

JADE REGENT SESSION SUMMARY 08/19/2012

ATTENDANCE

Chris notes, “Bruce, you’re the first person to show up today!”

Bruce explains that he is quite surprised: he had a long journey to get to the game. Neither makes a point of the fact that he hasn’t actually traveled that journey yet, given his virtual status.

Both become concerned as nobody else shows up. *Georgina* arrives, but fails to quell the mood as she is a virtual ghost just like Bruce. But then *Ernest* walks in. *Chris* exclaims, “Speak of the Devil!”

Ernest swiftly answers, “I am the Devil!” All hope that this summary is not frequent reading material for high-agitation fundamentalists.

Patrick arrives. He is blissfully unaware of the fact that it has been raining for the last two days, and that he should keep his windows up. In swift succession, *Paul* appears with quaintly antique computer and various books and documents.

Ernest is all about his new feat choices – he took Manyshot to up his rate of fire. *Chris* wonders, “How is that different from Rapid Shot?” *Ernest* indicates, “They stack!”

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Level</i>
Harwynian Fallingleaf	Bruce	Elegant Elven Transmuter	9
Yoshihiro Kaijitsu	Ernest	Tien Reckless Mounted Archer-Knight	9
Jacob Frostfang	Matt	Ale-Loving Kellid Party Sorcerer	9
V’lk	Chris	Mute Feral Elf Stabber (and Oracle)	2/7
Gobo Samarillian	Patrick	Blind Gnomish Fortuneteller	9
Bjorn the Unlucky	Tim	Ulfen Woodsman	9

ORDU-AGANHEI

The characters have been celebrated and feted for several days in the Hongal capital of Ordu-Aganhei as the personal guest of *Prince Batsaikhar*. He is fascinated by

Varisian women and noted for a highly volatile personality, so several of the female caravan members have been impelled to put up with his entreaties. The characters have also had the opportunity to sample a wide variety of interesting local Hongal delicacies, including roasted duck heads, eel stew, blood needles, drunken prawns, congealed duck blood and thousand-year-old eggs, cow's lung soaked in chili sauce, deep-fried bee larva, and duck's feet marinated with blood. The secret ingredient is the *blood*.

On the fifth day of the characters' visit the Emperor commands that the populace be happy for their presence, so all the locals walk around with tremendously exaggerated smiles all the time. It isn't just smiles and glazed stares: there is also a street festival, including a tremendous Dragon Parade through the streets of Ordu-Aganhei, accompanied by fireworks of all size and description.

The local languages are Hon-la (native), Minkaian, Senzar, and Tien. Several of the characters speak Tian Min and a few of them speak Minkaian, so they are able to get along relatively well. Harwynian has long determined that carrying *Comprehend Languages* around all the time is just good sense.

NINJAS AT THE LAKE MARKET

The lakeside neighborhood of Ordu-Aganhei is a bustling place called the Lakeside Market. The characters head there in search of tasty (and comprehensible) treats, among other things. *Bjorn the Unlucky* announces, "I see a marketplace map out! I think we're going to do some tactical shopping!"

The characters are watching a long dragon-chain of dancers go by when suddenly the dancers throw off the costume and attack! They are ninjas! Bjorn is in his favored terrain and is easily able to spot the duplicitous ninjas. Everyone else is completely gulled. Bjorn is stoked, "This is my battle! I'm in my favored terrain, facing my favored enemies, and I have my favorite *Nine-ringed Ghost Sword* in hand!"

Noting that he now has the Quick-Draw feat, Bjorn instantly pulls out his magical starknife and flings it at a nearby ninja. The lemons he had been contemplating fall forgotten to the ground. Everyone else is simply stunned by the speed of his response.

Two ninjas attack *Yoshihiro*, leaving him horribly injured and poisoned. Three attack Harwynian, dropping him instantly. He is also poisoned, though this really concerns him a lot less.

Bjorn draws out his nine-ringed sword and slashes at a nearby ninja, damaging the man lightly. He follows up by whacking the fellow in the face with his shield. *V'lk* casts *Greater Invisibility* and moves away from a nearby ninja. The ninjas respond by chopping Yoshihiro bloody, forcing him to use his resolve to stay standing. One ninja attacks Bjorn, cutting him and leaving his strength drained. Those ninjas who had attacked Harwynian move on to other targets.

