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FORGOTTEN REALMS™

Official Game Adventure



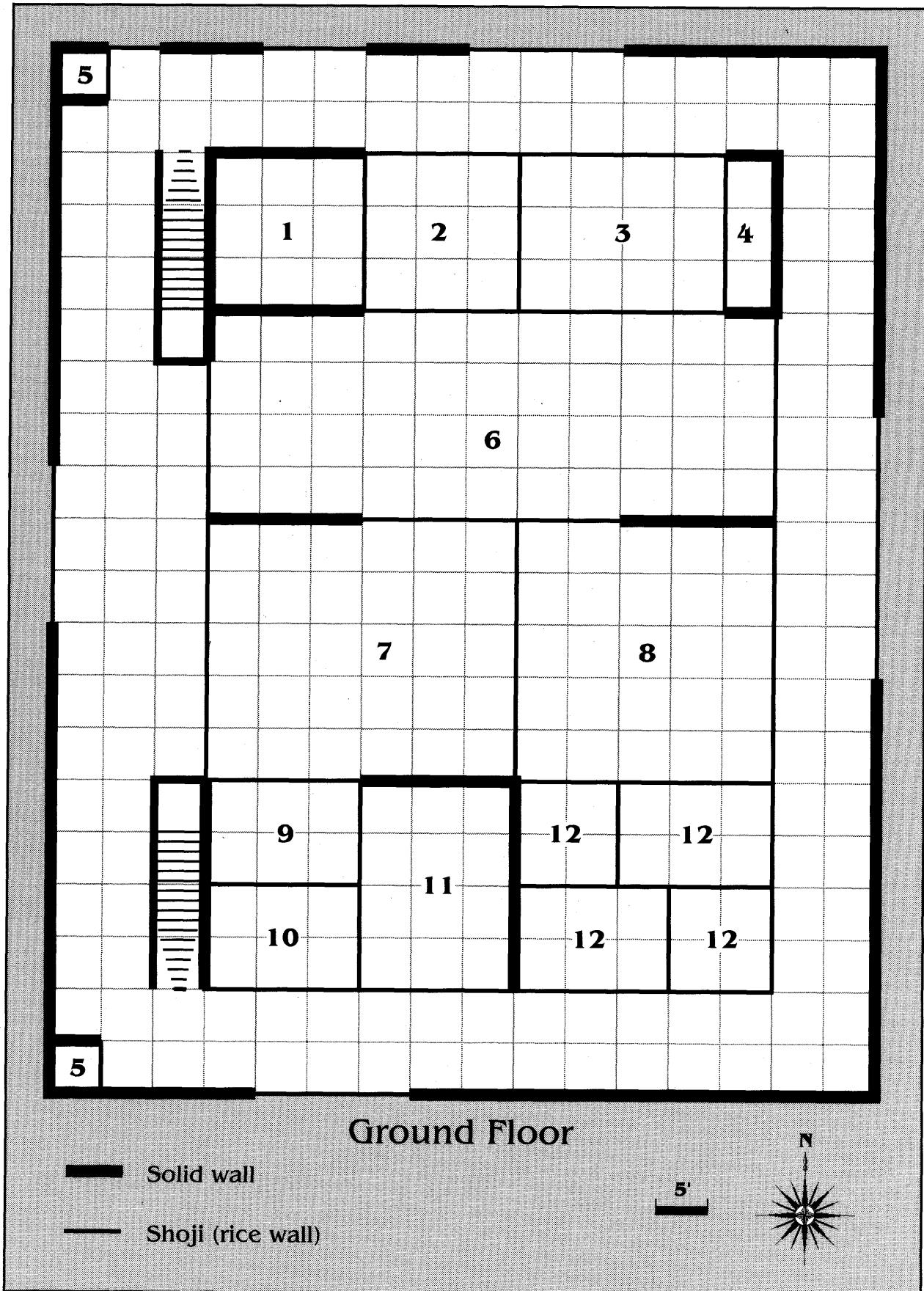
Oriental Adventures

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Ninja Wars

By Nigel Findley

Benju's Donjon





OFFICIAL GAME ADVENTURE

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Printed in the U.S.A.
ISBN 0-88038-895-1

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Chapter I: Introduction

Welcome to *Ninja Wars*, the latest in the series of *Oriental Adventures* modules set in the world of Kara-Tur. To use this module, you need to have a copy of the *Oriental Adventures* hardcover. Although it isn't strictly necessary, it would be useful if you had access to the *Kara-Tur Campaign Set* and the module *Blood of the Yakuza* – since these products contain information on the land of Wa, where this adventure takes place. This package contains enough information for the DM to be able to use it without reference to these earlier products; however, the additional information found in *Kara-Tur* and *Blood of the Yakuza* will help the DM in developing and maintaining the atmosphere that is so vital to a successful *Oriental Adventures* session.

Story Line

Here's a brief overview of the story line of the module. It will help familiarize the DM with the names of important places and NPCs, and give a "broad strokes" picture of how the adventure will probably develop.

The adventure takes place in and around the town of Aru, a remote community on the west coast of the island nation of Wa. Its only claim to fame is that it's the site of a famous shrine – the **Shining Temple of Bishamon** – that is the destination of tens of thousands of pilgrims each summer. Because of its remote location, the shogun pays little attention to the town or its politics, and never notices the actions of Aru's *daimyo* (or lord) . . . unless that daimyo makes a mistake. The easiest way for the daimyo to make a mistake is to let something happen which interferes with the steady and smooth flow of pilgrims into and out of the town. If this should happen, the shogun is certain to notice, and is quite likely to replace the daimyo with a member of another clan. This removal from office will usually be accompanied by "permission" from the shogun for the disgraced daimyo to "take the final step on the road of life." Over the past several decades, the daimyate has been held by members of five clans. In only one case – the Matsutomo clan – has the daimyate been held by more than one member of that clan. In fact, there have been five Matsutomo daimyos, four of whom have been removed from their posts because of some failure or other.

The current daimyo is **Benju Matsutomo**. Once a bold samurai, Benju is very much aware of his clan's heritage of bad luck when it comes to ruling Aru. Thus, he is doing everything in his power to make sure that the pilgrimage season is running smoothly, and that everything is well-prepared for the upcoming **Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps** at the Shining Temple.

Unfortunately for Benju, there's another inhabitant of the Aru region that would very much like to see the pilgrimage season and the Ceremony disrupted. This individual is **Eichiro Tanaka**. For personal reasons, he hates Benju and would love to see that worthy forced out of office. Eichiro would also like to see him-

self in the position of daimyo. To reach that end, he's hired a newly-formed "family" of ninjas – the **Yamaguchi** clan, led by **Takahashi Yamaguchi** – to help him out. In a carefully-planned campaign of ninja assassinations and terror tactics, Eichiro plans to stir up enough fear and commotion in Aru to attract the attention of the distant shogun. When the commotion has reached its peak, Eichiro plans to march into town at the head of his small personal army, and destroy the "evil influences" that have been causing all the trouble. This involves betraying and destroying Takahashi Yamaguchi and his ninjas, of course, but nothing must stand between Eichiro and his eventual success. While this move will purportedly be a friendly gesture towards Benju – in fact, an attempt to solve the problems before Benju gets in trouble – Eichiro hopes that the shogun will interpret it in a different light: as an indication that Eichiro can take care of business, while Benju is an impotent blunderer.

Although he doesn't know the details of the plot, Benju has learned through his intelligence network that something unpleasant is afoot. Realizing that his position and honor depend on maintaining the smooth running of the pilgrim season, the daimyo has decided to invest in a little "insurance." Benju has hired his own ninja "family" – the clan **Ohara** – and charged them with protecting the pilgrims . . . and, incidentally, Benju and his family.

A third faction at work in Aru is the local yakuza clan. The clan's network of informers has told the *oyabun* the basis of Eichiro's plan. In fact, the *oyabun* is better informed than Benju, since he knows that Eichiro is behind everything. The yakuza clan sees this as a great opportunity. While Benju is distracted by Eichiro's maneuvering, perhaps the yakuza can grab a little more influence in Aru. Thus it's in their best interest to indirectly aid Eichiro by stirring up more trouble . . . but not too much. They know how life would be with the ruthless Eichiro as daimyo, and don't relish the prospect at all.

If that weren't enough, a wandering *wu jen* of great power – **Daisake Mayazato** – has moved into the area. For his own reasons, he wants the pilgrimages stopped, and believes that force is the only way to guarantee this. He is backed by three ninjas of great power, rogues who have left the family that trained them. Daisake has nothing against Benju as daimyo, and certainly doesn't like Eichiro. But if the removal of Benju is the price the *wu jen* must pay to stop the pilgrimages, then so be it.

It's into this volatile situation that the PCs have wandered. As travelling adventurers, they represent a fresh perspective on the problem, and Benju immediately recognizes this. One way or another, he persuades the PCs to work with him. Benju is very careful about what he tells the PCs; initially, he tells them only that there have been some "incidents" in Aru, and that he wants them to investigate them to the best of their ability.

As matters begin to escalate, the PCs discover evi-

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dence pointing to a spy in Benju's household. Benju's son-in-law—a young firebrand named **Buntaro** whose arrogance gets on most people's nerves—is acting suspiciously, and the PCs are placed in a position where they can challenge and arrest the young man. Unfortunately for the PCs, it turns out that, while Buntaro did have a hidden agenda, it was perfectly harmless. In addition, Buntaro is unaccountably one of Benju's favorite relatives. Shamed, the PCs are expelled from Benju's household.

Eichiro learns of the PCs dismissal immediately, and suspects a trick; perhaps—he thinks—Benju is hoping that Eichiro will try to recruit the "disaffected" adventurers. Eichiro decides to send a message to Benju . . . a message that will take the form of the PCs corpses. Should they manage to escape Eichiro's attempt on their lives, the PCs are able to uncover some valuable intelligence with which they can buy their way back into Benju's good graces.

With only a day or two left before the ceremony, the PCs must uncover Eichiro's plans. If they can prove to Takahashi Yamaguchi that Eichiro plans to turn on the ninja clan and destroy them, then the ninja leader will dissolve his contract with Eichiro, and will testify against him to anyone who will listen. The ninja's testimony will seal Eichiro's fate, and stabilize Benju's position of authority.

PC Involvement

The success or failure of Eichiro's plan—and hence Benju's life—depends entirely on the actions of the PCs. Without their involvement, Benju will be unable to uncover the true nature of the threat against him and thus combat it. Eichiro's ninjas will stage an incident threatening to disrupt the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, then Eichiro himself will lead his army into town and eradicate the ninjas he himself hired. The shogun will certainly hear of these events, and Eichiro will replace Benju as daimyo.

At this point, the wu jen and his ninjas will step up their campaign to stop the pilgrims. Finding himself in a position chillingly similar to the one he placed Benju in, Eichiro must try to negate the threat of the wu jen and his followers. Without help he will be unable to do so, and the Ceremony and subsequent pilgrimages will be disrupted. Eichiro will, in turn, be replaced. With three daimyos in such a short time span, the entire Aru province will be thrown into chaos.

Obviously, the success of the PCs is pivotal to the continued well-being of the whole province.

How To Use This Book

Ninja Wars is divided into several chapters, each of which serves a distinct purpose in unfolding the story described above. By reading over the following chapter outline, the DM can quickly find the information he requires on any subject. Since this is, obviously, Chapter I, the outline begins with Chapter II.

Chapter II gives a brief history of Aru, both the town and the province.

Chapter III describes the layout of Aru town, and describes some of the points of interest.

Chapter IV describes the intricate political situation in Aru, and the balancing act that Benju Matsutomo is forced to maintain. Much of this has already been hinted at in the "Story Line" section above.

Chapter V contains the encounters and events that make up the main story line of the adventure.

Chapter VI contains "mini-adventures" and adventure ideas. Aru is an active town, after all, particularly as the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps approaches. There is much more going on than the events relating to the major story line. This chapter provides the DM with story starters for "background" encounters and events. Some of these encounters tie in—at least peripherally—with the main adventure; some are red herrings, and some are totally unrelated. The DM can pick and choose from among them, and use as many or as few as he or she sees fit. Many of these story starters can be used in other adventures as well, or might even plant the seed for a full-scale gaming session on their own behalf.

Chapter VII contains the complete descriptions of the major NPCs involved in this adventure. Minor NPCs are described in the text of the adventure when they occur.

Chapter VIII is an "Encounter Generator." This is a way for DMs to quickly generate random encounters to spring on the PCs whenever it seems appropriate.

Chapter IX contains a series of brief adventures that can be used as sequels, side adventures, or stand alone games. For those who need to fill a single game session, these are excellent tools.



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Chapter II: History Of Aru

Origins

Even several hundred years ago—as far back as trustworthy records go—there was a settlement on the site of what is now called Aru town. Initially, it was just a tiny shrine to Bishamon, tended by a handful of dedicated monks. Even then, however, it was the destination of a small but steady stream of pilgrims. At first, there were no facilities to house or otherwise care for these pilgrims. On arrival, they would simply set up camp near the shrine, and live in these harsh conditions for the length of their stay. The journey to the shrine was difficult, leading as it did through some of the most rugged passes of the Ikuyu Mountains. Each year, during the pilgrimage “season”—summer, because of the difficulty of traversing the passes during bad weather—some of the pilgrims would die as a result of the taxing journey and the austere conditions once they reached their destination. The monks were forced to set up at least some facilities to succor the pilgrims.

As the decades passed, some of the pilgrims took up permanent residence near the shrine. Others came to the area, to provide services for—and, if the truth be known, to profit from—the influx of pilgrims. Soon a town had sprung up centered on the shrine—a town *de facto* if not *de jure*; it was not yet recognized by the government of Wa, and so had no daimyo or official government. The monks of the shrine—some of whom were well-skilled in the martial arts—provided protection against bandits and did their best to ensure that the burgeoning town didn’t become lawless.

During this time, the shrine itself grew, supported by the donations of the faithful. A tiny shrine became a small temple, and eventually expanded into a large temple. By the year 1594, the Shining Temple of Bishamon had taken on much of the form it has today. As the temple’s fame became more widespread, the flow of pilgrims and sightseers increased.

The Founding Of Aru

It was the shogun Eiko Nagahide—who assumed that office in 1601—who officially recognized what had, in fact, been reality for years. The shrine, its monks and its other “support staff” had become a town, even a small city. In 1608 he officially named the settlement **Aru**—after a small river that provided the area with fresh water—and decreed that it would be the capital of a newly-formed province split off from Jasuga Province. The newly-formed Aru province would officially include the Isle of Devils, and would be responsible for many of the passes through the Ikuyu Mountains.

Of course, a new province needs a new daimyo. The shogun selected a family that he knew was totally loyal to him—the Matsutomo clan—and ordered that they relocate to Aru. The head of the clan was Arata Matsutomo, and he became the first daimyo of Aru Province.

Arata served loyally and well for almost 20 years. But then, in 1627, bandits supported by supernatural creatures of some kind—perhaps tengu, perhaps something else—fell upon a large train of pilgrims on their way to Aru and slew them all. Although the attack took place in one of the mountain passes, well short of the town, the event was within Aru Province, and thus was Arata’s responsibility. Arata received a strong reprimand from the shogun. The next year, in 1628, a similar attack occurred. Although this time the pilgrim train was guarded by Arata’s samurai, the result was the same: no survivors.

Uneasy is The Head . . .

This time the shogun’s displeasure was sufficient to warrant the removal of Arata. The daimyate was passed on to Sousuke Toda, the head of a clan that had recently taken up residence in Aru. Sousuke Toda served well as daimyo, and everything was quiet for almost a decade. But then Sousuke was killed in a hunting accident, and his young son Eiji—barely 17, having just reached his majority—took over as daimyo. Although ardent in his desire to serve well as daimyo of Aru Province, Eiji was simply too inexperienced. In the three successive years after his ascent to the position of daimyo, bandit attacks savaged the pilgrim trains, and in 1640 a small raiding party of barbarians—perhaps from Shou-Lung-won through the daimyo’s defenses to the outskirts of the town and burned much of the eta settlement. Although the shogun—now Takahiro Nagahide—was willing to grant Eiji Toda some leeway because of his youth and inexperience, this latter failure was simply too much. Eiji Toda was removed from office, and he died without heirs, ending the Toda line in Aru.

The shogun turned back to the Matsutomo clan, and named Koji Matsutomo the new daimyo. Koji was a weak man, well-loved by the peasants but generally despised by the other noble families that had steadily been moving to Aru. He managed to survive two coup attempts in 1645 and 1649, and responded by concentrating all his efforts on trying to protect himself and his family. This led to his paying insufficient attention to the administration of the province, and corruption grew rampant. In 1652, when the annual shipment of tax payments arrived at Uwaji, its actual contents turned out to be some thirty percent less than what was listed on the manifest. Koji Matsutomo was removed, and the daimyate fell to Seiji Kubahachi.

The clan Kubahachi ruled Aru well for two generations. The third daimyo in this line was Koji Kubahachi, a strong and cruel ruler with a harsh temper. His most memorable act took place in 1713, when a particular fishing village short-changed him on a special tax he levied to pay for improvements to his castle. In response, he slaughtered all the residents of the village, burned all buildings, salted the ground . . . and for good measure extended the same practice to the two neighboring villages on the grounds that

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they must have known about the plot to defraud him.

In 1717, an attempt was made on Koji Kubahachi's life by two ninjas who entered Aru disguised as members of a group of pilgrims. Both ninjas died in the attempt, so Koji was unable to learn who had paid for his removal. In retribution, and as a message to the ninjas' unknown patron, the daimyo had every member of that pilgrim train killed.

This was a little too much for the shogun—now Matsanori Nagahide—who removed Koji Kubahachi from office and bade him leave the land of the living. Once more, the shogun returned to the clan Matsutomo to find his new daimyo.

The new Matsutomo daimyo—Masakito—vowed not to make the same mistakes that his less-than-illustrious ancestors had made. His rule was strict and efficient, and certainly more enlightened than had been Koji Kubahachi's. Unfortunately, Masakito wasn't a young man when he assumed the office, and he died after only eight years. In 1725, Masakito's son, Hisao, took over as daimyo. His wisdom was considerably less than that of his father, and soon Aru province sank back into a state of rampant corruption. Many of his advisors set up their own "business interests", the most noticeable of which was charging the pilgrims a "visitation fee" if they wanted to worship at the Shining Temple. Word soon reached the shogun of this serious contravention of tradition, and once more the Matsutomo daimyo was removed from office.

Takashi Yayazato became daimyo in 1730, and he ruled well until 1758. When he took office, Takashi had three strong sons and potential heirs. During his rule, however, all three were killed—two when a typhoon sank the vessel they were travelling on, and the third in a tragic mishap while climbing the treacherous "Dragon's Face" of Mount Matazan. When Takashi Yayazato died he did so without official (i.e., male) heirs. Once more, in what had by now become almost a tradition, the shogun—now Matusuri Nagahide, in the fourth year of his rule—named another Matsutomo as daimyo.

Benju Matsutomo

This was Benju Matsutomo. He was a powerful and bold samurai, known throughout Wa for his courage and wisdom. Since 1758 he has ruled Aru Province, and in general he has ruled well. As he aged, however, he has become more and more concerned about the well-being of his family. He has concluded that many of his forebears' mistakes were the result of overambition, of doing too much—paraphrasing an old folk tale, of being more like King Stork than King Log. Benju has decided to play the role of King Log to the hilt: to remain as quiet and inactive as possible, to avoid making waves... and hence making mistakes. If his clan can hold onto the daimyate for several generations—Benju believes—they may eventually be rewarded with a better position.



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Chapter III: Aru Town

Like many cities in Wa, Aru is a walled town. Its four main gates are open during the day, but closed at sunset. By day the gates are guarded by detachments of 12 samurai, whose main job is to keep the peace; at night, 20 samurai are stationed in the watchtowers that flank each gate.

Aru is built in the shadow of a large, rocky knoll to the north of the town. It's atop this knoll, several hundred feet above the city, that the Shining Temple of Bishamon stands. Leading up to the temple from the Temple Gate is a broad staircase of three thousand steps. The staircase is made of the finest white marble, and pilgrims work constantly to keep it spotlessly clean. Each day, pilgrims leave blossoms, flower petals or prayers written on tiny pieces of parchment on the steps. The stairway is flanked by rows of wooden pillars dyed red and topped with ivory spires.

The town is divided internally into different districts, or wards. People can travel between the wards only by passing through gates. These gates are usually open, but squads of eight samurai stand round-the-clock watches at the ward gates. No passes or other approval is necessary to enter or leave any ward (except for the Castle District, of course), and the gate guards never prevent the free passage of people. Cultural traditions are very strong in Aru, however, and these traditions are taken so seriously that they have the force of law. For instance, it's unacceptable for an *eta* to enter the samurai district except when making a delivery. Conversely, members of the samurai caste will enter the



eta quarter only if their current duty requires it.

The wards have quite different personalities. The ***Eta District*** has narrow, winding streets, and most buildings are small and dilapidated. Tiny *minka* are the rule. The streets are dirty, and there are many beggars.

The **Pilgrim District** is an area of hostels and *ryokans* (inns). Its main purpose is to house and support the many pilgrims that come to Aru. There are many stores of various kinds, and almost all of them sell religious trappings and paraphernalia, such as strings of prayer beads, tiny brass apples, etc. Prices for food and other essentials are usually higher here. For this reason, only the most naive pilgrims actually buy anything in this district. The area is clean, and well-patrolled by samurai.

The **Merchant District** is a bustling area of shopkeepers and artisans. There are few if any *ryokans* or hostelries. The streets are crowded from dawn to dusk, often almost blocked with vendors' wagons and stalls. By night, however, the streets are almost deserted. The Merchant District also comprises the warehouse area.

The **Samurai District** is reserved exclusively for members of the samurai caste. (This doesn't mean that every resident of the district is of the samurai character class, of course.) It is almost exclusively residential, with few stores. The buildings here are well-built and generally attractive. The streets are kept scrupulously clean, and are well-patrolled.

The **Castle District** is reserved for the daimyo's household and his troops. The gates are always shut, and guarded by detachments of at least 12 well-armed samurai. Very few townsfolk have ever seen the inside of this district. In the center of the district is Benju's central donjon.

The remainder of the town is referred to as the "**Mixed**" District. It's here that members of all the different castes and occupations rub shoulders. There are many food stores, restaurants, tea gardens, and bars of one variety or another. During the summer, the level of activity remains high throughout the day, and continues well into the night.

Places Of Interest

1. **The Shining Temple of Bishamon.** The temple stands atop the high knoll to the north of the town. Apart from the area directly around the temple, the top of the knoll is covered with trees.

For the temple itself, use the floor plan at the end of the *Oriental Adventures* hardcover book. The only difference is that 3,333 bronze statues representing the priests of Bishamon are scattered throughout the temple area.

Outside the temple is a huge apple tree sacred to Bishamon. Legend has it that the apples grant immortality to the deserving. Hanging from a branch of the mighty tree is a brass bell. The bell is rung hourly by one of the priests of the temple.

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2. Temple Gate. The gate is flanked by two huge ebony lions, standing 10' high. The lions' eyes are gold, and their teeth are crystal (not diamond, although they look like it). Legend holds that the lions will animate and attack anyone who tries to desecrate the temple atop the flight of stairs.

3. Marketplace. Every three or four days, based on some kind of arcane calculation, is market day. On these days, the marketplace is a bustling mass of humanity, as hawkers try to sell anything and everything to anyone who happens by.

4. "The Waiting Stone" Ryokan. This is one of the many *ryokans* in Aru.

5. Shrine of the West Wind. This small temple is detailed in Chapter V.

6. Yamaguchi Warehouse.

7. The House of Heavenly Sand. This establishment is detailed in Chapter V.

8. The Grand Noh Theater. This is a large, elaborate building in which noh and kabuki theater is performed most evenings.

9. "The Tengu" Sake House. A middle-class drinking establishment.

10. Whispering Breeze Tea Garden.

11. "Tojo's". A well-known restaurant.

12. "Aki's". Another well-known restaurant. (As described in Chapter VI, Tojo and Aki are brothers as well as business rivals.)

13. Livery Stables.

14. Fusae's Minka.

15. Graveyard. Most bodies are cremated outside the city walls. Some people's religion, however, requires that they be buried. This is a small, well-kept graveyard, surrounded by a low wall. The gates of wrought iron are more for show than anything, and are rarely closed.

16. Naomi's room. The wardrobe contains a selection of kimonos of the finest quality. A tiny bonsai tree in a lacquer pot sits on a low table.

17. Takako's room. The wardrobe contains a range of clothes. A small brazier burns around the clock, on which tiny slivers of aromatic wood smoke, scenting the air.

18. Sumihiro's room. Unlike the other bedrooms, which are scrupulously clean, this is slightly untidy. A worn kimono is bundled in a corner, and a mismatched pair of *ebi* (socks) lie on a low table.

19. Toshikazu's room. A small shelf holds half a dozen books on topics ranging from falconry through military tactics to the philosophy of religion.

20. Yuji's room. The wardrobe contains Yuji's formal regalia, plus the warrior's second-best katana.

21. Guest room. For the day or two surrounding the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, this room is occupied by Hiro Matsu. At other times it's empty.

22. Antechamber.

23. Guest room. For the day or two surrounding the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, this room is occupied by Zukimoto Chikitada.

6. Reception Room. There is a low table in the middle of the room on which rests a beautiful flower arrangement.

7. Private Reception Room. A little smaller and less formal than the main reception room, this is where the daimyo would meet with people on less official business.

8. Waiting room. Here servants would serve sake or *cha* to people awaiting a meeting with the daimyo.

9. Parlor. On the solid west wall hangs a delicate watercolor of a landscape, painted by Benju's wife. This is a private room, and Benju often comes here to meditate.

10. Tea Room. Again, this is a private room. Only members of Benju's family or his closest friends ever receive *cha* here.

11. Kitchen. This is more a preparation room than a true kitchen. There is no hearth, although some limited cooking could be done over a brazier. Most cooked meals are prepared in another building.

12. Servants' rooms. Each room has a futon and a chest in which the servants can store their clothes.

SECOND FLOOR

13. Buntaro's room. In addition to his futon, Buntaro has a wardrobe in which he keeps his formal regalia. Unless he's carrying it with him, Buntaro's *daikyu* stands in a corner, wrapped lovingly in silk.

14. Lady Satomi's room. A wardrobe contains a selection of kimonos of the finest quality. A tiny bonsai tree in a lacquer pot sits on a low table.

15. Benju's room. The room is spartan, almost bare, with nothing to indicate that it belongs to the most powerful man in Aru.

16. Naomi's room. The wardrobe contains a selection of beautiful kimonos, and a samisen of high quality in a lacquer case.

17. Takako's room. The wardrobe contains a range of clothes. A small brazier burns around the clock, on which tiny slivers of aromatic wood smoke, scenting the air.

18. Sumihiro's room. Unlike the other bedrooms, which are scrupulously clean, this is slightly untidy. A worn kimono is bundled in a corner, and a mismatched pair of *ebi* (socks) lie on a low table.

19. Toshikazu's room. A small shelf holds half a dozen books on topics ranging from falconry through military tactics to the philosophy of religion.

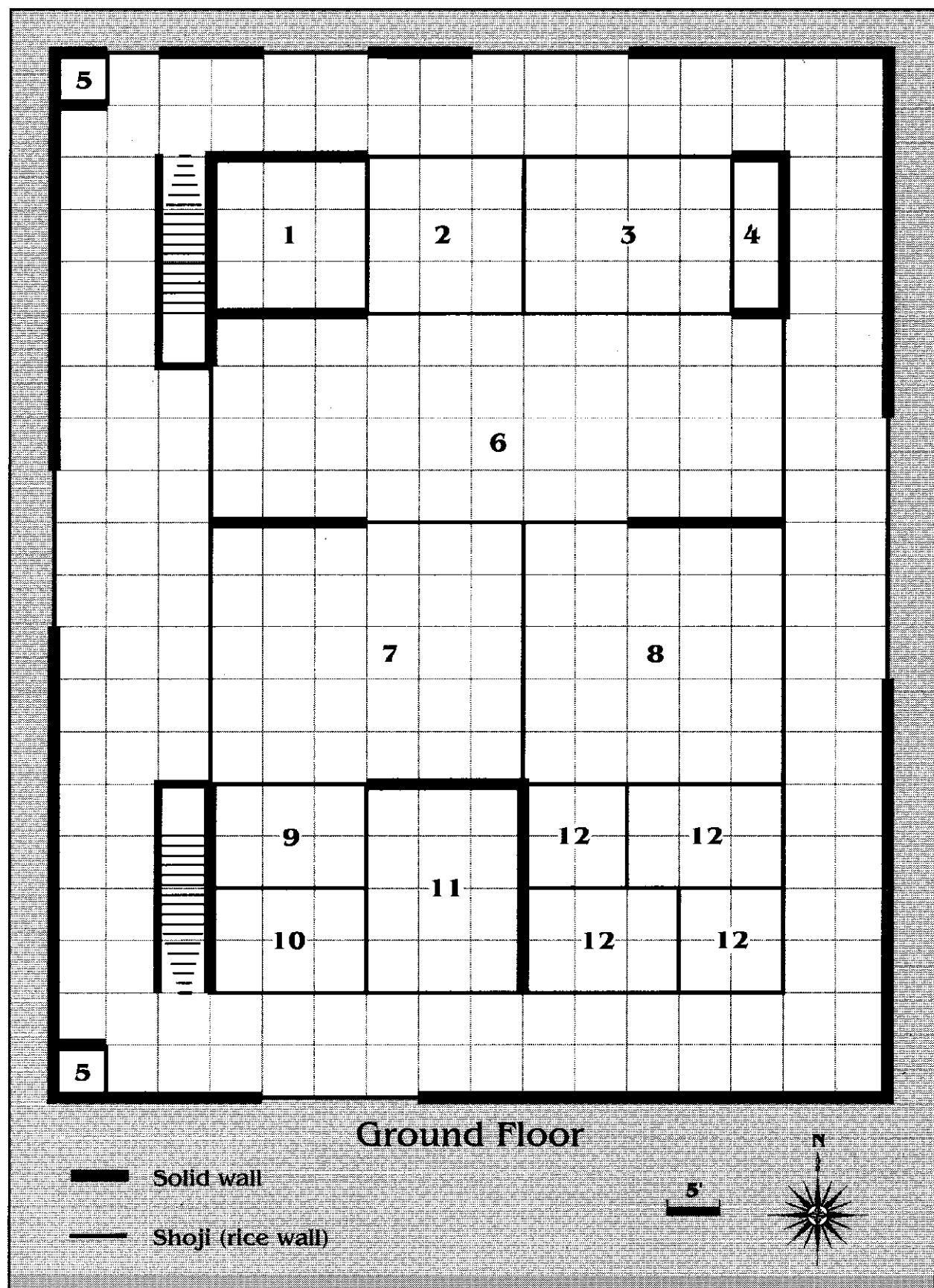
20. Yuji's room. The wardrobe contains Yuji's formal regalia, plus the warrior's second-best katana.

21. Guest room. For the day or two surrounding the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, this room is occupied by Hiro Matsu. At other times it's empty.

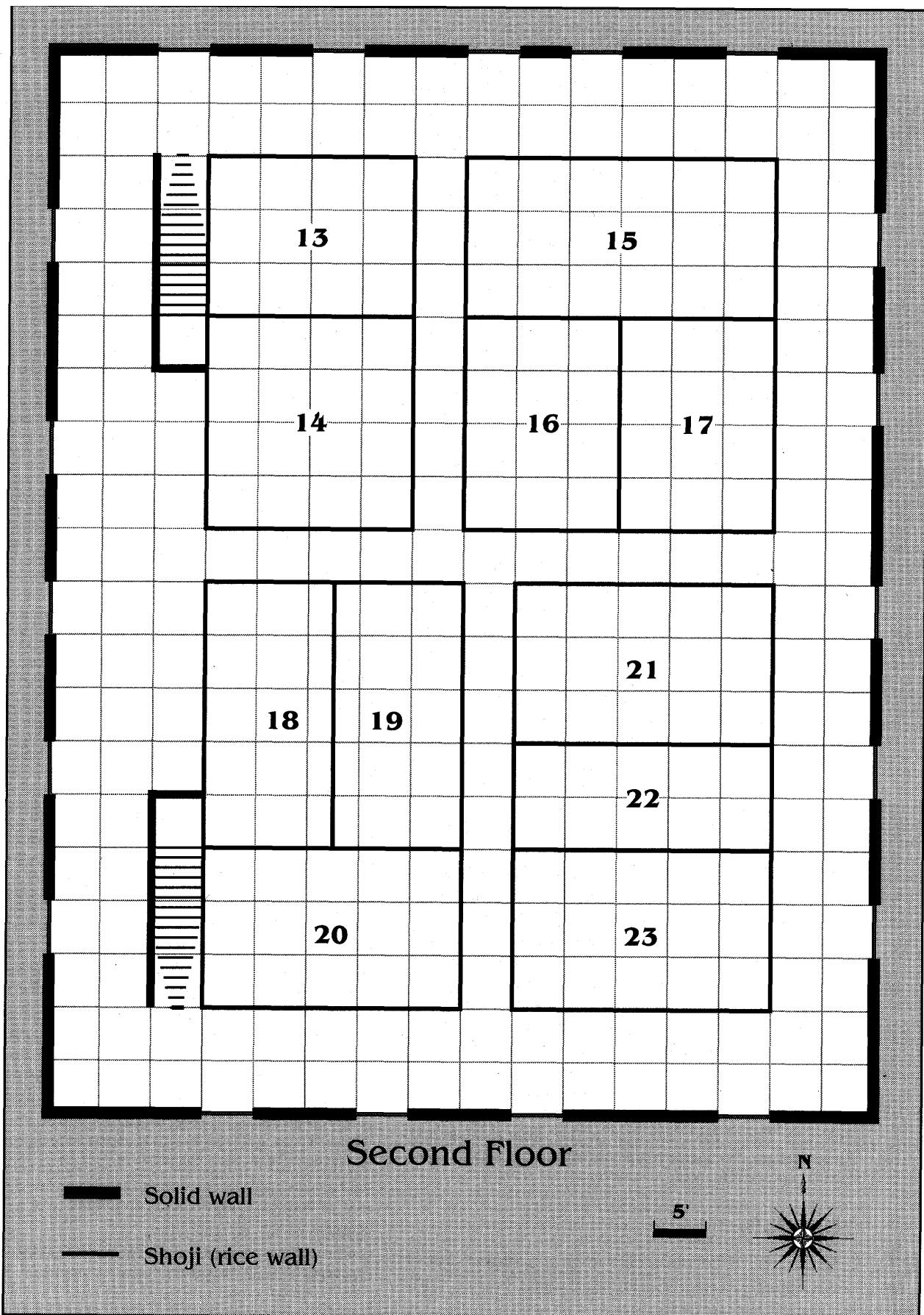
22. Antechamber.

23. Guest room. For the day or two surrounding the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, this room is occupied by Zukimoto Chikitada.

Benju's Donjon



Benju's Donjon



拔氣紳俛伏膚拔趺付腐
鄂弗伏紳俛伏膚拔趺付腐

Chapter IV: Politics

"King Log"

As described in Chapter II, **Benju Matsutomo**, the daimyo of Aru Province, has decided that the best way to avoid making any fatal mistakes is to do as little as possible. Of course, total inaction would bring on disaster as fast as—or faster than—anything else. He must make sure that the pilgrimage season—and particularly the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, which takes place in high summer—comes off without a hitch.

Unlike some of his predecessors, he has surrounded himself with good advisors. His right-hand man is **Yuji Takaesu**, an aging samurai, and a vassal who is totally unshakable in his loyalty. Yuji is a sterling administrator, and as good a leader of men as Benju himself. He has taken Benju's force of samurai and trained them to a level of excellence rarely seen outside the shogun's personal bodyguards. These samurai—under the direct leadership of **Toshikazu Wada**, commander of what has come to be known as Benju's "Home Guard-patrol the passes leading into Aru, escort pilgrim trains into and out of the province, and serve as an incorruptible police force to keep peace in and around the city itself.

Family Matters

Abiding by the shogunate policy of *sankin kotai*, Benju's wife and children live in a yashiki in the city of Uwaji—effectively hostages to the loyalty of the daimyo. There are more distant members of his family currently living in Benju's donjon, however: **Sumihiro Matsutomo**, his nephew; **Takako Shimizu**, his niece and a samurai in her own right; and the **Lady Satomi**, his mother-in-law (who despises him . . . and vice versa). Closest to him—even closer than Yuji Takaesu—is his favored consort, a young woman named Naomi. Born samurai of the clan Yayazato—and granddaughter of the one-time daimyo Takashi Yayazato—she is currently with child and will hopefully soon present Benju with another male heir.

There is also a young samurai named **Buntaro Ostatto**, of noble lineage. He was married to Benju's first daughter, whose *karma* was to die giving birth to Buntaro's only son. Although Buntaro is arrogant almost beyond belief, and hated to a greater or lesser degree by almost everyone else in the castle, Benju inexplicably likes his son-in-law, and forgives him lapses of manners that would cost anyone else their head. Benju has posted Buntaro to assist Yuji Takaesu in managing his fief, and has asked him as a personal favor to pass on to his samurai Buntaro's almost superhuman skill with the bow. (Unknown to Benju, Buntaro "has it bad" for one of the daimyo's serving girls, **Sono**, and arranges secret assignations with her whenever he can.)

Nemesis

During his illustrious career as a samurai, Benju Matsutomo was involved in many major battles, both

against invading barbarians and against other forces within Wa (although very little is ever said about these skirmishes, since they so obviously contravened the shogun's peace). In one of these, Benju was allied with the clan Tanaka, led by Eiji Tanaka. In a particularly pivotal battle, Benju led the central body of the Wa army, while Eiji Tanaka led the right flank and another ally led the left. At the height of the battle, when Benju's forces were fully committed to the fray, Eiji's force suddenly wheeled in place and attacked Benju's flank. In an almost superhuman display of generalship—coupled with personal feats of arms that are remembered in song to this day—Benju and his remaining ally won the day. Eiji Tanaka was captured and forced to admit that he had sold out to the enemy. Benju personally took Eiji Tanaka's head. In a gesture of mercy that was characteristic of Benju—but noticeably rare throughout the rest of Wa—Benju spared Eiji's family, even though their lives were officially forfeit as a result of their clan leader's treachery.

While this is the way the events of that day actually ran, the stories that were passed down to Eiji's children were considerably different. Nothing was ever said of the treachery, and it was told that Benju killed Eiji Tanaka out of jealousy over the man's superior generalship. Despite this rewriting of history, most of the Tanaka clan have learned what really happened, and have accepted the fact that their erstwhile leader betrayed an ally.

Not so Eiji's youngest son, **Eichiro Tanaka**. Still unborn at the time of the events in question, Eichiro has fully accepted the "embellished" version of his father's death, and refuses to believe—or to accept—the truth. His hatred for Benju, his father's "murderer", burns brightly, even though he conceals it from all but his closest confidants. Since the death of Eiji, all of his other sons have come to grief in one way or another. Now Eichiro is leader of the Tanaka clan.

Vengeance is an honorable tradition in Wa, but to make it official Eichiro would have to ask permission from the daimyo of the province—in this case Benju, who would be rather unlikely to give it—or from the shogun himself. Even with his meticulously-constructed tissue of false beliefs, Eichiro has admitted to himself that he can't pursue official channels if he wants vengeance against Benju. Instead, he must act covertly. Rather than putting his oh-so-precious skin at direct risk, Eichiro has decided—perhaps with some outside help—that it would be the height of poetic irony if the shogun himself were to become the instrument of his vengeance against Benju Matsutomo. All that must happen for this to take place is for the pilgrimage season—and possibly the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps—to be seriously disrupted: the most serious disruption ever. Only one such disrupted season should prove enough to sweep away all memory of Benju's so-far-successful rule, and to have the daimyo removed in shame.

Taking this a step further, Eichiro is certain that if he can prove himself to be a better ruler than Benju—by

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quelling the disorder himself—that the shogun will name him as daimyo of Aru Province.

To this end, Eichiro has hired the services of a small clan of ninjas. This family, under the leadership of **Takahashi Yamaguchi**, has been ordered to wage an escalating war of terror against the pilgrims, against Benju's family and against Aru in general. Although Eichiro had to tell Takahashi much of his plan, including the reasoning behind it, he has kept secret his intention of "cleaning up" the problem. Eichiro has planned that, when the disruptions become intolerable, he will use his own samurai—and his intimate knowledge, gained from Takahashi, of how the ninjas will be operating—to fall upon the ninja clan and destroy them all. This will not only prove to the distant shogun that he can take care of business much better than can Benju, but it will also bury forever his involvement in the terror. Eichiro is proud of his plan, and certain of its success.

Official Oversight

Distant though Uwaji is, the shogun is aware that Benju's rule so far has been impeccable. To honor the daimyo—and, incidentally, to make sure that things are actually running as smoothly in Aru as the reports claim—the shogun is sending one of his trusted inspectors, a samurai lord named **Hiro Matsu**, to attend the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps.

Neither Benju nor Eichiro know that Hiro will be ar-

riving in Aru with his unit of loyal samurai. If Eichiro did know this, he'd be overjoyed. How convenient that a personal emissary of the shogun should be on hand to witness Benju's failure and Eichiro's success in quelling the campaign of terror against the pilgrims.

Eyes in The Shadows

There is another faction that is deeply interested in events in and around the city of Aru. This is the city's "family" of Yakuza. Through his exceptionally efficient network of informants, the *oyabun* has learned something of Eichiro's plans. He knows that ninjas have been hired, and has concluded that their only purpose could be to disrupt the pilgrimages.

This suits the *oyabun* well . . . to a point. Troubles with the pilgrims will distract Benju, hopefully to the point that the yakuza will be able to grab more influence in Aru than they currently have. The *oyabun* doesn't want to see Benju fall, however; he knows that if the cruel and ruthless Eichiro takes over' his family will do considerably less well than they are currently. To this end, he plans to allow the disruptions to take place, perhaps even helping them along, until it reaches the point of Benju's imminent removal. Then the *oyabun* will mobilize his entire family to stamp out Takahashi Yamaguchi's clan of ninjas.

This will have two benefits to the yakuza, in addition to the added influence they should have been able to grab during the commotion. One is that the



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daimyo Benju will be grateful to the yakuza, and perhaps grant them some further concessions. The second is that the people of Aru will see that the yakuza have fulfilled their role as protector of the common citizenry, which will bring the family much face.

Move and Countermove

Although not as extensive as the yakuza's, Benju's own network of informants is efficient. The daimyo has learned that Eichiro has hired a clan of ninjas, and can draw his own conclusions as to the reason. If Aru were just slightly more isolated, or were in a place like Kozokura which isn't under an enforced peace, Benju would respond to this threat in a very straightforward manner. He'd mobilize his forces, which are considerable, raze to the ground the town in which Eichiro lives, and kill or capture the entire Tanaka clan.

As it is, Benju must respond in kind to Eichiro, through stealth. Accordingly, Benju has hired his own ninja family to help him. This family, the clan **Ohara**, has been entrusted with countering the moves of Eichiro's ninjas whenever and wherever possible.

A little more complexity has been added to an already complex situation by the relative notoriety and reputations of the two ninja clans involved in this covert conflict. The clan Yamaguchi, hired by Eichiro is very new on the scene; in fact, this will be their first major operation. Despite its newness and relative inexperience, it is a large clan possessed of great breadth and depth of knowledge and skill; because of its newness, the clan's members will be trying to establish the reputation of clan Yamaguchi, and can be depended upon to be even more bold than the majority of ninjas.

Through his intelligence network, Benju has learned the Eichiro has hired a new ninja family, and assumes—incorrectly—it to be a small, relatively weak organization. It was this that prompted him to hire the clan Ohara to assist him. The Ohara ninjas are highly skilled, and have a good reputation in those circles that know of such things, but the clan is small—considerably smaller than clan Yamaguchi. If the truth be known, in a direct confrontation—which is what this whole thing is becoming—clan Ohara would be unable to stand up against clan Yamaguchi.

INTERNECINE CONFLICT

Although to the world they present a united front, which is always the decision of Benju, there are differing opinions within the Matsutomo household as to how to deal with the crisis. The person most outspoken in his opinion is—not surprisingly—Buntaro Ostato, Benju's son-in-law. Benju has wisely edited what he's told the hot-headed younger man, but what Buntaro has learned—that Eichiro is plotting against the daimyo—is enough to send him into a rage. Buntaro counsels the direct approach: mobilize the daimyo's forces and strike directly at Eichiro. Certainly, such an attack would be against the law of the shogun,

but isn't honor sometimes the highest law, neh, and hasn't Eichiro Tanaka challenged the honor of Benju Matsutomo?

Luckily wiser heads prevail. One of these is on the shoulders of Toshikazu Wada, commander of Benju's Home Guard. He knows no more of the intricacies of the situation than does Buntaro, but he has a much better grasp of political realities than does the young hot-head. Toshikazu also counsels direct action, but with a slightly different twist. In place of Buntaro's plan, which is to march on Eichiro with Benju's banners flying, Toshikazu proposes that the attacking force disguise themselves as a band of masterless ronin. All could be ordered to take every step to avoid capture if such an event seemed likely—an order that hardly need be given considering the discipline and loyalty of Benju's samurai. The result, win or lose, would be that nobody could ever prove that Benju had any connection with the attack on Eichiro. If necessary, to complete the deception, Benju could stage a showy campaign to capture or drive away the "rogues" that had the temerity to operate within Aru Province.

Toshikazu's superior—Yuji Takaesu, Benju's right-hand-man—can appreciate the thought and creativity that went into the younger man's plan, but can see some serious dangers associated with it. In Wa, almost everyone who's anyone has an intelligence network of some form or another. It's almost a certainty that someone would discover Benju's involvement in the ronin attack on Eichiro. Being implicated in something like that might be enough to topple Benju from power. In addition, there's no guarantee that Toshikazu's idea of "driving away" the rogues would repair the damage that Benju's credibility would suffer from the actions of such a large band of ronin in the first place. The very fact that they made that single attack might be enough of a justification for the shogun to remove Yuji's master from office . . . and that would simply not be acceptable.

Benju trusts his second-in-command Yuji well enough to share with him everything he knows and thinks about the situation . . . almost. Armed with more information than Buntaro or Toshikazu, the old man proposed the idea of fighting fire with fire: hiring another ninja clan to oppose the one employed by Eichiro. Yuji even suggested that his master hire the clan Ohara, because of its reputation. The daimyo agreed, and made the necessary arrangements.

Although he trusts the old man explicitly, Benju hasn't shared with Yuji all of his thoughts and plans concerning the matter at hand. Benju is a good enough tactician to realize that it's possible to be too close to a problem, that it's sometimes necessary to get the point of view of someone not intimately involved in ongoing events.

With these thoughts in his mind, it's understandable why Benju Matsutomo showed such great interest when he heard that a small band of adventurers had entered Aru town . . .

Chapter V: The Main Events

Introduction

Ninja Wars is an adventure designed for characters of 6th to 9th level. A good mix of character classes is advisable, although it would be best if at least one character were a samurai; evil characters are not recommended. For this adventure, the PCs can either be inhabitants of Wa, or strangers to this shore. If the former, they should not be residents of Aru Province, but should come from further afield. If the latter, the DM should remember Wa natives' tradition of arrogance and xenophobia. Because of this, the adventure will probably prove more difficult—but much more entertaining—if the PCs are strangers to Wa.

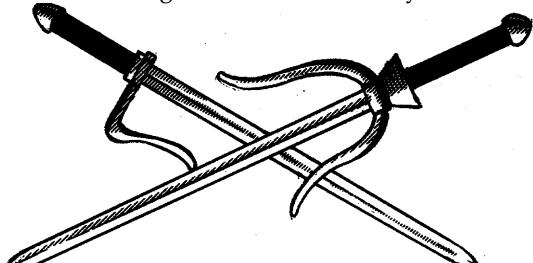
The adventure is broken up into "Acts"; these are encounters or events. In most cases, the acts should be played in the order in which they are presented here. There are certain acts, however, which can be played out of order should the DM so decide; these are marked with an asterisk (*) next to the act title.

The events in many of the acts will take place whether or not the PCs are present or involved. These acts include a section called "Probable Outcome", which describes how the events will most likely turn out without PC intervention. The DM is free to change the outcome, of course, if doing so would enhance the story. The DM must find an appropriate way of informing the PCs of what has happened in any act that the party did not participate in. Some possible ways of doing this might be street gossip or perhaps an audience with an angry Benju.

Throughout this adventure certain portions of the text have been enclosed in boxes. As a rule, these are used to set a scene or otherwise describe an event. The DM can read such boxed text directly to the players, or can paraphrase it as appropriate.

