

Narrow Ground

**A One-Round Low/Mid-Rank Adventure for Heroes of
Rokugan (Champions of the Emerald Empire)**

**by
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The Phoenix Clan is laboring to repair a bridge through the mountains behind Sleeping Thunder Mountain. If completed, it will ease both trade and pilgrimages to the Shrine of Jurojin. But accidents are plaguing the construction site, and many villagers fear the wrath of the Kami.

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A four-hour time block has been allocated for playing this game. The actual playing time should be about three and a half 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.

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.

GM's Information

THIS SCENARIO SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD! Please read the scenario thoroughly before attempting to run it.

This adventure is a Low/Mid-Rank adventure. This means that only Rank 1, 2, or 3 Characters should be allowed to play. This adventure was not written with Rank 4 or 5 characters in mind and cannot anticipate all that these characters may bring to the table.

All bulleted information is just that, pure information. Feed it to the players through an NPC when appropriate. Sometimes, reading it straight just doesn't sound right.

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."

Glory and Honor Awards and Penalties

This adventure contains suggested Glory and Honor awards (and penalties) for dealing with the challenges presented herein. However, at times the players may take extra actions which the GM judges worthy of additional reward – or punishment. The following may be considered as guidelines:

- Performing an act of selfless, sacrificial loyalty to one's daimyo or clan: +1 point of Honor.
- Abiding by the tenets of bushido when one could gain an obvious advantage from breaking them: +1 point of Honor.
- Betraying or disobeying your duty, Clan, or family: lose 1-10 points of Honor and Glory, depending on the severity of the failure.
- Crying out in pain when injured: lose one point each of Honor and Glory.
- Using sneaky, underhanded, or treacherous methods when at an Honor rank higher than zero: lose 1-5 points of Honor.
- Using poison: lose 1-10 points of Honor, depending on the circumstances (there is always an Honor loss for using poison).
- Performing a socially acceptable public act of extreme courage and skill: +1 point of Glory.
- Drunk, insulting, or otherwise ill-mannered in public: lose 1-5 points of Glory.
- Made ronin: Glory drops to zero.

Adjusting for Party Strength

This is a Low/Mid-Rank adventure, and thus can involve parties of widely varying capabilities. The encounters have been optimized for a party of average Rank Two.

Although most of the challenges here are role-play oriented and thus not terribly dependent on party strength, a few changes can be made to adjust the adventure difficulty for low-end and high-end parties, as follows:

Low End Party (most/all characters Rank One):

- Lower the TNs of skill rolls (not Trait rolls) by 5.
- The Mantis saboteurs have Nofujutsu skill 3 and Air of 2 (Reflexes 3).
- The Mantis leader, Akira, is School Rank 2 and has Awareness 3, Strength 3, and Void 2.

High End Party (at least two Rank Three characters and no more than one Rank One character):

- The Mantis saboteurs have Earth of 3.

- The Mantis commander, Akira, has Earth of 4, Void 4, Nofujutsu skill of 6, and the Quick advantage.

Adventure Summary and Background

This adventure occurs in Phoenix Lands, on a road east of Aojiroi Oku Shiro (Pale Oak Castle). Spring is just reaching the mountains, Winter Court is over, and travelers can once again venture out onto the roads.

War between the Phoenix and Dragon Clans is imminent. In an effort to prepare an unexpected blow against the Dragon Clan, the Shiba family is repairing a bridge on a secondary road connecting Pale Oak Castle to the Shrine of Jurojin. The work is publicly excused as a project to ease the journey of pilgrims to the famous but remote Shrine. In reality, it is meant to facilitate a rapid move of Phoenix troops through the mountains to strike the Dragon Clan by surprise.

The task will not be an easy one. The road was abandoned because the old bridges were repeatedly destroyed by the disgruntled spirit of nearby Sleeping Thunder Mountain. In hopes of overcoming this threat, the Phoenix have hired a team of Kaiu Engineers, the finest builders in Rokugan, to make their bridge.

The project, however, has been plagued with delays, accidents, and ill fortune. The season of the spring floods is soon approaching, and if the bridge is not completed, the floods will surely wash it away, wasting all the labor and expense.

On a seemingly unrelated note, the Mantis Clan has been campaigning for support to be elevated to “Great Clan” status. To this end, they have formed a military alliance with the Unicorn and Crab Clans. The Lion, Crane and Scorpion, however, are decidedly against the elevation of the Mantis (indeed, this seems to be the only subject worthy of collective agreement among those three Great Clans). The Phoenix Clan is allied with the Lion, making them potential opponents of the Mantis Clan’s goals. Of course, there is no way to predict what the enigmatic Dragon will do, assuming they even decide to participate in the debate.

Yoritomo, the Mantis Champion, has decided it is in his best interest to keep the Dragon-Phoenix conflict going as long as possible. So long as those two Clans are bogged down in war, they will do nothing to obstruct the Mantis Clan... and with the Lion allied to the

Phoenix, this will keep Lion resources occupied as well.

The Crab have their own interest in the matter as well – their Clan Champion’s plans require that the Phoenix-Dragon war continue as long as possible. The Kaiu Engineers are too honorable to sabotage their own work, of course, but Hida Kisada has passed on reports of their project to the Mantis Clan. Yoritomo knows that a successful Phoenix surprise attack through the mountains may tilt the tide of the war too strongly in their favor, bringing the war to a swift conclusion. Therefore, he has dispatched a small group of bushi, led by an elite agent named Akira, to sabotage the bridge.

It is these Mantis bushi, posing as laborers, who are responsible for the accidents and delays at the site.

The PCs will become involved in this matter through the request of a local Phoenix official, Isawa Masahiro, who is concerned by the reports of trouble on the bridge-building project. Masahiro, a pacifist who has campaigned to avoid war, has no idea of the bridge’s military significance, and will honestly ask the PCs to look into the matter. Once they arrive, the PCs will quickly find that things are more complicated than they first appear.

As with many Heroes of Rokugan scenarios, the PCs may find themselves divided by personal values and Clan loyalties. Dragon and Mantis PCs in particular may find themselves caught between Honor and Clan Loyalty. This is deliberate – such conflicts and moral quandaries are an essential element of the campaign.

Introduction

The PCs begin the scenario at Aojiroi Oku Shiro, Pale Oak Castle, a splendid and famous castle located in Kyuukai province at the edge of the Isawa Mori (Isawa Forest). The castle is well-known as the grave-site of Hantei the Seventeenth, who disregarded tradition and demanded to be buried – not cremated – in a field near where the woman he loved was born. Below the castle are the Pale Oak Plains, fertile farming lands which lie between Isawa Mori and the mountains which form the western border of Phoenix territories.

The PCs may be here for any number of reasons. They might be returning from Winter Court, on a diplomatic mission to the Phoenix lands (quite likely for Lion, Dragon, or Imperial PCs), on a pilgrimage to Seido Jurojin, or simply passing through on their way somewhere else. Ronin PCs are probably looking for work. Regardless, it may be assumed that the PCs have

some free time and are not immediately required elsewhere.

The PCs are presumed to pay the usual courtesy visit to the castle (some of them may have been here before, in the adventure *Proposal of Peace*), and after a suitable wait, are met by the *karo* (chancellor), Isawa Masahiro.

Isawa Masahiro, karo. Masahiro's daimyo, Asako Shizu, was murdered last summer (in the adventure *Proposal of Peace*) and he has been running the castle ever since, waiting for the Asako family to appoint a new daimyo. He is in his late twenties, good-looking but a bit plump, and wears his hair long and tied back into a loose ponytail, Crane-style. (He is trained as a Doji courtier, rather than a shugenja.) His wife Isawa Sukimi (a pretty but small and mousy woman) is shugenja-trained, and sits obediently behind and to one side of him, quietly reinforcing whatever he is trying to say or do.

Masahiro is a loyal and true servant of the Isawa family and the Phoenix Clan. A dedicated pacifist, he believes strongly in the Isawa ideals of peace, reconciliation, and honor, and will make a point of speaking especially politely to any Dragon PCs, expressing the hope that both sides will soon see reason and end "this pointless conflict." If any of the PCs played through *Proposal of Peace*, he will remember them by name and makes a deliberate point of recalling their best moments from that adventure, while ignoring any fumbles or problems they suffered.