Yoshihiro takes an attack of opportunity as he moves into position and drinks a potion of *Vanish* to get out of immediate danger. The ninja who hits him inflicts a disappointingly small amount of damage.

Gobo Samarillian decides that now is the time for a *Color Spray*. Unable to get Bjorn to separate from the ninjas, Gobo simply blasts all of them. Three ninjas go down, blinded and stunned. Bjorn goes down too. “His fight” turns out to be disappointingly short.

V'lk finds himself as one of the few remaining characters in the combat who is not somehow incapacitated. He places his soothing elven hands upon Harwynian, bringing him back around. Harwynian recognizes that things are going badly, so he casts *Blink* upon himself.

More ninjas pile in, carving the stunned and blinded Bjorn apart and barely scratching the resolute Yoshihiro. Gobo launches his second *Color Spray*, taking out two more ninjas.

Still invisible, *V'lk* draws upon his Oracle shadow power to add his oracle levels to his rogue levels and pump up his backstab damage. He takes advantage of this to flense one unsuspecting ninja into shattered gibbets. The other two ninjas are horribly shocked by the fact that one of their comrades suddenly died thanks to a flurry of unseen attacks.

Yoshihiro rallies with Gobo and the blitzed Bjorn to protect them. Harwynian uses *Expeditious Retreat* to join up with them as well.

V'lk, as the one active combatant the characters have, moves in on another ninja. By the time he's done, another ninja is cut clean through and down and his friend is lightly injured from a secondary dagger swipe to the arm.

The one surviving ninja throws a smoke bomb at the ground and vanishes.

Yoshihiro captures as many of the stunned ninjas as he can. Bjorn wakes back up to find all the ninjas done and dead, so he walks over to a nearby sake stall, picks up a handy vial, and knocks it back. He asks, "Did you manage to get the bastard who stunned me and dropped all my defenses? Whoever that guy was, he caused me like 40 points of damage!" Gobo says nothing at all.

The characters thoroughly loot the fallen and captured ninjas. They come up with several nice items:

- Seven potions of *Cure Serious Wounds*
- Seven potions of *Displacement*
- Twenty-four doses of *Shadow Essence Poison*
- Seven masterwork chain shirts
- Seven masterwork katanas
- Seven dozen shuriken (84, that is)

AN ALLY FROM THE KAMI

A pretty young woman comes running up to Bjorn. She cries out, "Oh! I'm too late! I was coming to warn you of this attack!" Bjorn hands her a cup of sake as Yoshihiro looks her up and down for V'lk-induced stab wounds. She continues on, "I live in the Forest of Spirits and tracked these attackers from there. The kami speak to me and warned me that the Amatsutsu heir was coming! The evil kami also sense this, and this is why the attackers traveled here!" She is *Miyaro*, a Tian-Min human. She

continues her explanation, noting that Minkai is beset by its oni enemies and the kami have asked her to help the characters defeat them.

EXPRESSING OUR REGRETS

After the ninja attack the characters return to the palace. Yoshihiro explains what happened in the market to Prince Batsaikhar. The Prince is deeply upset, indicating that his guards should have protected the characters from any such threat. That they failed is an indicator of their lack of skill and loyalty: he commands for all of them to be executed, their heads added to the already large piles of heads outside the city gates.

Yoshihiro attempts to argue against him for a while, but ultimately fails to convince the Prince to take an alternate path of action. The Prince promises the characters, “You please me! You may stay in my city as long as you like!” As the Prince makes his proclamation, Yoshihiro decides that he would like to stay in the city until about 04:00 tomorrow morning, just after all the guards have been executed.

BEFORE OUR DEPARTURE

The characters sell some of their accumulated goods. Gobo makes a point of insisting that each character have (and wear) a gold bracelet worth 100 gold. He explains that these bracelets give him a way to cast a *Sacred Bond* spell on the group, allowing him to heal them at range. Everyone instantly accepts this explanation.

After some quick sales, the characters each gain 1033 gold and 8 copper pieces. The characters also distribute out the ninjas’ potions of *Cure Serious Wounds* and *Displacement*. V’lk takes the *Shadow Essence* poisons.