The earlier acts in this adventure have a certain level of subtlety to them. While the daimyo knows that there is ninja activity in the area, the PCs shouldn't be aware of this initially. It's up to the DM to distract their attention from this conclusion, at least temporarily. This is where the encounters in Chapter VI come in. Several of these involve—or *appear* to involve—ninja activity. The DM should intersperse these encounters with the earlier acts of this adventure so the players are never completely sure exactly where the "Ninja Wars" fit into the grand scheme of things.

The DM should feel free to intersperse other "mini-adventures" drawn from Chapter VI, or encounters generated by the system in Chapter VIII, into the flow of the module. In the Eastern Realms, danger, excitement, and intrigue lurk around every corner.



Act 1 –Introductions

Set-up

The DM must devise a reason for the PCs to visit Aru that fits well with earlier events in their adventuring lives. Perhaps the PCs have heard tell of the beauty of the Shining Temple of Bishamon and have decided to see it for themselves; or perhaps a PC's master has ordered him and his companions to travel to Aru for whatever reason; or perhaps the PCs have been shipwrecked on the coast near Aru town. In any case, the DM should urge them to recuperate from the hardships of their journey by spending a night at "The Waiting Stone", a local ryokan or inn (area 4 on the city map). (Use the "Town Inn and House" map in the Oriental Adventures hardcover book.)

In terms of time, the season should be summer, and their arrival should be exactly seven days before the date of the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps. (The Ceremony takes place traditionally "in high summer", but the DM can shift the actual date so that it ties in well with the actions of the PCs.)

It's difficult for the inhabitants of Aru town to ignore the passing of time: each hour, the brass bell at the Shining Temple of Bishamon chimes. The DM can use this regular chime as a reminder to the PCs that time is ebbing away, and that the Ceremony of the Three Thousand steps is fast approaching.

Unquiet Slumbers

It's chill at night, here in northern Wa, even in what's supposed to be high summer. You're glad that your room includes a small brazier and a good supply of charcoal. You toss another chip of aromatic wood onto the glowing coals and dispose yourself for sleep. With crystal clarity, you hear the great brass bell of Bishamon chime the hour from the hill above the town.

Hardly have you settled yourselves on your futons when there's a rap on the *shoji* of your room. A rap quiet enough to be polite, but still firm.

You slide back the *shoji*. Standing outside your room is a body of eight samurai clad in brown kimonos. Their leader bows respectfully to you . . . although his hand never strays far from the hilt of his katana.

"*Konbanwa*," he says. "My master has ordered me to invite you to drink *cha* with him this evening. We will escort you to him. I must ask you to give your weapons into the keeping of my men. No dishonor is intended by this."

The leader of the samurai is **Tsukku**, one of Bunтарo's lieutenants. If questioned, he will tell the PCs that his master is Benju Matsutomo, daimyo of Aru Province. He doesn't know why Benju wants to see the PCs—who Tsukku rather suspects are ronin and ne'er-do-wells, although he'll never show this suspicion.

Tsukku's orders are to bring the PCs into Benju's

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presence, no matter what he has to do to succeed. Although the request that the PCs give up their weapons is traditional, Tsukku will relent if it seems obvious that the PCs won't accompany him unless they can take their weapons with them.

Tsukku (7th level samurai): AC 7; MV 9; hp 41; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-10 (katana) + 2 (damage bonus); THAC0 14; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 11; AL LG(N); Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, painting, poetry.

Tsukku wears ring mail and is armed with his katana and wakizashi. He is young, and very proud. Because Benju's orders are explicit, Tsukku will put up with breaches of manners that would normally cause him to draw steel. He won't forget any impolite or dishonorable actions by the PCs, however, and insulting him in any way will lead to his life-long enmity. If he has been grievously offended, at the first appropriate opportunity he will ask Benju for the right to challenge the offending PC(s) to a duel.

Tsukku's samurai wear ring mail. All carry katanas and wakizashis; two also carry daikyu and 12 arrows. (Use the statistics for "Benju's Samurai" in Chapter VII.) These samurai, too, have been ordered to do whatever it takes to bring the PCs to Benju, and so will suffer breaches of manners that otherwise would lead to combat. If a PC is particularly offensive to Tsukku, however, one samurai's discipline will slip, and he will attack the PCs. Tsukku and the other samurai will try to stop the rage-blinded samurai, killing him if necessary. If the samurai survives, he immediately asks permission from Tsukku to atone for his disgraceful conduct "in the traditional way." Naturally, Tsukku agrees. This should serve to remind the PCs how seriously manners are taken in Wa, and how dangerous it can be to cross a samurai or to disobey orders.

Assuming that the PCs agree to accompany Tsukku, the band of samurai leads them out of the ryokan and into the streets of Aru, towards Benju's castle.

Midnight Meeting

The daimyo's castle rises above the low buildings of the town, standing like a giant among pygmies. In the moonlight, you can see the gold-ornamented green roofs of the central donjon, steeply sloped to shed rain and snow. The walls are a delicate, pale blue. You see movement on the extensive walls surrounding the castle: daikyu-armed samurai guards, no doubt.

The large gate swings open at a command from Tsukku, the leader of your escort, and you pass into the castle grounds. Quickly the samurai lead you through the castle hallways. You gain quick impressions of many halls and rooms . . . and an almost inordinate number of samurai guards who watch you with ill-disguised suspicion.

Finally you stop. Tsukku knocks gently on the

shoji, and you hear a grunted response from inside. The *shoji* slides back, revealing an antechamber. Kneeling within is an older man, rail-thin but with an aura of pent-up energy like a steel spring. His kimono is more elaborate than that of your samurai escorts, but is the same shade of brown as their garb. He is flanked by four samurai guards. The old man nods his head—a bare acknowledgement of your presence—and beckons you to enter the chamber.

This room is area 8 on the donjon map.

The old man is **Yuji Takaesu**, Benju's right-hand-man (see Chapter VII for stats). He is currently unarmed and unarmored. The four samurai carry katanas and wakizashis; they are unarmored. Use the statistics for "Junior Officers" in Chapter VII.

Yuji introduces himself to the PCs, and informs them that his master, Benju Matsutomo, awaits them within. If the PCs are still armed, Yuji insists that they hand over all of their weapons to him. He is adamant on this point; the PCs will get no further until they turn over their weapons. Yuji is very careful to point out that no dishonor is meant by this, and will even swear a binding oath that neither the PCs nor their weapons will come to harm this night in the castle. Even though Yuji knows most of the daimyo's intentions regarding the PCs, he will tell them nothing, merely saying that his master will explain all in good time.

When Yuji is satisfied that the PCs are unarmed, he slides back the *shoji* leading into the next room.

A single figure sits on a dais at the far end of this larger room. He's perhaps in his early 60s, but he still looks strong and very capable. His brown kimono is plain and unadorned, like those of the samurai who escorted you here, but it's obvious from his bearing that this is the daimyo. On the dais before him rest a katana and wakizashi—both sheathed, but both obviously well-used weapons of the highest quality.

Yuji Takaesu enters, bowing low before his lord, then he beckons you to enter as well. The samurai do not join you. Instead, they take up positions as guards in the antechamber. The bell of Bishamon chimes the midnight hour.

For the first time, you notice that there's another person present, kneeling in the rear corner of the room behind the dais. It's a young girl—a beautiful young girl. Is she a servant, you wonder, or one of the daimyo's consorts?

As you bow before the daimyo, he speaks in a rich voice, the voice of a natural leader. "Konbanwa, adventurers. I believe that there is a service you can perform for me."

This is, of course, **Benju Matsutomo** (see Chapter VII for stats). The girl is **Sono**, a servant (again, see Chapter VII).

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The PCs must treat Benju with the politeness and respect due to a daimyo; if they don't this interview will go no further, and the PCs will be forcibly expelled from the castle. In this and every other audience with the daimyo, the DM may use the Etiquette non-weapon proficiency to adjudicate whether or not the PCs are behaving acceptably. The dice roll should never overrule role-playing, of course.

After greeting the PCs curtly but not impolitely, Benju beckons to Sono. Sono taps on the rear *shoji*, which slides back to admit two other serving girls. Together, the three girls serve *cha* (tea) to all present. As the tea is served and drunk, Benju asks the PCs how they came to this area, and what their purposes are.

This conversation is really an opportunity for the PCs to get themselves in trouble by offending the daimyo, and then being forced to extricate themselves . . . somehow. This is a perfect chance to impress once again upon the PCs exactly how strongly authority and politeness must constrain their behavior.

Assuming the PCs don't seriously offend Benju, the daimyo finally explains to them the service that they can do for him:

"I'm sure you're aware of the importance to Aru of the pilgrims who visit the Shining Temple of Bishamon," the daimyo says at last, setting down his fine porcelain cup. "Temple and pilgrims are, really, the sole reason for the existence of this town. Nothing can be allowed to interfere with their visitation.

"Unfortunately, there have been several—shall we say—*occurrences* that make me believe that the pilgrims might be somehow threatened. The Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps will take place in seven days. Before that time, I wish you to investigate these occurrences, find out who or what is behind them, and put a stop to them. Success will be greatly rewarded."

Although the question is the height of bad manners, many PCs will ask exactly what "greatly" amounts to in monetary terms. If a PC actually is so impolite, read the following:

You hear Yuji's breath hiss through his teeth, and in your peripheral vision you see his right hand flash to where the hilt of his katana would be were he armed.

The daimyo's face darkens in a scowl. When he speaks, his voice is as cold as the sea. "I will put it in terms a *merchant* would understand. Each will receive seventy-five koku. Assuming you succeed. But then, how could merchants succeed in this? And why would I need merchants?"

The DM should make sure that the PCs realize that merchants as a class are generally scorned in Wa. The PCs should realize that they have to apologize for their impropriety in asking about the reward. If they do so, then Benju will make no further derogatory

comments, and will continue as though the question hadn't been asked at all. If the PCs don't apologize, then Benju will have them expelled from the castle, and their involvement with him is at an end.

If the PCs didn't ask an insulting question, or once they're back on reasonable terms with Benju, the daimyo assures them that helping him out in this will reflect well on them, and they will gain in honor. (He doesn't explicitly state the converse—that refusing him will lead to a loss of honor—but that is the implication.) If the PCs agree to aid Benju, each PC gains one point of honor; if they refuse without good reason—and the only acceptable reason would be a direct order to the contrary from one of the PCs' masters (which the DM should definitely avoid)—each loses two points of honor.

Assuming that the PCs agree to aid Benju, read the following:

The daimyo nods. "Good. You will follow my orders, of course, but you will also follow the orders of Yuji Takaesu here as though they were mine. Do you understand? Good. Yuji-San?" And he makes a dismissing gesture with his fingers.

Yuji Takaesu bows deeply, watching you from the corner of his eye to make sure you do the same.

The interview with the daimyo is ended, and Yuji leads them out of the castle into the courtyard. Their original samurai escort, led by Tsukku, is once more with them.

Yuji Takaesu produces a scroll from within the voluminous sleeve of his kimono and hands it to the leader of your party.

"This scroll identifies you as vassals of the Lord Benjui," he explains, "and gives you the authority over the *no* (farmers and fishermen), *ko* (artisans and craftsmen), *sho* (merchants) and *eta* ("outcasts") of Aru Province. You will note that this authority does not extend to the *shi*—the noble class—and definitely not to the lords who may dwell here. This is to assist you in your investigation. I trust you will not abuse this honor."

"One of my lieutenants will show you the sites of the, er, incidents. You will meet him outside the gates of the castle one hour after sunrise tomorrow. Good evening to you."

With that, he turns on his heel and vanishes back within the castle.

The samurai escort the PCs out of the castle grounds and close the gate behind them.

Should suspicious PCs try to confirm that the scroll gives them the authority Yuji said it would, they'll find that everyone who is not samurai will treat them as though they were samurai in the service of Benju. Even samurai will treat them with grudging respect upon reading the scroll . . . although they'll stop just short of treating PCs who aren't truly samurai as equals.

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Act 2—Scene Of The Crime Buntaro

The next morning, one hour after sunrise, a group of five samurai await the PCs outside the main gate of the castle. The leader of the group is **Buntaro Ostatto**, Benju's son-in-law (see Chapter VII for stats), today wearing leather scale armor (AC 7).

The four accompanying samurai wear leather armor, and carry katanas and wakizashis. In addition, two carry daikyu and 12 arrows each. Use the statistics for "Benju's Samurai" in Chapter VII.

Benju has specifically ordered Buntaro to be polite to the PCs, and not to provoke them (which, Benju knows, Buntaro would probably do). For this reason, Buntaro will try his best to control his arrogant and irritating nature . . . albeit with little success. His conversation will be filled with jibing comments and insulting silences. If he realizes he's going too far, and that one or more of the PCs is likely to take action, he'll remember his daimyo's orders and back down. But he'll definitely push his luck as far as he can.

Although the samurai accompanying Buntaro are under his orders, they don't feel any affection for their leader. If Buntaro seems on the verge of provoking the PCs beyond their tolerance level, one of the samurai will glance at the PCs with a subtle shake of his head, and a glance that obviously means "Ye Gods, he's at it again". If that isn't enough, one of the samurai will distract Buntaro with a trivial question about their destination, their formation, or something similar. This will divert Buntaro's hostility onto the samurai for a while, giving the PCs a chance to realize the kind of man Buntaro is.

"Like Sand Through The Hourglass . . ."

The first place that Buntaro leads the PCs is an establishment known as the House of the Heavenly Sands (area 7 on the city map). This is a huge, barn-like building situated over a volcanic vent which continuously emits small quantities of very hot steam. Sand has been piled over the vent, to be heated by the steam. Visitors of both sexes now pay for the privilege of being buried up to their necks in the warm, moist sand, since this is said to leach out poisons, cure arthritis, and prolong life. A map and description of the House can be found in the following section.

On the way to the House, Buntaro explains:

"It was four days ago," Buntaro tells you in his harsh voice. "Those *eta* women who work at the House, they started screaming and carrying on loud enough to wake the dead." He laughs harshly. "Well, it didn't work."

"By the time a samurai detachment got there, there was quite a crowd, all jabbering about the body they'd found in the sand. That's right, a stinking body: Well, of course, lots of people thought it

was those foul *eta* who'd left one of their customers buried, but that wasn't it at all. When the body was brought out, we knew it was something quite different. I was there, and I knew him. He was the headman of a village near here. No wound on him, not a mark. No clue how he died.

"And no clue how he got in the stinking sand, either. The House is locked up tight at night, and there were no signs of forced entry—nothing at all. It was as if the body had just appeared there."

Buntaro knows more about the headman, but has been ordered to keep it to himself. In fact, the man was one of Benju's informants, and had recently passed on a report to Benju that he thought something strange was going on in Eichiro Tanaka's hometown of Anjiro. Benju had sent a request for more information, but nothing more was ever heard from the headman. Although Buntaro will be careful not to reveal this information to the PCs, his suddenly smug manner might clue them in that he's hiding something . . . and enjoying it.

If the PCs ask about the body, Buntaro will tell them that it was cremated the next day. It was questioned beforehand, of course (with *speak with dead*, but couldn't tell them anything of any import. (In fact, the corpse confirmed that the headman had been poisoned, but Buntaro has been ordered to conceal this information, too.)

Buntaro will escort the PCs to the House, and they are free to snoop around and question people, as long as they don't take more than one hour doing so. (The DM should use the hourly chime of Bishamon's bell to remind the PCs of the time they're taking.) After an hour, Buntaro will get more and more impatient, until he demands that the PCs accompany him to the site of the next "incident".

The House of Heavenly Sand

The House is built out of dark wood, with a high, steeply-sloped roof, and few windows. The only light that most of the building receives comes through skylights set into the roof. These skylights are glazed with frosted glass, reinforced by a mesh of stiff wire.

The following descriptions refer to the numbered areas on the accompanying map.

1. Entryway. The only illumination in the room comes from the skylight above (indicated by the dotted lines). Sitting just inside the double doors is an old woman, hunched on a low stool. This is **Fusae**, the proprietress. She is described in more detail in Chapter VII. When anyone enters, she holds out her hand to them, and indicates through a clumsy sign language the cost for using the facilities: 1 yuan. She also tries to hand everyone a small towel from the pile next to her, and indicates that they should remove their shoes.

Should anyone try to ask her questions, Fusae bows,

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shakes her head apologetically and points to her throat. Even the slowest PC will soon realize that the woman is dumb.

To the left and right of the double doors are racks to hold the shoes of patrons: women to the right of the door, men to the left. There are two pairs of shoes in the men's rack, one in the women's.

If male PCs look as though they're heading towards the women's changing room (area 2) or vice versa, Fusaie will agitatedly try to stop them, but will back down before Buntaro's anger.

2. Women's changing room. There is a bench in the middle of the room, and hooks on the wall. Hanging on one of the hooks is a woman's kimono of poor quality. The only illumination comes from a frosted glass window high on the wall (well above a man's height), which is reinforced with the same kind of wire grill as the skylight in room 1.

3. Men's changing room. The layout is identical to the women's changing room. There are two men's kimonos—both of mediocre quality—hanging on hooks.

4. Women's sand room. The curtained doorway from the changing room leads out onto a stone floor into which is sunk a bathtub full of volcanically-heated water. From the bathtub level, a small flight of wooden stairs leads three feet down to the steam-heated sand.

Apart from the bathtub level, the entire room area has a sand floor. Towards the western end of the room, wisps of steam can be seen rising from the sand. Near the bathtub, the sand is merely warm; moving westward, however, it increases in temperature until, at the western wall, it's too hot to touch.

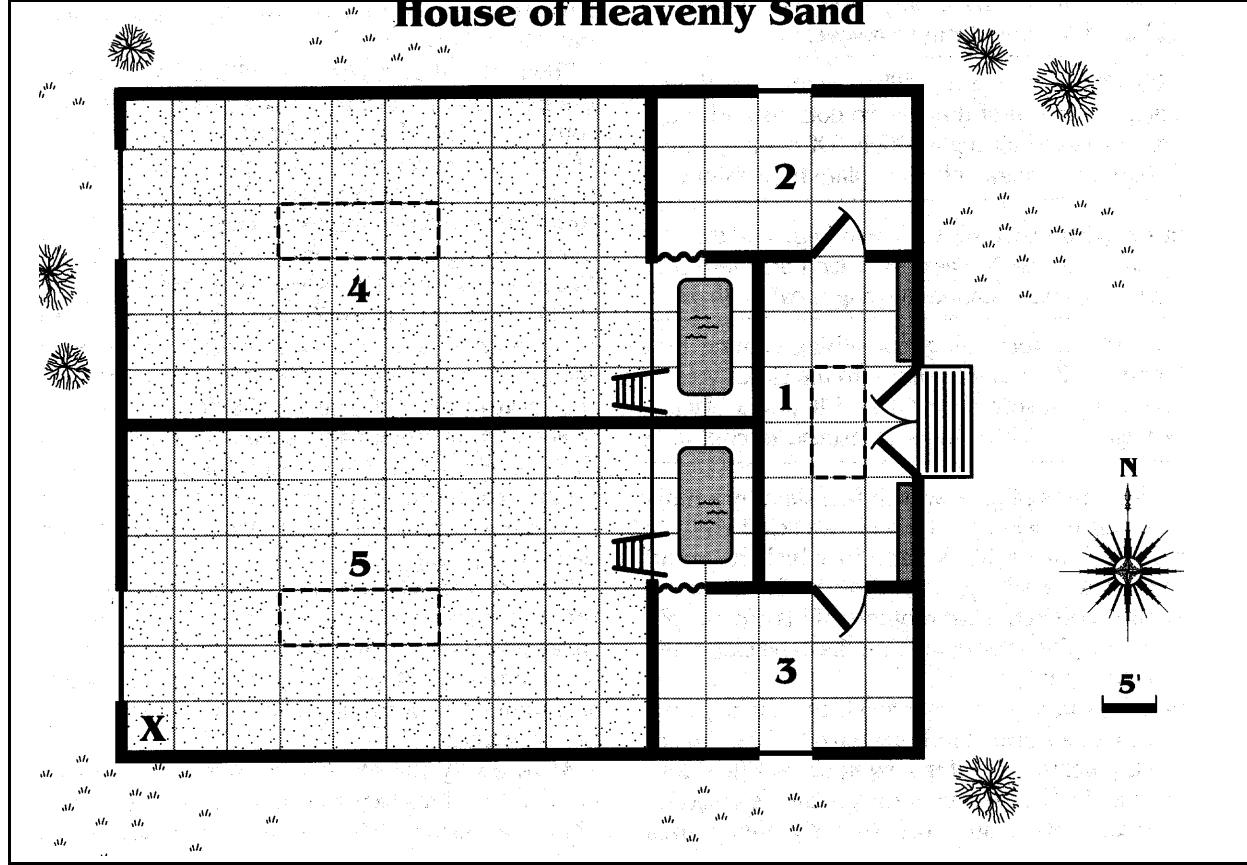
Light comes through a wire-grilled skylight, and through a wire-reinforced window set high in the western wall.

5. Men's sand room. The layout is identical to the women's sand room. Everyone present will treat the PCs and samurai with the appropriate deference, but none knows anything about the body.

If the PCs are interested, Buntaro shows them where the body was found—at the spot marked 'X', buried in hot sand. There is nothing of interest or import in the sand.

Should the PCs manage to examine the skylight set into the roof—which is more than thirty feet above the sand floor—let each PC who examines the grill roll a 5d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. Anyone successfully making the roll will notice that the metal nails holding the western end of the grill in place are newer and shinier than those at the eastern end of the grill. The PC will also notice that the panes of frosted glass at the western end of the skylight aren't as securely seated in their frames as the other panes. The obvious conclusion is that someone gained entry to the House of Heavenly Sand through this skylight.

House of Heavenly Sand



Act 3— The Monster of The Shrine Visiting The Shrine

After their visit to the House of Heavenly Sand, Buntaro leads the PCs to the site of the second “incident”. This site is one of the smaller shrines dotted around the rocky promontory on which the Shining Temple of Bishamon sits. (The shrine is area 5 on the city map.) A map and description of the shrine can be found in the following section.

On the way to the shrine, Buntaro gives the PCs this background:

“The next incident took place a day after we found the dead headman,” Buntaro growls, as though the whole thing had been orchestrated by vengeful *kami* just to plague him. “Another dead body, but this one different. This one was a pilgrim, and this time there was no doubt how he died. His body was rended by claws.”

“It seems he decided to spend the night in prayer in the Shrine of the West Wind. That’s normal: almost every night at least one pilgrim decides to spend the night in at least one of the minor shrines. As usual, two samurai were on duty outside the shrine. In the morning, when the pilgrim’s companions came to join him, they found him dead . . . spread out on the altar like a sacrifice. There was hell to pay.”

If the PCs ask what—if anything—the guardian samurai heard or saw, Buntaro answers:

“Nothing,” Buntaro spits. “They swore on their nonexistent honor that they heard nothing and saw nothing untoward all night. Fools. Of course, I ordered them to immediately to expiate their failure.”

Buntaro explains that this body was kept, and the PCs can see it later. If the PCs ask, Buntaro tells them that this corpse, too, was questioned using *speak with dead*:

“It said it saw something, something coming toward it before its soul was sent into the Great Void” Buntaro makes a sour face. “It said it saw a black, manlike figure . . . with wings. Nonsense, of course.”

The unfortunate pilgrim was in fact slain by a ninja wearing a pair of nekode. The ninja was clad entirely in black, and wore a black cape in which he could wrap himself to break up his outline. In the darkness of the shrine, and in the last moment of his life, the pilgrim can be forgiven for mistaking the cape-clad ninja for a winged man.

As the PCs and samurai approach the shrine, they see four other samurai standing guard before the entrance to the shrine. (Buntaro explains that he’s doubled the guard.) These four samurai—all wearing the brown kimono of Benju’s forces—keep their hands

ready on the hilts of their katanas even after the PCs’ group is close enough for them to have recognized Buntaro. They relax only when Buntaro officially greets them. (These samurai have vowed to themselves not to make the same mistake as their dead and dishonored colleagues, and will remain unfailingly vigilant.) The four samurai are unarmored, but carry katanas and wakizashis. Use the statistics for “Benju’s Samurai” in Chapter VII.

Buntaro escorts the PCs into the shrine, and shows them the altar on which the body was found.

Shrine of The West Wind

The Shrine of the West Wind is a small, single-storyed temple. It has the fluted ceiling typical of most temples; it is not terraced, however. The outer walls are weight-bearing, of strong wood. The inner walls are of woven reeds, more like screens than anything else. The shrine is poorly lit by smoking lanterns of animal fat, which are mounted on the eight pillars.

The central statue-representing Komoku the Wide Gazing—stands 25 feet tall, and is constructed of wood covered with the thinnest coating of beaten gold. The four statues at the eastern end of the shrine are life-sized representations of famous priests who worshipped Komoku.

Before the central statue is a wooden altar on which pilgrims lay offerings to Komoku. These offerings are usually of flowers or intricate works of origami. The pale wood of the altar bears a barely-visible discoloration—a blood stain. Visitors to the temple have tried to scrub away the stain, but a faint reminder still remains.

Today the altar is covered with offerings, many of them to smooth the journey of the murdered pilgrim’s soul. There are four people in the shrine when the PCs arrive. Three are simple pilgrims (use the “general townsfolk” statistics). The third is a more formidable-looking figure: a shaven-headed, ascetic man wearing orange monk’s robes. This is the monk Yaemon (refer to Chapter VII for statistics).

The pilgrims treat the PCs and samurai with respect and honor. Yaemon responds politely to the PCs and the other samurai, but to Buntaro his behavior is on the verge of insult. (In fact, if Yaemon weren’t so obviously a holy personage, Buntaro would probably draw steel on him.) The reason for Yaemon’s animosity towards Buntaro will come out if the two engage in any conversation: the monk blames Buntaro for the death of the pilgrim.

None of the pilgrims or Yaemon can expand upon what Buntaro has already said about the death. All three pilgrims travelled with the dead man, but none knew him well. One of the pilgrims was among those who found the body, but he can shed no further light on the incident.

Angered by the attitude of Yaemon—and particularly by the fact that the monk might well be right about his responsibility—Buntaro will not tarry long



in the shrine, wishing to lead the PCs to where they can view the body.

The Dearly Departed

The body of the slain pilgrim rests on a low wooden table in a ramshackle hut just inside the wall of the town's graveyard (area 15). Two samurai guard the shack from busybodies. They carry katanas and wakizashis, and both also carry daikyu and 12 arrows; they are unarmored. Two *eta* gravediggers are waiting outside the shack, ready to deal with the body (use "general townsfolk" statistics).

Buntaro leads the PCs into the shack to show them the body. Read the following:

Buntaro's description has prepared you for what you see. The pilgrim died badly, you can see immediately. The deep tears in the man's throat and chest are just what you'd expect from the clawing attack of a man-sized or larger creature—perhaps a tiger. But then, a tiger would have dragged the corpse off to eat it, isn't that so? And no matter what Buntaro may think—it's doubtful that even the most unobservant samurai wouldn't have noticed a tiger entering the shrine.

And is this the environment for tigers anyway?

There's nothing more of use to be learned from examining the body. Buntaro waits impatiently until the

PCs are done, then leads them away from the shed, nodding to the gravediggers to do their work. Once the group is back inside the wall of the town, read the following:

Buntaro turns to you and bows—the bare minimum required by politeness and not one degree more, although he's not being directly insulting . . . quite.

"My master orders me to tell you to go about your investigation now," he growls at you. "You are free to travel the town, and speak with who you will. You are to report anything you learn directly to me or to Yuji Takaesu. My master also orders me to say"—and here Buntaro looks as though he's tasted something foul—"that, if you wish to pass your information on to him directly, you may do so. Speak to either myself or Takaesu-*san*, and we will arrange an audience. Finally, my master orders me to invite you to view the sunset with him from the Shining Temple of Bishamon this evening. He orders me to tell you it would be his honor to see you there."

And then, with another perfunctory bow, Buntaro turns his back and strides away, flanked by his samurai.

The PCs have the remainder of the day to wander around Aru town, learning the lay of the land and talking to anyone they like.

Act 4 –For Whom The Bell Tolls Approaching Sunset

The DM should make it clear to the PCs that ignoring Benju's invitation to view the sunset would be the height of insult.

For details on the layout of the Shining Temple of Bishamon, refer to Chapter III.

As you climb the steps that lead up to the Shining Temple of Bishamon, you can see Benju Matsutomo's party high above you. To the west of the stairway is a rocky shoulder that looks over the city. It's from here that the daimyo has chosen to view the sunset... and a very good vantage point it is, you quickly realize.

You reach the top of the stairway, a little flushed from the exertion. Benju's gone to a lot of trouble to make this a lavish experience, you notice. The entire shoulder of the hill is covered with richly woven carpets. Serving girls kneel around the daimyo, ready to offer him food, *cha* or *sake*, as he wishes.

Kneeling beside Benju, in a position of honor and authority is the old man, Yuji Takaesu. Further away, in a position of considerably lesser authority is Buntaro. There are five others close by the daimyo that you haven't seen before: two men and three women. The entire group is cordoned around by fourteen samurai in the uniform of Benju's Home Guard.

The daimyo sees you approach and waits to receive your respects.

The entire party comprises Benju, Yuji Takaesu, Buntaro, **Toshikazu Wada** (commander of the Home Guard), **Sumihiro Matsutomo** (Benju's nephew), **Takako Shimizu** (Benju's niece), **Lady Satomi** (Benju's mother-in-law), and **Naomi** (Benju's favored consort). Refer to Chapter VII for descriptions of those NPCs in bold face type. All are unarmored, and carry the minimum weaponry appropriate for their caste and position—that is, *daisho* ("long and short") for the males, and a knife for each of the women.

There are five serving girls present, among them Sono (whom the PCs may remember from their initial audience with Benju). All wear simple kimonos and are unarmed.

Of the fourteen samurai, six are officers who serve Benju as his personal bodyguards; the other eight are standard samurai of Benju's Home Guard. All are unarmored, and carry katana and wakizashi.

If the PCs have been foolish enough to try to enter the daimyo's presence armed, two of the samurai officers intercept them and politely request that the PCs leave their weapons with them. (Only *hatamoto*—totally trustworthy vassals and advisors—are allowed to bring weapons into the presence of the daimyo.)

Again, the DM should make it clear to the PCs that this is necessary. Once the PCs are unarmed, read the following:

As you approach, the samurai guards bow to you respectfully, as equal to equal. The bows of the other members of the daimyo's party range from reasonable respect to borderline insolence (Buntaro, of course). The daimyo's bow is merely an inclination of his head, but from a daimyo that is more than respectful enough.

"Greetings, adventurers," Benju says in his powerful voice. "Please, sit." He indicates the carpet near him. The view will be good from there, *neh?*"

Once you've settled yourselves, he continues: "Do you have anything to tell me?"

If the PCs have learned anything—doubtful, this early in the proceedings—they have the option of telling Benju or keeping it to themselves for the moment. Benju will respect their silence, assuming that they'll tell him anything important in private at a later time. Benju introduces the rest of his party. As always when in Benju's presence, the PCs must be on their best behavior. The other members of the daimyo's party will react immediately and unmistakably to any hint of impropriety, giving all but the most obtuse PCs a clue that their behavior is inappropriate.

Of all the people present, Benju's consort Naomi will be the most outgoing and polite towards the PCs. If they return her politeness, then she will provide them with highly valuable information later (Act 18).

Poetry

If the PCs have managed to avoid major social gaffes, eventually read the following:

As the limb of the sun creeps closer to the horizon, the party falls silent. The sky is spectacular, a symphony of reds and oranges. Finally the sun vanishes, and all that remains are scattered clouds, hanging above the horizon, their underbellies the color of salmon.

Into the stillness, Benju Matsutomo speaks:

*"As the sun sinks
To quench itself in the distant ocean,
So does my soul descend
To the Nether Word."*

The daimyo turns to the old man beside him. "Yuji-San?" he prompts.

Yuji Takaesu responds immediately.

*"But, as the sun will rise
Once more to sail the skies,
So does my soul in silence
Await rebirth."*

The daimyo looks directly at you, his expression expectant.

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Act 5—Rumors*

This act can be used whenever the DM sees fit after the destruction of the bell—once or several times.

Whenever the PCs talk to any typical townsfolk, or overhear townsfolk in conversation, roll 1d6. On a result of 1, the PCs hear one of the following rumors (roll 1d26, or select one). Some of the rumors have some relation to reality, while others are totally false.

- 1 “Bishamon has cursed Aru, yes he has. It’s because of pride, the daimyo’s pride. I didn’t say that, no, so sorry, I didn’t mean it!” (False)
- 2 “Whatever’s doing all this, it’s not after us. It’s just after the daimyo.” (True)
- 3 “The tiger-bird spirit that killed the pilgrim . . . I saw it, last night. It sang to me.” (Totally false)
- 4 “I don’t know why, but the yakuza seem very concerned all of a sudden. Maybe they know something we don’t.” (True)
- 5 “A storm is about to break over Aru. I can feel it in my bones.” (True)
- 6 “I had a dream last night. I saw a creature with a snake’s head, wreathed in smoke, moving through the moonlight. And it’s coming closer.” (True; see Act 14)
- 7 “It’s the Matsutomo curse, I swear to the gods it is. My grandmother told me that whenever a Matsutomo becomes daimyo, Aru suffers the torments of hell.” (False)
- 8 “I saw my brother’s face at my window last night. And he’s dead. Has been for three years . . .” (False)
- 9 “It’s the Turning of the Age, when spirits walk the streets, and all reason is overturned. The graves give up their dead, and bodiless souls prowl the land and feed on the living.” (False)
- 10 “That monk, what’s his name, Yako, Yaemon, something like that. He’s a hard one, he is.” (True)
- 11 “This is going to get a lot worse before it gets better.” (True)
- 12 “That Buntaro. I know he’s got something to do with all this. He hates the daimyo. I’m sure he’s betraying him somehow.” (False)
- 13 “Don’t believe a word of it. It’s all a trick. And—just between you and me—I wouldn’t be surprised if the daimyo’s behind it. Look well if it’s just an excuse to raise taxes . . .” (False)
- 14 “This talk of the supernatural . . . crazy! That pilgrim, a tiger got him when the samurai were asleep. And the bell? Well, bells get old, too.” (False)
- 15 “I think the daimyo’s more worried than he lets on. Some day take a look at the list of past daimyos, and what happened to them. You’ll understand.” (True)
- 16 “If you ask me, those strangers have something to do with it. Those foreigners the daimyo took in. Never trust a foreigner. Oh . . . so sorry, I didn’t see you there, honored travellers . . .” (False)

This gathering has suddenly become an informal contest in poetry. All PCs, as well as the other noble members of the gathering, are expected to participate. Use the rules in *Oriental Adventures* for informal contests and the honor rules to judge the PCs’ success or failure.

Even though Buntaro has proficiency in poetry, tonight he’s just not in the right frame of mind to pull it off. He will automatically fail in his first attempt. If one of the PCs wins the contest, that PC will be the target of Buntaro’s particular detestation for the rest of the adventure.

Benju will congratulate the winner, and gift him or her with a prize of one kimono of the finest silk (worth 5 tael). If Benju himself wins, he will accept congratulations humbly (he’s a good winner).

When the contest is concluded, read the following:

In the gathering darkness, you see a robed figure moving towards the towering apple tree that stands in front of the temple. It must be one of the temple shukenja, you conclude, going to ring the brass bell that hangs from the tree.

You watch as the shukenja reaches up to draw back the clapper of the bell and lets it fall . . .

Instead of the clear, chiming tone you’ve heard every hour since your arrival in Aru town, there’s a dull *clunk*. The brass bell crumbles into fragments, which patter to the ground at the feet of the astonished shukenja.

Benju and the rest of his party surge to their feet . . .

The bell is well and truly shattered. If a PC examining the fragments of the bell has one of the following proficiencies, he or she is entitled to a success roll based on that proficiency: armorer, blacksmith, jeweler, or weaponsmith. This roll is made at a +1 penalty. A successful roll indicates that the PC has detected something untoward: minuscule traces of a strong acid that could have the effect of weakening brass and turning it brittle.

Note to the DM: While everyone was distracted by the sunset and the poetry contest, a ninja climbed unnoticed into the apple tree, and poured acid on the bell. He then left the area the way he came.

The common people—and even the majority of the nobles—will take the breaking of the bell as an omen of the worst possible kind. Perhaps it signifies that Bishamon has withdrawn his favor from the temple and from the town, or perhaps it intimates that evil spirits have turned their malign attention towards Aru—that’s how the rumors will run.

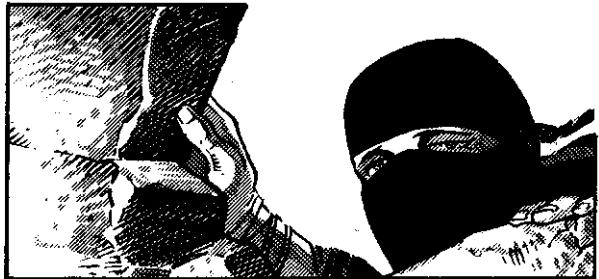
The destruction of the bell ends the evening’s gathering. Surrounded by their cordon of samurai, Benju and his family hurry down the stairs and back to the castle. The PCs are free to ‘respond however they see fit.

- 17 "It's all a curse cast by Lady Satomi, the daimyo's mother-in-law, the witch. Have you noticed she doesn't cast a shadow?" (False)
- 18 "It's something to do with that wandering wu jen, Dosko I think his name is. He cast a spell on me, blighted my right arm. Well, it got better . . ." (Partially true)
- 19 "It was a tiger-bird spirit. And I'm never going back to the House of Heavenly Sand. Only the gods know what else is buried under the sand." (False)
- 20 "Some people say it was a 'tiger-bird spirit'. Nonsense. There's no such thing as a 'tiger-bird spirit'. That's just superstitious nonsense, not worthy of attention by right-thinking, intelligent people. Particularly when intelligent people know it was a flying spirit goat-carp that did it . . ." (False)

The DM can get quite a lot of mileage out of the "tiger-bird spirit" rumor, which is currently making the rounds of the poorer areas of town. If the PCs try to follow up on that rumor, they'll find that several people claim to have seen the tiger-bird spirit. Of course, they're all either liars, inveterate drunkards, or victims of their own imaginations.

These rumors have two main effects. The major one is to show the PCs how much credence the populace is giving to the supposedly supernatural nature of the "incidents" that have occurred recently. The other effect is to present the PCs with a number of valuable gems of information. . . all well mixed in with red herrings, of course.

In addition to these rumors, the PCs should see a quickly-growing business in good luck charms and "anti-spirit potions", sold by the enterprising to the gullible. As matters progress, stalls begin to spring up at many street-corners, and many hawkers are doing great trade in these gewgaws and nostrums. (Of course, none of these gimmicks are at all magical, and all are totally useless. Some may—at the discretion of the DM—even be counter-productive: mild purgatives, etc.) The DM can use these sellers of hokum for "nuisance encounters" whenever it may seem appropriate.



Act 6—Fire!

This act can be used whenever the DM sees fit early in the development of the adventure. The PCs can be involved or not, at the DM's option. If they're not involved the DM can give them the appropriate information from the "Probable Outcome" section that follows.

If the PCs are to be involved, this act can be played out whenever the PCs are abroad on the streets at night (perhaps directly after Act 4 and the destruction of the bell). Read the following:

The night breeze is freshening, and carries a symphony of scents: flowers, the perfume of a passing courtesan, food cooking, and—from the eta area—the harsh chemicals used in tanning, and the unmistakable odor of blood from the town's single small slaughterhouse.

And, suddenly . . . smoke. A red glow lights the sky over among the ramshackle eta huts. Cries ring out: yells of pain and dismay, punctuated by sharp orders.

Firestarter

If the PCs respond immediately and head towards the fire, they have the opportunity to learn a little more about what's going on; read the following section. If they hesitate, skip this encounter entirely and go on with "The Firefighters". If they don't investigate at all, find some appropriate way of giving them the appropriate information from "Probable Outcome"; it's as if they haven't been involved at all.

The street is suddenly full of people: terrified peasants, grim-faced samurai. Despite the fear that appears on many faces, they're all heading towards the glow in the sky.

No, not all. A single figure pushes through the crowd, hurrying away from the blaze. His face and clothing are nondescript, and none of you recognize him.

But he recognizes you. As your eyes meet, you see terror flash across his face. He turns and runs, knocking people off their feet in his desperation to reach the small, dark alley across the street . . .

This figure is **Onoshi**.

Onoshi (0-level male human): AC 8; MV 12; hp 7; #AT 1 or 3/1; Dmg 1-3 (knife) or 1-6 (karate); THAC0 20; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 9; AL LN. Proficiencies: karate. Honor: 2.

Onoshi is the 20-year-old son of an Aru fishmonger, hence of the *sho* class. He wears an undistinguished kimono, with a knife concealed in the sleeve. Remember: possession of weapons is illegal for all but samurai. Any samurai who finds this knife in his possession will immediately take Onoshi's head, without asking

any questions. If the PCs want to be able to ask Onoshi about his actions, they're going to have to protect him from the righteous wrath of any NPC samurai who happens to be nearby. Onoshi has been trained in karate; thus his Armor Class and high number of attacks. He knows two special maneuvers: *circle kick* and *feint*.

In addition to his highly illegal knife, Onoshi carries 10 tael. He received this princely sum in return for setting fire to a peasant's *minka* in the eta area of town. When the PCs spot him, he's trying to get away from the scene of the crime. If pursued, he'll do whatever he can to get away; he knows the winding back-streets of the city better than the PCs, so he has a good chance of succeeding if they don't go after him immediately. Should he be caught or cornered, he'll fight: throwing his knife at any pursuer who looks remotely like a spellcaster preparing a spell, then using his karate skills. Onoshi fights fiercely, but not to the death, and always with an eye to escape. As soon as it's apparent that he's outmatched and that escape is impossible, he flings himself to the ground, begging for mercy. If the PCs keep him alive, he'll answer any questions . . . intermixing the responses with a good measure of pleas for mercy, of course.

Unfortunately, he can't tell the PCs much. Yes, he was approached by a man who wanted him to set fire to the *minka*. But the man was a stranger; Onoshi had never seen him before. He can't even say whether his employer was from Aru, or a stranger to the town, and has no idea as to the man's rank or motivation. He describes the man as "mid-height, with dark hair and dark eyes, wearing a plain dark kimono" . . . which, of course, is of no help at all.

The Firefighters

If the PCs decide to head for the site of the fire, read the following:

As you hurry towards the glow, you're filled with foreboding. There's been no rain for more than a week, and *minka*—particularly in an *eta* village—are notorious fire-traps. You could well be witnesses to a firestorm like the one that devastated much of Juzimura several years ago.

But when you reach the spot, you see an amazing sight. The fire is totally under control—almost extinguished, in fact. There's a well-organized bucket brigade fighting the fire, and others are tossing water on the roofs of nearby buildings to prevent it from spreading. As you watch in amazement, the fire is completely quenched. Tired and grimy—but exultant—the eta and others turn away to return to their homes or businesses.

If the PCs want to find out anything about the fire, they're going to have to ask the spectators and participants. The PCs must work hard to extract all of the facts, which are as follows:

拔氣紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐鄂弗伏紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐

- The fire started in the home of a family of *eta*.
- All but one of the family escaped. The old and infirm grandfather perished in the blaze.
- The fire was very sudden, and nobody has any clue how it started and flared up so fast.
- The campaign to fight the fire was started by four men, who responded instantly to the threat and organized the bucket brigade.

The PCs will probably question the townsfolk further about these four men. If so, read the following:

The *eta* bows to you. "I don't know them, honored lords (and ladies). Never saw them before. They wore poor clothes, like us, yes. But they weren't of us, if the honored nobles understand me. Their voices, their manners . . . They weren't *eta*. But we don't know who they are, none of us."

Various people will give varying descriptions, but they'll all boil down to "mid-height, with dark hair and dark eyes".

Each PC involved in questioning the *eta* should make a 4d6 Ability Check against Wisdom. A successful roll means that he or she has noticed clues that some of the *eta* are lying. The PCs can proceed as they like to discover the truth.

The truth of the matter is that some of the locals recognized the four men who organized the bucket brigade—not by name, but by status. The men are members of the local yakuza clan. (Once the truth is out, the locals will speak proudly of the yakuza: "Doing their duty, they were. Protecting the common folk, as yakuza should.")

If asked, the townsfolk will admit to knowing Onoshi, the fishmonger's son . . . but will always follow up the answer with something like "Why? He's not in trouble, is he? Maybe I don't know him after all. What did you say his name was? . . ." They respond to the news that he set the fire with disinterested fatalism.

Probable Outcome

If the PCs aren't involved in this act, they can learn the following facts, either as rumors or as an official report from some member of the Matsutomo household (perhaps' a samurai assigned to guide them, or some such).

- An old man died in an unexplained fire in the *eta* area last night.
- The fire was put out surprisingly quickly, perhaps saving the city from a major conflagration.
- In a seemingly unrelated incident, a merchant—the son of a local fishmonger—was cut down on the street when he pulled a knife on a samurai.

Act 7—Ungrateful Dead?

The PCs can be involved in this act or not, at the DM's option. If they're not involved the DM can give them the appropriate information from the "Probable Outcome" section that follows.

Set-up

If the PCs are to be involved, the DM must find some way to manipulate them into visiting the Shining Temple of Bishamon at night. Read the following:

The *mama-san* who runs your *ryokan* hustles over to you as you're heading for your rooms. "A message," she says breathlessly, holding out a folded piece of parchment. "Important, the delivery boy said."

As the *mama-san* goes about her business, you open the message.

"Greetings, travellers," it reads. "I desire a meeting with you. It would be to your benefit as much as to mine. Let us meet tonight at midnight, in front of the Shining Temple of Bishamon. I have much to share with you, and little to ask." The message is signed "Yaemon".

Yaemon? Isn't he the monk who almost clashed with Buntaro when you visited the Shrine of the West Wind?

Again, if the PCs decide to forego the proposed meeting, convey to them the appropriate information from the "Probable Outcome" section; unless they show up at the temple for other reasons, they'll have no further involvement in this act.

Midnight at The Temple

If the PCs decide to meet with Yaemon, or if they arrive at the temple for other reasons, read the following:

The night is clear, and the wind from the west, carrying on it an almost subliminal hint of salt from the not-so-distant sea. You reach the top of the three thousand steps, the warmth in your legs reminding you of every one.

The moonlight seems almost as bright as mid-day. You can easily see the four figures arrayed before the temple's main entrance. The night is even bright enough to see the four additional figures ranged around the circumference of the building. The four door guards tense as they see you, hands flashing to sword hilts. Then the hands fall away as the samurai recognize you. As you approach, you see the samurai are still wary and on guard—as they were ordered to be. Good.

Use the statistics for "Benju's Samurai" for these guards. All eight wear leather armor, and carry

拔氣紳俛伏膚拔趺付腐鄂弗伏紳俛俛伏膚拔趺付腐

katanas and wakizashis. The four samurai guarding the perimeter of the temple also carry daikyu and 12 arrows each.

Should the PCs ask about the monk Yaemon, the samurai will tell them that they haven't seen anyone up here since the last pilgrim left shortly after sunset. (Note to the DM: Yaemon has been detained by other circumstances, as will become apparent in Act 8, "The Monk's Revenge".)

Tiger-Bird Spirit?

When the time seems appropriate, read the following:

There's a grunt of alarm and amazement from the samurai. You spin, and your eyes follow his gaze.

There! Among the trees to the east of the temple: a figure that could be a man . . . except men don't glow with that cold greenish light. The figure spreads its wings, then retreats into the trees, immediately vanishing from sight. What was it? It couldn't be a tiger-bird spirit . . . could it?

A bowstring thrums, and an arrow sings across the open space . . . to bury itself impotently in the bole of a tree—exactly at throat-height, and just where the glowing figure had stood a moment before. A nice shot.

Of course, it's one of the samurai who loosed the arrow. He immediately apologizes for firing without being ordered, but the strange figure had (understandably) startled him.

The PCs are free to pursue the figure or not, as they see fit. If they don't do so immediately, the glowing figure will make another tantalizing appearance, always withdrawing before anyone can send an arrow or spell its way. When the PCs finally investigate, five of the samurai will accompany them unless otherwise ordered . . . leaving only three to watch the temple.

If the PCs enter the woods, they never see the glowing figure again. Instead, however, they hear soft sounds of movement up ahead. These sounds are always far enough away that nobody in the PCs' party can see what might be making them. Each PC who enters the woods is entitled to a 3d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. A successful roll means that the PC is aware, from the direction and duration of the sounds, that the fleeing creature—whatever it is—is moving through the treetops, and is travelling faster than a man could move through the woods.

No matter how fast the PCs pursue, they can never catch the "creature" making the sounds. The trail ends when the woods stop at the edge of a steep cliff.

