glory for nezumi.

truth as they see it. Their knowledge of history may be biased, incomplete, and even incorrect, but they speak what they believe. If they fail the check, they are unable to determine whether the nezumi are being earnest.

Apart from consequences to their glory, if the PCs do not agree to meet the leader, the unknown threat to the tribe will grow, destroy the tribe, and pursue the PCs. If this happens, see **What If The PCs Just Kill or Ignore the Nezumi?** on page 22.

The village where the leader waits is not far, perhaps a twenty minute walk, so if the PCs intend to turn on the nezumi or somehow escape them on the way, they have little time in which to do so.

Any nezumi asked about the castle speak their warnings in whispers:

- ❁ “Don’t go in the castle. Once you get in, you can’t get out!” The idea of being trapped terrifies the nezumi.
- ❁ “Always fighting there, fighting and death, that’s all the castle knows. But sometimes they are tricks, just shadows of past stories.”
- ❁ “Lucky Silver is as brave as any samurai, but the Dreamer tells us of the wicked things in the castle. Our leader wouldn’t go in there. No one should go in there.”
- ❁ “Death in there isn’t like everywhere else. There’s no rest for the dead in that castle.”
- ❁ “The Thing wants stories, that’s what Three Tooth says. It wants to eat them up, and maybe pups too. Watch out for the thing that looks like insides turned outside, bigger than a tent.” Three Tooth is a nezumi infiltrator that may help the PCs if they successfully assist the tribe against Frayed Whisker. See page 21 for Three Tooth’s profile.



KNOTTED TAILS WARRIOR

MINION

CONFLICT RANK: 3 1

A rag-tag bunch wielding whatever weapon or tool they can find, these warriors nonetheless take pride in their role, and might surprise the PCs by showing great courage when their tribe is threatened or if fighting becomes inevitable. After all, survivors in the Shadowlands face many terrifying threats. Nezumi society is so different to that of samurai, that they are unlikely to gain most samurai’s respect. Regardless of this, PCs should be left with the impression that these are warriors with their own sense of honor and duty.

SOCIETAL	PERSONAL
30 HONOR	ENDURANCE 9
15 GLORY	COMPOSURE 7
00 STATUS	FOCUS 5
DEMEANOR -1, +2	VIGILANCE 4

ARTISAN 0

MARTIAL 3

SCHOLAR 0

SOCIAL 2

TRADE 1

ADVANTAGES

Strength in Numbers:

☞ Martial; Physical, Mental

Deferential:

☞ Social; Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Makeshift Spear: Range 2, Damage 3, Deadline 3, Mundane

Gear (equipped): Scrounged Armor (Physical 2), nutritional glowing fungus

ABILITIES

For the Tribe: A Knotted Tails warrior is a being of silhouette 1 who can never gain the Afflicted condition or the Shadowlands Taint disadvantage. As long as one or more of its living comrades or its village are visible, a Knotted Tails warrior treats its Endurance as 12.

OCCASIONAL WARRIORS

Some nezumi tribes have dedicated warriors among them, trained to fight and die for the tribe from birth, but this is not the case in the Knotted Tails. Being relatively small, most of the tribe takes on different roles as necessary, and no roles are considered demeaning. The Knotted Tail warriors that make up the patrol are also scavengers, lookouts, healers, and pup-sitters. They therefore vary considerably and show no evidence of any military training and discipline that a Lion or Crab would recognize. Some wear armor constructed from scraps of metal and wood, while others wear patched clothes, or

nothing but strips of cloth. Many bear evidence of previous fights: torn ears, ugly scars, or missing claws, paws, or tails. These areas are often decorated with piercings or ribbons, and are certainly not deliberately hidden.

Among the Knotted Tails, the wounded are well-cared for, and scars are worn with honor. They do all, if possible, have knots in their tails. If questioned about these knots, the nezumi only say: “so we won’t forget.” This is because the tribe still feels collective shame for their ancestors having left the Hiruma to die alone. This is something for which they seek to make amends.

NEZUMI REPUTATION

The PCs may be reluctant to interact with creatures that most Rokugani consider vermin at best, and mistake for Shadowlands monsters at worst. The presence of the nezumi patrol forces the PCs to face them, but whether the PCs are willing to talk, travel with them, and ultimately even help them, is up to the players. The tribe can offer certain aid to entice the PCs to help them:

- ✧ If the PCs are weary or injured, the nezumi tell them the tribe’s leader will grant them shelter or aid.
- ✧ The nezumi drop hints about the unknown threat to appeal to the players’ curiosity.
- ✧ If the nezumi mention “*blood painters*” and this adventure is being tied into *Mask of the Oni*, then the PCs may believe Sokori has gone this way, assuming they are on her tail. This is not the case, but the nezumi don’t know that.
- ✧ If the PCs have a Crab escort, the Crab may suggest that when desperate, they must take allies where they can find them, and ensure the success of their mission.
- ✧ If played within *Mask of the Oni*, if the players saved the scout Kurumi while traveling to Shiro Hiruma, the nezumi offer to heal him. They know how to expel parasites, to “*get the bad out*.” See **The Parasite** on page 9 for more details. PCs can then leave Kurumi in the care of the nezumi while they enter the castle, with the intention to collect him and return him to the Wall after their adventure.

Even if the PCs decide to go along with the nezumi, once in the village they encounter many habits and traditions of the tribe that might provoke them into conflict. In particular, depending on the characters of the PCs, the tendency of this tribe to imperfectly emulate samurai etiquette and culture might intrigue, repel, or merely annoy them.

NEZUMI HONOR

Contrary to popular Rokugani belief, the nezumi are not merely cowards who care only for their own survival. Living in the Shadowlands requires a willingness to run or fight as necessary, but nezumi generally care more about the well-being of their tribe than the individual. Although the concept of honor varies between tribes, for most it necessitates defending friends, family, and allies whatever the personal cost. This version of honor is what the current, nomadic nezumi culture is based on, and what enables it to survive. Nezumi heroes tend to be those who sacrificed themselves to protect their tribe. As a reward, such heroes live on in the tribe’s memory, their stories told and passed down to new pups so they are never forgotten. Truly exceptional nezumi may also become Transcendents, explained further on page 15.

The selfless honor of the Knotted Tails is apparent in the care with which they treat their visitors, the way they encourage pups to share food equally, and their honesty and openness. The latter might seem rude to the PCs, but for the nezumi, dishonesty weakens the trust on which their tribe relies. Conversely, for a tribe who survives by scavenging and sharing everything, stealing is an unfamiliar concept. Only “special” items are considered off-limits, and these are items with a history, like the leader’s wakizashi or the Rememberer’s collection.

Many nezumi consider themselves to be honorable, and for a samurai to question this would be insulting. However, most nezumi would not react to an insult with the same indignation that a Rokugan samurai would. The exceptions are those nezumi who have learned all they can about Rokugani honor and seek to copy Rokugani practices, such as the Knotted Tails leader, Lucky Silver.

OUTCAST NEZUMI

While nezumi are usually resilient and even resistant to the Taint, living in the Shadowlands offers ample opportunity to witness unimaginable horrors. Encountering the warped creatures of the Shadowlands takes its toll even on the nezumi who survive physically untainted. When a member of the tribe becomes obsessed with gaining power over monsters, or so consumed by fear that they endanger or even attack the tribe, it falls to the leader to judge whether they can be helped.

If the Dreamers and healers of the tribe cannot mend their minds, they are exiled from the safety of their tribe. Without the protection of their people, most succumb to the perils of the Shadowlands. Those that endure alone become outcast nezumi, and often grow bitter and dangerous over time.

Part 3: Knotted Tails Village

Once the PCs begin to travel with the nezumi scouts, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The nezumi pause as they reach the brow of a hill, looking expectantly at you. Standing on the crest, you get your first view of the nezumi village, a scattering of mismatched tents hidden amongst the rocks below. Furred figures emerge from numerous burrows and stand to watch your approach. The smallest among them, nezumi about the size of human infants, swarm up the hill on all fours, squeaking excitedly.

If the PCs ask, the warriors assure them that the oncoming swarm is only a pack of pups. These run excitedly around the PCs' feet and accompany them into the village. If the PCs act threateningly in any way, such as by drawing a blade, the pups scatter. Obviously, if the PCs harm the pups through misunderstanding or malice, all nezumi turn on them at once (see page 8 for the nezumi pup profile). If this happens, skip to page 22 and begin reading the section **What If the PCs Just Kill or Ignore the Nezumi?** If the PCs stoically ignore the pups, the bravest attempt to climb onto the PCs' shoulders. The pups understand some Rokugani, but don't speak more than an odd word of it themselves as they are still learning.