Harwynian purchases the inks and papers needed to write out several scrolls during his time in Ordu-Aganhei. Specifically, he increases his collection with scrolls of:

- *Dimension Door*
- *Blink*
- *Haste*
- *Scorching Ray* (3 scrolls)

- *Knock*
- *Arcane Lock*

ADVICE ON THE FOREST OF SPIRITS

The characters also spend some time seeking advice from Miyaro on how best to propitiate and appease the kami of the Forest of Spirits. She describes the common practice of putting up roadside shrines, of giving gifts of food and liquor (among other things), and avoiding specific actions (like cutting down trees). She indicates that the kami have invited the characters to travel through the Forest of Spirits, so they should get generally good reception during their journey through the forest.

Miyaro also points out that the Forest of Spirits is the birthplace of all the kami in the world. It is a forest the size of an entire country, and just about everything in the forest has a kami associated with it.

ESCAPE FROM ORDU-AGANHEI

The characters leave the city of Ordu-Aganhei in the depths of the night and strike out across the steppes. The entire nation of Hongal is known as the Land of the Horse Lords, so the characters are fully prepared for a long journey across a mostly featureless plain of long grasses.

It is a five hundred mile journey through the Northeastern steppes of Hongal to reach the edges of the Forest of Spirits. Two days into the journey a pack of ninjas attacks the caravan. The characters circle the wagons and fight back! They find that they take additional caravan-level damage from traps, tricks and esoteric chain weapons, leading Bjorn to comment, “At this point, preparing for ninja attacks just seems like common sense.” The others first agree and then proceed to destroy the ninja threat in detail.

Over the next three days the caravan passes several small villages and nomad encampments. The characters try to trade with the natives but find that the locals do not have the money to purchase their goods.

MINKAI OUTFRIDERS

On the seventh day of their journey the characters meet up with a party of armed Minkaian warriors on horseback. The leader of the group commands, “Our Shogun has instructed us to investigate all travelers coming from the north! Open your wagons!”

Yoshihiro objects, “Your Shogun has no authority here! We travel under the authority of Prince Batsaikhan!”

The Minkai warrior is unimpressed, “Ordu-Aganhei is many days travel from here. Open your wagons!”

Yoshihiro decides to try and bluff the warriors. He tells them, “We would be happy to, but some of our people have fallen ill with the yellow jack. That is why we travel under the banner of flame” Yoshihiro indicates the *Banner of Comfort*. This is enough to keep the warriors to a quick search of the caravan, not thorough enough to uncover the presence of Ameiko underneath a bundle of furs.

As the warriors ride off, Yoshihiro jokes, “Do we not look like... Indians?” All laugh.

TARANTULA ATTACK!

As the characters reach the borders of the forest the caravan is attacked again, this time by giant tarantulas. Yoshihiro cautions V’lk and Bjorn, “Just to be clear, don’t touch the dead tarantulas!” He remembers very well when the characters last encountered poisonous creatures and were hurt worse in the attempt to recover the creatures’ poison glands than by the actual attack.

The characters manage to drive the creatures off, but not before the things inflict a remarkable amount of damage upon the caravan.

Miyaro explains that once the characters enter the Forest of Spirits they will no longer be troubled by attacks from giant animals. Pressed for more details on her own background, she explains that her parents were peasants who fled into the forest when she was just a baby. They fell afoul of the kami and were slain, but the kami spared her and raised her as one of their own. Yoshihiro notes, “So, you’re just like Princess Mononoke!”

THE SECRETS AMONG US

As Bjorn has more time to watch Miyaro more carefully, he gets a sense that she is very odd, and may be playing a role. She is completely uninterested in money or possessions, instead sometimes falling to fascination with the colors of some leaves or the texture of her cloak. He goes to Harwynian, who detects that she is under the effects of some kind of enchantment. Harwynian tries casting *Magic Circle against Evil* and walking the area of effect across her; he sees no change in her behavior. At that point, Bjorn and Harwynian let the other characters know what they've found.

Yoshihiro and Bjorn try asking her about what she's doing outside the Forest of Spirits. She explains that the kami she serves aren't really mobile: they cannot leave the area of their ward, so she goes outside the forest as their eyes and ears. She has spent much time creeping around the edges of the human lands, trying to appear as a simple peasant woman unworthy of notice, trying to learn as much as she can about human ways.

