

...And Does Not Descend

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Requirements:

There is no greater shame than a fallen son. There is no greater heroism than a noble fight against injustice. Only the Phoenix rises and does not descend. - A Legend of The Five Rings scenario from Gaelcon 99

The Court was in uproar. The courtiers whispered and fluttered like a disturbed flock of birds. They shot venomous glances towards the hulking form of the Crab who had dared utter such words. The Crane lord stood and looked the Crab straight in the eye. "Anything a Crab can do, a noble-born scion of the Clan of the Crane can do - with a thousand times more finesse and sincerity!" The Crab was unimpressed. "Prove it."

* * *

The Kaiu wall is the greatest fortification in the Empire. It marks the edge of the world of men, and the beginning of the Shadowlands, the realm of uttermost evil. Here, the Crab fight their endless war against the darkness. The lone Crane samurai climbed the thousand stairs up to the battlements, ignoring the jeers and taunted of the crude Crabs. His honour was untarnished, his ancestors stood with him. He could not fail.

He reached the last stair. A chill wind bearing an oily, rotting stench struck his face. He climbed and looked out over the wall into the Darkness.

Darkness looked back at him.

Backstory: Kakita Morishu was the son of a noble Crane lord, Kakita Morihoshi. Morishu was a gifted swordsman, and excelled under the tuition of the masters of the Kakita Fencing Academy. Many whispered that the young man would one day surpass even Toshimoko, the Grey Crane. His family took great pride and gained honour from the young boy's exploits. Then, a month before Morishu's gempukku (coming of age ceremony), a Crab lord, Hida Jinjo, visited Morihoshi's court. The two lords argued. Jinjo knew of Morihoshi's pride in his only son (the Crab had been visited by a Scorpion diplomat, Bayushi Depura) and questioned the strength and skill of the young Cranes. Incensed, Morihoshi boasted that his son was better than any Crab. Jinjo demanded that Morishu accompany the Crab back to the Hida lands and prove himself against the Shadowlands. Morihoshi had no choice but to accept, and sent his son to the dangerous lands of the south. Morishu was not yet sixteen years when he left his father's house.

If Morishu had died in the southlands, honour would have been satisfied. If he had proved he was better than any Crab, his father's boasts would have been validated. He did neither - his young, untried will broke, and he fled. Such a loss of honour would have broken the family of Morihoshi - but Bayushi Depura appeared and offered a compromise. Only a few had seen Morishu's dishonour, all men loyal to

Hida Jinjo. If Jinjo could be placated - say by marrying Morihoshi's daughter - then the tale of infamy could...go untold. The Scorpion would be only too happy to arrange it. Morihoshi went to his private rooms and wrote a letter offering his daughter's hand to Jinjo - but that only solved half the problem.

Then Kakita Morihoshi ordered his son's death. That was a year ago.

Scenario structure: This is not a linear scenario. There are two major centres of action - Goroso's court and the bandit forest. Events occur in both places without the intervention of the players, and the story will run to a conclusion if the players do nothing.

There are a number of key events which are necessary for the climax to run as planned:

Morishu must be captured

The bandits must learn of this

But almost everything else is fluid and can be changed according to events.

There's a timeline and list of NPCs at the end of the scenario. Detach these for easy reference J.

There's also a quick guide to the setting, which any players unfamiliar with Legend of the Five Rings should read.

Basically, I'm giving you a lot of plot threads to weave as you see fit. The scenario should run fairly smoothly, but I can't predict what the players are going to do.

The Characters: They are a group of samurai travelling in the Lion lands. Initially, the Crane PCs know something of the above events, as does the Scorpion, but the others are ignorant.

Lady Doji Isahime. A beautiful Crane courtier, she is known at many courts across the land. She has a special role within the Clan - she maintains the façade of honour and nobility when it is damaged.

Daidoji Hokato, Isahime's bodyguard. He is young, brash and head-over-heels in love with his charge.

Matsu Yanuriko, a Matsu samurai-ko assigned to guard Lady Isahime. Yanuriko acts like a typical Matsu, but she's secretly rather soft-hearted.

Akodo Yoshi, a politically ambitious and calculating samurai.

Kitsuki Taja, a Dragon Magistrate who has been asked to help Lady Isahime with her duties as a favour to the Cranes.

"Kakita Osudo" aka Shosuro Osohama. A Scorpion actor posing as a wandering duellist. He has been sent to spy on Isahime.

Isahime knows that Kakita Morihoshi suffered dishonour, and has heard of his son's death in the Shadowlands, but doesn't know Morishu is still alive. Osohama knows some of Bayushi Depura's plot, and will probably try to profit from the whole situation.

It's fairly likely that the PCs will argue. The Lions and the Cranes want different things from the

scenario. Don't let PCs kill each other until the end - the Lions have both sworn to protect Lady Isahime, and cannot injure her...

Current situation: After fleeing the Kaiu wall, Kakita Morishu wandered Rokugan as a Ronin. He ended up in the lands near Beiden Pass, the domain of a Lion named Akodo Goroso. Goroso is a cruel and harsh lord, and his peasants groan under the weight of his rule. Morishu, now calling himself the Green Ronin, joined a gang of bandits dwelling in the forest who are dedicated to overthrowing Goroso (think of them as the Merry Men, with young Morishu as Robin Hood).

An emissary of Morishu's father, Morihoshi, discovered that Morishu was the mysterious heroic bandit. Morihoshi sent a pair of samurai to the forest, carrying the family wakizashi. They were ordered to find Morishu and demand he commit seppuku to restore his honour. If he refused...a samurai cannot live if his honour is stained, one way or another.

However, the two samurai fell prey to bandits, who stole their belongings...

Events in the scenario:

(before the characters arrive) Morishu is given a box stolen from the two samurai caught by the bandits. He opens it alone and unaware; it contains a note from his father and the family wakizashi. Shocked, he flees the glade and wanders witless, terrified that his past has caught up with him.

An eta, a half-crazed old man who gathers firewood in the forest finds the wakizashi Morishu left behind. He brings it to the village and tried to trade it for a jug of sake. He is attacked by youths that want to steal the sword.

The characters enter the village and come upon the old man fighting the youths. They find the blade.

They can question the villagers, the old man, the troops of Lord Goroso etc.

They can explore the woods. If they do, they meet the bandit troop.

They meet the samurai sent by Morihoshi.

Meanwhile, Morishu is captured by the troops of Lord Goroso.

The characters must decide what honour demands of them - let Morishu be executed as a common criminal, try to convince him to commit seppuku, rescue him, or try to profit from the situation.

Optional Plot Complication: Bayushi Depura, the manipulator who caused the whole mess, can be hanging around the area, drawn by rumours of a Ronin skilled in Iaijutsu. Depura is a tool for the GM to guide the players if necessary or complicate matters if things are going too fast. He can be hiding in the village inn, or in Goroso's court. See Depura's write-up at the end of the scenario.

Timing: The events take place over about 36 hours. The game starts at dusk; Morishu is captured in the morning of the following day. He is executed at dawn the next day.

1. Pleasant Eaves of Mountains' Cloak Forest Village

"Lanterns hanging above the village gate guide you as the dusk gathers. Flocks of bird soar over your

heads, heading for the forest to roost. As you approach, you see that the village is guarded by an armoured samurai, bearing the Mon of the Akodo family.”

The samurai are guards sent by Lord Goroso. They are led by Gunso (Sergeant) Akodo Tama. He is a loyal to Goroso, and sees the peasants as scum who should be glad to work their fingers to the bone in service to his lord. He lives here in a large townhouse, and has been stationed here to guard the village from bandits who live in the forest. He has four guards with him (non-samurai).

