

Arrows From the Woods

**A One Round Low-Rank
Living Rokugan Tournament**

by Robert Hobart

Rumors of bandits and Shadowlands monsters are haunting the Road of Lengthy Commerce between Lion and Unicorn territories. A lowly merchant asks your help to get his caravan safely through the danger zone. For Low-Rank heroes.

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This is a RPGA Network adventure game. A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing the game (or this round of the game), but the actual playing time will be about three hours.

It is a good idea to ask each player to put a name tag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name, race, and gender at the top. This makes it easier for the players to keep track of who is playing which character.

Scoring the game for RPGA points: The RPGA has three ways to score this game. Consult your convention coordinator to determine which method to use:

1. *No-vote scoring:* The players write their names and numbers on the scoring packet grid, you fill in the top of the grid. That is all. No one is rated. This method is used for people who are just playing for fun.
2. *Partial scoring:* The players rate the game master and the scenario on their player voting sheet, and provide personal information, but don't vote for other players. The game master rates the scenario and completes personal and event information, but does not rate the players as a team or vote for players. This method is used when there is no competition, but the convention coordinator wants information as to how the game masters are performing, or the game master wants feedback on his or her own performance.
3. *Voting:* Players and game masters complete the entire packet, including voting for best player. If this method is used, be sure to allow about 15-20 minutes for the players to briefly describe their characters to the other players, and about 5-10 minutes for voting. This method is used when the players want to know who played the best amongst them, or when the adventure is run in tournament format with winners and prizes. Multi-round adventures usually required advancing a smaller number of players than played the first round, so voting is required for multi-round adventures.

When using Voting, rank the players in order of your voting choice while they are completing their forms, so that you are not influenced by their comments on your abilities.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment and weapons their characters are carrying.

Some of the text in this scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in ***bold italics***. It is strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text, instead of reading it aloud, as some of the text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

In addition to the text of the adventure below, you will need to be familiar with the Legend of the Five Rings rulebook.

GM's Information:

This adventure is a Low Rank adventure. This means that only Rank 1 and Rank 2 characters should be allowed to play. This adventure was not written with Rank 3 through 5 characters in mind and cannot anticipate what these characters may bring to the table.

(Low Rank is characters of Ranks 1 or 2, Mid Rank is characters of Ranks 2 or 3, and High Rank is characters of Ranks 3 to 5. There will also be Low-Mid Rank adventures.)

The world of Rokugan is a cross between feudal Japan and China. It is set in an age of honorable samurai, serving their Lords (Daimyos) and Empire. Remember that family names come before personal names. Akodo Toturi is from the Akodo family and his personal name is Toturi.

A note on female designations: If a samurai has the designation of -ko, then the samurai is a female. For example, if you see Samurai-ko, then this denotes a female samurai.

A note on commerce in Rokugan: Samurai are not supposed to care about worldly possessions, especially money. A samurai pays a commoner as if the money is meaningless, a concession to the commoner's silly needs. Between samurai, the exchange of money and merchandise is an exchange of "gifts."

Background

This scenario takes place on the Road of Lengthy Commerce (Michi no Nagai Shogyo) between Lion and Unicorn lands. Recently, several merchant caravans on that route have been attacked, and there are rumors that Shadowlands creatures are responsible for the trouble. The PCs meet a merchant who is anxious for guards to protect him on the trip.

If the PCs accompany the merchant, they will have an opportunity to discover the truth behind the rumors. The initial problem was, indeed, caused by Shadowlands creatures – namely, a pair of wandering ogres who have settled in the region. However, an enterprising gang of bandits, led by a former Kuni, have decided to capitalize on the trouble by impersonating a band of Shadowlands monsters, counting on the fear created by their masquerade to magnify their numbers. These "bakemono bandits" are quickly getting rich off the plunder of their exploits, and travel on the Road of Lengthy Commerce is faltering as commoners and

samurai alike take alarm. It will be up to the PCs to deal with the problem.

PC Introduction

It is a pleasant autumn afternoon in the City of the Rich Frog, an independent town that lies between the territories of the Lion and Unicorn clans. The golden light of Lady Sun dances on leaves that are just starting to turn from green. Fate and chance have brought you together at this prosperous township. A few miles to the east is Shiro Ikoma, home to the famous Ikoma bards who keep the Empire's histories. But here, beyond the Lion border, the people are uneasy; there are rumors of Shadowlands creatures raiding the great road which leads northwest toward Unicorn lands: Michi no Nagai Shogyo, the Road of Lengthy Commerce. Merchant caravans are normally frequent on this road, but now they are rare, most merchants being unwilling to brave a possible encounter with the minions of the Dark One. As you gather in the common room of the Red Branch Inn, you hear many tales and rumors flying of exactly what dangers threaten the road.

People in the Red Branch Inn

The Inn is crowded, with commoners crowded around several large trestles while samurai and other nobles sit at smaller, higher quality tables. Besides the general crowd and the Inn's workers, there are several people here who may be of interest to the PCs:

Various Lion Bushi are here, pausing to eat and drink on their way from one assignment to another. The Lion have increased their presence in the region recently, as part of their general higher level of alertness in recent months. A mixture of Matsu, Akodo, and Ikoma, these bushi are instinctively belligerent to anyone who is not of their own Clan (especially Cranes, Scorpions, and Unicorns) but are not drunk enough to provoke any fights. They generally dismiss the stories of Shadowlands creatures, suggesting instead that "fearful merchants" have attributed supernatural properties to simple bandits. Some of them remark that if the threatened lands were under Lion rule, they would be safe. "That's what comes of handing territory over to those gaijin Unicorn imposters."

Several Ronin are also present, drinking and eating quietly and shaking a few dice behind hunched shoulders. Some of them have already hired on with Nervous the merchant, while the rest are on their way to some other part of the Empire. They defer sullenly to

any true samurai in the place, but will speak in a semi-friendly manner to any fellow Ronin in the place.