As the PCs reach the village, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

As you near the village, you realize that much of it must be underground; the few tents standing aren't nearly enough to shelter whole village of nezumi. Some nezumi have gathered to see what the scouts have brought, while some stare at you from dark burrows. All eyes are fixed upon you, and it is as if the entire village is holding its breath.

Burrows for sleeping are underground, where the Knotted Tails feel safer. The tents above are skeletal structures of wood and metal, with scraps of cloth and dried vegetation stretched between struts to provide shelter and shade. A small fire heats a cooking pot inside one, and within another the PCs might glimpse a nezumi beating salvaged metal into usable shapes with a rock, the dull clanging muffled by the fabric of the tent. If a PC enters one of the burrows, they take 1 strife due to the cramped, dirty conditions.

Any samurai who have dealt with nezumi before may note that this is quite a small tribe. The Knotted Tails scrape by, living on the weeds and insects of the Shadowlands. Their territory has shrunk as more aggressive tribes have expanded into it, but they are tough and determined.

NEZUMI PUP

MINION

CONFLICT RANK:  1  1

Nezumi pups begin life helpless, blind, and hairless. They develop quickly, emerging after two weeks to join older pups in training, foraging, and listening to stories. They are inquisitive and playful but know from scent markers where they can safely explore. Pups only wander away in extreme circumstances. Fear usually drives a pup back to a parent or other adult, but if its home suffers a disaster or is attacked, a pup obeys the instinct to flee. Unless found by its own or a friendly tribe, such pups either perish or become outcast nezumi.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
00 HONOR		ENDURANCE	4
05 GLORY		COMPOSURE	4
00 STATUS		FOCUS	3
 +1,  -2 DEMEANOR - CURIOUS		VIGILANCE	1

ARTISAN 0

MARTIAL 1

SCHOLAR 0

SOCIAL 1

TRADE 1

ADVANTAGES

Unnoticed:

 Martial; Physical

Defenseless:

 Martial; Physical

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Teeth and Claws: Range 0, Damage 1, Deadliness 2

Gear (equipped): Fur (Physical 1)

ABILITIES

INQUISITIVE

A nezumi pup is a being of silhouette 0 who can never gain the Afflicted condition or the Shadowlands Taint disadvantage. Their curiosity means they might be found almost anywhere in the Shadowlands, such as curled up in a backpack or behind a tent flap. As a downtime activity, a character may observe a nezumi pup's playful antics and remove 3 strife. A character who targets a nezumi pup with an Attack action receives 5 strife.

The Parasite

If the injured Crab Hida Kurumi from *Mask of the Oni* (see page 15 of that adventure) is with the PCs when they enter the village, some of the nezumi warriors attempt to lead him into a burrow near the edge of the village to heal him. Kurumi cries out in pain as the nezumi try to maneuver him into the darkness of the burrow. If the PCs object to his treatment, the nezumi explain that the process is messy, and they intend to move him afterwards, burying the parasite in the burrow. However, it is possible, using a **TN 1 Command (Earth)** or **Courtesy (Water)** check, to persuade them to treat him in one of the tents instead. Either way, one of the nezumi warriors scurries off to fetch a special brew from the Dreamer, which is given to Kurumi to expel the parasite. This is an unpleasant and painful process, and if above ground, the parasite attempts to escape into a nearby body. In this case, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The nezumi surround Kurumi, blocking your view, but their continued squeaking cannot mask his moans and cries as the potent concoction does its work. As he begins to retch, the nezumi suddenly scatter, just as a dark worm-like shape lurches from Kurumi's mouth, skids across the ground in a squirming, slimy mass, and slithers quickly towards the closest viable host.

If the PCs are nearby, they must make a competitive **TN 2 Survival (Water)** check to determine whose body the parasite attempts to enter (see page 26 of the core rulebook for details on competitive checks). It tries to enter the body of the lowest rolling individual, and that PC must make a **TN 2 Fitness** check to fend off the vicious slug. If the parasite fails to enter the first body it encounters, it flees the village. If it succeeds, the infected PC suffers the Afflicted condition. If the PC asks the nezumi for treatment, they learn Kurumi received the last of the Dreamer's supply of the pungent brew. They may request he makes more, but the nezumi say he is dream-dwelling now, and cannot be disturbed (see the **Dreamer's Brew** margin sidebar on page 16 for more details).

The Leader's Tent

When the PCs reach the leader's tent in the center of the village, any remaining pups scatter. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

This tent is larger than the others, made from skins and furs stretched over a wooden frame. A faded and torn banner bearing the Crab mon stands on one side of the tent flap, while a crude representation of a knotted tail painted on a strip of cloth hangs on the other. The scouts lead you inside, where the air is dark and smells faintly of temple incense, or something

LUCKY SILVER'S BLADE

Lucky Silver's wakizashi, on display behind her, is a Kaiu blade. The PCs might question why she owns such a valuable weapon, in which case she explains that it was a gift to her ancestor from the Crab. This heirloom is her most prized possession and she won't easily part with it. The PCs may later learn that her ancestor, tribe leader Silver Ears, actually favored a different weapon (see **Transcendent Advice** on page 22). If they choose to bring it to her, or otherwise convince her that she is better off with something else by succeeding in a **TN 4 Courtesy (Earth 6, Air 3)** check, they may be able to take the Kaiu blade. The TN of this check is reduced by 2 if the PCs discover and defeat whatever is attacking the village and Lucky Silver survives.

very much like it. A single candle burns in a broken lamp set on the floor. A large grey-furred nezumi with long, drooping whiskers sits cross-legged beside the light, and she bows her head low in greeting. She is dressed in ill-fitting Crab armor, dented but polished to a shine. A horned helmet and wakizashi rest on a makeshift stand in the gloom behind her. Her warriors supplicate themselves inside the entrance, leaving space for their visitors to kneel in front of them.

"Greetings, honored samurai, I am Lucky Silver," the leader says. "Our Dreamer told me of your coming. I believe we can help each other."

The leader is long-lived for a nezumi, and her interest in samurai and Rokugan has only grown over the years. She firmly believes that her tribe's ancestors were close allies of the Hiruma, and considers herself an honorary samurai, a position she believes she has inherited from her predecessors. She sits very straight, and maintains intense eye contact, behavior she believes is typical of samurai. Her mimicry may resemble a crude mockery to the PCs, or the Crab Escort if present.

As their leader, Lucky Silver is the heart and soul of her tribe, and in battle she holds the rest together. If she falls, chaos is the result, as some nezumi flee while others stay to fight and die. She is old by nezumi standards, and after her death the new leader is likely to change the character of the tribe. She has declared that any candidates must duel to first blood for her position once she's gone, so even she doesn't know who will shape the future of the tribe.

Lucky Silver is keen to help the PCs as long as they show her some respect and is curious to closely observe the

A MATTER OF HONOR

Lucky Silver is courteous to the PCs, but she takes her honor very seriously and would challenge a PC to a duel to first blood if she felt sufficiently slighted. She is a fierce warrior and has a strong sense of honor, though the nezumi concept of honor varies from that of most Rokugani (see the sidebar **Nezumi Honor** on page 7). She has instilled in her people the idea that to obey her is paramount, though they have no belief in the Celestial Order.

If for any reason Lucky Silver duels the PCs, they might be surprised to find she wields the wakizashi like a katana, and with some skill. She has no idea that these two types of blades are symbolically or practically different and believes that the wakizashi is simply a blade crafted for someone of her stature.

behavior of real Rokugani samurai. She has seen the occasional Crab scout, but they never stay long. She willingly provides information, and if the PCs want more than she is willing to give, a **TN 2 Courtesy (Earth) check** is enough to persuade her. Regardless, she offers the PCs aid in the form of safety, tending to Hida Kurumi (if present), aiding a PC with removing the parasite if someone is suffering from the affliction by convincing the Dreamer to make more of the brew. She warns them again about the unknown threat, suggesting they stay in the relative safety of the village until the culprit has been discovered and dealt with. If the PCs are willing to assist the tribe, Lucky Silver offers them a guide to Shiro Hiruma or for a distance towards their destination.

LUCKY SILVER, LEADER OF THE KNOTTED TAILS

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK:  4  2

The silver-furred leader of the Knotted Tails is respected and even feared within her tribe, though she is related to many of them. She is older than most nezumi, but her skill with her blade makes up for any frailties of age. She isn't merely interested in samurai, but considers herself one and tries to live up to the title. Her tribe looks up to her and is unwaveringly loyal; in turn, she sees her role as leader as a sacred duty, so the tribe always comes first.