Play Tama as a bully, but he’s not stupid. He doesn’t like Cranes, but he’s not going to insult or even closely question a group of six samurai. He will respond best to Akodo Yoshi or Matsu Yanuriko. Tama will mention the bandit scum who hide in the forest, led by a masterless man named the Green Ronin.

The village is inhabited by about 200 heimin (half-people, commoners). Use the map provided as a guide. The characters will probably head for the teahouse or inn. The streets are quiet (the folk are scared of Tama and his men, who will probably amuse themselves later by beating some unfortunate if no bandits turn up.) As they walk, they hear sounds of a scuffle in an alley.

“An old man dressed in filthy rags is cowering against a wall, his arms wrapped around some burden. Surrounding him are three peasant youths, who are kicking and punching the old man. His whimpers and yelps are muffled, as if he is trying not to cry out.”

If the characters attract the attention of the youths, the three turn to face them. The old man takes advantage of the break in the attack to reach into the cloth bundle he’s carrying. He grasps the hilt of a sword and tries to draw it like he’s heard samurai do. He loses his grip on the handle, and the sword flies out of his hand and clatters to the cobblestones of the alley.

The characters immediately notice the sword is a beautiful, incredibly ornate and well-made wakizashi. It is two feet of bluish polished steel, with shimmering engravings all along the blade. Golden and jade dragons dance along the silk-wrapped hilt. The sword is a masterwork, and should be at the side of a daimyo, not in some peasant’s firewood bundle.

Assuming the characters aren’t totally distracted by the sword, they have to deal with the three thugs. The alley is a dead end, but the wall at the end is climbable. Two of them shove the third towards the characters and run for the far wall. The old man scrambles for the sword, but can’t get a grip on it. The remaining peasant isn’t too bright, and will charge the characters.

Bura the peasant youth:

“Wild-eyed and panicked, the burly youth runs towards you, his clothing flapping behind him like wings.”

A dozen peasants would be no match for the characters. A single panicked boy is even less of a challenge. Bura will not surrender unless the players threaten him. (Contrast him with Morishu). If the players want to fight, Bura’s no problem.

Agility 2 Reflexes 1 Void 1
 Intelligence 1 Awareness 1 TN to be hit: 5
 Stamina 3 Strength 2 Hand to hand: 1 (attack dice 3)
 Willpower 2 Perception 1 Damage: 3 K 1

If they capture Bura, he knows nothing. His friends Kane and Jinjiro saw the old man and thought they'd have some fun. (Kane and Jinjiro are over the wall, out of the village and halfway to the Unicorn lands by now...)

The old man: He gives his name as Ebisu. He is a half-wit, a non-person fit only for gathering firewood and burying the dead. He stinks, and his teeth are rotten. One eye is swollen closed due to a sore on his eyebrow. And this man was carrying a sword fit for the Emperor.

Ebisu will be incredibly grateful for his rescue, fawning and slobbering over the characters. He will claim the sword is his, but he isn't bright enough to make up even a vague story about how he could own a sword. Play him as uneducated, stubborn and panicky.

If the characters threaten him, he will bend like a reed and start begging for forgiveness. His tale of how he got the sword is a simple one:

"I was gathering the firewood, neh, in the forest when Lady Sun was climbing down the sky, and I came to a clearing with a waterfall and a river and I saw the sword shining on the grass, yes, and I thought well surely Lady Sun herself left it here for me to find for it is so beautiful so I reached out and I took the sword but then the spirits moved in the trees and I was scared and and I ran home."

The "sprints" he mentions was nothing more than the wind in the trees. He was wandering in the forest and came upon the clearing where Morishu had been. Morishu's bandits had captured the samurai sent by Morishu's father Morihoshi, and brought the sealed box to their leader. Morishu opened the box, saw his family sword inside, and ran. He's currently blundering through the forest, and is going to get captured by Lord Goroso's men.

Ebisu can guide the characters back to the clearing if they wish, but he will warn them that the forest is full of bandits and goblins and demons and worse things.

The Sword: It is called Heaven's Glory Reflected in the Soul's Steel. It was forged when the world was young by one of the greatest Kakita bladesmiths. Despite its age and the high place it holds in the estimation of the Crane, Heaven's Glory Reflected in the Soul's Steel is not a blade of legend that hurls thunderbolts or slices sunbeams on two. Its power is a subtle one. Those who gaze upon the blade find themselves reflecting on the meaning of honour, and comparing themselves to the ideal of the samurai.

"The blade shines in the waning light as if a shard of the sun had been caught in steel and brought to earth. Its hilt is made of some bluish metal that feels like silver, and wrapped in finest silk. Kanji delicately traced on the blade name the sword Heaven's Glory Reflected In The Soul's Steel, and the mon of the Crane adorns the base of the hilt."

At this point, the characters can go where they wish. The likely order of encounters is as follows: they go to the forest, visit the clearing, meet the captured samurai, get attacked by the bandits, find out about Morishu's capture, and go to the Lion castle. However, they may choose a different path.

In playtesting, the characters ended up sneaking into the castle, smuggling the wakizashi in to convince Morishu to do the honourable thing...

The Village: The players may choose to stay in the village. Describe the place as grimy, dark, and poor, despite the richness of the surrounding fields. Think of the village in Seven Samurai. Subtlety isn't that important here. The guardhouse manned by Akodo Tama's men towers over any other building in the

village. Most of the villagers are gathered in...guess what, the inn. The village headman is Torishigawa. If the characters (who are noble samurai, after all) enter the inn, he will rise and greet them in a suitable obsequious manner.

“The headman rises from his table in a corner of the inn, and limps over to greet you. He bows low, not meeting your gaze, and in a cracked voice bids you welcome to Pleasant Eaves of Mountains’ Cloak Forest Village. A young woman, obviously heavy with child, helps the old man back to his seat.”

Torishigawa was a broken man. A lifetime under Goroso’s harsh rule left him a hopeless and fearful man. The exploits of the bandits led by the Green Ronin (Morishu) renewed his hope, and he now waits for the day when Goroso is overthrown. He will initially mistrust the players, and plans to tell Morishu everything he knows later. Serving Torishigawa is his young daughter, Sariko, who’s pregnant. Guess which dashing young rogue hero is Torishigawa’s secret son-in-law. Sariko will pop up later...

If the players ask about life in the village, he will be philosophical, speaking about how hardship is a peasant’s lot and the Celestial Order. He will not even try to be sincere, but stuck-up players might not notice the subtleties in a peasant’s speech.

Torishigawa knows nothing about the sword. He does remember that two samurai passed through the fields two days ago, heading for the forest. He has no idea what they wanted, but he did tell them the best path through the forest. (He actually directed them straight into a trap, but he’s not going to tell the players that).

2. The Forest: These woods grow on the foothills of the mountains. The land there is twisted, hilly, as if the earth had writhed in pain before being petrified. The Naga once slithered through the undergrowth beneath the forest canopy. Now it is the home of bandits and thieves.

If the characters leave the village and head straight for the forest, they will be stopped by Akodo Tama. He will warn them of the bandits and evil spirits who lurk in the shadows. Tama has had several bad experiences with the bandits. If he sees the characters go to the forest, and they return unscathed, he will suspect the Crane characters of being in collusion with the bandits.

As the characters enter the forest, slow the game down. Make them feel paranoid and watched, because they are being watched. The bandits have spies watching all the roads. The bandits will not reveal themselves during the day - if it is at night, they will attempt to capture the characters - see below. If they have entered the forest before dawn, they hear shouts after travelling for some time.

“The wind whispers through the knotted branches of the over-arching trees, and the land is drowned in green shadows. The smells of rotting vegetation and wildflowers are oppressive, and the undergrowth is tangled and treacherous. The forest seems like a giant beast, crouched on the hills, watching you hungrily.”