Kiokure, a commoner merchant (whose name means "Nervous"), is seated at a table with two fellow merchants and a silk-maker with whom he is negotiating goods for the caravan he hopes to lead up the road tomorrow. A thin, anxious-looking man, Kiokure gives a good impression of what a mouse might be if turned into a human. A vassal of the famed Yasuki Taka, Nervous wears the Yasuki School mon on his simple kimono, and has cultivated a simpering, toadying mannerism which allows him to manipulate the samurai around him without their realizing it. After finishing his business with his fellow merchants, and toasting the deal with sake, he spends some time sizing up the PCs before approaching them (see Nervous Approaches, below).

Togashi Shiina, a wandering Ise Zumi, eats a simple meal of rice and pickled vegetables, then entertains the commoners with a startling display of sleight-of-hand and juggling. Always smiling and chuckling, he treats commoners and samurai with equal disinterested good humor. If he is approached in a friendly manner, he will be happy to talk and share rumors and tales about the troubles on the Road of Lengthy Commerce, although he tends to describe things in a maddeningly elliptical manner. He can also guide the PCs to the peasant who claims to have witnessed a caravan attack (see "Rumors and Tales" below). Anyone who treats Shiina rudely or belligerently, however, soon find themselves pinned with a jujitsu hold – Shiina is a Rank 4 Ise Zumi, and does not suffer insults from anyone.

Kadokawa and Mizuko, two monks of Amaterasu, are traveling from their shrine in Unicorn lands to the valley of the minor Centipede Clan, to pay their respects to the Clan which follows Amaterasu Herself. They know almost all the stories about what is happening on the Road of Lengthy Commerce, and will happily share their information with anyone who speaks with them politely.

Ikoma Yuji, an Ikoma bard, has stopped in the Inn on his way back to Shiro Ikoma after recording the personal history of a Matsu warrior named Hiro. He has no personal knowledge of what is happening on the Road of Lengthy Commerce, but knows lots of rumors and is happy to share them in exchange for an interesting tale or two from the PCs. Unlike the other Lions in the Inn, he will be friendly to those from other Clans, although Cranes still get only basic courtesy from him.

Rumors and Tales

By speaking with the people in the Inn, the PCs can learn some or all of the following information on the troubles plaguing the Road of Lengthy Commerce. The exact manner in which this information is divulged will depend on who is telling the tale, of course, so the GM should adjust accordingly.

- Five caravans have been destroyed in the last three months, though whether by bandits or Shadowlands is uncertain. There were no survivors from any of the caravans.
- There have also been reports of missing livestock and villagers vanishing from the woods and fields.
- A village along the route was destroyed. This is pure rumor as far as most people are concerned, but the two Monks of Amaterasu can confirm it as fact, since they traveled through the stricken village themselves.
- The other villages along the road live in fear, and some have been hiring ronin to protect them from whatever the danger is.
- One drunken peasant will claim to have witnessed the destruction of one of the caravans. “I saw it! It was a terrible creature, ten feet tall, with little goblins capering around it!” He can give no concrete details, since he ran as soon as he realized what he was seeing.
- A Kuni witch-hunter, Kuni Moriya, looked into the trouble last month, but he vanished. The monsters must have eaten him!
- The real cause of the problem is a curse from some Maho-Tsukai.
- The real cause of the problem is the Unicorn Clan, which is raiding commerce along the road to try and hurt the Lion Clan.
- The real cause of the problem is the Lion Clan, which is raiding commerce on the road to try and hurt the Unicorn Clan.
- The real cause of the problem is the Scorpion Clan, which is raiding commerce on the road to try and sow anger between the Lion and Unicorn Clans.

Nervous Approaches

While you are discussing the matter with the various guests at the inn, you notice that the Yasuki merchant has been watching you attentively. Finally he rises and approaches your table, bowing and scraping in a supplicating manner. “Greetings, great and noble samurai. I am called Kiokure. Could I trouble you for a few brief moments of your valuable time?”

Kiokure wants the PCs to accompany his caravan on a trip up the Road of Lengthy Commerce to Unicorn lands, thereby protecting him from the Shadowlands evils he fears to be lurking along the route. Of course, he couches this in the humblest of terms, speaking unctuously of the great honor the mighty samurai would do him if they would accompany his lowly, miserable convoy. He knows better than to suggest anything as crass as monetary payment (unless the PCs are ronin, see below), instead offering the suggestion that the samurai PCs could serve the Empire by defeating the Shadowlands villains, should they appear. “My master, Yasuki Taka, would be deeply in your debt if you could find it in your generous hearts to assist this lowly person,” he murmurs.

Nervous has already hired some ronin guards, but he knows brave samurai would be better than ronin any day. If any PCs are themselves ronin, he approaches them privately later and suggests that “tough ronin are always more reliable than samurai, but one has to flatter those nobles to get them to help,” or some such, and offers to hire them for 2 koku each.

The PCs may not like this sniveling commoner merchant – merchants are the lowest of the heimin class, after all, who make nothing for themselves but merely resell the creations of others. On the other hand, if the Shadowlands are involved, any honorable member of the noble classes has an obligation to investigate. Also, since the threatened lands lie between the Lion and Unicorn, there is no one to care for the peasants who are endangered by this evil. Ultimately, the PCs should choose (however reluctantly) to help the merchant – after all, if they say no, there’s no adventure!

A Morning Departure

Assuming the PCs agree to accompany Kiokure’s caravan, they find four ox-drawn wagons gathering in front of the Inn the next morning. Besides Nervous himself, there are a dozen other heimin in the caravan – servants, drivers for the wagons, and so forth – and two Ronin, Goro and Izumi. The ronin ride ponies, while the rest of them ride on the wagons. Nervous will hire ponies for any PCs who lack steeds of their own (he does not expect any PCs to lose dignity by sharing wagons with commoners, but if they prefer to do so he will not argue).

