

# Challenge, Focus, Strike!

## Adventure Hooks for Legend of the Five Rings

### VOLUME I: CFS OF THE WEEK #1 THROUGH #13

Written by *Isawa Nazomitsu (Scott Stockton)* • Compiled & Edited by *Pirate Spice (Sean C. Riley)*

## Foreword

When I first joined Alderac Entertainment Group's gaming forum ([www.alderac.com/forum](http://www.alderac.com/forum)), I was delighted to discover the L5R RPG GMs section rife with plot hooks and adventure ideas in the classic "Challenge, Focus, Strike" (CFS) format. Though many were excellent, one author's submissions stood out as an example for all others to strive for. Isawa Nazomitsu's "CFS of the Week" feature has been a source of inspiration and joy for many a Game Master, myself included.

Following is the first volume of a series of documents collecting the esteemed Nazomitsu's brilliant weekly installments. *Challenge, Focus, Strike!* is just my way of thanking him for sharing his enlightened creativity with us, and making his excellent work more readily available to the L5R community.

For the sake of further organizing these, I have attempted to give each hook a title (also taking inspiration from suggestions on the forum). The hooks themselves are presented in the order that they were originally posted, edited for brevity and typography.

It is my deepest honor to open *Challenge, Focus, Strike! – Volume I* with an exclusive "CFS of the Week #Alpha," written by Nazomitsu specifically for this release.

– *Sean C. Riley (a.k.a. Pirate Spice)*

## A Simple Errand

*This one is dedicated to Pirate Spice for the fantastic job he did in archiving, laying out, and presenting my numerous adventure hooks. And also to all the GMs who put their blood, sweat, and tears into creating memorable adventures for their players.*

*This scenario can be used to provide an overarching story for a campaign, giving the party a reason to work together, and directing them as they travel toward further adventures.*

*Enjoy!*

– *Scott Stockton (a.k.a. Isawa Nazomitsu)*

## CHALLENGE

The player characters are asked or assigned to help a group of monks maintain a library. The library is well-known as a popular refuge for retired samurai of station who wish to escape the demands of their former lives, and just about every clan has at least one daimyo who supports the library. As such, the player characters are excused from their normal duties until the maintenance is completed.

That shouldn't be any cause for worry, however, as their part in the project is bound to be no more than just a simple errand.

## FOCUS

The head archivist is a retired samurai who has taken the name Rai Li. He meets the player characters warmly and takes them to his office, where a series of scrolls are laid out on a writing table. The scrolls tell of the heroic deeds of a number of Rokugan's lesser known heroes, and are part of a larger historical account. Rai Li tells the PCs that a Phoenix historian donated the set of fifty-two scrolls to the temple so that the Empire might know of the great deeds that brave men and women perform every day. He goes on to explain that a copy of each scroll was also given to the hero or heroes whose stories were detailed in that particular volume. While this fact would normally be no more significant than an archival footnote, recent developments have made these copies especially important. It turns out that a number of the original scrolls suffered water damage during a severe storm last year and are no longer readable. Thus, without the copies of the missing scrolls, the set is incomplete.

Naturally, Rai Li would like the PCs to gather the scrolls. He would do it himself, but other duties are keeping him busy. And, after all, a group of samurai should have no difficulty performing the job of a simple librarian.

## STRIKE

The missing volumes are scattered all across the Empire, and while Rai Li has records that can tell the PCs where to start looking, it will take some time and effort to track them down. Some have been incorporated into other libraries, either out of carelessness or for safekeeping. Some are being kept as family treasures. Some are stored in dusty warehouses. One was given to a geisha as a present a few years ago, and another was stored in the Kitsu Tombs with the ashes of an honored soldier. One has been lost in a haunted cave, and two were in a box that was stolen by bandits. A ronin duelist uses one as a means of proving his samurai heritage, and one more is being kept by a shugenja who has since gone insane.

Still, all the PCs have to do is gather a few scrolls and bring them back to the library. No trouble at all, right?

## 1. A Measure of Worth

*Today's adventure idea has two versions, depending on how nice or naughty you want to be to your players.*

## CHALLENGE

A mysterious monk passes through the area, causing quite a commotion. The monk claims to be seeking "the worthiest soul in the region" to bestow a great reward on that man or woman.

