CAST OF CHARACTERS

_Paul_ indicates that he is now teaching people to use FedEx software and websites, for the benefit of clueless account executives and employees of large corporations who are doubly clueless. He is now a Software Solutions Consultant!

_Tim_ goes wildly against type by revealing that he is off in Richardson with _Bruce_. He indicates that _April_ and _Georgina_ are off in the other room maintaining a comfortable level of background noise.

_Chris_ muses upon the worth of various legal and political dramas upon television. _Ernest_ contributes that he has now seen a photograph of Barack Obama armed with a rifle. He presumes that the Apocalypse is not far off.

_Patrick_ takes this caution very seriously. He is already distraught because he’s come to understand that _Song of Ice and Fire_ hovers between five and ten Whedons of distress. His own favorite character managed to survive, but only because she became boring.

_Matt_ shows up, but he remains curiously invisible. There is a strange, white blob next to Patrick on the monitor screen… either it is Matt, or a horrible carnivorous blanmange ravenous for Patrick’s sweet, sweet blood. Fortunately for Patrick, it proves to be Matt.

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<td>Bjorn the Unlucky</td>
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THE ROAD TO SHIRIO ONSEN

The last session ended with the defeat of the Daimyo Sikutsu Sennaka and the enlistment of his brother and the Northern Armies in the service of the true Empress Ameiko Kaijutsu. The characters headed back to the city of Sakakabe after their victory, encountering only minor violence and obstruction on the road.

Harwynian looks up from a map he is studying and tells the others, “Hey, we should visit Minata! It’s just like the Philippines, and it’s got a university where Undead Douglas MacArthur teaches classes about strategy and tactics.”

Bjorn the Unlucky adds, “Yes! I heard that his corncob pipe is stuck right through the flesh of his lower jaw. They had to do that because his jaw was disconnecting from the rest of his head.”

Nobody else knows quite how to respond.

SAKAKABE IS A GREAT TOWN

Sakakabe is built on a series of terraces going from the sea to the mountains. It is famed both for its silver mines and its position in the pearl trade. The characters ignore all of this and simply head to the entertainment district to reconnect with the geisha who served as their contact with the Daimyo’s brother.

On the way, the characters hear the name of Annamuramon mentioned. The characters know him as the leader of the Five Winds oni and the current Jade Regent, so they pause to listen. It turns out to be coming from a puppet show, performing a historical drama of a (mortal) character named Annamuramon who fought against the Emperor Kinchiro, eventually striking down the Emperor on the battlefield. However, the warlord was not able to seize his bounty because the Emperor called upon the power of the Shojinawa Seal to curse him and cast his soul into the void.

The characters talk to the puppeteer. He turns out to be a short, unassuming fellow. Gobo asks him why he is performing this politically-dangerous play. The puppeteer introduces himself as Tomoha Kitamura. He claims that he has performed this
play many times before. He learned it from his father, a horse breeder of some reknown who never approved of the fact that his son became a performer.

Beyond the parts of the story he performs, he knows some other secret parts of the story. The northern nomads say that Annamuramon wandered the spirit plane after his soul was cast out, until he prayed to the god of Dishonor and was transformed into an oni. But even after he came back to the world his desires were thwarted, because the Laws of Golden Perfection stated that no oni would ever rule Minkai until the last of the true emperors were dead.

Yoshihiro attempted to clarify with the puppeteer, “So that means that Annamuramon could become Emperor once all the noble families are dead?”

Tomoha Kitamura agrees, “Yes!” And then he stabs Yoshihiro clean through, inflicting horrible injury and leaving Yoshihiro with DEX damage, but still alive. Then he springs into the crowd and vanishes. He is clearly the Master Ninja that the party was warned about!

Bjorn the Unlucky is very perceptive and spots that there is a person in the crowd who wasn’t there a moment before. V’lk spots him too and flings a vial of alchemist’s fire at him, hoping that a man on fire will be easier to follow than a man who changes his appearance. He hits him, and the axiom “A burning ninja is hard to hide” is born.

Yoshihiro is wounded, but hardly down. He draws out his daikyu, shouts “Assassin!” and launches a flight of arrows at the fleeing ninja, striking him twice and inflicting over 100 points of damage, dropping the man in his tracks. He tells the others, “Normally I don’t get challenge bonuses with arrows – but this fancy new Daikyu of Commanding Presence lets me get challenge bonuses with archery! It’s really swell!”

The characters search the dead ninja, who once again appears to be a fairly unassuming man with weathered skin and short, greying hair. Underneath his robes he is wearing an ancient-looking bronze coin on a cord around his neck. The characters carefully examine the coin, suspecting that it is the Magic Ninja Coin artifact they have heard about. It is. The six symbols printed around its edge stand for various hidden
powers like escape, disguise, misdirection, stealth, evasiveness, perception, and ascension. Beyond the coin, Tomoha has a variety of magical equipment, including:

- Mithral chain shirt +2
- Dragon Maw Nunchaku
- 10 Shuriken +2
- Ring of Protection +2
- A Portable Hole containing various outfits and props used for disguises.
- Potion of Cure Serious Wounds
- Two potions of Invisibility
- Five doses of Black Adder Venom
- Five doses of Oil of Tagget
- Five doses of Deathblade

V’lk claims the Mithral Chain Shirt +2. Harwynian claims the Ring of Protection +2, contributing his Ring of Protection +1 to the common treasure pile. Yoshihiro and Harwynian split the potions of Invisibility. Bjorn takes the potion of Cure Serious Wounds. The characters leave the body behind and head off, whistling the Master Ninja theme song (to the tune of “Pokerface”).