Typically, the two ronin will ride in front of the caravan, scouting for danger, while the four wagons follow in single file. The PCs can ride where they wish, although the ronin (especially Goro) will be

somewhat insulted if the PCs insist on riding up front with them. (“What? Only a real samurai can scout, is that it?”)

The caravan’s cargo (if the PCs ask or look for themselves) includes silks and spices from the Mantis Isles, artwork from Crane lands, metal ingots (iron, copper, silver and gold), and other items which are comparatively rare in Unicorn lands. There is nothing improper or illegal in the cargo – Kiokure is a legitimate merchant.

The commoners will, of course, be extremely deferential to the PCs, speaking only when spoken to, offering help with anything the PCs might need, and so forth. The two ronin will be slightly more outspoken – as pseudo-members of the samurai caste they can get away with a great deal more than mere heimin – but will try to avoid provoking duels. They will be friendlier to fellow ronin, of course, than to Clan PCs.

Goro: This fellow is a large, burly man, dirty and unshaven, full of bravado and noise. He insists loudly that if any Shadowlands monsters appear, he’ll deal with them easily enough. He tends to be especially rude to Scorpions and Cranes, but seems cautious around Crabs. He is a former Crab himself, which the PCs can easily guess from his size, manners, and knowledge of the Shadowlands. He is also one of the bandits, planted with the caravan to help with the planned ambush up the road. Goro is actually quite good at concealing his real motives, and the PCs are unlikely to realize his true nature unless they question him on specific themes (such as why he hired on with the caravan, or whether bandits could be behind the problems) and make contested Perception rolls against his Awareness+Acting. Goro is supposed to stay with the caravan until the ambush, no matter what, so if any of the PCs are sufficiently insulted by his oft-crude behavior to challenge him, he backs down and grumbly apologizes.

Izumi: Smaller and cleaner than Goro, this woman has a gloomy, mournful air about her, and derives a dark amusement from making mordant comments on the pain and injustice which fills the universe. Having lost all faith in bushido, the Empire, the Fortunes, and the Celestial Wheel, she is merely trying to get through life as best she can with the skills available to her. Her original clan is unguessable, and she treats all the PCs with the same gloomy disdain. Fundamentally, Izumi is a coward, and feels no particular shame at running away to save her life. If a PC actually gets angry enough with her manners to challenge her, she agrees to a fight the next morning, then disappears that night.

The First Day’s Journey

As the caravan departs the city, they encounter a large party of mounted Lion samurai, who insist on carefully checking their travel papers before letting them travel on. Technically the Lions have no jurisdiction here (this is independent land), but they are feeling aggressive and will not take kindly to PCs who point this out. Although it may be assumed that the PCs have their own travel papers (especially if any of them are Emerald Magistrates), it will not be a problem in any event – Kiokure has travel papers for his caravan and “anyone accompanying,” signed by the provincial governors of the neighboring Lion and Unicorn territories. The Lion bushi look the papers over, scowling, and wave the caravan to proceed.

If any PCs ask the Lions about the rumors of trouble on the Road of Lengthy Commerce, they are dismissive. “Peasant tale-telling,” they snort. If asked what they are doing in these lands outside their borders, the Lions glare (especially if the interrogator is a Crane or Scorpion) and bark, “None of your business!”

Once the Lion are left behind, the day’s journey passes more-or-less uneventfully as the caravan winds through low hills and clumps of forest. The normal every-couple-of-mile villages which fill the settled lands of Rokugan, are absent here – this is unclaimed land, without the stability and protection of a Clan. For much of the trip the only sounds to be heard are the wind and the calls of birds and animals. Nervous and his fellow heimin watch the peaceful landscape carefully, jumping whenever they hear a birdcall. The two ronin are more relaxed, especially Goro, who whistles to himself and munches on rice-balls. Izumi prefers to comment on how everyone could be killed without warning in this empty wilderness. “An ideal place for an ambush,” she glooms...

In mid-afternoon the caravan finally comes to a place of civilization – an isolated village, Wabishii. The place is fairly large, with perhaps 200 inhabitants, and includes a high-quality roadside inn (the House of the Golden Leaf) which normally feeds off the traffic on the Road of Lengthy Commerce. Currently the village is experiencing something of an economic downturn, due to the lack of traffic. Nervous will want to halt the caravan here, even though it is still some hours until dark, since staying in the village is safer than camping in the wilderness. He arranges housing for everyone at the House of the Golden Leaf, and parks the wagons at the nearby stables.

The commoners in Wabishii Village know little more than those in the City of the Rich Frog, although they

can confirm that the next village, Boubi, has hired ronin to protect itself. One wizened old man, however, claims to have seen two monstrous creatures, “as tall as trees,” crossing the hills to the west. The other villagers dismiss the old man as senile, but it is plain that they half-believe his tale. If the PCs question him carefully, they can make Intelligence+Shadowlands Lore rolls to deduce that he is describing ogres.

The only other samurai in the village are a trio of Otaku Battle Maidens who have stopped at the Inn for the night. The three sit together, apart from anyone else at the Inn, and quickly get drunk on sake and shochu.

The Otaku: Kino, Asayumi, and Ai are sharing a journey across the Empire, indulging the wander-lust which besets so many Unicorns. They have traveled cross-country to get here, and know nothing of the problems on the Road of Lengthy Commerce. The three are much alike in appearance, being short, compact, and tough, with close-cropped hair and features that might be pretty if they were not roughened by outdoor life. All three are loud and brusque, although their exact mannerisms differ – Kino is a humorist, fond of jokes, while Asayumi favors insults and boasting, and Ai enjoys reciting Unicorn travel poetry loudly and at length. Both Kino and Asayumi will pick on one of the male PCs (preferably a non-Unicorn, and most especially preferring someone from a Clan with more traditional notions on gender roles, such as the Crab or Scorpion) and begin insulting him, drawing unfavorable comparisons with their own skills, deriding his Clan, and so forth. The commoners in the room lower their eyes and avoid watching the uncouth spectacle (as is proper).