## FOCUS

### VERSION 1

Naturally, everyone who hears of the monk's quest will have a different idea of what exactly constitutes worthiness. Humble men will clamor to nominate and support those they respect. Proud men will step forward to declare (or show) why they are worthy. And wicked men will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that they are found worthy somehow. After all, if you can take something, are you not worthy of having it?

### VERSION 2

Naturally, everyone who hears of the monk's quest will have a different idea of what exactly constitutes worthiness. A number of impromptu competitions break out as individuals seek to show off their strength, intellect, prowess, and virtue. The characters are free to participate if they wish, or they can simply deal with the problems that arise from the charged atmosphere. The monk keeps track of everyone who comes forward, but pays particular attention to those who act with honor.

## STRIKE

### VERSION 1

When the monk's reward is finally revealed, he announces to all present that the recipient is the worthiest soul in the region to receive the wisdom of Shinsei and the blessings of the fortunes in the coming months. He calls upon everyone to recognize the incredible potential that the winner holds, and lauds the lucky man or woman with praise and promises of good fortune. Once the winner receives his or her public recognition the monk is satisfied and says no more, other than encouraging others to "wait and see."

### VERSION 2

The monk is actually a Bloodspeaker initiate searching for a suitable victim for ritual sacrifice. If the PCs do not stop his plans he will kill the "winner" of the contest and summon a swarm of vengeful yokai to torment the innocent. Naturally, the PCs will have some qualms about this idea if one of them is chosen as the lucky winner.

*There you go. Two ways to get your characters involved in a variety of fun and interesting situations, with rewards that are definitely more than they bargained for.*

## 2. Much Ado About Nothing

*Today I give you a mystery scenario with a twist.*

### CHALLENGE

A sudden storm forces the player characters to take refuge for the night at a roadside inn. A handful of other travelers hailing from different clans and families are also stuck in the small building, which offers just enough room for privacy.

### FOCUS

Dinner is served in the common room, and it is apparent that not all of the travelers in the inn consider each other worthy of courtesy and respect. One samurai in particular, Matsu Ryosuke (feel free to change the family name as you see fit), is quite outspoken and abrasive.

After dinner ends the travelers retire to various rooms around the inn to get away from one another and relax in private.

Thirty minutes later Ryosuke is found stabbed to death in the outhouse. All signs point to one of the other people staying in the inn as the culprit.

### STRIKE

Ryosuke is actually a Ninja Shapeshifter. It is not "dead," but is merely appearing so in an attempt to sow paranoia in the other people staying at the inn. Rather than drop its disguise or take action against anyone else, it will let suspicions build among the remaining travelers. It hopes that distrust and wild accusations will eventually cause one or more of the residents to draw steel against another.

*Remember that using the Commune spell on a dead body is considered Maho. If you want to be especially sneaky you can rule that any other elemental kami in the area reply with "I saw Nothing" when questioned.*

*If you really want to spice up the scenario, try taking players aside for private conversations or passing out secret notes to build paranoia in the group too. It doesn't work with everyone, but it can be an interesting role-playing challenge for groups who come from different clans and backgrounds.*

## 3. The Price of Blasphemy

*This week we find ourselves with a ronin, a problem, and a small fortune, but not necessarily in that order.*

### CHALLENGE

A young ronin shugenja approaches the party while they are relaxing and introduces himself as Kintaro. He explains that he is searching for knowledge and requests a chance to buy or copy any spell scrolls the party might be carrying. While this is an extremely unorthodox proposition, Kintaro is willing to pay any amount of money, and has more than enough to tempt unscrupulous samurai.

### FOCUS

If no one in the party accepts the money Kintaro offers he becomes desperate and reveals the details of his problem (listed in the Strike section below), begging the characters to help him.

If anyone in the party does provide Kintaro with spell scrolls in exchange for money, he thanks them profusely and pays the agreed upon amount. From that moment onward, the shugenja who accepted Kintaro's money is afflicted by the same curse that Kintaro suffers (see below), although it may take some time before he or she notices.

### STRIKE

Kintaro gained his wealth by stealing several valuable treasures from a shrine dedicated to the elemental kami. The kami struck back by placing a curse on Kintaro and any who share magical resources with him. Any spell scrolls carried by such a shugenja are good for only a single use, and become blank after used to cast a spell.