The Cranes: The two samurai sent by Morishu’s father Morihoshi were ambushed, defeated, robbed and bound by the bandits. If the characters go to the forest by night, then the two Cranes are still tied to a tree dressed in their underclothes. By dawn, they have escaped and gone to Lord Goroso (see below).

If the characters arrive in time, they come upon the strange sight of two young men dressed in little more than loincloths, tied to a tree. The younger of the two is hanging his head in shame, the older is shouting and screaming furiously.

The older man is Kakita Adoru, the younger Kakita Yasurugi. They were sent by Kakita Morihoshi to hunt down his son and ensure he ended his shame in the proper manner. They have sworn not to reveal their mission to anyone, and to complete it without delay or dishonour. Getting beaten by bandits, losing the ancestral wakizashi as well as their own daishos, and probably losing any hope of getting to Morishu doesn't exactly stay within those orders. Being found in the woods by a lady of the Court and five other samurai really puts the jingasa (cap) on it. If either of the two had wakizashis, they'd probably fall on them. However, they are samurai, with a mission to complete, and they cannot lie down and die.

Adoru is a typical Crane. He's utterly convinced of his own nobility and honour, and regards every other Clan as thuggish and dumb to a lesser or greater extent. The shame of being beaten by bandits has angered him beyond measure, and now he wants the bandits dead, Morishu dead, and he actually wouldn't mind if every sign of his shame were wiped out. He's not blind, though, and recognises that he needs the help of the characters to complete his mission.

Yasurugi is far more dangerous, in a way. He believes passionately in bushido. He was beaten by the bandits only because he hesitated to use his blade on a peasant. He will not make the same mistake again. He would walk into the mouth of hell to preserve his honour, and the strength of his purity is a terrible force.

Adoru will try to convince the characters to free them. He will not reveal their mission, saying only they are travelling samurai who were captured by bandits. They know where the bandit lair is, and would welcome aid in defeating the miscreants.

If asked how they were captured, Adoru will say that the bandits hid in the trees, and fired arrows at the samurai. The two Cranes moved into cover, where more bandits were waiting for them. They do not know why they were not killed (Morishu recognised them, and ordered their lives to be spared...)

If the characters reveal that they have the Wakizashi, Adoru will attempt to claim it, but he's not stupid enough to get into a fight with the characters when he's unarmed. He will say that he was carrying it, but will not say why, who owns it, or how he lost it.

If Ebisu the beggar is with the characters, he can show them to where he found the sword - see The Forest Glade below. Adoru has no interest in eta's tale - he wants the characters to accompany him to the bandit camp and get his swords back (as well as find and capture Morishu). He assumes that the bandits were overcome by the spirit of the sword, and forced to abandon it.

Yasurugi will stay silent, and speak only when spoken to. His eyes will burn with focussed anger.

If the characters don't let the Cranes accompany them, the Cranes leave the forest, and return to the village. They force a peasant to go into town and purchase clothing, and go to Lord Akodo Goroso's castle. There, they tell him where the bandits may be found.

If the characters have gone into the woods at night, they're vulnerable, and will be ambushed. If they go in during the day,

An ambush: Small groups of people wandering through the woods get ambushed. Small groups of armed samurai get ambushed only when they get too close to the bandit hideout.

Night ambush:

If the characters go into the woods at night, the bandits will ambush them as follows:

Strange glowing lights appear far off in the trees (coloured paper lanterns).

These lights float (on pulleys) through the trees.

A woman appears (lights are lowered from the surrounding trees). She is quite beautiful, and dressed in a simple green kimono.

If the characters approach, the lights go out and she vanishes. A moment later, she appears off in the distance. (The bandit woman has a twin sister. She's standing off in the distance, beyond undergrowth, brambles, etc. Getting near her takes him).

While the characters blunder through the forest, bandit woman #1 runs off to another point beyond her sister. Once the characters get close to the sister, the lights are pulled back up into the trees, the woman vanishes.

The characters are being led deeper into the woods. If they keep following the lights and the woman, they eventually blunder into a pit (perception + tracking, TN 25 to notice it).

Remember the bandits know the woods very well, and have done this sort

of ambush before. If the characters do fall into the pit, the bandits will force them to hand over their weapons at arrow-point. If a character refuses to hand over his sword, make it as tense as possible (strict bushido says not to give in...). The peasants will call Imuro, so you can skip to the section below where he interrogates them.

If the characters do anything stupid like shoot an arrow at the woman, the peasants will go to plan B, the brutal ambush (day ambush).

Day ambush:

The bandits are wood-wise, and stealthy, but what look like magic glowing lights and ghostly maidens by the shadow of Lord Moon look like paper lamps on strings and grubby peasants under the gaze of Lady Sun. If the characters get too close to the bandit camp during the day, a group of seven bandits creep through the brushes and climb through the trees until they have surrounded the characters. The bandit then aim bows at the characters. The bandit leader steps out, dressed in green armour (if the characters succeed an awareness+heraldry/armourer roll, they notice that the armour is ill fitting). The bandit leader is Imuro, but he will pretend to be the vanished Green Ronin (Morishu).

Imagine Little John trying to be Robin Hood. Imuro is a big man more comfortable with a Bo stick than a duelling sword. He will try to be witty and heroic, but it's really not his style.

The bandits will initially assume that the characters are samurai of Lord Akodo Goroso sent to find their hiding place. They will attempt to take them captive. If the characters resist, a fight will ensue. Try not to let them slaughter all the bandits, but don't worry if they do.

Peasant archers (6)

Agility 2 Reflexes 2 Void 1

Intelligence 2 Awareness 3 TN to be hit: 10
Stamina 2 Strength 2 Hand to hand: 2 (attack dice 4)
Willpower 2 Perception 2 Damage: 3 K 1
Archery: 1 (attack dice 3)
Damage: 2K2
Imuro
Agility 3 Reflexes 3 Void 2
Intelligence 2 Awareness 2 TN to be hit: 15
Stamina 3 Strength 4 Sword: 1 (attack dice 4)
Willpower 2 Perception 2 Damage: 7 K 2

If the characters are captured, or if they convince the bandits that they're not Goroso's men, they will be led to the bandit camp.

If the characters are captured, Yasurugi will vanish. The young Crane is a quiet man, always in the background.

The Forest Glade: This is the clearing where Ebisu found the sword. It is a cleft in the side of a hill. A pure stream flows out of the rocky ground, winding its way down towards the fields of the village. As characters approach the glade, they will be struck by the peaceful and meditative aura of the area. The babbling brook and wind in the trees soothe the soul.

Examining the scene, footprints lead from the deep forest down to the rocky banks. Running steps lead away from the glade, out of the forest's shelter towards Goroso's castle. There is a box lying in the mud on the bank.

The box is 4 feet long, and made of lacquered cherry wood. A Crane holding a cherry blossom is drawn on the lid in lapis lazuli and gold leaf. Inside, the box is lined with finest silk. It is just the right size to hold the wakizashi. Lying in the box is a note (see handout 1).

The footprints leading out of the forest lead to the lands of Lord Goroso. See the section the Capture of Kakita Morishu.

The Bandit Camp: The camp is actually more like a small village. Lord Goroso is such a harsh master that many peasants have fled into the woods. There are several women here, and children play and laugh under the trees.

If the characters are captives, the bandits will steal their equipment and they'll be dragged to a fairly deep pit and thrown in (damage 1k1).

Imuro will question the PCs, looking down on them from the edge of the pit. He will keep playing the part of the Green Ronin, and will ask them about "one of my band who wandered from the forest." -i.e. Morishu. He will not give the name of the missing bandit. Imuro isn't that quick-witted, but he's not dumb either, and it will take some convincing for him to let a group of the oppressive samurai out of a pit.