SOCIETAL	PERSONAL
65 HONOR	ENDURANCE 12
25 GLORY	COMPOSURE 10
05 STATUS	FOCUS 6
 +2,  -1 DEMEANOR -DEDICATED	VIGILANCE 7

ARTISAN 1

MARTIAL 3

SCHOLAR 0

SOCIAL 2

TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

DISADVANTAGES

Veteran's Fortitude: Martial; Mental, Physical**Hot-Tempered:** Social; Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Kaiu Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Durable, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Altered Crab armor (Physical 3)

ABILITIES

LUCKY

Lucky Silver is a being of silhouette 1 who can never gain the Afflicted condition or the Shadowlands Taint disadvantage. Once per scene, when making a check, Lucky Silver may reroll any number of her dice.

THE UNKNOWN THREAT

Lucky Silver fills in any details the patrol left out and explains how anyone wandering too far from the village alone has disappeared. She is unsure of what exactly the threat is—the tribe has not caught the scent of any goblins, and their Dreamer does not think that there is any demon involved—but whatever it is has been getting bolder. Victims have started to disappear from the outskirts of the village itself, such as the lookouts and those who wander from the communal burrow at night. In fact, there have been several cases of sleepers wandering off and disappearing into the night, never to be seen again.

These are the possible culprits as she sees them:

- ✱ A "blood painter," by which she means mahō -tsukai. This suggestion might get the PCs involved if they are in pursuit of Kitsu Sokori from *Mask of the Oni*. If asked about blood painters, Lucky Silver tells the PCs that "they are humans in robes who shed blood to force things to change. While our Dreamer looks beyond our world for answers, the blood painters look within our world for ways to control it. They make the dead rise, spread sickness, and summon monsters. If a blood painter has taken nezumi, it can only be for some terrible purpose."
- ✱ A Kuni shugenja looking for test subjects. She refers to them as "painted samurai," a term soem Crab PCs might find uncomfortably close to "blood painters." If the PCs correctly deduce that she means Kuni shugenja, they might take offence. She explains that "our Rememberer tells stories of samurai with painted faces to scare the pups and stop them from wandering from the village alone. In the stories, these painted samurai drag pups away and cut them into pieces, trying to turn them into monsters. It's a story for the pups, but some say there is truth in it, and that one day these monsters will come back to the village to eat us all." See the **Nezumi and the Taint** sidebar on page 13 for more information.
- ✱ An aggressive rival tribe, but if this is the case, their tactics are very unusual. She says "tactics" very proudly, wanting to sound like a general. She can explain that while some nezumi, like the Knotted Tails, wander through the same territory over and over and set up their village in familiar sites, others aren't afraid to travel further. Warrior tribes are the sort of nezumi that take what they want from anyone they want, so secrecy isn't usually a priority for them. Besides, there have been no scent markings in the area rivaling the Knotted Tails.

- Alternatively, if this adventure isn't being played within *Mask of the Oni*, a GM can add in any subtle reference to whatever the PCs are looking for or hunting in the Shadowlands to get them invested. The leader has taken measures to keep her tribe safe, such as moving the village, posting lookouts in groups, and charging patrols with watching for unusual visitors such as themselves. Nothing has helped; nezumi continue to disappear. If the PCs ask Lucky Silver how many nezumi have disappeared, she says nine, including two pups. If the PCs ask about the Dreamer, she tells them to seek One Eye's burrow at the far edge of the village, but not to disturb him until the next morning when he will eventually emerge from his dreamdwelling, a deep meditative state that would be dangerous to interrupt (see **The Realm of Dreams** on page 16 for more information on One Eye).

NEZUMI AS HOSTS

Whether the PCs decide to help the nezumi or not, Lucky Silver invites them to stay with the tribe, resting and recuperating before their adventure ahead. She is quick to remind them that there is safety in numbers and suggests that at the very least they should rest a night and leave in the morning, so they can reach the castle before another nightfall. If the PCs have offered to help, the nezumi treat them as honored guests.

The PCs are free to explore the village, in which case example locations and encounters are given on the following pages.

MEETING THE REMEMBERER

On the bare ground near the leader's tent, the pups are listening to a story told by the tribe's Rememberer. If the PCs move closer to hear what's going on, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the Rememberer, he ceases his squeaking and begins to speak in Rokugani. The pups glance at you and return their attention to the story:

"When the dead began to walk again, our warriors knew the cause was hopeless. They could not save the castle, but they thought they could save their friends. 'Come, Samurai!' Silver Ears called, 'we will show you the way out! We know the tunnels...' But the samurai would not follow, they stood and faced the monsters that had once been their comrades. Our warriors, fearful for their lives, fled through the tunnels and away. So, the castle fell, and our friends perished while we survived. Each warrior wrung his paws in grief and guilt, until leader Silver Ears tied a

NEZUMI GAMES

If the PCs wander the village, a group of nezumi invite them to join in a game called Traps. The game involves any number of players taking turns to place sticks as walls and stones as rewards. Circles made from twists of string or weed-stems represent the players, who have to gather as many rewards as they can before they are trapped. The game inevitably descends into chaos as the players attempt to trap each other and release themselves. Any PC who participates must make a **TN 1 Games (Water) check** to discern. Each character who fails receives 1 strife.

If a PC succeeds, they understand enough of the game to win (made competitively if more than one PC plays see page 26 of the *Legend of the Five Rings* core rulebook for more information on competitive checks), gaining further admiration from the nezumi playing. If a PC wins the game, they are awarded a small, broken pendant in the shape of a moth. It appears to be of Rokugani manufacture, but the surrounding nezumi can say little about its origin. If the PCs press, one of the nezumi suggests speaking to the Rememberer because, "The Rememberer knows almost most things!"

THE NEZUMI LIFE CYCLE

Nezumi usually only live a handful of years, though Rememberers, Dreamers, and tribal leaders may live a decade or more. For more information on nezumi see Shadowlands, the ultimate sourcebook for the defiled lands of Fu Leng.

knot in the end of his tail. 'So I will never forget the pain of this day,' he said, pulling the knot so tight his tail-tip came off in his claws. His warriors each did the same, and when you are old enough, each of you may choose to do the same."

The Rememberer of the Knotted Tails is a frail and aged nezumi with long, limp grey whiskers and shaking paws. The other nezumi talk about him as though he's ancient, but he's actually only 7 or 8—he does not know which. Life in the Shadowlands has not been kind to his body, but his mind is sharp. During the day, he can usually be found telling tales to the pups or napping in the shade of a tent. At night he sleeps in the safety of the communal burrow. He's too frail to fight, but is a great source of information and is very willing to talk to anyone who is willing to listen, though he is unwilling to say much about himself. If asked his name, he emits a series of shrill squeaks, and explains his name is too difficult to translate. Other nezumi refer to him as "the Rememberer."

If questioned, the Rememberer tells different stories depending on what he's asked. The following stories add

flavor, though the GM should make sure to include the last story, as it hints who is responsible for the missing nezumi. The Rememberer begins with “Let me tell you a story...”

❖ **“...of the Shadowlands.** There was once a great scavenger in our tribe, called Iron Teeth. He wasn’t afraid of anything, and other scavengers felt braver just for being with him. Iron Teeth scavenged far and wide, and others followed him. When he came across the lair of a many-legged monster, a bulbous, dark creature that clambered silently across the Shadowlands seeking fresh meat, Iron Teeth didn’t run away. He waited for the monster to disappear over the horizon and ran right into its lair. His companions waited at the entrance, watching for the monster’s return. Iron Teeth called to them from inside the cave, telling them of the wonderful things he’d found, weapons, clothes, and a strange sort of sack. Sure it must be full of some treasure, he opened it, and his screams sent the others running all the way back to the village. Iron Teeth was never seen again, and no one has ever been back to learn what might have been in that sack.”

❖ **“...of our samurai heritage.** Once, a pack of goblins attacked the village and killed half of the tribe. The rest ran to safety, and while raw with

grief, leader Silver Claws demanded the lookouts reveal themselves. Only one nezumi stood forward, the rest too afraid to admit they’d let the goblins sneak up on them. Lucky Fang was her name, due to her crooked teeth, and she shivered and shook while the tribe clamored for her punishment. Leader Silver Claws silenced them. He thanked Lucky Fang for her bravery and honesty and named her his heir. Then Silver Claws drew the sword handed down from their ancestors and told his tribe he’d take the guilt upon himself. He ended his own life like a brave samurai, and that was how Lucky Fang became our leader, Lucky Silver, today.”