Whether Kintaro explains his problem to the party willingly, or they have to find the truth another way, the shrine's treasures must be completely restored and reparations made before the curse may be lifted (at which time all blank scrolls are restored to normal). Although Kintaro knows the depths of his misdeeds, he is afraid to face the kami's wrath, and would much rather continue running from his mistakes than go back to the shrine.

If you think your party might be overly reluctant to trade in magical scrolls, you can change Kintaro into a young woman named Kaneko. Players might be more inclined to help a woman who is down on her luck, and a sweet girl's smile goes a long way toward convincing player characters to give aid.

## 4. Behind Closed Doors

*Since this is the fourth installment in this series, and the number four means death in Japanese, here's a little something to get under your players' skin. Be warned: don't read it while you eat.*

### CHALLENGE

The characters are invited to the home of an influential and respected nobleman in a small town famous for its natural beauty. The noble offers the party a chance to relax in his "little paradise."

### FOCUS

After a few days in the estate it becomes clear that something is wrong in paradise. No one smiles or laughs, and the few servants visible in the house take pains to go about their duties as quietly as possible. A pall hangs over not only the noble's home, but the entire town as well. Colors are muted, and emotions subdued. No matter how hard the characters search, they will find nothing of beauty here.

### STRIKE

The noble is insane, and has a torture chamber hidden in a secret room beneath his estate. He not only performs physical torture on the people of his village, but abuses them in other unspeakable ways. For example, feeding on their remains and forcing their loved ones to do so as well. His impure actions have brought a blight on the town, but his authority and status make him all but politically untouchable. The characters must decide what they will do in the face of such heinous atrocities.

## 5. All Fools' Day

*April Fools' Day is almost upon us, and while this holiday is not celebrated in Rokugan (or is celebrated every day, depending on your players) it still provides an excellent excuse to run scenarios that are just a little (or quite a bit) silly.*

### CHALLENGE

The characters are invited to a dinner party at the home of a local noble. A number of important personages are also invited, including any NPCs that have strong relationships with the characters. The host has gathered a number of delicacies for the occasion, and promises an event that none will ever forget.

### FOCUS

The party begins without incident, but just before the second toast (to be made with a fruity type of alcohol from the Mantis Isles) is served the characters are called away by their servants. It seems that a trio of mujina are ransacking the party's gear, and something must be done to minimize the damage. Unless the PCs insist on getting a drink first, this bothersome interruption will likely prevent them from enjoying the wine.

### STRIKE

This is only the start of the party's problems. The mujina also drank all of the fruit wine before the start of the feast, and replaced it with a brew from their native realm of Sakkaku. Anyone who drinks the wine is automatically influenced by chame for the rest of the evening. Chame (described on pages 44 and 45 of *Fortunes and Winds*) causes victims to act in a foolish and unrestrained manner, as if intoxicated. Depending on the individuals affected and the mood the GM wishes to present, the results could range from hilarious to deadly serious.

*If things get too out of hand, you can always rule that everyone affected remembers nothing come morning and let the PCs intimidate the servants into keeping quiet. After all, seppuku kind of takes the fun out of April Fools Day. Or you could let the repercussions, whatever they may be, linger for some time to come.*

## 6. As Driven Snow

Here in Osaka the weather is getting better and better every day, and the cherry blossoms are just starting to bloom. Soon the flower viewing parties will start. Of course, not everyone is lucky enough to live in an area with cherry blossoms, so here's a little something to enjoy instead of the real thing.

### CHALLENGE

A young poet who is on good terms with the player characters asks for a favor. He explains that he met a young temple maiden who befriended and inspired him during a trip to the Isawa Woodlands in his youth. He will hold his first cherry blossom viewing party soon, and he wishes for his dear friend to attend. He asks the party to deliver his invitation to the temple where she lives, and also to convince her to attend if she is reluctant.

### FOCUS

The maiden attends a temple in the mountains in the northern reaches of the Phoenix lands, where winter is still in full force. As the player characters go further, the weather grows colder and the snows become deeper. Although travel is possible, it becomes difficult to advance, and it takes a few days before the temple can be found in the coldest, snowiest reaches of the forest.