It is up to the PCs how they respond to this problem. If they choose to ignore it (the most “correct” route from an etiquette standpoint) the Otaku get more and more belligerent and ill-mannered, with a drunken Asayumi finally getting up and stumbling over to bump into the chosen victim, spilling her drink on him. “You going to do anything about that, you MAN?” she bellows in his face. If the PC still refuses to rise to the bait, she staggers back to her table, loudly calling him a coward.

Obviously, the drunken Otaku are spoiling for a fight. They would prefer a straightforward drunken brawl where everyone is equally embarrassed and guilty, but will also accept a challenge to a duel. In that case Asayumi will take the challenge, staggering out of the Inn to face her opponent on the street. Due to her drunken state she is at a +5 penalty to all her TN. She will attempt to make the Awareness+Iaijutsu roll to read her opponent’s rings and, if she feels herself outmatched, mutters, “You have defeated me,” before passing out in the street. Otherwise she will do her best to fight the

duel, although not to the death – like any impromptu duel fought without sanction of a daimyo, this is a battle to first blood only.

If the PCs manage to avoid fighting the Otaku, the three drunken women eventually stumble off to their rooms, grumbling about cowards and weaklings.

Three Otaku (Kino, Asayumi, and Ai)

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 2 Reflexes 3
EARTH 3	WATER 2 Strength 3
VOID 2 (Asayumi has Void 3)	

School/Rank: Otaku Battle Maiden 1

(Asayumi is rank 2)

Honor/Glory: 2.5/1.8

TN to be Hit: 15, 20 with Light Armor

Skills: Battle 1, Defense 1, Horse Archery 2, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 1 (Asayumi is Iaijutsu 2), Kenjutsu 3, Poetry 1 (Ai is Poetry 2)

Advantages/Disadvantages: Kino has Quick, Asayumi has Strength of the Earth (rank 2), and Ai has Precise Memory/All three have Brash.

Equipment: Daisho, Light Armor

The Second Day’s Journey

From Wabishii Village, the caravan heads northwest toward a thick belt of forest. The weather is still clear in the morning, but as the day wears on, clouds begin to fill the sky, and the temperature drops slightly. The caravan reaches the forest a little after midday, and here Kiokure orders a halt while he rummages through his wagon for a moment and then produces a small flute. He stands upright on the wagon and plays a short, simple tune on the flute, repeating it several times. The other commoners on the caravan seem unsurprised by this, although the two ronin goggle in bewilderment.

If the PCs ask, Nervous will be happy to explain his actions. He has summoned those who control the forest, to bargain for safe passage. And indeed, in short order a half-dozen ratling bushi emerge from the woods, chittering and eyeing the humans suspiciously. These are the Clever Eyes tribe, a group of ratlings who have migrated from their ancestral home in the Shadowlands to safer territories here. Since no Clan claims these territories, the Clever Eyes have managed to establish de facto control over this forest. Any PC who rolls Intelligence+Commerce at TN 25 remembers hearing vague stories about ratlings charging tolls for those who take the Road of Lengthy Commerce.

Neither the Lion nor the Unicorn have yet bothered to deal with the problem.

Kiokure negotiates with the ratlings in their own tongue (any PC with the Nezumi Speech skill can understand what they are saying), offering various shiny rocks and gewgaws in exchange for safe escort through the forest. The ratlings drive a hard bargain. Eventually, assuming the PCs do not interrupt, they agree to terms, and an “escort” of four ratlings accompanies the caravan for the four hours it takes to traverse the forest belt. The creatures move around constantly, sniffing, getting into places they shouldn’t, and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

If the PCs react violently to the ratlings, the creatures are offended and begin actively harassing the caravan: throwing stones, shooting arrows from hiding, trying to panic the ponies, and so forth. They are inherently cowards and will not actually attack the caravan directly, but the trip through the forest will be much more painful and aggravating with the ratlings as enemies.

Boubi, the Second Village

This is a smaller village than the previous one, and the citizens are considerably more anxious and frightened. There is an Inn, but it is a much simpler and lower class establishment than the one in the last village (it doesn’t even have a name). As the caravan rolls into the town, several armed men step forward to bar the road. Behind them, peasants watch the proceedings anxiously.

These men are ronin who have been hired to defend the village. They are cautious until they can confirm that the caravan is genuine and not a bandit trick. Once they are sure there is no threat, the ronin become much more friendly, and ask Goro, Izumi, and the PCs about conditions on the road. The village headman and the innkeeper emerge from their dwellings to welcome the caravan, while peasants crowd around asking questions. Even as the caravan pulls in at the Inn, the lowering clouds finally burst open, and rain begins to cataract down. Merchants, peasants, and ronin all flee indoors.

The Inn currently has no guests except the ronin, who are staying there free of charge in exchange for guarding the town. The innkeeper is of course delighted to have the caravan staying here – he has been desperately short of business in the last few weeks. While the PCs and merchants eat dinner, the town’s ronin soon start a dice game in the corner, with Goro and Izumi joining in. They will invite any ronin PCs to join the game as well. Samurai PCs can join the game if they want, but playing dice is a rather inglorious activity...

The following information is available from the five ronin and the villagers:

- Kuni Moriya came through this village last month. He did not speak much, but seemed to think he was on the trail of something important.
- Two villagers have disappeared in the last three months: a farmer who vanished while chopping wood, and a boy who disappeared while visiting the outhouse at night. There were large footprints in the mud where the boy disappeared.
- No one has actually seen what is threatening the village, but some claim to have heard an inhuman bellowing late at night.
- There has been no word from the next village, Yosui, in over two months. A week ago a pair of monks came through the village and reported that Yosui was destroyed. The ronin have since visited Yosui and confirmed that it was wiped out.
- If the PCs ask the ronin about conditions in Yosui Village, they will describe it accurately (Takuhiro and Oyami were the ones who scouted it). Maeda assumed from this evidence that he was dealing with either a bandit gang, or a mix of ogres and goblins.
- The village has no money to pay the ronin, and is instead supporting them with food and lodging. At least some of the ronin (notably Maeda himself) hope to make this a permanent arrangement.