**BACK WITH OKOHAKU**

The characters return to the teahouse to describe their successes to the geisha Okohaku. Yoshihiro explains that they were attacked by a ninja on the way through the city. Okohaku tells them that forces of the Jade Regent are attacking the bandit fortress of Senaru Heikiko, now commanded by the characters’ ally Hirobashi Jiro.

The new Daimyo Sikustu Itsuru is now at Engenoka, reassembling his government and preparing to strike against the forces of the Jade Regent. He may be able to help relieve the attack upon Senaru Heikiko.
**STUDYING THE NINJA COIN**

Harwynian uses his *Identify* powers to learn about the ninja coin taken from Tomoha Kitamura. He is able to determine that the six ideograms on the ninja coin correspond to the six skills of Acrobatics, Climb, Disguise, Escape Artist, Perception, Stealth. For the coin to work the user must have at least eight ranks in each of those skills. For a user with those skills, each ideogram allows a different magical power. Harwynian is unable to determine how the coin can be destroyed. He does think that if it is held by someone who does not have the skill to wield it, it will eventually vanish from their possession. And after two more people use it, it will cause a horrible curse upon the land.

The closest person to meeting the skill requirements in the group is V’lk, and even he is short several ranks of several skills. Bjorn has four of six of the skills. The characters decide that they must bring the coin to the Three Monkeys in Engenoka, hopefully before it vanishes from their hands.

**A VISIT TO THE MARKETPLACE**

The characters go to the higher end of the Sakakabe marketplace to sell some of their loot. Each character gains 8000 gold from the sale.

The characters’ plan is to purchase a *Scroll of Teleportation* to get them swiftly to Engenoka so they can enlist the new Daimyo Sikutsu Itsuru to assist Senaru Heikiko. They are able to find the necessary scroll in a dusty corner of an old shop. They make arrangements for the caravan to head towards Senaru Heikiko with all due speed while the characters teleport around the countryside locating allies.

**ENGENOKA IN A SINGLE STEP**

The characters *Teleport* to Engenoka. They appear from a dimensional warp and make arrangements to speak to *Kando Yori*, the leader of the Emerald Branch of the Three Monkeys ninja clan. She is the only one of the three who expressed the sentiment that the coin is too dangerous to be used, so the group likes the cut of her jib. Sadly, their skills at Streetwise and subterfuge are not good, so they have some trouble making
contact with the ninja leader. They eventually meet up with her in a noodle shop. She is a middle-aged woman with a thick neck and cold, hard eyes.

She asks the characters, “Is Kaibuninsho dead? Do you have proof?” The characters show her the coin and note that she does not move to touch it.

The characters negotiate with Kando Yori to retain the services of the Emerald Branch as spies to locate the Jade Regent’s troops. Each character’s share of the cost amounts to 1666 gold. One complication is that the Black Lotus and Dragon Shadow branches will be unwilling to work for the characters knowing that Kaibuninsho has a contract to end them – and without either the Coin of the Ninja or the Dragon Maw Nunchaku as proof it will be hard for the characters to demonstrate that he is now dead (and the contract is void). To avoid this problem, the characters arrange to provide funding through some of their merchant allies.
It will take about eight days for Itsuru to bring his forces into position to attack any host moving north along the Imperial Road. During this time, Harwynian makes himself a pair of *Winged Boots* and *Jacob* buys an *Amulet of Mighty Fists* and works with Gobo to make it *Holy* as well.

The characters presume that while any regular troops will need to walk the oni high command will fly in. A plan is hatched; the Daimyo and the army will intercept the bulk of the Jade Regent’s forces right outside of Enganoka and the PCs will go straight to Senaru Heikiko and await the oni. They buy a scroll of *Teleport*, Harwynian transcribes the spell into his spellbook, then uses multiple castings to bring the group directly to Senaru Heikiko. Hirobashi Jiro and his men are very glad to see the characters arrive.
Harwynian celebrates by writing several scrolls: three *Dispel Magic*, and one each of *Break Enchantment* and *Chain Lightning*.

**THE BATTLE OF SENARU HEIKIKO**

The characters use *Koya Mvashti’s* magical *Crystal Ball* to follow the progress of Sikutsu Itsuru’s troops against the Imperial forces. They do quite well, but there is no sign of oni officers on the Imperial side. We take this as a sign that the plan has worked and that the oni are bypassing the mortal battle to come hit the fortress directly.

There is a huge explosion of booming laughter outside. The characters rush to see what is happening as the guards send up the alarm. The main gate of the fortress is knocked down by three massive oni. The alarm bell falls silent. Several guards lie motionless on the ground and Jiro’s banner lies upon the dirt.