After some polite conversation (inquiring how the PCs' journey has been so far, asking after their health, etc), Masahiro will invite the PCs to stay for dinner to enjoy the hospitality of Pale Oak Castle. Assuming the PCs agree (they would be boors not to, not to mention the adventure would be over for them), they will enjoy a fine evening of food, drink, and civilized conversation.

Masahiro's Request

After dinner, Masahiro will invite the PCs to walk with him in the castle gardens, where they can view the famous Pale Oak itself, growing from the grave-site of Hantei the Seventeenth. There, assuming the PCs have not managed to fatally insult him, Masahiro will make his offer:

"I wonder if I might trouble you to perform a favor for me, samurai-san." [Assuming the PCs assent, he continues.] ***"As you may know, in the mountains east of here is the famed Seido Jurojin, the shrine of the Fortune of Health and Longevity. Many pilgrims***

from across the Empire come to pay their respects to Jurojin at the Shrine, but the journey is a difficult one, a narrow and winding road through the mountains. Our Shiba family is taking steps to ease this journey. They are rebuilding a bridge which will open a quicker and easier route."

"However, there is a reason why this road has been closed for so long. Each spring, the waters of the melting snow rush down from the mountains in torrents, especially from the mighty peak of Sleeping Thunder Mountain. All the previous bridges built on this route have washed away. This year, the Shiba hope to make a new bridge strong enough to finally withstand the mountain's wrath." [If any of the PCs are of the Crab Clan, he will make a point of mentioning that the Shiba are employing Kaiu Engineers.] ***"Unfortunately, I have been hearing reports of bad fortune at the construction site – accidents and unaccountable delays. If the work is not finished soon, the spring floods will arrive, and the half-made bridge will share the fate of its predecessors. Although the bridge is not my responsibility, I cannot help but worry. I wonder, honored samurai, could you look into this matter for me?"***

If the PCs refuse, Masahiro will look saddened, but does not question their choice. "I understand, samurai-san, your own duties must of course come first." Unless such PCs decide to investigate on their own, they will be out of the adventure.

Assuming some or all of the PCs agree to help, Masahiro will be delighted, thanks them profusely, and offers them traveling papers to visit the construction site. He has very little other information to share, but will offer what he can:

- The construction began on New Year's Day, a propitious date chosen in hopes of appeasing the spirits of the mountains (especially the mighty Sleeping Thunder Mountain) and persuading them to withhold the spring floods.
- The bridge is being constructed next to a small village, Fuku no Mura (Crouching Village). There is a small shrine to the spirit of Sleeping Thunder Mountain near the village.
- Masahiro knows the Shiba plan to hold a ceremony when the bridge is completed, in hopes of further gaining the approval of the spirits.

- The bridge-building is under the command of Shiba Takuzawa, a *taisa* in the Phoenix armies. The chief engineer is a woman named Kaiu Otsu.
- Masahiro has no concrete information on the nature of the trouble at the site, just rumors of accidents and delays. He has also heard gossip that the bridge may not be completed in time to withstand the spring floods.

Part One: Getting There

Spring arrives more slowly in the mountains. In the lowlands, spring planting is well under way, flowers are blooming and the landscape is changing from lifeless gray to vibrant green. On this mountain road, however, these harbingers of the new season are not in evidence.

Banks of snow and ice still loom to either side of the road, and the heavy traffic from the construction project ahead has turned the road itself into slushy mud. Peasants carrying loads on their backs contend for passage with heavily-laden wagons and hand-carts. Although they do their best to move aside for you, progress is still slow.

The general mood on the road is an upbeat one, almost festive (the peasants are excited about the bridge project), but also with an underlying tension as the season of the spring floods approaches rapidly. If the PCs stop to talk to anyone, the peasants will react with the humility and mild fearfulness one would expect (although they will be less fearful of Phoenix samurai). They can share the following information:

- Most of this traffic is supplies for the bridge project. Many of these peasants are from the lowlands, and have been assigned the task of supplying the project. Others are from Fuku no Mura (Crouching Village), the small village near the bridge-site. The peasants from Fuku no Mura are especially excited about the project, because it will mean a revival of travel and commerce on this road, bringing prosperity to their home.
- Some of the peasants will probably mention that Ochiba, owner of the Mountain's Shadow Inn, is especially happy about the project. He has had more business in the last three months than in the three years before. At least one of the wagons which the PCs pass on the road will be loaded with supplies (food, sake, etc) for the Inn.
- If the PCs ask about problems with the construction project, the peasants become more subdued. There have been accidents, they say – one of the support beams fell over a month ago, construction scaffolds have collapsed, and one worker was killed in a fall. Some of the peasants also mention stories about the wrath of the mountain, recalling that the last bridge collapsed over a century ago when the Sleeping Thunder Mountain became angry. “They say foul smoke boiled up from the river, and then there was an earthquake and a flood.” If the PCs ask whether there has been any such smoke this year, the peasants look at each other and venture, “Not yet, samurai-sama.”
- If the PCs mention a shrine, or ask about any efforts to appease the mountain, the peasants nod and trade stories about Chobu, the “drunken old priest” who lives in the shrine. “He says the mountain has an upset stomach, like a child who has eaten too much,” one peasant volunteers. They all trade a laugh at this silly notion, and tell stories about Chobu's eccentric behavior (swimming in the river in the middle of winter, showing up naked at a village meeting, frequently found passed-out drunk in the shrine, etc). Some of them may also mention that Chobu recently got himself beaten up by some of the bridge workers.
- If the PCs ask about who is working at the construction site, the peasants explain that the actual workers are mostly brought in from elsewhere, since they have no knowledge of bridge-making themselves. “A few came with the Kaiu early last winter, and the rest arrived after New Year's when the work began.” They have a mixed opinion of these workers – although they are mostly cheerful sorts and spend lots of their wages at the Inn, the PCs can tell that some of the peasants are unhappy with having so many strangers in their home. One or two peasants will drop hints that the workers sometimes misbehave.

Arrival at the Village

The road crests a low ridge and passes into a narrow valley, tucked in below the massive bulk of Sleeping Thunder Mountain. A tiny village, no more than a dozen or so huts, is huddled in the valley. On the near side, close at hand, is a two-story Inn which looks like it slid down the mountainside and couldn't navigate the turn onto the road.

Beyond the village, a jagged crevasse emerges from behind the shoulder of the mountain and stretches across the valley, bisecting the road. On the mountain's shoulder you can see a torii arch, marking the location of a shrine. Where the road meets the crevasse, the skeleton of a bridge is taking shape. Even from half a mile away you can see craftsmen and laborers swarming over it.

Most of the traffic on the road goes to the construction site, where a small tent city is visible. Others go to the Inn, delivering supplies. The PCs will be free to wander around, explore the village and the surrounding region, and speak with the various NPCs.

At some point after the PCs get here, new incidents will occur – sabotage at the bridge-site, and new manifestations of the mountain kami's unhappiness. The timing of these events will vary depending on how aggressive the PCs are in their investigations. See Part Three and Part Four for details.

Part Two: People and Places

There are a number of different places for the PCs to go in the village of Fuku no Mura, and many people for them to talk to. The following sections details these:

The Village

Fuku no Mura is a small, unimportant farming community, little different from thousands of other such villages which cover the Empire. The total population is only about 250, and the village boasts no major crafts or resources other than its modest fields of rice and grain. Long an isolated backwater, it is now crowded and invigorated by the work on the bridge. Most of the younger villagers are excited about the work and the potential prosperity which it offers, but many of the older folk are unhappy with so much excitement and so many strangers in town.

Most of the villagers can offer roughly the same information as those on the road (see Part One above). The village headman, 42-year-old Kumaro, can share the following additional information:

- He regards the old priest, Chobu, as a good and wise man who has succumbed to age and drink. "He helped the village much in his younger days, tending to those who were sick or injured, and teaching our children about the Fortunes and

Kamis. A pity the years have not treated him kindly."