❖ **“...of my apprentice.** She gained her name, Quick Shadow, as a pup. No one could ever find her unless she wanted them to. There was a time when our Dreamer had warned us it was time to move on, and we’d packed up the village and everyone was hurrying through the Shadowlands with their packs in their hands and the young on their backs, and she was forgotten. She had been playing when the call came to move, and no one had seen her. She came home looking for food and found the village gone, except for one nezumi. There was I, sitting alone, waiting for her. I did not forget her, as I don’t forget

ITEMS IN THE SHRINE TO MEMORY

At the GM’s discretion, the shrine can contain alternative items useful or particularly tempting to the PCs. This is an opportunity to provide incentives, or simply give them access to what they require. The Knotted Tails have been scavenging in the Shadowlands for so long, there has been ample time for them to come across all manner of items. The Rememberer might keep these whether he understands their nature or not. The one necessity is that the items are portable, as the Rememberer carries them in a sack when the village moves, setting up the shrine in a new place each time.

If the GM wishes to test the morality of the PCs, a treasured, valuable item that one or more PCs desire can be included, something the Rememberer does not wish to part with. This might cause PCs to question whether it’s wrong to steal something that was already “stolen.” The Rememberer is too old and frail to prevent the PCs from seizing whatever they wish, but stealing from the kindly Rememberer requires a PC to forfeit 6 honor for breach of the tenant of Courtesy. Depending on the needs of the PCs, the following could be found on the shrine:

- ❖ An item relevant to the PC’s motivation. Particularly, if this content is being used in conjunction with *Mask of the Oni*, see page 6 of *Mask of the Oni* for possible PC motivations. Note that the ancestral wakizashi should not be included here.
- ❖ An ancestral weapon from a PC’s family or clan.
- ❖ Jade items, particularly useful in the monster-infested Shadowlands.
- ❖ A nezumi-made map of Knotted Tails territory, a few human generations out of date.
- ❖ A scroll containing a secret the nezumi don’t have a right to keep, such as a personal letter or the pillow-book of a samurai’s ancestor.
- ❖ A sacred item the Rememberer doesn’t understand the significance of, such as prayer beads, a bag of shells to cast for divination, or a nemuranai (see page 307 of the core rulebook) with a Rank 1 bound invocation.

anyone. That was the day she asked to be my apprentice, and carried my pack for me, and I have been working on her memory since."

- ✱ "...of the dangers of dreaming. Long ago, a young pup called Frayed Whisker begged our Dreamer to take him on as an apprentice, and though the eager pup was clever and quick on his paws, he didn't have the quiet mind needed for dreamwork. He asked and asked, until the Dreamer gave in and taught Frayed Whisker as best he could, but the first time the young apprentice entered the Realm of Dreams, he saw something that changed him forever. A warning from the ancestors, perhaps. We will never know. Whatever it was, Frayed Whisker woke at once, and horrible visions plagued him day and night. He became afraid, then angry, and when the Dreamer tried to help him, he lashed out and clawed one of the Dreamer's eyes from his face. Lucky Silver was pained by this, but wisely knew Frayed Whisker was too dangerous to stay with the tribe, so he was exiled from the safety of our people long, long ago. That is why our Dreamer is known as One Eye. A sour memory, but an important one."

If shown the moth pendant (see **Nezumi Games** on page 11) the Rememberer says that it was an item left by visitors before his time. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

"Samurai who came to talk to the Dreamer lost it," he says. "A shame it is broken; what power it had is lost, unless it can be mended."

The Rememberer does not know what its power was, as it was something only a Dreamer could understand. If questioned about the past or himself, the Rememberer talks about his role and how remembering nezumi history is a sacred duty. His stories maintain the tribe's identity and pass on lessons they've learned to the pups. He remembers the names of hundreds of nezumi and is teaching his apprentice to do the same.

If the PCs have already spoken to the Dreamer, the Rememberer wrings his hands and mentions that Quick Shadow, his apprentice, is due back from the graveyard at any moment, and that she was escorted by two nezumi guards for her own safety. She has to learn to tell the stories of dead nezumi from their skulls, as part of her training. If the GM is ready for the PCs to go to the graveyard, the Rememberer can begin to worry and suggest the PCs might check on her for him. Otherwise, he can offer to show them the Shrine to Memory.

NEZUMI AND THE TAINT

The nezumi somehow survive in the Shadowlands without falling victim to the Taint—most of the time. Many tribes consider this evidence of their biological and moral superiority, humans being easily Tainted because they are flawed creatures with suppressed dark sides waiting to be released. The Knotted Tails do not take this view, however, seeing the Taint as a sickness and pitying the victims they find. On the rare occasions this tribe has come across an afflicted samurai they have offered what help they can, though they have no treatment for the condition.

The Kuni have long been interested in the nezumi resistance to the Taint but have never been able to establish a cause. There are rumors that in the days before the Crab knew the nezumi were intelligent creatures, Kuni shugenja dissected not only nezumi corpses, but live subjects too, in an effort to understand where the resistance came from. If there is some truth to these rumors, this might explain where the nezumi stories of evil samurai with painted faces came from.

The Shrine to Memory

If they are willing, the Rememberer leads the PCs into a burrow and through an underground tunnel to a small hidden cave with a hole in the roof. This cramped space, lit by a weak shaft of sunlight, contains relics of nezumi history. These include simple things like a brass button, an engraved snuff pot, a copper coin with unrecognizable symbols on it, and other things he keeps and carries with him to remind his tribe of their ancient history. These are arranged with care on shelves dug into the cave walls, creating a crude sort of shrine.

The Rememberer believes these things will prove his story to the PCs. Among these things may be Crab artifacts "salvaged" from Shiro Hiruma, items the PCs may consider stolen: a crumbling bundle of incense sticks, a battered Hiruma scout helmet, and an old Imperial decree granting pardon to a rōnin whose name has faded beyond recognition. The GM can adjust the nature of this decree to fit an ongoing campaign or use it to start a new adventure by leaving a name legible, so the PCs can later search for the owner. Prominently in the center stands a jade dagger, or some other important item which the PCs easily identify as coming from another clan, perhaps one of their own (see the sidebar **Items in the Shrine to Memory** on page 12). If challenged, the Rememberer is adamant that it is a Hiruma artifact and is his to protect, as he is charged with remembering their fallen samurai allies. The PCs may make

REMEMBERED DEEDS

If the PCs ask about the orange streaked symbols on the wall of the burrows (see page 14), the Rememberer sadly notes that those marked have been removed from the tribe for one reason or another. He lists the last three nezumi to be expelled: White Tail for abandoning a pup to save herself; Crooked Nose, for stealing food in times of hardship; and Frayed Whisker, for attacking members of the village and clawing out the Dreamer's eye.

If the Rememberer has not yet told the story of Frayed Whisker see "...of the dangers of dreaming" on page 13.

a **TN 3 Courtesy (Earth 4, Fire 4, Void 1) check** to appeal to him. If they succeed, the Rememberer offers one of the items as a reward for helping the tribe.

Eating with the Tribe

As the PCs pass near the tent sheltering the cooking pot, several nezumi appear and usher them toward the pot. An assortment of bowls and cups are thrust into the PCs' hands, as they are invited to dip them into the bubbling liquid (see **Nezumi Cuisine** on page 14). An unappetizing, acrid smell fills the air. The nezumi crowd around the PCs expectantly, assuring them the stew has been well-cooked. If asked, the nezumi list the ingredients by their nezumi names: three-chew weed, pop-pop bugs, and crackling wings. A successful **TN 1 Medicine check** allows the PCs to deduce the food is inedible, and if they consume even a small amount they suffer the Afflicted condition (see page 271 of the core rulebook).

If the PCs reject the food, they must do so tactfully to avoid offending the pair of nezumi who cooked it (Far Scent and Spike, whose fur stands up in spikes on her head). Reminding the nezumi of the human vulnerability to the Taint would be an effective excuse, alternatively a PC may make a **TN 2 Culture (Fire) check** to make up a creative excuse, or a **TN 2 Skulduggery (Air) check** to pretend to eat the stew. If the cooks are offended, for the remainder of the PCs' time in the village these nezumi look for petty ways to have their revenge. As the pair of nezumi cooks are also lookouts, scouts, and whatever else the tribe needs, this means they can pop up whenever the GM wishes. For example, if the PCs accept shelter for the night, these nezumi could be posted as guards outside the PCs' tent. Then they shirk their duties and allow pups inside to steal from the PCs. The pups are used to scavenging and have no real understanding of theft as a crime.