There are two clues that the PCs might find, but they have to look in the right places. Any PC who climbs into the trees is entitled to a 4d6 Ability Check

against Wisdom. A successful roll means that the PC has found something: a small, cunningly-designed clockwork mechanism. The device can be wound up by a small key, then, after a predetermined period of time, a small lever moves, with enough force to audibly rustle small branches. A determined search will turn up six of these devices, planted along the supposed route of the "creature". (PCs should quickly realize that they were led deep into the woods by false sound effects.) Each mechanism can be sold for 10 ch'ien . . . if the DM rules that an interested buyer can be found.

The second clue can be found at the foot of the tree that was struck by the samurai's arrow. Any PC who examines the ground around the tree is entitled to a 4d6 Ability Check against Wisdom. A successful roll means that the PC has noticed something: a tiny speck of glowing residue on a blade of grass. This speck glows with the same cold, green light as the mysterious figure.

Any PC examining the residue closely can make a 5d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. If the character has proficiency as a herbalist, or is a wu jen, he or she receives a -2 bonus to the die roll. A successful roll indicates that the PC has an idea what the residue is: a natural substance that gives off a cold light as a result of a chemical reaction, similar to the light of a firefly.

If they're unable to identify the residue themselves, the PCs might decide to take it to a sage or other specialist. The light has a limited duration, however. The substance ceases to glow in 2d6 turns, after which time even a sage can't identify it.

Note to the DM: The true nature of these events is as follows. A ninja used the cover of the night to approach the temple through the woods. Donning a thin cloak, the outside of which had been treated with the light-producing substance, the ninja made his "magical" appearance. As soon as he knew that the PCs were pursuing, he took off the cloak, rolled it up so that the glowing surface was inside the roll, and concealed it in a pouch. He then made his escape while his cunning mechanical devices led the PCs on a merry chase in a totally different direction.

Meanwhile, Back at the Temple . . .

When the PCs return from their abortive pursuit, they find the samurai that stayed behind are alert and on guard. Read the following:

The leader of the guard detachment barks a guttural order, and one of the samurai darts inside the temple. After a moment, you hear a quickly-muffled cry of alarm.

What now? The samurai pound up the stairs and into the darkness of the temple.

Immediately you see the samurai who had been sent inside. His face is grim and his posture firm, the very picture of the unshakable warrior. (It's al-

most enough to make you forget the cry of fright.) The samurai points.

Standing rigidly upright, his back against one of the wooden screens surrounding the statue of Bishamon, is a man wearing the robes of a pilgrim shukenja. After a moment, you realize why his posture is so upright and motionless: a spear of some kind has been driven right through his chest, and into the screen behind him.

Unless the PCs prevent him for some reason, the lead samurai will have the pilgrim taken down from the screen. Read the following:

"Take that down," the leader of the guard detachment snaps. Obediently, three of the samurai run to follow his order.

While two samurai hold the dead pilgrim, the third struggles to remove the spear. He finally does so, but with obvious difficulty: that thing had been driven firmly into the wood.

The samurai with the spear gasps with surprise as he sees clearly for the first time what it is he's holding. The metal head is of a design you've never seen before: basically leaf-shaped, but with a strange ripple to the edges. There's a diamond-shaped cut-out through the middle of the head.

As the samurai holds up the spear, his fellows gasp as well. One of them mutters under his breath, "A *gaki*- spear . . ."

None of the samurai are comfortable talking about it, but if they're questioned firmly, they'll explain what they know about the *gaki*- spear. According to a local legend, unknown outside the vicinity of Aru town (and so unfamiliar to the PCs), a *jiki-ketsu-gaki* of great power lives in the mountains nearby. (Refer to the entry in the *Kara-Tur Monstrous Compendium* for information on *gaki*.) In addition to his regular powers, this *gaki* also has the power of prophesy. When an age of trouble is about to befall the land, the *gaki* warns the local residents with an omen. The legend states that the chosen omen is the body of a wise man, killed with a spear of a peculiar design. The pilgrim shukenja and the strange spear certainly seem to match the details of the legend . . .

Note to the DM: The Yamaguchi ninja are residents of Aru Province, and so are familiar with the legend of the *gaki*. From their collection of strange weapons, they selected a good candidate for a "gakispear", and gave it to one of the four ninja assigned to tonight's mission. First of all, the ninja tracked down the unfortunate pilgrim shukenja, and slew him with poison, then carried his body secretly to the woods behind the Shining Temple. Then, while one of their number led the PCs—and possibly many of the samurai guards—away, the others sneaked into the temple with the body and the spear, and quickly arranged the

"omen". The ninja then made their escape into the night. The timing should be such that the PCs have no hope at all of tracking the ninja.

Each PC examining the body is entitled to a 3d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. A successful roll indicates that the PC realizes the spear-thrust wasn't a death-blow: the unfortunate pilgrim was already dead when the spear entered his body.

Any PC examining the body further is entitled to a 6d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. If the character has proficiency as a herbalist, or is a ninja, he or she receives a -4 bonus to the die roll. A successful roll indicates the PC has discovered that the shukenja was killed by poison.

If the body is questioned using *speak with dead*, the PCs can learn that the shukenja has been nowhere near the temple tonight. The last thing he remembers is sitting down in his room for a relaxing cup of *cha*.

RUMORS, RUMORS

Unless the PCs explicitly order the samurai—and anyone else who may become involved, such as a sage—to silence, the next day the town will be filled with rumors regarding what happened around the temple. Even if the PCs do order silence, rumors will still begin to circulate, but only after two days. (It takes that long for the wives, consorts, friends, etc., of the samurai to extract the information from them.)

Even if the PCs have discovered any of the non-magical aspects of the evening's events (i.e., the mechanical devices), the rumors will contain none of these mundane—and therefore boring-facts. The rumors will concentrate on the glowing figure—obviously the tiger-bird spirit, since it had wings—the fact that the samurai's arrow had passed clean through the spectral figure, and the appearance of the *gaki*- spear.

Probable Outcome

If the PCs don't get involved in this act, for whatever reason, they can learn about the events through rumors or as an official report from some member of the Matsutomo household. Stripped of all the supernatural trappings, they can learn the following facts:

- The samurai guarding the Shining Temple saw a glowing figure on the margin of the woods. The figure was vaguely humanoid, but appeared to have wings.
- One of the samurai shot an arrow at the figure, but was unable to hit it.
- When they returned to the temple, they found the body of a pilgrim pinned to a screen with a spear of unfamiliar design.
- The spear and the dead shukenja seem to match well with a local legend concerning a *gaki* and omens of ill-fortune.

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Act 8—The Monk's Revenge*

Avenger

This act can be used when the DM sees fit, but only after the events of Act 7. It can be used whenever the PCs are abroad in the streets, unaccompanied by Benju's samurai. Read the following:

In your short time in Aru town, you've become almost accustomed to the heavy press of people that usually fills the streets. When it isn't there—like now—you almost miss it . . . almost.

"Murderers!" The cry rings out with no warning. For a moment you look around, bemused, looking for the murderers. Then, with a shock, you realize that the voice must be referring to you.

"Die, you death-mongering barbarians!" The scream—an obvious challenge—hangs on the still air. Then a figure hurtles like an orange-clad projectile out of an alley and into your midst.

The "orange-clad projectile" is the monk Yaemon. He is unarmored (of course), but carries a lajatang. He attacks the PCs with great ferocity, concentrating his attentions on warrior-types first.

If Yaemon notices a PC spellcaster preparing a spell, read the following:

"You honorless fiends," the monk cries. "Would you use magic as you use assassination? The souls of those you murdered curse you!"

He immediately concentrates his attack on the spellcaster, trying to disrupt the spell.

The PCs should quickly realize that Yaemon is operating under incorrect information. Claims of innocence won't sway him from his course, however. If the PCs want to force him to see reason, they'll have to subdue him somehow.

Throughout the fight, Yaemon continues to scream things about the PCs having no honor. This should cue them that the monk holds honor in the highest esteem. If one of the PCs issues him an honorable challenge, Yaemon will accept it immediately, and stop fighting until he faces the challenging PC one-on-one. Should the PCs attack Yaemon during this pause, or should anyone interfere with the progress of the duel, each PC immediately loses 3 points of honor. Yaemon will insist that the duel continue until one combatant is reduced to one-quarter of his or her current hit point total.

If Yaemon wins the duel, he immediately challenges another PC. This continues until Yaemon is defeated, or until he vanquishes all PCs. Should the monk emerge victorious over all of the PCs, he insists that they accompany him to the nearest magistrate as his prisoners, where he will accuse them of the crime described in the following section.

If Yaemon loses, read the following:

The monk bows to you. "Even foul murderers have some honor," he says harshly. "I have failed in my duty to my charges. My life is forfeit to expiate my failure."

Unless the PCs stop him, he extracts a small knife from within his robe and does what honor demands.

If the PCs subdue Yaemon, if all lose in their duels with the monk, or if they prevent him from taking his own life, the PCs have a chance to learn the reasons behind his attack on them.

Murder Most Foul

As described in Act 7, Yaemon had tried to arrange a midnight meeting with the PCs at the Shining Temple of Bishamon. As circumstances developed, he didn't make the meeting. (This was the night that the PCs saw the glowing "tiger-bird spirit".)

Before climbing to the temple to meet with the PCs, Yaemon decided that he'd stop in to visit some of "his" pilgrims—travellers who'd accompanied him on the road, and who were staying at a nearby *ryokan*. When he arrived, the inn was in an uproar. According to witnesses, a number of armed people had smashed into the rooms occupied by the pilgrims and had slain four as they tried to scramble out of their beds. The murderers had then fled, cutting down a fifth pilgrim who'd tried to stop them. None of the witnesses knew the attackers, but Yaemon was able to piece together good descriptions based on various people's testimony. The descriptions almost perfectly match the appearance of the PCs . . . Filled with righteous anger, Yaemon went forth and tried to track down the PCs so he could destroy them.

Assuming that the PCs can force Yaemon to listen to them, it should be possible to prove to him that they weren't responsible for the killings. If they were present for the events in Act 7, the PCs will be able to get the samurai to testify that they were at the Shining Temple when the murders were being committed. Yaemon will accept this alibi, since it fits in with rumors he's heard, but has up to this point discounted.

Once Yaemon has accepted that he's in error, he's very apologetic towards the PCs, and insists that they let him "take the final journey" to remove the stain of the false accusation from his honor. If they don't persuade him otherwise, Yaemon will kill himself. If they do prevent him from taking his own life, he will promise to help them in the future in any honorable way; all they have to do is ask. (The PCs can't force him into an action that he considers dishonorable; if pressed, he always has the final escape of an honorable warrior.)

Eventually, the PCs should remember to ask the monk why he'd originally tried to set up a meeting with them. If they finally do ask, read the following:

The monk clears his throat, looking somewhat embarrassed. "It seems somehow dishonorable," he says quietly. "But, as investigators, you should know what I have learned. Those who would know such things have told me that Buntaro—that obnoxious animal who accompanied you to the shrine—has been acting in a most suspicious manner. I hear tell he skulks through the castle at night, in areas where he has no cause to be. When a samurai guard—who was only doing his duty—didn't recognize him and asked him his business, Buntaro drew his sword and slew the man. Certainly, considering his rank, such was his right . . . but often the right to perform a certain act is insufficient justification to actually perform it, correct?" Yaemon coughs uncomfortably. "Now, I myself make no accusations of impropriety against Buntaro, that you must understand. Passing on gossip such as this soils my honor. . . but I feel it is important that you know what I know."

Yaemon can tell the PCs nothing more. Even if pressed, he won't name his sources for their protection.

Background

The murder of the pilgrims was set up to discredit the PCs, and to hinder their investigation as much as possible. The attackers who were disguised as the PCs were yakuza. Unfortunately for the PCs, they left no clues behind to identify them.

Consequences

If the PCs kill Yaemon without first talking to him, it will be very difficult for them to find out what triggered him. The word will quickly spread throughout Aru town that the "strangers" murdered several pilgrims, then killed the monk who tried to avenge them. The PCs should quickly notice that the townsfolk are treating them differently, with a sullen, distrustful manner, or even with overt hostility. If they try to find out why, the DM should make it difficult for them to dig out the information.

Once the PCs find out what they're suspected of, they might try to spread counter-rumors concerning their innocence. Perhaps they can back up these rumors with testimony from the samurai who were guarding the Shining Temple the night of the "tiger-bird spirit". As in our world, however, people are much more willing to believe rumors of guilt than claims of innocence. Even if they manage to persuade Benju or another official to publicly announce their innocence, the townsfolk will still remember them as the "murderous strangers".

If the PCs don't kill Yaemon, and manage to prove their innocence to him, the rumors will still spread but not as widely or as fast. The townsfolk won't show overt hostility, although some will still treat the PCs with serious suspicion. There's nothing that the PCs can do to circumvent this.

Act 9— Conversation With a Mute*

This act can be used whenever the DM sees fit early in the development of the adventure. It will prove particularly useful if the PCs haven't yet begun to suspect that the "supernatural" events are actually staged by very natural agencies. Should the PCs already be thinking about ninjas, or if the DM needs to pick up the pace of events, this act can be omitted. None of the information contained in the act is vital to the PCs success, although it is educational and interesting.

Invitation

"Please excuse me, honored sirs (and ladies)." The voice from behind you is unctuous, ingratiating.

You turn to see a poorly-dressed messenger, holding a very low bow. In his hand, extended towards you, is a folded scrap of parchment.

"My mistress bids me give you this," he goes on. "My mistress Fusae- *san* wishes to speak with you this evening."

The PCs may remember that Fusae is the mute old woman who runs the House of Heavenly Sands. When they examine the parchment, it's just what the messenger described: an invitation to speak with Fusae that very evening, one hour after sunset. The address given is in the *eta* area of town. No matter how much the PCs may press him, the messenger is unable to give them any more information (such as how a mute can carry on a conversation with them . . .).

The Audience

The PCs might very well be suspicious about this meeting, particularly if they've already been involved in earlier nastiness. Should they try to investigate Fusae, they'll find that nobody knows much about her, just that she's an old harmless *eta* and the proprietress of the House of Heavenly Sands. If they decide to check out the meeting place beforehand, they'll find it to be a simple peasant minka.

If the PCs decide to attend the meeting—and there's really no good reason why they shouldn't—read the following:

Even an hour after sunset, with the night breezes blowing firmly, the *eta* area smells no better than it does during the day. The address mentioned in the invitation is easy to find. It's a peasant minka—one of many minka, with nothing at all to distinguish it from its neighbors.

You approach the front door slowly, preparing to knock. But before you can, the door swings open. Silhouetted against the light within is a withered, old figure. You recognize her at once: Fusae, from the House of Heavenly Sands. She beckons you in.

祓氣紳挽伏膚祓趺付腐鄂弗伏紳挽伏膚祓趺付腐

Fusae's minka is area 14 on the city map. Use the standard layout of a peasant minka from the *Oriental Adventures* hardcover. The meeting takes place in the large room, the one with the hearth. Fusae silently beckons the PCs to follow her into this room. Assuming they agree to do so—and, again, there's no good reason why they shouldn't—read the following:

The bent old woman slides back the shoji and signals for you to follow her into the minka's main room. The area is dimly lit by two small oil lamps that seem to produce more smoke than they do light. The smoke from the small fire in the hearth seems somewhat averse to using the chimney, and doesn't help the visibility a whit.

In the dimness, you see a figure kneeling in the far corner of the room. The figure bows deeply, then moves slightly forward, more into the doubtful light of an oil lamp. You see for the first time that the figure is a beautiful young woman.

Fusae makes a rapid series of complex gestures towards the young woman, who says in a pleasing voice, "We bid you welcome, honored travellers. My grandmother asks you please to make yourself comfortable."

For the first time, you notice something else that seems totally out of place in a peasant minka such as this. In the far corner of the room, near where the young woman was originally kneeling, you see a flower arrangement of almost transcendent beauty.

Fusae and her interpreter—who is called **Cachiko**—won't get down to business until the PCs have settled themselves comfortably, and Cachiko has served them their choice of *cha* or sake. Throughout this encounter, all conversation is conducted through Cachiko. She interprets her grandmother's sign language, always speaking as "we" or as "my grandmother". Fusae can obviously understand any questions put to her, answering yes-or-no questions with a definite nod or shake of her head.

When the pleasantries and formalities are out of the way, read the following:

Fusae gestures again, and Cachiko translates her signing. "My grandmother remembers you from the House of Heavenly Sands," the young woman tells you. "She has information that you should know about the unfortunate body found on her premises. Unfortunately, when you visited her before you were accompanied by Buntaro and he—so sorry, this is what she insists I tell you—he is a pig.

"My grandmother was at the House on the evening when the body must have been . . . er, delivered," Cachiko continues. "She left perhaps two hours after sunset. And, as she walked away from the building, she saw something. Figures on the rooftops. Figures clad in black, with black hoods. They were watching her. She saw them, but gave

no indication of her knowledge. She says . . . so sorry, she says men of action always err in their judgement of the old and infirm. Such as my grandmother see much, and know much for which they never receive credit."

If questioned, Fusae—through Cachiko—will say that she saw three black-clad men, but suspects that there were probably more. She knows nothing further, and won't speculate. Never does she use the word "ninja"; the PCs must make that leap of judgement themselves.

Should the PCs ask about Fusae's background, they can learn all of the background described in Chapter VII. Neither Fusae nor Cachiko will volunteer any of this information, however.

If asked, both Fusae and Cachiko will admit that they don't believe the "incidents" that have been happening recently have any supernatural aspects to them at all. Both women know that the PCs are investigating the incidents and wish them luck; neither of them is able to help them in any way, however, because of their eta status.

Probable Outcome

If the PCs don't go through with the meeting, the consequence is simply that they don't receive Fusae's potentially-useful revelation.



Act 10—Warning* Casual Encounter

This short act can be dropped in whenever the PCs are travelling through the town, either by day or night.

A plainly-dressed man bumps you—not hard, and obviously not maliciously. “So sorry,” he says with a bow. Then his eyes open wide in recognition. “Ah, the honored travellers.” He bows again, lower this time. “It is my honor to meet you. My name is Juto, though that is unimportant, of course. I understand that you’re helping our liege-lord to investigate the ‘incidents’. Oh, yes, your fame has already spread far.

“But . . .”—and here he leans forward, his voice dropping conspiratorially—“there are those who question what you’re doing. Not me, you understand, but some. They say. . . well, if it’s Aru town’s fate to suffer, then . . . it’s bad karma to interfere. And those who pursue bad karma will also suffer. Isn’t that true?”

He bows again, and speaks at a normal level. “Well, again, it was my honor to meet you. Perhaps our paths will cross again.”

Unless prevented, the man will leave the PCs and lose himself in the crowd. If the PCs ask him exactly who has spoken of bad karma, he’ll be as vague as he can get away with, if necessary making up false names. The PCs might sense that his words are actually a threat, and call him on it. If they do, he will instantly and contritely deny that any threat was intended.

The man—whose real name is **Nada**—is a yakuza, although he won’t admit it to the PCs. His true background is an open secret among the townsfolk, however, so it should be fairly easy for the PCs to discover this after the fact. Nobody knows where he lives, or where he operates from.

Nada’s sole purpose is to subtly warn the PCs away from their investigation (although this encounter will probably have the diametrically opposite effect). He will fight only if the PCs attack him, and even then his main goal will be escape. He won’t fight to the death, instead surrendering as soon as he’s reduced to 3 hit points. Once he’s surrendered, he’ll admit he’s yakuza, and that he was ordered to warn the PCs off, but he won’t tell the truth about his yakuza “family,” instead making up whatever totally false story he thinks will get the PCs to leave him alone.

Nada (5th level yakuza, male human): AC 10; MV 12; hp 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (ninja-to); THAC0 17; Str 11, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16; AL LN.

Special Abilities: HS 31%; MS 40%; OL 42%; PP 50%; HN 20%.

Proficiencies: gaming, ninja-to.

Honor: 27.

Act 11—Sunset Audience* Invitation

This act can be used whenever the DM sees fit, when it’s time to escalate matters, and point out the direct threat to Benju and his family. Whenever the PCs are abroad in the town, read the following:

You see the figures approaching when they’re still a good way off. Four samurai, wearing the brown kimonos of Benju’s Home Guard, all armed with *daisho*. Their leader has a determined expression on his face, and they’re heading straight for you.

The samurai stop at a respectful distance, and bow politely . . . but not quite low enough to indicate that they consider you as equals.

“Sirs (and ladies),” the lead samurai says with no preamble, “my liege lord Benju- *sama* orders me to invite you to an audience with him this evening, one half hour after sunset. You are to meet him in the top chamber of the North Tower. Do you understand?”

Once the samurai has delivered his message, he and his men leave. They don’t know the reason for the audience, and will consider any questions about it as bad manners. Use the statistics for “Benju’s Samurai” in Chapter VII.

After Sunset

The twelve guards at the gate to Benju’s castle will challenge the PCs when they try to enter, and ask to see the parchment that Benju gave them in order to confirm their identity. They will not open the gate or allow the PCs in unless they can produce this parchment. (If the PCs left it at their *ryokan*, the DM should keep close track of the time needed to go and get it, particularly if this would make them late for their appointment.) Use the statistics for “Benju’s Samurai.”

Once the PCs have satisfied the gate guards, four of the samurai escort them inside and take them to the foot of the North Tower: a very ordinary guard tower separated from the other buildings of the castle, and hence a good place for a private meeting. Read the following:

The staircase is steep and narrow, and you have to proceed in single file. Around and around, up and up the stairway leads. When you reach the final landing, you are met by six more samurai. You’re starting to recognize the subtleties of samurai uniform, so you recognize that these men are officers, and personal bodyguards to the daimyo.

“Good evening,” one of the samurai says, bowing stiffly. “You will please leave your weapons with me. This is not intended as an insult.”

As before, the samurai will not allow the PCs to enter the tower room armed. Use the statistics for "Samurai Officers."

When the PCs have handed over all their obvious weapons, one of the samurai opens the door to allow them into the room. Read the following:

The room is small and low-ceilinged, the floor covered with tatami of the finest quality. There are two windows on opposite sides of the room, open to the night breeze. The cross-draft is cool and refreshing.

Kneeling comfortably, awaiting you, is Benju Matsutomo. Standing behind him, wearing their katanas and wakizashis are Yuji Takaesu—the old general—and Toshikazu Wada—the young commander of the Home Guard. They bow to you with a minimum of politeness. Benju makes no motion of recognition, just fixes you with his steely gaze.

After a moment, the daimyo nods to the samurai guard, who leaves and shuts the door behind him.

The politeness with which Benju and the others treat the PCs depends on whether or not they're on time for the meeting. If the PCs are on time, once the door is shut Benju treats them fairly affably. If they're late, he can be seen to be biting back on his anger, and the others react with barely-contained hostility. Benju asks—or demands, as the case may be—a report on what the PCs have been doing, and what if anything they've discovered about the "incidents."

If the PCs are unwise enough to mention any rumors concerning Buntaro's supposed misdeeds, read the following:

The daimyo's face reddens with anger, and his eyes turn as cold as iced steel. His voice is low and dangerous as he says, "I believe it unwise to put credence in unsubstantiated rumors, and the height of courtesy to monger such rumors yourself. Neh? Continue your report, but you would do well to confine yourself to facts."

When the PCs are involved in conversation with the daimyo, read the following:

A shriek of surprise and pain—quickly bitten back—splits the night air. Toshikazu looks numbly down at his right arm. Across the biceps, his kimono is shredded, and blood, impossibly red, spurts from a tear wound.

Everyone is still for a protracted moment, a frozen tableau. Then Yuji leaps forward, clamping his hand hard over the spurting wound. Quickly, with his teeth and his free hand, the old general tears a strip of cloth from the younger man's kimono, and binds the wound, stanching the bleeding. Pale-



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faced, Toshikazu looks down at the makeshift bandage, and nods his thanks.

Each PC has a percentage chance equal to his or her Intelligence to have noticed something: a flash of silver streaking across the room, in through one window and out the other. Each PC who noticed the flash of silver is entitled to a 4d6 Ability Check against Intelligence to realize that what he or she saw was actually a shuriken, thrown with hideous accuracy in through one window to wound Toshikazu and then continue out the other window, leaving no evidence of its passage.

The wound to Toshikazu's arm has inflicted 3 hp of damage, and looks suspiciously like the injury that would be caused by the slashing claw of an invisible monster. In fact, unless one or more PCs saw the shuriken, that's exactly what Yuji and Toshikazu will assume it was. The general instantly draws his katana, and slashes it through the empty air around where Toshikazu was standing, as if trying to slay an invisible foe. Read the following:

The daimyo is on his feet in an instant, and lays a calming hand on the old general's shoulder. "Easy, old friend," he says reassuringly. "There are no invisible assailants here. No, this attack was natural ...although I don't know how..."

If the PCs are aware that the damage was done by a shuriken, they are free to go to the window through which the weapon entered. Twenty feet below the window, flattened against the wall and clinging to tiny cracks and projections, is a ninja clad in tight-fitting black clothing. The night qualifies as shadow, so the ninja has his normal chance to Hide in Shadows, plus a 15% bonus to represent the difficult angle of view. The ninja remains totally motionless until the PCs have given up looking for him. Then he continues down the tower and makes his escape from the castle.

If he is spotted, the ninja throws a shuriken at the observant PC (-2 to hit to represent the difficulty of throwing upwards), then drops the 40 feet to the ground (from which he takes no damage). He then tries to make his escape, using stealth and concealment to avoid any guards that may be called out to stop him. The DM must mediate any attempts to stop the ninja's escape, but should definitely give the man the benefit of any doubt. Unless the PCs personally pursue, the odds are excellent that he'll make his escape safely. (Remember that the PCs are probably unarmed, and must retrieve their weapons from the samurai outside the room. This will delay them if they want to follow the ninja out through the window.)

Ninja (9th level ninja / 9th level bushi, male human): AC 10; MV 12; hp 42; #AT 3/2; Dmg by weapon; THAC0 12; Str 13, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 14; AL LN.

Special Abilities: HS 56%; MS 70%; FT 60%; CW 93%; D 52%; OL 62%; TW 60%; PV 12.5'; F 40'; E 42%; BS x3.

Proficiencies: ninja-to, shuriken.

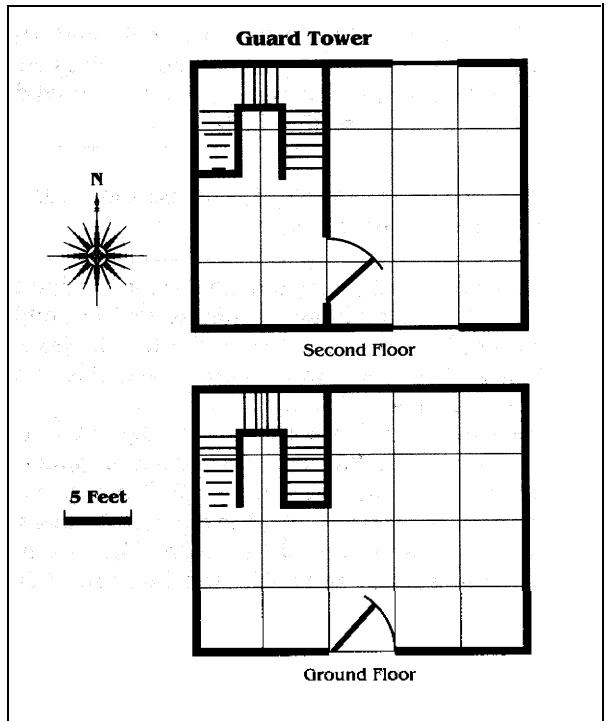
Honor: 28.

The ninja is armed with a ninja-to and six shuriken (not including the one he threw at Toshikazu). His mission was to injure the young warrior and then escape without being detected. He will fight to the death, and—if capture is inevitable—will kill himself either using his ninja-to or by biting down on a poison capsule he has concealed in his cheek. This poison will cause painless death in 1 round. He has the mark of the Yamaguchi ninjas—a tiny tattoo of a "flame knife"—under his left arm. Since the Yamaguchi ninjas are a new and unknown family, however, this symbol will mean nothing to anyone who finds it.

Even if the PCs don't see the shuriken, the weapon will be found in the courtyard the next day. The PCs can hear about this discovery in any way that seems appropriate, and can draw their own conclusions.

Benju won't tell the PCs anything more than he already has about the political situation, and will claim complete ignorance about why ninjas should want to kill Toshikazu.

If the PCs don't spot the ninja, or even if they do but he gets away, rumors will quickly spread that an invisible assailant—perhaps the already-notorious "tiger-bird spirit"—assaulted Toshikazu. Conflicting rumors will claim that the assailant was actually trying to kill Benju, but that the young warrior was wounded while trying to protect the daimyo. Rumors travel fast within the castle, and then are spread to the rest of the town by cooks and menial workers. No matter how hard the PCs and others try to stamp out these rumors, there's no practical way to prevent their dissemination.



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Act 12—Guard Duty Set-up

This act follows immediately after act 11. As soon as the ninja attack is resolved, one way or the other, Benju has new orders for the PCs. If they've tried to pursue the ninja, samurai find the PCs and order them to return to the tower room to speak with the daimyo. Read the following:

The daimyo's face is set in a grim expression. "You will assist my guards tonight," he says flatly. "I want you stationed with my regular samurai outside my room. They will follow your orders to the letter, I will have Toshikazu make this perfectly clear to them. I doubt that there will be another... incident... before dawn, but better to be safe. Do you understand? Toshikazu will detail your duties." He gestures to you dismissively. As you turn to leave, you hear the daimyo say to Yuji, "Bring me Buntaro."

Toshikazu leads the PCs down from the tower and takes them to the hallway outside Benju's sleeping rooms (area 15 on the donjon map). There are eight guards already present: six regular samurai ("Benju's Samurai" statistics) and two officers.

Toshikazu instructs the PCs and the samurai to remain on guard until dawn. After about fifteen minutes, Benju arrives, escorted by Yuji and the four samurai officers from the tower. Benju bids everyone goodnight with instructions that he's not to be disturbed before dawn, and goes into the room alone. Yuji and the four samurai officers leave. If the PCs try to go inside Benju's room, the samurai will prevent them from disturbing their lord.

Battle Stations!

The night is uneventful until two o'clock in the morning. At two, read the following:

The night is still, with nothing but the steady breathing of the motionless samurai guards to break the silence.

Then, shockingly, the peace of the night is ripped by sounds that you know all too well. Cries of rage and pain, the clash of steel on steel. The noise echoes through the castle. The samurai guards turn to you expectantly, awaiting orders . . .

The sounds are coming from the hallway outside area 20 on the donjon map. The PCs are free to order the samurai to respond in any way they see fit, and the samurai will obey. (As Benju promised, Toshikazu so instructed them at the beginning of the watch shift.) If the PCs' orders will leave Benju's sleeping quarters unguarded, none of the samurai will say anything at the time. They'll make sure that Toshikazu—and hence Yuji and Benju—know of this slip later.

Should the PCs open the shoji to Benju's room—perhaps to warn him—they'll find him gone. His room is occupied by Naomi, Benju's consort. She was asleep, but the commotion has awakened her. If questioned, she explains that, yes, Benju did enter these rooms, but he immediately left through her room, which is adjoining (room 16). She doesn't know why.

Invaders!

The PCs should eventually follow the sounds of battle to the southwest corner of the building, outside room 20. When they arrive, read the following:

Chaos! The hallway is filled with milling figures. Surgically-sharp steel flashes in the light of lanterns... and in a redder light that can only be fire.

At first, the melee that fills the hallway seems to be a free-for-all, every participant fighting every other. But then your mind makes sense of the scene. The majority of the figures are brown-clad samurai from Benju's Home Guard. The others... There's no consistency in clothing. Some wear almost-presentable kimonos, while others are dressed in rags. *Ronin*, you conclude at once, and armed with a startling array of weapons.

Benju's samurai outnumber the raiders... but the daimyo's disciplined forces are definitely being overwhelmed by the rag-tag force opposing them. The tide of battle is swinging against the samurai... and well they know it.

Suddenly, in the midst of the melee, you recognize a familiar face. It's Benju Matsutomo, laying about him like an avenging *kami* with his katana. He slays one intruder, then with berserk strength another. But now he's faced by four of his foes. . . .

In addition to Benju, the melee comprises 10 samurai—8 "Benju's Samurai," and 2 "Samurai Officers." Another 6 samurai already lie dead. All samurai are unarmored, and armed with katanas and wakizashis. Benju is unarmored, and is armed only with his katana. By the time the PCs arrive, he's suffered a handful of minor wounds, which amount to 8 hit points of damage.

They are faced by 9 ninjas—4 "Senior Ninjas," 5 "Junior Ninjas" (see Chapter 7). Two more ninjas already lie dead. The ninjas are all dressed in rags, in the hope that they'll be identified as ronin should they fail in their mission. All are armed with 4 shuriken, and carry 10 tetsu-bishi (caltrops). In addition, the Junior Ninjas carry ninja-tos (at the DM's discretion, their scabbards might be modified to conceal daggers, more shurikens, powders, etc.); the Senior Ninjas carry both kamas and kawangas. When the PCs arrive, two Senior Ninjas and two Junior Ninjas are facing Benju; the Junior Ninjas are trying to flank him. The remaining ninjas are doing their best to hold off Benju's samurai.

From the sounds, the PCs can tell that there are samurai reinforcements on the way. Unfortunately, they're trapped on the other side of a fire that the ninjas have set. (This fire blocks off the hallway that leads north from this corner, and prevents access to the stairs.) The fire is impassable without the use of magic. Beyond the fire are 10 "Benju's Ninja," 5 "Samurai Officers," Yuji and Toshikazu. They are currently fighting the fire. Ten rounds after the PCs' arrival, the fire will become passable, although passing through it still inflicts 1d6 hit points of damage. At this time, the reinforcements will charge into the fray, heedless of the damage they suffer.

The 5 Samurai Officers among the reinforcements carry daikyu and 12 arrows each in addition to their katanas and wakizashis. The fire is currently too fierce for them to be able to see well enough to shoot at the attackers.

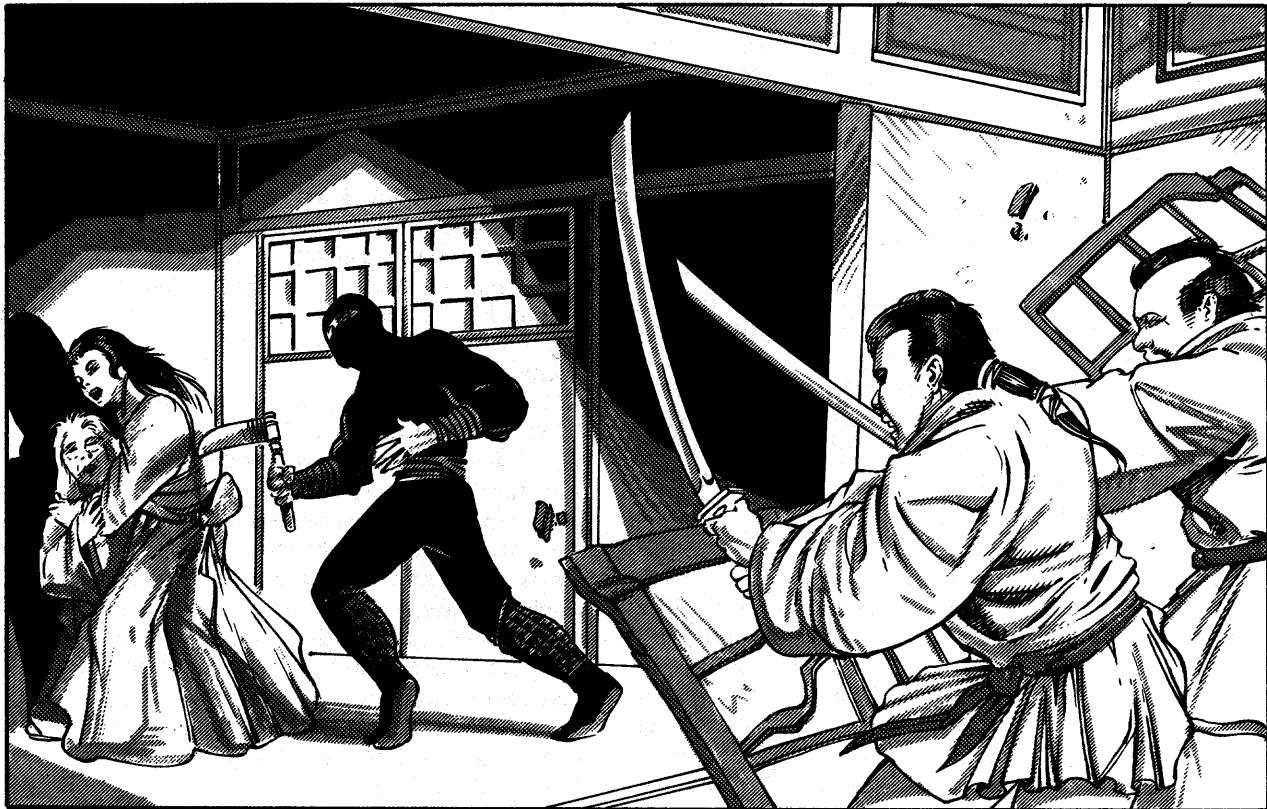
Background

The room outside which the fighting is taking place is Yuji's normal sleeping quarters. After the events of the evening, however, Benju decided it might be best if he didn't sleep in his normal quarters. Instead, he took Yuji's. (The only people in the castle fully aware of this were Yuji himself and Buntaro, who Benju told immediately after the PCs left the tower room. Naomi knew that Benju had decided to spend the night elsewhere, but didn't know exactly where.)

It will probably appear to the PCs—and probably to the others, as well—that this ninja attack was an assassination attempt against Benju. The PCs will probably also conclude that there has to be a spy in Benju's household, otherwise how could the ninjas know where to find the daimyo? They'll also probably conclude that the spy could only be Yuji or Buntaro.

The truth of the matter is considerably different. In fact, the ninjas were ordered to slay Yuji . . . or, more precisely, to kill the occupant of a particular sleeping room. Neither they nor those who gave the orders realized that Yuji's room would tonight be occupied by Benju, and those among the ninjas who recognized the daimyo naturally assumed that he was their intended target.

The ninjas' orders are to slay the occupant of Yuji's room, or to die trying. When they've succeeded, their plan is to escape through the nearby windows and down the wall, "sowing" tetsu-bishi to help cover their retreat. They've specifically been ordered not to be taken alive. To this end, any ninja will kill a comrade too badly wounded to escape, and will do *everything* he can to avoid capture himself. All ninjas carry in their mouths poison capsules; biting down on the capsule causes painless death in 1 round. (As discussed in Act 7, the DM should remember that *charm* spells probably won't stop the ninjas from employing this poison.) Although *hold* or *paralysis* spells may allow the PCs to immobilize a ninja, as soon as the spell is lifted—as it will have to be for the PCs to question the



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Act 13-Death in The Streets

Set-up

The morning after the ninja attack on the castle, no matter where the PCs may be, Toshikazu Wada, commander of the Home Guard, tracks them down to speak to them. Read the following:

Toshikazu Wada strides towards you, a determined expression on his face (but then, there's always a determined expression on his face). He stops in front of you. "I want you to accompany me," he says flatly. "This is not an order, merely a request, but one you will probably be interested in agreeing to. I understand you were involved in [or abroad during] the fire in the eta quarters the other night. I have received a message from one who knows for certain who set the fire, and why. This informant wants to meet with me. Do you wish to accompany me?"

Invitation To a Meeting

Toshikazu isn't concerned one way or the other; he simply made the invitation out of politeness. Whether the PCs accompany him or not, he is escorted by four of "Benju's Samurai." All are unarmored, and carry katanas and wakizashis. In addition, two of the escorting samurai carry sode garamis.

If the PCs decline the invitation, then Toshikazu goes to his death alone; give them the information from the section on "Probable Outcome." Otherwise, the young man leads his contingent into the pilgrim area of town, heading for an address near the city's outer wall. Toshikazu's path leads the group through a bustling market scene. During this segment of the journey, read the following:

The merchants and peasants scatter in front of you to clear your way . . . or at least, they try to. But the crowds are simply too thick, and you find yourself being bumped every few steps by apologetic members of the "lower classes" who weren't able to get out of your path quickly enough.

Although experienced players will probably be clamoring to the DM that their characters are expecting pickpocketing attempts, the danger in the crowd takes a different form. Each PC who is paying attention to the crowd is entitled to a 5d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. A successful role means that the PC has noticed something. Read the following privately to the appropriate player:

Curious. As you glance over your shoulder, you recognize a figure following you. It's not as if you know who he is—you don't know him from a hole in the ground. But nonetheless it's strange: when

captive—the ninja will bite down on the poison capsule. It should be extremely difficult to capture a ninja alive.

Should the PCs examine the bodies of the "ronin," they'll find that each bears a tiny tatoo of a "flame knife" under his left arm.

Consequences

For the adventure to continue to its planned conclusion, Benju shouldn't die in this attack. If the PCs are unable to save him, or if they don't try for some reason, the DM should so manipulate events that Benju escapes.

Although the fact that the attack was directed at Benju was purely a coincidence, the PCs almost certainly won't come to that conclusion. Instead, they'll probably conclude that the attackers were tipped off as to Benju's location by either Yuji or Buntaro . . . and probably the latter. If the PCs try to denounce either man to Benju, the daimyo will cut them off angrily before they can finish. He trusts both men implicitly, and will listen to no aspersions against their characters. Unless and until they can present solid evidence pointing towards the men's guilt, Benju orders the PCs harshly, they are to keep their petty suspicions to themselves. Of course, the PCs have no solid evidence, and repeating the hearsay they received from Fusae or Yaemon would only make Benju angrier.

Yuji is level-headed enough to realize that the evidence does seem to point towards him, and won't be overly angry with the PCs unless they are actively insulting to him or his master. Buntaro, however, will do a slow burn throughout the proceedings, and only the presence of Benju will prevent him from taking the PCs' heads for their insult. When he's had time to calm down, he realizes that his daimyo is keeping the PCs around for a reason, and so won't do anything to them until Benju has no further use for them. Then he'll officially ask his lord's permission to kill them for their lack of manners. Until that time, though he won't do anything violent, he will be almost impossible to deal with.

Probable Outcome

It's possible—although unlikely—that the PCs will obey their orders to the letter and remain on guard outside Benju's normal quarters. If this happens, then Benju, his guards, and his reinforcements are able to take care of the ninjas themselves. None of the attackers survive or escape. Through questioning those involved, the PCs can find out all of the information in the preceding sections . . . except the existence of the "flame knife" tatoos; neither Benju nor anyone else had the presence of mind to look for them. (And, unless the PCs are quick to think of it for themselves, the bodies will be swiftly disposed of.)

you last saw this figure, he was heading in the opposite direction to you, not with you...and had been moving with such determination that he bumped almost rudely into Toshikazu...

This figure is a minor yakuza member who today has received the major honor of concluding a contract on Toshikazu Wada. The man's name is **Haku**.

The PCs are free to respond in any way to Haku. If they make any overt motions towards him, he immediately flees, trying to lose himself in the crowd. He's much more familiar with the town than are the PCs, or even Toshikazu's samurai, so he definitely has the advantage. If cornered, he'll fight to the death (since this is what he's been ordered to do). If capture seems inevitable, he'll try to take his own life; since he isn't equipped with a poison capsule, however, he might be unsuccessful. (Note that, although his orders include avoiding capture, his sense of duty isn't as strong as was the ninjas'. Thus a *charm person* spell or correctly-worded *suggestion* should prevent him from "taking the honorable step.")

Sudden Death

At a dramatically correct time, read the following:

Out of the corner of your eye you see Toshikazu grimace with displeasure, and suck the blood from a minor nick on the back of his hand—probably the result of an unintended collision. But then the young man's grimace turns into something else: a rictus of agony. Clutching his throat, he collapses in a heap on the ground. He convulses once, then lies still...

Toshikazu is the victim of a highly toxic and fast-acting poison, introduced into his body by a needle wielded by Haku. The time course from first symptom to death is incredibly rapid: 6 segments. Any PC wishing to cast a spell to save Toshikazu must complete the spell in this time. The procedure is as follows: Each PC attempting to cast an appropriate spell must roll 1d6 representing initiative, and add the result to the casting time of the spell (in segments). If the total is greater than 6, then the spell is too late and Toshikazu is already dead. (Thus, the PCs have a 5 out of 6 chance to succeed in casting *slow poison* on Toshikazu, while *neutralize poison* – with a casting time of 7 segments – will automatically fail.)

If the PCs haven't already spotted Haku, any PC scrutinizing the crowd receives another 5d6 Ability Check against Intelligence, with success yielding the same result as before.

The PCs must respond immediately, however: Haku stays around only long enough to confirm that the poison has taken effect – 1 round at the most – then tries to melt into the crowd and make his escape. Unless he knows he's been spotted, all his movements

will be slow and casual, to avoid drawing attention to himself.

It's remotely possible that the PCs might save Toshikazu's life, and then question him about the informant he was going to see. When they follow up on the information, however, the PCs will find that the address he was given for the meeting doesn't actually exist.

Haku

The assassin is a young man, perhaps 25 years old, wearing simple and unobtrusive clothing. His whole appearance, in fact, is absolutely nondescript.

His orders are simply to scratch Toshikazu Wada with a poisoned needle that he was issued. He is a low-level member of the local yakuza, and, as such, knows only his immediate superior and a few colleagues. The person who gave him the order, however, wasn't anyone he knew or recognized . . . although the person knew all the appropriate recognition symbols, of course. Should the PCs manage to keep Haku alive, the only description he can give of this person is of the "mid-height, dark hair, dark eyes" type.

Haku (4th level yakuza, male human): AC 10; MV 12; hp 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2-5 (chain) or 1-3 (knife) or 1 (needle); THAC0 19; Str 11, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 9, Cha 16; AL LN.

Special Abilities: HS 25%; MS 33%; OL 37%; PP 45%; HN 15%.

Proficiencies: chain, knife, needle, gaming.

Honor: 29.

Haku is armed with a chain (wrapped around his waist under his sash) and a knife (concealed in his sleeve). He still holds in his hand the needle with which he tried to kill Toshikazu. There is no poison left on the needle, but Haku doesn't know that . . . and neither do the PCs. If capture seems inevitable, he will try to kill himself by scratching the back of one hand with the needle. (This won't work, of course.)

Consequences

Benju and Yuji are both very fond of Toshikazu, and will be greatly saddened by his passing. Neither will blame the PCs for his death, however. If the PCs can provide any proof that the assassin was a yakuza, then the daimyo will order a crack-down on yakuza operations of unprecedented magnitude.

Probable Outcome

If the PCs don't come along, then none of Toshikazu's escort will notice Haku when he strikes with the poison needle, or afterwards when their commander collapses and dies. Without capturing Haku, it's impossible to discover that the assassination was organized by the yakuza. Instead, everyone will assume that it was perpetrated by the same group that organized the attack on the castle.

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Act 14—Smoke and Moonlight*

This act can be used whenever the DM sees fit after the (attempted) assassination of Toshikazu. This act introduces two of the three highly-powerful ninjas working with the wu jen Daisake Mayazato. Although it's unlikely that the PCs will do more than spot the ninjas for the first time, this act is important because it's the stimulus that makes the local yakuza clan change their policy of adding to the chaos. For the first time, the yakuza leaders decide that events have gone too far, and that they must do something to bring them back under control. This leads indirectly to the conclusion of the adventure.

Set-up

This act can occur whenever the PCs are abroad in the town (for example, immediately after the assassination of Toshikazu). Read the following:

A screaming woman pelts down the street towards you. At first her cries seem like completely uncontrolled sounds of terror. But then you make out some of the words: "Foes! Fire! Help me, gods, they're killing them, they're killing the pilgrims!"

The woman is too terrified to answer any questions in an articulate manner. If questioned, however, she will point in the direction of the commotion: somewhere in the neighborhood in which the transient pilgrims stay.

Assuming that the PCs decide to investigate, read the following:

It's easy enough to choose the right direction, you realize: simply go against the flow of panicked humanity. Everyone seems to want to get out of the pilgrim quarter—pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike. Ahead you hear screams, and smoke climbs against the sky.

Wrecking Crew

When the PCs reach the center of the pilgrim quarter, they find a number of buildings on fire. Read the following:

The heat is intense, and you feel the skin of your face tighten. You squint against the brightness . . . and you see figures! Two humanoid figures moving in the midst of the inferno.

Immediately, the figures see you. Obviously discerning that you're different from the fleeing masses, they step out of the flames and start to walk slowly towards you.

Yes, they're human in figure, except their eyes flare with a brilliant, unnatural light. And bright sparks—almost miniature lightning bolts—flicker and lick around them . . .