- If the PCs ask about the mountain and Chobu's warnings, Kumaro looks pained. "Chobu-sama has often spoken of such things... but usually when he is in his cups. I do not know if there is truly an angry spirit in the mountain – the last bridge was destroyed over a century ago, and I do not know how much of the stories about that are true and how much is merely the telling of tales. They say the mountain belched forth a cloud of foul-smelling smoke before the earth shook and collapsed the bridge – perhaps that is where Chobu gets his stories of an upset kami."
- He has a low opinion of the innkeeper, Ochiba. "That is a man who thinks to rise above his station," Kumaro remarks disapprovingly.
- Kumaro has a mixed view on the construction crew. He is respectful of the Phoenix leader, Shiba Takuzawa, and has a generally good opinion of the Kaiu engineers, although he is obviously a little uneasy with the fact that the lead engineer is a woman. His opinion of the construction crew is lower, however; he describes them as "rowdy, troublesome fellows, they often drink too much and get into fights." He especially dislikes the main work crew who arrived after New Year's, and grumbles that they are "city folk, crude and disrespectful."
- If the PCs ask Kumaro to be more specific about his problems with the workers, he will first mention that a few villagers have been injured in brawls and quarrels. The he explains (reluctantly, if any of the PCs are female) that some of these fights started when workers tried to seduce or buy the favors of local girls, sometimes even in the presence of their husbands. "We may be peasants, but our women are not prostitutes to be bought," he says with quiet dignity.
- If the PCs ask about the incident where Chobu was beaten up by some of the construction wokers, Kumaro will sigh. "It was after one of the workers was killed, falling into the river. Chobu ran around drunk, shouting that some of the other workers had pushed the man off the bridge. They were angry, of course – and Chobu probably deserved it, making such wild accusations."

The Mountain's Rest Inn

The Mountain's Rest Inn has clearly seen better days – seen up close, the walls are warped, there are crude patches in the roof, and the large vertical sign-board is so weather-beaten that it can barely be made out: an image of a plump old man snoozing against a miniature mountain, hands clasped across his ample belly.

Inside, however, the Inn is hopping with business: not only are the samurai and skilled artisans working on the bridge staying here, but the off-duty laborers are spending their wages here on food and sake. The place is busy all day, and downright crowded in the evening.

A trio of bedraggled serving maids struggle to keep the customers' drinks full and the rooms cleaned. If the PCs want rooms at the Inn, they'll have to pay 2 silver bu per night

The innkeeper, Ochiba, is a thin, hollow-cheeked older man (perhaps forty, perhaps sixty, it is difficult to say) with a mouthful of twisted, rotten teeth. Accustomed to years of poverty and failure, he is now almost delirious with sudden success, while at the same time wracked with worry over the problems with the bridge project. If the bridge is completed, he will enjoy a life of prosperity and success from the new road traffic; if it is abandoned, he will return to penury. As a result, his attitude oscillates wildly and unpredictably between cheer and gloom.

Depending on when they visit here, the PCs will be able to speak not only with Ochiba and his employees, but also with many bridge laborers (both Mantis and non-Mantis), Shiba Takuzawa, Kaiu Otsu and her apprentice, a visiting Lion samurai named Chugitsu, and an assortment of local villagers.

Ochiba knows everything that the other villagers know (as described above in Part One). He also has the following additional information:

- Ochiba regards Chobu, the priest at the Sleeping Thunder Shrine, as a useless and tiresome old drunkard, and dismisses his stories about the mountain kami's anger as "drunken fables." At the same time, he is clearly a bit nervous about the topic – if there is anything behind Chobu's stories, after all, it could mean the doom of the precious bridge.
- If the PCs mention the incident of the priest Chobu being beaten-up by some of the workers, Ochiba snorts. "Call a man a murderer, he's liable to get angry. The old fool should know better."

- Ochiba claims to have a high opinion of the village headman, Kumaro, but it should be obvious that there is bad blood between them. Ochiba hopes to better himself, while Kumaro is content with his current station in life – the quintessential clash of merchant and peasant attitudes.
- The innkeeper has nothing but good things to say about Shiba Takuzawa ("an honorable samurai") and the Kaiu engineers ("very proper and capable"). He claims to also have a high opinion of the workers, especially since they spend their earnings quite freely.
- If a PC asks about problems with the workers (fights, improper advances toward women), Ochiba will first deny any trouble, then attempt to minimize it. ("A few lonely men get a little frisky, and the next thing you know, half the women in town are screaming rape!") If the PCs spend much time at the Inn, it will eventually become clear that Ochiba has "solved" the problem by making his serving maids turn double-duty as prostitutes.
- If the PCs ask about the accidents, Ochiba knows nothing more than the general population. The topic clearly annoys and frightens him – he is alarmed at the prospect that the bridge project might fail.

Chugitsu is the only samurai at the Inn who is not directly associated with the bridge project. A stern-faced man in his late twenties, with a proper samurai topknot dyed gold, he is a former Akodo, and a gunso (sergeant) in the Lion armies. He will claim to be merely traveling on the business of his daimyo, but in fact is here to review the progress of the Phoenix bridge-building project before reporting back to his superior officer, Ikoma Gunjin. If he speaks privately with fellow Lion, he will explain the military significance of the bridge to the imminent war, and urges them to make sure it is completed on time. With all other samurai he will be polite and distant (although he cannot avoid showing a certain cold hostility to Cranes and Scorpions).

The Sleeping Mountain Shrine

The shrine is located on a rocky outcrop of the mountain, three hundred yards above the level of the village. It is a small wooden structure with a pagoda roof and open sides. The priest, Chobu, lives in a tiny one-room hut behind the shrine.

Inside the shrine stands a large stone statue of the Kami of Sleeping Thunder Mountain. The carving resembles a plump balding man, his large hands clasped before his ample belly. Incense sticks sit in a bowl before him, filling the shrine with sweet-smelling smoke. Aside from that, however, the shrine does not seem to be well-cared-for – some of the roof-tiles are missing, and dead leaves from the previous winter are still rotting in the corners.

If the PCs come at night, Chobu will be in his hut, probably passed-out drunk. During the day, he will most likely be puttering around the shrine, moderately drunk and making half-hearted efforts to clean the place up.

Chobu is an old, old man, toothless and bald except for a few wispy white hairs that wreath his bulbous head and skinny neck. There are several large ugly bruises and scrapes on his body, the legacy of his recent violent encounter with the bridge workers. His voice is raspy and he comes across as alternately grumpy and slightly batty, a drunkard of uncertain sanity. His vision is bad at short range but excellent at distance, although this may not be apparent when he spends all his time squinting irritably at the PCs.

Chobu believes that he is in communion with the spirit of Sleeping Thunder Mountain, and often holds long one-sided conversations with the statue in the shrine. Whether these conversations are genuine spiritual experiences or merely alcohol-induced delusions is impossible to say. (A PC with the ability to see spirits, such as a Sodan-Senzo, will be able to tell that the statue is, indeed, linked in some way to a powerful kami. They will not be able to tell whether Chobu is actually talking to that Kami.)

Chobu is the only one who has actually seen the Mantis saboteurs at their work. However, the PCs may have a hard time getting such information from him, or believing it.

Conversation with Chobu is a frustrating experience. He is almost always drunk, his mind frequently wanders, and when near the shrine he regularly interrupts conversations to address comments to the statue (which he reveres, but also treats casually, like an old friend). Often he treats everyone around him like ignorant children, complaining of a lack of respect from younger folk. At other times he is childlike himself, throwing temper-tantrums, laughing at simple jokes, and playing juvenile pranks. Chobu is secretly ashamed of his own weakness (his taste for alcohol) and if confronted on this issue will sometimes abruptly

break down, weeping, promising to mend his ways and purify himself. (Such conversions never last, of course – many of the villagers can recount stories of such moments of “reform,” followed in due course by a return to the bottle.)