The Burrows

The nezumi assume the PCs would be most comfortable above-ground, but if the PCs wish to explore the burrows, they are free to do so. In order to find the Dreamer, the PCs must travel through the burrows regardless of if they are curious enough to look around. Passing through the tunnels may be uncomfortable, but not impossible for all but the largest samurai, though bulky armor or weapons may make movement awkward. Entering the burrows causes any Rokugani to receive 1 strife due to the dirtiness of their surroundings. The Crab Escort, if present, refuses to enter such a place. Glowing fungus dots the walls of the tunnels, allowing the PCs to see faintly. They see the following:

NEZUMI CUISINE

Nezumi Rememberers tell of the mythic days in which their ancestors dined on dishes so nutritious their people grew twice the size of modern nezumi, and intoxicating liquors that rendered those who indulged euphoric, while improving mental capacity. In the Shadowlands, however, the nezumi have little choice but to consume whatever they can find to survive. Their robust digestive systems allow them to partake of Shadowlands weeds that would be highly poisonous to humans, the tainted flesh of Shadowlands monsters, and the indeterminate liquids that accumulate in stagnant puddles. The Kuni have also claimed to witness nezumi eating both human flesh and that of their own kind. The Knotted Tails would be disgusted by such a thought, and adamant that certainly none of their own tribe could ever conceive such a thing.

The favorite foods of the Knotted Tails include insects that crack open to reveal soft, fleshy innards, worms and grubs of astounding size dug from the ground, and a luminous fungus the tribe cultivate in a burrow. For the PCs, the nezumi combine these delicacies in an aromatic stew. The ancestors of the Knotted Tails observed samurai cuisine at Shiro Hiruma and now the nezumi try to replicate it on special occasions, believing such practices will make the food safe and worthy of samurai.

- ⊗ A large communal sleeping burrow full of tattered blankets—apparently empty. However, an old nezumi is asleep under a heap of these blankets, and wakes with a shriek if disturbed.
- ⊗ A nest of very young pups, hairless and blind, being cared for by a pair of female nezumi who neglect their charges to welcome and examine their unexpected guests.
- ⊗ A storage burrow with a heaped assortment of broken armor and weapons, cooking utensils, and odd artifacts. If the PCs investigate closely, they might brush against a Tainted obsidian amulet in the shape of a crescent moon that has the Unholy item quality. They may also notice a cracked staff with what looks like faded bloodstains on the end. This once belonged to tribe leader Silver Ears, but its importance has been forgotten.
- ⊗ A foul-smelling burrow where a small and dubious selection of foodstuffs is stored, wrapped in leaves and strips of cloth.

- ✿ A long tunnel that leads to a dead end, with a small tunnel leading to the left (see **The Realm of Dreams** on page 16 for more details). Someone has painstakingly carved lines and chips into the rugged rock wall. This collection of symbols makes up the written language of the Rememberers. Most Rememberers, regardless of tribe, practice a similar use of symbols to record names, note warnings, and keep records of important events in an area for future Rememberers to learn from. This list, however, is an incomplete collection of tribe members' names, as other names appear on lists in other places the village travels to, including some sites no longer used. Notable, however, are several names that have been marked with a strange orange substance. If the PCs ask the Rememberer about this, see the margin sidebar **Remembered Deeds** on this page.
- ✿ A burrow made not by the nezumi, but an enormous, slimy, maggot-like creature who has tunneled into the tribe's territory. It looks fierce, but if the PCs approach the creature, it slithers away surprisingly fast. If they alert the nezumi to its presence, they only laugh. "Oh, that's Mushy," they say, "he won't hurt you." Although his slime is mildly poisonous, the nezumi intend to eat him if food grows scarce.
- ✿ The mushroom farm: a single burrow full of rotting leaves, on which grow squat, bioluminescent, large-capped mushrooms. As with everything in the village, this miniature farm can be transported

when the village moves. The tribe is proud of producing a foodstuff in relative abundance, and a single nezumi stands guard here. If the PCs wish to enter, he allows them in but watches them carefully, afraid they might tread on the harvest with their "big samurai feet." The mushrooms are used as food, but also in medicine—including the purgative used to cure Kurumi, if he came to the village. If the PCs wish to know more about the mushrooms or Kurumi's treatment, they may attempt a **TN 2 Courtesy** or **Sentiment check (Air 4, Fire 1)** to persuade the nezumi to explain their medicinal, recreational, and nutritional use, or even provide a small vial of the purge to take away (to be used or studied). Only the Dreamer can teach someone how to harvest the mushrooms and prepare them properly, and only a successful **TN 3 Courtesy (Earth 4, Fire 4, Void 1) check** will persuade him to pass on such information.

EMERALD EMPIRE

GMs can find more information on Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams, on page 136 of *Emerald Empire: The Essential Guide to Rokugan*, a supplement that expands the world and offers both GMs and players an opportunity to delve deeper into the setting.

Sleeping in the Knotted Tails Village

The nezumi wish to make the PCs as comfortable as possible and find blankets to soften the ground inside the biggest tent (apart from Lucky Silver's), whether the PCs have agreed to sleep in the village or not. As nightfall approaches, the PCs are encouraged to sleep in the tent, protected by guards as well as groups of lookouts stationed at the edges of the village. The PCs can rest in relative comfort, protected from any prowling

TRANSCENDENTS

Nezumi believe in two forms of life after death: that being remembered grants a sort of immortality, their names living on in their tribe's memory, and that important heroes, leaders, and dreamers ascend to Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams, from where they can offer advice to their descendants. Those who ascend are known as Transcendents, as rather than simply dying they transcend the confines of the physical world. Dreamers seek them in the Realm of Dreams for their guidance, but Transcendents can also enter the dreams of the living when they wish to warn or encourage someone.

While Transcendents offer wise advice, it is often difficult to interpret. Existing in the shifting reality of the Realm of Dreams, Transcendents gradually lose their grasp of important concepts like time and space. The job of a Dreamer is to translate their

wisdom for the common nezumi, granting the tribe insight without causing confusion. However, the longer a Dreamer spends in the Realm of Dreams the more disconnected they become, until they are eventually more like the Transcendents themselves.

When a Transcendent visits someone who is untrained, the encounter might be interpreted as a confusing dream. Simple messages such as a general warning of danger are more likely to get through than complicated advice. A particularly zealous or ancient Transcendent might overwhelm the person they are trying to help, which is part of Frayed Whisker's problem. For the PCs, if they gain One Eye's approval, he encourages a Transcendent to offer them help in the future, to appear in their dreams to offer guidance when needed.

DREAMER'S BREW

The Knotted Tails Dreamer is capable of making a special brew that can expel certain kinds of Shadowlands parasites.

This is not a cure or treatment for the Taint, but can remove the Afflicted condition caused by such creatures.

If the PCs convince the Dreamer to allow them to help make the brew, they find that it requires a special kind of yellow fungus that grows on the craggy rocks by the nezumi graveyard. This can be an avenue for the GM to get the PCs to the graveyard for the final confrontation.

If the PCs return with the fungus, the Dreamer has already made the rest of the brew, and simply adds it to the bubbling mixture. The Dreamer is unwilling to tell the PCs what else is in the concoction.

Shadowlands monsters. If the PCs accept this hospitality, they are untroubled by nightmares and remove all strife. A knowledgeable shugenja might also deduce through a successful **TN 2 Theology (Void) check** that the presence of a Dreamer in the village is what protects their dreams.

THE REALM OF DREAMS

The Dreamer's chamber is set at the end of the main burrow, far from the other nezumi. No nezumi go this far down the tunnel, and this is as much out of respect as fear; they know not to disturb him. If the PCs seek him out, they are pointed in the right direction, but warned again not to wake him if he is still dreamdwelling. The PCs must enter the burrow to find him, which is large enough to admit them, but is cramped and dark. The PCs must pass through complete blackness before the small tunnel opens into a larger space, lit by a cluster of glowing mushrooms. This is where the Dreamer sits cross-legged, cloaked in a tattered blanket, apparently meditating, with a fairly clean bandage over one of his eyes.

If the PCs attempt to deliberately wake the Dreamer, he breaks his trance abruptly, but is angry and unwilling to speak to them, driving them from his home with a barrage of untranslatable nezumi insults and claw-prodding if they refuse to leave. Only by enlisting another nezumi to speak on their behalf will the PCs gain an audience if this happens.