### STRIKE

The maiden remembers the poet fondly and would like to accept his invitation, for she has never seen cherry blossoms in bloom. There is however, one problem. She is a Yuki no Onna, and snow follows in her wake no matter where she goes. She believes that the Isawa Libraries might hold an answer, but there is no way she could enter without causing an indoor blizzard. If the player characters could find a solution on her behalf, however...

*The key to bringing the Snow Maiden to the festival without freezing the flowers could be a secret spell, difficult ritual, lost artifact, or plea for divine intervention, depending on your preferences. Remember to make sure the players are aware that there is a time limit. Like too many things in this world, the cherry blossoms bloom for but a short time before they wither and fall.*

## 7. Garden Pests

This week's adventure idea continues the cherry blossom theme from last week and is based on an actual Japanese legend. I hope you enjoy both the adventure and the story.

### CHALLENGE

An important lord is troubled by the sad state of his garden. His beloved cherry trees have become withered and barren, and refuse to blossom. He has heard tales of an old man who can restore sick trees to health called 'Hana-Saka-Jiji,' and he offers a reward to anyone who can bring the miracle worker to him.

### FOCUS

Although the old man's talent with flowers and trees is legendary, he is not an easy man to track down. He roams the land, going wherever his fancy takes him. The last reports of his whereabouts place him near the holdings of the Sparrow Clan, but he has continued his wanderings since then.

In addition, other ambitious groups of samurai and courtiers are also seeking Hana-Saka-Jiji. While these rivals pose no mortal threat to the party, they are not above stooping to sabotage in their attempts to gain the lord's blessing for themselves.

### STRIKE

When Hana-Saka-Jiji is brought to the lord's garden, he scatters ashes over the cherry trees...revealing a flock of invisible monsters! The creatures have been draining the life energy of the trees, causing them to become sick and wasted. Once they are revealed they can be dispatched by normal means, but care must be taken to avoid harming the lord's precious trees.

*Use whatever statistics you feel appropriate for the monsters. If your characters are still rather inexperienced, flying goblins will probably be enough to pose a challenge. For more powerful parties you can use anything up to minor oni with health draining attacks.*

## 8. Good Help is Hard To Find

This week we move away from cherry blossoms and focus on another aspect of spring in Japan. This season sees numerous students entering school, as well as many young adults entering the work force and seeking jobs. On one hand, the influx of new blood is welcome, but at the same time many employers bemoan their new hires' lack of skill.

### CHALLENGE

One of the characters' superiors retains the services of a new advisor. The man, named Baramucha, comes from another family in the supervisor's clan, and confidently assures everyone that he will bring great knowledge and skill to the job.

### FOCUS

As time goes on, Baramucha's advice continually proves to be incorrect. He loses track of important details, confuses different facts, and mixes truth with nonsense until the result is impossible to understand. He maintains complete faith in his methods, and changes the subject whenever his mistakes are mentioned. The only useful skill he displays is duping the unwary into believing him. To make matters worse, he has sufficient status and glory to make questioning him publicly difficult.

### STRIKE

If the players choose to look into Baramucha's background, they'll find he is completely clean. He has no hidden agenda or skeletons in his closet. He is a loyal and well-meaning, if unintelligent and misguided, member of the clan who gained his position through favors and luck. Nonetheless, if he is left unchecked, he could cause considerable damage.

*The exact area under Baramucha's command depends on the tone you want to set for the adventure. If you want things to be serious, you can make him the master of the family's army. If you want a more humorous touch, he can be placed in charge of organizing the household. If you feel really like being really evil toward your players, make Baramucha their new boss.*

## 9. When the Student is Ready...

My apologies for being late this week. Several of my students had last minute projects to complete and needed my advice. (And then I couldn't log on to the forum.) So to make up for the delay I bring you another scenario with multiple versions. Now your players can know the joys that come with being a teacher.

### CHALLENGE

One or more of the characters are asked to train and instruct a young bushi named Shinichiro. The young man has just completed his gempukku ceremony, and his sensei would like him to receive some practical guidance from experienced samurai.

### FOCUS

Shinichiro is quite talented in combat techniques, and already has a good deal of expertise with the sword. He is an apt pupil and is eager to learn from the player characters.