Assuming the PCs can wade through Chobu’s conversational eccentricities, they may be able to extract the following information from him:

- Chobu knows the mountain’s spirit is unhappy, a condition which he likens to a “stomachache.” The spirit is, by Chobu’s account, “sick at the stomach” from the noise and commotion of the bridge, and the lack of respect and worship it gets from the village. This is why it always destroys the bridge, to bring about peace and quiet and to punish the villagers for their lack of proper attention and reverence.
- Chobu warns that the mountain kami will destroy this bridge as well, no matter how well-made it may be. “You need to be treated properly, my friend, don’t you? Otherwise it won’t matter how hard those Crabs work.”
- If the PCs ask about the accidents, perhaps suggesting that the spirit is causing them, Chobu will cackle. “Men do such things, not spirits,” he says. “The mountain isn’t subtle or sneaky, are you, my friend?”
- If the PCs ask why Chobu would say that “men” are responsible (or suggest such a thing themselves, such as by asking about the beating Chobu got from the workers), he will become cagey and cautious, rubbing his bruises. The PCs will have to be polite and persuasive (or ply him with sake) in order to learn more. If so persuaded, Chobu says that he has watched the workers “while out walking, to clear my head,” and claims that some of them are “tricky folk, making trouble.” He can’t be very clear about this, but implies strongly that these “tricky” workers are behind the accidents, especially the fatal fall. “I saw them. They say they tried to catch him, but I saw them, and I know!”
- If the PCs press him for details about these “tricky” workers, Chobu will claim there are several such “rotten fellows,” and that they are led by one “slippery fellow, the one with the scar.” He taps his hand at the left side of his face, mimicking the facial scar of Akira, the Mantis leader. “They all listen to him, yes. Always sneaking about, making

plans, burying secrets. They hate the bridge as much as you do,” speaking to the shrine, “don’t they?”

- If the PCs ask, the men who beat up Chobu were not the “rotten fellows.” “No, no!” Chobu shouts, stamping his foot. “They were just fools, angry because I was telling the truth!”

Chobu will not repeat his accusations to others (“those samurai didn’t believe me once, why would they now?”), nor will he directly confront the workers again – he is bitter about the beating he received. “I tried to warn them – they’re own fault if they won’t listen!”

He will be more cooperative about the problem of the angry mountain spirit, especially if the PCs take his warnings seriously. Chobu will suggest that they ask the spirit for advice: “Talk to him, like I do. He likes to talk, don’t you, my friend?”

The Construction Site

At closer view, the bridge project is even more impressive. A series of massive support posts, set into stone foundations, reach most of the way across the deep ravine. Not all of these posts are in place yet, but already the nearer side of the bridge has taken shape, a frame of heavy timbers tying the posts together into a unified structure. A few massive smooth planks have even been laid to form the beginning of the actual road. Workers swarm over the site, leaping and swinging about the wooden superstructure with casual ease, a hundred feet above the rocky riverbed.

Near the site, two men and a woman in the dress of samurai stand around a small folding table. One man, a handsome fellow with a proper samurai topknot, wears an elegant kimono in red and orange. The other man and the woman are dressed in much more practical-looking clothing of dark gray, and both have their short hair tied back in simple ponytails. The table between them is covered in papers, held in place by a pair of stones.

If the PCs look around for the construction supplies, they will spot a huge pile of lumber on some higher ground about fifty yards away. The slope leading down to the bridge-site is rutted and slippery with mud from the many beams and logs which have been dragged down to the construction site. Down in the gorge, on the stony river-bank, large boulders are being moved into place and shaped with chisels to form the foundations of the remaining posts.

Some distance away from the construction site is a fair-sized cluster of tents, housing most of the regular workers. (The skilled artisans get the stay at the Inn, along with the samurai.) During the mornings and evenings this area is busy, as the workers eat, wash up, change their clothes, and so forth.

The PCs will be free to look around and ask questions, although if they disrupt the work they will quickly earn the wrath of the Kaiu engineers. For details of what the PCs can learn about the various accidents, see “The Earlier Accidents,” below.

Interviewing the Samurai

The three samurai are, of course, Shiba Takuzawa, Kaiu Otsu, and Otsu’s apprentice Kaiu Tanuji. A **Heraldry/Intelligence** roll at TN 10 will identify the small, nondescript mon of the Kaiu school on the garments of the two Engineers.

If the PCs try to speak with the Kaiu, Otsu will be irritated at being interrupted in the middle of her work.

Her apprentice Tanuji will suggest that the PCs find them at the Inn tonight. If the PCs insist on an interview now, the Kaiu will be angry and uncooperative, and the PCs will get little to no help from them for the remainder of the adventure.

Shiba Takuzawa, however, will be more than happy to speak with the PCs at any time, once they explain why they are here (on behalf of Isawa Masahiro).

Shiba Takuzawa is a young officer in the Phoenix armies, a man from a prominent family with many friends higher in the military ranks. The bridge project is his first independent assignment, and he is very worried about the outcome. He can share the following information:

- There have been numerous delays and problems with the project since construction began in earnest after the New Year’s festival. Accidents have been the least of it – there have also been lost and broken tools, mis-cut pieces of lumber, work done wrong so that it had to be re-done, and so forth. Takuzawa worries that the whole project may have been cursed by bad fortune.
- If the PCs ask specifically about the accidents, Takuzawa doesn’t really know any more than the commoners (he’s a supervisor, not an engineer).
- Anyone who defeats Takuzawa in a **Contested Awareness** roll can tell that he is very anxious

about the status of the project. If they make at least two Raises over him, they can tell that this anxiety is not merely due to the possible damage to his own reputation: larger things are riding on the outcome of this project.

- Takuzawa will only confide in Shiba bushi PCs, or Lion PCs who are open about their support of the Lion-Phoenix alliance. To such PCs he will privately confide that an attack is planned through this route as soon as the bridge is completed. “They say this attack should let us deliver a decisive blow at the start of the war, one which will lead to swift victory,” he says. “I cannot help wondering if the Dragon Clan has become aware of this. Our problems might be the result of sabotage.”
- Takuzawa is aware that he lacks the expertise to compete the project on his own – he is completely dependent on the Kaiu engineers. He will be reluctant to reveal this, however, seeing it as an admission of incompetence.

Kaiu Otsu is a distant, vague woman who doesn’t have much interest in anything that doesn’t relate to engineering. She is focused and formidable when dealing with engineering problems, or when drawing sketches of her designs, but on other matters comes across as rude and distracted. To a considerable extent, she depends on her apprentice Tanuji to deal with the “real world” for her, leaving her free to focus on her love – nay obsession – with engineering.

Kaiu Tanuji has his own issues. He is haunted by the spirit of his little sister, who died when a goblin raiding pack got through the Kaiu tunnels and assaulted their home. As a result, Tanuji has actual combat experience (unlike Otsu) and keeps his weapons and armor back at the Inn. There is an aura of sadness and loss about him, and he usually speaks in a soft voice. He does most of the talking for the two Kaiu, except when matters of technical expertise arise (at which point Otsu suddenly pushes herself into the conversation).

- The Kaiu both know that this project has had an unusual run of bad luck. Otsu has been meticulous in her designs and planning, but the project keeps having problems and falling further behind.
- Despite the many delays, the Kaiu hope to have the bridge completed within the next two weeks. “We are working sunup to sundown to finish before the spring floods,” Tanuji says proudly.

- If the PCs ask about the accidents, the Kaiu can provide detailed descriptions of all three (see “The Earlier Accidents” below for details on the accidents). They saw most of the incidents personally. However, they did not witness the incident in which a worker (“Hachi, I think his name was”) died. Tanuji can point the PCs toward the two workers who saw it happen, Kuso and Makoto.
- If the PCs ask why there have been so many problems, Otsu frowns and mutters something near-inaudible (“our own workers would never have so much trouble”). Tanuji hesitates a moment, then speculates that part of the problem may be that the workers are not accustomed to this mountain environment. “They are from the coastal towns, mostly. Sailors make good bridge-makers, because they have excellent balance and usually do not fear heights. Still, perhaps these mountains do not suit them well. Certainly they seem to be distracted too easily. We’ve had many discipline problems, clashes with the locals, that sort of thing.” He snorts. “Such nonsense would not be tolerated in Crab lands, of course.”
- If the PCs ask about the priest Chobu, reports of anger from the spirits, and similar things, Otsu snorts. “This is not the Shadowlands.” Tanuji elaborates: “In our own lands, we might suspect interference from the forces of He Who is Not to be Named. But the Phoenix lands are not known for such troubles. We believe this is a problem of engineering and human capability, not angry spirits.”