MIYAKO'S NATURE IS REVEALED

The edge of the Forest of Spirits is constantly surrounded by snow. There is little undergrowth beneath the massive trees. As the characters approach, V'lk decides that he has lost patience: he casts *Dispel Magic* upon her, removing the *Transmutation* that changed her shape from kitsune to human. She squeals and hides behind a nearby tree in embarrassment.

The characters quickly learn that her history is a bit more complicated than she originally described. She was actually the child of a notorious kitsune bandit chieftain in northern Minkai. He was killed by the kami for dishonoring a sacred grove and her mother committed honorable suicide to bind her child to the kami and erase the dishonor on their family name. Aside from those minor details, her story exactly as she first described.

THE KAMI OF THE WAYMARKER

Miyako leads the characters to a hidden path between trees laden with snow. A small stone monument laden with symbols has fallen across the path. Miyako notes that it is a waymarker, a warning to outsiders. She thinks that its guardian kami would be pleased if the characters righted it and left a gift. The characters do so. As the characters leave the offering, the characters feel a sense of well-being. A moment later a wizened man two feet tall appears. He bows and thanks the characters in Tien. “Thank you, visitors, for your offering. You have earned the blessing of the spirits today!” The kami of the waymarker is *Shuhishi*. He is a shikigamikami; apparently all of his kind look rather like *Dungeon Master* except when they look like lumps of glowing rock.

As the characters enter the Forest of Spirits, the characters have the feeling of being watched but they can see nothing. Strange noises ring out through the forest, though it is impossible to discover their source.

THE SPIRITS OF THE FOREST REACH OUT

Harwynian starts to feel something weird... as if something is trying to invade his mind. He decides to allow it, because that idea worked out nicely the last time. He is possessed by the spirit of a young poet who died in the woods, but who doesn't really realize that she is dead. She thinks that everything that has happened since her death is a dream: she is dreaming of possessing him. Harwynian is compelled to recite various epics and poems in Tien. The others don't notice any real change in his behavior, except that he insists that he is suited to take a lead role in the play *The Cuckolded Cuckoo*, and sometimes refers to himself as *Wushi* (Desert Flower). The game effect is that he gets a +2 bonus on Knowledge (history), Knowledge (nobility) and Knowledge (local) rolls. If he is possessed for a month or more he will also gain a rank in Perform (sing).

STONE GIANT OVER THERE

Days pass. The characters follow a line of high tors through the forest. The characters hear some strange bird-calls. Bjorn is unimpressed, “That is not a sound made

by a bird. That is someone imitating a bird call.” The others are amazed by his sudden display of ranger skills. He goes on to imitate a hunter’s bird call in response.

V’lk simply sneaks off into the woods. Behind him, Harwynian casts *Magic Circle Against Evil*. V’lk creeps up onto a stone giant crouched down in an excellent ambush spot along the path. He has a good collection of stones nearby and plainly intends to ambush the caravan. V’lk doesn’t see any others nearby, but is fairly certain they must be there. He returns to the caravan to warn the others. They decide to bypass the ambush site, choosing a longer and more difficult path.

□AND MORE SPIRITS, BAD SCARY SPIRITS

A day later, V’lk feels a tugging at his mind. He allows the visitor in and finds himself possessed by an angry samurai named Unashi Taesuke. Unashi was a cruel man, known for acts of rage and brutality against prisoners. He was slain by one of his own escaped prisoners. While possessed, V’lk suffers disturbing dreams (Will save against DC 17 to fall asleep, be fatigued through the next day if sleepless through the night). The others don’t see much different in V’lk’s behavior, but they do notice his haggard and weary demeanor.

Gobo examines V’lk and concludes that he has a disease. He gives V’lk some medicines that have no effect upon the ghost, but which do give him erectile dysfunction.

Eventually, Bjorn decides that V’lk’s problems are caused by ghosts. He touches V’lk with his *Nine-ringed Ghost-Killing Sword* and uses its powers to try to expel the ghost. The ghost resists his attempt. Fortunately, after five days V’lk manages to push the angry samurai out.

A massive albino dire tiger springs from the forest and confronts the caravan! Bjorn suspects that the tiger is not acting naturally. Its roar is almost understandable as words. He realizes that these tigers are generally sacred to the kami and uses his Wild Empathy to make it friendlier. He convinces it that the characters are not its enemies and heads into the bush.

