Into the Woods

By Jason Flowers

Challenge

 The small village of Murasha no Kura lies where Scorpion and Hare lands intersect with the enigmatic Shinomen Mori. This small and inconsequential Hare holding would be entirely forgotten if not for the small amount of taxes it contributes to the Clan each year. Whether the Player Characters are here to collect those taxes, are pursuing a criminal, or for some other reason, they find a village that is in poor condition. It seems as if the upkeep has completely been ignored. The peasants they pass in the street seem tired and apathetic, but a few look upon the PCs with anxious hope.

 The samurai family here is led by Usagi Kyucihi, an aging samurai with a lame right arm. He and his entire family seem slightly nervous at the visiting samurai’s presence. When questioned about the state of the village or their nervousness, he will explain that for the past few months members of the village have been mysteriously disappearing. Once every few weeks, a villager will go missing in the night. Screams can be heard from the nearby Mori, but no one knows whether it is that of those taken, or the thing that has been taking them. Until recently only peasants had been taken, but almost a week ago his son, Yasuhigo, disappeared. Usagi Kyuichi had already sent for help from the Clan, but as of yet no aid has arrived.

Focus

 Usagi Kyuichi tasks the headman, Endo, with showing the Player Characters around the village while they investigate. As they search the village, they learn that there has been no rhyme or reason to the abductions; adults and children have all vanished. Those taken typically live closest to the forest. The night of Yasuhigo’s disappearance he was seen walking alone around the village. Masagaro, a woodcutter, will mention seeing overly large footprints and drag marks leading directly to the tree line after a recent abduction; Obviously from a troll or ogre or something more foul.

 The village is rife with rumors about what is happening. Some say a curse was placed upon Usagi Kyuichi by a maho-tsukai for some offense years ago. Others insist the screams they hear are those of the taken returning to perpetuate their fates. Many agree, if not openly to the samurai, that Usagi Kyuichi let the situation go on too long and only decided to act when his son was taken.

Strike

 Eventually the Samurai will be forced to follow the story of Masagaro into the Shinomen Mori. The PCs will need to navigate the dark forest in search of those who are missing. Inside the Mori, the air is always still and scented with the musty odor of decay. Soon they will discover who, or what, is responsible and learn the fate of those taken. Is it a gang of Forest Killer bandits using the reputation of the Shinomen Mori to cover their slaving? Have the villagers been dragged into the forest to be consumed by a troll, as the footprints seemed to suggest? It may be that a creature more horrific has found its way to Murasha no Kura and is slowly wrenching the people away for its own diabolical plans.