Interviewing the Workers

There are over sixty workers laboring on the bridge. They climb and swing around on the structure with casual ease, seemingly untroubled by the fact that they are working above a hundred-foot-deep crevasse with a stony river-bed at the bottom.

The majority of these workers are simple laborers, going about the business of hauling massive pieces of timber and securing them in place. The laborers are mostly young men in their twenties; there are a few older men, in their thirties and forties, who act as crew chiefs and supervisors. (Akira, the leader of the Mantis sabotage team, is one of these men.) The dozen or so carpenters and stonecutters who do the more complex and skilled work on the bridge are also older men, some as old as their fifties.

There are no females in the work-crew, and many of these men are clearly a little embarrassed at taking directions from Kaiu Otsu (although they would never be foolish enough to openly defy a member of the samurai caste).

If the PCs want to speak with the workers, they will need to find chances to do so in between their tasks (Kaiu Otsu will be quite unhappy if the PCs interrupt any jobs), or else speak to them at the tents or the Inn during off-hours. (The craftsmen are staying at the Inn, and many of the laborers visit there every night to spend their wages.)

Most of these men are exactly what they appear to be – laborers and skilled artisans. Only a handful of them are saboteurs – six regular Mantis bushi and their leader, the scar-faced, middle-aged Akira. The Mantis do their best to avoid the PCs’ attention and blend in with the crowd. However, if the PCs make a point of trying to “scope out” workers who seem nervous, deceptive, or more skilled than they should be, they can roll **Contested Investigation/Perception** against the Mantis’ **Acting/Awareness** to notice that their behavior is slightly different from the other workers.

The workers can share the following information. (Note that the Mantis will never tell the truth to anyone but a fellow Mantis.)

- The workers are all nervous about the many accidents and problems on the site, and some of them suspect that the project has been cursed by angry kamis or some vengeful Fortune.
- Many of the workers have heard occasional late-night rumbles from Sleeping Thunder Mountain, which they believe are signs of the kami’s wrath. Some workers also claim (delusionally) to have seen “spirits” stalking through the village at night. All of these accounts come from workers who were out late and had been drinking, so they are not terribly reliable – Shiba Takuzawa, for example, will dismiss such things as “drunken visions, augmented by superstition.”
- The workers can all describe the previous accidents (see “The Earlier Accidents,” below), and in the case of Hachi’s death, can point the PCs at the two witnesses (Kuso and Makoto). The normal workers are of divided opinions as to whether these accidents are the results of bad fortune or sabotage. Those who suspect sabotage (about a quarter of the work-force) usually put the blame on the Dragon Clan.

- If the PCs ask about the incident in which the priest Chobu was beaten up, the workers will report, angrily, that the “old drunk fool” went around a few weeks ago claiming that some of them were responsible for the death of Hachi. (He didn’t give specific names.) They were upset at such accusations, and drove the priest away with curses and blows. “He made a mockery of our friend’s death!”
- If the PCs ask about trouble with the locals (propositioning women, etc), the workers have the good grace to look abashed, and claim its all been misunderstandings. Some of them are actually sincere about this, and the rest do their best to look sincere.

If the PCs look for a worker with a scar on his face (due to speaking with Chobu), they can roll **Simple Perception** at TN 10 to spot Akira. He is a grizzled man in his late thirties or early forties, his head shaved down to stubble. An ugly scar furrows through the left side of his face, and his usual expression is a grim, serious frown.

- Akira will stonewall the PCs, denying any knowledge and insisting he is just a simple worker. He dismisses Chobu as a “foolish old drunkard.” Akira is a skilled deceiver and the PCs will have to make a Contested roll of **Investigation/Awareness** (or **Ichi Miru/Awareness**) against his **Acting/Awareness** to see through his story. (Magic such as *Secrets on the Wind* can also work, although Akira is magic-resistant.)
- Akira’s scar can be recognized as a combat injury by rolling **Battle/Intelligence**, **Medicine/Intelligence**, or a suitable **Lore** skill at TN 15. He will claim (falsely) that the scar was caused by an accident at sea (a boat-hook).
- **If any of the PCs are of the Mantis Clan**, Akira will try to find a chance to speak with them alone. He will explain the situation and urge the PC(s) to stonewall the investigation until his men can wreck the bridge completely.

The Earlier Accidents

Anyone at the construction site can confirm and describe the earlier accidents.

- **The Fallen Beam:** a support beam fell while being winched into place. Nobody was hurt, but work was delayed by over a day.
- **Fallen Scaffolding:** After the beam accident, there were two separate occasions when scaffolding collapsed, causing serious injuries in one case.
- **The Death:** In between the two scaffolding incidents, a worker named Hachi fell to his death while tying a crossbeam into place.

There are no real physical clues to be found about any of these incidents, since too much time has passed. The accounts of the Kaiu and the various workers (both real workers and saboteurs) are all more or less the same.

A very clever PC may think to ask about **worker patterns** (such as the same persons working on all these parts of the bridge before the accidents). To find out who was working on each accident area, the PCs will have to carefully question the workers and rolling **Kuenai/Awareness** at TN 15, **Intimidation/Willpower** at TN 20, or **Sincerity/Awareness** at TN 25. A shugenja who thoroughly questions the local spirits (casting *Commune* multiple times) can also gain this information.

Once the PCs have figured out who was working on what, they will need to roll either **Investigation/Intelligence** at TN 15, **Nazado/Intelligence** at TN 10, or **Simple Intelligence** at TN 20 to realize that one or the other of Kuso and Makoto, the witnesses to Hachi's death, were also involved in the work on the fallen beam and one of the two collapsed scaffolds.

If the PCs ask about **witnesses** to the incidents, they will get a long list for the fallen beam and the scaffolds. In the case of the death of Hachi, however, there were only two direct witnesses: Kuso and Makoto, who were working on securing the same beam when he fell. The two workers are both Mantis saboteurs. They will claim that Hachi slipped while shifting position on the beam. "It was so quick, samurai-sama. He fell before either of us could move." They are lying, of course (which can be determined with **Contested Awareness**), but the PCs will need more than gut-feeling to act against them (the Kaiu will not tolerate unjustified assaults on their valuable workers).

Smart PCs may think of **asking the local eta** about the condition of Hachi's body after he fell. The *eta* can

describe the dreadful injuries (broken limbs and spine) which Hachi suffered. If a PC asks specifically whether there was anything strange or out-of-place on the body, the *eta* will think a little while, then confess that the body had also suffered an odd injury to the head. "It was odd, I thought so at the time, samurai-sama. The body had fallen legs-first, you see, the legs snapped and then the spine, but there was also a spot on the side of the head smashed in, as though he'd been struck sharply with a club. Perhaps he smacked into part of the bridge on his way down."

If PC shugenja **attempt to question spirits** about these incidents, they will find this more difficult than they might think. Since this is an outdoor location above a rushing stream, the Air and Water spirits in the region are constantly changing, and none remain who remember the incidents. There are no Fire spirits, of course. The Earth spirits of the ground do not pay attention to what happens on the bridge. Only specific Earth spirits within the bridge itself remember these incidents. These spirits can be found for the fallen beam (the PCs just have to ask the workers which beam it was), and for the death of Hachi (again, simply ask which beam he was working on when he died). The PCs will not be able to track down which pieces were used on the collapsed scaffolds, since those are re-used interchangeably.

- The Earth spirits from the fallen beam remember that "a man" shifted the rope which was holding the beam, so that the rope slipped loose. The spirit does not remember anything notable about the man – he was just "one of the men doing things here." If a PC thinks to ask whether the man has a scar on his face, the spirit answers: "No, that's a different man. They speak to each other often."
- The spirits who saw Hachi's death are more informative. They remember that Hachi was arguing with two other men. Then one of the other men struck Hachi with a stick (jo staff) and he fell off the beam. Again, the spirits cannot remember any details about these men, except that all three were workers – but as before, if the PCs ask about a scarred face, they learn that the two killers associated with a scar-faced man.