After a while, the PCs will be left with a guard watching them. The guard has a horn to blow if someone attacks him. Kakita Yasurugi will step out of the forest in front of the guard, daring him to go for the horn. When the guard moves, Yasurugi cuts him down with a single draw-cut. The PCs can then escape the camp, or recover their weapons and kill the bandits.

If the characters have made their own way to the camp, the bandits will make a stand against them. There are about 25 bandits and about 40 non-combatants (women, children, and the elderly). 25 bandits Vs a handful of samurai aren't great odds, and some sort of compromise is suggested...

If the characters do manage to question the bandits (whether through capturing some of them, diplomacy, or some other method), they will tell how they tricked and defeated the two Kakitas and stole a box from them. One bandit took the box, and now they are looking for him. They will be loath to admit that their leader is missing, but observant characters will probably spot it...

If they can, the bandits will turn the conversation around to the evil Lord Goroso and their rightful rebellion against his harsh oppression. They will tell of crippling taxes, brutality and depravity, all enforced by his thuggish and dishonourable samurai. Goroso is a stain on the honour of the noble Akodo family.

If it is morning, and Morishu has been captured, a peasant boy runs from the village and tells the bandits the terrible news.

The Capture of Kakita Morishu: Ok, at some point, Morishu is going to stagger out of the forest, raving and terrified. The shock of opening the case and finding his family sword has momentarily driven him over the edge. He will be captured by Lord Goroso's forces, led by Akodo Tama. Morishu has to be captured for the plot to stay on track, but you can run this event in several ways:

If the characters go straight into the forest, or to the castle, and get caught up arguing with Imuro or Lord Goroso's men, then Morishu will be captured "off-screen" by a wandering patrol.

If the characters are leading troops to the bandit stronghold or have a military escort for some reason, then Morishu blunders into them and gets captured. The guards recognise him as a bandit. Alternatively, if Adoru and Yasurugi are leading troops, then they can encounter Morishu. See section 4 for the Cranes' plans for Morishu.

If the characters are heading for the castle in the morning, then they see a group of samurai heading for the forest...and a single man wandering through the fields between the forest and the soldiers.

Whatever happens, make sure Morishu is captured. He's unarmed apart from a knife, but he fights bravely. The guards overpower him through sheer force of number. He's then taken to the castle. See later for a description of Morishu.

The Castle of Lord Goroso:

North of the village, overlooking the main road from Beiden Pass, is the castle of Lord Akodo Goroso. He is a minor daimyo in the grand scheme of things, but he is the unquestioned lord of this domain. He has a loyal standing force of 20 samurai and 50 ashigaru footsoldiers.

Goroso's castle stands on a man-made hill on the bank of the river. The farmland around the castle is fairly flat, and any movement can be easily spotted.

The castle is four stories high (see maps provided.) Lord Goroso and his family sleep on the top floor, below them are the barracks and armoury. On the second floor are the halls, living chambers etc, and below them are servants quarters and stores. There are about 60 people in the castle. It is a dull heavy building, easily defensible and capable of holding far more troops in time of war. The castle is a

lynchpin in the Lion's hold on Beiden Pass.

Arrival at Dusk: If the characters for some reason go straight from the village to the castle, they will find it the gates locked and guarded. The guards will let the PCs in if they prove their identities (a footman will leave the castle and examine their travel papers.) They will be given good food and drink, as well as beds for the night in the common barracks, The Crane players are going to cause a fuss about this (if they don't, they're not very good Crane players...), but Lord Goroso will not see them until the morning. They won't be able to leave the castle until morning either (well, the guards will tell them so, but they can leave if they press the issue.)

If they ask any questions about the sword, they'll be told to wait for Lord Goroso. Make the Crane (and to a lesser extent, the Dragon) feel as unwelcome as possible. Play up dissent within the party, and give the two Lions all the breaks.

Arrival by Morning: If the PCs spend a cold night wandering around in the woods, then they won't make it to the castle until after Lady Sun smiles upon the world. They might also see Morishu being captured.

At the Court of Lord Goroso: Lady Isahime is a high-ranking noblewoman, and the two Lion samurai are respected, so the characters will be shown into the court of Lord Goroso without question. Goroso holds court in the great hall of his castle. This room is sombre, yet richly decorated. Tapestries showing famous battles and Lion samurai of old hang on the walls next to ancient and magnificently made weapons. Lord Goroso's trusted chui (lieutenants) guard their lord.

Lord Goroso: He is a huge man, a veteran of many wars. His face is scarred, twisting his mouth into a permanent grimace. He is missing two fingers on his left hand. He speaks gruffly, and is angered when interrupted or contradicted directly. He is a fervent believer in bushido, but he has no respect for lesser men or those who defy him. He knows that he is grinding the peasants into the dirt, but this is in accordance with the Celestial Order, and it is the duty of a daimyo to rule his subjects.

The bandits of the forest try his patience greatly, but he is unwilling to waste men looking for their camp. While his troops could wipe the bandits out easily, he would lose many men searching the whole forest, and that would weaken the Lion defences here unacceptably. He reserves a special hatred for the Green Ronin.

If the characters ask about the sword, Goroso will ask to see it. He will be deeply impressed and reverent of its workmanship, although he might mutter something vaguely disparaging about Crane swordfighting, all style and no soul. He will be concerned about how such a sword came to be found within his domain. He will reason that the sword was either brought to his domain by two Crane samurai who recently passed through...or more likely (since neither of the Crane was of sufficient rank to warrant such a blade), the sword is a trophy won by the Lion in some long-ago battle, a trophy that was lost, and has now been reclaimed. He will suggest (in the way only a high-ranking noble in his own stronghold can suggest) that the sword be kept by him until the truth of its origin can be determined. Of course, the only way to prove that the Crane samurai brought it is to find the Crane samurai.

Lady Tatanko, Goroso's wife: A quiet woman. She defers to her husband in all things. In Rokugan, the wife runs the estate and controls the finances, and she squeezes every possible profit out of her lands.

Akodo Tama, Goroso's chui: Though Tama has been granted the village as his personal holding, he attended court during the day. He has a fierce hatred of the Green Ronin and the bandits, and is

fanatically loyal to Goroso.

Seoko: Goroso's daughter, she is training in the Akodo samurai school. She is still young and idealistic. However, any attempts to persuade her than hinge on blaming her father for anything fail.

Let the characters connive if that's what the players want.

Events during the day: The following happen at the castle during the day.

Morning: Kakita Morishu is captured and thrown into the dungeons. Initially, the guards assume he is just a bandit, but then Akodo Tama recognises him as the bandit leader, the Green Ronin. Overjoyed, Goroso orders that the criminal be prepared for execution, and that the peasants be told of their hero's capture.

Noon: If they didn't go with the PCs, then Kakita Adoru and Kakita Yasurugi turn up at the castle, hoping to trade their knowledge of the bandit camp for Goroso's aid. If the characters are arguing with Goroso about the origin of the sword, then the testimony of the Cranes should be able to help....except the Cranes are honour-bound not to reveal their mission. If the shame of Lord Morihoshi was made public...

At this point, then Adoru and Yasurugi will start confiding in Lady Isahime and the other Cranes (excluding the Lions and Dragon - can we say "break party unity?"). Basically, they can't reveal why they are looking for Morishu, but they can't give up the sword either.

This whole problem gets even more twisted when the Green Ronin's identity is revealed. How this happens depends on the players...if they have any sense, they'll pick up on the importance of the captured bandit. If they don't, then try to use Bayushi Depura to guide the scenario.

Afternoon: Goroso sends out messengers to the villages and forts, proclaiming that the bandit king, the enemy of the people, the Green Ronin, has been captured, and will be executed in the castle courtyard at dawn.

The bandits will quickly hear of this, and prepare a rescue plan....