If the PCs wait quietly, he will eventually, slowly, return from Yume-dō and speak to them, but this will require patience. The fastest way to speak to him would be for the PCs to meditate quietly with him. Then, he not only becomes aware of their presence more quickly, but is also impressed by their actions.

If and when the Dreamer does talk to the PCs, he can give them as much information as the GM desires. However, his long stays in Yume-dō have made him almost as detached as the Transcendents, or ancestors, he communes with, so all information he gives is presented cryptically, and he doesn't always answer the proposed question, but offers different information instead (see the **Transcendents** sidebar on page 15):

- ☸ "Ah, moths around a candle. My ancestor, Torn Ear the Second, had visitors once. He taught them the secret ways to the Realm of Dreams. We don't all have such minds." This refers to a group of samurai who visited the Knotted Tails generations before. Even the Rememberer knows little about them, as their business was with the Dreamer.
- ☸ "The dreams have grown darker, bloodier; they whisper of a violent return." The Dreamer is tapping into Frayed Whisker's dreams, but does not recognize him.
- ☸ "Such anger, such betrayal. What did our leader do, before her fur turned silver?"

NEZUMI DEAD

While Rokugani dead are cremated so there is no risk they rise to undeath, the practices of the Knotted Tails are very different. Skulls and bones are left deliberately visible so the dead are not forgotten, and they, as well as a few other tribes, pass the chosen graveyard regularly. This does not mean the nezumi like to visit and face their mortality. The Rememberers are the only nezumi to linger there to fulfill their duties. The markers they leave in the ground nearby communicate warnings and messages to the Rememberers of other tribes. These sticks are decorated with shiny stones or metal fragments and gnawed into peculiar shapes, and some have nezumi symbols scratched into them.

Unlike human remains, nezumi corpses are resistant to mahō, a property which may relate to their resistance to the Taint. The Knotted Tails believe their graveyard is safe from blood painters, so it is not guarded or hidden.

The Knotted Tails believe that the only nezumi corpses that rise again are those that evil sorcerers force Transcendents to return to. This is a rare and terrifying occurrence, resulting in angry undead, desperate to spill the blood of those who dared drag them back from the Realm of Dreams.

- ☸ "Someone out there dreams of home. He dreams of us. We are none of us forgotten."
- ☸ "Someone with a long memory, that's what you need. He dreams only of the past."
- ☸ "We don't all live so long. I only live so long as I live so little. I dream more than I live, and such dreams! But it is so hard to teach..."
- ☸ "It is so important to remember." Again, this can be used as a hint to encourage the PCs to speak to the Rememberer.
- ☸ "The castle is a twisted reality, with evil energy. The living cannot go there, not waking. Never waking."
- ☸ "The Transcendents warn of wicked things, wicked things to come. They see your path and do not envy it."
- ☸ "Dreams of Crabs, armor like shells, and a woman, but what is her name? Another moth, another with secrets, and such power..." This refers to Hiruma Masami, but the Dreamer does not know her identity, and the PCs cannot learn it except during *Mask of the Oni*.

Regardless of which of the above prophecies and ramblings are chosen, the GM should be sure to include the following two if they are looking to either guide the players back to the Rememberer or to the graveyard.

- ☸ “Memories, memories... he can’t even remember his own name! But the Transcendents remember it, they do. Hmm...hmm...something troubles him, something weighs on his mind.” This clue should be used if the PCs haven’t talked with the Rememberer much at this point, and the Rememberer will direct the PCs to the graveyard where his apprentice was supposed to go (see **Meeting the Rememberer** on page 11).
- ☸ “Surrounded by death! He breathes it in! Surrounded by bones, a small shadow fights for her life, go, go! Save the shadow!” Once the Dreamer says this, this is all he will repeat, urging the PCs to save “the shadow,” or Quick Shadow, the Rememberer’s apprentice, from some horror in the graveyard. This should only be used if the GM is ready for the PCs to move on from the village.

What should eventually become clear is that there is a nezumi out there who is angry at the Knotted Tails, particularly Lucky Silver. Someone who remembers the village, someone who knows the tribe. The Dreamer is too distracted to realize the significance of what he himself is saying, so it is up to the PCs to take this information to Lucky Silver or act on it.

The Dreamer is a good source of information about the Realm of Dreams, if the PCs wish to ask about this. For more information on the Dreamer’s methods, see the sidebar **Transcendents** on page 15. He has also met the Crab souls caught in Yume-dō, though he considers them honored Transcendents, and despite talking with them, he doesn’t understand why they would rather be elsewhere. He may mention a shugenja Transcendent whose name he doesn’t know, as this will be significant during *Mask of the Oni* (for more information, see **Helpful Dreams** on page 23 in *Mask of the Oni*).

If a PC is infected with the parasite, they may ask the Dreamer to make more of the healing brew to treat them. A successful **TN 1 Courtesy (Earth) check** persuades him to do so, but he insists it will take time and asks the PCs to help the tribe while he gathers the ingredients (see the margin sidebar **Dreamer’s Brew**).

If asked about the moth pendant (see **Nezumi Games** on page 11), the Dreamer says: “Old visitors, a very old thing. Not whole. I could use it, whole.” If the PCs can mend the pendant, through a **TN 3 Design (Earth) check** or by some other means in the future, the pendant becomes an item with the Sacred quality that reduces the TN of Meditation or Dreamdwelling checks by 1. The Dreamer covets such an item, which could be offered in exchange for something else, or as a gift to gain his favor.

ONE EYE, DREAMER OF THE KNOTTED TAILS

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK:  2  2

The One Eye’s fur is white, and so bright it picks up even the dim light of the mushrooms in his home and seems to glow. The only member of his tribe to wear no clothes or armor, he merely drapes a ragged blanket upon his shoulders, pulling it over his head like a hood and hiding his single eye from the sunlight when he leaves his burrow. His tribe grants him even greater respect than their leader or Rememberer, and some seem a little afraid of him. They whisper that he was actually there at the fall of Shiro Hiruma, he is so long lived. He spends much of his time dreamdwelling and communing with Transcendents or contemplating their cryptic warnings and advice. His self-imposed solitude and extended time in the Realm of Dreams has left him disconnected from the rest of his tribe. He is easily distracted and easily frustrated.



ARTISAN 1

MARTIAL 0

SCHOLAR 4

SOCIAL 1

TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES

DISADVANTAGES

Friendly Transcendents: Scholar; Mental**Distant:** Social; Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Claws and Teeth: Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 3**Gear (equipped):** Bandages, worn blanket

ABILITIES

DREAMREADER

One Eye is a being of silhouette 1 who can never gain the Afflicted condition or the Shadowlands Taint disadvantage. As a Scheme action, One Eye may enter a trance state. In a trance state, he counts as being Unconscious, but may perform the actions listed below:

Free the Dreamer (Support): One Eye purifies one target at range 0–2, removing the Unconscious condition and any effects that cloud its mind.

Whispers of the Mind (Scheme): One Eye scrys upon the mind of a sleeping or unconscious target at range 0–4.

Part 4: The Nezumi Graveyard

Although the Knotted Tails are nomadic, they often return to the same locations, and they regularly visit the graveyard on their route. Once the PCs learn there is a graveyard, any nezumi can point the PCs in the right direction to reach it, though none offer to accompany them. Used by several tribes, it is a grisley sight: a natural pit the nezumi have filled with the corpses of their dead over the centuries, leaving their bones and skulls exposed. While this is a horrifying thought for any samurai, for the nezumi it is a sign of respect. Their dead are not hidden and forgotten, and Rememberers can recognize their skulls and tell their stories.

LUCKY SILVER IN THE GRAVEYARD

Before the PCs head to the graveyard, whether asked by the Rememberer or pieced together throughout their time in the village, the PCs might seek to explain their theories about the disappearances to Lucky Silver. If they do, Lucky Silver is determined to go with to fight whatever or whoever the foe is.

If the PCs instead go straight to the graveyard without speaking to the Lucky Silver first, Frayed Whisker and his nezumi remain in hiding and don't attack until Lucky Silver is present.

In either case as the PCs arrive, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

You follow the nezumi's directions, and the pups that follow you from the village quickly turn back and leave you alone. You know it's not far, and yet it's unexpected when the chasm opens before you, a mound of brownish bone within stretching away into the distance. The sheer number of nezumi bodies here seems impossible, the flesh decayed and fallen away. Large flies buzz about the bones, though there is no scent on the still air.