Clever PCs may come up with other ways to gain information about the incidents. The GM should be prepared for such innovations.

Part Three: The Sabotage Continues

“Accidents” will continue to happen once the PCs arrive in the village. There will be a total of three of these, each one more serious than the last. If the PCs thwart the third and most devastating accident, the Mantis will try to use their secret stash of gaijin pepper (gunpowder) to blow up the bridge.

The First Incident: Failure of Stone

This will happen late in the afternoon on the day that the PCs arrive. The workers will attempt to raise the next support post for the bridge:

The massive wooden post, larger than a man’s arms can circle, is slowly lifted vertical by dozens of ropes, fed through pulleys on the bridge’s superstructure. Sweating, straining laborers haul on the ropes, chanting rhythmically as the post slowly rises from horizontal to vertical. At the bottom of the river-gorge, other workers use heavy braces to guide the base of the post into a foundation of heavy stones. But as the post begins to slide into place, some of the foundation stones shift. The post twists and then topples sideways, workers cursing and leaping out of the way. The released ropes whipsaw through the air as the massive post crashes back down into the stream, sending up a huge spume of water.

Kaiu Otsu and her apprentice scramble down into the riverbed, cursing, and examine the post for damage before ordering the foundation rebuilt. It will not be ready for another attempt until tomorrow. Shiba Takuzawa watches and heaves a sigh. “Another day. At least this time no one was injured.”

Clues: If the PCs examine the stones of the foundation, they can roll **Engineering/Intelligence** at TN 10 or **Investigation/Intelligence** at TN 15 to realize that the stones were placed correctly, but cracked and crumbled under the pressure of the post’s massive weight. This suggests that bad stone was used. The Kaiu Engineers will be at a loss to explain this – the stone looked good when they chose it.

A PC who carefully examines the stones for damage or flaws, and rolls **Siege/Perception** at TN 15, **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20, **Engineering/Perception** at TN 20, or **Simple Perception** at TN 25 can realize that there are some barely-visible chisel-marks at the points where the stone fractured. It was weakened deliberately.

- If the PCs question the workers to learn if anyone noticed somebody chiseling the foundation-stones, they will need to interrogate a large number of workers and roll **Kuenai/Awareness** at TN 20, **Intimidation/Willpower** at TN 20, or **Simple Awareness** at TN 25. Success finds a couple of workers who remember noticing a man named Bokuji working on the rock a little while ago. They assumed he was acting on orders from the Kaiu engineers.
- A smart PC may think to immediately search all the workers for freshly-used chisels. They will not find any. However, immediately searching the entire construction site can discover (with **Investigation/Perception** at TN 15, or an organized search effort involving the entire crew) a chisel, covered with fresh rock-dust, discarded behind one of the other support beams. None of the workers will admit to owning the chisel.
- A shugenja PC can *Commune* with the Earth spirits in the chisel, with Earth spirits in the broken stone, or with Air or Water spirits immediately around the stone (so long as this is done within a couple of hours, the correct Air/Water spirits will still be present). The Earth spirits in the chisel can identify their owner as a plump man with a short pigtail and a bald spot. The spirits in and around the stone can likewise describe (or, for Water spirits, show) such a man furtively working on the stone a short time before the post went up.
- Asking around the other workers can track down the man who meets this description: Bokuji (another Mantis). If the PCs see his image in a Water spirit’s picture, they can find him themselves by rolling **Investigation/Perception** at TN 10 or **Simple Perception** at TN 15.
- Akira will be unobtrusively watching the area after the accident. (The PCs will not notice him unless they specifically look for eavesdroppers and defeat his **Stealth/Awareness** with their **Investigation/Perception** in a Contested Roll.) If he realizes the PCs have found out too much, he will slip away and warn Bokuji. The Mantis saboteur will immediately try to flee the area, losing himself in the crowds that travel up and down the road every day. (This will reduce the total number of Mantis bushi to five, plus Akira.)

- If the PCs manage to spot Bokuji and catch him, he will not confess. (See Part Five for details.) The Mantis will decide they need to step up their plans and will move straight to the third incident, skipping #2 (the assassination attempt).

The Second Incident: Assassination of Kaiu Otsu

If the PCs do not immediately track down the cause of the problem with the fallen post, the Mantis will bide their time for at least two days. Their next action will take place on the third day. This will be an attempt on the life of Kaiu Otsu.

By this point, the last support post will finally be in place, and work the bridge superstructure will be underway. Heavy loads of construction timbers are brought down from the storage area on sledges, with workers holding ropes to control the speed of their descent across ground turned muddy and slippery by the damp spring weather.

Akira will approach Kaiu Otsu with a complex technical question about the work on the bridge, and uses it to keep her deep in conversation while steering her into place below the next load of timbers. At the key moment, two of the Mantis workers who are holding back the sledge-load of lumber will “slip” on the mud and let go. As the sledge rumbles down-slope out of control, Akira skillfully trips Otsu while turning to run himself. The Kaiu engineer is buried beneath a massive avalanche of heavy beams and planks.

If the PCs want to spot this, they will have to make a point of keeping track of what is happening on the construction site at all times. PCs who actually witness the workers “slipping” can roll **Contested Investigation/Perception** against the Mantis’ **Acting/Awareness** to realize that their slip-and-falls were faked. A PC who is watching Akira and Otsu at the critical moment can roll **Jiu-jutsu/Perception** at TN 15, **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20, or **Simple Perception** at TN 25 to realize that Akira deliberately trips Otsu, while making it look like their legs tangled when he turned to flee.

A PC who attempts to save Otsu will have to be standing nearby and must roll **Athletics/Agility** at TN 25 to reach her and drag her aside. Failure means the PC cannot reach her and suffers 3k2 damage from the crashing lumber. A botched roll (failure with three or more 1’s) means the PC is caught under the full avalanche of wood and shares Otsu’s fate.

A shugenja PC who can get a suitable spell off in one round might be able to save Otsu that way. The GM must adjudicate such efforts.

After the accident, the witnesses (Kaiu Tanuji, Shiba Takuzawa, and about a third of the work crew) will mostly describe the scene as a tragic accident, the worst yet. If the PCs question the workers carefully, and roll **Kuenai/Awareness** at TN 15 or **Simple Awareness** at TN 20, they will find a few workers who reluctantly admit that it “looked like” Akira tripped Kaiu Otsu on purpose.

Shugenja PCs who question the spirits will be able to access Earth, Air, and Water spirits (the latter in the muddy ground). The Earth and Air spirits will be able to describe the incident but do not realize that it was faked. (For example, of Akira and Otsu they will say, “They started to run and their legs got tangled. The woman fell down, but not the man.”) Water spirits will show images of what happened, and PCs observing those images can make the same skill rolls as above to realize that the accident was faked.

- Again, Akira will watch the post-action investigation carefully. If it appears that the “jig is up”, he and the other Mantis will attempt to slip away and hide, then return later (preferably at night) and use the gaijin pepper to finish off the bridge.

The Third Incident: Bridge Collapse

At the end of the fifth day after the PCs arrive, the last foundation post will be in place and the superstructure will be nearly complete. (If Otsu died, this will take seven days instead.) At that point the Mantis will try to weaken several of the support joints and cause a full-scale collapse of the bridge.

- If the PCs detected Bokuji’s sabotage of the support post, the Mantis will move up their schedule and attempt to destroy the bridge three days later, skipping their assassination attempt against Kaiu Otsu.
- If the PCs detect the Mantis saboteurs at any point, they skip this entire plan, go into hiding, and try to use their gaijin pepper.

The Mantis will sabotage the bridge by covertly loosening the ropes, pegs, and wedges which hold the superstructure together. This process will take place over about 24 hours, while the final work is being

completed on the bridge and the road-planks are being laid down.