These two frightening figures are the two "super-ninjas," Smoke and Moonlight (see Chapter VII for stats). Each carries a *pearl of fire protection*, and has cast on himself the spells *fiery eyes* and the "custom" spell *ghost lightning* (again, see Chapter VII). They have been ordered into town to disrupt the pilgrim quarter, and they've decided on this as the most efficient way of doing so. Although their main goal isn't to kill people, the fire has claimed a handful of lives.

The ninjas won't attack the PCs; instead, they'll stand motionless, observing them. If the PCs don't do anything within one round, the ninjas both cast *dimension door* — which has enough range to take them outside the city walls—and then return to their home base. If the PCs attack them, they fight, using their considerable abilities to their best effect.

Once engaged in combat, the ninjas continue to fight until one or the other of them is reduced to 75% of his normal hit points. At this point, they use their abilities to withdraw—perhaps by using the *leap* special martial arts maneuver-then cast *dimension door* to make their escape.

At no time do the ninjas speak, but they consistently treat the PCs with respect and honor.

As soon as the ninjas have gone, the residents of the neighborhood scurry back to fight the fire.

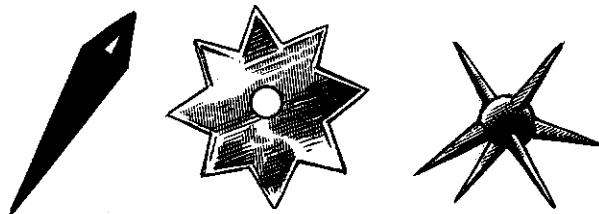
Whether or not the PCs fight the ninjas, rumors will instantly spread around the town about the "spirit monsters" that were setting fires in the pilgrim quarter. Although these magical creatures didn't have wings—at least, not visible ones—it's "obvious" that they're somehow related to the tiger-bird spirit that's been bedeviling the town.

RUMORS

By this time, the rumors are building to a crescendo, and the town is taking on a siege mentality. Few people go out at night, and sales of good luck charms and "anti-spirit potions" are at an all-time high (of course none of these gimmicks does any good whatsoever). Benju is well aware of the town's near-hysteria, and recognizes the threat that it represents to him. Word reaches the PCs through any appropriate channel that the daimyo wishes them to step up their investigations immediately.

Probable Outcome

If the PCs don't go to investigate the commotion, they'll learn about the fires and the deaths, but all they'll hear about the ninjas are distorted rumors of "spirit monsters" and creatures with glowing eyes.



Act 15—Buntaro Abroad*

This act can be used whenever the DM sees fit—when it's time to provoke the PCs into denouncing Buntaro to the daimyo . . . with the associated consequences.

Suspicious Behavior

This act can occur whenever the PCs are abroad in the streets (perhaps immediately after their encounter with the ninjas Smoke and Moonlight). Read the following:

There are more people on the street than you expected. (But then, here in Aru town, there are always more people on the street than you expect.) Farmers, merchants, samurai, laborers . . .

There. A flash of a familiar profile. That man hurrying by . . . Is that Buntaro?

No, it couldn't be. Buntaro would never go abroad in the streets without his katana and wakizashi, symbols of his samurai status. But this figure is—apparently—unarmed, wearing a nondescript kimono covered by a grubby travelling cloak. The figure has one hand under the cloth of the cloak, as though holding something that should be concealed.

It couldn't be Buntaro. Could it?

It is Buntaro, of course. He is unarmored, but has his wakizashi and a dagger concealed beneath his travelling cloak. So far, he hasn't spotted the PCs. If he notices them, he immediately runs, trying to melt into the crowd. (Again, he knows the town better than do the PCs, so he should have the advantage in this.)

Should the PCs decide to do something violent to Buntaro, the DM should remind them of the consequences of such an act. This is the daimyo's son-in-law, after all, and—while his behavior is definitely out of character—there's no law against walking the streets incognito. The DM should suggest that discretion is sometimes the better part of valor, and recommend that they follow Buntaro to see what he's up to. (This guidance can come from the mouth of any appropriate NPC, of course.)

Buntaro has been ordered by Benju to deliver an encrypted note—which is what he has concealed beneath his coat—to a particular address in the merchant quarter. (In fact, the note is to the Ohara ninjas—through an intermediary—asking them to keep an eye on the PCs. The ninjas are to protect them from harm, when and if possible . . . but also to watch for any suspicious actions that could hint at divided loyalties. Buntaro is totally unaware of this.)

Unless the PCs draw attention to themselves, Buntaro makes his way—with rather overdone stealth—through the streets into the merchant quarter. Once there, he ducks down a back alley. If the PCs try to follow him, their way is blocked by a horde of mer-

chants, purchasers and peasants that seems to materialize out of nowhere. While these people do nothing overt to harm the PCs, and in fact are highly apologetic about getting in their way, their very presence seriously hinders the PCs, giving Buntaro time to vanish around another corner. (This is blatant manipulation of the PCs, of course, but it does have precedent. The atmosphere and "feel" should be highly reminiscent of the crowded market scenes in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.)

Six of the "merchants" and "peasants" are actually Junior Ninjas from the Ohara clan, in disguise. They are unarmored and unarmed, except for "weapons of opportunity" such as bottles, staves, agricultural flails, hoes and the like. All others—and there should be enough present to really slow down the PCs—are normal townsfolk who have been paid a few fen to get in the way of the "foreigners."

The DM should strongly advise the PCs against attacking these "innocent townsfolk," since doing so would be a serious blight on their honor. If they do so anyway, the regular townsfolk immediately flee. The ninjas will engage in non-lethal combat—if possible—just long enough to prevent the PCs from catching Buntaro, then will try to escape. The ninjas will fight to kill only if the alternative is letting the PCs catch Buntaro.

(Remember: The message to protect the PCs hasn't been delivered yet.) All the ninjas will, of course, not allow themselves to be captured alive and have poison capsules. They don't know who they're supposed to protect or why, so even if the PCs manage to question them, nothing much can be learned. Unlike the Yamaguchi clan, the Ohara clan uses no identifying tattoos.

The ninjas and the others don't have to hold the PCs up for long: one round should be sufficient, then they can let them through. When the PCs burst through the cordon, read the following:

You bowl over the last snivelling merchant and charge down the alley. You take the same corner as Buntaro...

And skid to a halt in front of a blank wall.
Dead end.

The PCs might want to search for secret doors, and the DM should let them waste their time. There are none: Buntaro was hoisted up onto the roof of one of the buildings on a rope dropped by several ninja. By the time the PCs have reached the dead end, Buntaro is well and truly gone.

Consequences

The obvious consequence of this—and, in fact, the intention of the act—is the reinforcement of the PCs' suspicions against Buntaro. Nevertheless, the PCs should realize that they have no real proof that Buntaro was engaged in anything untoward. Even if they

拔氣紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐鄂弗伏紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐

managed to capture a live ninja—which should be virtually impossible—there's still only the PCs' word that the mysterious figure was Buntaro.

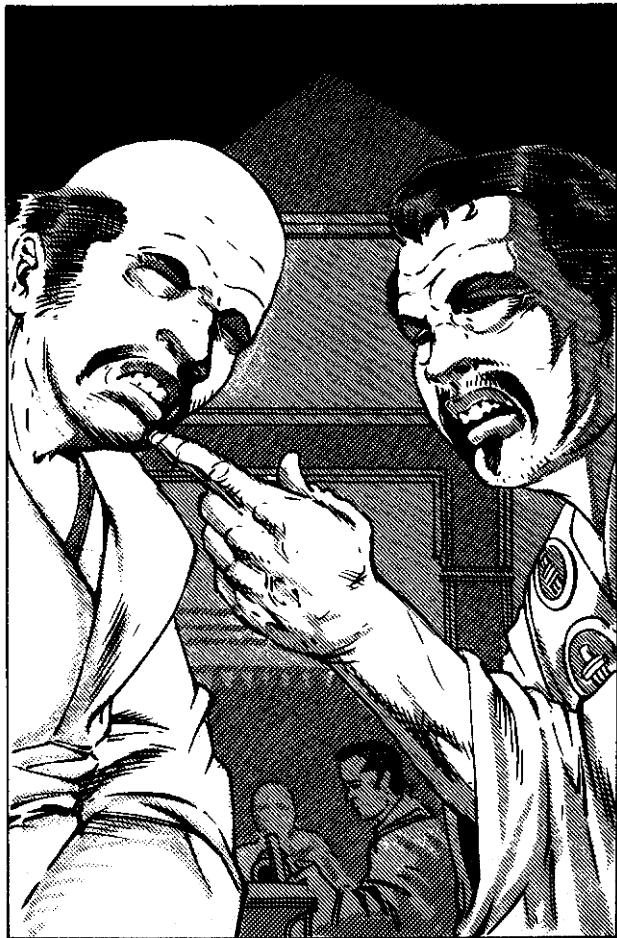
If the PCs want to bull on through and try to denounce Buntaro to Benju, they should find it impossible to arrange an audience with the daimyo no matter how hard they try. (It simply isn't the right time yet for such a denunciation . . .) They should quickly realize that the only appropriate way to deal with Buntaro is to gather truly incontestable evidence against him.

It's conceivable—although neither likely nor desirable—that the PCs might come into possession of the note. If they do, they find it encrypted in a complex code breakable only by magical means (within the time-frame of this adventure, that is). Should they decipher it, they find that it reads:

Watch the Wanderers, they are valuable. But also watch for ambiguity.

Probable Outcome

If the PCs decide not to follow Buntaro, there are no overt consequences. They simply don't learn that somebody is trying to protect him.



Act 16—Two Messages*

This act can be used whenever the DM sees fit after PCs have seen the "superninjas" Smoke and Moonlight. (If the PCs didn't participate in that encounter, only the second message is relevant. The DM can devise another NPC and encounter through which to pass on that communication.)

First Message

This act can occur virtually anywhere, at any time of day or night. Read the following:

The man approaching you is dressed as a simple laborer. But his manner is reminiscent of a messenger. As if to confirm this, he bows to you and holds out a folded piece of the finest parchment.

"Honored lords (and ladies)," he says, struggling to add a patina of culture to his rough voice. "Please, I have reason to believe that this message is of great importance."

If asked about where he got the message, he tells a mysterious story. Read the following:

"To tell you honestly, noble travellers," he tells you, "I don't know. I returned to my minka but an hour ago, and I found this parchment in the center of the floor. I picked it up, mystified as you can imagine, and with that . . . My mind became dazed, as though I dreamed. And a voice spoke in my dream, bidding me deliver this parchment to the travellers who serve Benju- *sama*. I discussed this with one who I trust, and he told me that it would be best if I obeyed the voice. And so here I am, noble ones."

The messenger (use the "General Townsfolk" statistics) is telling the truth about the message . . . as far as he knows it. (In fact, the "voice" is actually the result of a *memory* spell cast by Daisake Mayazato, who was concealed in the laborer's minka. The PCs should be unable to discover this, however.) He will admit if pressed that he did read the message, but has no idea what it means, and definitely doesn't know who Smoke and Moonlight are. If the PCs ask about the person who the messenger trusted, refer to the following section.

The note reads:

*To those who saw us before the fire:
Greetings. Though we may seem in conflict, our quarrel is not with you, and your deaths would diminish us. We meet honor with honor, and ask respectfully and with compliments that you not oppose us, our brother or our father. If duty demands that you do oppose us, we will match honor with honor. We promise that your deaths, should they be required, will be as speedy and worthy of esteem as it is within our power to grant.*

With honor,

Moonlight & Smoke

拔氣
縛
免
伏
膚
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趺
付
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Second Message

Once the PCs are ready to dismiss the messenger, read the following:

The messenger leans forward conspiratorially. "I have another message," he tells you quietly. "Not so mysterious, but almost as interesting, I think." He passes you a small scrap of parchment.

The parchment reads:

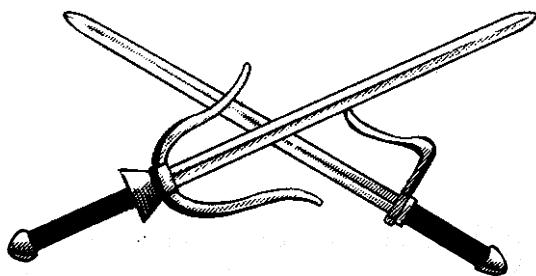
You may remember a cryptic warning, quickly given. An untouchable fire, quickly quenched. And a noble heart, quickly stilled. These were errors. I bid you meet me at a shrine where whispers may be blown from the setting sun, at the next even hour. Much will be revealed.

This message, of course, refers to the yakuza-organized events that the PCs have been involved with—the warning from yakuza, the fire in the *eta* (untouchable) neighborhood, and the death of Toshikazu. The shrine in question is the Shrine of the West Wind. The time of the meeting is, obviously, the next even-numbered hour: 2 o'clock, 4 o'clock, 6 o'clock, etc.

If pressed, the messenger admits that this second parchment was passed to him by a person who is very close to him—his personal adviser, in a way, and the same person with whom he discussed the message given by the voice. This person is called Mura, and he's an old carpenter.

When the messenger told Mura about the voice, the old carpenter asked him to wait for several minutes. When Mura returned from wherever he'd gone—and the messenger truly doesn't know—he had the second parchment with him, and gave it to the messenger. The messenger read this message too, of course, but it means nothing at all to him. (He is sure that neither the phraseology nor the handwriting belong to Mura, however.) Only if he's pressed hard will the messenger admit that he believes Mura to be somehow connected with the local yakuza.

The PCs can easily force the messenger to tell them where Mura lives, or even to escort them to his home. By the time the PCs arrive, however, Mura is long gone, and none of his neighbors is able to tell the PCs where he can be found.



Act 17—Meeting at The Shrine The Shrine of the West Wind

This assumes that the PCs have decided to attend the meeting at the Shrine of the West Wind. However the PCs approach the shrine, they find that the immediate vicinity is deserted; even the samurai who are supposed to be on guard are missing. (This indicates how influential the yakuza are.) There are no guards around the shrine, and no traps of any kind. No matter how carefully the PCs inspect the area, all they will learn is that there's one single woman waiting—unarmed—inside the shrine.

The woman is named **Kimie**, and she is a minor member of the local yakuza. As with the assassin Haku, Kimie knows only her direct superior, and a few of her closest colleagues. She received her orders through the standard chain of command. She is unarmed and unarmored.

As soon as the PCs enter the shrine, read the following:

There's only one person in the shrine: a middle-aged woman, totally innocuous in appearance, clad in a dark kimono bearing assorted stains. She bows to you.

"Greetings," she says levelly. "I assume you are who I was assigned to meet. Unfortunately, I don't carry the information you want. You can find it beneath the most enlightened priest of the Shining Temple.

"I bear a warning as well: the ninja are your enemy, and they want your heads. I've been told to urge you to hurry. The ninjas have ears in many shadows."

Kimie memorized the message she was supposed to pass on, and understands very little of it. She certainly doesn't know what information she's supposed to pass on, she doesn't know what's meant by the "most enlightened priest," and she doesn't know why ninjas might be after the PCs, or who hired them. Although she can—under pressure—give the PCs names of her nearest yakuza contacts, none of these people will be accessible for questioning . . . nor would they be of any use if the PCs could get in touch with them.

Kimie (1st level yakuza, human female): AC 10; MV 12; hp 5; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (unarmed); THAC0 20; Str 11, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16; AL LN.

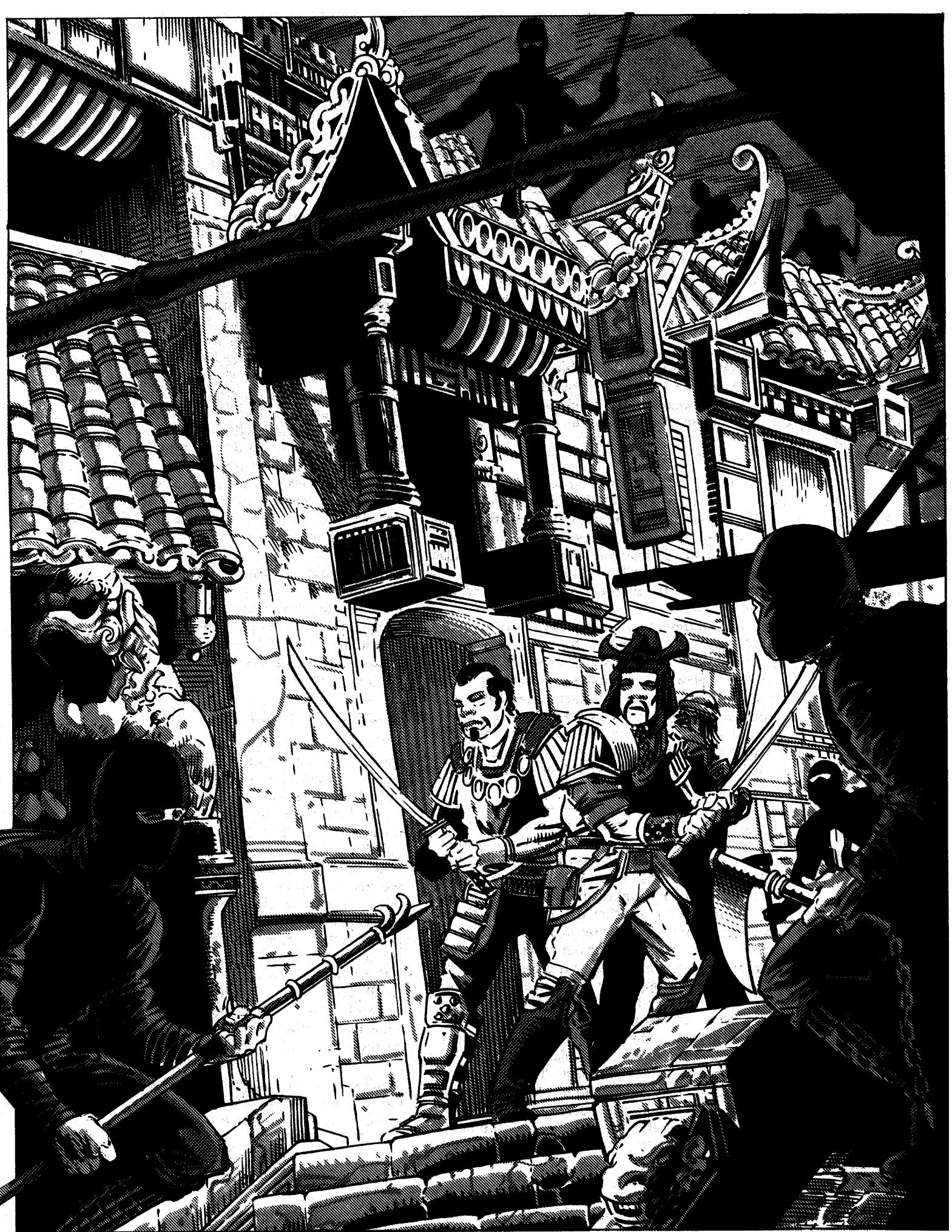
Special Abilities: HS 10%; MS 15%; OL 25%; PP 30%; HN 10%.

Proficiencies: knife, gaming.

Honor: 22.

Kimie is unarmed and unarmored.

After the meeting with Kimie, the PCs will probably head for the Shining Temple of Bishamon.



Ambush

The DM must determine the route taken by the PCs from the Shrine of the West Wind to the Shining Temple. As soon as this route takes the PCs down a narrow road with buildings on either side, read the following:

Interesting. For about the first time since you arrived in Aru, you've found a stretch of street that's not packed with humanity. In fact, the block you're traversing is actually deserted.

Alarm bells go off in the back of your mind, but a moment too late. Black-clad figures, their faces concealed by hoods, drop silently from the rooftops to block your advance. You spin, to see similar figures close off your retreat. There's movement on the rooftops above you. Ambush!

The black-clad figures are poised, ready. Ninja-tos hiss from oiled scabbards; chains flash as they swing in whistling arcs; shuriken catch the light as arms draw back for the throw . . .

The ambushing figures are Yamaguchi ninjas, and they attack at once. The PCs shouldn't be able to get an accurate count on the ninjas, but there are at least 10. In fact, the number of ninjas is totally indeterminate. The DM should just keep throwing more ninjas into the fray as the PCs kill off their attackers. The result should be that the PCs realize they're in a no-win situation.

As a rule of thumb, two out of every three ninjas are Junior Ninja, with one out of three being a Senior Ninja; the DM can alter this as he sees fit, however. The ninja are armed with whatever interesting weapons the DM wants; ninja-tos, kusari-gamas, kawangas, kyoketsu-shogi, and shurikens are suggested.

The DM shouldn't kill the PCs here, but should certainly make them think that they will be killed. When the battle is at its peak, and the PCs are starting to get low on hit points, read the following:

Black-clad figures lie dead or dying at your feet, but still they come on, in silent waves. Deadly shuriken rain down from above, while flashing steel hem you in on all sides. You've always prided yourself on your tactical instincts, and now those instincts are screaming that this is a losing fight, that your life will end here on this dusty street.

What's that? Out of the corner of your eye you see something astonishing. On a rooftop, one black-clad ninja has just lopped the head off another. And there: another ninja has fallen, a shuriken in his throat. Now it's happening elsewhere, and the pressure on you suddenly lessens. It's ninja against ninja, black-clad figure against black-clad figure.

But no, not black against black. The ninjas that have been facing you are clad in black, that's for sure. But these new figures, the ones that are killing them, their clothing is slightly blue: the deep

blue-black of a twilight sky. There are two factions here, and though you don't know the motives of the blue-blacks, an old saying comes unbidden into your mind: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend"...

The ninjas clad in blue-black are members of the Ohara clan, the clan engaged by Benju. Abiding by the message passed on earlier by Buntaro, they've been watching the PCs, and so, as soon as it became obvious that the PCs wouldn't survive this ambush, they entered the fray to save them.

Since this is, again, a plot device and not a fair fight, the DM doesn't need to play out the combat between the Yamaguchi and Ohara clans in detail. Aided by surprise, the Ohara ninjas slay many of the Yamaguchi clan, and then withdraw. The PCs are left facing seven Yamaguchi ninja: five Junior Ninjas and two Senior Ninjas, armed with whatever weapons the DM sees fit. The PCs must defeat these survivors if they want to live. (From this point, the encounter is a fair fight, and the DM must handle the details of combat.)

As always, the ninjas on both sides have been ordered to take their own lives if capture seems inevitable, and to kill any of their number too badly injured to travel.

Assuming the PCs survive this encounter, they can examine the bodies . . . and there are a lot of them, all but one wearing the black of the Yamaguchi clan. The Yamaguchi ninjas all bear the flame knife tatoo that should be familiar to the PCs by now. The single Phara ninja who fell is clad in blue-black, and has no identifying tatoo.

The Most ENLIGHTENED Priest

There are eight of Benju's Samurai on guard around the Shining Temple, but they won't hinder the PCs in any way. If asked, the guards claim that they've seen nobody suspicious enter or leave the temple area. Once they're inside the temple, however, the PCs must solve a riddle: what did Kimie mean by "the most enlightened priest"?

Religious writings—both in Wa and in other worlds—sometimes define enlightenment as being "close to god" or "close to godhood." In this context, the riddle becomes clear. "The most enlightened priest" is that statue out of the 3,333 that is nearest to the central statue of Bishamon.

If the PCs examine the base of this statue, they find a small gap into which has been inserted a folded piece of parchment. There's a message on it, written in the same handwriting as the second parchment delivered by the messenger. It reads:

There is a plot afoot to destroy the daimyo's influence. We know not who is behind this plot. Initially, we saw this as a good thing, an opportunity for our family, and we acted accordingly. But with the fire in the merchant quarter,

拔氣紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐鄂弗伏紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐

We learned serious error. We cannot undo what has been done, but our actions will not be repeated.

He who is behind these actions has acquired the help of those who practice the way of stealth. These ninja are of the clan Yamaguchi.

Use this information as you see fit. There is no value in further contact between us.

The PCs will not recognize the name Yamaguchi, nor will anyone else they ask. (Remember, the clan Yamaguchi is a new family and has yet to develop a reputation.)

When the PCs leave the Temple, they find Yuji talking with the samurai guard detachment outside. Read the following:

The old warrior looks you up and down, his sharp eyes cataloging your various wounds. He's too polite to ask, but he's unable to totally mask his curiosity. "You're wounded," he says. "Report to the castle infirmary. Ask any samurai, they'll direct you." He looks you over again and adds, "And clean yourselves up." He turns away.

Infirmary

The infirmary is a small out-building within the castle district. It's staffed by three medics (0-level), whose skills extend no further than cleaning and dressing wounds. The infirmary is run by an aging shukenja named Ce-ishi. He is glad to cast his full complement of healing spells on the PCs to bring them up as close to normal as possible. The infirmary has in stock one potion of healing, but Ce-ishi won't volunteer its use. The PCs must persuade him to do so.

Ce-ishi (7th level shukenja, male human): AC 7; MV 12; hp 29; #AT 2/1 or 1; Dmg 1-6 or by weapon (unarmed); THAC0 16; Str 9, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 14, Cha 10; AL LG.

Spells: calm, cure light wounds (x5), chant, slow poison, withdraw, cure blindness, death's door

Proficiencies: bo stick, three-piece rod, religion (x3), etiquette, jujutsu.

Honor: 23.

Ce-ishi is unarmed and unarmored. He has received rudimentary training in jujutsu, hence his AC of 7, his high number of attacks and his damage.

Once the PCs have been treated to the best of their ability, the next step is up to the DM. If it's night, they might return to their ryokan, where the DM can spring Act 18, "Strangers in the Night," on them. Since this act is totally optional, the DM might decide to proceed directly to Act 19, "Caught in the Act."

Act 18 – Strangers in The Night*

This act is completely optional at the discretion of the DM. If the PCs haven't figured out that there are two groups of ninjas, and that one group seems to be on their side, this act can be used to channel their thinking in the right direction. The events in this act will occur only if the PCs have been polite to Naomi—Benju's consort—in the few times that they've met her.

Midnight Visitors

Perhaps after their visit to the infirmary, the PCs return to their ryokan to rest. Read the following:

It seems that the entire world is conspiring to prevent you from getting an uninterrupted night's sleep. Hardly have you settled down when there's a firm rapping on your door. You slide the door back and see a squad of samurai facing you. They wear the brown kimono of Benju's Home Guard, but their faces are covered with hoods. All stand ready, hands on the hilts of their katanas. But no-one has yet drawn a blade.

The leader bows to you, a bow of equals. "My . . . my superior has ordered me to order you to accompany me. No harm or dishonor will befall you, on that I give you my oath as a samurai. I ask that you give me your weapons now, and I will carry them with you in safe keeping. I also ask that you submit to being blindfolded. These are my orders, and I intend no dishonor to you. What say you?"

There are 12 samurai present, all Samurai Officers. They wear leather armor (AC 9) and carry katanas and wakizashis. In addition, four carry daikyu and 12 arrows, and another four carry mancatchers. In their present condition—probably still weakened by their fight with the ninjas—the PCs should recognize that the best move is to go with the samurai. Although the samurai leader won't tell the PCs who ordered the visit or why, he will swear in whatever manner the PCs want that he intends them no harm.

Audience

The PCs should eventually agree to accompany the samurai, and abide by the conditions of the invitation. The samurai respectfully receive the PCs' weapons then carefully blindfold them before leading them off. Read the following:

You can feel the presence of the samurai all around you—a protective cordon, but also a barrier to prevent your escape. They lead you carefully, with a hand on your arm indicating direction and warning of hazards such as stairs.

At first you try to visualize your course, but a few rapid changes in direction destroy the image in

your mind. You think you're heading for the castle, but you're not sure.

Sounds and the feel of the air change, and you know you're indoors somewhere. There's a wood floor beneath your feet, then you're lead up a flight of stairs. You hear a *shoji* open, and you're led into a room.

"Kneel," one of the samurai prompts you. You do so, feeling tatami beneath you. Then your blindfolds are removed.

Facing you across the room is a young woman you've seen before. For a moment you dredge through your memories for the name. Then it comes to you: this is Naomi, Benju's favored consort.

The epitome of grace and self-possession, she kneels, awaiting your bow.

Once the PCs have shown suitable respect, read the following:

Naomi gestures to the hooded samurai that still flank you. They bow and leave, closing the *shoji* behind them.

For the first time, Naomi speaks, her voice like soft music. "Greetings, adventurers," she says. "I apologize for the . . . unusual nature of this audience. But you must understand, I'm acting without the approval of my lord. Oh, I act only in his best interest, I assure you . . . but sometimes Benju- *sama* isn't aware of just what his best interest is.

"I have some information for you," the woman continues, "although I understand that you've already learned some of it. There are ninja about who oppose my lord . . . for what reason I know not. But not all ninja are enemies. My lord has hired a clan of ninja himself, to protect him and his and to confound the plans of whoever opposes him.

"He is using you, sending you out like stalking horses, without telling you the true scope of his plans. Such is his right, of course. But I believe you can serve him better if you know more of the truth. Thus this meeting."

Naomi has nothing more to say and, in fact, knows nothing more than what she's already told the PCs. She doesn't know that Eichiro is the one opposing Benju, and she doesn't know the identities of the ninja clans involved. As soon as practical, she picks up a tiny silver bell from the tatami next to her and rings it, signalling the samurai outside to open the *shoji*. The samurai escort the PCs away from the meeting room—without blindfolds this time—and lead them down into the courtyard where they return their weapons. (The meeting took place in room 22 of the donjon map.)

Act 19—Caught in The Act

Depending on whether Act 18 is used or not encounter can occur as the PCs are leaving the infirmary, or after they've been escorted from the reception room.

Suspicious Behavior

As you cross the courtyard, you see a familiar figure—a familiar back, really—vanish into a doorway opposite you. It's Buntaro again. For someone whose national personality puts great stock in concealing one's thoughts and emotions, Buntaro is almost unbelievably easy to read. Even in the fleeting moment that you saw him, everything about him—his expression, his body language, his movements—everything seemed to scream "I've got a secret . . . and I feel guilty about it."

If the PCs do something dumb—like yell "Stop, Buntaro!"—then Buntaro will run. Any pursuing PCs will be accidentally held up by collisions with samurai, servants, etc. in the narrow hallways, giving Buntaro plenty of chance to escape. The DM must then orchestrate another opportunity for the PCs to spot Buntaro acting suspiciously.

The main goal of this encounter is to get the PCs to follow Buntaro surreptitiously through the halls of the castle. If the PCs are at all careful the odds of Buntaro spotting them are very low: 5% per round. (Buntaro's just not very observant at the moment.) The DM should make the odds of being spotted seem much higher, and inject tension into the pursuit.

If Buntaro spots the PCs, he turns and strides toward them, angrily demanding why they were following him. Of course, he won't tell them anything about what he was doing. His hair-trigger temper is only barely restrained, making him exceptionally dangerous; the PCs should recognize this and react accordingly. Buntaro will demand that the PCs accompany him to Benju, and explain to the daimyo what they're doing. This should provoke the events described in the section "Denunciation."

Whispers and Whisperers

Assuming that Buntaro doesn't spot the PCs, they can trail him to his destination, the hallway outside room 23 on the donjon map. In the middle of an empty hallway, Buntaro kneels before a *shoji*, raps once and then begins whispering. If the PCs somehow manage to eavesdrop, Buntaro is saying: "Meet me tonight, at the usual place. I have something to tell you that you'll want to hear, just like the last time."

Buntaro receives no audible answer. He quickly stands, and returns the way he came. His chance of spotting the PCs is now 95%. If he does spot them, he demands that they accompany him to Benju to explain their continued rudeness and lack of respect to him.

It's possible that the PCs might take Buntaro's appar-

拔氣紺挽伏膚拔趺付腐鄂弗伏紺挽伏膚拔趺付腐

Act 20—Hiro's Welcome*

Unless the PCs have gone through the preceding acts incredibly fast, by now it should be only one or perhaps two days to the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps. This act is an optional encounter designed to introduce the PCs to another important player in the scene that will take place on the day of the Ceremony. If time constraints so dictate, the DM can bypass this act, but inform the PCs of the salient facts through rumor and conversation with NPCs.

At some time when the PCs are on the streets—perhaps immediately after having been kicked out of the castle—read the following:

Before you quite realize what's happening, everyone around you on the street is bowing. (Not to you, you belatedly realize.)

Coming up the street is a palanquin carried by four burly bearers, and flanked by twenty samurai decked out in the finest regalia. After a moment's thought, you recognize the regalia as belonging to the Shogun's personal guard. Leading the procession is a sour-faced samurai, who's staring at you. You suddenly realize that you're the only ones on the street not bowing . . .

The personage in the palanquin is **Hiro Matsu**, official inspector under the direct authority of the Shogun. (The PCs might assume that the palanquin contains the Shogun himself, of course . . .) Hiro is unarmored, but carries an uchi-ne in addition to his katana and wakizashi.

The sour-faced samurai is Hiro's right-hand man, **Zukimoto Chikitada**. He wears o-yoroi (AC 3) and is armed with katana and wakizashi. In addition, he carries a standard bearing the symbol of the Shogun's house.

Use the Samurai Officer statistics for the samurai guards. They wear o-yoroi (AC 3) of the finest quality. All carry katanas and wakizashis; ten carry daikyu and 12 arrows, and ten carry naginatas in addition to their swords. For the bearers, use the General Townsfolk statistics.

If the PCs don't bow immediately, Zukimoto hands the standard to one of the samurai, and strides over to the PCs, his sword half-drawn, and orders them to bow. Before anything unpleasant can start, however, Hiro opens the curtain of the palanquin and tells Zukimoto, "Don't bother with them, it's not important. Just get me to the castle. I'm tired and I want a bath." Unwillingly, Zukimoto backs down and returns to the front of the procession.

The PCs can easily find out through the grapevine—which is notoriously well-informed—the names and significance of Hiro and Zukimoto. They can also discover that Hiro is in town to observe the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps . . . and to carry his judgement back to the shogun as to Benju's performance as daimyo and his fitness for that office.

ent treachery as an excuse to attack and kill him. If they attack him, after one round a detachment of 12 Samurai Officers "coincidentally" happens by to break up the fight. They take Buntaro and the PCs to Benju.

If the PCs arrest or capture Buntaro instead of attacking him, the man demands that they make any accusations they have before the daimyo.

If the PCs open the *shoji*, they find that the only occupant of the room is Sono, the serving girl, who is replacing the futon with a new one.

The outcome of this encounter should be that Buntaro and the PCs appear before Benju, with the PCs ready to denounce Buntaro as spy and traitor.

Denunciation

Benju can be found in his main reception room (room 6), flanked by Yuji and eight Samurai Officers. If necessary, the DM can have a detachment of 12 Samurai Officers escort the PCs, Benju and perhaps Sono into the room. Read the following:

Benju Matsutomo scowls across the room at you, anger etched in each line of his face. "You have a quarrel with my son-in-law," he snaps. "Explain it to me."

Benju will try to goad the PCs into telling him their suspicions. When they've done so, Benju turns to Buntaro. "Well?" he asks harshly. "What do you answer?"

Buntaro explains his actions. If the PCs have mentioned how they followed him in town but he gave them the slip, Buntaro reminds Benju that he was simply acting on the daimyo's orders. Benju confirms this.

As to his suspicious behavior today, and the whispering at the *shoji*:

Buntaro flushes with embarrassment. "I was speaking with Sono," he explains quietly. "I was . . . I was arranging an assignation with her tonight. I . . . I love her, my lord. Last night I told her so, and tonight I . . . I was going to tell her I intended to ask your permission to wed her. If that is a crime, then I'm guilty. But that is my only crime."

Benju nods with a grim smile. "Your love for Sono is known to me." He chuckles dryly at the surprise on Buntaro's face. "You thought to keep a secret from me in my own house? I'm not that much of a fool."

The daimyo turns to you, and his anger is back in full force. "You have shamed my son-in-law, and brought foundationless accusations before me. These are not the acts of honorable men. Your employment is terminated, all payments forfeit . . . and consider yourself lucky that I don't take your heads as well, or let Buntaro take them. Get out of my house."

Benju can't be swayed by any pleas or arguments, particularly since any divination magic will confirm that Buntaro is telling the truth. If the PCs won't leave peacefully, Benju can call up as many Samurai Officers as it takes to expel them from the castle.

Act 21—Gambit Declined

This act can take place at any time after Benju has terminated the PCs' employment and kicked them out of the castle. Tales of their expulsion has got back to Eichiro, but he doesn't believe a word of it. In fact, Eichiro is convinced that this is some kind of maneuver on Benju's part. Perhaps the daimyo hopes that Eichiro will try to hire the "disaffected" PCs to help him. Well, Eichiro is too smart to fall for a trick like that, and he decides to send a message to that effect to Benju. The message will consist of the PCs' dead bodies.

Another Ambush

By this time, the PCs will probably be justifiably suspicious of narrow streets and deserted alleyways. Accordingly, this ambush takes place in a crowded marketplace. Read the following:

Normally you enjoy the hustle and bustle of a marketplace. But this time you're too morose to derive any pleasure from it.

Flash! The first indication that anything's wrong is when the figure—dressed in the rags of a penniless *ronin*—looms up from behind a vendor's stall and aims a whistling sword-cut at your head...



The ambush consists of 12 Yamaguchi ninja—eight Junior Ninja, four Senior Ninja. They are all dressed like ronin, but wear leather armor and *kote* beneath their rags (giving them AC 7). They are armed with whatever range of "neat" ninja weapons the DM wants to give them, although the weapons of choice will probably be *ninja-to* and *shuriken*. The ninja will fight fiercely and to the death. As always, they will use their poison capsules to make sure that they are not captured.

This free-for-all battle in the crowded marketplace should have the same atmosphere as the similar scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. There are barrows to knock over, stalls to duck behind, spilled produce to trip over, and—everywhere—panicked people trying to get out of the way. The PCs are totally on their own in this encounter; the Ohara ninjas have received word that the PCs are no longer on Benju's payroll, and hence no longer under the Ohara clan's protection.

When it's apparent that the tide of battle is turning against the ninja attackers, read the following:

What's that ninja doing? He's got something in his hand, and he's stuffing it into his mouth. Not a poison capsule. A piece of parchment . . . and, no doubt, one of grave importance.

The PCs should recognize that the parchment must be significant, or the ninja wouldn't take the time in the middle of a fight to try and eat the evidence. The DM can select any one of the ninjas to be the bearer of the parchment, although it would be more likely that he is a Senior Ninja. If the PCs want to prevent the ninja from destroying the parchment, they must either totally immobilize him in some way, or kill him. They have three rounds in which to do so; after that time, the parchment is unrecoverable.

The note is encrypted, but anyone with an Intelligence of 16 or more can decode it in 2-24 minutes. PCs with lower Intelligence might be able to decode it. The chance for success is 70% minus 10% for each point of Intelligence below 16 (thus a PC with Intelligence 13 has a 30% chance of decoding the note); the time necessary to decode the message is 3-60 minutes.

My Lord:

All is in readiness for your master-stroke at the ceremony. I have persuaded Benju that a full detachment of samurai around the temple will be too disturbing to the pilgrims. Thus there will be no significant number of guards to prevent the clan Yamaguchi from staging their attack on the pilgrims. Then, when you arrive at the head of your force, and destroy the clan Yamaguchi, there will be none with whom you must share the honor of victory.

With the Shogun's inspector present to see his failure to protect the pilgrims, Benju must fall. And then to whom other than you should the daimyo be awarded?

I await word of your triumph.

拔氣紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐鄂弗伏紳挽伏膚拔趺付腐

Act 22—Back To The Castle Gatekeepers

Whether the PCs want an interview with Benju, or want to investigate his closest advisors, they must first gain entry to the castle . . . which is no longer easy. The twenty samurai guarding the main gate have received word that the “foreigners” are no longer working for the daimyo, and thus have lost their right of access to the castle. Although the guards won’t be actively hostile, they will definitely bar entry unless the PCs can persuade them otherwise.

The DM should role-play any attempts at persuasion very carefully. The guards are just men doing their job, and have nothing particularly against the PCs. They are definitely looking out for the best interests of the daimyo, so if the PCs can play on this somehow they might be able to gain entry.

Use the statistics for Benju’s Samurai for the gate guards. They wear leather armor (AC 8), and carry katanas and wakizashis. In addition, 10 are armed with daikyu and 12 arrows each. They won’t initiate hostilities, but will definitely fight if attacked.

Inside The Castle

Whatever the PCs’ purposes within the castle, they should experience the following “set-piece” encounter:

You turn a corner of the hallway, and see two figures ahead of you: a young serving girl carrying a tea service on a tray, and an older woman, no doubt a senior servant. The older woman is feeling the side of the teapot.

“It’s too cold,” she says with finality. “She’ll send it back, and then we’ll both be in trouble. Remember, this tea is for the Lady Lotus.”

This should trigger the PCs’ memory of the lotus symbol on the note from Act 21. If the PCs ask the servant about “Lady Lotus,” read the following:

“I’m sorry, noble lords (and ladies),” the servant woman snivels, bowing deeply. “I meant no disrespect. It’s just a name we servants have for her, the Lady Satomi. Haven’t you noticed? Everything she wears—her kimonos, her jewelry, her regalia—has on it the symbol of the lotus. Oh, I grant the symbols are sometimes too small to see easily. I understand it’s something to do with her family . . .”

The servants can tell the PCs that Benju and Lady Satomi, his mother-in-law, are taking tea together in the formal gardens behind the donjon.

At the bottom of the note, in place of a signature, is a symbol: a stylized lotus blossom. Any PC with proficiency in gardening, flower arranging or something similar will automatically recognize it. Other PCs must make a 3d6 Ability Check against Intelligence to recognize the symbol as a lotus.

The PCs should quickly recognize the significance of this message. Not only does it lay out the ultimate goal of whoever is opposing Benju—the daimyate—but it also confirms that this person is receiving help from one close to Benju (for who else could persuade the daimyo to change the disposition of troops?). It also tells the PCs that the enemy—whoever he is—plans to betray the ninjas that he himself hired. (It should also tell the PCs one more thing: The Yamaguchi ninja that the PCs have defeated were acting as couriers. Obviously, since the message discusses their betrayal, the ninja clan is not expected to read it (which also explains why it was in code). In fact, that’s the case: the ninja bearing the message was ordered not to read the message, and to destroy it to prevent anyone else from reading it.

The PCs have three main options on how to proceed. Firstly, they may decide to inform the Yamaguchi clan that their employer is planning to betray them. The problem with this plan is that the PCs don’t know how to contact the Yamaguchi clan, and don’t have enough time to do the research necessary to track them down. They should quickly realize this, and choose another option.

Secondly, the PCs may decide to try and discover which of Benju’s confidants wrote this note. Thirdly, they may want to use their newly-found information to “buy” their way back into Benju’s favor. Both of these options require a return to the castle.

Of course, there’s a fourth option, and that’s to let the whole matter drop and leave Benju to his fate. But that would be a dishonorable action for any Lawfully-aligned character, and would cost him or her 3 points of honor.

“Debugging”

As the DM will understand, it’s important that the PCs should get their hands on this note. If the PCs ignore it, or are unable to prevent the ninja from destroying it, the DM has several options. First, should they search the bodies of the dead ninja, they’ll find another copy of the note—equally encoded—on the person of one casualty. (The message was obviously so important that the traitor in Benju’s household decided that redundancy was a sensible precaution.) Second, the DM can orchestrate another encounter with a single ninja or a small group, carrying the note. Third, the PCs might notice a servant in Benju’s employ acting in a suspicious manner, and passing a folded note to a dubious-looking messenger (another Junior Ninja). In any case, it’s important that the PCs should obtain a copy of the note.

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鄂弗伏縛挽伏肩拔趺付腐

Tea Party

Benju, Yuji and Lady Satomi are sitting in the formal gardens of the castle. Twelve Samurai Officers are also present, but at a discreet distance. The samurai will come forward instantly to prevent the PCs from approaching Benju, however.

At first Benju will be angry, demanding to know why the PCs have returned. If they tell him what they've discovered, particularly about Lady Satomi's complicity, he will hear them out. At the first accusation of treachery, Lady Satomi denies it hotly, but Benju orders her to silence. Throughout, Yuji keeps looking at Satomi speculatively (he'd always suspected that there was something strange about her). When the PCs are finished, Benju demands proof. If they hand over the note—and this is the only concrete proof that Benju will accept—read the following:

The daimyo scrutinizes the note. Then he looks up, his eyes meeting yours. "This is her handwriting," he says, "I recognize it."

With the speed of a striking snake, Lady Satomi snatches for the note. But Yuji is even quicker, catching her wrist in a grip of steel.

The PCs should recognize that the logical next step is to pass this evidence of treachery on to the clan Yamaguchi. (If they don't think of this themselves, ei-



ther Benju or Yuji can suggest it.) The problem still remains, though: how do they get word to the Yamaguchis?

Again, the PCs should realize that Lady Satomi must know how to contact the ninja clan. After all, wasn't one of their number carrying a message for her? (Again, Benju or Yuji can suggest this.)

The problem is, how to get Satomi to give them the information. She refuses to tell them, and Benju rules out any suggestions of torture. Unless the PCs can come up with some innovative solution, read the following:

Benju shakes his head. "She won't tell you. She's a tough old bat, and samurai besides." He sighs. "Well, her guilt is obvious. The sentence will be death . . . for her and her daughter."

"What?" Lady Satomi shrieks. "No, you can't, not my daughter . . . your wife."

Benju shrugs. "I know how close you and she are. I can't accept that you'd keep this a secret from her

which makes her an accessory, and thus liable for the same punishment as you, *neh*? Unless, of course . . ." He leaves the thought hanging.

Lady Satomi sobs, a broken woman. "Alright," she hisses after a moment. "One of the meeting places is a warehouse," and she names an address in the merchant quarter. "The code word is 'Lotus Blossom'. You'll spare my daughter's life? You both swear it?"

Benju and Yuji both swear that Satomi's daughter—Benju's wife—will be held blameless for any of her mother's actions. And as soon as the words are out of their mouth, the woman cackles maniacally. Almost magically, a knife is in her hand and she's hurling herself at Benju . . .

Benju, Yuji, and the samurai are automatically surprised. The PCs must make surprise checks as normal. If none of the PCs is able to stop her, she gets a free attack against Benju—with a +2 bonus to hit and to damage as a result of her ferocity. On the next round, Yuji and the samurai enter the fray, and slay the woman as fast as they can. If the PCs saved Benju from Satomi's sudden attack, he is extremely grateful to them, and all gain 1 point of honor as a result of his esteem.

When the matter of Lady Satomi has been settled, Benju orders the PCs to go to the warehouse and pass on to the ninja clan the note, proof that they are to be betrayed. (From his manner, it's obvious that he considers the PCs to be back on the payroll.) If asked, he'll tell the PCs that he believes the enemy to be Eichiro Tanaka.

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Act 23—Meeting with a Ninja

The Warehouse

The PCs can easily find the warehouse that Lady Satomi named (area 6 on the city map). There's nothing at all about it—apart from the address—to distinguish it from the other warehouses that flank it.

If the PCs try to enter by the front door, as they approach, a bent and wizened man dressed like a caretaker comes out to greet them. Read the following:

The stooped figure bows to you and says in a cracked and quivering voice, sorry honored ones, this house is closed and empty. Nothing here at all. Unless you have a word for me . . ."

In fact, the "caretaker" is actually **Takahashi Yamaguchi** in disguise. If the PCs use the code "Lotus Blossom," read the following:

"Ah, Lotus Blossom, is it?" The caretaker nods. "That's all right, then, isn't it? Come in, there's a gentlemen who wishes to see you." He holds the door open. "Well, come on."

It's possible that the PCs will try to gain surreptitious entry into the warehouse. The ninjas' security is excellent, however, and will immediately detect any such attempt at entry. When the PCs get inside—no matter how they do so—a disguised Takahashi Yamaguchi is waiting for them, and responds in exactly the same manner as above.