### STRIKE

Choose one of the following:

#### VERSION 1

Shinichiro has a great deal of confidence in his own abilities, and lacks the patience for prolonged training. He insists on progressively intense training sessions, eventually challenging one or more of his teachers to combat with live weapons. Claiming that he has the control needed both to protect himself and avoid inflicting a serious injury on his training partner, Shinichiro will not be satisfied until he has had the chance to prove his skill.

If you decide to go this route, feel free to give Shinichiro some skill in subtly deriding and insulting the skills of those who refuse to face him.

#### VERSION 2

Shinichiro is eager to test the skills and maneuvers he has learned in real combat situations. He takes every possible opportunity to look for a fight, and does his best to put the player characters and himself in situations where combat seems likely. His confidence in himself and the party is so great that he desires a chance to show the whole Empire what they can do, and he does not hesitate to proclaim that they can defeat any challenges.

Having connections of his own to call upon and not being completely subject to the commands of the party could greatly aid Shinichiro in his efforts to get the party involved in some daring mission.

#### VERSION 3

Shinichiro is not really a young bushi, but is actually a Shosuro actor who has taken the young man's place. His assignment is to learn the weaknesses of the player characters' schools, and he does his best to find any flaws in their styles that he can exploit at a later time.

If you desire, you can have the character come back at a later time as an antagonist, with multiple ranks in the Know the School skill.

#### VERSION 4

Shinichiro is a tormented man. Although he has great skill with the sword and is eager to achieve perfection in his art, he does not wish to be party to any violence or bloodshed. During practice his swordsmanship is flawless, but in real combat he does his best to hide or flee without being noticed.

To further add to Shinichiro's torment, you can provide him with the foretelling of a Great Destiny which requires him to defeat a great enemy.

*Of course, if the party manages to give Shinichiro what he wants and teach him something valuable in the process...well, then they are great teachers indeed.*

*By the way, feel free to post your own ideas for possible twists on Shinichiro's story. After all, every student (and every gaming group) has special needs.*

**Editor's Note:** *Following are the other ideas that were posted.*

#### VERSION 5 (BY AKODO AKIRA)

Shinichiro is a complete waste of time. Whenever he can he drinks and whores around (yes, he visits brothels rather than geisha house, though he goes there too), he skips out on practice (thinking himself to be good enough), and ignores the samurai in charge (his position is really quite high, or rather his father's position is high). How do the PCs deal with him? Do they disrespect him and possibly earn the father's ire? Do they do only what they are told? Or do they rise to the occasion and turn the young man around into something better than he was?

#### VERSION 6 (BY BAYUSHI BAKA88)

Regarding [Version 4], I feel as if it would be a good plot to go with whilst the party is traveling with Shinichiro. That way, the revelation of his true combat skills will be more of a shock and a great burden to the PCs. Shinichiro could, of course, eventually conquer his fear (Great Destiny) and end up saving the PCs in some manner.

## 10. A Devilish Debt

*Things have been kind of quiet lately, so let's see what a sudden monster attack can do to shake things up.*

### CHALLENGE

A relatively weak minor oni of an unknown type emerges from the wilderness to attack the home of the characters' lord or commanding officer. Although the oni is not a serious threat, the attack is focused, sudden, and ruthless.

### FOCUS

If the minor oni is defeated another new type of minor oni appears a few days later, attacking with the same goal in mind. Another minor oni comes forth three or four days after that. And another new oni arrives three days after that. None of the oni have been seen before, and they all seek the destruction of the lord's home.

### STRIKE

Last winter, the inhabitants of a nearby village were on the brink of starvation when a mysterious shugenja arrived bearing enough rice to last the village through the season. The villagers owe their lives to the shugenja, and he has been calling upon that debt to bind their names to oni. If the characters do not find and eliminate the shugenja, both the lord and the villagers under his protection will suffer.