The leader of the oni is a three-eyed, red-skinned fire giant oni. He contemptuously ignores the arrows the defenders fire at him. His companions are massive two-headed oni armed with double-headed monk staves. On each of them, one head is bestial and the other is sublime. The two double-headed oni fly to the top of the peaks surrounding the fortress courtyard. The giant oni *Nigan Kono* challenges the characters, daring them to attack him. “I want to crunch your little bones and drink your royal blood!” He casts *Fire Shield* upon himself.

Gobo casts *Spell Resistance* upon Yoshihiro. V’lk invokes a *Blessing of Fervor* upon the group. Bjorn moves directly to melee range with Nigan Kono, marking the giant oni as his quarry. The oni on the wall cast *Haste* upon themselves, so Harwynian matches them by casting *Haste* on the characters. *Shalelu Andosana* fires arrows at the oni, inflicting only minimal injury. Hirobashi Jiro draws his katana and rushes Nigan Kono, receiving a mighty, bone-crushing blow for his troubles.

Yoshihiro challenges the fire oni and starts sending arrows down at him with his *Daikyu of Commanding Presence*. His arrows inflict only light injury to the oni.

Jacob transforms into the shape of a silver dragon and flies up to join Bjorn and Hirobashi Jiro in engaging Nigan Kono. The oni brandishes his massive tetsubo and swings, striking Jacob squarely in the head and almost crushing him. His flames race
across his tetsubo and flow over Jacob but inflict no damage thanks to the Protection from Energy spell Koya cast. Gobo swiftly casts Heal to keep Jacob in the fight. Jacob has real trouble figuring out exactly what has happened to him.

_Sandru Vishki_ uses his Hasted speed to move up to the fire oni. Nigan Kono smashes him with his tetsubo, and then turns to strike V’lk when the elf attempts to heal Sandru.

Bjorn moves in to slash at Nigan Kono. He is horrified to discover that the fire shield damage he takes is larger than the damage he inflicted on the oni. Even worse, as he moves backward out of tetsubo range the oni strikes him again.

One of the two-headed oni casts Black Tentacles around his boss, trapping Sandru Vishki. Hirobashi Jiro evades the tentacles and launches himself at Nigan Kono. Then Yoshihiro fires a raft of arrows at him and downs him, but only for a moment – his regeneration brings him back up swiftly.

Hoping to help the situation, Gobo casts a Mass Cure Moderate Wounds spell on the folks still engaging Nigan Kono – Jiro, Sandru, V’lk and Jacob. V’lk takes advantage of his newfound health to slash Nigan Kono again, dropping him a second time at the cost of a moderate burn.

Bjorn sets his sights upon one of the ettin oni, one who had landed to engage the archers in the back. He charges with his Nine-Ringed Ghost Touch sword, inflicting a minor cut. The oni uses his Ward off Distractions power to cast a spell on his weapon with one head while his other head directs a strike at Yoshihiro. Yoshihiro evades his strike. He is terribly upset at the idea that he is nothing more than a distraction. Harwynian sends down a Chain Lightning at the oni, only to see it glance harmlessly off the oni’s spell resistance. Yoshihiro shoots the oni down with two arrows, then turns to fire on the other oni.

The oni on the mountaintop attacks Jacob. Jacob’s damage shield inflicts damage in return. Then Jacob in his dragon shape flurries at the giant, tearing the creature into shreds.
Koya Mvashti heals Bjorn, who is still badly injured after his encounter with Nigan Kono’s fire shield. Yoshihiro leads the men in a proper “Huzzah!” after which the characters loot the dead oni. The interesting items all come from the fire giant oni:

- Large Do-maru +1
- Tetsubo of the Titans (giant-sized Tetsubo +3)

The two ettin onis had nothing worth having. How typical.

**THE ROAD TO AKAPUTE**

The characters’ armies (and yes, the characters have armies now) advance south after the Battle of Engenoka to start a siege at the city of Akaputo, the second-largest port in Minkai and a major center of the lumber trade. The Governor there is completely loyal to the Jade Regent, and must be dealt with for the characters’ forces to be able to move on to Kasai without risk of attack from the rear. The warfare continues on for another several months.

Meanwhile, Hiraboshi Jiro sends his second in command Hatsue down to Kasai as a spy. She reports back that the capital is under martial law, with the Jade Regent and his allies all isolated in the palace. Unfortunately, she is later picked up by the Jade Regent’s agents and taken to an undisclosed location.

For Ameiko to become Empress she must be blessed by the spirits of the land at the Imperial Shrine or the Shrine of the Heavenly Sovereigns on the bay. Starting from the siege of Akaputo, the characters’ plan is to use Scrying to determine where Hatsue is, then multiple Teleports (thanks to scrolls written by Harwynian) to get the characters to that location, rescue Hatsue, get Ameiko to the shrine and get her blessed, and kill the Jade Regent and/or anyone else in that zip code who offers resistance.

**THE END OF THE SESSION**

The session ends with the characters attending the siege of Akaputo, preparing for their assault upon Kasai.