Ninja Leader

The "caretaker" leads the PCs into the main open area of the warehouse. No matter how bright the day outside, inside is pitch blackness. The PCs will probably use some means to generate light; if they don't, Takahashi lights a lantern. Read the following:

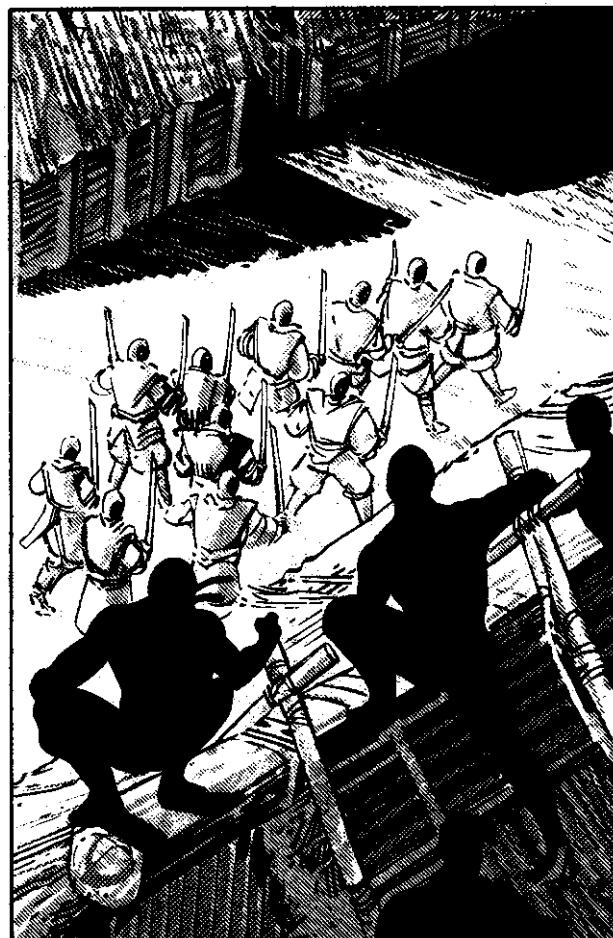
Light flares, pushing back the darkness. The warehouse is empty . . . except that the walls are lined with figures. Figures clad head to toe in unrelieved black. Twenty, two dozen, more . . . They're all around you.

Totally unconcerned, the wizened caretaker walks to the center of the room. "Oh, yes. Meet my family." His voice is no longer that of an old man, but is vibrant with youth. He draws himself up to his full height and the years seem to fall away from him. "My family, the clan Yamaguchi."

Takahashi Yamaguchi will listen to everything the PCs have to say, but will neither confirm nor deny that he's working for Eichiro Tanaka. He will ask to see the note, and his manner should cue the PCs that it's not in their best interest to refuse him.

The "caretaker" examines the note expressionlessly for a moment, then folds it carefully and puts it in his sleeve. "Thank you, gentlemen (and ladies)," he says with a slight bow. "You can go now."

Takahashi will not tell the PCs anything about his plans for the day of the ceremony. Again, his manner should make it clear to the PCs that when he says "go," it's best to go.



Combat isn't the goal here, but if the PCs start something the figures lining the wall are equally divided between Senior and Junior Ninja. There are 34 ninjas present (not including Takahashi Yamaguchi), more than enough to finish off the PCs if they get foolish.

Act 24—The Grand Finale

This act takes place on the day of the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps.

Preparations

Benju calls the PCs to an audience with him. In consultation with Yuji, the daimyo asks the PCs their advice as to how he should handle matters. Probably the best idea—and this is what Yuji will suggest if the PCs don't—is to let Eichiro think that his plan is working. In other words, Benju should keep the majority of his samurai away from the temple. When Eichiro arrives—which he should if Lady Satomi's note was anywhere near accurate—one of the PCs should challenge him to a duel. The big question is, what—if anything—is Takahashi Yamaguchi going to do?

The PCs may decide to do a little digging. They can find out exactly nothing about the Yamaguchi clan or their plans. They can find out, however, that Eichiro is already on the way towards Aru town at the head of an "honor guard" of one hundred samurai. This is obviously much too large a force for the PCs to take on personally. Benju won't "lend" the PCs any of his samurai, should they suggest a direct attack on this force, and the daimyo makes it absolutely clear that even the thought of assassinating Eichiro is dishonorable and totally unacceptable. (Assassinating Eichiro on their own behalf—and against the orders of their

liege lord—would cost each of the PCs 20 points of honor.)

The Ceremony

At noon, the ceremony begins. Read the following:

Soldiers have cleared the main road that leads through the Temple Gate to the foot of the Three Thousand Steps and up to the Shining Temple of Bishamon. Samurai, dressed in their finest regalia, ring the small square to keep back observers. (But there aren't anywhere near as many warriors as you'd like to see . . .) On either side of the Temple Gate are two elaborate reviewing stands. On one stands Benju, surrounded by his closest advisors and family. On the other is the Shogun's inspector, Hiro Matsu, with the sour-faced Zukimoto Chikitada beside him. Arrayed behind them are his twenty samurai.

A clamor of gongs signals the beginning of the ceremony. The crowds fall back from the street opposite the stairway, and the procession moves into the square. At its head is an elderly priest, followed by the largest *minyan*, or portable shrine, you've ever seen. This shrine is carried on poles like a palanquin, and is heavy enough to require thirty sweaty pilgrims to bear it. Following the *minyan* is a column of six *sohei*, wearing the robes that iden-



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tify them as devotees of Bishamon. And behind them, an untidy column of hundreds of pilgrims.

As the procession advances slowly towards the staircase, there's a commotion on another street, and peasants scramble to get out of the way of a column of mounted samurai. At the head of this column is the young man that you know must be Eichiro Tanaka.

You tense. If anything's going to happen, it will happen now . . .

And it does. A young man flanked by eight others dressed as *ronin* steps out into the square. You recognize him immediately as Takahashi Yamaguchi.

The ninja holds up his hand to halt the procession. "Stop," he says firmly, his voice carrying over the crowd. He steps forward and faces Eichiro. "It is over," he announces. Then he turns to Hiro Matsu on his reviewing stand. "You do not know me, and you have no need to do so. All that you must know is that the travellers hired by Benju- *sama* have proof of a traitorous plot to discredit Benju- *sama*, daimyo of Aru. By my oath, I swear it. They will tell you what you need to know. And you . . ."—he turns back to glare at Eichiro—" . . . you honorless dog, your plan comes to naught. I suggest you look to your men."

Eichiro spins. Many of the samurai aligned behind him have removed their headgear. Underneath their helmets they wear black face-concealing cowls. Each cowled "samurai" has a blade poised at the throat of an authentic Tanaka samurai. And the entire body of men-at-arms is flanked by raggedly-clad ronin—or are they ronin?—who also have glittering blades poised to strike. It's obvious that within moments the entirety of Eichiro's command could be slain.

Takahashi Yamaguchi speaks as he walks over towards you and hands you a parchment—the note you conveyed to him in the warehouse. He bows to you, and to Hiro Matsu, then turns once more to Eichiro. "Your treacherous plan is at an end," he says in a carrying voice. "Let justice be done." And with that, he melts back into the crowds.

"No!" Eichiro howls, and spurs his horse forward, whipping from his shoulder his great bow and nocking an arrow . . .

Eichiro charges directly for Hiro Matsu on his reviewing stand, firing an arrow at him as he does so. Everyone except for the PCs are surprised; the PCs must roll normally for surprise. PCs who aren't surprised have the chance to block Eichiro's charge. Once the PCs are engaged, both Benju and Hiro will signal to their samurai to leave Eichiro to the PCs. (Much better to keep matters small than fill the square with flying arrows.) Eichiro's own samurai take a step or two forward, but then remember the ninja blades poised to take their lives. They also realize that an attack on the Shogun's personal representative is a form of high treason. With these twin considerations firmly in mind, they return to their formation and leave Eichiro to his fate.

Eichiro will remain on horseback as long as he can, and will fight to the death. If the PCs manage to take him alive, he is imprisoned for execution the following dawn.

Eichiro wears a full o-yoroi (AC 3), and carries a daikyu and 12 leaf-head arrows in addition to his katana and wakizashi. Finally, in a belt sheath he has a dagger, its blade poisoned (inflicts 1-8 points of damage on each of the next three rounds; save vs. poison for half damage).

Saving Hiro from Eichiro's mad attack is an honorable action, and each PC participating gains 2 points of honor. If the PCs don't get involved, Eichiro does his best to kill Hiro, while Zukimoto tries to defend his master. In this case, after one round of combat, Hiro's samurai join the fray and kill Eichiro.

The Last Hurrah

When the matter of Eichiro has been settled—one way or the other—read the following:

The square is still. You feel the tension start to drain out of you . . .

But then the air is split by a concussion like a thunderclap. A cloud of foul-smelling black smoke blossoms in the center of the square, and the figures of four men step out of it. Three are young and black-clad; their eyes glow with an unnatural light, and tiny lightning bolts crackle around them.

The fourth is old and bent, wearing a simple grey robe and leaning on a staff. It is he who raises his voice and calls, "The pilgrimages will stop. I, Daisake Mayazato, command it. I ask you, with all respect and honor, to return to your homes and forget this ceremony, forget this temple. Otherwise we will destroy you. Unless there is one among you who will face us with honor, that is how it shall be."

A somewhat startled Hiro Matsu will ask for proof, and will definitely want to know what was in the note that Takahashi handed to the PCs. Hiro Matsu will question the PCs closely. When he's satisfied that he knows everything there is to know, read the following:

The inspector sits back with a sigh. "The evidence and testimony is compelling, and I can't doubt it. Eichiro Tanaka," he says loudly, turning towards the young lord, "by the authority vested in me by the Shogun, I convict you and sentence . . ."

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鄂弗伏拂俛伏膚拔趺付腐

The three black-clad figures are the ninjas, Smoke, Moonlight and Snake. (The noise and the smoke are non-magical: just a little pyrotechnics courtesy of fireworks.)

As in the earlier confrontation with the monk Yaemon (Act 8, the foreshadowing for this event), Daisake's language should cue the PCs in how to handle matters. If one of the PCs offers an honorable challenge, then Daisake will accept it. If the challenging PC is a wu jen, then the challenge is between the PC and Daisake; if the PC is a fighter-class, ninja or sohei, the challenge is with Snake, one of the three ninjas.

If the duel is between two wu jen, Daisake explains the procedure: the combatants start 50' apart, and are free to use any magical or physical attack they like. The duel will continue until one or the other combatant is unable to continue or surrenders. Daisake will surrender as soon as his hit point total drops below 4 points; the PC is free to surrender at any time, or fight to the death. (Remember: Daisake is highly intelligent, and will use his arsenal of spells in the most effective manner possible.)

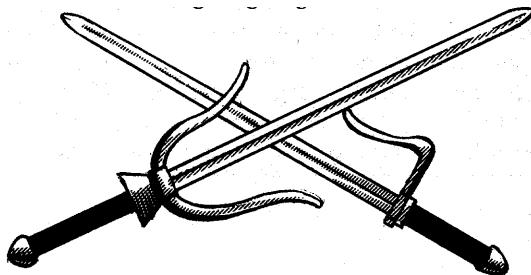
If the duel is with one of the ninjas, the procedure is similar: The combatants again start 50' apart. They can use any weapons, martial arts abilities or physical attacks they like; they can not use spells or spell-like abilities (this doesn't include natural *ki* powers). Again, the duel will continue until one combatant surrenders or is rendered incapable of continuing. Snake will surrender as soon as his hit point total drops below 8 points; the PC is free to surrender at any time, or fight to the death. As his weapon, Snake chooses a sang kauw.

This is an honorable duel, and interference is highly dishonorable. Any PC who interferes in a duel suffers a penalty of 3 points of honor. In addition, interference means that all bets are off: Daisake and the three ninja no longer consider themselves bound by the conditions of the duel, and all of them immediately attack the PCs. Now the fight is to the death.

The Results

If the PC loses the duel, Daisake repeats his demand that the ceremony be canceled. Another PC is free to take up the challenge, however, under the same conditions as above.

If the PC wins the duel, then Daisake and the ninjas will admit defeat and promise under oath not to disrupt the pilgrimages in the future. They then leave. (Both Benju and Hiro will strongly discourage the PCs from doing anything so dishonorable as preventing



Concluding The Adventure

Once the ceremony is complete—and nothing further happens to disrupt it—Benju privately congratulates the PCs for their successes. He hands over letters of credit worth the 75 *koku* each that he promised them . . . plus a bonus of an additional 10 *koku* each. In addition, he promises to post public notices explaining that the PCs discharged their duties in a highly honorable way. This entitles the PCs to an additional 5 points of honor.

During the altercation with Daisake, Smoke, Snake and Moonlight, the Ohara ninja have melted into the crowd and vanished. Unless the DM wants to use the ninja families in another adventure, the PCs are unable to make any further contact with either the Ohara or Yamaguchi clans.

Eichiro Tanaka is out of the way—either slain by the PCs or executed—but his family still lives. Certainly, some member of the Tanaka family might decide to avenge the PCs' involvement in Eichiro's death.

Buntaro still stings from the PCs' accusation of treachery. Depending on how the PCs handle him, he might still go to Benju for permission to take the PCs' heads. While Benju won't grant that permission, if they've alienated him badly enough, Buntaro might come after the PCs anyway.

Finally, the odds are good that Daisake Mayazato and the three ninja are still alive. While they have sworn not to interfere with the pilgrimages, and have no grudge against the PCs—assuming that they were defeated in a fair duel—they can still become the focus of many future adventures.

Probable Outcome

Throughout this adventure, there are a number of places where the PCs can "get off track" and never get back on. Without the PCs' involvement, events will go like this:

Unaware that Lady Satomi is actually a traitor, Benju will follow her advice and assign only the bare minimum of samurai to guard the ceremony. At the height of the procession, Takahashi Yamaguchi and his ninja brethren—all disguised as *ronin*—will burst from the crowd and attack the pilgrims in the procession. Eichiro Tanaka will lead his mounted troops in to mop up the ninja attackers. Eichiro will gain great face in front of Hiro Matsu, and Benju will be disgraced. Before Eichiro can benefit from his stratagem, however, Daisake Mayazato and his three ninja arrive, demanding that the ceremony be stopped. Eichiro realizes that he's caught in a trap: he has to lead his forces against the four intruders, much as he doesn't want to. Not being smart enough to pick up on the concept of an honorable duel, Eichiro leads his samurai in a frontal assault, and is killed in the battle. Benju, too, is slain, trying to redeem his honor. The ceremony is disrupted, many pilgrims die, and Aru Province is left without a daimyo. Chaos reigns.



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Chapter VI: Mini-Adventures

This chapter contains a number of mini-adventures, encounters and “story starters” that the DM can use to liven up the PCs’ stay in Aru (if it isn’t already lively enough . . .). The DM can select an appropriate encounter whenever things are getting dull or the PCs are getting complacent, or may use these ideas to develop a complete random encounter table. There is no obligation to use all—or even any—of these ideas. While some may seem peripherally connected to the main adventure, none is vital to the PCs success, and several are out-and-out red herrings. The adventures marked with an asterisk (*) in their titles relate somehow to—real or imitation—ninja, and are useful to confuse the players as to exactly what is going on between the two ninja clans.

Each adventure follows the same format:

Set-Up: How the PCs become involved in the adventure and the problem presented to them.

The Plot: Background information, events of the story, and likely encounters.

Notes: Other possible complications, suggestions for expanding the adventure, and general information for the DM.

The DM should feel free to expand or modify these adventures as he or she sees fit.

Uninvited Visitor*

Set-Up: When the PCs return to their *ryokan*, they find their room(s) in a state of chaos. Someone has obviously searched through all of their belongings.

The Plot: The mess was caused by a petty thief who entered the rooms looking for valuable items. If the PCs left anything of value behind in the room, it’s gone. The *mama-san* who runs the *ryokan* tells the PCs that another guest saw someone leaving the room—someone dressed in close-fitting black clothing—but didn’t think much of it at first. The PCs have been having some pretty interesting visitors already, *neh?*

Notes: The petty thief has no connection whatsoever with the ninja clans or the yakuza . . . although the PCs will no doubt conclude differently. At the DM’s option, the thief might have left some telltale clue behind that points to his identity.

Secret Admirer

Set-Up: One of the PCs—the male with the highest Charisma—receives an invitation by messenger. The invitation, written in the finest calligraphy, invites the PC to “view the sunset with me atop the Shining Temple,” and is signed, “An Ardent Admirer.”

The Plot: The invitation is from Takako Shimizu, Benju’s niece, who has become smitten with the PC.

Notes: If the PC doesn’t show up, or attends but doesn’t reciprocate Takako’s ardor, she becomes angry and starts rumors around the castle that the PC is “trifling with her affections.” These rumors will cause the PC to suffer a temporary loss of 2 honor points un-

til he can (somehow) resolve the problem.

If, on the other hand, the PC reciprocates (or pretends to reciprocate), then word will get back to Benju that the PC is “shaming” his niece. The daimyo will order the PC to stay away from the woman. If the PC obeys, Takako will become enraged, and spread the same rumors as in the previous paragraph.

Battle of The Chopsticks

Set-Up: Two competing restaurants in Aru town are run by two brothers, Aki and Tojo Marushima. The rivalry between the two brothers is intense, each claiming that his restaurant is the best in town. The brothers agree to use the PCs as objective judges, and invite the PCs to dine—for free—at their respective restaurants on two consecutive nights.

The Plot: Sounds like a deal . . . except both brothers are remarkably unscrupulous. The night that the PCs dine at Aki’s restaurant, Tojo hires someone to slip a mild purgative into the PCs’ dishes. The problem is, Aki has hired someone to do the same thing at Tojo’s restaurant.

Notes: The purgative takes six hours to take effect. Six hours after eating, each PC must save vs. poison or suffer disconcerting gastrointestinal events. These continue for 2-8 hours, and cause the victim to fight at -2 to hit and to damage for as long as they last. In addition, the gastrointestinal problems are highly distracting to spellcasters. Each time a PC tries to cast a spell, the chance of failure is equal to 25% minus the PC’s Constitution. “Failure” will usually mean that the spell just fizzles; however, 10% of the time “failure” leads to reversal of the spell’s effect, or other unpredictable results. (Depending on how well the PCs are doing with the main body of this adventure, and how powerful they are in comparison with the level guidelines for this module, the DM could so arrange it that the PCs enjoy one of their free meals the evening of the ninja attack on Benju. This could serve as an “equalizer” if—for example—magically-armed PCs are going through all opposition like a hot knife through butter.)

Flame Knife

Set-Up: During a visit to the public baths, one of the PCs notices a tattoo on the right arm of a fellow bather. The tattoo looks like a “flame knife,” the symbol of the Yamaguchi ninja clan.

The Plot: The bather—named Horoko—is a 1st level bushi who gave up the way of the sword and became a landscape gardener. The tattoo is a souvenir from an old campaign, when he and all his comrades got drunk on sake and visited a tattoo parlor. He doesn’t even remember how he chose the tattoo, or whether somebody else chose it for him. (The fact that it’s on his right arm—not a normal place for a clan tattoo—might clue the PCs in that Horoko isn’t really a ninja.)

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Notes: Horoko still enjoys his sake, and is three sheets to the wind—and quite irritable—when the PCs confront him. If they don't believe his story or if they accuse him of being a ninja, the chances are good that his temper will snap and that he'll attack them with his fists. Killing or wounding an innocent landscape gardener won't do the PCs' reputation any good.

The Fan

Set-Up: At one time, the PCs notice that someone is watching them with great interest, possibly even following them. Once they notice this character, he doesn't respond in any guilty way as a spy would: instead, he smiles at them and waves . . .

The Plot: The person observing the PCs calls himself Karima, and he will willingly admit that he's become fascinated by the PCs' escapades. Karima can recite almost everything that the PCs have done since they arrived in Aru, and concentrates on the interesting, amusing or embarrassing events. He is a fan of the PCs, Karima tells them; he means them no harm, and simply enjoys watching them go about their business. If the PCs try to chase him away, he tells them that he understands their reaction . . . but he'll be around even if the PCs don't see him.

Notes: Karima is a monkey hengeyokai, and a highly skilled bushi. What he tells the PCs is the complete truth: their exploits have triggered his exceedingly well-developed curiosity, and he simply enjoys watching them operate. He will do nothing to actively harm or help the PCs (although the DM might use Karima to deliver information or suggestions that the PCs wouldn't receive otherwise). If the PCs are foolish enough to attack Karima, he fights to save his life.

Karima (9th level bushi, monkey hengeyokai): AC 10/6; MV 12/12; hp 57/29; #AT 3/2 / nil; Dmg 1-10 (katana) / nil; THAC0 12 / n/a; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 11; AL CG; Honor: 15. (Statistics after the slash refer to animal form.)

In his human form, Karima is a small man, with long, thin arms, a broad face, and a flat nose. He is always smiling, and talks constantly (often about fairly inane subjects). He is proficient with the katana, and always carries one with him. He never wears armor.

Fortune-Teller

Set-Up: The PCs are abroad in the town, and encounter a wizened old man squatting in the gutter, casting a handful of coins on the ground and examining the way they fall. He makes a cast just as the PCs walk by. The old man glances up at one of the PCs (random determination), down at the coins . . . then his face turns pale. He casts another furtive glance at the PC, then he quickly scoops up the coins and stuffs them in his pouch. He tries to hurry away.

The Plot: The old man is 0-level with no character class, but occasionally he does have the Art to read the

cast of the coins. The effect of the cast he has just made is the same as if he'd cast the spell *fate*. The old man knows instinctively when he's made a truly prophetic cast, and the sensation scares him (hence his reaction). He is generally unwilling to share the result of such prophetic casts with anyone.

Notes: The PCs will probably assume that the old man has seen something bad in the coins; this isn't necessarily the case, however.

This encounter is an opportunity for the DM to provide information or insight to the PCs that they'd otherwise miss out on.

Called Out

Set-Up: While abroad on the streets of Aru town, a warrior-class PC accidentally bumps into a man who is coming out of a store, causing the man to drop the package he is carrying. The man instantly whisks out his katana, and faces the PC, saying: "You insult me. I challenge you, here and now. Draw your sword!"

The Plot: The man is a bushi of whatever level would represent a tough but fair fight for the PC he challenges. He won't be dissuaded from his duel by apologies; in fact, he responds to any apology with something like, "Close your mouth and let your steel talk for you, honorless pig!"

Notes: The bushi will fight the duel to the death. Honor adjustments for winning or losing the duel are as normal. Interference in the duel by other PCs is highly dishonorable, leading to an immediate 3 point loss in honor for every member of the group.

The bushi's story is this: Several years ago, he was the personal aide to a well-known general. The general was slain by an assassin, and the bushi blames himself for his master's death. The bushi isn't samurai, so taking his own life isn't obligatory in the case of failure; in fact, the bushi is a member of a faith that considers suicide to be a sin for all but members of the samurai caste. Wanting to end his life without sinning, the bushi decided to challenge anyone and everyone to a duel, whenever an honorable opportunity presented itself.

The problem is, he's won every single one of those duels, and it's starting to get to him. Theoretically, the PCs might be able to get the bushi talking and discover this about him. After that, they *might* be able to convince him to renounce his death-quest. If so, he will become a friend and possibly a henchman. (Whether the PCs succeed or fail in convincing him, it's an excellent opportunity for in-depth role-playing.)

If the PC defeats the bushi honorably, the next day a messenger delivers a copy of the bushi's will to the victorious PC. The bushi has left all his worldly possessions—most notably his katana (a weapon of quality), a small tract of land, plus a small sum of cash—to whoever defeated him in a duel. (The DM can add or change any items in this bequest in order to develop future adventures. For example, perhaps the tract of land contains a haunted house; or perhaps

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collecting the bequest requires an arduous cross-country journey.)

ikiryo

Note: This is a particularly nasty encounter because of its ramifications. DMs should use it with care. (Handled correctly, it can be highly effective, however, particularly if it occurs early in the adventure before the PCs learn for sure that the "incidents" aren't supernatural in origin.)

Set-Up: One of the PCs starts to feel weak and listless. He or she is becoming clumsy, and much slower to grasp intellectual concepts . . .

The Plot: The PC is the victim of an ikiryo (refer to the entry in the *Kara-Tur Monstrous Compendium*). The ikiryo's source might be Buntaro (who just generically hates the PCs), or Lady Satomi (who sees the PCs as a threat to her plan).

Notes: The DM should make sure the PCs are aware that the ikiryo is a result of the source's *subconscious* hatred, *not* a purposeful "sending."

The Lost Sword

Set-Up: As the PCs are passing through a marketplace, someone beckons to them from an alley, offering to sell them "a katana of most transcendent workmanship." The hawker—who looks somewhat like a weasel—shows them the sword: a katana blade, finished in every aspect except for the fact that it has no hilt on it yet. Any PC with proficiency as blacksmith, weaponsmith or armorer immediately recognizes that the blade truly is the work of a master craftsman. The hawker asks 15 ch'ien for the katana, but can be bargained down to 10 ch'ien. (Any PC with an appropriate proficiency will recognize that even the initial asking price is low by a factor of three for such a blade.)

The Plot: The katana blade was created by a master swordsmith, Hiroyasu Ohta, who lived in Jasuga. Two years ago, rumors were circulating that Hiroyasu was working on the katana that would be the culmination of his life's work. Unfortunately, the swordsmith was killed when thieves broke into his workshop (presumably looking for this masterwork of a sword). Hiroyasu's last sword was never found, and legends have sprung up around "*The Lost Sword*."

The katana that has been offered for sale to the PCs is *The Lost Sword*. It was taken by the thieves who killed Hiroyasu, but it brought them no pleasure and ultimately no benefit because the sword is apparently haunted.

Whoever owns *The Lost Sword* is bedeviled by a spirit-creature of some kind which tries each night to possess him or her. Since the death of Hiroyasu two years ago, the sword has gone through some two dozen owners, each of whom has sold the sword as soon as its true nature has become apparent.

The "spirit-creature" that "haunts" the sword is ac-

tually a 6 HD kuei (see *Oriental Adventures*). This kuei is the spirit of Hiroyasu. His purpose is simple: he wants to complete the sword, his masterwork. Since he's dead and incorporeal, that necessitates possessing a living person who can put the hilt on the sword and finish it off. Each night, Hiroyasu's kuei tries to possess the current owner of the sword. So far his fortune has been bad, and he's been unable to succeed.

Notes: Should Hiroyasu succeed in possessing a PC, that PC will temporarily gain the skills necessary to finish the sword. Of course, that PC's companions won't understand what he or she is trying to do, and it won't cross Hiroyasu's mind to explain to them what's going on.

Once the katana is complete, Hiroyasu's kuei is satisfied, and vanishes forever leaving the possessed PC with no memory of his or her actions, or of the skills used to install the sword's hilt.

The katana truly is a masterpiece. Without a hilt, it suffers a -2 penalty to hit to reflect the difficulty of wielding the blade by the bare tang. Once the hilt has been properly installed, however, the weapon is +1 to hit, and receives a +2 bonus on damage whenever a *natural* 20 is rolled. It isn't a magical weapon, and so won't harm creatures that can be struck only with magical weapons. These bonuses merely reflect the outstanding balance and exquisitely sharp edge of the blade. The completed katana can be sold for 60 ch'ien.

Pilgrim Lynch Mob

Set-Up: Whenever the PCs are abroad in the town, they see a single young man being chased down the street by twenty or so other people. The pursuers are dressed like typical pilgrims; their quarry wears religious vestments of some unfamiliar type.

The Plot: The quarry is a young man named Yuka, and he's a fanatical—but basically harmless—devotee of the Nine Travellers faith. He had set up a stall at the foot of the Three Thousand Steps, and had started to try and sway the "benighted heathens" away from their "false belief" in Bishamon. Obviously, this didn't sit too well with the pilgrims who'd travelled hundreds of miles to worship at the Shining Temple of Bishamon. Some of the more touchy pilgrims decided to show Yuka the error of his ways through the judicious application of violence. Deciding that such instruction didn't appeal to him, Yuka fled, the mob in hot pursuit . . .

Notes: If the PCs don't intervene, the mob will eventually catch Yuka and beat him almost to death. Should this happen, word will get around that the PCs just stood by while the daimyo's peace was being broken. This will definitely hurt their reputations.

If the PCs want to stop the ugly pursuit, they've got to be careful that they don't seem to be supporting Yuka's "heathen faith" over the worship of Bishamon; otherwise the mob, already fired up, might fall upon them. The consequences of that would be ugly, since

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popular rumors would relate that the armed PCs beat up on a group of unarmed pilgrims.

Yuka and his pursuers are all 0-level and unarmored. Most of the mob are unarmed, but some few have picked up weapons of opportunity such as bottles, sticks, stones, etc.

Assassination!*

Set-Up: Whenever the PCs are abroad in the town at night, they hear an agonized scream from within a nearby *ryokan* (inn). If they investigate, they find a rich-looking traveller lying on his futon . . . with a blade of unusual design driven into his chest. Assuming the PCs react rapidly, they will see two black-clad figures disappearing out through the back of the *ryokan*.

The Plot: The traveller is actually in Aru under false pretenses. He was a high-ranking yakuza leader in another city (the DM should choose one with which the PCs are somewhat familiar), but decided to effect a career change by embezzling large amounts of money from his family. When the *oyabun* found this out, he hired the Amida Butsu ninja clan to terminate the embezzler with extreme prejudice.

If the PCs examine the body, they find that the man has extensive yakuza-style tattooing covering the left side of his chest.

Notes: The two black-clad figures are Junior Ninja of the Amida Butsu clan. They are unarmored, and armed with whatever weapons the DM likes (the more unusual the better). Their orders were to kill the embezzler, not to get into a scrap with the PCs; therefore, they'll choose escape over combat if they can. Their honor prevents them from being taken alive, if any alternative is open to them. Both ninja have small tattoos under their left arms: three inter-linked red circles, the symbol of the Amida Butsu clan.

If questioned, the Amida Butsu ninja can tell the PCs about the embezzlement, and about the internecine turf wars that broke out when the yakuza made his escape. (The DM can make this story as extreme as he or she cares to. Perhaps the embezzler has unwittingly precipitated a major gang war.) The ninja know nothing about other events in Aru town (of course), and can give the PCs no help. They have no connection whatever with either the Yamaguchi or Ohara clans involved in this adventure (although the PCs will probably not believe a word of that . . .)

Mistaken Identity*

Set-Up: Whenever the PCs are abroad in the town at night, they hear a woman screaming and yelling incoherently. A dumpy little *mama-san* is running down the road towards them, hollering for help. If they stop to talk to her, she tells them that she runs the Drowsy Blossoms *ryokan*, and that something terrible has happened to one of her guests. She tries to drag the PCs back with her to show them.

If they follow her, she leads them to a spectacularly unmemorable inn whose guest list seems to run more towards vermin than humans. She takes them to one of the rooms, and pulls back the *shoji*. Inside, on the futon is a man, bound and gagged. His eyes' roll with fear.

The Plot: The man is almost hysterical, and will blurt out his story as soon as he's freed. He was woken by movement in his room. He opened his eyes . . . and suddenly a powerful hand was clapped over his mouth, silencing his cry of panic. There were two black-clad and cowled figures next to him, both with long blades drawn. Almost fainting with fear, he lay still while they tore back his sleeping kimono to bare his chest. After examining his (tattoo-free) body, the black-clad figures exchanged disgusted looks. Then they bound and gagged him, and vanished into the night.

The man is a pilgrim, and has no idea why ninja (because who else could the black figures be?) would be interested in him. If asked, he explains that he came from another city in Wa (the same one that the DM selected for the encounter described above, "Assassination!").

Notes: The two ninja are members of the Amida Butsu clan. If the DM uses this encounter before "Assassination!," the ninja were looking for the embezzler, but were confused because this pilgrim came from the same city. If this encounter takes place after "Assassination!," then the ninja were following up on the possibility that the embezzler might have had an accomplice. In either case, they realized their mistake when they found that the pilgrim had no yakuza affiliation (as witnessed by his lack of tattoos).

Note to the DM: The story of the embezzler can give rise to any number of other rumors or encounters, as the DM sees fit. The Amida Butsu clan might conceivably be checking other *ryokan* in the area for the embezzler's (non-existent) accomplice, or can by trying to track down where he hid his ill-gotten gains. The PCs can hear recurring stories of black-garbed figures infiltrating *ryokan* and terrorizing guests, and might even see mysterious figures themselves. (If the PCs came to Aru from the same city as the embezzler, then the ninja clan might make a nocturnal visit to *their ryokan*.) In all such cases, the ninja have no interest in the PCs' actions once it's established that the PCs aren't associated with the embezzler.

No member of the Amida Butsu clan has any information about the ninja activity associated with Benju Matsutomo, or can recognize the name Yamaguchi. (If asked under appropriate circumstances, however, they might be able to confirm that there is a ninja clan with the name Ohara.)

Fighting Drunk

This adventure can be run at any time. It is best suited to a period when the characters are looking for a chance to relax and recover from some exhausting chain of events.

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Set-Up: The PCs are enjoying some rest and recreation in a small yakitori bar or drinking establishment. An exceedingly drunk and abusive samurai staggers slightly as he passes, and bumps into one of the PCs. The samurai turns in rage and challenges the PC to a duel right then and there.

The Plot: This samurai is Mifune, the only son of a local noble (not part of Benju's household, however). He is totally serious in his challenge, and won't be talked out of it. If the challenged PC tries to leave or doesn't respond to the challenge at all, Mifune draws his katana and attacks. He will fight to the death, or until he's somehow incapacitated. His ability scores and other statistics are presented below and reflect his current drunken state. Scores in parenthesis are those when he is sober.

Mifune: 7th level samurai
LN human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 70 (54); #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +2 (damage bonus); THAC0 16 (14)

Str 17 (15), Dex 8 (12), Con 18 (12), Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 8 (10)

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, noh

Honor: 18

Mifune is in his middle-30s, barrel-chested and very ugly. While he is normally somewhat surly, the affects of alcohol have made him downright aggressive at the moment.

Notes: If Mifune is defeated but not killed—perhaps through such “dishonorable” tactics as magic—he can't let this “insult” rest. He gives up his position of samurai, becoming a 7th level ronin, and dedicates his life to hunting down and killing the characters who “shamed” him.

If Mifune is killed, his father—a rich noble—will discover who did it and seek vengeance. The form of this vengeance is up to the DM, but could comprise just about anything (including, perhaps, hired ninja).

A Night on The Town

Set-Up: The PCs are abroad on the streets at night, and encounter a group of four very tipsy revellers. The revellers are loud and boisterous, but harmless. Any PC who expresses interest in the group makes a 6d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. Success means that the PC notices one of the revellers—the one in the middle of the group—is better-dressed and apparently wealthier than the others, and that one of the other revellers doesn't look anywhere near as drunk as his companions . . .

The Plot: In fact, three of the “revellers” are bushi who have turned to thievery. Their preferred tactic is to act drunk and befriend rich patrons in drinking houses around the city. While pretending to drink heavily, they goad their “pigeon” into getting highly intoxicated. Then they lead him away to a dark alley

where they rob him blind and—often—leave him with a slit throat.

If the PCs talk with the revellers, at first the bushi will keep up their drunk act, laughing and singing . . . but all the while trying to move their “pigeon” on and get away from the PCs. If the PCs show no intention of leaving, or try to join the party, the bushi who wasn't acting as drunk as his fellows gets surly and abusive, trying to drive the PCs away. The “pigeon” himself will get into the act, telling the PCs—in a slurred upper-class accent—to begone and leave him and his “besht friends in the whooole world” to their pursuit of more alcohol.

If the PCs don't leave, or if they confront the bushi, the “revellers” will try to escape, leaving their pigeon behind.

If the PCs didn't notice anything untoward about the revellers when they first saw them, they have a second chance to get into the action. A minute or so after the revellers have passed, the PCs hear a scream of fear from nearby. Following the sound, they find the three bushi robbing the drunk pigeon at knife-point. When confronted by force, the bushi will fight until it becomes obvious they can't win. Then they'll try to escape. If escape is impossible, they'll surrender (with the full intention of turning on their captors at the first possible moment, of course).

“Drunk” bushi (x3): 4th level bushi
NE human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 21, 29, 31; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (shortsword); THAC0 17

Proficiencies: shortsword (specialization), dagger, weaponsmith, armorer, bowyer

Honor: 7

The bushi are unarmored, but all have short swords and daggers concealed under their cloaks.

“Pigeon”: 0-level
LG human male

AC 10; MV 8 (12); hp 6 (4); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (unarmed); THAC0 20

Str 11 (10), Dex 3 (10), Con 16 (13), Int 9 (11), Wis 6 (10), Cha 10 (12)

Proficiencies: etiquette, poetry

Honor: 35

The pigeon's name—if he can remember it—is Achiko, and he is the 25-year-old son of a local noble. His hit points, MV, Str, Dex, Con, Int, Wis and Cha have all been altered by his drunken state. His normal stats are those in parenthesis.

Achiko is unarmed and unarmored, and totally useless in any tussle. (If anyone gives him a weapon, with his low Dex he'll be more danger to himself and his allies than his enemies.)

Notes: If the PCs save Achiko's life, he will report this to his father, who may be disposed to reward the PCs in some manner. Any survivors from among the bushi may make return appearances later.

Chapter VII: Nonplayer Characters

The following pages contain a variety of useful information on the various NPCs who hold major places in *Ninja Wars*. The Dungeon Master should read through this section and familiarize himself with the motivations of these people in advance of their first contact with the adventurers. By doing this, the DM can be judge their reactions to the heroes and lay down the groundwork for future dealings with them.

Benju Matsutomo

15th level samurai
LG, human male

Str 15	Dex 15	Con 14
Int 14	Wis 13	Cha 17

AC 10; MV 12; hp 87; #AT 2/1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +4 (damage bonus); THAC0 6

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry, noh, falconry, tea ceremony, heraldry.

Honor: 85

Benju is in his late 60s, but he has the appearance and personality of a man perhaps a decade his junior. He is a large man, broad and powerful, with a strong face and dark eyes. Even when motionless, he seems as powerful as a force of nature, and as impossible to stop or divert. His voice is usually quiet, but effortlessly adopts the crack of command. Despite his size and obvious power, he moves with the silent, fluid grace of a dancer.

Benju wears armor only when required by protocol. He is rarely without his katana and wakizashi. His katana is a weapon of quality, and has been in his family for ten generations.

He rose through the ranks as a samurai and famed warrior. In the past, his family had been shamed by having a number of members serve as daimyo of Aru Province, only to be removed for failure in their duty. Perhaps it was the desire to expunge this dishonor that pushed Benju to his great achievements. By thirty, he was already well-known among the Shogun's generals. By forty, it was obvious that he was destined for greater things.

Now, as daimyo of Aru, his personality seems to have changed. He's very concerned about the future of his family, and believes that if they can only hang onto the daimyate for several generations, their stability and security are assured. Thus the risk-taking and daring of his youth are long-gone.

Benju loves music, although he is totally incompetent at any instrument he's ever tried (and this saddens him deep in his soul). He is highly skilled at *noh*, however, and frequently puts on plays for his household in which he and Yuji Takaesu display their abilities. He enjoys the outdoors, and loves falconry.

Benju hates his mother-in-law (and vice-versa), but inexplicably he likes his son-in-law the quarrelsome Buntaro.

Buntaro Ostato

9th level samurai
LG, human male

Str 16	Dex 12	Con 13
Int 14	Wis 13	Cha 8

AC variable; MV 12; hp 58; #AT 2/1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +3 (damage bonus); THAC0 12

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship (+1), calligraphy, poetry (+1), etiquette.

Honor: 46

Buntaro, Benju Matsutomo's son-in-law, is a hulking brute of a man with the appearance and personality of a dyspeptic bear. His voice is harsh and displeasing, and his smile—on the few occasions that he displays it—looks like a grimace. His manner is such that, even when he's strictly following the precepts of etiquette and politeness, he seems arrogant and obnoxious.

Buntaro wears armor appropriate to his current duty or assignment: this ranges from nothing all the way up to full o-yoroi on formal occasions. He always carries his katana and wakizashi, and often carries a daikyu as well.

Buntaro was married to Benju's eldest daughter, but she died in childbirth. (Perhaps this is what has warped Buntaro's personality.) Throughout the Matsutomo household, Buntaro is comprehensively hated for his arrogance. The only person who likes him is



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拔氣縛俛伏膚拔趺付腐
鄂弗伏縛俛伏膚拔趺付腐

Benju . . . and he likes him a lot. Benju will put up with rudeness from Buntaro that would get any other man killed.

Buntaro is a proud man, unshakably loyal to the daimyo. He believes strongly in duty, and hates anyone whose loyalty seems to be shaky. Buntaro is in love with **Sono**, one of Benju's serving girls, and is currently trying to get up the nerve to ask the daimyo for permission to wed her.

Perhaps surprisingly, Buntaro is good at poetry; however, his imagery is usually blunt, sometimes even violent . . . but nonetheless emotionally effective.

Cachiko

0-level

LG, human female

Str 9	Dex 13	Con 10
Int 12	Wis 10	Cha 13

AC 7 or 10; MV 12; hp 2; #AT 2/1 or 1; Dmg 1-6 or by weapon type; THAC0 20

Proficiencies: Flower arranging (+2), etiquette, poetry, jujutsu.

Honor: 5

Cachiko is the granddaughter of Fusae, proprietress of the House of Heavenly Sand. She is perhaps 18 years old.

Cachiko is skilled in the sign language that the mute Fusae uses, and often serves her grandmother as interpreter. Cachiko's skill at flower arranging is famous throughout the neighborhood (hence the fact that her honor is higher than her grandmother's). She is never armed, but has received some training in jujutsu. She knows the special maneuvers *pain touch* and *stunning touch*. She will fight only to protect her life and that of her grandmother, however.

Cachiko's mother is Fusae's daughter; she doesn't know her father. Because of Fusae's dishonor, Cachiko is officially an eta. Her grandmother, with whom she lives, has taught her much that would normally be learned only by samurai (thus her apparently-inappropriate proficiencies).

Daisake Mayazato

13th level wu jen

N, human male

Str 9	Dex 11	Con 9
Int 17	Wis 10	Cha 12

AC 10; MV 12; hp 30; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (bo stick); THAC0 16

Proficiencies: bo stick, shuriken.

Spells: *drowsy insects* (1st), *elemental burst* (1st), *hail of stone* (1st), *magic missile* (1st), *shield* (1st), *fire shuriken* (2nd), *hypnotic pattern* (2nd), *phantasmal force* (2nd), *stinking cloud* (2nd), *wind breath* (2nd), *animate fire* (3rd), *fire rain* (3rd), *fire wings* (3rd), *memory* (3rd), *confusion* (4th), *dancing blade* (4th), *fire enchantment* (4th), *wall of fire* (4th), *telekinesis*

(5th), *wall of force* (5th), *disintegrate* (6th), *sword of darkness* (6th), *power word stun* (7th)

Honor: 35

Daisake Mayazato is a disreputable-looking old man, whose long, dark hair is always greasy, and is always surrounded by the stench of stale sweat. (This is a result of the man's taboos against bathing and cutting his hair.) His clothes are always immaculately clean, however, as if to compensate. Despite his age, his voice is rich and powerful.

Over the years, Daisake's sanity has started to slip, and he now has the tendency to become obsessive about a certain idea or plan for no real reason. He will then pursue this (sometimes illogical) goal to the best of his considerable abilities. This is what's happened now. He has got it into his head that he must stop the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, and end the pilgrimages to the Shining Temple of Bishamon. (If anyone were to ask him why, he couldn't answer . . . but this wouldn't necessarily sake his resolve.)

Several years ago, he saved the three ninja, Smoke, Moonlight and Snake, from an ambush by spirit folk that would have killed them. In return for their lives, they have agreed to serve him for a period of five years. Even though they have nothing against the pilgrim "business," their loyalty to Daisake forces them to continue his campaign against the pilgrims.

Daisake never wears armor, and only rarely carries a weapon (preferring to use his magic). When he is armed, he carries a bo stick and three or four shurikens.

Eichiro Tanaka

12th level samurai

LN(E), human male

Str 17	Dex 12	Con 18
Int 15	Wis 14	Cha 9

AC 3; MV 9; hp 85; #AT 2/3; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +3 (damage bonus); THAC0 9

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, naimaki, horsemanship (+2), calligraphy (+1), poetry, etiquette.

Honor: 38.

In his late 30s, Eichiro Tanaka is built like a bull: broad shoulders, bulging muscles, and eyes that are sunken under bony brows. He is a harsh man who generally believes that politeness is for others, not for him.

Eichiro blames Benju Matsutomo for the death of his father, Eiji. The events and rationale are described in detail in Chapter IV in the section "Nemesis."

Even Eichiro isn't quite sure whether the idea for revenge was his or Lady Satomi's.

Eichiro usually wears his o-yoroi. He always carries katana and wakizashi, and often has a daikyu as well. He favors leaf head arrows because they inflict such nasty wounds.

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Fusae

3rd level bushi
LG, human female

Str 13	Dex 8	Con 13
Int 14	Wis 15	Cha 11

AC 10; MV 9; hp 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3 (knife) +1 (damage bonus); THAC0 18

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), knife, daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry, etiquette, flower arranging.

Honor: 1

Fusae is a withered old woman in her mid-60s who runs the House of Heavenly Sand in Aru town. She is mute, but her hearing is excellent and her mental faculties unimpaired.

Fusae is always unarmored, and usually unarmed. At home and at work, however, there's always a knife within easy reach if she really needs it.

Fusae's story is interesting, but not that uncommon. She was raised the daughter of a well-known samurai and general, and her upbringing included all of the skills essential to a samurai. Unfortunately, when she was still fairly young, her father participated in an abortive coup attempt against a local daimyo. As punishment, her father and mother were executed, and she and all her relatives were officially "demoted" from the samurai caste and became *eta*. (This didn't affect what she'd already learned in the way of proficiencies, of course, but did "demote" her from samurai to bushi.) She moved up north to Aru, and started a new life well away from the memories of her old one.

Hiro Matsu

11th level samurai
LG, human male

Str 15	Dex 11	Con 15
Int 15	Wis 14	Cha 16

AC 10; MV 12; hp 71; #AT 2/1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +4 (damage bonus); THAC0 10

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, uchi-ne, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry, falconry, etiquette.

Honor: 80.

Hiro Matsu is a handsome man in his early 50s. He is generally soft-spoken, and prefers to listen rather than talk, but when he has anything to say it's always incisive, and his voice can assume the crack of command. Hiro is on the Shogun's personal staff, and travels throughout Wa as the Shogun's inspector. Despite the largely-ceremonial nature of his duties, Hiro has maintained his combat skills at a very high level.

Hiro Matsu is a fair-minded and highly honorable man. He hates the corruption that seems to be spreading throughout Wa, and does his best to stamp it out wherever he finds it. He is particularly disgusted by

political intrigue and petty empire-building (such as that shown by Eichiro Tanaka). He always cracks down hard on this kind of behavior.

Hiro rarely wears armor. He carries a katana and wakizashi, and also has one or more uchi-ne in his palanquin.

Lady Satomi

2nd level bushi

N, human female

Str 9	Dex 10	Con 8
Int 15	Wis 10	Cha 8

AC 10; MV 12; hp 8; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3 (knife); THAC0 18

Proficiencies: knife (specialized), etiquette, calligraphy, poetry.

Honor: 45

Although Lady Satomi is Benju's mother-in-law, she is only a year or two older than he is. (This reflects the relative youth of Benju's wife.) She was once very attractive, and attempts with make-up to maintain her looks . . . but has very limited success.

Satomi was raised in the samurai caste, and received some training in the skills and traditions of the samurai. At a young age her alignment shifted away from Lawful, however, which caused her character class to change to bushi.

Lady Satomi loves her daughter—Benju's wife—with all her heart. She has always hated Benju, more because he was the person who would take her daughter away from her than for any faults in him as a man, and tried to block the marriage. Satomi's husband, since dead, overrode her wishes, and the politically expedient marriage went ahead.

Over the years, Satomi's love for her daughter has twisted, becoming a desire for control and possession. She wants her daughter back in her household, where she can watch over her and run her life. Benju represents an obstacle to this. When Benju was named daimyo, and the shogunate policy of *sankin kotai* required his family to live in Uwaji, her hatred for Benju reached full flower.

Unknown to anyone else in the household, she has been in communication with Eichiro Tanaka, and has offered to help him with his plot against Benju by supplying information. (In fact, it's quite possible that it was Satomi who set Eichiro on his present course.) Her rationale is this: If Benju is disgraced and removed from office, her daughter will be released from *sankin kotai* and returned to her. It either hasn't occurred to her or doesn't matter that Benju's removal will disgrace her daughter as well, possibly driving her away from her family in shame.

Lady Satomi is known to the servants in the Matsuomo household as "Lady Lotus." They use this name among themselves, but never in the hearing of anyone of higher class . . . and particularly never to Lady Satomi's face. The name springs from a characteristic

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鄂弗伏拂俛俛伏膚拔趺付腐

of her garb. Everything she wears—her kimono, her jewelry, her regalia—has tiny symbols that represent stylized lotus blossoms all over it. At any distance of more than 5 feet, the symbols are too small to make out: they simply look like abstract patterns. When viewed from close up, however, anyone with a relevant proficiency (flower arranging, gardening, etc.) can recognize them as lotus blossoms. Even people without relevant proficiencies will recognize them as flowers of some kind. Lady Satomi will never mention the symbols, and if asked will be insulted at such a personal question. (The DM should mention the intricate patterning of her clothes when describing her, but should not stress the nature of the patterns.)