The Mantis will do their best to keep their activities secret. Neither Kaiu Tanuji nor Shiba Takuzawa will notice that anything is amiss (they are too focused on finally completing the bridge). However, if Kaiu Otsu survived her assassination attempt (or if the Mantis skipped the attempt), she will get a **Simple Perception** roll at TN 20 (no Void) to notice that something is wrong. If so, she will suddenly shout out and rush onto the bridge, demanding to know what one of the workers is doing. At this point the Mantis will realize they are “blown” and try to escape, hoping to return later and set off their gunpowder bomb.

If Otsu is dead, or fails her roll, there is still the possibility that the PCs can detect this sabotage. This can only happen if they specify that they are keeping tabs on the bridge-work, inspecting periodically for sabotage, or something similar. Such PCs can roll **Engineering/Perception** at TN 15, **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20, or **Simple Perception** at TN 25 to realize that sabotage is underway. *Communing* with the spirits of the bridge or the surrounding area can also detect the sabotage, if the PCs ask the right questions. Again, the Mantis will try to escape and return later to use their gunpowder bomb.

If nobody detects the sabotage, the following scene takes place:

This afternoon the bridge is nearly complete. Only a few dozen heavy planks remain to complete the platform, and the massive waist-high railings are nearly finished as well. But as a stiff morning wind rushes down the valley, the bridge suddenly seems to shift slightly. You hear the snapping noises of several ropes letting go, followed by the angry, splintering, grinding sound of wood which is abruptly overstressed. Workers scramble off the bridge in panic. Shiba Takuzawa shouts an angry denial and takes a few steps forward, but Kaiu Tanuji grabs him by the shoulder. The young engineer’s face is set in stone. “It is too late, Shiba-san.”

Too late indeed. The bridge lurches sideways, shuddering and groaning, and then topples into the gorge. Water fountains up as the splintering timbers land in the river. About half the support posts remain behind, sticking up like broken teeth in an otherwise empty mouth.

The Last Act: Gaijin Pepper

The Mantis have buried a keg of gaijin pepper in the wall of the crevasse, beneath the near side of the bridge. This is their “insurance policy” in case their other plans are foiled. PCs can discover this hidden bomb if they search under the bridge and roll **Investigation/Perception** at TN 20, or if they make skillful use of magic (such as asking Earth spirits if there is anything buried in the area).

If the PCs discover and foil the final sabotage of the bridge (as described above), or unearth the saboteurs before they can conduct that sabotage, the Mantis will attempt to go into hiding, concealing themselves in the mountainous foothills around the village. Assuming the PCs do not track them down, the Mantis will try to sneak in to the construction site the following night and ignite the powder charge.

The PCs will have to be watching (or magically monitoring) the construction site in order to catch the Mantis in the act. Otherwise, their first warning will come when the bridge blows sky-high with a monstrous crash. (If the PCs already discovered the gunpowder charge, the Mantis will simply give up and leave.)

Alternatively, if the PCs catch the Mantis saboteurs during an earlier deed of sabotage, and they are unable to escape, Akira may decide to try to blow the bridge immediately. He will shout “Fire!” to the other Mantis, and the entire team will immediately scramble down below the bridge to ignite the slow-match to the powder charge.

Once the slow-match is lit, it will take ten rounds to burn to the powder charge. The Mantis will use that time to try to get away, taking shelter in the village, then hopefully escaping in the post-blast confusion.

Any PC who is within thirty feet of the gunpowder charge when it detonates will take 10k10 damage from the blast and subsequent rain of debris (almost certainly fatal). Between thirty and a hundred feet, the damage is 7k6 (still probably fatal). Beyond a hundred feet, out to two hundred, the damage is 4k3, and from two hundred to four hundred feet the damage is 3k2. PCs who come up with intelligent ways to protect themselves (throwing themselves flat, finding shelter to hide behind) can reduce their damage by 1 to 3 kept dice (GM’s discretion based on how intelligent the PCs behave).

Part Four: Sleeping Thunder Mountain Shows Its Anger

The second evening after the PCs arrive, a thick cloud of foul-smelling vapor will come boiling down the river, filling the crevasse and spilling up into the village. Many of the villagers are frightened by this incident – especially older ones, who name this the “mountain’s breath.” They will explain (if the PCs do not know already) that the last time this smoke appeared, over a century ago, it was followed by an earthquake which destroyed the old bridge.

Some of the more superstitious villagers will head to the shrine to pray for the mountain spirit to calm itself. Chobu will putter around shouting incoherent prayers and ringing a small prayer bell. “The spirit must be given proper respect!” he shouts. “It’s no use praying now, he’s already angry! You should have been praying months ago, years ago!”

That night, anyone who is awake will hear a faint rumbling noise from the mountain, and feel a very slight tremor in the earth. PCs who are asleep can wake up and notice this if they roll **Simple Perception** at TN 20.

The “mountain’s breath” will recur three days later, followed by another, slightly stronger, earth-tremor that night. The next morning, PCs will notice that the villagers are quite upset – the village’s chickens and draft oxen have both escaped, panicked by the earthquake. Most of the village will spend the day hunting down the missing animals.

If any of the PCs brought mounts, they will notice that after the second occurrence of the “mountain’s breath” the animals become very uneasy, requiring a **Horsemanship/Awareness** roll at TN 10 to keep them calm enough to ride. The PCs may also notice (if they pay attention to such things) that the local wildlife is all vacating the area, spooked by the impending wrath of Sleeping Thunder Mountain. A PC who can communicate with animals (such as a shugenja with the spell *Nature’s Touch*) will be able to learn that the animals fear an impending burst of wrath from the mountain’s spirit.

Part Five: Solutions and Conclusions

There are two problems facing the PCs in this adventure: the sabotage of the construction site, and the wrath of the mountain. Each requires its own solution. Further, some PCs may feel compelled by Clan loyalties to obstruct any solution. The GM should be prepared to improvise based on the guidelines presented here.

Dealing with the Saboteurs

If the PCs realize what is happening, either by collecting enough evidence or “catching them in the act,” they will probably confront the Mantis saboteurs. (Of course, if some of the PCs are themselves Mantis, this may complicate things.)

How the Mantis react will depend on the situation. If they are in a private confrontation with the PCs (for example, if the PCs interrupt them while trying to sneak up and ignite their powder charge), they will try to quickly kill these meddlesome samurai and dump their bodies in the river. The Mantis are ruthless and skilled fighters, and represent a real danger to unprepared or overconfident PCs.

If the PCs confront them publicly, in the presence of witnesses, or accompanied by Shiba Takuzawa or the Kaiu engineers, the Mantis will be more cautious, and probably try to stonewall or pretend innocence until they can slip away and escape. If that is not an option, they will fight, attempting to win free by force of arms.

Given the chance, the Mantis will always try to perform their final act of sabotage by detonating the gaijin pepper charge (as described above under Part Three).

Under no circumstances will any of the Mantis ever be voluntarily taken alive. These are hand-picked samurai and are fully prepared to die for their lord and Clan. If the PCs somehow manage to capture some of them (such as by reducing them to Down and then tying them up and healing them), they will never admit to who they are, and will do their best to divert the PCs and the Phoenix with false testimony (for example, by claiming to be ronin hired by the Dragon Clan or the Scorpion Clan). They will not tell the truth even if tortured. Given the chance, they commit suicide.

If the PCs have the Mantis prisoners strip-searched (before or after death), they will discover a number of nautically-themed tattoos on their bodies – images of

tossing waves, kobune ships, sharks, octopi, and so forth. Any PC who rolls **Commerce/Intelligence** at TN 10 knows that these tattoos are common among sailors. A PC who rolls **Lore: Mantis Clan/Intelligence** at TN 15, **Lore: Minor Clans/Intelligence** at TN 20, or **Heraldry/Intelligence** at TN 25 recognizes some of the tattoos as being commonly found among the Mantis Clan's sailors.

Appeasing the Mountain

As Chobu warns, the mountain is “grumpy” and unhappy about the bridge and about what it perceives as a lack of proper respect from the local humans. In order to prevent the Sleeping Thunder Mountain Kami from trying to wreck the bridge, the kami will have to be invoked and appeased.

