The High Road

By Jason Flowers

Inspired by *Stagecoach* by John Ford

Challenge

 The Player Characters have been hired or assigned to escort a small caravan making its way across contested border lands. Fear of bandits, warring clans, or some supernatural presence makes the journey potentially dangerous. Among the caravan is an odd assortment of samurai and peasants.

 Shiba Kagami, a magistrate, hopes to capture her old friend, the ronin outlaw Rengoki, who is rumored to be in the province. The shugenja, Daidoji Kazuhito, travels to a new remote posting as punishment, attained due to his addictive tendency to indulge in opium. Okimi, a young geisha, hopes to find a new life for herself at the end of the journey. The sake master, Kin, is exceedingly polite to all members of the caravan, providing their best sake for the lengthy march. Yasuki Chiyo, is a corrupt merchant, notorious for lining her own pockets at the expense of anyone she deals with. Akodo Michi, the pregnant wife of a famous Lion general, is traveling to be with her husband for the birth of their child. And lastly the guileful gambler, Kasuga Itachi, swears to protect Akodo Michi, likely to raise his own station.

 Shortly after the caravan sets out, they come upon Rengoki, the ronin outlaw. Shiba Kagami, despite their previous friendship, is forced to take him into custody. The PCs then learn that Rengoki is wanted for the murder of his father, but he vows that he is innocent. The ronin tells them the murder was committed by a bandit leader named Yama. Rengoki hopes to get vengeance before being executed for his crimes.

Focus

 The caravan continues onward, quickly seeing evidence of the local threat. At one waystation along the road, they learn that Akodo Michi’s husband has been in a ferocious battle and was grievously wounded. The shock causes Michi to prematurely go into labor. Daidoji Kazuhito, will likely require the PCs assistance, if he is even sober enough to deliver a baby. During the chaos of the birth, Rengoki sees an opportunity to escape, and slips away. Some Player Characters will have to follow the ronin. After a short pursuit, they will find him, along with clear evidence of an inevitable attack by the ever-present threat. The caravan must continue to move or be caught in a raid.

Strike

 As the caravan hurries on to its destination, they are stymied by a flooded ford slowing the last crossing before safety. Finally caught and surrounded by their pursuers they must stand and fight. The besieging force greatly outnumbers the defenders of the caravan and all hope looks lost. Whether because of a last-minute intervention by a friendly force or the sacrifice of a caravanner, the threat is eventually beaten back providing the time to get the last of the carts and wagons across the river to safety.

 Having reached safe harbor, the members of the caravan go their separate ways with promises of eternal friendship. Shiba Kagami, allows Rengoki the necessary time to hunt down the bandit, Yama. The Player Characters may choose to help him if they have been moved by his story. With their intercession Rengoki may even survive his encounter with the bandit and his men. If he does survive, does Shiba Kagami take him into custody again, or has she been convinced of his innocence?

**Dramatis Personae**

**Shiba Kagami**, Magistrate, coming along because of rumored presence of ronin “outlaw”, her former friend

**Daidoji Kazuhito**, Shugenja healer with opium addiction, has been assigned to remote place as punishment

**Okimi**, Geisha, traveling to new place for a new start

**Kin**, Sake brewer, exceedingly polite

**Yasuki Chiyo**, Corrupt merchant, has stolen funds from clan

**Akodo Michi**, Pregnant samurai of high rank, traveling to be with her husband stationed at destination

**Kasuga Itachi**, Disingenuous samurai, gambler, vows to protect pregnant samurai to raise his own position

**Rengoki**, “Outlaw” ronin, hunting the men who caused him to become wanted, has friendly history with magistrate