Lady Satomi always has a knife concealed in her *obi*.

Moonlight

8th level wu jen / 12th level ninja
LN, human male

Str 14	Dex 13	Con 15
Int 15	Wis 11	Cha 14

AC 8 or 10; MV 12; hp 38; #AT 3/1 or 3/2; Dmg 1-8 or by weapon type; THAC0 15

Proficiencies: nunchaku, bo stick, shuriken, karate.

Special Abilities: HS 77%; MS 94%; FT 75%; CW 96%; D 64%; OL 77%; TW 75%; PV 14'; F 55'; E 54%; BS x4.

Spells: *fiery eyes* (1st), *ghost lightning** (1st), *magic missile* (1st), *wall of fog* (1st), *fire shuriken* (2nd), *pyrotechnics* (2nd), *smokey form* (2nd), *fire rain* 3rd), *fire wings* (3rd), *protection from normal missiles* (3rd), *dimension door* (4th), *wall of fire* (4th)

Honor: 29

Moonlight is a powerfully-built young man, perhaps 35 years old. His shoulders are broad, and his limbs well-muscled. He received his ninja training, along with his colleagues **Smoke** and **Snake**, in the Warazama family. When that family was destroyed by internal dissension, the three colleagues took to the roads together. They have thrown in their lot with the wu jen **Daisake Mayazato**, not so much because they share his goals, but because they owe him service for help he gave them in the past.

Moonlight never wears armor, and always carries his preferred weapon—the nunchaku—plus half a dozen shurikens. In addition, he usually carries a pearl of fire protection.

As a ninja, he is highly skilled at karate, and knows all of the special maneuvers appropriate to that style.

“Moonlight” is not the ninja’s real name, of course; he took it as a symbolic *nom de guerre* since moonlight can enter a room through even the tiniest opening.

In Moonlight’s spell list, the asterisk indicates that the spell *ghost lightning* is a custom-designed spell. Its casting time, duration and components are exactly the same as for the similar spell, *ghost light*. The spell

allows the caster to form tiny lightning bolts (more like large sparks, really) that crackle and lick around his body. These sparks cause no damage, and can’t be used to ignite flammable substances.

Naomi

0-level
LG, human female

Str 11	Dex 12	Con 11
Int 15	Wis 14	Cha 14

AC 10; MV 12; hp 6; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; THAC0 20

Proficiencies: Etiquette, tea ceremony, flower arranging, poetry (+1), origami.

Honor: 45.

Naomi, an attractive woman in her mid-20s, is Benju’s favored consort. (According to Wa law, a man can have only one wife at a time, but can have any number of consorts. These consorts are respected and honored only slightly less than the wife. This explains Naomi’s relatively high honor score.) She loves Benju deeply, and will do whatever it takes to further his interests . . . even going so far as to sometimes disobey his direct orders when she thinks them foolish. (So far, Benju has always agreed with her reasoning after the event and forgiven her these transgressions.)

In public, her personality always seems mild and introverted. In reality, however, she is very intelligent and strong-minded, and can sometimes be more decisive than Benju when circumstances so warrant.

Naomi was raised in the samurai caste, but never received training in any character class. She usually has a knife concealed in her *obi*.

Smoke

7th level wu jen / 12th level ninja
LN, human male

Str 13	Dex 14	Con 14
Int 16	Wis 13	Cha 16

AC 8 or 10; MV 12; hp 35; #AT 3/1 or 3/2; Dmg 1-8 or by weapon type; THAC0 15

Proficiencies: Kau sin ke, bo stick, shuriken, karate.

Special Abilities: HS 77%; MS 94%; FT 75%; CW 96%; D 64%; OL 77%; TW 75%; PV 14'; F 55'; E 54%; BS x4.

Spells: *elemental burst* (1st), *fiery eyes* (1st), *ghost lightning** (1st), *magic missile* (1st), *fire shuriken* (2nd), *stinking cloud* (2nd), *strength* (2nd), *fire rain* (3rd), *protection from normal missiles* (3rd), *dimension door* (4th)

Honor: 28

Smoke is a powerfully-built young man, perhaps 30 years old. He received his ninja training, along with his colleagues **Moonlight** and **Snake**, in the Warazama family. When that family was destroyed by in-

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ternal dissension, the three colleagues took to the roads together. They have thrown in their lot with the wu jen **Daisake Mayazato**, not so much because they share his goals, but because they owe him service for help he gave them in the past.

Smoke never wears armor, and always carries his preferred weapon—the kau sin ke—plus half a dozen shurikens. In addition, he usually carries a *pearl of fire protection*.

Like **Moonlight**, he is highly skilled at karate, and knows all of the special maneuvers appropriate to that style.

“**Smoke**” is not the ninja’s real name, of course; he took it as a symbolic *nom de guerre* since smoke can be invisible at night and drifts with the wind.

In **Smoke**’s spell list, the asterisk indicates that the spell *ghost lightning* is a custom-designed spell. Its casting time, duration and components are exactly the same as for the similar spell, *ghost light*. The spell allows the caster to form tiny lightning bolts (more like large sparks, really) that crackle and lick around his body. These sparks cause no damage, and can’t be used to ignite flammable substances.

Snake

7th level wu jen / 13th level ninja

LN, human male

Str 15	Dex 14	Con 17
Int 15	Wis 13	Cha 15

AC 8 or 10; MV 12; hp 36; #AT 3/1 or 3/2; Dmg 1-8 or by weapon type; THAC0 14

Proficiencies: sang kauw, bo stick, shuriken, karate.

Special Abilities: HS 85%; MS 95%; FT 80%; CW 97%; D 68%; OL 82%; TW 80%; PV 14.5'; F 60'; E 58%; BS x4.

Spells: *fiery eyes* (1st), *ghost lightning** (1st), *hail of stone* (1st), *magic missile* (1st), *fire shuriken* (2nd), *smokey form* (2nd), *fire rain* (3rd), *protection from normal missiles* (3rd), *steam breath* (3rd), *dimension door* (4th)

Honor: 28

Snake is about 28 years old. Though strong, his build is slender and supple. He received his ninja training, along with his colleagues **Smoke** and **Moonlight** in the Warazama family. When that family was destroyed by internal dissension, the three colleagues took to the roads together. They have thrown in their lot with the wu jen **Daisake Mayazato**, not so much because they share his goals, but because they owe him service for help he gave them in the past.

Snake never wears armor, and always carries his preferred weapon—the sang kauw—plus half a dozen shurikens. In addition, he usually carries a *pearl of fire protection*.

He is highly skilled at karate, and knows all of the special maneuvers appropriate to that style.



“**Snake**” is not the ninja’s real name, of course; he took it as a symbolic *nom de guerre* since nobody has ever heard a snake’s footsteps (and nobody has ever heard his).

In **Snake**’s spell list, the asterisk indicates that the spell *ghost lightning* is a custom-designed spell. Its casting time, duration and components are exactly the same as for the similar spell, *ghost light*. The spell allows the caster to form tiny lightning bolts (more like large sparks, really) that crackle and lick around his body. These sparks cause no damage, and can’t be used to ignite flammable substances.

Sono

0-level

LG, human female

Str 9	Dex 14	Con 10
Int 10	Wis 10	Cha 14

AC 10; MV 12; hp 5; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; THAC0 20

Proficiencies: Etiquette, tea ceremony, music, massage.

Honor: 18.

Sono is a beautiful girl around 20 years of age. She serves in the daimyo’s household as a servant and sometimes masseuse. She is highly skilled with the samisen, and frequently is invited to perform for Benju and his closest friends.

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While she is totally loyal to the daimyo, she is in love with Buntaro, and lives in hope that one day he will ask Benju for permission to wed her.

Considering that she is just a servant, her honor may seem high; this is a reflection of her skill with the samisen, and of the esteem in which the daimyo holds her abilities.

Sumihiro Matsutomo

6th level samurai

LG, human male

Str 13	Dex 6	Con 13
Int 14	Wis 13	Cha 9

AC 10; MV 12; hp 31; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +2 (damage bonus); THAC0 15

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry.

Honor: 30

Almost 40 years old, Sumihiro Matsutomo is Benju's nephew. He's a sullen, ugly man, with the appeal of a week-dead fish. After decades of the best training money can buy, he's only managed to reach 6th level (possibly because he's almost unbelievably clumsy), and is somewhat of a disgrace to the house of Matsutomo. He never wears armor, and always carries his katana and wakizashi (neither have been drawn in several years, however, so there's no telling what condition the blades are in . . .)

Takahashi Yamaguchi

10th level bushi / 17th level ninja

LN, human male

Str 12	Dex 15	Con 13
Int 15	Wis 13	Cha 17

AC 8 or 10; MV 12; hp 76; #AT 3/1 or 2/1; Dmg 1-8 or by weapon type; THAC0 11

Proficiencies: sang kauw (specialized), bo stick, katana, shuriken, etiquette, weaponsmith, armorer, bowyer, karate.

Special Abilities: HS 96%; MS 99%; FT 95%; CW 99%; D 84%; OL 99%; TW 96%; PV 16.5'; F 80'; E 74%; BS x4.

Honor: 25.

Takahashi Yamaguchi is the leader of the Yamaguchi ninja clan. He is in his mid-30s, although he appears a decade younger (unless it suits him to appear otherwise, of course). He is handsome but not strikingly so, and has a well-modulated voice that would be the envy of any actor.

The clan Yamaguchi is new on the scene, and is only just starting to build a reputation (hence Takahashi's relatively low honor score). Takahashi received his training in another ninja family—the Warazama clan, as it happens—but founded his own when that family was destroyed by internal dissension.

Takahashi Yamaguchi is a man of honor, and hates oath-breakers with a passion. If anyone reneges on an

oath made to Takahashi, the young man will go to whatever lengths are necessary to revenge himself on the traitor.

Takahashi rarely wears armor, and only occasionally carries any weapons other than a concealed shuriken or two. His preferred weapon for serious combat is the sang kauw. He is highly skilled at karate, and knows all of the special maneuvers appropriate to that style.

Takako Shimizu

6th level samurai

LG, human female

Str 13	Dex 14	Con 13
Int 15	Wis 13	Cha 14

AC 10; MV 12; hp 38; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-3 (knife) +2 (damage bonus); THAC0 15

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, knife, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry, origami.

Honor: 39

Benju's niece, Takako is different from Sumihiro in almost every way, and is the epitome of the samurai woman. She is in her late 20s, and very attractive and vivacious. Her movements are graceful and fluid, and both her intellect and wit are very sharp.

Despite the limited time she has in which to practice, she has progressed to 6th level as a samurai. She never wears armor, but always carries a knife concealed in her obi. Although she doesn't possess her own blade, she is specialized with the katana.

Toshikazu Wada

10th level samurai

LG, human male

Str 14	Dex 11	Con 16
Int 14	Wis 14	Cha 15

AC variable; MV 12; hp 68; #AT 2/1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +3 (damage bonus); THAC0 11

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry, falconry, etiquette.

Honor: 51

Toshikazu is a direct subordinate of Yuji Takaesu, and is the commanding officer of Benju's Home Guard. About 35 years old, he's friendly, outgoing and boyishly handsome. He's more easy-going by nature than virtually any other member of Benju's household, but he knows when it's appropriate to be serious.

Toshikazu wears armor when appropriate, but prefers not to. He is never seen without his katana and wakizashi.

Benju likes Toshikazu, and vice versa. Although their age and relative positions makes it impossible for them to be close friends, they enjoy each other's company, and frequently hunt together. Toshikazu's prized falcon was a birthday gift from Benju.

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Yaemon

8th level monk
Ln, human male

Str 15	Dex 15	Con 11
Int 8	Wis 15	Cha 9

AC 4; MV 22; hp 23; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (lajatang)+4 (damage bonus); THAC0 17

Proficiencies: lajatang (specialization), religion, tae kwon do.

Honor: n/a

Yaemon is a tall, ascetic-looking figure with a shaven head. He always wears orange monk's robes. His eyes are piercing, and his voice is loud and commanding.

As a monk, Yaemon gains an additional attack every two rounds and gains a damage bonus of 1d8 when using his martial arts skill. He knows the following special maneuvers: kick 1,2; throw 4; movement 5.

Despite his high Wisdom, Yaemon isn't highly intelligent, and often jumps to conclusions. His tendency to react violently to misperceived situations has got him in trouble in the past. When shown the error of his ways, however, he is a steadfast fellow. At all times, honor—in his case, meaning "fairness"—is near the forefront of his mind.

Yaemon has come to Aru town to attend the Ceremony of the Three Thousand Steps, and sees himself as a defender of the pilgrims.

Yuji Takaesu

12th level samurai
LG, human male

Str 13	Dex 13	Con 15
Int 14	Wis 16	Cha 12

AC 10; MV 12; hp 77; #AT 2/1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +4 (damage bonus); THAC0 9

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry, noh, gaming (go), flower arranging, tea ceremony, etiquette.

Honor: 75

Yuji Takaesu is 62 years old, and his face is that of a man ten years older. He is almost bald, and what little hair he has is snow-white. His body is thin, and appears withered with age; this is highly deceptive, however, since his wiry muscles still have the strength of spring steel.

Yuji wears armor only when it's required by protocol; he'd much rather remain unencumbered. He is never seen without his katana and wakizashi.

He is unshakably loyal to his master, Benju Matsutomo, and serves him as advisor, right-hand man and close friend. They met decades ago when Benju was still building his reputation as a general and warrior, and have been firm friends ever since. Yuji's reputation is second only to Benju's.

When not concerned with matters of state or of his lord's safety, Yuji is an intellectual and introspective

man. He loves music, and is fascinated by the game of go, with which he became familiar late in life. He sometimes acts in noh plays with Benju, and is very accomplished.

Zukimoto Chikitada

7th level samurai
LG, human male

Str 14	Dex 12	Con 15
Int 15	Wis 14	Cha 10

AC 3; MV 9; hp 53; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +2 (damage bonus); THAC0 14

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, tetsubo, horsemanship, calligraphy (+1), poetry, etiquette.

Honor: 70.

Zukimoto is a sour-faced man in his early 40s. His expression and manner always seem to imply that everything displeases him to one degree or another. When anyone else would be laughing with glee, Zukimoto merely looks slightly less disgruntled.

Zukimoto is aide, secretary and right-hand man to Hiro Matsu, the Shogun's inspector. As such, he is responsible for protecting the inspector as well as doing all his paperwork. Zukimoto is unshakably loyal to his superior, and honestly likes him as a person (although expressing such a feeling just isn't in his nature). He will react quickly and probably violently to any perceived insult to his master.

When on official duty, Zukimoto usually wears an elaborate o-yoroi in the Shogun's colors. He is always armed with his katana and wakizashi, but is also skilled with the tetsubo.

General Townsfolk

0-level
LG(N), human male or female

AC 10; MV 12; hp 1d6 + 1; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; THAC0 20

Proficiencies: Relating to their profession, or none.

Honor: 0-10, depending on profession and caste.

By law, townsfolk are unarmed and unarmored, although in a pinch almost anyone would be able to find something that could serve as a weapon.

One out of twenty townsfolk has received a little training in some martial art style: typically karate or jujutsu. These trained townsfolk have the same hit point values as normal townsfolk, but their number of attacks, damage and Armor Class reflect the style they have learned. There is a 10% chance that the individual will have learned one special maneuver appropriate to the style.

Townsfolk carry small amounts of money, ranging from a couple of fen for eta up to a string of several tael for merchants.

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Benju's Samurai

2nd level samurai

LG, human male

AC 10 to 7; MV 12; hp 2d10; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +1 (damage bonus); THAC0 19

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry.

Honor: 1d6 + 14

Depending on their particular assignment and duty, samurai can wear anything from no armor up to scale mail. All carry *daisho* (katana plus wakizashi) at all times; sometimes they will also be armed with daikyu and 12 arrows.

Samurai carry no money.

Samurai Officers

4th level samurai

LG, human male

AC 10 to 7; MV 12; hp 4d10; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +1 (damage bonus); THAC0 17

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, noh, painting, poetry.

Honor: 1d6 + 16

Depending on their particular assignment and duty, junior officers can wear anything from no armor up to scale mail. All carry *daisho* (katana plus wakizashi) at all times; sometimes they will also be armed with daikyu and 12 arrows.

Samurai carry no money.

Junior Ninja

3rd level ninja / 3rd level bushi

LN, human male

AC 10 to 8; MV 12; hp 3d10 +3d2; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (ninja-to); THAC0 18

Proficiencies: ninja-to, shuriken, chain, weapon-smith, armorer, bowyer.

Special Abilities: HS 20%; MS 27%; FT 30%; CW 87%; D 28%; OL 33%; TW 30%; PV 9.5'; F 10'; E 18%; BS x2.

Honor: 21

The statistics above apply to Junior Ninja in both the Yamaguchi and Ohara clans.

Depending on their particular mission, Junior Ninja may wear leather armor, or be totally unarmored. The weapon proficiencies above are for the "typical" ninja; however, there will definitely be some atypical individuals who are proficient or specialized with different weapons. (This gives the DM complete freedom to equip ninja with an interesting array of weaponry.)

One out of every two Junior Ninja is proficient in a martial arts style; the Yamaguchi clan concentrates on karate, the Ohara clan on jujutsu. In general, Junior Ninja each know 1d4 special maneuvers (DM's choice); exceptional individuals may know more or fewer.

Ninja of both clan have been taught that duty is more important than life, and that death is the only alternative to success. This has a significant consequence should PCs use *charm* or similar spells to try to prevent ninja from "taking the final step to avoid capture." Since evading capture through death is considered the highest duty, a ninja would respond to any suggestion or order not to do so in the same way that any other character would view an order to commit suicide. In other words, they would totally ignore it.

Yamaguchi ninja all have a tiny symbol called a "flame knife"—a jagged-bladed knife—tattooed under their left arm. Ohara ninja have no such identifying mark.

Senior Ninja

7th level ninja / 7th level bushi

LN, human male

AC 10 to 8; MV 12; hp 7d10 + 7d2; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-8 (ninja-to); THAC0 14

Proficiencies: ninja-to, shuriken, chain, weapon-smith, armorer, bowyer.

Special Abilities: HS 43%; MS 55%; FT 50%; CW 91%; D 44%; OL 52%; TW 50%; PV 11.5'; F 30'; E 34%; BS x3.

Honor: 27

The statistics above apply to Senior Ninja in both the Yamaguchi and Ohara clans.

Depending on their particular mission, Senior Ninja may wear leather armor, or be totally unarmored. The weapon proficiencies above are for the "typical" ninja; however, there will definitely be some atypical individuals who are proficient or specialized with different weapons. (This gives the DM complete freedom to equip ninja with an interesting array of weaponry.)

Every Senior Ninja is proficient in a martial arts style; the Yamaguchi clan concentrates on karate, the Ohara clan on jujutsu. In general, Senior Ninja each know 2d3 special maneuvers (DM's choice); exceptional individuals may know more or (very rarely) fewer.

Ninja of both clan have been taught that duty is more important than life, and that death is the only alternative to success. This has a significant consequence should PCs use *charm* or similar spells to try to prevent ninja from "taking the final step to avoid capture." Since evading capture through death is considered the highest duty, a ninja would respond to any suggestion or order not to do so in the same way that any other character would view an order to commit suicide. In other words, they would totally ignore it.

Yamaguchi ninja all have a tiny symbol called a "flame knife"—a jagged-bladed knife—tattooed under one arm. Ohara ninja have no such identifying mark.



Chapter VIII: Encounter Generator

This chapter provides the DM with a method of generating "off the cuff" encounters. The system is based on a series of random-selection tables that define the major characteristics of the encounter: who the encounter is with, what he or she wants, and what the background circumstances are.

The fact that the system is totally random might seem to negate its value. After all, surely a truly random system is going to generate a lot of paradoxical, illogical or down-right nonsensical encounters. While this is true, this isn't necessarily a weakness in the system. DMs develop "comfort zones": ranges of characters, motivations and situations with which they feel comfortable. Since these comfort zones will probably be somewhat limited, this means that most spur-of-the-moment encounters created by a particular DM will have some recurring theme or familiar feature. While there's nothing wrong with this in essence, it means that it becomes difficult for a DM to challenge his or her players with truly new and totally unfamiliar encounters.

Hence the random encounter generation system. The system is designed to push the DM to adopt a new perspective, to break out of familiar "thought habits."

The best way to use this system is to roll up the encounter truly randomly, then take a moment to think through the ramifications of the result. Certainly, the components may seem, at first, to be incompatible or paradoxical. But the trick is to be creative, and try to find a way to incorporate all of the compo-

nents in one encounter. In this way, the system can be like a Rorschach test, where someone is forced to read a meaning into a meaningless ink blot.

Let's take an example: The DM rolls 1 on Table 1, 20 on Table 2 and 8 on Table 3: a human kensai. The next roll is on Table 4, and the result is 48, "Hates a character class." The next roll is on Table 5, and the result is 6: again, a kensai. The final roll is on Table 7, and is 92: "Depressed."

At first, this may seem to make little sense: a depressed kensai who hates kensai. Given a moment's thought, the DM might consider a kensai who is the implacable enemy of any kensai who holds a different religion, or is of a different race or alignment, or is from a different country. (But then why is he depressed?) This will generate an interesting encounter, particularly if the PCs have a kensai among them, but a little further thought might generate an even more unique encounter.

A kensai who hates kensai. What about a kensai who suffers from self-hatred? Perhaps a man who has dedicated his entire life to his weapon skill, to the exclusion of all else, but has become disillusioned when he realized just what he's forsaken in his life. How would such a character react to people who did him homage for his skill at arms? Might he not react with anger at their "superficial" judgement of his character? After all, isn't there more to him as a person than his combat ability? (No wonder the guy's depressed . . .)



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This is a potentially fascinating encounter that wouldn't immediately leap to most DMs' minds.

The "moral" is, no matter how illogical the random result may seem, take enough time to consider all the possible ramifications. The result might be something totally unique.

Procedure

The encounter generator consists of a number of tables. To generate an encounter, start with Table 1 – NPC Race. The result from that table will tell you what table to roll on next.

If a result is impossible according to the rules—for example, a spirit folk ninja—simply re-roll the impossible condition.

Table 1 –Race (1d8)

- 1-5 Human (Table 2)
- 6 Korobokuru (Table 2)
- 7 Hengeyokai (Table 2)
- 8 Spirit Folk (Table 2)

Table 2–Occupation (1d20)

- 1-3 Pilgrim (Table 4)
- 4 Farmer (Table 4)
- 5 Grain merchant (Table 4)
- 6 Grocer (Table 4)
- 7 Carpenter/Builder (Table 4)
- 8 Gardener (Table 4)
- 9 Artist (Table 4)
- 10 Musician (Table 4)
- 11 Laborer (Table 4)
- 12 Peddler (Table 4)
- 13 Food seller (Table 4)
- 14 Animal handler (Table 4)
- 15 Garment maker (Table 4)
- 16 Weapon maker/seller (Table 4)
- 17 Cook (Table 4)
- 18 Jeweler (Table 4)
- 19 Town official (Table 4)
- 20 Character class (Table 3)

Table 3 –Character Class (1d20)

- 1-2 Barbarian (Table 4)
- 3-7 Bushi (Table 4)
- 8-9 Kensai (Table 4)
- 10 Monk (Table 4)
- 11 Ninja (Table 4)
- 12-14 Samurai (Table 4)
- 15-16 Shukenja (Table 4)
- 17 Sohei (Table 4)
- 18 Wu Jen (Table 4)
- 19-20 Yakuza (Table 4)

Table 4–NPC Motivation/Action (d%)

After checking this table, go to Table 7 unless otherwise marked.

01-03 Wants to buy something
04-06 Wants to sell something
07 Pursuing someone/thing
08 Being pursued
09-11 Needs information
12-13 Lost
14 Malign intentions
15-16 Asks for help
17-19 Wants to be hired
20-21 Wants to hire someone
22 Involved in a fight
23-26 Idle conversation
27 Mistaken identity
28-29 Wants PCs' opinion on some issue
30-31 Opinionated comments
32-33 Rude comments
34-37 Curiosity
38-39 Unexplained interest
40-43 Eating
44-47 Drinking
48-49 Hates a character class (Table 5)
50-52 Hates a race (Table 6)
53-56 Practicing a skill
57-61 Accidentally bumps into PCs
62-64 Crowd forces NPC and PCs together
65-66 Asks for a favor
67-69 Drunk
70-72 Wants PCs to settle dispute
73-75 Loud argument
76-77 Being chased/attacked by non-monstrous animal (cat, dog)
78-80 Knocked over by someone else
81-83 Sleeping in inappropriate place
84-86 Being hassled by constabulary
87-89 Looking for lost item
90-93 Doing job
94-96 Compliments PC for some reason
97-99 Having pocket picked
00 Attacks PC for no apparent reason

Table 5–Hated Class (1d20)

Go to Table 7 after rolling on this table.

1-4	Barbarian
5	Bushi
6	Kensai
7-8	Monk
9-11	Ninja
12	Samurai
13	Shukenja
14-15	Sohei
16-18	Wu Jen
19-20	Yakuza

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Table 6-Hated Race (1d8)

Go to Table 7 after rolling on this table.

- 1 Human
- 2-3 Korobokuru
- 4-5 Hengeyokai
- 6-8 Spirit Folk



Table 7-NPC Quirks (d100)

- | | |
|-------|--------------------------|
| 01-02 | Ugly |
| 03-04 | Handsome/Beautiful |
| 05-06 | Very old |
| 07-08 | Surprisingly young |
| 09-10 | Disreputable |
| 11-12 | Dirty |
| 13-14 | Sloppy |
| 15-16 | Fastidious |
| 17 | Speaks foreign language |
| 18-19 | Talks a lot |
| 20-21 | Taciturn |
| 22 | Angry |
| 23-24 | Sad |
| 25 | ill |
| 26 | Injured |
| 27 | Seriously injured |
| 28-29 | Wise |
| 30-31 | Foolish |
| 32-33 | Dressed inappropriately |
| 34-35 | Very quiet |
| 36-37 | Witty |
| 38-39 | Cultured |
| 40-41 | Rude |
| 42-43 | Stupid |
| 44-45 | Personable |
| 46-47 | Uncouth |
| 48-49 | Deadbeat look |
| 50-51 | Charismatic |
| 52-53 | Tells bad jokes |
| 54 | Stutters |
| 55-56 | Naive |
| 57-59 | Stranger to town |
| 60-61 | Arrogant |
| 62-63 | Impatient |
| 64-65 | Trusting |
| 66-67 | Liar |
| 68-69 | Generous |
| 70-71 | Stingy |
| 72-73 | Poor |
| 74-75 | Surprisingly wealthy |
| 76-77 | Religious fanatic |
| 78-79 | Non-religious fanaticism |
| 80-81 | Brave |
| 82-83 | Cowardly |
| 84-85 | Reckless |
| 86-87 | Passive |
| 88-89 | Full of energy |
| 90 | Paranoid |
| 91 | Manic |
| 92-93 | Depressed |
| 94-95 | Boring |
| 96 | Half-asleep |
| 97-98 | Nondescript |
| 99 | Notable possession |
| 00 | Roll twice* |

* The DM can ignore obvious contradictions—e.g., “poor” and “surprisingly wealthy”—but should give some thought as to whether the results really are a contradiction. For example, an NPC who looks like a penniless vagabond but is actually incredibly wealthy might make a fascinating encounter.

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Chapter IX: New Adventures

These adventures are slightly longer and more detailed than the preceding mini-adventures. In these, the format changes, becoming more like that of the major adventure. Most of these adventures are more linear than the main event, however, which makes it less appropriate to take the various "scenes" out of order.

Important Note

Several of the NPCs in these adventures have more proficiencies than would normally be allowed. This reflects the fact that these are truly exceptional individuals in one way or another. These "extra" proficiencies are necessary for reasons of narrative drama or game balance.

Salvage

This adventure should only be played after the PCs have met Fusae, the proprietress of the House of Heavenly Sand.

Introduction

When you return to your inn, you find a messenger eagerly waiting for you. In fact, he is hopping from foot to foot with anticipation.

"Noble lords (and ladies)," he says, "I bear word from one who wishes to speak with you again. She bids you meet her at the House of Heavenly Sand this evening one hour after sunset. There is a service she would have you do for her, if you are willing. She bids me to tell you that she will pay, to the extent she is able. May I tell her you will attend?"

If the PCs ask, the messenger confirms that the message is from Fusae. If pressed, he admits that he didn't actually see Fusae; the message was relayed by her granddaughter, Cachiko.

Return To The Heavenly Sands

Assuming the PCs agree to the meeting, they will have time to make any preparations they wish to. When they arrive at the House of Heavenly Sand, read the following:

After dark, the House of Heavenly Sand looks a lot less enticing than it does during the day. The building is dark and boxy, its high windows blank and empty. It would be easy to picture the place as full of heartless menace.

But as you approach the front of the building, the door swings open, spilling warm light into the street. A figure is silhouetted in the frame—one you've seen before.

Cachiko, Fusae's beautiful granddaughter, beckons you in, and carefully shuts the door behind you. "I apologize for the minor subterfuge," she says with a deep bow, "but I feared you might

not come if I extended the invitation in my own name. But now that you are here, I need your help. I can pay you little, as I am sure you understand . . . But if you help me in this matter, I can promise you each a reward of 4 tael. A minuscule sum, I know, but all I can offer. Will you accept?"

Trying to bargain won't do any good; this amount is literally all Cachiko can afford. If the PCs don't accept it, she bids them farewell with regrets. Several days later, the PCs hear through the grapevine that both Cachiko and Fusae were slain by person or persons unknown. (This is a blatant shot at the old guilt reflex, and will probably make most players a little less quick to turn down a lady in distress in the future.)

If the PCs accept, read the following:

Cachiko bows again. "I knew I could count on such as you," she says with a smile. "Here is my story.

"For the past several days, my grandmother and I have been followed. Oh, not obviously, far from it. But we have both seen movement out of the corners of our eyes, strangers watching us on the street, pursuing footsteps when there was no pursuer visible . . . even figures on the rooftops, as Fusae-san related to you once before. I fear that enemies are drawing closer, enemies who wish to destroy us. You may think that such as we can have no important enemies. Not so. I cannot recall if I related to you my grandmother's background . . . ?"

If the PCs don't know Fusae's and Cachiko's backgrounds as described earlier in this book, Cachiko relates them now. When she's finished, read the following:

And it's someone from the past—from my grandmother's past—that I fear is threatening us now. Perhaps they fear that Fusae-san knows something damaging, I don't know. But I fear there are ninja on our trail."

She bows to you again. "What I wish—what we need—from you, noble ones, is protection. Will you guard me? Will you follow me—perhaps at a distance—and seek those who would harm me? Perhaps you can chase them away. . . or kill them."

Cachiko can tell the PCs nothing more. If pressed, she can relate the times and places when she thought she was being followed, but these details are irrelevant. If the PCs can't think of another way to handle matters, she suggests that they might follow her around for the next several days and see if they can spot the people spying on her.

If the PCs mention guarding Fusae as well, or even speaking to her, read the following:

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Cachiko looks flustered. "No," she says quickly, "I ask you not to do that. My grandmother . . ." She takes a deep breath. "My grandmother forbade me to seek help from others. She says this is a family matter. And that is why I believe these . . . people are somehow related to Fusae-San's past. I ask you not to let her know I came to you. Please. Will you agree to that? Please?"

DM's Background

In fact, Cachiko knows considerably more than she's letting on.

The story that Cachiko has told the PCs about Fusae's father's disgrace is true . . . as far as it goes. In fact, the daimyo he tried to lead a coup against—Zataki Yoyogi—was an evil man, an oppressor of his people, and definitely worthy of death. Unfortunately, there is only one time when insurrection against your liege lord is not a capital crime: when you win. Fusae's father didn't win, and so died a traitor's death. The night before his death, however, he handed over to his daughter—his only offspring—his sword. This was a finely-forged katana—a Weapon of Quality named "Oil Seller" that had been in his family for generations. He bound his daughter with an oath to keep the weapon safe and give it to the first male offspring of his blood. The next day he died a dignified death.

Fusae took him at his word, and concealed Oil Seller, hoping to give it to her son. When it turned out that she had only daughters, she kept the sword safe, hoping to give it to her grandson. As matters turned out, only one of her daughters had offspring that lived past childhood, and then only a daughter: Cachiko. Fusae still kept the sword safe, hoping to be able to hand it over to Cachiko's son.

In the interim, Fusae met a travelling wu jen who read her fortune (in fact, it was a *fate* spell). Her fortune was that her great-grandson—who would be a mighty warrior—would wield the sword Oil Seller and overthrow the descendent of the man who caused the death of Fusae's father. Under the auspices of this warrior, her family would regain the status it once had, and all dishonor would be expunged from the family's name.

Unfortunately, Zataki's son, Yoshi—now daimyo in his own right after the death of his father—has heard a similar fortune: that the offspring of a disgraced samurai line will wield a famous blade, and bring Yoshi down. Yoshi Yoyogi is perhaps even more evil than his, father, but he has good political sense. He knows that going out and killing everyone descended from any samurai who was disgraced during his father's reign wouldn't sit well with other daimyos—particularly since many of these potential threats live in other provinces or daimyates—or with the Shogun. Also, there are a lot of these people. (Fusae's story is far from uncommon, particularly in the daimyate of the family Yoyogi.)

Yoshi has figured out a more subtle solution. He's sent armies of spies—many of them ninja—into the countryside to track down these descendants of disgraced samurai. Their orders are then to investigate these potential troublemakers. If they gain any evidence that one of these people possesses a famous sword, they are to acquire the sword and kill the people. (The order is important. If they kill first, they might never find the sword, and then the threat against Yoshi would still be out there somewhere, floating around for someone else to find.)

Several of these "investigative groups" have fulfilled their orders. Others apart from Fusae still keep a prized weapon that belonged to a disgraced forebear. In three cases, Yoshi's agents have acquired these heirlooms and killed their owners. Having no way of knowing which—if any—of these blades is the one mentioned in the fortune, Yoshi locks each weapon he acquires away in his vault. He considered having the blades melted down, but then he realized that the metal might, sometime in the future, be used to forge another blade. And might that new blade not fulfill the prophecy as well as the original?

When Fusae's father gave her the sword Oil Seller, he made her swear an oath to tell only her direct descendants about the existence of the weapon, and to extract a similar oath from them. The oath has remained unbroken down to Cachiko. Thus she'll never tell the PCs about the sword.

Fusae has generalized this oath to include asking "outsiders" for help in protecting herself or the sword, since such a helper might eventually find out why she needs such help. Cachiko sees things slightly differently. As long as she doesn't tell potential helpers about Oil Seller, and as long as she does everything in her power to make sure they don't find out, she feels she's abiding by the conditions of the oath she swore. In fact, she can justify going to the PCs for help because otherwise the chances are good that she and her grandmother will die, and that Oil Seller will fall into the hands of her family's enemy. And isn't that exactly what the oath was really intended to prevent?

Although she can justify her actions sufficiently to assuage her own conscience, she knows that Fusae won't buy that line. Thus she's trying to ensure that the PCs will never let on to the old woman that they're involved.

Shadowing Cachiko

The PCs have various options as to how to proceed. The most likely course is that they'll follow Cachiko's suggestion and shadow her, hoping in that way to spot those who would do her harm.

Following Cachiko will be little hardship, since her daily schedule is so simple. One hour after sunrise, she leaves Fusae's *minka* and walks to a market nearby in the *eta* district. There she buys food for the day. At about the same time, Fusae herself rises and

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walks to the House of Heavenly Sand to open it for business.

After about half an hour of shopping, Cachiko returns to the *minka*, where she spends the morning cleaning the building and preparing food. Sometimes during the morning Cachiko is visited by clients—people of various castes who pay her to create flower arrangements for them. At noon, Cachiko carries two *bento*—lunches, presented in small lacquer boxes—to the House of Heavenly Sand, where she eats lunch with her grandmother.

One hour after noon, she returns to the *minka*, where she spends the afternoon. Again, she is frequently visited by clients who want flower arrangements. Before sunset she prepares dinner for herself and Fusae, who arrives home at or before sunset. They spend the evening in the *minka*, and retire early.

If the PCs choose this route, Cachiko urges them to use stealth when observing her: she tells them she doesn't want her enemies—whatever they are—to know about the PCs. (In fact, she's almost equally concerned that Fusae will discover her "bending" of her vow.)

The Watchers

On the second day of their vigil, the PCs have the chance to spot two of the ninja who have been shadowing Cachiko. Whether they spot the ninjas, or vice versa, depends on their actions, and how circumspect they are. (The DM must adjudicate this.)

There are two possibilities:

The ninja spot the PCs

If the PCs aren't careful and don't take precautions against being detected (disguise, etc.), the two ninja who are following Cachiko will quickly recognize that there are others shadowing the girl. The ninja, who are currently disguised as travelling merchants, don't confront the PCs immediately. Instead, they report to the leader of their group, whereupon they plan an ambush against the PCs. Go to the section entitled "Ambush!" to resolve this scene.

The PCs spot the ninja

Two ninja, disguised as merchants, follow Cachiko everywhere she goes about the city. (Two others are following Fusae.) Their hope is that one of the two women will give them some clue that they're more than the eta they appear to be, or maybe—if the gods smile—even lead them to the sword. Unfortunately, neither Cachiko or Fusae has changed her daily routine one whit, and they still can't be sure that these two are worthy of their further attention.

The ninja are well-disguised, and are skilled at "fieldcraft"—the art of blending in with the people around them. At an appropriate time when following Cachiko, each PC receives a 5D6 Attribute Check against Intelligence. A successful roll means that the PC has noticed something out of the ordinary. Read the following:

You feel like your eyes are about to fall out of your head. The streets are filled with people going about their daily business, and you're trying to examine each and every one of them. You're starting to feel that you're engaged in an impossible task...

But wait! What was that? Something caught your attention, something that set off subliminal alarm bells.

You look around even harder.

There, that was it. Two merchants—no different in dress or appearance from any of the others heading to and from the city's marketplaces. But one of them... there's something about his body-line, his movements. He seems harder-sharper, somehow more angular—than the others. There's strength there, strength, speed and grace kept in check... suppressed. You see him glance—seemingly casually—at his companion. The companion nods his head. Information has been conveyed, a message has been passed.

The merchants move, following Cachiko as she walks gracefully down the street.

If none of the PCs makes the roll, further events are at the discretion of the DM. Possible options are: one of the PCs notices the ninja anyway, despite the roll; the ninja notice the PCs (see the section above); or, the PCs can continue to shadow Cachiko until circumstances arise to give them a second chance to spot the shadows.

When and if the PCs spot the ninja, go to the next section, "Confrontation?"

Confrontation?

The PCs have the option of confronting the "merchants" openly, or of trying to follow them secretly. If the former, then the "merchants" will deny that they have any interest in Cachiko ("In who? Who are we supposed to be following?"), trying to maintain their facade as innocent travellers. If the PCs press the issue further, read the following:

One of the merchants' expressions changes. It's almost as if a mask has slipped away. You see a firm, determined set to his jaw, and a cold hardness in his eyes. "This is none of your concern," he says flatly. "You would do best to leave. Now."

Should the PCs draw weapons, or do anything else untoward, the "merchants"—who are, of course, ninja—will fight to the best of their abilities. If it looks like the fight is turning against them, they will try to escape. If escape is impossible, they'll fight to the death, taking their own lives if necessary to prevent capture. (They don't have poison capsules, so it should be possible for the PCs to take at least one alive... if this occurs to them.) Should the PCs try to question a captive, go to the section "Interrogation."

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Perhaps the PCs will choose to follow the ninja secretly. If they do so, one of the ninja will notice them almost immediately and warn his companion. Both will try to make their escape. If escape is impossible, they'll fight as discussed above.

Ninja (x2): 5th level ninja / 5th level bushi
LN, human male
AC 10; MV 12; hp 29, 33; #AT 1; Dmg 2-5 (chain) or 1-3 (gunsen); THAC0 16

Proficiencies: chain, gunsen, weaponsmith, armorer, bowyer.

Special Abilities: HS 31%; MS 40%; FT 40%; CW 89%; D 36%; OL 42%; TW 40%; PV 10.5'; F 20'; E 26%; BS x3.

Honor: 23

These are members of the Kata ninja clan. Like all Kata ninja, they are highly skilled at tae kwon do, and know the following special maneuvers: Kick 1,2,3; Strike 1; Throw 4; Movement 5; Weapon 1,2.

They are currently unarmored. Both carry *gunsen* (war fans; martial arts weapons), and have chains wound around their waists under their sashes, where they can be released almost instantly.

Members of the Kata clan are identified by a family tatoo: a small blue circle, about half an inch in diameter. This tatoo can be anywhere on the body, although it's often on the back of the neck where it will be concealed by the hair.

INTERROGATION

If the PCs can capture one of the Kata ninja alive, they can try to extract information from him. Obviously, the captive will be unwilling to tell them anything, and will do what he can to escape or to take his own life. Magic, of course, will make this interrogation much easier.

The two ninja who were following Cachiko don't know much. Their orders were to follow the girl, and report to their superiors if she did anything out of character for a simple eta woman. They were also told to keep a sharp eye out for a katana, but they don't know why, or anything about the significance of the weapon. The PCs might be able to extract the name of the ninja's superior—Asahi—and where they were supposed to meet him. The ninja don't know who hired their clan, or why. They do know that other two-man teams are working in the city, but they don't know where or what their orders were (they had no "Need to Know").

If the PCs decide to attend the scheduled meeting, they'll be disappointed—perhaps terminally so. Unbeknownst to the two ninja they confronted, there was a third member of the team, hanging so far back that he couldn't possibly be spotted. He saw the fate of his compatriots, and immediately reported to Asahi. The meeting will be an ambush for the PCs. Go to the section "Ambush!" if this takes place.

Cachiko Again

If the PCs survive the confrontation with the ninja—whether they capture one alive or not—read the following:

You hear a woman's cry, "Oh, oh, oh." You spin. It's Cachiko, running back towards you. "You saw them," she cries, "you saw our enemies."

If the PCs have interrogated a captive ninja by this time, they might have some pointed questions for Cachiko. She sticks very much to her previous story, that they were obviously hired by someone from her grandmother's past to dig up some secret. She claims to know absolutely nothing about any sword, should the PCs ask. (In fact, she jumps at this opportunity to propose that the whole thing is just some case of mistaken identity: she and Fusae are just innocent victims. But of course, the noble PCs will have to destroy the enemies anyway . . . won't they?)

If the PCs mention anything about speaking to Fusae, the girl begs them not to. She swore an oath to her grandmother not to let outsiders in, she stresses, and it would be a disaster for her if Fusae found out about her actions. Couldn't the PCs continue without telling Fusae what's happened? If the PCs seem about to turn away and leave her to her fate, she falls to her knees crying most prettily, and begging them to help



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her. Yes, she now admits, her grandmother once owned a sword of great value. But years ago it was destroyed in a tragic fire that almost claimed their lives. The people who are after the sword don't know this, however. The PCs know how ninja are, the girl continues: nothing but death will prevent them from completing their task, and if they think that she and Fusae still have the sword, then their lives are worthless.

It's quite possible that the PCs will notice some of the gaping logical flaws in this story, but Cachiko will use some fast talking and profuse tears to try to bamboozle them into continuing with their "duty." If they decide to drop the matter, two days later they hear of Cachiko's and Fusae's deaths.

Confronting Fusae

If, despite Cachiko's entreaties, the PCs at any time speak with Fusae about the whole matter, read the following. (Remember that Fusae is mute, and must depend on Cachiko to interpret for her.)

The old woman's face clouds with anger. Her sign-language gestures are sharp and harsh with anger.

"My grandmother chastises me for my foolishness," Cachiko says, a catch in her voice. "These are not matters for outsiders. She bids you to leave and not concern yourself further with our troubles. And she forbids me from ever speaking to you again. I am sorry." She fumbles in the voluminous sleeve of her kimono and extracts some silver coins. "Here," she says, offering them to you, "the payment I promised. My grandmother insists that you take them . . . and then that you leave this place. No dishonor is meant by this, we know your motives are noble . . . but, please, go." The girl's voice is firm. But there's something very much like pleading in her eyes.

The coins are the 4 tael each that Cachiko promised the PCs. Neither Cachiko nor Fusae will talk to them any further. The PCs are free to continue with the task—which, of course, is what Cachiko wants them to do, and which is what honor would bid them do anyway—or to leave the women to their fate.

Background Research

Rather than following Cachiko in the first place, the PCs might decide to see what information they can dig up on Fusae and those who might wish to do her harm. They might also choose this path after being sent away by the old woman in the section "Confronting Fusae."

There are many people throughout Aru town that the PCs might talk to: Fusae's neighbors, patrons at the House of Heavenly Sand, clients of Cachiko's flower-arranging business, those of Benju's samurai

who patrol the city streets, even Benju himself or members of his household. No matter who they talk to, however, they get basically the same thing: nothing. Certainly, Fusae's neighbors and clients know of the old woman; Cachiko's clients know the girl is Fusae's granddaughter. But nobody knows anything about the family's background. Most people assume that Fusae's always lived in Aru, and those few old enough—and coherent enough—to remember her arrival know nothing about her earlier life. If the PCs ask specifically about samurai heritage, they get laughter: "What eta doesn't claim to be descended from samurai, neh?" In particular, nobody knows anything about a valuable sword that once was—or might still be—in Fusae's possession.

Concerning the people following Cachiko and Fusae, the general consensus is the same: since nobody else has seen them, the "followers" are obviously products of the women's imaginations. After all, Fusae's getting on in years, isn't she, and her mind may be slipping. And Cachiko, although talented at her art, has been living with her grandmother too long, and probably has picked up the old woman's paranoid streak.

Unfortunately, talk on the street goes both ways. While the PCs are running into brick walls, the Kata clan—the ninja family hired by Yoshi Yoyogi to investigate Cachiko and Fusae—has heard that the adventurers are very interested in the two women. This gives the Kata clan food for thought. Why—if the women are just the harmless eta they appear to be—would prominent adventurers be interested in them? The only reason they can think of is that the women have some importance beyond their apparent status. Perhaps they do have the sword after all . . .

The Kata clan decides to change its tactics. Instead of subtle shadowing, they will now use a more direct approach. That night, they will send "representatives" around to Fusae's minka to "interview" the women and settle matters once and for all. This is detailed in the section "Nocturnal Visitors."

But what about the PCs? If, as it appears, they've been hired as bodyguards—and where would simple eta get the money to hire such high-powered help?—they could interfere with the Kata operation. It would be much better all around if the PCs were removed from the scene . . . permanently.

The ninja clan decides to ambush the PCs and eliminate them. This is detailed in the next section.

Ambush

The events in this section happen soon after the Kata clan learns that the PCs are interested in Fusae and Cachiko. The ninja family can learn this in various ways: if the PCs are asking questions around Aru town; if the ninja "merchants" who were following Cachiko spot the PCs; or, if the PCs confronted Cachiko's ninja shadows. However they learn of the PCs' interest, they decide that it would be better all around if

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the PCs were dealt out of this particular hand. . . permanently.

It's up to the DM to decide when and where the ninja family makes its move, taking into account the PCs' movements and habits. If the PCs have a regular base of operations—a *ryokan* or inn somewhere, for example—and haven't gone to any trouble to keep their presence there a secret, then the DM can assume that any ninja worthy of the name could find this out. In such a case, assassination would be the action of choice.

If the PCs don't have a regular routine and "safe house," or the DM figures that the ninja can't learn of the PCs' habits, then the Kata clan has only one option: ambush. (Note that, if the PCs have learned from a captured ninja about the planned meeting place and time—see the section "Interrogation"—then there will certainly be an ambush waiting for them.) This ambush can take place anywhere and at any time. The DM is urged to think like a ninja—sly, sneaky and nasty—and choose circumstances that suit that mind-set.

Assassins

If the Kata clan decides that stealthy assassination is the best way of terminating the PCs, then they'll make the effort to do it right. The assassination team will comprise two to four junior ninja (depending on the number of PCs in the party), led by two senior ninja; statistics on these individuals follow. The team will infiltrate the PCs' residence and kill the adventurers as quickly and efficiently as possible.

An assassination attempt by well-trained ninja—which these are—is a difficult thing to stop . . . particularly when the killers have the appropriate equipment. If the PCs haven't bothered to set a sentry, or otherwise guard their sleeping quarters, it would be quite possible for the intruders to kill all of them without difficulty. Unless the players have been totally incompetent in their game play, this is probably not a desirable outcome.

To give the PCs a fighting chance, one of them might hear a tell-tale sound as the ninja team is penetrating the building. Or perhaps a PC wakes from a paranoid nightmare just in time to see shadowy figures at his window (what a coincidence!).