The ronin: These five individuals have been brought together here by chance, but have formed a small, self-sufficient military unit. They patrol the village throughout the day; at night, a single one walks around the perimeter, watching for danger. Tonight, with the rain slashing down in a torrent, there is much good-natured grumbling and complaining as they trade off their shifts.

Maeda:

The oldest of the ronin, and their de facto leader, this stoic, weary-looking man speaks quietly, his eyes shadowed by the memory of a dishonor he will not discuss. Maeda is a former Lion, although he will never admit this to anyone. He is polite to the PCs and defers to them whenever possible.

FIRE 3	AIR 2
	Reflexes 3
EARTH 3	WATER 3
VOID 3	

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 2

Honor/Glory: 3.4/0.8

TN to be Hit: 20 (Light Armor)

Skills: Archery 2, Bard 1, Battle 1, Defense 2, Etiquette 1, History 2, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Law 1, Tea Ceremony 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Balance, Higher Purpose (Restore his Honor)/Social Disadvantage (Ronin)

Equipment: Daisho, Light Armor, Bow and Arrows

Takuhito:

A much younger man than Maeda, Takuhito is a former Phoenix who lost the shugenja he was protecting. He now serves as Maeda's deputy, a sort of "karo" who keeps the other ronin in line. Normally friendly and cheerful, he turns sullen and mean around Scorpions (he believes a Scorpion poisoned the Isawa shugenja he guarded in his Phoenix days). He will not actually provoke a fight with a Scorpion PC (Maeda will restrain him anytime he is provoked) but will treat them as rudely as he can short of that.

FIRE 3 Intelligence 4	AIR 2 Reflexes 3
EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 3	

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 1

Honor/Glory: 2.3/0.6

TN to be Hit: 20 (Light Armor)

Skills: Archery 1, Battle 1, Defense 2, Etiquette 1, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 3, Lore (Shugenja) 1, Medicine 2, Meditation 1, Naginata 1, Shintao 2, Sincerity 1, Tea Ceremony 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Quick/Social Disadvantage (Ronin), Bad Reputation (Hates Scorpions).

Equipment: Daisho, Light Armor, Naginata

Oyami:

This pudgy, shaggy-haired, jovial woman is a former Mirumoto, although that will be impossible to tell unless she is in a fight. She jokes and wisecracks frequently, and is an outrageous cheat at dice. Oyami lives life from day to day, seizing whatever opportunities she finds. She respects Maeda, but is completely irreverent to everyone and everything else. She and Izumi get into a drinking contest as the evening progresses, with the gloomy Izumi somehow coming out victorious.

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 3 Reflexes 4
EARTH 3	WATER 2 Strength 3
VOID 3	

School/Rank: Mirumoto Bushi 2

Honor/Glory: 1.7/0.5

TN to be Hit: 30 (Light Armor, Daisho technique)

Skills: Archery 1, Athletics 1, Bard 1, Battle 1, Defense 2, Gambling 2, Hunting 1, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Lore (Shugenja) 1, Meditation 1, Yarijutsu 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Ambidextrous, Large, Strength of the Earth (rank 1)/Chemical Dependency (sake), Social Disadvantage (Ronin).

Equipment: Daisho, Light Armor, two sets of dice (one loaded)

Satoru:

This thin, dirty, ill-mannered man is actually a former Crane who has fallen very far indeed. Bitter and glum, speaking seldom and drinking often, he holds a deep grudge against his former Clan, and will not be afraid of a duel – indeed, he may try to provoke one, preferably a lethal one. He obeys Maeda out of practicality – he knows someone has to command, and Maeda is best suited to the task – but does not particularly respect the older man. He and Takuhito frequently get into quarrels about his attitude.

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 3 Reflexes 4
EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 2	

School/Rank: Kakita Duelist 1

Honor/Glory: 1.3/0.4

TN to be Hit: 25 (Light Armor)

Skills: Archery 1, Athletics 1, Battle 1, Defense 1, Etiquette 1, Gambling 1, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu 2, Shintao 1, Sincerity 1, Stealth 1

Advantages/Disadvantages: Social Disadvantage (Ronin), Compulsion (hates his former Clan)

Equipment: Daisho, Light Armor, Bow and Arrows

Tsuruaka:

The dirtiest and most poorly mannered of the ronin, this fellow is actually a peasant who stole his swords from a battlefield; the light armor he wears is a conglomerate of bits and pieces salvaged from a dozen battles. He is rude and disrespectful to all members of the samurai caste (including other ronin), but gets along well with the peasants, and often helps them with work around the village. If any PCs challenge him, he simply runs away – he has no sense of shame or bushido, and is perfectly willing to make a fool of himself in order to survive. On the other hand, if anyone threatens the peasants Tsuruaka will suddenly become fierce and angry, defending them against all comers.

FIRE 2 Agility 3	AIR 2 Reflexes 3
EARTH 3	WATER 2 Strength 3
VOID 2	

School/Rank: None (true ronin)

Honor/Glory: 0.4/0.2

TN to be Hit: 15

Skills: Athletics 2, Craft (farmer) 2, Defense 1, Gambling 2, Herbalism 1, Hunting 2, Kenjutsu 2, Stealth 3, Yarijutsu 2

Advantages/Disadvantages: Luck (rank 1), Quick Healer, Higher Purpose (protect fellow peasants)/Coward (moderate), Dark Secret (really a peasant), Social Disadvantage (Ronin).

Equipment: Daisho (poor quality), Yari

The Incident

The storm worsens as the evening progresses, dark clouds blotting out the moon and wind and thunder roaring furiously. Osano-Wo, the Fortune of Thunder, is angry. The PCs all find themselves giving thanks for being indoors. Not until the early morning does the rain subside to a soft drizzle.