As the PCs investigate the graveyard further, Lucky Silver arrives if she has not already. As they search together for signs of Quick Shadow, read or paraphrase the following:

Large posts have been stuck into the ground surrounding the pit, marked by scraps of cloth and bits of ribbon. Tufts of fur snagged on the jagged rocks near the edge of the pit flutter, caught by a wind you cannot feel. Drops of dark blood staining the ground suggest a recent struggle. Following them away from the pit, you find the ripped and bloodied bodies of two Knotted Tails scouts. A little further beyond the bodies you see the patched robes of a Rememberer—but she is nowhere to be found.

If at any point before arriving or while at the graveyard the PCs suggest the cause of the abductions is Frayed Whisker, Lucky Silver is in denial. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The grey-furred nezumi shakes her head and explains, "Many years have passed since I was a young leader to my tribe, and I am now old. The creature or monsters that seek my people's blood must be fast and strong, and Frayed Whisker would be old, like me now. I am still strong, but it would take a much greater strength to attack my warriors so easily."

If the PCs continue to look around, they find a post that Quick Shadow seems to have been working on, scratched with etchings similar to those found at the end of the burrow (see **The Burrows** on page 14 for more details). Though

Lucky Silver struggles, she is able to decipher the warning: that a whole pack of nezumi stalks the Knotted Tails. With



the object of his rage present, Frayed Whisker's minions begin their assault; read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Bones begin to crunch in the pit nearby as you search the area for the missing Rememberer. As if beckoned by the sound, a figure scampers up the side of the pit—then another, and another. Soon there is a horde of nezumi emerging from the browned bones and rotting flesh, heading straight for Lucky Silver. She calls out, seeing members of her tribe she thought dead, “My people, my friends, my blood! What are you doing? You are found!”

CONFRONTATION

The following is a skirmish as described on page 262 of the core rulebook. Among the nezumi are several members of the Knotted Tails, entranced by Frayed Whisker's dreamwalking and also nezumi from different tribes, either abducted or exiled. All of these nezumi use the outcast nezumi profile on page 20. For a group of four PCs of rank 2, there are five nezumi outcasts. If the Crab Escort is present see the **Dramatizing an Encounter** margin sidebar on this page. To adjust this encounter, GMs can take the total group rank of the PCs and any companions with profiles (excluding Lucky Silver) and divide by two plus one to find the appropriate number of nezumi outcasts.

THE SURROUNDINGS

All terrain in the graveyard is Defiled terrain (see the Defiled Terrain margin sidebar on the right). To the right of Lucky Silver is the massive graveyard pit. The pit is considered Defiled and Dangerous (see terrain margin sidebars to the right). If a character willingly chooses to enter the pit, that character must forfeit honor and glory equal to their current honor and glory ranks. Entering the pit for any reason causes a character to receive 4 strife.

There are several jagged rocky outcroppings that rise up in front of where Lucky Silver and the PCs are, and these slopes are considered Dangerous terrain.

HELPING THE TRIBE

The outcast nezumi engage with everyone present, but are more focused on Lucky Silver. The PCs must decide whether saving Lucky Silver is worth risking their lives and their true mission in the Shadowlands. If they decide to help, the Dreamer arrives the second round of combat, taking the lowest initiative. As the Dreamer arrives read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Angry dreams whisper in the ears of our lost kin! Find the whisperer, find them! I will free the trapped ones. Find the whisperer!

The Dreamer begins using his Dreamreader ability (noted on page 17) and starts releasing the controlled nezumi from Frayed Whisker's influence. However, if the Dreamer is attacked he will wake from this state. Lucky Silver refuses to harm her people, and instead uses the Guard or Assist actions as appropriate (see pages 163-164 of the core rulebook). She will, however, attempt to attack Frayed Whisker if he is visible. If it looks like the Dreamer is going to be attacked, Lucky Silver calls out, “Protect the Dreamer, his body quiets, but his mind works to free them!”

In the third round of combat, there is movement at the top of one of the treacherous slopes. Frayed Whisker enters the scene, acting at the same initiative as the nezumi outcasts. He prefers to stay distant, controlling and cursing the nezumi below (see page 20 for the profiles of Frayed Whisker and the outcast nezumi). If Frayed Whisker is killed or loses consciousness, the nezumi affected by his dreamwalking are released from his control.

When Frayed Whisker appears, he calls out over the graveyard. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

See me, Lucky Silver? See Frayed Whisker, stronger now! You are weak, weak like the Dreamer and weak like the tribe. Abandoned me, abandoned the one who could fight back the bad that comes! Die now, die! You are the bad now!

Lucky Silver is notably shocked by Frayed Whisker's arrival. Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

You...you have not aged one day! Frayed Whisker, please, you do not need to do this anymore. The Dreamer believes he can help!

Frayed Whisker scoffs at this and the battle continues. Throughout it, Lucky Silver makes comments about being unwise as a young leader and making the rash decision to expel Frayed Whisker from the tribe. She regrets this heavily, and it has weighed on her for years. Though saving the Knotted Tails from Frayed Whisker is the main goal of this storyline, but it may now occur to a PC that Frayed Whisker himself could be saved. If Frayed Whisker is captured alive, One Eye, or a powerful shugenja, might be able to help him, either by completing his training or severing his tie to the Realm of Dreams.

LEAVING LUCKY SILVER TO HER FATE

If the PCs let Lucky Silver fight alone they must forfeit 3 honor for violating the Bushidō tenants of Jin (compassion) and Yū (courage). Left alone to face Frayed Whisker and his horde, she dies. Then Frayed Whisker waits until night to attack the village, whether the PCs are still there or not. Without leadership, the village is decimated and some flee while others stay to fight and die.

DRAMATIZING AN ENCOUNTER

If the Crab Escort from *Mask of the Oni* is being used as a narrative device to show off the horrors of the Shadowlands rather than being used as individual NPCs (giving each Crab Escort a profile is not recommended, as it will complicate things for the GM, make combats much longer, and has the potential to outshine the PCs) the GM can add one or two outcast nezumi per Crab to fight these NPCs and add to the drama of the encounter.

If Hida Nagahide is being used with the loyal bushi profile, add two nezumi outcasts to balance for her presence.

DEFILED TERRAIN

All characters within an area that is defiled, such as the nezumi graveyard, must make a TN 2 Fitness or Meditation check. Each character who fails suffers the Afflicted condition (see page 271 of the core rulebook). Tainted beings reduce the TNs of their checks to resist the effects by 1 while in Defiled terrain.

DANGEROUS TERRAIN

When a character in Dangerous terrain performs a check, the character suffers physical damage equal to the ☯ symbols on their kept dice.

OUTCAST NEZUMI

MINION

CONFLICT RANK:  2  1

These nezumi survive by instinct, running on four paws and eating anything they find, including rotting carcasses. Their solitary life in the Shadowlands leaves them unable to communicate even with other nezumi. They recognize scent signals to keep away, so they rarely bother the tribes, but consider any Rokugani either as an enemy or potential food. Without the advantages of civilized nezumi, they are usually a threat only to a lone scout or group of wounded samurai. Occasionally, they band together to hunt, but once the prey runs out they inevitably turn on each other.



ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 2 SCHOLAR 0 SOCIAL 1 TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES

Instinctive Behavior:

 Martial; Physical

Always Hungry:

 Martial; Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Claws and Teeth: Range 0, Damage 2, Deadline 3

Gear (equipped): Fur (Physical 1), several haunches of raw meat

ABILITIES

FEROCIOUS DEFENDER

An outcast nezumi is a being of silhouette 1 who can never gain the Afflicted condition or the Shadowlands Taint disadvantage. When it is the target of an Attack action check, it may receive 1 strife to negate 1  from the attacker's check result.

FRAYED WHISKER

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK:  3  2

Sandy furred, with unusually long claws and ragged ears, Frayed Whisker is older than he looks. Many of the nezumi who follow him are compelled to do so by forces they do not understand, and should he fall or be incapacitated, they cease fighting for him. In the meantime, having a group of followers makes him arrogant and self-assured, and he has been getting bolder when selecting victims from the Knotted Tails village. He suffers from visions while awake and asleep, making him angry and frustrated at his inability to block the nightmares from his mind.



ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 3 SCHOLAR 1 SOCIAL 2 TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES

Sneaky:

 Martial, Trade; Physical

Arrogance:

 Social; Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS

Makeshift Blade: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadline 3

Gear (equipped): Ragged Armored Robes (Physical 2)

ABILITIES

DREAMWALKER

Frayed Whisker is a being of silhouette 1 who can never gain the Afflicted condition or the Shadowlands Taint disadvantage. Frayed Whisker can perform the actions listed below:

Ensnares the Dreamer (Scheme): Frayed Whisker binds one Unconscious target at range 0–2. The target can act as if they were not Unconscious, but do so according to Frayed Whisker's will. This effect persists until the target ceases to be Unconscious.

Rattle the Mind (Scheme): Frayed Whisker curses up to 2 nezumi at range 0–1. The affected nezumi immediately perform an Attack action targeting a target of Frayed Whisker's choosing (then regains control of itself).

Part 5: Resolution

If Frayed Whisker dies during the confrontation, the other outcast nezumi scatter and the Knotted Tails are safe. The tribe is immensely grateful, and offers the PCs gifts, such as an item from the Shrine to Memory (see **The Shrine to Memory** on page 12). Assuming Lucky Silver survives, she also pledges loyalty to the PCs on behalf of her tribe, which gives the PCs the Support of the Knotted Tails advantage (see page 110 of the core rulebook). She also offers a Knotted Tails infiltrator as a guide (see page 21) to show the PCs the way into Shiro Hiruma, should that be their destination, or possibly another location if it is within a reasonable distance. With a nezumi infiltrator as a guide, the PCs can navigate the tunnels into Shiro Hiruma with relative ease, but no Knotted Tails nezumi is willing to explore the castle. Once the PCs are inside, any accompanying nezumi scamper home.

The PCs can rest and recover before they leave the Knotted Tails village. The PCs gain the following experience, glory, and honor:

- ✱ If the PCs risked their lives to save Lucky Silver, demonstrating the Bushidō tenet of Yū (courage), they each gain 4 honor.
- ✱ 1 XP for completing the skirmish, regardless of success.
- ✱ 2 XP for freeing some or all of the controlled nezumi.
- ✱ 1 XP and 3 honor for capturing Frayed Whisker alive.

If the PCs aided the Knotted Tails and the Dreamer is alive, the PCs may meet a Transcendent in their dreams within Shiro Hiruma, if this supplement is played with *Mask of the Oni*, or while they are otherwise traveling in the Shadowlands. The Transcendent tries to help the PCs with their mission, though his warnings are cryptic (see the **Transcendent Advice** on page 22). If the PCs utilize the nezumi infiltrator and the Hiruma ghosts are saved, the tribe considers themselves redeemed. They may even cease to tie knots in their tails.

THREE TOOTH, KNOTTED TAILS INFILTRATOR

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK:  2  1

While adaptable like the Knotted Tails warriors, Three Tooth is a lean, brown-furred nezumi who specializes in helping scouts on their missions and boasts that he is one of the few in his tribe to have actually entered Shiro Hiruma before, though he is known to overexaggerate. Braver than most of his tribe, he nevertheless has a keen survival instinct and will flee if he feels the odds are against him. Using his size and speed to his advantage, Three Tooth is able to hide, sneak, and run really fast.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
30	HONOR	ENDURANCE	8
20	GLORY	COMPOSURE	7
00	STATUS	FOCUS	5
+1, -2 DEMEANOR - CURIOUS		VIGILANCE	8

ARTISAN 0

MARTIAL 1

SCHOLAR 1

SOCIAL 1

TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Fleet of Foot:

 Martial; Physical

Opportunist:

 Martial; Mental

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Nezumi blade Range 0–1, Damage 3, Deadliness 3**Gear (equipped):** Makeshift armor (Physical 2)

ABILITIES

ESCAPE ARTIST

Three Tooth is a being of silhouette 1 who can never gain the Afflicted condition or the Shadowlands Taint disadvantage. When cornered or about to be captured, the infiltrator can perform a **TN 2 Survival (Fire) check** to find an escape route for himself and any companions.

TIES BACK TO MASK OF THE ONI

After the fight at the graveyard, the PCs may proceed to Shiro Hiruma, with or without the help of the nezumi. At this point, it is recommended that the PCs get the opportunity to rest, whether in the nezumi encampment or on their way to their destination so they are as prepared as possible for the horrors of the castle.



WHAT IF THE PCS JUST KILL OR IGNORE THE NEZUMI?

While interaction with the Knotted Tails is encouraged, players should not be forced to act contradictory to the nature and goals of the PCs. If the PCs fight and kill the initial nezumi patrol, a larger group of nezumi warriors follows the first, shouting insults to the PCs, declaring that real samurai would not soil the ground with innocent blood. For a group of four PCs that are rank 2, four scouts (using the Knotted Tails warrior profile on page 6) are present. This gives the PCs a second chance to choose to talk rather than fight, but if they kill this group of nezumi, word spreads among the tribes and the PCs gain the Scorn of the Nezumi disadvantage found on page 127 of the core rulebook. After completing this encounter, if the PCs chose to kill or talk their way out of working with the nezumi, they gain 1XP.

If the PCs do not help the Knotted Tails, Frayed Whisker kills Lucky Silver, swells the ranks of his army, and eventually decimates the tribe. While the PCs are traveling in the Shadowlands in the future they have a chance to encounter Frayed Whisker and his a band of outcast nezumi. For a group of four PCs of rank 2 there are four outcast nezumi present along with Frayed Whisker. If the Crab Escort is present, add one additional outcast nezumi. For more information on adding drama to encounters with the Crab Escort, see the **Dramatizing an Encounter** margin sidebar on page 19. To adjust this encounter for different group sizes and ranks, see **Gauging an Encounter** on page 310 of the core rulebook.

This encounter is dangerous and surviving it gains PCs 2 XP. GMs should keep in mind that players should not be exhausted when they arrive at Shiro Hiruma, if this storyline is being played with *Mask of the Oni*, and will also likely be out of most resources after completing that adventure. Frayed Whisker and his minions should be used carefully to enhance the Shadowlands experience, not hinder it.

TRANSCENDENT ADVICE

If the GM decides it is appropriate for a Transcendent to enter the dreams of the PCs, either inside Shiro Hiruma or during some other adventure, read or paraphrase the following:

It seems only a moment has passed since you began drifting off to sleep, yet here you are, walking through an icy grey mist that sits so heavy in the air it does not part as you pass through.

GMs should make it clear to the PC or PCs that they are in a dreamlike world where they have little power over their wispy, faintly glowing forms. The read aloud continues:

After a moment, an hour, or maybe an eternity, you spy a glow like sunlight breaking through clouds. Whispers begin, first ahead and then all around you, fast and urgent, clamoring for your attention, each drowning the others out. You can make no sense of them, and they grow louder and louder, until a sudden crack brings silence.

The mist drifts away like smoke on the wind, and an aged nezumi in bloodied Crab armor stands before you, a thick staff in one black-furred paw. The dark-stained end of this is planted on the ground, mist swirling round the wood and fading away. The old nezumi lifts his head and fixes his beady eyes on you. Large silver hoops hang from his ears, reflecting a blinding light.

The Transcendent is Silver Ears, once leader of the Knotted Tails. He has seen the past and the future, the dreams of his tribe, the Hiruma, the PCs, and many less-welcome visitors to the Shadowlands. The PCs might notice that he appears with a staff (the same broken staff from **The Burrows** on page 14) and not the Kaiu wakizashi. He can reveal whatever the GM wishes the PCs to know, but he does not simply answer questions. He might appear to say one thing, but with layers of hidden meaning, be it through a riddle, an anecdote, or a very important clue, its nature is up to the GM.

On waking, the PCs might suffer 1 strife for their disturbed sleep, but also gain 1 Void point, as being visited by a Transcendent infers an important destiny.

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Legend of the Five Rings

ROLEPLAYING

THE KNOTTED TAILS

DISCOVER WHAT FOUL CREATURE HUNTS FOR NEZUMI BLOOD IN THE SHADOWLANDS

As a band of samurai travels through the dangerous, twisting landscape of the Shadowlands they encounter strange rat-like creatures called nezumi. The scouts describe a monster who hunts their tribe and they plead with the samurai for aid. Faced with a possible lead on their adventure, the samurai must choose whether they will help or destroy the scouts of the Knotted Tails tribe.

A supplemental storyline for *Mask of the Oni*, *The Knotted Tails* expands upon the information presented in *Shadowlands*, a sourcebook on the twisted machinations of the fallen Kami Fu Leng and introduces players to a remorseful tribe of nezumi. This storyline for the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* offers heroes a mystery to solve and a slight reprieve from the dangers of the Shadowlands while they journey onward towards Shiro Hiruma.



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