Meanwhile, Sariko (the village elder's daughter, and Morishu's secret wife) turns up at the gates of the castle, sobbing and wailing. If the players do nothing, the guards will go out and restore the harmony of the surroundings by making her leave. Anyone who lets a few guards beat up a heavily pregnant young woman deserves some honour loss (jin is the quality of compassion, and is inherent in the bushido code.)

The bandit plan: If the characters are in communication with the bandits, they may be told of/observe the bandit rescue plan. Imuro and his men have no intention of letting their master die. Their plan is described in section 4.

Resolution

Ok, by this point in the scenario, Morishu is facing execution as a bandit. Groups

Interested in his fate are:

The bandits, who want to free their leader, the Green Ronin.

Goroso, who wants the bandit executed.

The Cranes Adoru and Yasurugi, who want to see Morishu's shame hidden and his honour restored with seppuku.

The Crane characters, who want to see Morishu's shame hidden no matter what.

(possibly: the Scorpion, who want his shame exposed...)

If they haven't already reached the castle, Adoru and Yasurugi turn up soon after

the capture of the bandit is announced. They have a simple plan - get the sword, go to the dungeons, allow Morishu to restore his honour, and leave if possible, if not, die well. This plan will certainly not work if they do it on their own, and even if the PCs help, it won't be very likely to succeed.

If Goroso has the sword, then the Cranes have a simple plan to get it. They

demand it. While Goroso has to hand over the sword, he will be intrigued as to why so many important Cranes are wandering around his domain. If anyone reveals that the bandit is in fact Kakita Morishu, son of Morihoshi, Goroso will be angered beyond belief. For a Crane noble to lead bandits in a Lion's domain is tantamount to an act of war. Morishu will be executed as a dishonoured samurai, and the tale of his evil will be spread far and wide as a warning to others.

If possible, get the players to talk to Morishu. See his description in the NPC list. Make him as sympathetic and likeable as possible. The crux of the scenario is that he is a genuinely good man, with one flaw (his tendency to panic). He has acted with honour and justice, and led a heroic rebellion against an evil and tyrannical lord.

I really can't hope to predict what the players will do here. I'm going to outline the main possibilities, but run with the game, and only use the endings I describe here if they're appropriate.

Forced seppuku: Either the Players or the two Cranes try to convince Morishu to end it all. If time is pressing, and they role-play well enough, then Morishu does the honourable thing. If you're still some time away from the ending, he refuses, and Akodo Tama overhears the conversation. This reveals Morishu's heritage, so Goroso will execute him as a Crane samurai...shaming Morihoshi's family and the entire Crane clan.

In playtesting, the PCs smuggled the sword into Morishu's cell, but Morishu used it to slay the guards and tried to escape.

The Bandit rescue: If Morishu is still alive by dawn, then he is dragged out to the courtyard. A crowd of peasants is assembled to watch the Green Ronin be slain. If Morishu's heritage has been revealed, then he is dressed in ceremonial blue robes, and wears the Crane mon (Goroso wants everyone to know that the bandit who defied his rule was a noble Crane of a respected house.)

Morishu's loyal band of bandits are not going to sit by and watch their lord die. They have infiltrated the crowd of peasants, and hope to rush the executioner, freeing Morishu and running back to the woods. Two of the bandits are hiding near the main gate, and will close it behind the others, trapping Goroso's

men in their own castle.

The success or failure of this attempt depends on the players. If they support the bandits, then the guards will be overcome and Morishu will escape. If they fight the bandits, then the bandits will be defeated, and most of them slaughtered before Goroso. If the players do nothing, then Imuro will break free of the crowd and charge, sending the guards holding Morishu flying. Imuro and the three guards fall to the ground in front of Lord Goroso. Goroso steps back, allows Imuro to get to his feet, then slices him in two. If the players want, they can get Morishu out of there and deal with him themselves.

If the players do not intervene, or mess up, Morishu is decapitated by Lord Goroso.

A Duel: In Rokugan, testimony is everything. A samurai can challenge a crime, and if that samurai is unopposed, then his testimony takes precedence over all other evidence. If Morishu reveals himself as a samurai, he can challenge Goroso, denying that Goroso's allegations are true.

Goroso, as daimyo, may select a champion...and he will choose the PC who was most sympathetic to Morishu - preferably Daidoji Hokato, Yanuriko, or Osudo... If the PC refuses, he will be dishonoured. Morishu's got the Iai skill to beat any of the PCs, but his nerve might break. Make the duel as stressful as possible. Morishu would intentionally lose under normal circumstances, but with Sariko (his wife) looking on, and his bandit allies needing his leadership, he might fight to clear his name. It will depend on how honourable his foe is. Optionally, use a karmic strike (both duellists kill each other.)

Aftermath:

After the climax, you must deal with the aftermath.

Morishu dies without his true identity being revealed: This is the best result for Lady Isahime, but it fails to remove the shame of the house of Morihoshi. Kakita Adoru and Yasurugi take the sword and return to Lord Morihoshi, to atone for their failure.

Morishu dies with his identity revealed: The Crane are shamed, losing influence to the Lion. If the Lion or Scorpion play capitalise on this, then they've done well.

Goroso dies: Regardless of Morishu's fate, if Goroso dies, then the bandits have essentially won. The manner of Goroso's passing may raise questions though.

Morishu lives: This is the tricky one. Allow the players to offer him one last chance at seppuku. He will return to the forest with his wife and bandits. Adoru and Yasurugi will take the sword and leave.

Later, news will reach the PCs that the son of Lord Morihoshi died with honour in the forest.

*Only the Phoenix rises,
And does not descend
And everything passes
But nothing is truly lost.*

NPCs:

Kakita Morishu, aka The Green Ronin: Morishu is really the central character of the scenario, although he only shows up towards the end. It is his fate that the events of the game decide, and his ending will

have repercussions for all concerned.

He was born to a noble family of the Crane Clan. His ancestors were famously skilled duellists, and Morishu shared their skill. From an early age, he was intensively trained in the art of iaijutsu. The pressure and intensity of his training was almost unbearable. Morishu is the equivalent of an olympic athlete in his field of duelling, and his life was entirely encompassed by his father's court and his sensei's dojo. When he was old enough, he attended the famed Kakita iaijutsu school, where he was driven even harder to succeed.

Then his father argued with Hida Jinjo, and Morishu was sent to the Kaiu wall to prove a point. He was 16 years old. Morishu had been isolated from the true horrors of war and the darkness. He had been taught that his training made him the greatest swordsman possible, but his training was useless. Like an over-sharpened sword, he bent and broke at the first blow.

He fled the wall, consumed by shame. He had failed his family, his teachers, his clan, and himself. He wandered witless, and without admitting it to himself, he looked for a place to die. Then, in the Lion provinces, he came upon a pair of samurai beating an unfortunate peasant. He tried to intervene, the Lions turned on him, and Morishu killed them both with two perfect cuts. The peasant was Torishigawa, the village headman. Torishigawa saw in the young Ronin the promise of hope, and sent Morishu off to join the bandits of the forest.

In the forest, Morishu found companions who did not expect perfection in all things from him, he found a cause to fight for to redeem his soul, he found love, he found himself again. He believes he is doing good by fighting against Lord Goroso. It is as if his past life, as scion of the House of Morihoshi with all the eyes of his clan on him, was but a dream, and he is just a simple Ronin doing good for the common folk.

Lord Akodo Goroso: The other major character, Goroso is a fervent believer in the Celestial Order. He rewards unquestioning obedience, and punished disobedience and discourtesy. A minor argument between the peasants and their Lord over some trivial question of land years ago compelled him to punish the dissenters, and since then, the peasants have hated him, and he has returned their feelings with brutality and harshness. He is not evil for the sake of it, but believes that peasants should be utterly subordinate to the samurai caste. He believes he is the wronged party in all this.