The ronin patrol schedule for the night is Oyami, then Satoru, then Tsuruaka. They are good-natured about the misery they face – “we have to earn our keep.”

The next morning, however, something is wrong: Tsuruaka does not return from his patrol. Maeda is organizing the other ronin for a search when a wail of horror and grief rings through the village.

Tsurauka's body lies near the pen that houses the village's draft oxen; one side of the pen has been smashed down, and one of the great beasts is missing. Tsurauka's body itself is crushed as though by a mighty blow, and lies in a puddle of bloody water. The surviving oxen are anxious and wild-eyed, shifting their hoofs in the thick mud and lowing angrily.

The other ronin gather around Tsurauka's body, silent and grim, waiting for the village's eta family to arrive and dispose of the corpse. There is no sign of the missing ox. The torrential rains have washed away any tracks, but the PCs can hazard a guess (with Intelligence+Shadowlands Lore rolls, TN 20) that this was the work of ogres. If any of the PCs have the ability to sense Shadowlands Taint (e.g. Kuni Witch Hunters, Moto bushi, etc.), there is a very faint residual of it here.

The surviving ronin are clearly spooked by this incident. Maeda orders the construction of a ditch and palisade around the village, and the terrified peasants quickly set to work. Nervous is frightened by the incident, but relieved that the attack struck at the locals rather than at his caravan, and decides to move on at

once. “If these creatures, or bandits, or whatever they are have decided to hunt here, better to be far away.”

Yasui, the Third Village

It is early afternoon, and the last of the clouds are finally clearing from the sky, when you come in sight of the next village. Just as the rumors said, the village has been destroyed; the buildings are wrecked, some of them burned to the ground, and the remains of long-rotted corpses lie in the grass. Black, foul-looking arrows stick out from some of the shattered structures. The place is silent and still, the only sound a distant warbling of a bird.

The village was actually destroyed by the bandits, with the goal of spreading the rumors that they are exploiting. If the PCs can detect Taint, they find there is none in the village. If the PCs examine the arrows, they appear (Intelligence+Shadowlands Lore, TN 15) to be of goblin make; however, if the PCs roll TN 25 or better they realize the workmanship on the arrows is a little too good to be goblin make. Goro, on the other hand, will insist that these are clearly goblin arrows, and begins scouting further ahead of the caravan, apparently eager to confront the Shadowlands threat. This is an act, of course – he is setting up for the ambush which lies ahead – but the PCs will have to ask about Goro's motives and make contested Awareness rolls against his Awareness+Acting to discern his real motives.

The Ambush

A few miles past the third village, the caravan enters a shallow valley between two low hills covered in scrubby forest. Ahead of them, about fifty yards away (two rounds of movement on foot, one round on horseback), the road climbs over a low ridgeline crested with larger, thicker trees. Here, the bandits spring their ambush. Read the following to the players:

Suddenly you hear a bellowing roar, and birds spring up from the trees in startled clouds. A series of crashing footsteps follow close on the bestial howl, and you see a huge, bipedal form crest the ridge ahead of you, standing squarely astride the road. As it waves its huge arms, one brandishing a gigantic club, you can see smaller, dark forms dancing and gesturing in the trees to either side.

Goro the ronin is riding well ahead of the caravan, and at the sight of the ogre he draws his sword and charges with a shout. But to your horror, a single ponderous blow from the ogre swipes Goro from the back of his pony; he tumbles into the grass and lies still. At that, Izumi shrugs and wheels her

own mount around, galloping for the rear as fast as the animal can run. Some of the merchants join her, shouting in terror.

The “ogre” is actually a construct made from cloth stretched over a wooden frame, the sound effects supplied by the bandit’s shugenja leader, Saishi (“Clever”). Goro’s “death” is playacting, of course, but the PCs will have to specifically ask and roll Perception against Goro’s Awareness+Acting to realize he is faking. The false ogre is designed to panic and disrupt the caravan, allowing them to be slaughtered at ease. The bandits will attack anyone who doesn’t flee immediately, using archery by preference.

There are a total of ten normal bandits: four hiding in the brush to either side of the roadway, four more disguised as goblins and capering on either side of the false ogre, and two behind the ogre itself, pushing it forward and manipulating its limbs. Saishi is also hiding near the ogre, waiting to unleash his magic on any especially dangerous foes. The four “goblins” will begin firing arrows immediately, preferentially targeting anyone advancing toward them. The archers hiding to either side of the road (who have not bothered to disguise themselves as goblins) will wait until the PCs decide whether or not to charge the ogre, then open fire on whoever stays behind at the caravan. If the PCs specifically ask whether anyone is in the trees to either side of the road, they can roll Perception+Battle at TN 25 to spot the hidden archers.

Goro will “play dead” until he sees an opportunity to attack a PC by surprise, or until the PCs realize the deception (in which case he will leap up and attack the nearest foe). If the PCs specifically ask about Goro’s condition, they can roll Perception+Medicine at TN 15 to notice that he has no visible injuries.

Once the PCs advance at least halfway toward the waiting “ogre,” they can roll Perception (+Shadowlands Lore, if they have it) at TN 20 to realize it is fake. The TN drops to 10 once they reach the ridgeline.

The bandits are not fanatical, nor are they particularly loyal to Saishi. Badly injured bandits (those reduced to –3 dice or lower) will try to dodge out of the fighting, and if Saishi and six or more of the bandits are disabled the entire group will attempt to flee. They have ponies tied up in the trees about a hundred yards away; if the PCs pursue them toward their mounts, use contested Stamina+Athletics rolls to determine whether the bandits can outdistance them and make their escape. Badly injured bandits who cannot escape will surrender, hoping for mercy; Saishi and Goro will not, since they know they can expect only death.