Bjorn tracks the tiger, leading the rest of the characters. When he finds it, it is almost whimpering. Gobo casts *Speak with Animals* to ask what is wrong. It tells him, “I

am stricken with great grief, for my friend and protector has died.” The tiger’s name is *Tieqing*, and his protector was *Wushang* the guardian kami. Bjorn repeats his Animal Empathy trick and persuades the tiger to join the group.

A couple of days later, Bjorn feels a tickling in his mind. He lets the spirit in and is possessed by an angry spirit, a woodsman named *Bokugan* who was driven mad by poisonous berries and killed his entire family. The spirit is driven by an insatiable hatred of all woodland creatures. He is consumed by rage, taking -2 to all CHA-, INT- and WIS-based skill checks. However, he can also call upon Bokugan’s passionate devotion to his family, giving him *Heroism* for up to 10 rounds/day.

Four days later, Bjorn spots some berries. He sees that something is amiss with them. He uses Knowledge (nature) to identify them, but must take a -2 penalty due to his unfathomable rage. He recognizes that these berries are similar to some edible berries, but poisonous: they can cause the eater to become mad, perhaps mad enough to kill his entire family.

Bjorn notifies Yoshihiro of the situation, “Yoshihiro! These berries will drive you mad! You must put them in your oatmeal! Raaaugh!”

Yoshihiro is cautious, “Ahh, that doesn’t sound like something I want to be part of.” Then the characters hear the sounds of an axe being sharpened. A moment later, the spirit of Bokugan emerges from Bjorn’s head.

The spirit tells Bjorn, “You have put my mind at rest. It was the berries that caused me to kill my family. Now I can rest.” Bokugan vanishes, taking his rage with him, but leaving the ability to call upon *Heroism* at will.

This prompts the characters (led by Bjorn, who has some ability to sense spirits) to determine how many spirits are around, and how many folk in the caravan are possessed. They find that in addition to Harwynian there are twelve more members of the group who are possessed by some kind of spirit or other.

THE GATHERING OF THE KAMI

The characters travel to an area where the kami are weak. They find a massive wooden torii gate. A huge armored figure floats a few inches above the ground. It is Noburo, a zuishikami. He is guardian of gates and doorways, sworn enemy of the oni.

Miyako explains, “This is the guardian of the grove. You must ask his permission to enter.”

The characters respectfully ask permission. Noburo allows them to pass. He is so impressed with their show of respect that he also agrees to rid the caravan of unwanted spirits. Then he invites the characters to a gathering of the kami in the clearing later that night.

As the shadows deepen, the characters become aware of strange forms approaching from among the trees. They have unusual forms, all of them shaped by the nature of their area of protection. The characters remain still and do not approach. The kami themselves approach only slowly, tentatively. They speak in strange words that Miyako can translate.

She tells the characters, “The kami long ago swore an oath to safeguard the Oni of the Five Storms in a pagoda called House of Withered Blossoms. 160 years ago, the oni escaped their prison – the kami still do not know how.” She continues to explain that one oni remains in the *House of Withered Blossoms*, but the kami cannot enter to investigate because they are still bound by oaths that keep them out.

The clearing grows quiet as the kami stop talking and wait for the characters’ response. Yoshihiro speaks for the others, “Yes, we will go to the House of Withered Blossoms.” There is an audible (creepy) sigh through the assembled kami.

One small kami, an ancient warrior with a tree branch growing from his head, approaches the character. He introduces himself as *Akumi*. He asks for one favor: his ward is a bonsai tree stolen by hobgoblins. They took it inside the House of Withered Blossoms and he cannot recover it on his own. He asks that they retrieve it. They agree, to his great relief.

THE MAGIC FAN

Miyako says that she will stay with the caravan, but she will lend the characters her magic fan. It was once owned by Kikiga, a legendary Minkai courtesan. It provides several benefits:

- A +2 bonus on CHA-based checks;
- When held, it provides the somatic components for spells;
- Cast *Calm Emotions*, *Forceful Hand* and *Whispering Wind* (3 mile range) each once per day.

Harwynian accepts the loan of the magic fan, speaking a short poem in thanks. V'lk is confused: is Harwynian wearing makeup? Harwynian notes: "Yes, it brings out my beautiful lashes."