He is an honourable and loyal man. He is a strong supporter of the Lion cause, and mistrusts the other Clans. He especially dislikes the Crane. He is fanatically loyal to the Akodo and the Empire.

If possible, let the players see the noble side of Goroso. He's not the bad guy, he's a noble samurai with strict laws and beliefs.

Imuro: If Morishu is a Rokugani Robin Hood, Imuro is his Little John. A towering, bulky man, Imuro's father was cut down on the spot for insulting a samurai, and the family was stripped of farm and possessions. Imuro left to join the bandits. He is Morishu's best friend, and respects the skills, knowledge and idealism of his young leader. Imuro is a jovial and peaceable man, willing to compromise. He hates Goroso and the Lion samurai though, and waits for the day when he can avenge his father.

Kakita Adoru: Adoru is the elder of the two Cranes sent to...resolve the issue of Morishu. They were sent south to find his body...one way or the other. They arrived at the village, and then travelled into the forest. They were ambushed and captured by the bandits, and the ancient wakizashi they carried was

stolen.

Adoru does most of the talking and planning for the two. While he is arrogant and rather brash, he has a good sense of tactics and diplomacy when he takes time to think. He will stop at nothing to complete his mission. He must see that the shame of Morishu is never made public, and if possible, Morishu must perform the ritual of seppuku to cleanse the dishonour.

Kakita Yasurugi: Adoru did the talking, the arguing. Adoru asked directions of the peasants, choose the inns the two stayed at, decided their route and made the plans. Yasurugi just humbly followed, never complaining, never speaking unless spoken to.

Yasurugi is untroubled by the outside world. He is utterly, inhumanly calm. He is a quiet, humble samurai. He is also relentlessly competent, and is a terrible, remorseless killing machine. He's the quiet one of the Cranes, the silent one...the killer. He will overcome all with the force of his honour.

Torishigawa: A humble peasant, promoted to the position of village elder by sole virtue of his age - or so most believe. If Torishigawa had been born a noble in the Crane or Scorpion clans, then all the courts would have feared him. He is a natural manipulator and schemer. His simple life in the village, though, left him with few opportunities to use his skills - until the relations between Goroso and his subjects turned into a barely-suppressed rebellion. Torishigawa was too old and weak to fight, but encouraged others to rebel, arranged for weapons and supplies, inserted traitors into Goroso's serving staff - and convinced a young Ronin to lead the bandits.

Torishigawa wants Goroso dead, and he'll lie, manipulate and anything else to complete this goal.

Akodo Tama: Tama is Goroso's chief lieutenant, and the leader of his forces. He rules and lives in the village, but spends his days at the castle or on duty. He is utterly loyal to Goroso, but has a slightly better attitude towards the peasants. If the characters get into a fight in Kyuden Goroso, or side with the bandits, or cause any trouble, Tama and his retinue will be the ones to sort them out.

Bayushi Depura: This Scorpion was the architect of Morishu's disgrace, and is an excellent schemer. He doesn't have to appear in the scenario, but can be brought in to bring events back on track.

If you do use Depura, he'll appear to be a merchant, wearing his swords on his back under a heavy cloak. He will not deliberately hide his true station, but he will appear on first glance to be a merchant. If anyone tries to order him about, he'll reveal himself as a samurai, shaming them and putting them in his debt. Depura is the master of Shosuro Osohama, the Scorpion PC.

Depura wants Morishu's true identity to stay hidden, unless there's no hope of it staying a secret, in which case he'll do his best to make it public (he'll then race back to the Crab lands and stop Hida Jinjo marrying Morishu's sister, putting the Crab in his debt again...). Depura's your tool, use him as you see fit.

Timeline

Day Time Events

- 1 Evening The Crane pass through the village.
- 1 Night The Crane are captured by the bandits.

2 Afternoon Morishu is given the box. He finds the sword, panics, and flees.

2 Evening Ebisu finds the sword.

2 Evening THE PCS ARRIVE AND MEET EBISU.

3 Morning Morishu is captured.

3 Afternoon The Capture of Morishu is announced to the peasants. The bandits begin making plans to rescue him. Sariko, Morishu's wife, turns up at the gates.

4 Dawn Morishu is executed. The bandits attempt to rescue him.

Non-timed events

The PCs explore the forest, and meet the Cranes.

The PCs are captured/meet the bandits.

Lord Goroso is told of the bandit camp.

Morishu's identity is revealed.

My Son,

We are descended from the divine Kami. We are a part of the Celestial Order. Everything under the heavens has its place in the order. Nothing can rebel against its place. To do so is to deny everything sacred.

There are duties that are unpleasant, but they are no less honourable for that.

What has been done is done, and cannot be changed. The Celestial Order is a cycle, and the Wheel cannot turn against the flow. Each of us must live or die with the consequences of our actions. I failed you, and I am truly sorry. But you have failed me, your family, your daimyo, and yourself. We both must make recompense in the appropriate manner prescribed by bushido.

We have no choice in this. I wish things were otherwise, but if you shirk from this duty, you will wilfully ruin everything we both hold dear. As your daimyo and father, I must invite you onwards.

Autumn smoke rises

Sword reflects pyres light

A samurais death

KITSUKI TAJA

The Dragon are the most enigmatic Clan in the Empire. The Togashi monks possess strange powers, the Agasha sorcerers practise odd spells, and the Mirumoto two-sword style is unknown outside the northern mountains. The Empire rarely thinks about the Dragon, and the Dragon rarely speaks to the Empire.

You are a Kitsuki, a member of the smallest family in the Dragon. Your family also follows strange ways. In Rokugan, only the testimony of witnesses is important. The tales of objects, of footprints and clues, are ignored – except by the Kitsuki. Following the teachings of your ancestor, your family has learned to notice and understand what others ignore. Your skill at solving crimes and mysteries is

famous, although Kitsuki evidence cannot be used in court. Only testimony is valid. Despite this, many Kitsuki become magistrates and law-givers.

You did, for a while. Now many winters have passed, and you are tired of chasing bandits and villains. You have put your skills to another use. You are in service to Lady Doji Isahime of the Crane Clan. The Crane control the courts and the economy, and the appearance of honour is paramount to them. Lady Doji's duty is to secretly ensure that "embarrassments" are dealt with quietly and smoothly. You use your investigative skills to help her in this duty. You are not like the Scorpion clan, you'd never use this information for blackmail, but she is indebted to you.

You are accompanying her north, back to the Doji lands, and are passing through the Lion territory. You are accompanied by several guards.

Character: You've seen many things in your career as a magistrate, and are somewhat world-weary. You are no longer as strict in your dedication to bushido as you were, and have seen too many arrogant samurai and meaningless deaths. You are kindly, but have a fiery temper when angered.

Your companions:

- **Lady Doji Isahime:** Beautiful and charming, and hard as marble. She plays the innocent lady, but she's ruthless in the execution of her duties.
- **Daidoji Hokato:** Her bodyguard. A young samurai, fresh from school and eager to show his skills.
- **Kakita Osudo:** He's a wandering Crane duellist, looking to test himself against the world. He seems to be rather distant, and avoids you.
- **Matsu Yanuriko:** A Lion samurai-ko. The Matsu are famed as fierce, cat-like warriors, and she tries to be fearsome and angry. You suspect she's actually quite reasonable, but is trying to scare the Cranes.
- **Akodo Yoshi:** The other Lion. The Akodo are tacticians, but he's different. He treats everything like he treats the battlefield, manipulating words like armies. He worries you.

SHOSURO OSOHAMA

There is an ageing man who wanders the southern parts of Rokugan. He is a duellist named Kakita Osudo, and he claims to be looking for skilled warriors to try his skill against. If you ask him, he will tell you tales of duels and battles, his history and his lineage, and he believes every word of it.

