

Introduction

Long Ago ...

In times long past, the Kadaichi range of foothills was serene and peaceful, remaining far removed from the *daimyo* lords and imperial politics. As ages passed, the winds brought merchants over these secluded hillsides, and later a handful of settlers to farm upon the fertile landscape.

A dark time came when a *daimyo*'s entourage arrived to survey the hills and valleys. After inspecting the land, the *daimyo* ordered the construction of a pyramid, which he claimed was to serve the court's astrologists as an observatory of the stars. What none in the villages knew was that the *daimyo*'s wife, an ambitious and ruthless woman, had seduced her new husband and diverted court funds to oversee the construction of a sanctum specially designed to enhance the practice of her alchemical arts.

Construction of the corrupt woman's pyramid took almost a hundred years. When it was complete, the withered crone, having buried her husband long since, took up residence within its darkened corridors. The now-powerful Alchemist used potions to restore her youth and prolong her life so that she could

continue her plan to achieve absolute divinity and immortality.

In order to create servitors, she trapped villagers in a prison cell and starved them until they devoured each other, creating *jikininki* — walking dead cursed to feed on corpses. Using the *jikininki*, the Alchemist captured more subjects to experiment upon in her search for immortality. Her work resulted in the discovery of the Essence of Divine Winds, a liquid distillation of divine *ki* energies. By immersing herself within its waters for a millennium, the Alchemist could achieve perfect immortality, and be transformed into a living god! Sealing her inner sanctum, and so losing control over the *jikininki*, she has slept undisturbed over the centuries in the crystal bath that refines these energies.

The people of the Kadaichi range shunned the place and whispered of the missing villagers and of the tortured screams that sometimes echoed in the hills. All forgot the name of the *daimyo* and his ancient widow, and a new legend arose of long-fingered 'demons' that walked the foothills by moonlight. Eventually, a brave band of demon hunters — monks and priests of light — sought out the pyramid and discovered the nest of living dead. While the group could not breach the seals to the hidden inner sanctum, they suspect-



ed the warded chamber led to *yomi* — the spirit worlds. To ensure that no other demons could come though, the band placed their own wards, guardians, and traps within the pyramid.

Also, the demon hunters succeeded in releasing many of the jikininki from their tortured state, but accidentally scattered the rest so that they spread across the foothills. Believing the job done, they sealed the pyramid and left for parts unknown, stopping only to establish the Shrine of the Vigilant Light nearby in thanks for their god's favor in cleansing the hillside.

The diaspora jikininki, following their depraved instincts, returned to the hold of their mistress to find themselves locked out. The cursed packs dug a network of tunnels underneath the pyramid so they could lie close to their vile mistress. For centuries the jikininki entombed themselves there, remaining dormant until their unnatural hunger would rouse them once again.

One Month Ago ...

As the centuries passed, the pyramid became overgrown like a *kofun* — an ancient mound tomb — shrouded with vegetation that transformed it into just another hill within the Kadaichi range. For years, the peaceful villages lived in harmony with the flow of seasons. But then sorrow again came in the form of a barbarian *obok* called the Han — a tribal clan from the mainland.

The Han *obok*, lead by the cunning bandit Zhang, came to the island chain to seek out a lost arcane pyramid or tomb. While searching the area on behalf of their relic-seeker employers, the Han took the opportunity to sack and plunder the surrounding villages. What the barbarian raiders did not foresee in this remote locale was formidable resistance in the form of a hunting lodge housing several *samurai*. The *samurai* proudly met the Han in battle on the plain called the Killing Fields, falling before the superior numbers of the barbarians.

As the characters enter the scene, the weakened Han have taken up residence in the old hunting lodge, called Nagaya, and the undead jikininki have just awakened, roused by the unburied on the earth above them.

Adventure Overview

Lean and Hungry is a Japanese-analogue fantasy scenario for a mid-level party of about 4th to 6th level. The adventure will likely take up two sessions, and a good breaking point is at the end of Chapter Two.

Clerics, monks, and paladins — characters symbolizing authority or faith — have an easier reception and should be included in the party if possible. The module assumes the party to be more or less heroic, but can be converted for play with more mercenary parties by adjusting the character lures given below. For example, the characters could be sent at the behest of a *ninja* clan to stake a claim in the area.

Also, having at least one PC capable of tracking and at home in the wilderness will be of considerable help to the party.