The ninja team has its orders—kill the PCs at any cost—and will die trying. Death is preferable to capture, and these ninja are carrying poison pills. They've also been indoctrinated with the same "death before dishonor" philosophy as the ninja families in the main adventure, so *charm* and similar spells will be less effective than usual.

If the PCs interrogate one of the junior assassins, he can tell them little of interest: his leader ordered him here to kill the PCs or die trying. He has no knowledge of why the killings are important, or even what his family is doing in Aru town.

A senior ninja can tell the PCs considerably more, however. He knows that the Kata clan was hired by

Yoshi Yoyogi to retrieve a sword that Yoyogi considers very important. There is reason to believe that the sword is in the possession of the old woman Fusae. The sword is a weapon of quality, the ninja knows, and figures prominently in some kind of prophesy. The ninja also can tell the PCs that some of his fellows are planning to visit Fusae and her granddaughter at the old woman's *minka*. The "visit" is scheduled to take place no more than half an hour after the assassination attempt.

Junior Ninja: 3rd level ninja / 3rd level bushi
LN, human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 18, 19, 25, 30; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (ninja-to); THAC0 18

Proficiencies: ninja-to, shuriken, chain, weapon-smith, armorer, bowyer.

Special Abilities: HS 20%; MS 27%; FT 30%; CW 87%; D 28%; OL 33%; TW 30%; PV 9.5'; F 10'; E 18%; BS x2.

Honor: 21

The weapon proficiencies above are standard for ninja; however, the DM should feel free to give one or more of the killers "atypical" proficiencies—particularly proficiency with a ninja-style weapon that the DM finds especially interesting.

Like all Kata ninja, they are highly skilled at tae kwon do, and know the following special maneuvers: Kick 1,2,3; Strike 1; Throw 4; Movement 5; Weapon 1,2.

The ninja are unarmored and dressed in tight-fitting black clothes, with hoods over their heads. They are armed with ninja-to, shuriken, and any other "neat" weapons that the DM feels like throwing at the PCs.

One of the junior ninja—thinking that he wanted an "equalizer"—has poisoned the points of his shurikens. As long as he handles the weapons carefully, he faces no risk of poisoning himself. If he is knocked off his feet, however, he must save vs. paralyzation or wound himself with his own weapons. Someone struck by a poisoned shuriken must save vs. poison or suffer 1d4 points of damage on each of the next three rounds, coupled with excruciating pain that penalizes all attack rolls by -3. A successful save reduces the damage to 1 point of damage per round, and drops the attack penalty to -1. The poison damage is in addition to that inflicted by the shuriken itself, of course.

In addition to weaponry, they carry whatever other equipment they need to penetrate the PCs' residence: ropes, hooks, lockpicks, etc.

Members of the Kata clan are identified by a family tatoo: a small blue circle, about half an inch in diameter. This tatoo can be anywhere on the body, although it's often on the back of the neck where it will be concealed by the hair.



Senior Ninja (x2): 7th level ninja / 7th level bushi LN, human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 42, 50; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-8 (ninja-to); THAC0 14

Proficiencies: ninja-to, shuriken, chain, weapon-smith, armorer, bowyer.

Special Abilities: HS 43%; MS 55%; FT 50%; CW 91%; D 44%; OL 52%; TW 50%; PV 11.5'; F 30'; E 34%; BS x3.

Honor: 27

Again, the DM should feel free to equip these ninja with "neat" weapons.

The senior ninja are highly skilled at tae kwon do, and know the following special maneuvers: Kick 1,2,3; Strike 1; Throw 4; Movement 5; Weapon 1,2.

The ninja are unarmored and dressed in tight-fitting black clothes, with hoods over their heads. They are armed with ninja-to, shuriken, and any other "neat" weapons that the DM feels like throwing at the PCs. The two senior ninja also carry suitably small and concealable martial arts weapons, such as *sai*. Finally, they both carry four eggshell grenades: two each of flash powder and pepper.

In addition to weaponry, they carry whatever other equipment they need to penetrate the PCs' residence: ropes, hooks, lockpicks, etc.

Members of the Kata clan are identified by a family tatoo: a small blue circle, about half an inch in diameter. This tatoo can be anywhere on the body, although

it's often on the back of the neck where it will be concealed by the hair.

Brutal Ambush

If a nocturnal assassination isn't appropriate, or if the PCs are planning to "crash" the meeting between the ninja "merchants" and their superior, the Kata clan will set an ambush to rid themselves of the PCs. Since even the best ambush is more problematical than a stealthy assassination, the group assigned to the mission is larger: 6 junior ninja led by 2 or 3 senior ninja (depending on the number of PCs in the party). The ninja will lay the ambush carefully, making sure that they have the high ground, and that they can prevent the PCs from fleeing the "killing ground" when the cutting begins. (For example, they might lay the ambush in a narrow alley. Half the ninja, armed with missile weapons, conceal themselves on the rooftops overlooking the killing ground, while the rest are concealed at both ends of the alley, ready to block it off with merchants' barrows, and to slay any PCs who run away.)

The ninja team has its orders—kill the PCs at any cost—and will die trying. Death is preferable to capture, and these ninja are carrying poison pills.

If the PCs interrogate one of the junior assassins, he can tell them little of interest: his leader ordered him here to kill the PCs or die trying. He has no knowledge of why the killings are important, or even what his family is doing in Aru town.

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A senior ninja can tell the PCs that the Kata clan was hired by Yoshi Yoyogi to retrieve a sword that figures in a prophesy of some kind. There is reason to believe that the sword is in the possession of the old woman Fusae. The ninja also can tell the PCs that some of his fellows are planning to visit Fusae and her granddaughter at the old woman's *minka*. The "visit" is scheduled to take place no more than half an hour after the ambush.

The statistics for these individuals are the same as those presented in the preceding section.

Nocturnal Visitors

If the PCs have managed to interrogate one of the ninja who attacked them—either through assassination or in ambush—they should have discovered that the Kata clan has decided to be more direct in their approach to Fusae. Should the PCs not have asked the right questions, or not have managed to take a ninja alive at all, they should still find out somehow that Fusae and Cachiko will be receiving visitors. How this happens is up to the DM. Perhaps one of the ninja has a note on his body ordering him to meet "the rest of the team" at Fusae's *minka* as soon as the adventurers have been dealt with. Or perhaps one of Fusae's *eta* neighbors, concerned for the old woman's welfare, seeks out the PCs because he's seen suspicious characters sneaking around Fusae's home.

In any case, if the PCs hurry they can (maybe) reach Fusae's *minka* before the festivities get underway. If they dally, they'll have to penetrate a defensive screen of ninja.

Tactics

The leader of the Kata group sent to Aru is an older man named Asahi. He's an expert tactician, and never takes risks that he can avoid. For example, even though he's sent a team to deal with the PCs and has every reason to believe that they'll succeed, he still brings a support team with him to Fusae's to cover all eventualities:

Asahi's team comprises 8 junior ninja (hp 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31) and 3 senior ninja (hp 43, 51, 58); other stats are as listed in the previous section. The ninja are armed with a wide array of weapons, at the discretion of the DM. Unless he managed to escape the earlier mayhem, the ninja carrying the poisoned shuriken will not be present.

On arrival, the team is deployed to form a defensive screen around Fusae's *minka*. The ninja take up positions of concealment where they can spot—and engage—anyone trying to approach the *minka*. Their orders are to kill on sight anyone trying to interfere with Asahi, who'll be inside the building dealing with Fusae and her granddaughter. If the intruders are too powerful to kill, the ninja team has orders to warn Asahi—who'll take the women hostage—and then to cover their leader's escape.

The ninja team is experienced in this kind of thing.

When they take their positions, they set up overlapping fields of observation. This means that anyone approaching has the chance of being spotted by at least two ninja. It also means that each ninja is visible to at least two of his fellows, making it very difficult for intruders to eliminate a single ninja and slip through the cordon that way.

Asahi

While his men stand guard outside, Asahi goes into the *minka* and confronts Fusae and Cachiko. He demands to know the location of the sword Oil Seller. Fusae at first tries to brazen it out, denying all knowledge of the sword, but Asahi then turns his attention on Cachiko, threatening to harm the young woman if Fusae doesn't cooperate. Cachiko bravely tells her grandmother not to say anything, since the sword is more important than her life, but Fusae can't let the girl suffer. She tells Asahi that the sword is concealed under the sand in her place of business, the House of Heavenly Sand. As soon as he has the information he needs, Asahi kills the two women, and he and his team leave.

This is how matters will transpire if the PCs don't interfere. If they manage to penetrate the defensive screen, they can confront Asahi inside the *minka*, hopefully saving the women. If Asahi is alerted by his defensive force, or by hearing the sounds of combat outside, he will grab the women and drag them out of the building, trying to make his escape with his two hostages. If he gets away, he'll sweat the location of the sword out of Fusae, as above, and then kill his captives. If the PCs try to stop him, he'll use Cachiko as a human shield and threaten to kill her if the PCs don't let him leave unharmed. He won't use Fusae this way, since he needs to learn the location of the sword from her. He thinks that the PCs know this, and will call his bluff if he threatens to kill Fusae.

If alerted by sounds of combat inside the *minka*, the defensive force outside will rush inside in 1d4 rounds to support their leader.

Asahi: 8th level ninja / 8th level bushi

LN (Evil tendencies), human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 65; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1-8 (ninja-to); THAC0 13

Str 13, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 15

Proficiencies: ninja-to, shuriken, kusari-gama, weaponsmith, armorer, bowyer.

Special Abilities: HS 49%; MS 62%; FT 55%; CW 92%; D 48%; OL 57%; TW 55%; PV 12'; F 35'; E 38%; BS x3.

Honor: 28

Asahi is almost 50, but has the physique of a 20-year-old. He is fast, strong, and a cunning adversary. For this mission, he is unarmored, wearing the same black garb as his men. He carries a ninja-to, 6 shuriken, a kusari-gama, and a fang. He is highly skilled at tae kwon do, knowing the following special maneuvers:

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Kick 1,2,3; Strike 1; Throw 2,4; Push 1,2,3; Vital Area 1,2; Movement 5; Weapon 1,2,3. He bears the tatoo of the Kata clan on the inside of his left wrist.

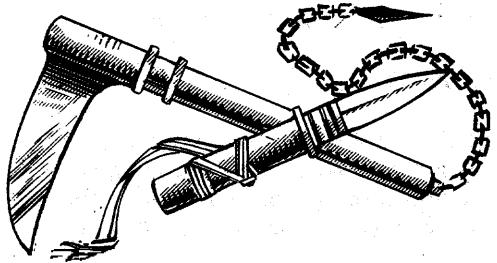
Concluding The Adventure

Once the Kata clan has been defeated in the final showdown, they'll leave Fusae and Cachiko alone. The two women will be grateful to the PCs, so much so that the old woman will tell them the true story about the sword. She promises them that she'll tell Cachiko's (eventual) son about the brave adventurers who made his destiny possible, and make him promise to keep their names alive in song and story once he's defeated the evil Yoshi Yoyogi (or his descendant). Under no circumstances will she let the PCs have the sword, however, no matter how vehemently they promise it would only be for "safe keeping." (For DMs who enjoy such role-playing, there's the potential for a romance between Cachiko and a male PC. Perhaps the lucky PC might have a more intimate part in the fulfillment of the sword's destiny than he expected...)

If Asahi escaped the final confrontation with his life, his hatred of the adventurers who humiliated him will grow with time, eventually becoming an obsession. He will leave the Kata clan, and concentrate on plotting revenge against the PCs. Thus the ninja can become an ongoing nemesis.

Yoshi Yoyogi himself might learn that the PCs foiled his attempt to get the sword. Depending on the DM's preferences, he can try again to obtain Oil Seller—perhaps requiring the PCs to defend Fusae and Cachiko once more—or he might decide to rid the world of the PCs before going after the sword. Particularly swashbuckling PCs might decide that honor requires that they do something permanent about Yoshi. Inventive DM's can no doubt develop many adventures centered around the PCs' attempts to topple this tyrant. (It's up to the DM to decide just where Yoshi's daimyōte is in Wa.)

It's possible that the PCs will fail to save the two women. In this case, the surviving Kata ninja will take the sword Oil Seller to Yoshi, who will lock it in his vault as discussed earlier. Future adventures might arise from the PCs trying to retrieve the sword from Yoshi. (Perhaps, with the death of Cachiko, the sword's destiny changes. One of the PCs might learn, through a *fate* spell for example, that he will wield a famed sword in a noble struggle to overthrow a tyrant.)



Oil Seller

Oil Seller is a finely-forged katana—a weapon of quality that gives its wielder a +1 bonus on attack rolls. The sword isn't magical, however, and gives no bonus to damage. Oil Seller's blade was forged of the finest steel, folded over upon itself 200 times (a characteristic of the best oriental weapons). Its hilt is made from precious ironwood, wrapped with cord woven from silken threads. Its scabbard, too, is ironwood, and has been stained night-black. The end of the scabbard is shod in heavy, cold-forged iron, giving the scabbard the balance and weight to make it an excellent club.

Oil Seller is worth 100 ch'ien simply as a fine weapon, and three times that to anyone who knows its history and heritage. When scabbarded, it looks like a well-made weapon, but nothing outrageously special. When drawn, however, the play of light along the steel of its blade shows its true worth to anyone with the discernment to recognize it.

Fusae has concealed **Oil Seller** in the best hiding place she can think of. Wrapped in oilcloth and leather, the weapon is hidden under the warm sand at the western end of the woman's sand room in the House of Heavenly Sand.



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Kidnapped!

This adventure should be used after the main events of this module are concluded.

Introduction

You spot a familiar figure walking toward you. It's Buntaro . . . but there's something different about him. He's walking, not swaggering, and his usual expression of arrogance and barely-concealed disdain has been replaced by worry and concern.

"I need your help," he says bluntly. (At least one thing hasn't changed, you note with some relief: Buntaro is still about as tactful as a tsunami.) "Will you come with me? It's important. I . . ." And the young man stops, his face showing the titanic struggle going on within him. "I . . ." he tries again. Finally he spits the words out: "I beg you. Help me."

Buntaro won't tell the PCs what his problem is or what he needs. If they ask, he looks around nervously, as though he expects to see spies everywhere, and tells them that he must speak privately. If the PCs agree, he leads them to his quarters in Benju's donjon.

It's quite possible that the PCs won't be too enthusiastic about helping Buntaro. If so, read the following:



Buntaro accepts your comments with a bowed head. "I admit I alienated you," he says in a low voice. "That is my way, and I am well aware of it. But I treated you with honor, if not politeness. Now I ask the same of you. I debase myself before you. I am forced to beg a favor of you. Once you hear my needs, I promise you'll agree that they're honorable. Please, accompany me to my room and hear what I have to say. Will you not do this much?"

If the PCs refuse to have anything to do with Buntaro's request, he turns away sadly and mopes off (definitely out of character; normally he'd berate the PCs as honorless worms). Several days later, the PCs hear through the city grapevine that Buntaro has been found dead, apparently from self inflicted wounds. They also hear, in a seemingly unrelated rumor, that Sono the serving girl has vanished without a trace.

Buntaro's Visitor

When the PCs reach Buntaro's room in the donjon, read the following:

Buntaro slides back the *shoji* and ushers you inside. The first thing you see is a body lying on the floor; by its clothes, the corpse seems to be a beggar. The second thing you see is the body's head, a rather uncomfortable distance away from the neck that once supported it.

Buntaro looks sheepish, and prods the body with his toe. "I lost my temper," he says by way of explanation. He gestures to the tatami floor. "Please, make yourselves comfortable while I explain.

"I trust you remember Sono," Buntaro begins. "She is my . . . well, the love of my life. She has been foully kidnapped, by person or persons unknown. I learned of this from this heap of dung"—and he kicks the body again—"two days past. As proof of his claim, he brought a silk handkerchief belonging to Sono—one that I gave her—and it was stained with her own precious blood. He told me the wound was slight, but would be the first of many if I didn't follow his instructions.

"He wants me to influence the decisions of Benju-sama," the man continues. "He knows that the daimyo trusts my judgement in many things. If I don't, he promised that my Sono would die slowly and agonizingly. I cannot let that happen.

"Yesterday this worm of a messenger demanded that I persuade Benju-sama to have mercy on a convicted criminal. I am convinced that the criminal means nothing to the kidnapper, that this was simply a test of my influence . . . and my obedience."

Buntaro's expression is that of a man drinking vinegar. "I did as I was bidden. Today the messenger returned with another order: to influence my liege-lord's decision in a policy matter concerning

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taxation. Again, I suspect that this was just a test, but a more difficult one."

Buntaro hesitates, then forces himself to continue. "As he turned to leave, he said to me, 'I will see you again, my puppet'. My temper snapped. I drew my steel and slew him where he stood. And now you know why I need your help."

He faces you firmly. "My actions have sealed Sono's fate . . . unless you do something to free her. I would try myself, but subtlety is required here, something I have little knowledge of. Your successes in Aru have proven that you are skilled in these matters. Also, I suspect that I am being watched, and that any move on my part to seek Sono would simply end her life. Now that you know my problem, will you help me solve it? Again, I beg you."

DM's Background

The person responsible for kidnapping Sono is a man named Naga, a member of the local yakuza family. Naga has become a little unstable recently, and has come up with various overblown plans that his family consider too farfetched to even attempt. One of these was to put pressure on Buntaro through his girlfriend Sono, and thus influence the policies of Benju the daimyo.

When the yakuza family vetoed his suggestion, Naga decided to put the plan into action on his own. Even though wiser heads thought him a crackpot, Naga has enough followers among the yakuza willing to help him out with his plan. (One of these followers is currently lying dead in Buntaro's room.)

Naga is using a disused store—a glassblower's studio, to be precise—in the merchant quarter of town. It's here that he meets with his followers, and that he's keeping Sono prisoner.

The leadership of Aru's yakuza community knows what Naga's doing. Although they think the project too risky to try themselves, they're quite willing to let Naga go ahead with it. If he succeeds, they benefit; if he fails, they don't have to weather the consequences. They will support him only so far as to not turn him in to the authorities, and not to tell what they know to casual investigators (i.e., the PCs). The yakuza "rank and file" know nothing about Naga's plan, although they would recognize him, and his name. Similarly, typical yakuza know that the messenger slain by Buntaro was working closely with Naga for some reason. They also know that another junior yakuza member—a somewhat manic woman named Atsuko—is closely involved with Naga.

Investigation

Buntaro wasn't kidding when he said that subtlety was alien to him. He can propose no sensible avenues of investigation . . . unless the players are really lost as

to a means of resolving this dilemma, in which case he might have a brainstorm. If the PCs ask Buntaro for suggestions, his contributions are along the lines of, "He's a yakuza? Then kill all yakuza."

Assuming that the PCs are willing to help Buntaro, they have some detective work ahead of them. They have two major options.

Examining the Body

The dead messenger was a man of about 25. Although his outer clothes are those of an old beggar, his undergarments—and particularly his shoes—are of considerably better quality. His chest bears tattoos identifying him as a yakuza. Concealed under his outer garment are two throwing daggers.

There are no obvious clues to his identity anywhere on his body. There is a clue as to where he's been recently, but it's not easy to spot. If any PC examines the dead messenger's shoes—specifically, the soles—he or she gets to make a 4d6 Ability Check against Intelligence. A successful roll means the PC notices something interesting: there is an unusual quantity of tiny glass fragments, little more than dust, imbedded in the shoes. The glass fragments are of varying colors. The PCs can then make 5d6 Ability Checks against Intelligence to realize that one place you might pick up glass dust like this is at a glassmaker's establishment. If the players themselves figure this out, that's fine (and worthy of an experience point reward). The second roll can be used to help out players who need it.

Questioning the Yakuza

Even if they don't see the dead messenger's tattoo, the PCs might conclude that he is yakuza. Thus, another possible avenue is to "interview" members of Aru's yakuza community.

All shopkeepers and businessmen know at least one member of the yakuza: the person to whom they pay their "insurance." Knowing an identity and revealing it are two totally different matters, of course. Players should be required to role-play all attempts to wheedle the identities of yakuza out of cautious—even paranoid—shopkeepers. (In this case, the PCs might find some use for the bullheaded Buntaro: as a "blunt instrument" to intimidate closed-mouthed businessmen into talking.)

Most shopkeepers will have contact with fairly low-level yakuza, typically around level 3. For convenience in this adventure, no matter who the PCs talk to, they receive the name of the same yakuza: a man named Tetsu.

Meeting With Tetsu

Tetsu won't willingly tell the PCs anything about any other yakuza, and—considering the man's physical attributes—extracting information against his will won't be overly easy. If the PCs do manage to break down his resistance, however, he can tell them much of what they need to know.

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If the PCs actually show Tetsu the dead messenger—or describe him extremely clearly—then the yakuza will recognize him. The messenger was a man named Tojo, and Tetsu knows that he was involved both romantically and professionally—with a yakuza woman named Atsuko. He also knows that Atsuko was working closely with “that idiot” Naga. While he can’t tell the PCs where Atsuko and Naga have their base of operations, he can describe Atsuko to them, and tell them a little about her daily routine. It seems that Atsuko still collects protection money from several merchants in the marketplace, and it just so happens that her collection day is today!

Tetsu: 3rd level yakuza

LN, human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (short sword or nunchaku); THAC0 19

Str 17, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16

Proficiencies: short sword, nunchaku, gaming, iaijutsu (short sword)

Special Abilities: HS 20%; MS 27%; OL 33%; PP 40%; HN 15%; I 28%

Honor: 18

Tetsu is about 30, and built like a bull. The bulges of his muscles have bulges on them, and everyone who knows him agrees that his name—which means “steel”—is particularly appropriate. Despite his great size and strength, he’s fast and graceful. He’s skilled in karate, and knows the following special maneuvers: Strike 1; Kick 1; Movement 1; Mental 1; Weapon 1.

Atsuko

Using the information that they extracted from Tetsu, the PCs should have little trouble spotting Atsuko when she visits the marketplace to collect her protection money. If the PCs are smart, they’ll follow Atsuko secretly rather than trying to confront her.

Atsuko is a manic-paranoid—a rather unpleasant combination, but one that Naga feels comfortable working with. She always takes great care to look for people who might be following her. Unless the PCs take good precautions or show significant tradecraft when following Atsuko, she has a 15% chance of spotting each PC who follows her.

Her personality is such that Atsuko will immediately turn around and confront anyone she sees following her. She demands to know what her shadow wants, and orders him or her to leave before she gets violent. Atsuko will follow through on her threat, fighting like a wildcat until she’s reduced to 4 or fewer hit points. Then she’ll try to escape. If escape is impossible, Atsuko fights to the death.

If the PCs manage to follow Atsuko without being spotted, she leads them to Naga’s hide-out.

Atsuko: 7th level yakuza

LE, human female

AC 10; MV 12; hp 27; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (katana); THAC0 17

Str 11, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16

Proficiencies: katana, gaming

Special Abilities: HS 43%; MS 55%; OL 52%; PP 60%; HN 25%; I 44%

Honor: 19

Atsuko is in her early 20s—young for someone of her abilities and stature within the yakuza community. She is slender and attractive, with long copper-red hair and green eyes (both very unusual features in Wa). She always wears loose-fitting robes or kimonos, allowing her to conceal her beloved katana under her clothing.

FINDING THE HIDE-OUT

Naga has chosen as his base of operations a disused glassblower’s studio—the Colored Bubble, near the gate into the merchant’s quarter.

If the PCs have recognized the significance of the glass dust on the dead messenger’s shoes, they have two ways of identifying Naga’s hide-out. One is through a brute-force search: visiting each and every glassmaker’s or glassblower’s in Aru town. Since there are at least a dozen scattered all over, this should be a long, drawn-out process which gives plenty of time for other adventures and random encounters.

A more sensible way is to ask around concerning suspicious activity at any of the glass-related establishments in town. If the PCs ask anyone who would reasonably know such a thing—another glassblower, for example—there is a 25% chance for each person spoken to that the PCs will learn the following: the Colored Bubble has been out of business for several weeks now since its owner died, but people have been seen coming and going around the building.

If the PCs reach the Colored Bubble in either of these ways, the only occupants of the building when they arrive are Naga and his captive, Sono. If the PCs reach the studio by following Atsuko, however, she is present as well to pose a further obstacle.

The Colored Bubble

The Colored Bubble is a single-story wooden building. All of its windows are boarded up, as is the front door. The back door, which opens onto an alley, appears at first glance to be boarded up as well. Closer inspection shows this to be a facade, however: the door can be opened normally. Unfortunately for any potential intruder, it’s locked. Intruders can force entry through the front door or windows, but removing the boards takes 1d4 rounds, and/or has a 15% chance per round of alerting those inside (unless spells like *silence* are used). The boards can be torn away by any

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combination of 2 characters who can apply a total of 28 Strength points to the task. This will definitely alert anyone within, however.

The important areas of the building are described below.

1. Showroom

A patina of dust covers everything: the floor, the walls, the two countertops to the left and right of the front door, and the shelves mounted on the walls behind the counters. The air is musty and close-smelling.

Apart from the counters and wall shelves—all nailed into place—everything has been cleared out of this room.

The dust on the floor is undisturbed; nobody has been in this room for weeks.

2. Stockroom

This is where the glassmaker kept the inventory that he didn't actually have on display. The walls are lined with shelves, all empty. Dust lies thick on every surface.

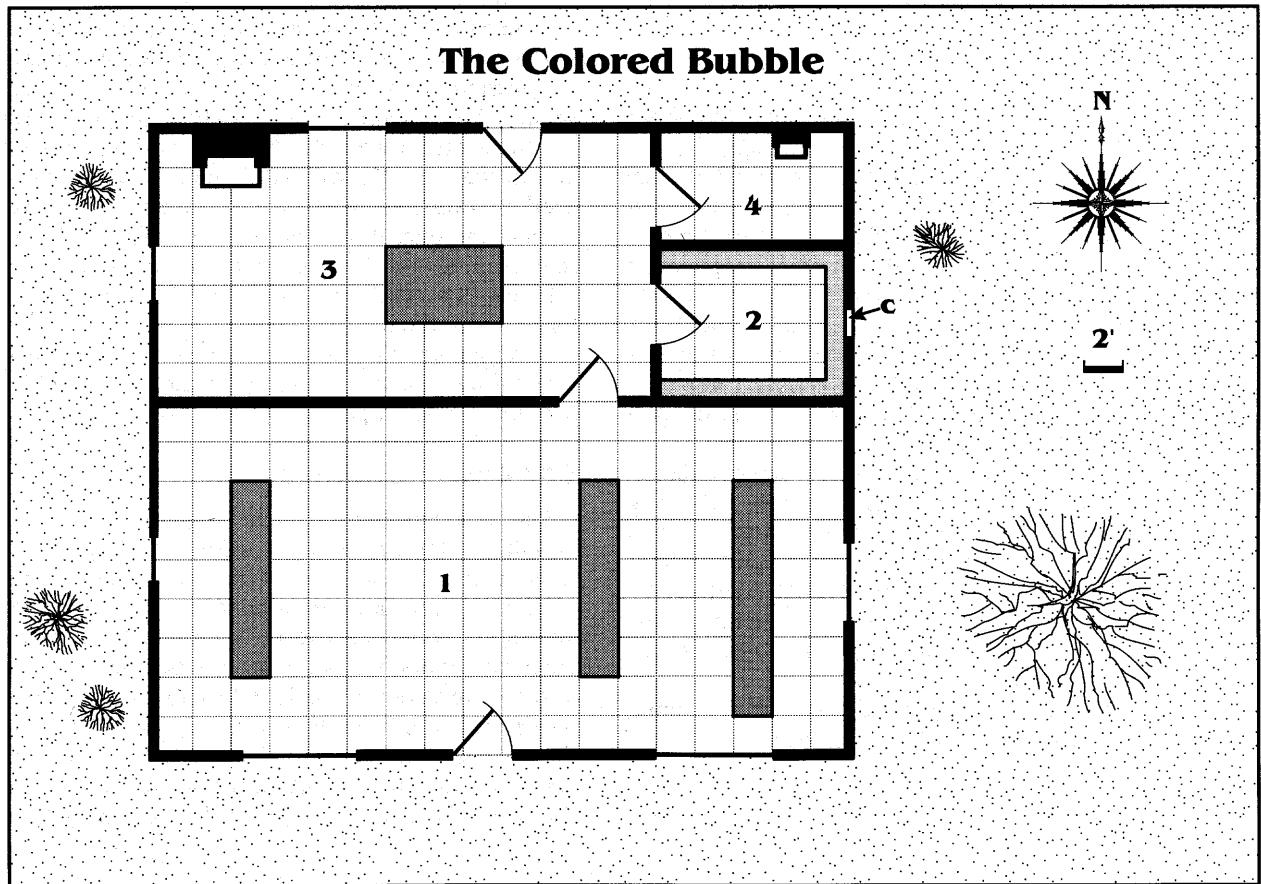
There's a concealed panel set into the wall opposite the door; it's about 12 inches on a side, and 12 inches from the floor. This is where the owner of the Colored Bubble kept his special pieces. He died without telling anyone about this concealed storage place, so the people who cleared out his inventory left it untouched.

Once a character has found the panel, it's easy to open: simply insert a thin knife blade (or something similar) into a crack in the wooden wall, and slide the panel back. Inside is a single glass chime of exquisite workmanship.

Players might assume that this is a *chime of opening* or something similar, and indeed it emanates a very faint aura of magic. In fact, however, the chime has no magical powers at all: it's simply an exquisitely-wrought item that shows how skillful the deceased glassmaker really was. (The magical aura comes from the glass itself. Some of the glass which the artisan melted down to form the chime came from a broken flask that had once contained an immensely powerful magic potion. The glass picked up an aura of magic from contact with the potion, and this aura is still detectable.) Although nonmagical, the chime's craftsmanship is such that it will fetch 1 ch'ien from the right buyer.

3. Glassblower's Studio

If the PCs have made any noise while entering the building, Naga—and Atsuko, if present—will be waiting for them here, armed to the teeth and ready to kill. Both will be hiding in the shadows, ready to attack from ambush. (Remember, the windows are all boarded up, so even at noon the illumination indoors will be pretty bad.) For Naga's stats, see the end of this section. If the PCs managed to enter silently, this room is empty. Read the following description:



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In the center of the room stands a heavy wooden table, its top bearing innumerable burn and scorch marks—presumably from hot glass. Against the building's back wall is a furnace constructed of heavy fire-bricks. The space beneath the furnace where the fire would be set is cold and dark. The mounting bracket for the bellows is still there, but the bellows mechanism itself is gone. There's dust everywhere . . . except for a path between the building's back door and the door in the wall to the left . . .

What was that? It sounds like a voice, coming from the door to the left. The door's shut tight, and you can't hear any words . . . but it certainly sounds like a male voice.

4. Glassblower's Room

The deceased owner of the Colored Bubble lived in this small room. All of his furnishings and personal effects were taken away after his death, however, so the room is bare. The only piece of furniture is a single chair, currently occupied by Sono the kidnapped serving girl. Against the back wall is a fireplace. A small fire is burning.

Unless they've been alerted by noise from elsewhere, Naga and Atsuko—assuming she's present—are in this room. Sono is bound to a chair and gagged. If the PCs have been quiet entering the building, Naga is pacing back and forth with barely-controlled energy, boasting about the power he's gained over Benju the daimyo. Although he's supposedly telling all this to Sono, he's totally unaware of whether she's listening at all; he's too wrapped up in his megalomaniacal plans. In fact, he's so consumed with his thoughts that he is automatically surprised if the PCs burst in on him. (Atsuko, if present, is automatically not surprised, however: she's so paranoid that she's always on her guard, even if there's no apparent reason for it.)

When trouble starts, Atsuko will fight to the death. Naga, on the other hand, will fight only until he sees that his cause is lost. Then he'll do what he can to escape. Options include using Sono as a hostage or a human shield, or throwing a smoke or poison gas grenade into the fire and trying to escape in the confusion. If his only alternatives are death or capture, Naga will fight to the death.

Naga: 13th level yakuza
LE, human male

AC 4 (10); MV 12; hp 51; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (lajatang); THAC0 8

Str 12, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16

Proficiencies: lajatang, dagger, grenade, gaming

Special Abilities: HS 85%; MS 95%; OL 82%; PP 100%; HN 40%; I 68%

Honor: 26

Naga is a totally nondescript man of medium height; there is literally nothing distinguishing about his appearance (a real boon to a criminal, of course). He wears tight-fitting black clothing, similar to that of a ninja. (This is an affectation on his part, but it does have practical benefits in that his movement is unrestricted.) He wears *bracers of defence*, AC 4.

Naga is skilled in an unusual martial arts style known as Snake Dance. It's a soft style concentrating on vital areas, and uses both hands and feet. The main statistics for the style are as follows:

#AT: 1/1

Dmg: 1-6

AC: 5

Principal attack: Hand and foot

Naga knows the following special maneuvers: Vital Area 1,2,3; Movement 1,4; Weapon 1,2.

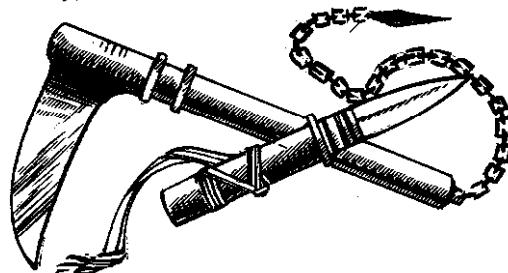
Naga carries a lajatang—his preferred weapon—and two throwing daggers. He also has two eggshell grenades: one produces a cloud of normal smoke, the other a cloud of poison gas. If things get dicey, he'll use one or both of these grenades to try and make his getaway.

Concluding The Adventure

If the PCs are successful in saving Sono, Buntaro will be outspokenly grateful . . . for a week or two. After that, he'll slip back into his arrogant and surly manner. He won't pay the PCs anything for their services—they acted for honor, after all—and will be highly insulted if they suggest it.

In the final conflict, the DM should make all reasonable efforts to keep Naga alive. Even more deranged than usual, he'll come back for revenge, and will prove an interesting nemesis for the PCs.

If they fail and Sono is killed, in his grief Buntaro will blame the PCs for her death. He will go berserk and attack them, fighting to the death unless he's somehow restrained. This berserk fit will last for 2d8 rounds, then he'll realize that it's not really the PCs' fault after all. He'll apologize to them and offer to expunge the shame of his attack in any *honorable* way the party desires. If he remains alive, he'll sink further and further into depression, until after several months he shaves his head and becomes a (still somewhat surly) monk.



It's A Dam Shame

Introduction

This adventure should take place after the events of the main adventure . . . assuming that the PCs have been successful. (During the main event, Benju has too much on his mind to concern himself with a ruined dam . . .)

To start the adventure, the PCs are summoned into the presence of the daimyo Benju Matsutomo. They are escorted into the donjon and to the main reception room by an honor guard of samurai.

You enter the reception room and bow politely. Once more you're in the presence of the daimyo of Aru province, Benju Matsutomo.

The changes in the man facing you across the *tatami* floor are amazing. Benju-*sama* seems taller, his back seems straighter—as if the weight of the world has been lifted from his shoulders—and he looks half a decade younger.

"Greetings, friends," he says, in a surprising show of informality. "It seems that once more I need your assistance. While the current problem is nowhere near as significant as the one you solved for me recently, I feel that your combination of reason and force is appropriate. Will you help me?"

While Benju's words sound like a request, this is really an order (he's the daimyo, after all . . .). If the PCs are stupid enough to refuse or to ask about payment, Benju clouds up and banishes them from his presence. Unless they find some way of working themselves back into his good graces, they'll have no further contact with Benju.

If the PCs agree to help, the DM should paraphrase the information in the next section.

The Dam

As the PCs should be aware, the economy of Aru town depends greatly on the yearly influx of pilgrims. These visitors inject much-needed cash into the economy when they buy food. Of course, this requires that there is food for them to buy.

Over the years, the pilgrim traffic has increased to the point where, during the height of the season, Aru town is hard-pressed to feed them all. And there's no reason to think that the increase in traffic won't continue. Benju has realized that the infrastructure of his town and province won't be able to feed a larger influx of pilgrims. Therefore he's investing large amounts of money in expanding farms and food-production facilities.

One "bottleneck" for food production has been the grinding of flour. There are simply not enough mills in



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Aru, and not enough workers or animals to work any more mills should they be built. Benju looked at a map of his territory, and quickly saw the answer.

Just northeast of town, a river flows down out of the mountains. This river, swift and powerful, is known to the locals as Yama-*san*. Benju realized that if he dammed Yama-*san* and installed waterwheels, he'd have enough free energy to turn more mills than he needed. He quickly sent engineers and laborers to complete the job.

The dam was finished ahead of schedule. When the first waterwheel was installed, it was even more efficient than expected. The next step was to install two more wheels, and build the mills.

That was when the problems started. When the crew of engineers arrived at the dam one day, they found the waterwheel had been destroyed—literally torn apart. Samurai combed the area around the dam, looking for creatures that could have done this, but nothing was found. The engineers replaced the waterwheel.

The next day, they found the new waterwheel shattered, and a huge hole torn in the dam itself. The lake that the dam had formed had drained, and Yama-*san* was flowing unimpeded.

Benju was understandably angry when he heard the news. He sent a crew of dam-builders to repair the damage, and—just to be on the safe side—sent half a dozen samurai to act as bodyguards. The group was never heard from again; needless to say, the dam was never repaired.

Now the daimyo wants to find out exactly what is going on. Obviously, someone—or something—is destroying his project and killing his workers. Benju wants to find out who the culprit is, and stop him. This is the task he has for the PCs.

DM's Background

Unknown to any of Aru's inhabitants, the river Yama-*san* has been home to a shen lung dragon named Li Kit Su for a thousand years. The dragon is old, and tends to sleep a lot. After a rather protracted nap—several weeks, to be exact—he woke to find a dam interfering with the flow of his beloved river, and a strange contraption doing something incomprehensible downstream of his home. Reacting in the straightforward manner typical of dragons, he tore the contraption apart, and went back to sleep, thinking the problem solved.

When next he woke, he found the contraption had been rebuilt. Li Kit Su was understandably miffed, and this time both shattered the contraption and tore a gaping hole in the dam that was messing up his river. Satisfied that this time the "spoilers"—whoever they were—would get the hint, he rewarded himself with another nap.

He'd hardly dropped off when he was wakened by a commotion on the shore. Unbelievably, the "spoilers" were back, and were trying to rebuild the dam! Li Kit

Su reared up out of the river, and demanded peevishly to know just what in heaven's name the spoilers thought they were doing. Several of the spoilers (in fact, Benju's samurai) were armed, and made the fatal mistake of attacking the dragon. Goaded beyond any semblance of draconic endurance, Li Kit Su slew everyone present and for good measure smashed the dam up a little more. (That should teach them!) He then returned to the water for a well-deserved nap.

Approaching The Dam

The PCs might ask Benju for some support—perhaps an escort of samurai like he gave the dam workers. Benju points out that the samurai escort didn't help the dam workers at all. In fact, he thinks that the PCs would be much safer with a small group that doesn't look as threatening as a full-scale armed column. For this reason, he refuses to send anyone with the PCs. In any case, their mission is simply to find the people (things?) responsible for destroying the dam. Once the culprits have been identified, Benju can send his whole army to hunt them down, if that's what's necessary.

The site of the dam is a good day's ride out of Aru town, in the rough foothills of a mountain range. The area is only partially patrolled, so there's the chance of encountering various wild animals or monsters.

When the PCs reach the dam site, read the following:

The dam is a tribute to Aru engineering . . . or it used to be. The river Yama-*san* was dammed at the downstream end of a narrow valley, perhaps only 500 feet in width. The dam was a simple earth rampart, reinforced on both sides by piled stones and boulders. The downslope side was shored up with tree trunks thicker than your chests. The dam should have been strong enough to resist anything that nature could throw at it . . .

So either nature has more tricks up her sleeve than you're aware of, or the perpetrator wasn't natural. The center section of the dam has been torn clean away, allowing the river to flow through unimpeded. You can see what's left of the waterwheel: wooden supports thicker than your thigh, shattered like flimsy chopsticks.

The land on either side of the river is marshy . . . understandable, since it was recently underwater. When you look at the walls of the valley, you can see the high water mark—the level of the lake's surface when the dam was intact. It's a couple of feet above your heads.

The valley is empty; nothing moves but the water, surging over the rocks. No birds sing, no insects buzz. The only sound is the river. The valley seems to be waiting for something . . .

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At this point, each PC receives a 5d6 Attribute Check against Intelligence. A successful roll means that, the PC has noticed something untoward. Read the following:

Out of the corner of our eye, you see movement. Something or someone on the side of the valley opposite you, above high water mark. As you turn for a better look, and see a flash of white as something withdraws into the underbrush.

If the PCs want to investigate, they'll have to cross the river. Yama-san is narrow and fast-flowing where the dam is. At this point, it's only 4' deep. Upstream of the dam, the river spreads out into a deep, slow pool. The PCs have two choices on how to cross the river without magic: ford the shallow, fast portion—which poses a serious risk of being swept away—or swim the pool—which poses its own danger; see the section "Li Kit Su."

Fording the river takes 2 rounds. Each PC attempting it must make a 6d6 Attribute Check against Strength each round or be swept off his or her feet. This roll suffers a penalty of -1 for each 15 pounds (or portion thereof) of equipment that the PC is carrying.

PCs swept off their feet suffer 1d2 points of damage for each round that they remain in the river. (This represents hypothermia from immersion in the icy-cold water, and impact against rocks.) Each round, a PC gets another 6d6 Attribute Check against Strength. Success means that the PC has regained his or her feet, and no longer takes damage from the water. He or she must still complete the crossing, however. For each round that PCs are off their feet, they are washed 30 yards downstream. (Obviously, this can split up a party quite effectively.)

PCs might try to ride horses across the stream. To determine if the horse falls, roll 6d6. If the roll is 20 or less, the horse doesn't fall that round; if 21 or greater, the horse falls, dumping the rider into the river. Horses take 1d4 points of damage per round they're off their feet, and must exceed 20 on 7d6 to regain their feet. Once a rider has fallen off, he or she follows the standard procedure to stand up again.

The far wall of the valley is muddy and very slippery. Anyone trying to climb it must make a 3d6 Attribute Check against Dexterity. Success means that the character has reached the spot where the movement was spotted. Failure means that the character has slipped, and slid to the bottom of the valley again (no damage, but the character is covered in mud from head to toe).

The Voice of The River God

The movement that the PCs spotted is an old, insane hermit who's made his home in this valley. He's seen the events discussed earlier, but he's interpreted them

somewhat differently than anyone else might.

The hermit has decided that the dragon is actually the "River God," and that he is the River God's high priest. The River God spoke to him (actually an aural hallucination caused by his insanity), and told him that it was his job to prevent anyone else from despoiling the god's home. (While this is just a neurotic's fantasy, it's actually pretty close to the truth.) The hermit now calls himself "The Voice of the River God," and plans to vouchsafe "the truth" to the PCs.

When the PCs reach his side of the valley, the hermit is waiting for them. Read the following:

This high up the valley side, the undergrowth is surprisingly thick. You push your way through a particularly hindering bush . . . and there's a figure in front of you.

It's an old man, frail and withered, but his posture is one that bespeaks power and command. His eyes are bright blue and piercing, particularly in contrast to his dark, weather-tanned face. He wears a simple robe of white cloth.

He holds a hand up, palm towards you. "Stop," he says in a ringing voice. "I command you."

He fixes each of you with a sharp gaze. "I am the Voice of the River God," he declaims. "It is my duty and my honor to tell you of the god's will. First, the god commands that you remove the abomination below"—and here he points at the dam. "Second," he continues forcefully, cutting off any response you might have had, "you will bring the god offerings of silver and of gold. (Particularly silver, he likes silver.) And third, you will venerate him with great veneration, or he will visit destruction on you as he did on those who came before, see if he doesn't." The man crosses his arms over his chest and regards you with a smug grin.

From the slips that the old man makes in his declamatory style, the PCs might conclude that the "Voice of the River God" is—to put it bluntly—barking mad . . . and they're right. If they ask about what happened to the dam and the engineers, the hermit describes the events, but always from his unique perspective. (For example, he never uses the word "dragon," and always uses phrases like "the god crushed them with his mighty fist, yes he did.") The purpose here is to mislead the PCs as to what actually lives in the river.)

The hermit is totally harmless, and happy in his delusion. If he realizes that the PCs aren't paying him any attention, he threatens them with divine retribution then wanders off into the underbrush.

Hermit: 0-level; LN human male

AC 10; MV 9; hp 2; #AT none; Dmg none; THAC0 n/a
Str 7, Dex 11, Con 9, Int 7, Wis 8, Cha 15

Proficiencies: none

Honor: n/a

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The hermit is totally unarmed, and won't defend himself even if attacked (he thinks the River God will raise him if he's slain, so why bother?). When addressing the PCs, he acts as though his honor were 100. In fact, he's not part of society at all, so he has no honor at all.

Li Kit Su

Li Kit Su is an ancient shen lung oriental dragon. He's lived in the Yama-san river for longer than he can remember—a millennium at least—and considers it home. He is most distressed when people try to mess up his home, and is likely to take rather direct action against those who do so. Much of his time is spent in protracted cat-naps (dragon-naps?), however, so he's quite surprised when he wakes and finds that someone has done something else to his beloved river.

Li Kit Su is atypical in two major respects. First, oriental dragons normally never sleep; sleeping is one of Li Kit Su's greatest pleasures. Second, he is fluent in the common tongue.

While Li Kit Su is actual older than he appears, the time he spends sleeping does not age him. Thus, while he is technically old enough to be considered *venerable* or even a *wurm*, he is only as powerful as an *old* dragon.

If the PCs have met up with the "Voice of the River God," they'll probably suspect that something lives in the river. They might try to explore the deep, slow-moving pool above the dam—either by boat or through the use of *water breathing* or other spells. This will certainly wake Li Kit Su, who will immediately confront the PCs to give them a piece of his mind. If a PC tries to swim the pool rather than ford the river, Li Kit Su will also appear immediately. In either case, read the following:

Something huge breaks the surface of the still, deep pool. A massive green head rears above you. Its snout is long and tapered, and whiskers protrude from beneath its nostrils. Two small horns sprout from the creature's brow, and a crest of spikes runs along its spine. Grey eyes as large as dinner plates regard you—somewhat myopically, you notice with surprise.

"Well, well," the creature rumbles deep in its throat. "So the spoilers are back, I see. Here to ruin my river again, hmm? Well, we'll see about that."

Li Kit Su won't initiate hostilities, but if he's attacked he'll do his best to kill the PCs. He won't pursue anyone who flees the combat. The dragon will listen to anyone who wants to try to explain matters; in fact, he much prefers conversation to combat. But he will definitely not allow anyone rebuild the dam.

If the PCs get into a discussion with the dragon, he'll explain his point of view. This river has been his home for much longer than Aru has existed. Therefore he

thinks that his rights of possession take precedence. Certainly he understands that the town needs food, but that's what happens when you let population grow too much. In any case, that isn't really his problem. He will point out that there are other rivers in the mountains. Granted, they're further away from the town and thus less convenient, "but I think I count as a considerable inconvenience, hmmm?"

Li Kit Su will make sure the PCs understand that he's the close friend of a number of chiang lung dragons, important members of the Celestial Bureaucracy, and that he'll certainly call upon them for help if the PCs bring an army back to remove him. In fact, he's considering calling them to help him if anyone even tries to rebuild the dam. His last word on the subject is, "This is my river; this is my home. If you try to ruin my home, it will mean war between my kind and yours. Is this what you and your daimyo truly want?" With that he disappears beneath the water.

Fighting The Dragon

Li Kit Su is a reasonable sort, so combat should be unnecessary. If the PCs are stupid enough to start something, the dragon uses his considerable powers to great effect. A particularly tough group of PCs might be able to kill Li Kit Su, but only at great cost to themselves. And—as discussed in the next section—this will be only the beginning of their problems.

Li Kit Su (old shen lung): Int High (13-14); AL CN; AC -5; MV 12, Fl 18 (E), SW 9; HD 71; THAC0 3 (-4); #AT 4; Dmg 1d8 + 7, 1d8 + 7, 2d12 + 7, 1d10 + 7; SA See below; SD See below; SZ G; ML 17; XP 13,000.

Li Kit Su is 180' long. He has no breath weapon, but can cast *bless* and *curse* once per day each, and *control weather* and *ice storm* three times per day each. He takes no damage from lightning, but double damage from fire-based attacks. He has the power of *scaly command* over 16d10 creatures, and *water fire* of 2d6 points value. He is immune to poison. All creatures coming within 25 yards of Li Kit Su are subject to the effects of his *fear* aura, although a save vs. spells is allowed (with a +1 bonus) to avoid it. No insect, arachnid or arthropod can approach closer than 60'. Like all oriental dragons, he has *ESP* (to a range of 40 feet), can become *invisible* at will (although not when attacking), can assume human form at will, and can *detect invisible* things (within 80 feet). Similarly, he has a natural *clairvoyance* ability with regards to his lair that has a range of 160 feet and requires that he concentrate on a specific section of his lair or its environs.