*The shugenja's motives and abilities are up to you. If the party requires more of a challenge, you can have the villagers be willing compatriots of the shugenja, or increase the power of the summoned oni. If the repeated oni attacks are too difficult for the party, you can increase the amount of recovery time in-between attacks or even have the NPC who is being victimized loan the characters some of his prized crystal weaponry for the duration of the threat.*

## 11. Footsteps of My Forebears

*A samurai never stands alone. The souls of his ancestors stand beside him at all times. Or at least, they're supposed to...*

### CHALLENGE

After being struck by a strange nemuranai or spell, one of the characters finds himself unable to receive aid or guidance from one of his heroic ancestors. Ideally, the ancestor in question should be one who has taken a personal interest in the character on previous occasions.

### FOCUS

If a Kitsu Sodan-Senzo or another expert on spirits is consulted, the character is told that he must retrace the path of his ancestor's most famous adventure. By performing the same tasks and undergoing the same hardships in the same places that his ancestor did, the character may enter an emotional state that makes it easy for his ancestor to rekindle the connection between them.

### STRIKE

The spirit of the ancestor's rival has also learned of the accident, and has sent his descendant to harry the character. If the rival's plan is successful, the character's ancestor may be cut off from the mortal world forever.

*Of course, you can tailor the tale of the ancestor's adventure to include whatever situations and problems you wish. Although the character in question does not receive any guidance from the banished ancestor, if the two are similar in personality and temperament you may allow him to gain some small benefits as the adventure progresses.*

*This idea could also be used to begin a campaign. In order to complete the same quest his ancestor did, the character must secure aid from the descendants of his ancestor's allies - the other player characters. The party must then undertake the same epic quest that their honored ancestors did so long ago.*

## 12. The Tomb of Takeda Fujimu

*You can't please everyone all the time this week. In fact, you'll be lucky if you can keep from making everybody angry.*

### CHALLENGE

While traveling through an unused area of woodland, the characters find the lost tomb of Takeda Fujimu, a famous ronin duelist who was granted a family name by the Emperor hundreds of years ago.

### FOCUS

The Takeda family is no longer surviving, but many others lay claim to the hero's tomb. The area is currently under the control of the Scorpion Clan, but at the time the tomb was built the land belonged to the Lion. Furthermore, Fujimu was a member of the Dragon Clan before he was made ronin, and he accepted a number of gifts from the Mirumoto when they attempted to convince him to return to the family.

### STRIKE

When a member of the Otomo family arrives to mediate the conflict, she insists that the characters assist her, claiming that the party was chosen by the spirit of Takeda Fujimu when they found the tomb. The characters could suggest that the tomb be given to any of the claimants, held in trust by another family, or even claim it for themselves. Whatever they do, many influential people will try to influence them, and many powerful figures may be angered by their final decision.

*If you want to get really wild, you can add more groups who desire stewardship of the tomb. Perhaps the tomb was built by the Kaiu family, and is still listed as part of their holdings. Or the Crane could have brokered a secret deal to offer Fujimu fealty before his untimely death prevented them from announcing it. Monks or the Phoenix could claim the site as sacred. And don't forget the possibility of a ronin claiming (either truthfully or otherwise) to be the lost heir to the Takeda family name.*

## 13. Do You Have an Appointment?

### CHALLENGE

The characters are sent to deliver a personal message to the Otomo daimyo on behalf of their superior, who asks that it be given in person and in private. The daimyo is currently attending to political matters at his estate, which is as large as it is busy.

## FOCUS

Once they reach the daimyo's home, the characters must deal with several levels of bureaucracy in order to secure an appointment with him. The gatekeeper of the estate, the captain of the guards, the manager of the household, and several assistants bar the way, each demanding proof of the characters' identity and business with the daimyo. The daimyo's personal assistant in particular is quite difficult to deal with, telling the party to "wait for an opening" time after time.

## STRIKE

The assistant in question does not bear the party any ill-will or genuinely seek to block their progress. He simply has a different sense of priorities, and is trying to manage the daimyo's time as efficiently as possible. Because new developments in the court demand the daimyo's attention every day, the players will have to convince the assistant that their business is important enough to be guaranteed a spot on the daimyo's schedule. How they do this is up to them, but their actions will certainly have an effect on how they and the message they bear are received.

*This adventure has the potential to be particularly difficult for characters with low social standing, while characters with high levels of status and/or glory may get by some obstacles simply by pulling rank. It also provides an excellent opportunity to show martially oriented characters the ways of the courts and the value of social skills.*