Alternate Settings

While this scenario is intended for an Eastern setting, the events can be refitted for a Western game, or an interesting mix of the two. A Western-style game involves mainly 'converting' the names and places to fit a more traditional fantasy campaign. Many of the character types and settings have Western equivalents; for instance, the Chinese barbarians become Viking raiders, the *samurai* Nagaya becomes the hunting lodge of Sir Roderic, the jikininki become burrowing ghouls, etc. Much like a 'Spaghetti Western,' this module can then work with a band of wandering *samurai*, monks, or some combination of both, travelling in a Western land.

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GMs might also want to consider the possibility of introducing a Western fantasy group into an Eastern setting for the module. For example, if the party has survived the attack described in the *Maiden Voyage* adventure module, also published by Atlas Games, or otherwise finds themselves on a ship, sea storms (or the vengeance of Krakas) may strike, marooning the hapless PCs on this exotic Eastern island. The strangeness of being confronted by a different culture adds an interesting element to game play.

 One suggestion for this type of starting point is that the GM should make sure that a scroll or magic item with the *tongues* spell is somehow made available to one or more PCs.

A final note; the local villagers have wild legends about demons and dragons in the foothills. This is a manifestation of their own intuitive sense that something wicked has always lain dormant there. GMs should allow the PCs' paranoid imaginations to run wild and confused at first by the conflicting accounts.

Story Focus

Lean and Hungry stresses a deep-immersion roleplaying focus. While the PCs explore the *kofun* pyramid, the villagers, the barbarian raiders, a group of relic seekers, and eventually the local *daimyo*'s swordsmen are affected by what the players do within the forgotten sanctum. The *kofun* should be looked at as a character in its own right, as it has a layered history. GMs should accentuate the difference between the Alchemist's mark on the place as opposed to the departed demon hunters', for example. Also try to consider the varying roles of the *kofun* as you describe it: the structure was built as a sanctum at the bequest of the Alchemist, but thanks to the departed demon hunters now serves to imprison her; to the relic seekers and barbarian raiders, the *kofun* is a vault to exploit; to the villagers, it is a demon's den that threatens their survival. Keep this in mind as the factions react to its discovery. Descriptions and stats for NPCs can be found in Appendix II; monster stats are located in the text of the adventure itself.

Luring in the Characters

Several options for getting the characters involved include:

- The characters are simply passing through the remote Kadaichi range in order to travel to another destination. They are expecting wild animal attacks and stiff necks to be the worst of their problems. But then they catch sight of the first sacked village ...

- The characters serve a local *daimyo* lord or owe her a substantial favor. Her scouts have reported a barbarian longship skirting the coast north of her hold. She is somewhat unconcerned as the area in question is quite remote and inconsequential to the prosperity of her demesne, but wants someone to scout out the area in order to make sure these raiders aren't establishing a staging point for further attacks.
- A shipwreck has marooned the unsuspecting heroes on an Eastern island chain. The natives, speaking a strange dialect, cannot be understood without magical aids. The PCs soon learn of the plight of the innocent villagers and take it upon themselves to mete out justice. Foreign characters may also find they have some explaining to do once the local lord's *samurai* arrive to deal with the barbarian raiders ...
- The PCs are a wandering band of demon hunters hoping to send errant demonic minions packing back to *yomi*. Divine visions and arcane prophecy lead the motley group to the remote village; there, omens suggest that an ancient evil must be put down once again. For a variant on this theme, the PCs could be reincarnations of the original band of demon hunters, come again to put things right for good.

Plot Synopsis

Whatever the ploy, the characters arrive in the remote range of foothills to find several recently destroyed villas. Fearing the worst, the PCs are somewhat relieved to find one village, Mura, remains and serves as the last stand for refugees. The overcrowded village initially meets the PCs' arrival with panic, then later with wonderment and hope as the village's leader, Madoka, declares them heroes and champions.

Determined to rescue the enslaved children of the ravaged *buraku* and incensed by the desperate hunger of the refugees, the characters set out to find the trail of the barbarian raiders responsible for the devastation. The NPCs learn of the presence of the raiders at a nearby hunting lodge, which they took after leaving the corpse-laden field where the barbarians and *samurai* did battle.

Soon after, the players discover the carnage at the Killing Fields has awakened corpse-eating 'demons' that use shallow tunnels to travel underground and attack the unwary. The finery that the demons wear hearkens to ancient days, and the villagers come to the conclusion that these monsters must come from deep tombs built in the days of the old empire.

Thanks to a spy within the village, the barbarians are tipped off about the *jikininki* and by implication the ancient *kofun*. They send word to their employers — greedy relic seekers eager to steal any magic items with-