Although Li Kit Su claims that he lives in the river, his actual home is in an extradimensional space accessible only from the bottom of the river. It's in this space that he keeps his considerable stash of treasure (treasure type Fx2). A word of command known only to Li and his draconic friends is needed to gain access

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to this space. (If the PCs manage to kill Li, finding out this command word or otherwise entering—and looting—his lair can form the core of several adventures.)

Concluding The Adventure

Sensible PCs will discuss matters with Li Kit Su, and will probably realize that he has more right to the river than does Benju. (Explaining this to Benju and getting him to agree with them is an excellent opportunity for in-depth role-playing.)

The dragon wasn't kidding when he said that he had friends in high places. If the PCs are foolish enough to come back—perhaps with an entire army—to try to eliminate Li Kit Su, they'll find that he's been reinforced by one or maybe even two chiang lung dragons. Li Kit Su's reinforcements will be watching from concealment, *polymorphed* into innocuous human shapes, and will only attack once they're sure of the intruders' intentions. (One of the dragons might *polymorph* into the appearance of the "Voice of the River God"—just for fun—and try to warn off the approaching PCs. If this happens, the PCs will notice that the old man's madness seems to have left him, and that he seems inhumanly confident.)

It's possible that the PCs will kill Li Kit Su in their first encounter. If this happens, it takes three weeks for Li's best draconic friend—an ancient chiang lung dragon called Yang Chu—to learn who was responsible. Yang Chu will then consider it his duty to avenge his friend's death. (He might include Benju—and even the whole town of Aru—in this vengeance, just for good measure.)



Presumed Guilty

This adventure can be used at any time that the local yakuza clan might consider the PCs to be a threat to their continued operation. This can be during the main adventure, before the yakuza realize that eliminating the PCs is a mistake. Alternatively, it can take place after the main events, whenever the PCs have done something to cause a setback in yakuza fortunes. (Perhaps the yakuza might decide to teach the PCs a lesson after the events in "Kidnapped!".)

Introduction

While the PCs are abroad in the streets, one of them is accidentally bumped by a passer-by. Experienced players will immediately be hollering that their characters are checking that their purses are still there. Perhaps surprisingly, they are; nothing is missing.

The staging of this scene is potentially very tricky . . . because, instead of stealing something from the PC, the "clumsy" passer-by actually planted something on the unwitting character. The players must remember this incident later, but can't pay it much attention when it actually happens. For this reason, the DM might insert it into a marketplace scene, and immediately follow it up with another encounter to distract the players from its significance. The DM should describe the clumsy passer-by only if the players specifically ask: he's around 5 feet tall with close-cropped black hair, and wearing a dark green kimono.

DM's Background

The small man in the green kimono is Komatsu, once part of a yakuza clan in a distant city, and now a free-lance thief. He's been hired by the local yakuza to "do a job" on the PCs. Komatsu's task is relatively simple: he must plant a ring on the person of one of the PCs, then report the ring to the town's samurai patrol as stolen, and claim that he thinks the PC took it. The samurai will arrest the PC, find the ring, and toss the "criminal" into jail for eventual punishment. The yakuza's revenge will be complete. Komatsu will then vanish, never to reappear in Aru.

The Arrest

The town's samurai patrol is very efficient, and with Komatsu's help—track down the "criminal" PC quickly. Read the following:

"Halt, please." There words are a barked command.

You turn to see a squad of eight uniformed samurai approaching you. From their kimonos you recognize them as part of the force that keep the peace and uphold the law in Aru town. All carry katanas and wakizashis, while three also carry *sode garami*—sleeve entanglers, weapons tailor-made

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for immobilizing criminals. It's the squad leader—a barrel-chested man with a face like a sunburned fist—who spoke to you. He's got his hand on his katana hilt, and determination in his step.

"Halt," he says again. "I have been told that you"—he points to [the PC who Komatsu bumped]—"have committed theft against a citizen of Aru town. I ask that you submit to a search. If you are innocent of the accusation, you have no reason to refuse this request. Will you submit?"

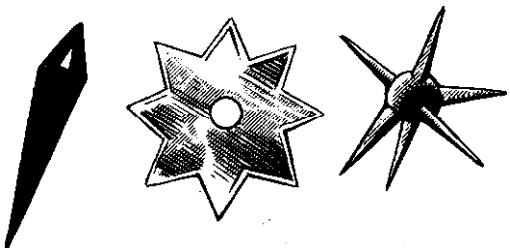
You look around. The other members of the group are deployed in a semicircle in front of you, and all have their hands on weapon hilts. These guys are serious, and they're expecting trouble.

The squad leader won't tell the PCs who accused them nor what was stolen. If the PCs take umbrage at this request, the DM should remind the players that there's no harm in it if they're really innocent.

If the PC agrees to the search, the squad leader assigns two samurai to empty all of the PC's pockets, pouches, packs, etc. The ring is found almost immediately, in an easily-accessible spot (such as a belt pouch). Read the following:

One of the samurai shouts in triumph and holds up a small object. It's a ring: a gold band set with a large emerald. For a moment you consider a set-up—maybe the samurai planted it. But you saw his hands were empty when he started the search, and you're sure that this buffoon—while no doubt death on two legs with a katana—doesn't have the skill necessary to palm and plant an object that slickly.

As one, the members of the squad draw their weapons. The squad leader addresses [the PC with the ring]. "You are under arrest for the theft of a highly valuable item from a citizen of Aru," he growls. "Surrender your weapons and come with us now, or we will be forced to kill you." He turns to the rest of your group. "As to you, I choose to believe that you were ignorant of your comrade's actions. You are free to go. Remember, however . . . aiding and abetting a known criminal makes you a criminal as well, subject to all the penalties of the land. And the penalty for aiding a thief is death. Such is the law of Aru province."



If one or more of the PCs decides to scrap it out, the samurai will fight to the death in their attempt to subdue and arrest the “thief” and “accomplices.”

Squad Leader: 4th level samurai
LG, human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 36; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +1 (damage bonus); THAC0 17

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, horsemanship, calligraphy, noh, painting, poetry.

Honor: 21

He carries katana and wakizashi, and wears no armor.

Patrol Samurai (x7): 2nd level samurai
LG, human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 5, 6, 8, 10, 14, 15, 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (katana) +1 (damage bonus); THAC0 19

Proficiencies: katana (specialization), daikyu, sode garami, horsemanship, calligraphy, poetry.

Honor: 19

All are unarmored, and carry katana and wakizashi. In addition, three carry sode garami.

Dealing with The Patrol

The PCs have four major options: confrontation, escape, negotiation, and acquiescence.

Confrontation

If the PCs decide to fight it out with the samurai patrol, there’s a very good chance that they’ll win. The word will soon be spread that the PCs are armed and dangerous fugitives from justice, however. While before the only accusation was theft, now the PCs are wanted for resisting arrest and killing the daimyo’s samurai patrol . . . plus theft. Since the punishment for aiding and abetting fugitives is death, the PCs will be hard-pressed to find anyone in Aru willing to help them. No member of Benju’s household—with the possible exception of Naomi—is likely to help them. Yaemon the monk will listen to their story, but won’t help them directly; instead he’ll insist that they turn themselves in and trust to the mechanisms of justice to prove their innocence.

In other words, the PCs will be alone and on the run. Every one of Benju’s samurai will be on the lookout for them, with orders to bring them in dead or alive. (Considering that the PCs have already killed some of their number, the samurai will probably choose to make it the former.)

If the PCs defeat the patrol and run, and then decide to stick around Aru to prove their innocence, go to the section “Proving Innocence.”

Escape

The samurai patrol is ready for an attempted escape. Nevertheless, the PCs should be able to get away

if they make a concerted attempt at it. Of course, the problem is that flight is usually considered an admission of guilt. The PC who had the ring is considered an escaped thief, while the other PCs are considered accomplices. The word is put out over the city to bring them in.

The situation isn’t quite as dire as in the previous section—they’re not killers as well, after all—but most of the same conditions apply. If the PCs want to try to get out from under the accusations, go to the section “Proving Innocence.”

Negotiation

This is basically a dead-end option: nothing the PCs can say will convince the samurai not to arrest the “thief.” Claiming that the ring was planted on the PC won’t help; every criminal who ever lived claims he was framed. The samurai certainly won’t be impressed by a magic-using PC casting a spell like *detect lie* to “prove” the thief’s innocence. Why should they believe a potential accomplice? For similar reasons, they’ll distrust any magical attempt to prove the PC’s innocence.

The PCs might remember that the “thief” was bumped by a short man with close-cropped hair and a dark green kimono. If they tell the samurai patrol about this and speculate that this was when the ring was planted, there are subtle signs from the junior samurai that they’ve made a significant point (5d6 Ability Check against Intelligence to notice the reaction). The squad leader isn’t impressed, saying “Who orchestrated that accidental contact, you or him? That could have been when you stole the ring.” This should clue the PCs in to the fact that it was the short man (Komatsu) who accused them.

No matter what the PCs say, the squad leader will insist that the accused character accompany them. If he or she is really innocent, the samurai says, then that will come out at the trial.

Acquiescence

The PCs might decide that the best option is to go along with the patrol’s suggestion. The accused thief will be imprisoned, but the other PCs will be free to take other action. Perhaps they plan to rescue their captive colleague, hunt down the short man in the green kimono, or find some other way of proving the “thief’s” innocence.

The Ring

Unless the PCs somehow “acquire” the ring from the samurai patrol, they’ll have little chance of examining it closely. If they do examine it, however—or take it to an expert—there’s something to be learned from it.

The samurai patrol referred to the ring as a “highly valuable item.” Anyone with proficiency as a jeweller will recognize that this simply isn’t the case. The “gold” band is base metal coated with a metallic var-

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nish. The large "emerald" is actually a chunk of colored glass. While the ring looks to the untrained eye as if it should be worth two ch'ien or even more, its real value is closer to one or two fen.

Imprisonment

Whether the "accused thief" is captured after a struggle or comes along quietly, the samurai patrol takes no chances in case the captive is capable of using magic. The samurai bind the prisoner's hands tightly to prevent somatic gestures, and gag him or her so speech is impossible. Several of the samurai even discuss whether they should break the PC's fingers, just to be sure, but the squad leader decides against it. (This is just to reinforce to the players that these guys are serious.) The samurai then march their captive off to a special "security compound" where the PC will remain for several days before the trial takes place.

This security compound is simply a one-room building with no windows and a single door. The walls and roof are made of thick wood, and the door is reinforced with iron. There is a narrow flap set into the bottom of the door through which plates of food can be slid. The only sanitary arrangements are two buckets, one containing water. This "brig" is guarded day and night by 6 Junior Samurai and one Samurai Officer (see Nonplayer Characters). All carry a katana and wakizashi, and at least two carry daikyu and a dozen arrows.

The location of the security compound is up to the DM, who should place it depending on the relative strength and intentions of the PC party. For example, if there are only two mid-level PCs free in Aru, and they're planning a midnight infiltration to rescue their colleague from jail, the security compound might be just inside the Castle District, with only one wall—and relatively few guards—separating it from the rest of the city. If, on the other hand, there are 10 high-level PCs planning a frontal assault, the security compound could be in the heart of the Castle District, separated from the city by three walls and literally scores of guards. The point is to maximize the challenge, while still making a rescue—if this is the PCs' intention—a possibility.

While imprisoned, the PC is fed adequately. The prisoner's little fingers are bound securely together, hopefully preventing somatic gestures and spellcasting. The gag is removed, however. The prisoner's personal effects—especially weapons, spellbooks and components—are confiscated and kept in a safe place in the middle of the guard barracks (virtually impossible to retrieve unless the DM feels remarkably generous).

The Trial

After several days of imprisonment, the accused PC is bound and gagged once more, and escorted to another building within the Castle District. Here a civil

judge hears the charges against the accused and renders judgement. This process takes place in isolation—no spectators are allowed. During the proceedings, the accused is surrounded by 6 Junior Samurai and 2 Samurai Officers. The judge is a 0-level bureaucrat; nowhere in the courtroom is a wu jen or shukenga.

The charges are read by a junior functionary of the court, and a deposition from the wronged party—in this case, Komatsu—is read out. The victim of the crime is not present in the courtroom. Once the charges and deposition have been read, the accused is given one minute to rebut the charges. (The DM should measure this time very carefully.) The accused's gag is removed, of course, but two samurai stand close behind, with orders to knock the PC unconscious at the first hint of an incantation.

Unless the other PCs have managed to dredge up some additional evidence (which is covered in the section "Proving Innocence"), the PC is found guilty. The sentence is amputation of the PC's hand. The PC is returned to the security compound until the following dawn, when the sentence will be carried out. This time, when the PC is locked up, the gag is not removed.

Proving Innocence

The only chance the PCs have of coming out of this untainted is somehow to prove the innocence of the "thief." They can do this while the accused is imprisoned, or after everyone escaped from the samurai patrol. They have several options open to them.

Finding an Advocate

One option is to somehow prove that the "thief" isn't lying when he or she claims that the ring was planted. This could theoretically be done by bringing into court—or perhaps bringing before Benju himself—a shukenga who can cast *detect lie* on the accused. The problem is finding such a shukenga who the authorities would trust. (Obviously, a PC simply wouldn't do.) There are no shukenga with this spell in Benju's household, so the PCs must look elsewhere.

Whether there is such an acceptable advocate in Aru is up to the DM. Perhaps the latest pilgrim train includes a famous holy man who would be glad to prove the innocence of a noble character. Or perhaps a member of the order of Bishamon would perform this service. Many mini-adventures and encounters can arise from trying to find such a person . . . and then persuading the authorities to accept this advocate's evidence.

Discrediting the Charges

If the PCs can prove that the "highly valuable" ring is actually worthless, this will go a long way towards discrediting the charges against the accused. After all, if the item has been misrepresented, it certainly gives more credence to the accused's claims that he or she is being framed.

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The problem here is that the PCs are unlikely to get a close look at the ring unless they "acquire" it from the samurai patrol. And then how can they prove that the ring they present to the authorities is actually the same one that the samurai patrol found on the "thief"? The PCs could easily have switched rings in an attempt to free their colleague. Inventive players might find some way of overcoming this problem, but it should be exceedingly difficult.

Finding the True Criminal

This represents perhaps the best hope for freeing the accused PC. The other PCs must track down Komatsu and prove to the authorities that he framed the accused.

Komatsu' diminutive size and very short hair make him a fairly memorable figure. If the PCs question people who were in the area when Komatsu bumped the accused, there's a 20% chance that anyone spoken to will remember him. There is a 5% chance that any given person will know that he is staying in a *ryokan* – The Apple Tree Inn – near the temple gate.

The Apple Tree Inn is an undistinguished small *ryokan* (use the inn layout from the hardcover book). There is a 50% chance that Komatsu is present when the PCs arrive.

Unless the PCs take some precautions to avoid detection as they approach, Komatsu has a 25% chance of seeing them coming. If he does, he immediately flees. If escape is impossible, or if the PCs surprise him, he'll fight ferociously until he's reduced to 4 or fewer hit points, then surrender. The PCs will probably demand that Komatsu confess to framing their colleague; this he'll willingly do . . . for now. When they bring him before the authorities, however, he'll recant, claiming that the PCs threatened to kill him if he didn't make a false confession. Unless the PCs anticipate this, bringing Komatsu to the authorities might do them more harm than good.

If Komatsu isn't present, or if the PCs kill or incapacitate him, they can search his room. Apart from clothing and other personal effects, he owns nothing of interest . . . except for a shallow lacquer box of fine workmanship. The box is about 18" by 12" by 3", and has a hinged lid on top (like a briefcase). Inside are maps and a traveller's diary. The diary is Komatsu's, and contains nothing but very superficial and trite reflections on his journeys. (Komatsu considers himself to be something of an intellectual and a poet; he couldn't be more wrong.)

Any PC examining the lacquer box can make a 4d6 Ability Check against Intelligence to notice that the interior compartment is about half-an-inch shallower than the outside dimension. Once a PC has noticed this, it's simple to find the concealed compartment in the bottom of the box. This compartment contains a rather interesting note in Komatsu's handwriting (easy to prove, since it matches his journal). The note is actually a checklist – Komatsu prides himself on be-

ing very methodical – with several of the items checked off. The list reads as follows:

Buy fake ring—Yamato?	✓
Locate targets	✓
Follow targets—learn routine	✓
Select victim	✓
Plant ring	✓
Report "theft" to samurai patrol	✓
Meet with ♀—collect payment	

The combination of this note and the journal in the same handwriting will go a long way towards substantiating the PCs' claim that Komatsu's confession was the real thing. The note contains one further important clue, however: the name Yamato. Anyone involved in the jewelry business in Aru knows Yamato to be a dealer in the cheapest and nastiest forms of costume jewelry. If the PCs pay a visit to Yamato, he'll remember selling the ring to Komatsu, and will be able to identify the diminutive man. Taken together, this evidence will be enough to free the imprisoned PC. (How the court deals with any deaths among the samurai patrol is up to the DM . . .)

Komatsu: 5th level yakuza

LE, human male

AC 10; MV 12; hp 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10 (katana); THAC0 18

Str 12, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16

Proficiencies: katana, dagger, gaming

Special Abilities: HS 31%; MS 40%; OL 42%; PP 50%; HN 20%; I 36%

Honor: 10

Komatsu is unarmored and always has a dagger concealed somewhere on his person. He has a katana under the futon in his room at the inn. If he has time when the PCs come to call, he'll retrieve it.

Concluding The Adventure

It's quite conceivable that the end of this adventure will see the PCs fugitives, forced to leave Aru or be hunted down and killed like mad dogs. If that's the way their actions turned out, so be it. Another potential bad outcome is that one of the PCs is a candidate for a *restoration* spell. The DM should remember the honor penalties for being accused and convicted of a crime: -4 and -10 respectively.

If the PCs manage to prove the innocence of their compatriot, the adventure doesn't have to be over. After all, they may decide to exact some vengeance on the people who hired Komatsu. Komatsu's only contact with the local yakuza family is a man named Zabato – the "Z" on Komatsu's checklist – and several adventures can arise out of tracking this man down.

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Tiger-Bird Spirit—The Sequel

This can be used any time after the events of the main adventure. The adventure starts with an invitation to meet with Benju Matsutomo in his donjon.

Introduction

It seems that the “tiger-bird spirit” is back! At least, that’s what you hear muttered around you as the samurai escort leads you to meet with the daimyo. You chuckle and shake your heads. You proved, once and for all, that the “tiger-bird spirit” was no more supernatural than you are.

But when the daimyo starts telling you his strange tale, you start to doubt . . .

“It happened last night,” Benju tells you. “I was asleep in my room, when I awoke to screaming. It was Takako-san, my niece. She had suffered a nightmare, a vivid dream of a monster engulfing her. At first we all dismissed it as simply a dream. But then one of my samurai noticed marks on the outside of the shoji of Takako-san’s room—marks that could only have been left by claws. There were more, similar marks on the outside of the donjon leading to the second floor. Finally, early this morning, the guard found the body of a samurai clumsily concealed behind a rain barrel. The body had been rent by claws. There were tracks leading from the body to the donjon, and up the outside of the building. But there were no tracks leading to the body, or tracks showing how the creature left the second floor of the donjon. The only conclusion I can come to is that we deal with a winged creature of some kind.” He looks at you, and you’re surprised to see a little fear in his eyes. “The tiger-bird spirit?”

Benju wants the PCs to find out what’s going on, and to protect his niece. During the day he wants them to carry out any investigation they see fit, while at night he wants them to stand watch in the hallway outside Takako’s room. As always when dealing with Benju, talking about payment makes him angry.

DM's Background

At first thought, a winged creature might seem to be a reasonable candidate. But then, why would a winged creature have to climb the outside of the donjon? Wouldn’t it be much easier to fly to its destination?

The fact of the matter is much more interesting. There were two sets of tracks, leading to and from the corpse . . . but they were superimposed. The creature started its nocturnal journey from within the donjon. It climbed down from the building’s second floor, slew the samurai and ate its fill, then climbed back up the outside of the donjon, before returning to its place of origin . . . Takako’s room.

Unbeknownst to anyone—especially Takako herself—the female samurai has been infected by a tigbanua buso. Last night, for the first time she transformed into a tagamaling buso.

Several weeks ago, Takako was hunting in the forest. She became separated from her samurai companions, and was attacked from ambush by a creature that she never even saw. She had only enough time to scream once before she was knocked unconscious. Her samurai companions heard her scream, and hurried towards the sound. The first one on the scene saw a humanoid creature crouched over the still body of Takako. Through the underbrush, he couldn’t get a clear view, but thought the monster to be a kala. Before he could burst through the underbrush and engage it, the monster fled, and the samurai were unable to track it. Apart from a minor scratch on her neck and a bump on her head, Takako was unharmed (apparently), and so she paid the event no more attention. Monster attacks in the wilderness are part and parcel of living in Aru.

Actually, of course, the monster that wounded Takako was a tigbanua buso . . . but a buso with a difference. Several centuries ago, he had been a human wu jen of great power and ambition. Unfortunately, his sanity began to slip and he sought to challenge the gods for control of the world. With someone of lesser power, the gods would simply have ignored the madman. But in this wu jen’s case, the deities figured that wouldn’t be a smart thing to do. Instead, a consortium of gods laid a curse on the wu jen, turning him into a tigbanua buso. Since he’s not a real buso, however, the infection that he inflicts isn’t permanent. Anyone turned into a tagamaling buso because of his attack reverts completely to normal as soon as he is killed. Because of its origin, this buso is more intelligent than the norm: its Intelligence is “low.”

Talking To Takako

Takako can tell the PCs little of value. She can’t remember much of the dream, just that it involved being swallowed by a hideous monster with one eye, and not being able to do anything about it. She has no idea why a creature of any kind might be after her . . . if, indeed, the monster actually was after her specifically.

If the PCs ask her about anything unusual that’s happened to her recently, she’ll relate the story of her near escape, as described above, along with several other possibly important stories that have no importance in this adventure. She attaches no real significance to it, however.

The PCs might decide to talk to the samurai who actually saw the monster. Takako can give the PCs his name and duty assignment, making it easy to find him.

The samurai is a young, earnest and handsome man by the name of Tazumi (use Junior Samurai stats). Tazumi reiterates what Takako told the PCs (after all, it

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was from him that she learned what happened). But, just as the PCs turn to go, read the following:

"Wait," Tazumi says as you turn away. There's indecision in his eyes, and a little doubt in his voice. "I told Takako-san that it was a kala. I thought it was a kala. But . . . do you know, the more I think about it, the more I doubt that the creature was white. And kalas are white." His expression firms once more. "No," he tells you, "it was a kala. It had to be a kala."

Although he's unwilling to admit it, Tazumi thinks he might have made a bad mistake. He's starting to think that perhaps the creature was a shikki-gaki. If so, then Takako might be infected with a horrible wasting disease. He's afraid to admit this even to himself, because then he'd have to admit that his error and slowness to realize the truth might have doomed his mistress. (In fact, of course, the samurai is wrong on both counts.)

INVESTIGATIONS

Interviewing the Guards

The PCs will probably want to talk to the samurai who were on duty around the castle at the time of Takako's "dream." Unfortunately for them, none of the guards saw anything untoward, or heard anything out of the ordinary.

Interviewing the Common Folk

If the PCs extend their investigations outside the castle into the city at large, they'll find that rumors have already started to spread about the "return of the tiger-bird spirit." During these investigations, the PCs will run into many people willing to relate their experiences of the night in question, but these tales are all flaky in the extreme—"I saw it, the tiger-bird spirit. It sang to me."—and come from drunks, senile dotards, and inveterate liars out for a little attention.

The Seer

There is one person in Aru town who knows something useful about the events of the previous night. Unfortunately, he's not the kind of person the PCs are likely to take seriously . . . until it's too late.

This person is a withered old man, with thinning white hair and skin so pale it's almost transparent. Nobody knows his real name; instead, people call him "the Seer." This is partially sarcastic, but also partially a reflection of the way some people view him. The old man claims to be able to see beyond the "veil of the world" at times and under certain circumstances, and glimpse truths concealed from normal mortals. Although it would be easy to dismiss him as just another senile crackpot, the Seer's "glimpses" have proven right just often enough to give most people serious second thoughts.

When the PCs are abroad on the streets of the city, read the following:

There's a commotion behind you. You turn to see a withered and bent, ancient-looking man hurrying towards you. His sparse hair is white and in such disarray that it makes his head look like it's exploding. Piercing blue eyes fix on you.

"I saw you," the old man says in a voice of wonder. "I saw you."

Before you can respond, a younger man grabs the ancient by the arm. "I'm sorry, noble lords [and ladies]," the younger man says abashedly. "He . . . well, the Seer is a little . . . shall we say, confused?"

But then the old man—the Seer?—shakes free and stands directly in front of you.

"I saw your problem," he says, "I saw the monster. Cut off the head to cure the headache, certainly. But destroy the creator and all will be well." He nods sagely as if he's said something you might conceivably understand. "And remember," he concludes, "guards must watch both ways." With a satisfied expression, he turns his back on you and wanders off.

Although the Seer's speech might sound like nonsense, it contains elements of truth. The remark about cutting off the patient's head to cure a headache refers to killing Takako: certainly that will solve the immediate problem of the buso inside the castle, but it's a tad drastic (at least, Takako would probably think so). "Destroying the creator" refers to killing the buso who infected Takako; when this creature dies, she'll return to normal. The last line, about guards watching both ways, is a warning to the PCs: while they expect the monster to come from outside the donjon, they might be in for an unpleasant surprise. (Of course, the DM shouldn't explain this to the PCs. The meaning of the old man's words should eventually come clear.)

If the PCs try to get the Seer to interpret his comments, they get nowhere. The old man has quite literally forgotten that he said a single word to the PCs. If they recite his comments back to him, he'll be able to make absolutely no sense of them. He won't be able to give the PCs any further information either, since his "glimpses" are fleeting, and never under his control.

If the PCs question others about the Seer, they'll learn that most people believe the old man has some kind of power. They'll tell the PCs (largely apocryphal) stories about how accurate the old man has been in the past . . . but they'll also admit that there have been times where he's been so far off the mark that it isn't even funny.

The Seer's stats are those for a Typical Townsfolk, with 1 hp.

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Guards Must Watch Both Ways

That night, the PCs must take their stint at guard duty, as ordered by Benju. The household has gone to bed by the time they take their positions outside Takako's room in the donjon (see the donjon map). There are four Junior Samurai located elsewhere around the upper floor who will arrive 1d3 rounds after the start of any disturbance. The DM should find some way of confirming to the PCs that Takako is in her room alone. (Perhaps she draws back the shoji and talks with the PCs. Although she tries not to show it, she's nervous about the "monster" and wants to make sure that her guards are close at hand.)

Some time into the PCs' guard shift, read the following:

The night passes slowly and quietly. Sometime after midnight, you hear a soft female moan from inside Takako-San's room. Maybe the lady's sleep is troubled by nightmares.

But then you hear a sound that makes the hair at the nape of your neck stand on end: a soft, guttural grunt that couldn't have come from a human throat. Before you can respond, there's a crash as the shoji bursts asunder. In the gap stands a hideous creature so tall that it has to stoop to fit in the room. Its neck and body are hideously elongated, and its feet are bony and oversized. Long black hair—surprisingly clean and lustrous—hangs down its back. A single yellow eye burns in the center of its face as it reaches for you with clawed hands . . .

The creature is the tagamaling buso that Takako has become. It will attack the PCs with great ferocity until it is either magically rebuffed or until it is reduced to 10 or fewer hit points. At this point, it tries to withdraw from combat, crying piteously and holding its hands up to shield itself from harm. The DM should make sure the PCs are aware that this is totally uncharacteristic behavior for something so obviously animalistic in intelligence. Read the following:

The body of the creature seems to ripple, like a reflection in the surface of a pool stirred by the wind. Within a couple of heartbeats, the creature shrinks as its neck and body shorten. Its skin changes from a grayish hue to a more human color, and its single yellow eye closes. The creature collapses with a very human moan. It stirs again a moment later and looks up at you with two very puzzled human eyes. The eyes are unmistakably set in the attractive face of Takako Shimizu . . .

Magic will confirm that this is the real Takako, not some illusion or *polymorphed* form of the creature. Takako bears the marks of any wounds she received while a buso, and her hit point total is the same as the

buso when it underwent its change. Takako remembers nothing of what went on, and is horrified to find herself wounded—and naked—on the floor. She is even more horrified when she hears what happened to her. (If she hasn't already told the PCs this story, she now relates the tale of her recent injury, possibly sending the PCs to talk to Tazumi the samurai.)

If the PCs kill the buso before it has a chance to withdraw from combat, the corpse instantly reverts to a very dead Takako. (Benju will be highly displeased with this turn of events, but will accept the PCs' word that the monster actually existed.)

Tagamaling Buso (1): Int Animal; AL CE; AC 5; MV 12; HD 6; hp 38; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d8; SZ M; ML 10; XP 420.

Curing Takako

The PCs will probably try to get Takako cured. This will mean finding a shukenja or taking Takako to a temple, unless the party includes a sufficiently powerful shukenja. (This can be an adventure in itself . . .)

Unfortunately for the PCs, the process doesn't work. If an NPC shukenja is casting the appropriate spell, read the following:



The shukenja shakes his head in puzzlement. "There is some resistance here," he tells you. "The . . . spiritual taint, if I can call it that, isn't centered in this young woman's body. The cause of her affliction isn't here at all . . . if that makes any sense. Nothing I can do to this woman will clear the taint. You must find the source of the taint, and eradicate that. Then she will be free."

If a PC shukenja is trying to cure Takako, he should receive feelings and impressions to this effect.

If the PCs haven't already met the Seer, the DM should orchestrate an encounter. After the attempt at curing Takako, his babble about "destroying the creator" should make much more sense. (The DM might have to find some way of reminding the PCs of the old man's words.)

Hunting The Creator

The PCs will probably decide to go hunting for the buso which infected riakako. They might now make the connection between the "kala" that attacked the woman and her current condition, and ask where the incident occurred. Takako can tell them roughly where she encountered the creature, but not precisely. She will definitely not escort them; her fear is too great. Unless they think of it themselves, she'll suggest that they get the samurai Tazumi to escort them.

The PCs should give some thought to what to do with Takako while they're away (after all, the hunt might take more than one day, and they can't leave the woman free to change into a monster and kill more innocents). Imprisonment is the obvious solution, but they're going to have to be very careful in how they suggest this to Takako and Benju.

The buso's attack on Takako took place in the forest about 3 hours ride out of town. Tazumi, if asked, will willingly show them just where it took place. Up to 5 other Junior Samurai will accompany the PCs if they ask for an escort.

The tigbanua buso is still in the area, but it knows better than to attack a large group, probably on horseback. Instead, it uses its natural cunning to hide from the hunters. The PCs will be forced to use tracking abilities or magic to hunt the creature down. If they confront the buso, it will fight ferociously until reduced to 15 hp, then try to flee (perhaps leaving behind it some infected PCs). If escape is impossible, it fights to the death.

If the PCs can't track down the monster, it follows them secretly, hoping for the chance to get one of the party alone. Should such a chance arise, it attacks from ambush, trying to wound its victim. Unless the creature thinks it has enough time-and sufficient combat strength-to kill its victim before reinforcements arrive, it will inflict a wound then make its escape. (It knows that this will disturb its opponents, possibly forcing them to make a mistake that it can capitalize on.)

Once the buso is killed, its body reverts to that of an old man.

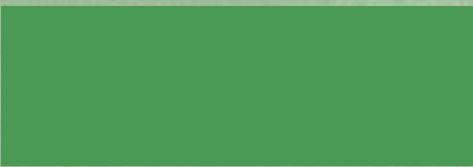
Tigbanua Buso (1): Int Low; AL CE; AC 4; MV 12; HD 8 + 2; hp 66; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d10; SA Paralysis (fear aura) and Disease; SZ M; ML 10; XP 2,000.

The buso's aura will automatically cause creatures of less than 1 HD to become paralyzed with fear. All greater creatures are entitled to a save vs. paralysis to avoid this effect. Affected characters remain frozen until 1d6 + 2 rounds after the buso has moved further than 10 feet away from them. Anyone struck by the creature must make a save vs. death or become infected with a disease that will eventually turn them into a tagamaling buso (see the Kara-Tur Appendix of the *Monstrous Compendium*).

Concluding The Adventure

Both Benju and Takako will be very grateful to the PCs if the tigbanua buso is killed, freeing Takako from her affliction. This gratitude probably won't take the form of money, but rather fame and notoriety around Aru, plus more prestigious service later on. If Takako was killed, Benju's thanks will be notably chilly; certainly the PCs saved his household from the monster's depredations, but he's not totally convinced they couldn't have reached the same goal without killing his niece.

As long as the tigbanua buso survives, Takako and any other character wounded by the creature has a 1% chance per night of becoming a tagamaling buso. Because of the original creature's unusual nature, the change lasts only until dawn, or until a change is triggered by traumatic circumstances (as happened with Takako). Short of a *wish*, there is no way of curing an infected character while the original buso still lives.

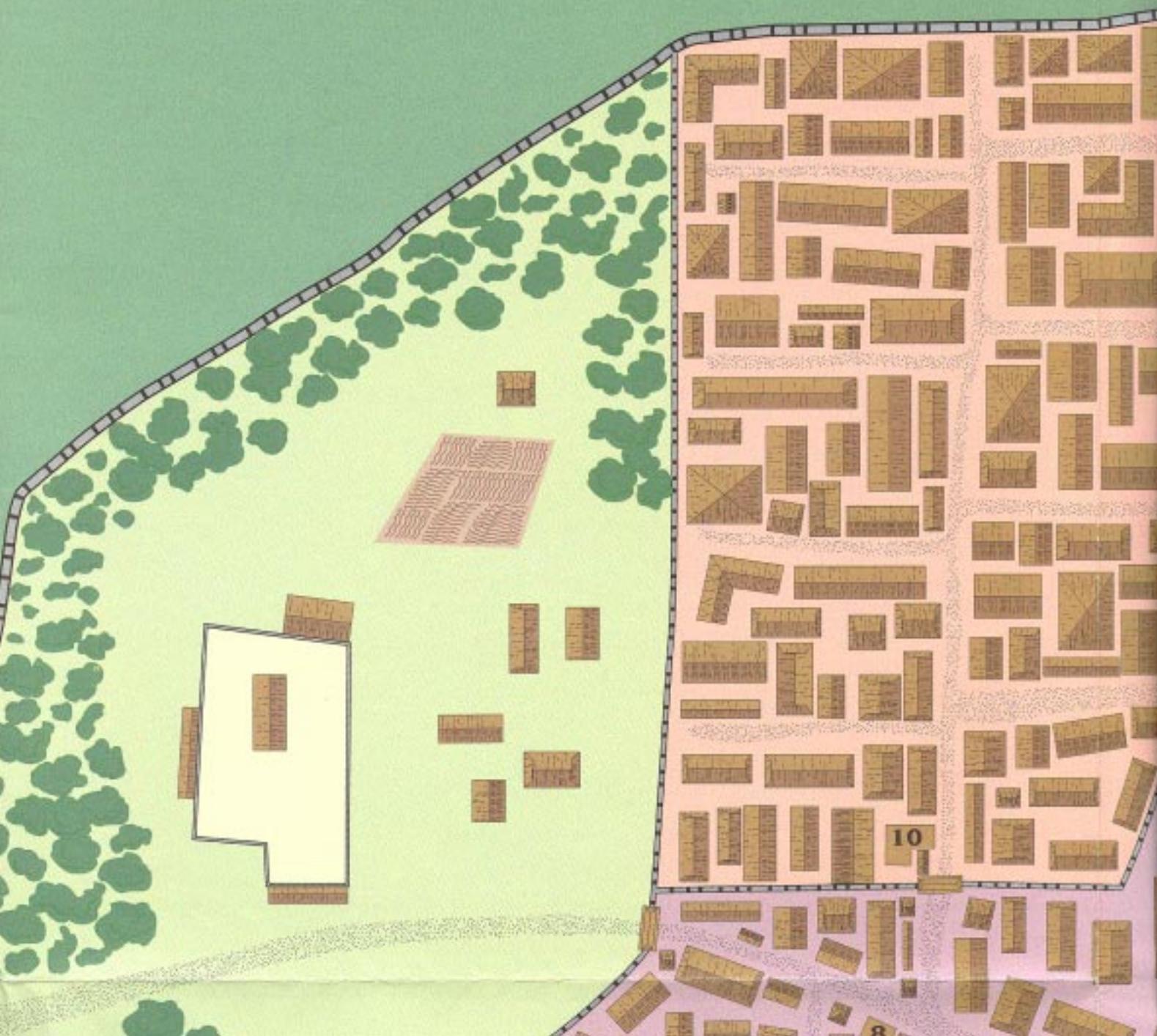


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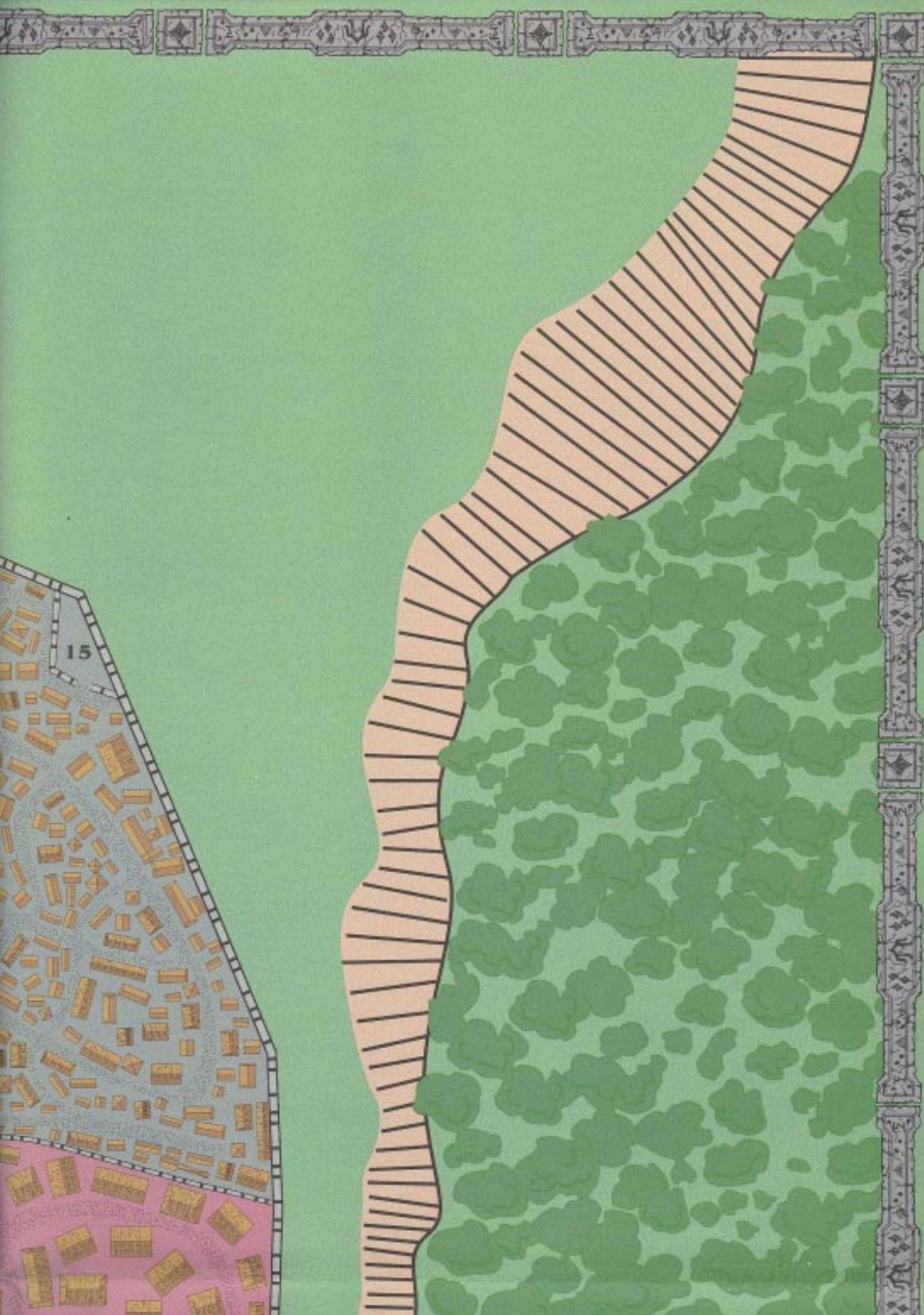
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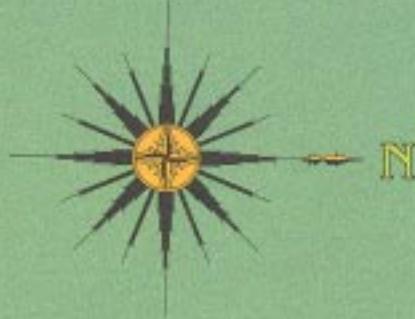
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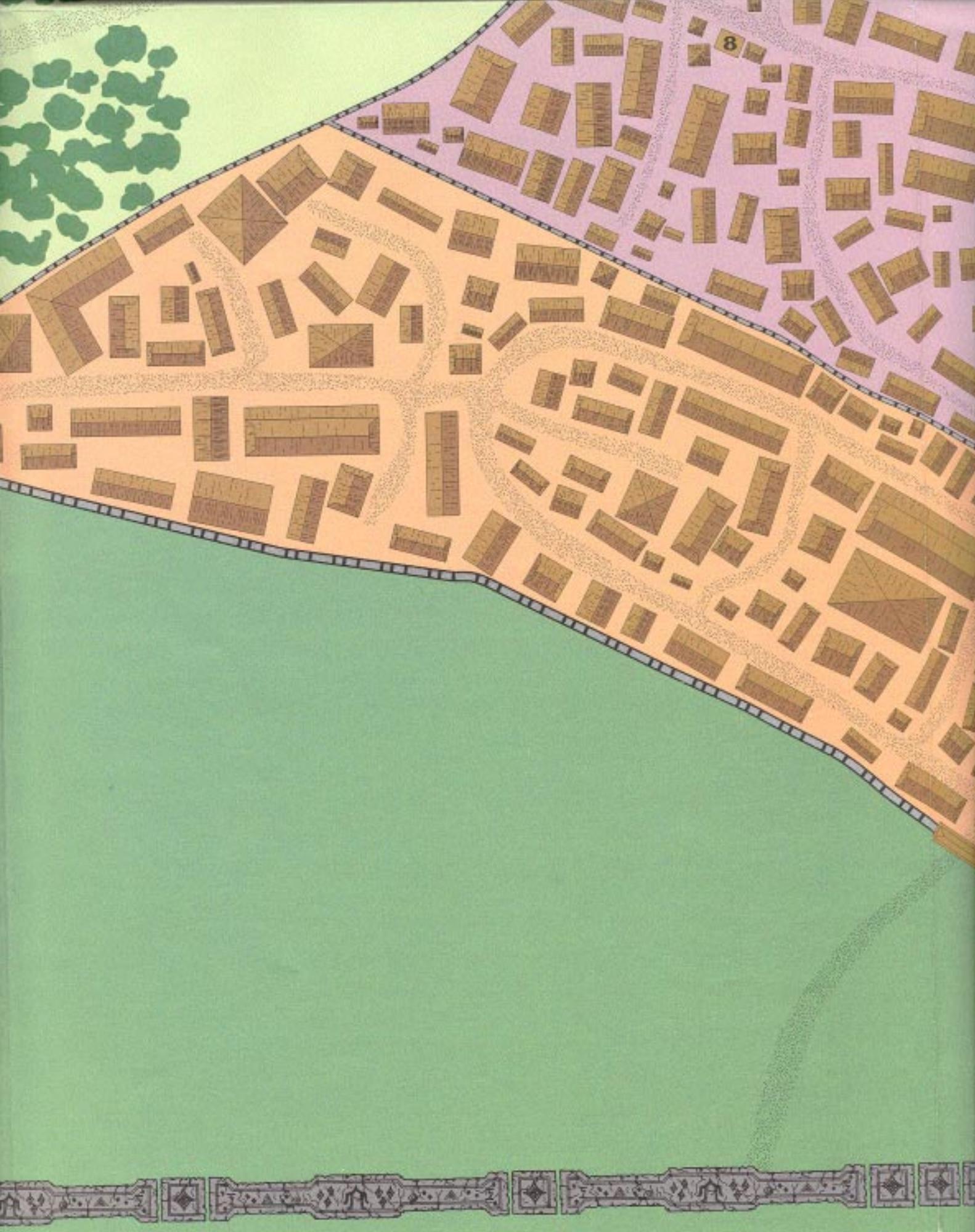


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- Castle District
- Samurai District
- Mixed District
- Eta District
- Pilgram District
- Merchant District





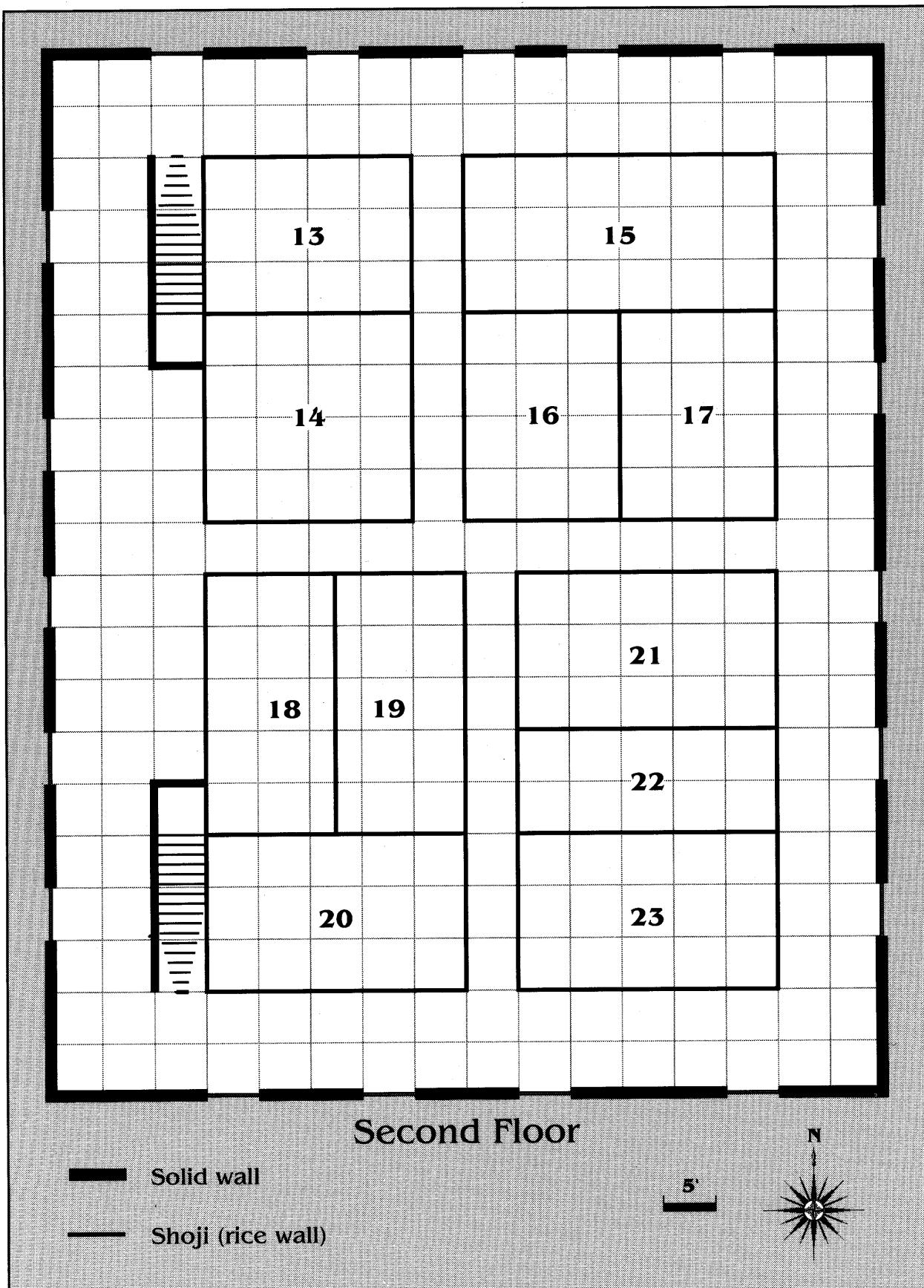




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Benju's Donjon



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By Nigel Findley

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