Of course, he doesn't exist. Kakita Osudo is a mask. You are Shosuro Osohama, a spy trained in the Shosuro acting school. When you are in your Kakita Osudo persona, you act like a Crane, think like a Crane, move like a Crane, breath like a Crane – but all the while you, Shosuro Osohama are there, hiding behind your own face.

The Scorpion Clan swore long ago to guard the Emperor from threats the Lion Clan cannot fight and enemies the Crab Clan cannot find. Your brethren know all the secrets and shames of the noble families of the Empire. Only the Crane Clan has more influence over the courts and politics of the Empire, and the Crane feverishly cling to their honour like drowning men. The Scorpion can swim, and know that the

greatest honour is loyalty to the Clan, and that all else is permissible.

You have been sent to spy on Lady Doji Isahime. She is one of the greatest banes of the Scorpion. Her duty is to hide and erase the errors and shames of the Crane, and she does her job very well. Your lord, Bayushi Depura, has set a plan in motion that will gain him great influence over certain nobles in both the Crab and Crane clans. You don't know the full extent of his plan, but he has warned you that a young Crane named Kakita Morishu must never be found. If Lady Isahime is looking for Morishu, she must be...diverted.

So you hide behind your own face, acting like an old warrior, and you watch and wait.

Character: You are fanatically loyal to your Clan and self. You will do anything to succeed, and are ruthless when you need to be. However, your own safety and reputation must never be endangered.

Your companions:

- **Lady Doji Isahime**, beautiful and intelligent. She will be difficult to stop.
- **Daidoji Hokato**, a Crane bodyguard who's barely old enough to hold his sword. Gullible and weak.
- **Matsu Yanuriko**. The Lion Clan are the greatest warriors in the Empire, and the Matsu are the fiercest of the Lion. She seems somewhat unsure of herself though.
- **Akodo Yoshi**. Now here's a rarity. The Akodo are descended from the man who wrote the code of bushido, their honour is unquestionable – but this man's eyes burn with a fire of ambition to rival your own.
- **Kitsuki Taja**. He may be a problem. The Kitsuki are investigators and magistrates, and uncover more Scorpion plots than anyone else. Thank the heavens they are few....

AKODO YOSHI

You are a samurai, born of the Akodo family of the Clan of the Lion. You are a blood descendant of Akodo, the greatest general and samurai who has ever lived. Akodo was ranked second only to Hantei among the children of heaven, and the Lion have always been the right hand of the Empire.

It has always rankled with you that the weak and useless Crane wield so much influence. They draw their strength from their money-grubbing merchants and their tie to the Imperial line – a tie gained from throwing their maidens at the Emperor.

It is intolerable that the noble Lion be scorned and rejected in the courts when your Clan is undefeated on the battlefield. Your family, the Akodo, are the greatest strategists in the Empire, and you have sworn to apply those skills in the courts. You will treat politics like a war, and you will sweep the Crane prattlers and Scorpion connivers from the field.

Now – sweetest irony – you have been assigned to escort Lady Doji Isahime, a noble of the Crane,

through the Lion provinces. She is well-known and well-respected in court, and you hope to use her as a stepping stone in your rise – either by proving yourself, or ruining her, whichever will fulfil your ambitions. You have taken an oath to protect her while she is on Lion land.

You are in the fiefdom of Lord Akodo Goroso, a harsh man who has no time for the twittering of Cranes. If Lady Doji were to get into any sort of trouble or difficulty here, or interfered with him, he would be greatly angered and she would be shamed. There are many possibilities and many strategies to consider as you accompany her north.

Character: You are an honourable man, but you are very ambitious. Those who are not with you are against you, and you destroy your enemies as a samurai should. You can be as diplomatic and soft-spoken as any courtier, but your sword is always ready and your soul never leaves the war.

Your companions:

- **Lady Doji Isahime.** A beautiful Crane courtier, she is known at many courts across the land. To be in the company of so influential and famous a lady is an opportunity.
 - **Daidoji Hokato,** her yojimbo (bodyguard). Dedicated, but young and inexperienced.
 - **Kakita Osudo.** A Crane duellist. He seeks to prove himself. Proof is found in the fires of battle, not in a formal duel. A man's heart is tried by adversity, by conflict, not by scratching the flesh in courtly duels to first blood.
 - **Matsu Yanuriko.** The Matsu are the fierce warriors of the Lion, the fiery heart of the Clan. Yanuriko tries to live up to her heritage, but you suspect her spirit is weak
 - **Kitsuki Taja,** a Dragon from the north. He is a foolish old man, but never dismiss a Dragon, for no man understands them.
-

Daidoji Hokato

Since the earliest days of the Empire, the Daidoji have been the spear arm, the defenders of the Crane clan. While the other families of the Crane are known as courtiers, artists and artificers, the Daidoji are brave and cunning warriors. Even the Crab berserkers who guard the Wall against the Shadowlands respect your family. Few dare cross the Crane and face the wrath of the Daidoji.

You were born to one of the lesser branches of the family, but your zeal to prove yourself won you a place in the Daidoji yojimbo (bodyguard) school. You have been assigned to guard the person and honour of Lady Doji Isahime, one of the foremost diplomats and nobles of the Crane. She holds the respected title of Keeper of the Family Honour. Your duty is to guard her on her journey from the Daidoji provinces of the south to her ancestral lands, beyond the holdings of the Lion Clan.

Lady Doji arranged for a pair of Lion samurai to accompany you, for there are said to be bandits in the lands just north of the mountains. You feel that her desire for extra protection is something of a slight to your honour, but you realise you must prove yourself in her eyes. You avoid challenging the Lions openly, but you know you are more skilled.

Character: You are well trained, but have seen little of the world outside the dojo. Your honour and optimism will sustain you through anything. You have a healthy mistrust of the other Clans, but respect their skills. You are a fervent believer in bushido. You are secretly terrified you might fail as a samurai.

Your companions:

- **Lady Doji Isahime:** Your charge. She is a beautiful and intelligent woman, as far above you as the sun is above the ground.
 - Kitsuki Taja, a Dragon samurai, a friend and aide of Lady Doji's. The Dragon live far far north, and you have never seen one before. They are said to be strange folk.
 - **Kakita Osudo:** Another Crane, the Kakita are the best duellists in the world. Osudo has been wandering the land proving his skills. He is much older and wiser than you.
 - **Matsu Yanuriko:** A Lion samurai-ko. The Matsu are very fierce warriors, and she seems to dislike everyone. Your teachers told you to trick the Matsu in battle.
 - **Akodo Yoshi:** The other Lion. The Akodo are tacticians. Yoshi has been a charming companion, but he is as arrogant as any Lion. Your teachers told you to face the Akodo on your own ground, for they are masterful strategists.
-

Lady Doji Isahime

You are a noble of the Clan of the Crane. The Crane are the elite of the Empire. Your family has the closest ties to the Imperial Hantei line, and the Doji are entrusted with the courts and the riches of the Empire.

You come from one of the eldest and most influential branches of the Doji family. You might have been wedded to some great noble to seal an alliance or been sent to grace some court with your charm and beauty. Your tutors noticed your dedication and inquisitive mind early, and you were groomed for a special role.

The honour of the Crane is paramount.

Without the Crane to be the perfectly balanced centre to the Empire, without the Crane's iron hold of the economy and the courts, the Empire would tear itself apart between Lion arrogance and Scorpion trickery. No-one can be permitted to damage the perfect reputation of the Crane. Your official title is Keeper of the House Honour. Your duty is to ensure that family problems stay within the family. You seek out those who would sully their heritage and educate them in proper behaviour. The Scorpion hate and fear you, for you have spoiled many of their plots.