Normal Bandits (10 total)

FIRE 2	AIR 1
	Reflexes 2
EARTH 2	WATER 2
VOID 1	

School/Rank: None

Honor/Glory: 0/0

TN to be Hit: 15 (Light Armor)

Skills: Archery 1, Defense 1, Kenjutsu 2, Stealth 2

Advantages/Disadvantages: None

Equipment: Poor-quality Katana (2k2), average quality bow and arrows, light armor

Goro, traitorous ronin

FIRE 2	AIR 2
Agility 3	Reflexes 3
EARTH 3	WATER 3
VOID 2	

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 1

Honor/Glory: 0.4/0.3

TN to be Hit: 20 (Light Armor)

Skills: Acting 2, Defense 1, Hand-to-hand (kubo) 1, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Shadowlands) 2, Stealth 1, Tetsubo 2

Advantages/Disadvantages: Large, Strength of the Earth (rank 2)/Social Disadvantage (Ronin), Brash

Equipment: Daisho, Light Armor

Saishi (“Clever”),

ex-Kuni shugenja, Bandit Leader

FIRE 2	AIR 3
Intelligence 3	
EARTH 4	WATER 3
VOID 2	

School/Rank: Kuni shugenja 2

Honor/Glory: 0.2/0.4

TN to be Hit: 20 (Light Armor)

Skills: Calligraphy 1, Defense 2, Hand-to-hand (kubo) 2, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Shadowlands) 3, Stealth 2, Tetsubo 3

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, (Earth) Earth’s Stagnation, Force of Will, Jade Strike, Tetsubo of Earth (innate), (Water) Path to Inner Peace, Sympathetic Energies, (Fire) Fist of Osano-Wo, Fury of Osano-Wo

(innate), Katana of Fire, (Air) Tempest of Air, Wind's Distractions.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Innate Abilities (Tetsubo of Earth, Fury of Osano-Wo), Strength of the Earth (rank 1)/Social Disadvantage (Ronin), Bad Reputation (failed to protect his students)

Equipment: Scroll satchel, Wakizashi, Light Armor

Aftermath

Once the PCs have defeated the bandits, they can interrogate any captured survivors. The bandits will readily admit their deception, and explain that they have been active on the Road of Lengthy Commerce for about two months. They blame Saishi for the massacre of Yasui Village ("It was all his idea, honorable samurai! We didn't want to do it, but he made us!") They then confess to destroying all five of the caravans that have been lost. They deny, however, any involvement in the random disappearances and deaths which have afflicted the villages along the road. They also deny any knowledge of the fate of the witch-hunter Kuni Moriya.

If any PCs are crass enough to search the bandits for wealth, they can recover a total of 4 koku worth of coins, mostly silver (bu) and copper (zeni). Of course, they will not be able to find most of this unless they search dead bodies, thereby making themselves unclean. Similarly, Saishi's scrolls can only be recovered from his dead body. Any PC rolling Intelligence+Law at TN 15 knows that, since Saishi is a Crab ronin, his scrolls really belong to the Crab Clan. A PC who chooses to keep the scrolls loses 2 points of Honor, and any other PC aware of this act who fails to stop it loses 1 point of Honor.

Any PC who examines Saishi's body can roll Intelligence+Lore (Crab Clan) or Lore (Shugenja) at TN 25 to recognize him as a Kuni shugenja who was exiled from the Crab for failing to protect his students from a marauding oni.

The bandits' headquarters, a camp in the midst of sheltering woods, is about a mile north of the Road of Lengthy Commerce. Any prisoners can lead the PCs to the camp, or the PCs can track them there by rolling Perception+Hunting at TN 25. The camp contains spare weapons and supplies (including the make-up which the bandits use to disguise themselves as goblins) but little of the loot from the previous caravans. If the PCs question their prisoners about the loot, they identify a merchant named Yamada in the next village, Kofuku, as the fence who sells what they capture.

The Journey Resumes

Kiokure survives the ambush, hiding under a wagon during the battle. Afterward, he collects those of his fellow merchants who survived and didn't run – in total, seven of the dozen who started the trip – and gets the caravan rolling again. Izumi is not seen again, and

Nervous, furious with her cowardice, is unwilling to search for her. "She chose her path," he mutters, "let her follow it." The next village is some distance away, and the caravan must camp in the open tonight – which makes the heimin more than a little frightened, after today's terrifying experience. However, the night passes without incident.

Kiokure is deeply and effusively grateful to the PCs for saving his life and his caravan. He intersperses his praises with muttered imprecations against the two ronin who betrayed him, and corresponding satisfaction with any ronin PCs who stayed loyal – he will reward such stalwarts with an additional 1 koku each.

The next day, the weather is again fair and pleasant. Midway through the day, any PC making a Perception+Hunting roll at TN 25 notices the freshly gnawed bones of an ox in the long grass near the road. There is very faint Taint clinging to the bones, and an Intelligence+Shadowlands Lore roll at TN 30 identifies the bite patterns as matching ogres.

Kofuku, The Fourth Village

The caravan reaches Kofuku Village in late afternoon of the fourth day of the journey. They are met at the edge of the village by several doshin (armed peasants who protect their village in the absence of samurai) who bow fearfully before the armed PCs.

The border of Unicorn Lands is close, and Kofuku Village is quite large and prosperous, with a population of almost three hundred. There are two Inns, both of good quality, along with a geisha house and a merchant's shop. The villagers are pleasantly surprised to see a merchant caravan reach them safely, and crowd around asking questions of the merchants. They will be far more polite and deferential to samurai PCs, of course.

Once the villagers learn of the defeat of the "bakemono bandits," they throw an impromptu celebration, with the two innkeepers bringing out barrels of sake to enliven the proceedings. If any PCs mention their suspicions that ogres are still on the loose, it throws a bit of a damper on the party, but the villagers drink, sing, and dance late into the evening regardless. Any captive bandits whom the PCs brought along are subjected to kicks, taunts, and general humiliation.

The local shop-owning merchant, Yamada, is of course the fence for the bandits. If the PCs do not seek him out immediately, he flees the village with all the wealth he can carry. Confronted, he quickly breaks – he is a soft, plump little man, quite lacking in nerve or courage – and confesses his crimes. The villagers are shocked to learn of such a criminal in their midst, and

the headman hands Yamada over to the PCs without question.