The characters organize a short poetry contest, with a stake of one gold piece each. Harwynian wins handily.

THE HOUSE OF WITHERED BLOSSOMS

Eerie animal calls echo through the forest. The characters come upon a depression in the earth, with a stylized porcelain pagoda with ornate carvings of creatures, plants, gods and monsters all upon it. The surrounding garden is filled with broken statuary. The overwhelming scent of death and decay hangs in the air. The exterior walls are choked with the vines of withered blossoming plants. All appear to be dead. The pagoda is massive, over 200 feet tall.

Yoshihiro examines the scene. "Wow. This place is creepy. Let's try the front door."

The front doors are bronze, carved to look like carved dragons. Hundreds of carved dragon heads stare at the characters from around the doorframe. The characters decide to go in through an upstairs window instead. There are four round windows up on the third – one on each side of the pagoda. Each is carved to evoke a monstrous mouth full of gnashing teeth, the teeth made from an array of inward curving barbed iron bars.

The windows are 5' in diameter, so creatures of small or medium size can pass without trouble. Yoshihiro recognizes that he will need to send his horse back to the camp.

Gobo projects a moon bridge up to one window, providing everyone with a convenient way to get to the third floor. As usual, Bjorn passes through the window first and triggers the trap. As he passes through, the vicious iron biting barbs contract inward to stab him. He yowls from the pain. From the inside, he is able to see that some of the levels above have been destroyed, leaving a 60' high chamber. There are stone barbs all across the floor, counting as caltrops. Thick webs sweep upward from the jagged floor into the dark shadows above. And eight giant human-faced spiders are climbing down from above.

Yoshihiro rushes through the window... and is also attacked by the window's teeth. He ignores the gouging injuries and opens fire on the spider-creatures. Now that he can see them better he can see that they have great, bloated bodies topped by vicious, corrupted human heads.

Harwynian, standing right outside the iron mouth window, decides that he'd rather not get chomped. He brings the rest of the party inside (and off the moon bridge) with a *Dimension Door*. Yoshihiro grumbles something about the cruelty of the initiative order. Harwynian whispers back a parable on the virtues of temperance and patience. Bjorn doesn't even know what those words mean.

The spiders start waving their arms in mystical patterns, and then all disappear. Yoshihiro invokes *See Invisible* and sees that the spiders are all approaching, ready to strike. He cries out, "They're right on top of us!" V'lk responds by casting *Greater Invisibility* on himself. Harwynian casts a *Magic Circle against Evil* on himself, covering the whole group. Gobo heals Bjorn. And Yoshihiro starts firing arrows at spider-creatures, killing one of them.

The spider creatures use the Graceful Descent of the Flying Spider Technique to swoop down upon the characters and bite them. Harwynian takes a bite and loses 3 STR. In the process he discovers that the spider creatures are not actually evil. Gobo takes two bites and loses 1 STR. Two female-faced spiders attack Bjorn, costing him 2 STR. Then

they make Acrobatics checks to swing out of the characters' reach. They are not completely successful in this: Bjorn manages to slash one of them as it goes by.

V'lk casts *Delay Poison* on Bjorn, protecting him from future poison effects.

Yoshihiro uses his *Efficient Quiver* to draw out the exact pattern of arrows he needs. Specifically, lethal ones. Sadly, his aim is off: none of his shafts fly true.

The spiders respond by casting *Charm Person* on everyone in the group. Even through the *Protection* they manage to capture Bjorn: he is particularly fond of the spider with the head of a hot chick. V'lk decides that this will just not do: he flies up to one spider, uses a potion of *Flame Breath*, and engulfs it in fires. Gobo follows suit, roasting the same creature even more. Yoshihiro sends another volley of arrows up, inflicting substantially additional harm. Harwynian stacks on a pair of *Scorching Rays* at the same luckless spider-thing and reduces it to ash.

The surviving three spiders decide that this is not a good situation. They flee into the upper floors, leaving several characters behind to suffer from the lasting effects of their poison. Harwynian finally manages to recover, but only after he is reduced to STR 3. He proclaims, "I'm weak as a kitten!"

THE UPPER LEVELS

Yoshihiro uses *Suishen* to *Air Walk* up to the next (broken) level. He looks around, burning away webs as he goes. He finds some cabinets and cupboards. He lets a rope down for the others to clamber up.