Recently, you travelled south to visit an old teacher of yours. He warned you to look out for a young Crane, Kakita Morishu. Morishu is one of the finest duellists of his generation, but his father Morihoshi sent him to the harsh Crab to prove himself. Morishu vanished, and must be found. He fled the Crab lands, and must be somewhere between you and home.

To return home, you have to pass through the lands of the Lion Clan, rivals of the Crane. You have

arranged for an escort through their lands.

Character: You act perfectly calm and meek almost all the time, like a proper lady. However, you have an iron will and great commanding presence, and are fanatically loyal to the Crane clan. Your honour is your life.

Your entourage:

- **Daidoji Hokato:** Your bodyguard. A young samurai, unsure of his place and eager to prove himself.
 - **Kitsuki Taja,** a Dragon samurai. The Kitsuki are renowned as investigators. While testimony, not evidence is valid in Rokugan, you have come to rely on Taja's eye and wisdom. He aids you in your duties, and you owe him a debt of gratitude.
 - **Kakita Osudo:** A wandering Crane duellist. Some samurai seek to test their skills, to prove themselves best.
 - **Matsu Yanuriko,** one of your Lion guards. The Matsu are angry warriors, fierce and terrible devotees of strict bushido
 - **Akodo Yoshi:** The other Lion guard. The Akodo are strategists and philosophers.
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Matsu Yanuriko

Your swords sit uneasily in their sheathes. You can hear their siren song of blood and carnage. You are a samurai, you fear nothing...but you are hesitant, and scared of your own soul.

You are a samurai of the Lion Clan, of the Matsu family. The family was founded by Lady Matsu, the greatest mortal warrior who has ever lived. She was so fierce that only the children who fell from heaven, the kami, could win her respect and loyalty. She was a terrifying mistress of the blade, and you are a daughter of her blood. In combat, your heart and soul flow through your blades, and the universe wheels around you. No foe can stand against your flashing katana. You're a born killer.

No wonder, then, that the ancestors turn their faces from you. Outside of combat, you feel unsure and weak. The bloodshed and carnage that so delight you in battle turn your stomach when you think on them. You try to avoid fighting, because you know you can barely control yourself, that anyone who angers you is likely to end up with their guts spilling over your boots. You're terrified of being caught up in the joy of battle and turning on your Clansmen or friends.

Thankfully, your present mission is unlikely to involve much slaying. You are accompanying a Crane noblewoman through the Lion lands, and have taken an oath to protect her while she is on Lion land. The Lion have traditionally been rivals of the Crane, but you secretly admire the sophistication and artistic nature of the Crane. You hide this, and pretend to be a typical fiery Matsu, but it's a sham. You're too meek and gentle to be a samurai – unless you're in combat, where Matsu smiles on her descendant.

Character: You are a woman of two worlds. Outside battle, you are scared of fighting, and shamed that you dishonour your ancestors with your fear. You try to act like a Matsu samurai should, but your heart

isn't in it.

In combat, you are at peace, your spirit afire. You destroy your enemies without mercy or remorse.

Your companions:

- **Lady Doji Isahime.** Your charge. She is quite charming, but keeps her distance.
 - **Daidoji Hokato,** Isahime's bodyguard. He's young and probably scared of you.
 - **Kakita Osudo:** A wandering Crane duellist. The Matsu hate the Kakita family – and you try to keep the family traditions.
 - **Akodo Yoshi.** The Akodo family are the leaders and generals of the Lion. Akodo was the only one to ever defeat Matsu. Yoshi is an ambitious man, with his eyes set on greater prizes. You wonder how much he will sacrifice for his ambition.
 - **Kitsuki Taja,** a Dragon. You have never met a Dragon before, and know little of them. The Mirumoto family are fighters, the Kitsuki are almost unknown to you. You hear they are magistrates.
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The Emerald Empire

One thousand years, the kami, the children of the Heavens fell to Earth. One, Fu Leng, was lost, falling far into hell and becoming a lord of pain and darkness. The other children forged an Empire, joining their fates to the mortals. The kami had a contest to see who would rule their Empire. Hantei won the contest, and founded the Imperial Dynasty. Akodo formed the Clan of the Lion, the army of Rokugan and Hantei's right hand. Lady Doji founded the Crane clan, merchants and courtiers. Shiba founded the sorcerous Phoenix clan, Togashi the enigmatic Dragon of the northern mountains. Bayushi gathered the tricksters and liars, and called them the Scorpion. Hida took his Crab warriors to the south, to defend the Empire against the terrible demon minions of their brother. Finally, Lady Shinjo led her Unicorn followers out of Rokugan to explore the lands beyond. It would be 800 years before her children returned, and they would learn strange ways from the gaijin outsiders.

A thousand years have passed since the kami brought order and honour to Rokugan. A thousand years, some prosperous, some lean, some peaceful, and many filled with bloodshed and war. The Clans still follow the precepts of Bushido, interpreted in their own manner, but rivalries and hatreds have formed between some of the Clans, noticeably between the strongest and most influential: the Lion, the Crane, the Crab, and the Scorpion.

Honour: The kami taught Bushido to the mortals. Act honourably at all times. Your word must be your bond, your promises sincere, your courage must be unquestioned, your loyalty to your family and Clan absolute, your actions just, your soul pure. All the Clans follow Bushido to a greater or lesser extent, from the absolute rigidity of the Lion and Crane to the deceitful and opportunistic Scorpion.

Some have fled from honour's demands to become Ronin, masterless men. While some Ronin do still follow bushido, having become Ronin in unusual circumstances, most Ronin are nothing more than bandits.

Justice: In Rokugan, honour is everything. Evidence counts for nothing in the face of the words of an honourable man. Whatever an honourable man says must be the truth. Magistrates enforce justice throughout the land.

Magic: Spirits are everywhere and in everything. The holy Shugenja can speak to the spirits, beseeching them with prayers and chants to perform tasks or miracles. Some dark sorcerers use maho (blood magic) to draw on power without invoking the spirits. Maho is banned, and the Kuni Witch-hunters of the Crab hunt down Maho-Tsukai (maho users).

Ninja: are a myth. Childrens' tales. While the Scorpion do have spies and assassins, they are not supernatural shades.

The Shadowlands: Fu Leng, the youngest of the Kami, fell through the earth and into hell. There, he raised an army of oni (demons), goblins, trolls and other horrors, and has made war on the Empire. Once, a thousand years ago, he almost won. He was defeated by Shinsei the wise monk, and the seven thunders, the embodiments of the virtues of the Clans. Now Fu Leng rules the Shadowlands, the domain of hell on earth. The Crab guard the border against him. The Dark One (whose name must not be spoken aloud) taints those who walk his lands. Jade is the only defence against the taint of shadow.

The Great Clans:

· **The Lion** are the greatest tacticians and warriors, and are famed for their strict belief in bushido. The Akodo lead the Clan, but the fierce Matsu are the strong arm of the Lion.

· **The Crane** are courtiers and artisans – but the duel is also a form of art... The Kakita duelling academy is famed for producing the best swordsmen in the Empire. The Doji rule the courts, while the Daidoji are bodyguards and warriors.

· **The Scorpion** are the Emperor's eyes in the dark. They are villainous and underhanded.

· **The Crab** defend the Empire from the Shadowlands, but a thousand years of war has made them brutish and uncultured.

· **The Unicorn** are outsiders, masters of the horse and bow.

· **The Phoenix** are the greatest sorcerers and priests, but their mighty magics are held in check by their pacifism.

· Finally, **the Dragon** are mysterious and otherworldly, cut off from the Empire by mountains. Their courtiers and magistrates are the Kitsuki, who use physical evidence instead of honourable testimony.