Any shugenja PC can invoke the spirit of the mountain by praying in the Shrine and casting *Commune* (Earth) with three Raises. It can also be done outside the shrine, but will require five Raises. An Ise Zumi with the Cloud tattoo may also summon the mountain kami, but only within the Shrine.

If the Kami is invoked, it manifests itself by possessing the statue in the shrine. The statue animates, grumbling and rubbing its belly in an irritable fashion, resembling nothing so much as a grumpy old man with an upset stomach. It mutters about how “all that noise, day in and day out, how am I supposed to sleep? Nobody cares about me at all, they just make their noise and go about their business. Oh, they pray so much when things go wrong, but the rest of the time, why, I'm lucky if that old monk remembers me.”

The “noise” is of course the bridge construction. Appeasing the spirit of the mountain will require both a sincere apology for the “noise” (**Sincerity/Awareness** or similar skill at TN 15), and a promise that the village will do a better job of venerating the mountain's spirit in the future. This promise will have to be fulfilled by the villagers – the PCs will have to extract a pledge of regular worship and veneration from the village headman.

The Fate of the Bridge

If the PCs do not expose the Mantis “wreckers,” they will eventually destroy the bridge completely, either by collapsing it or with their cache of gaijin pepper (gunpowder). At that point, if the Mantis are still here, they will secretly depart, leaving no clues as to their identities.

If the bridge is destroyed (either by sabotage or explosion), Shiba Takuzawa will angrily shut down the project – with the war looming, there is no time to start again from scratch. The Kaiu are paid off and depart for Crab lands.

If the saboteurs are exposed and eliminated (either killed or forced to flee) before destroying the bridge, the construction will be completed within two weeks. Any PCs who helped expose the “wreckers” will be invited to stay and attend the dedication ceremony.

The Bridge Dedication

The bright sunlight of spring shines on the raw, fresh planks of the barely-completed bridge. The workers and their Kaiu supervisors stand in rows beside the road, their faces suffused with the simple satisfaction of craftsmen proud of a job well-done. Shiba Takuzawa leads a trio of elderly Isawa priests onto the bridge, where they speak prayers to Koshin, Fortune of Travel, to bless and guard the bridge.

PCs who were invited to stay may also escort the old priests onto the bridge if they wish, and PCs who are shugenja themselves are invited to join in the prayers.

As the prayers continue, you become aware of a rising noise from the river-crevasse. The waters are rising rapidly, foaming and tossing, as the much-anticipated spring icemelt rushes down from the mountains.

If the PCs have successfully arranged to appease the spirit of Sleeping Thunder Mountain, the water will crash and foam against the thick piers of the bridge. The bridge vibrates just slightly, but holds. A cheer goes up from the villagers and workers as they see that their labor has not been in vain.

If the PCs did not appease the mountain's spirit, just as the rising waters smash into the bridge, the ground heaves and buckles. Everyone is flung to the ground, and the bridge groans and crackles ominously, large splinters appearing in the thick wooden timbers.

Shiba Takuzawa will grab one of the priests and rush to land. PCs who are on the bridge must roll **Athletics/Agility** at TN 5 to get off the bucking, splintering platform safely – the TN goes up to 10 if they are helping someone else. Those who fail are still on the bridge when it collapses, tumbling down-river in splintering ruin, massive wooden beams and posts tossing like match-sticks. Needless to say, this is a fatal experience.

Epilogue

If the bridge is successfully completed, any PCs who depart the area will pass a large Phoenix army – over four thousand bushi, with a dozen shugenja accompanying them. They march rapidly toward the bridge... and the Dragon Clan border beyond.

Rewards for Completing the Adventure

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

Playing through the adventure:	2 XP
Good role-playing:	1 XP
Bridge survives (non-Mantis PCs)	+1 XP
OR	
Mantis PC (only) helps sabotage the bridge	+1 XP

Total Possible Experience: 4 XP

Honor

Mantis Clan PCs who oppose their Clan's sabotage for reasons of principle/bushido gain +1 Honor if the bridge is completed successfully.

Glory

Mantis Clan PCs gain +1 Glory if the bridge is destroyed (and they did not actively protect the bridge).

Phoenix Clan PCs gain +1 Glory if the bridge survives and they actively helped protect it.

If the involvement of the Mantis Clan is somehow exposed, all Mantis PCs lose 3 points of Glory (unless they actively opposed their Clan's efforts).

Other Awards/Penalties

None.

Appendix: NPCs

Akira, Mantis Leader

FIRE 3	AIR 3
	Awareness 4
EARTH 3	WATER 3
Willpower 4	Strength 4
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Mantis Bushi 3

Honor/Glory: 0.4/2.3

Skills: Acting 4, Athletics 5, Battle 4, Commerce 3, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Heraldry 2, Kuenai 4, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu 4, Nofujutsu 5, Sailing 6, Sincerity 3, Stealth 5.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Ambidextrous, Crafty, Death Trance, Magic Resistance (rank one), Perfect Balance, Storm Legion/Dark Secret (Mantis saboteur)

Equipment: Peasant clothing, purse with 2 koku in assorted coinage, pair of jo staffs (0k2).

Mantis Saboteurs (“workers”)

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

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Mantis Bushi 1

Honor/Glory: 0.3/0.8

Skills: Acting 3, Athletics 4, Battle 2, Commerce 1, Kuenai 2, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Nofujutsu 4, Sailing 3, Sincerity 2, Stealth 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Bland, Death Trance/Dark Secret (Mantis saboteurs)

Equipment: Peasant clothing, purses with 1-2 koku in assorted coins, various peasant weapons (tonfa, jo staff, etc).

Shiba Takuzawa, Phoenix Supervisor

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 2	WATER 2
Willpower 3	
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15 (20 in light armor)

School/Rank: Shiba bushi 2

Honor/Glory: 2.8/3.1

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 4, Courtier 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Heraldry 3, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 2, Lore (Battle) 3, Lore (Shugenja) 3, Shintao 3, Sincerity 4, Theology 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Allies (Shiba military), Social Position (taisa)/Gullible, Obligation (Shiba military)

Equipment: Kimono, light armor (usually not worn), daisho set.

Kaiu Otsu, Chief Engineer

FIRE 2	AIR 2
Intelligence 4	Awareness 3
EARTH 3	WATER 2
Willpower 4	Perception 4
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: Kaiu Engineer (Path of Stone) 2

Honor/Glory: 2.6/1.4

Skills: Armorer 2, Battle 3, Craft (engineering drawings) 3, Engineering 6, History 3, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Engineering) 5, Lore (Shadowlands) 1, Siege 3, Sincerity 1, Traps 2, Weaponsmith 1.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Great Potential (Engineering), Ratling Ally (Tattered Ear Tribe)/Antisocial, Obtuse

Equipment: Practical kimono, writing kit, pouch of engineer's tools, wakizashi.

Kaiu Tanuji, Apprentice Engineer

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

TN to be Hit: 10

School/Rank: Kaiu Engineer (Path of Stone) 1

Honor/Glory: 1.9/0.8

Skills: Armorer 1, Battle 2, Engineering 3, Etiquette 2, History 2, Kenjutsu 3, Lore (Engineering) 2, Lore (Shadowlands) 3, Siege 2, Sincerity 2, Traps 1, Tsubojutsu 4, Weaponsmith 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Sensei (Kaiu Otsu)/Haunted (younger sister)

Equipment: Practical kimono, pouch of engineer's tools, purse with 5 koku in assorted coinage, light armor (kept at Inn, not worn), wakizashi, tetsubo (kept at Inn).

Critical Events Summary

Please answer these questions for any tables of this module which run between February and April, 2004. Return the results by mail to Robert Hobart, 300 Foxcreek Road, Rolla, MO, 65401, or by e-mail to <youta@rollanet.org>.

Was the bridge successfully completed?

If so, was the mountain spirit appeased, or did the bridge collapse?

Were the Mantis saboteurs killed, or did they escape?

Did any of the PCs identify the Mantis, and if so, did they tell anyone else?