The rest of the group manage to make it up to the next level. They find some interesting tidbits including a masterwork nunchaku, a potion of *Cure Serious Wounds*, a carving of a Minkai dignitary, a battered breastplate and a pair of fine leather shoes.

Gobo manages to find some chests on a shelf. The first contains three *Potions of Tumbling* and a string of coins worth 200 gold. The second is full of saffron. The last contains two opium pipes and eight doses of opium. Harwynian thinks the saffron is worth 200 gold and the opium is worth 25 gold per dose.

Meanwhile, Yoshihiro continues to fly up into ever-denser webbing. He burns it away with his torch, noting that the webbing is narrowing the pathway down to a single funnel. He flies through the funnel, burning with his sword as he goes.

THE OLD WEBS

Yoshihiro emerges into another level of the pagoda. The webs here are older. Spiders with blue-white bodies and white iridescent legs clamber towards him. He flies away, with masses of spiders behind him.

Yoshihiro drops down and shoots the leading spider with arrows, killing it. V'lk fires as well, inflicting relatively less damage. Bjorn flings his starknife and hits Harwynian. Harwynian complains, "Ow! That hurt!" Bjorn is unmoved.

Then the spiders surge in, biting V'lk. He suffers poison damage, then shrugs it off because he's got *Delay Poison* active on himself. Gobo decides that he's had enough of spiders – he breathes fire on the spider menacing him.

Yoshihiro is angered by a spider. He hovers back and shoots at it. He kills it, then follows up with three shots that seriously damages another spider. He loves the Rapid Shot/Multi Shot/Haste combo.

V'lk chops up a spider, leaving only four left. He gestures at Harwynian, "Four left! You said seven!" Harwynian takes these comments to heart: they are enough to send his *Scorching Ray* aim off. Yoshihiro is not bothered: his arrows slay one of the two spiders that had been menacing Harwynian. V'lk flanks with the other spider and destroys it utterly. Yoshihiro ends the last with arrows.

BACK TO THE OLD WEBS

With the spiders all dead, everyone heads up to the next level. The place is festooned with old webs and desiccated husks. The ceiling above is also broken through, though the massive dragon columns remain intact. The characters search the area. They find:

- A delicate silver snuff box in the shape of a turtle
- A rhino horn drinking vessel decorated with herons

Yoshihiro gives Harwynian the snuff box, on the grounds that he likes both turtles and snuff.

As the characters search around, Bjorn glances up to see three beautiful women in silk robes and an enormously corpulent man. The others see the women wrapped in filthy silk robes that apparently haven't been changed in years. Spiders scuttle in and out of the folds of the garment.

The corpulent man takes a long draw from his opium pipe and asks, "Why have you come to disturb my domain?"

Yoshihiro explains that the characters are looking for the Oni of the Five Storms, and that they have some opium for him. The corpulent man seems interested. Yoshihiro goes on, "And Bjorn here would like to take one of your womenfolk right in the spinneret."

Bjorn drives this last point home by offering, "I'd like to do it until I'm just a dried-out husk." Everyone winces.

The man says, "The oni are below, beneath the hobgoblins. They are powerful, but they are easily distracted and disorganized. In spite of their chaos, there is one leader who has remained constant among them: a wind oni named Annamuramon."

"How many oni are there? And hobgoblins?"

"I do not know. They have dug out many chambers beneath this pagoda. There may be dozens of them, but their numbers have been dwindling since they started attacking my people. The majority of their rank-and-file have been eliminated. They are naturally warlike, and the oni who rule them are dominated by their cravings for food, violence and anger. Munascaru and her best and most loyal hobgoblin warriors remain. They worship the oni as gods."

The characters also learn that only two of the mouth-windows are actually trapped: the spiderpeople only use the ones that aren't trapped. Everyone does the appropriate facepalm. The characters apologize for killing several of his bodyguards and citizens, and agree to fight the oni. They also send up the opium for the corpulent spider

master. The spiderpeople don't even wait for the characters to leave: as soon as they get it, they start loading up their opium pipes.

The blitzed spiderpeople show the characters a rip in the floor leading down a steep-walled shaft. They say that this is the way to the first level.

THE END OF THE SESSION

Next session – the characters start picking through the hobgoblin mazes. Everyone expects a gigantic dungeon crawl.