Nervous is cheerful and relaxed this evening, believing his gamble has paid off. The trip is almost over, he explains – tomorrow the caravan will cross the ferry on Arasoizuki (Contentious) River, a branch of the Sleeping River, and reach Unicorn lands.

If the PCs ask, Kuni Moriya never made it to this village.

The River Crossing

The fifth day is cloudy and cool, but Nervous and his fellow merchants are cheerful as they ride out of Kofuku Village. Their danger, however, is not over. The ogres have been watching the caravan with greedy eyes, sensing weakness in the wake of the battle with the bandits. Now they are lying in wait in the forest near the ferry, plotting to ambush and destroy these weak, pathetic humans.

The caravan emerges from another belt of woods and you see the Arasoizuki River before you, a ribbon of dark water slicing through the land, running southwest toward the larger Sleeping River. A large raft sits in the shallows on the far side of the river; it is connected to a thick hemp cord, as big around as a strong man's arm, which stretches across the river. On both banks of the river, the thick rope wraps around a large winch. Several burly peasants emerge from a hut at the riverside, wave to signal the far bank, and begin winching the barge across to this side.

The caravan pulls up at the riverside and waits for the straining, sweating peasants to winch the barge across the river. It is now, while they are pinned against the river, that the ogres strike.

There is an earsplitting roar from behind you! Several huge, humanoid figures burst from the trees and charge forward, gnashing their yellow tusks and brandishing huge clubs – or are they small trees, torn up by the roots? The difference between the false monster of two days ago and these living, bellowing monstrosities is clear and terrible, and you hear shrieks of fear as several of the merchants dive into the river, swimming for their lives. Kiokure shrieks at the peasants turning the winch to hurry, before the monsters devour them all.

Everyone must roll Fear (rank 3). It will take two rounds for the ogres to reach the party, time which the PCs can use to ready weapons, fire arrows, or charge (if they are mounted). The total number of ogres is determined by the number of surviving PCs – there are four ogres for

six or seven PCs, three ogres for four or five PCs, and only two ogres if there are three or fewer surviving PCs. The ogres fight to the death, shouting encouragement to each other in their guttural voices – they are too stupid to do otherwise.

The PCs can, of course, choose to jump in the river and swim for their lives. It will require three Agility+Athletics rolls at TN 15 to swim the river – add 5 to the TN if the PC is wearing Light Armor, and 10 for Heavy Armor. If any of the rolls is failed, the PC must roll Simple Stamina at TN 20 or drown (if the roll is successful, the PC manages to stay afloat until washing ashore many miles downstream). Of course, fleeing the fight in this manner is highly dishonorable and inglorious – the PCs in question lose 5 points of Honor and, if anyone survives to report their cowardice, three points of Glory.

Ogres, 2-4 (Grok, Zigi, Mukluk, and Shug)

FIRE 3	AIR 1
EARTH 2 Stamina 6	WATER 1 Strength 6
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 20

Attacks: 4k4

Damage: 8k2 (big club or small tree)

Armor: 7

Wounds: 15: -1; 30: -2; 45: -3; 60: Dead

Resolution

The PCs can track down the ogres' lair by rolling Perception+Hunting at TN 20. A foul, stinking earthen cave contains the bones of both animals and humans, plus bits and pieces of cloth, peasant tools, and other wreckage. Mixed into the filth are the sword, jade pendant, and traveling pack of the late, unfortunate Kuni Moriya, who did indeed find the monsters he sought. These should be returned to his family, as any honorable PC will know.

With the ogres defeated, the caravan finally crosses the river (minus one merchant, who drowns in the river) and arrives safely in Unicorn lands. Kiokure again thanks the PCs deeply and profusely, and assures them of not only his own humble gratitude, but that of his patron, Yasuki Taka. If the PCs brought any captive bandits along for trial, the Unicorn authorities make short work of them, executing them after a brief trial, and thanking the PCs for their efforts. If they return Kuni Moriya's belongings to the Crab Clan, they again receive public thanks (and Glory).

The Road of Lengthy Commerce is safe once again, and the PCs have destroyed not one, but two threats to the peace and prosperity of the Empire.

Adventure Consequences

At the end of the scenario, any PCs with Shadowlands Taint must make a Simple Earth roll with a TN of 5 + (5 x Taint Rank). If the roll is failed, the PC acquires one additional point of Taint.

Experience Points:

For Completing the Adventure:	1 XP
Good role-playing:	1 XP
Defeating the Bandits:	1 XP
Defeating the ogres:	1 XP

Honor:

- +1 Honor if the PCs dealt with the Otaku without losing face
- 2 Honor if the Otaku goaded them into a brawl, rather than a duel
- 2 Honor for keeping Clever's scrolls
- 1 Honor for allowing another PC to keep Clever's scrolls
- 5 Honor for fleeing the battle with the ogres

Glory:

- 1 Glory if they brawled with the Otaku or the ronin
- +1 Glory if they defeated the bandits and exposed them
- +1 Glory if they return Kuni Moriya's belongings to the Crab Clan
- 3 Glory if they fled the battle with the ogres (if others survive to report them)

Other (Intangible Rewards)

Any ronin PCs will be paid 2 koku for escorting the caravan. If Nervous survives the trip, he rewards any faithful ronin with an additional 1 koku.

If Nervous made it through the trip alive and with his caravan intact, the PCs gain Minor Allies: Yasuki Family (unless they are Crane).

Judge's Summary

(Fill out these questions after completing the round, and return it with the Who's-Who sheet.)

Did the PCs defeat the bandits?

Did Saishi get away alive?

Did Goro get away alive?

Did the PCs defeat the ogres?

Did the PCs attempt to fix blame for the bandits on some outside force (e.g. a Clan or family)?
And if so, who?

Did Kiokure (Nervous) survive?