Another Year

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Challenge

 Nestled deep in the Great Wall of the North Mountains is the small lumber village, Otsuma. This village is so remote, that the road to Otsuma is merely a game trail for most of its length. When the Player Characters arrive, the small village is in the thick of a local festival. Otsuma has no permanent samurai presence, so the PCs are welcomed warmly and invited to partake in the celebration by the residents. As the PCs tour the village, they learn of the festival and its cause. Each year the monk Kosai visits Otsuma to provide blessings. His efforts include blessing the children born in the last year, blessing newly married couples, prayers for the village’s dead, and even re-sanctifying the small shrine in Otsuma’s center. Those who have received the monk’s blessings report immediate feelings of joy and peace. In fact, Kosai’s mere presence is enough to provide a feeling of contentment.

 Because of the distance to other villages, this annual visit has become a holiday, something for those of Otsuma to look forward to each year. As the PCs take part in the festival games, dances, and banquets they learn from the villagers that Kosai has been visiting Otsuma every year for as long as anyone can remember. This information is surprising as Kosai appears to be no older than forty, and yet elderly heimin remember his visits from their childhood.

Focus

 While the inhabitants of Otsuma throw themselves into the festival, the PCs begin to notice things that are slightly off-putting about Otuma. There are numerous small patches of dead and dying grass, wilted flowers, and shriveled shrubbery on the village’s edge. The faint and fleeting presence of obscure smells are sudden occurrences throughout Otsuma. Occasionally the sounds of the forest cease as if a predator is nearby. These things on their own mean nothing, but together they draw the attention of the PCs, especially those attuned to the Kami or their own Sixth Sense. The villagers reassure the samurai that while those things may be unusual there is always a mundane explanation for each occurrence.

 Eventually the festival comes to an end, and Kosai says his goodbyes accompanied by his usual promise to return in one year. After the itinerant monk has departed the PCs are encouraged to stay in Otsuma for a few days more, perhaps to conclude the business which brought them here in the first place. However long they stay, the PCs will overhear mention of a villager that has fallen ill.

 The PCs will likely be drawn to this illness due to the earlier oddities observed during the festival and if not, the village healer, Misaki, will approach them. Despite the small size of the village Misaki is a stranger to the samurai, having not been present at any festival celebrations. She will explain that she avoids the festival because it is allowed to occur every year, despite her protests. Each year as the festival concludes some, otherwise healthy, villager becomes ill and does not recover. She has pointed this fact out to the village headman repeatedly, but either they do not see it, or are willing to overlook the loss of one to ensure the prosperity of Otsuma for another year. Misaki begs the samurai to help her save the sick heimin’s life, but whatever sickness they have is beyond even a trained shugenja.

Strike

 The Player Characters must set out into the surrounding mountains in pursuit of Kosai. The monk does not attempt to hide his passing, so the samurai eventually find him. They may find him further down the mountains near another village, or in a set of ruins deep in the forest surrounding Otsuma, or even closer to the peak of the highest nearby mountain. The monk could be a malevolent creature, a yokai, that feeds on the happiness of others, satiating its hunger in the remote villages of Rokugan. It might even be a creature that has no idea of the effect its presence has on those around it. While it could easily be that Kosai is a human practitioner of maho, it is also possible that he is an ancient Tengu that travels the mountains tending to the needs of the Rokugani, all the while unaware that he has been followed for years by the malign yokai that consumes joyous emotions.

 Once Kosai is found, the player characters must determine if there is a way to cure the illness that occurs each year. If the cause is malign, then it will likely be dealt with violently, either physically or spiritually. In the case of the Tengu, it may be that the samurai help rid Kosai of his wicked stalker, thus ensuring that he is able to continue his annual visits to Otsuma. Depending on the monk’s intent, it could be that Misaki’s patient can be cured, but it is likely that the best result achievable is to simply prevent more death in the years to come.