





# DESCENT INTO

# DARKNESS

For the Legend of the Five Rings RPG, 4th Ed.

Sample file

## Introduction

**T**he village of Mushi Mura used to be a quiet place. Its only claim to glory was its famous dried salted plums, which a few discerning brewmasters use in their specialty sake. Located in a remote place, not wealthy enough to attract bandit attacks, but rich enough to guarantee a fulfilling life of honest work, Mushi Mura and its inhabitants were happy and satisfied with their lot... until a few months ago.

Terror and pain now hang over Mushi Mura, and not even death seems able to offer relief to the villagers. It will be the characters' duty to investigate and hopefully solve Mushi Mu-

ra's mystery. When they learn the truth, will they have the courage to do what must be done?

This adventure is designed for characters of Insight Rank 2 or 3. In the spirit of Legend of the Five Rings RPG Fourth Edition, it is designed to allow for maximum customizability, making it easy for the Gamemaster to plug it into an ongoing campaign, regardless of the era chosen for play. Mushi Mura can be located almost anywhere in the Empire, and the family names of the Non-Player Characters (NPCs) have been left to the Gamemaster to decide. This is particularly important because, as it will become apparent at the end of the adventure, the Gamemaster will have the option to use the village as a base of operation for the PCs' future adventures.





## Overview of the Adventure

This section presents with broad strokes the events that took place before the Player Characters (PCs) arrive in Mushi Mura, and what is likely to happen when they are there.

### DESCENT INTO DARKNESS

Shinroku is the leader of a small cell of Spider Clan mahotsukai. A few months ago, they settled in the ruins of a Naga outpost in the forest near Mushi Mura and immediately started their sinister work. Shinroku's goal is simple: he wants to create a hidden pocket of Tainted land that can be used as a safe haven for both creatures of the Shadowlands and worshippers of Fu Leng. He intends to transform the Naga ruins into a necropolis where he will hide a small army of zombies. When the master of the Shadowlands needs strength, Shinroku will be able to answer the call and bargain for a position of greater power.

As soon as the ruins were refitted, Shinroku and his loyal followers turned their attention toward Mushi Mura. They ambushed the village's samurai protector Takashi and his budoka (armed peasant retainers). There was little Takashi could do against the sorcerer's blood magic and the Tainted strength of his bodyguard, and he was forced to flee with three surviving budoka. He returned to Mushi Mura and dispatched a

request for help with a carrier pigeon. While awaiting help Takashi had no choice but to retreat to the woods to try to prepare a counterattack. Over the next few days, he watched as Shinroku spread corruption to all the villagers, and he could feel in himself the Taint the mahotsukai had forced in him. If he could not defeat the evil sorcerer, he swore at least he would cleanse the village from the touch of Jigoku and then commit seppuku while he still had his own mind.

Shinroku, not satisfied of Tainting the villagers, took away all those who were unable to work. He told the rest of the villagers these hostages would remain unarmed as long as they cooperated. In truth, they were the first to be sacrificed in foul maho rituals to begin the desecration of the Naga ruins and their transformation into a piece of the Shadowlands.

Shinroku is a cunning man and anticipates that more samurai will eventually come to investigate. He stays in the village and poses as a carpenter. This also allows him to better watch the rest of the villagers as they pretend everything is normal. Toji, Shinroku's chief follower and bodyguard, has taken Takashi's place as Mushi Mura's samurai protector. Together they are ready to hide their activities and send any investigators back wherever they came from. And if they can manipulate them into getting rid of Takashi, all the better.

### PRISONERS OF FEAR

When the PCs arrive, Toji will try to send them away with assurances that everything is fine and Takashi's message was a false alert. If the PCs remain suspicious, Shinroku will try to deflect their worries toward a new target: Takashi and his budoka assistants, who Shinroku depicts as bandits raiding the village.

In all likelihood the PCs will investigate these bandits and track them into the woods. Depending how successful the PCs are in establishing communication with Takashi, they will either attack these so-called "bandits" or learn the truth about the situation. If they defeat the bandits, it is possible they will end the adventure with failure, although they may not even realize it. If they do manage to talk with Takashi, he will explain his shame and his intentions regarding the village, and hopefully join the PCs to help them kill Shinroku and his maho cell.

One way or the other, the PCs will have to confront Shinroku, Toji, and the rest of the cult.

And after the battle, they will have to decide what to do with the Tainted villagers... Will they follow their heart or their duty?





## A Call for Help

### Chapter 1

Hoshimitsu, the chief magistrate of the city the PCs are currently visiting, has received a message from the remote village of Mushi Mura. Delivered by a courier pigeon, it was extremely short and clearly written in haste: "Need help. Send reinforcement quickly."

Hoshimitsu would like to send someone to investigate, but most of his yoriki (assistants) are away at the opposite part of the province, chasing a bandit group. Those who are left are busy managing the influx of visitors arriving for the locally famous Festival of the Red Maple Leaf, which happens to be the following week. Fortunately for him, he has heard of the PCs' presence, and will ask for their help.

There are several ways to handle this, depending on the composition of the party. If there is at least one samurai in the group of the same clan as Hoshimitsu, the magistrate will approach the samurai and ask for help. If the party has at least one magistrate (or better yet an Emerald Magistrate), Hoshimitsu will specifically seek their help. If the party has no one fitting, the GM can opt to have Hoshimitsu seek them out after getting his lord's permission to enlist local samurai for the problem, and will offer the favor of his lord in return for their assistance. If the entire party is composed of ronin, he will simply offer to pay them 5 koku each to work for him.

Hoshimitsu tells the PCs about the message he received, and explains his situation. The PCs' task is simple: go to Mushi Mura and assist the local yoriki, a man named Takashi, in dealing with whatever problem seems to be so urgent. Hoshimitsu does as much as he can to help the party, but he has no spare men to accompany them. He can, if necessary, offer to loan the PCs some horses to expedite their travel, and can provide enough food for several days (enough to reach Mushi Mura with some left over).

If the PCs ask for more information about Takashi, Hoshimitsu will reply he does not know him very well. In fact, the only news he normally gets from him is the expected seasonal reports and feedback from the tax collector visiting the village once a year. Given the remoteness of the village and its modest size, this is hardly surprising. Hoshimitsu describes Takashi as a very honorable man but not ambitious. He has lost his wife to sickness two years ago and requested the assignment to Mushi Mura, apparently so he could grieve in peace. He has no children.

Mushi Mura is located 4 days' travel away from the city, at the edge of the province's border. The region beyond is mostly wild and empty.

## A Quiet Village

### Chapter 2

The party has a quiet trip to Mushi Mura. Takashi has a scout watching over the village and sees the PCs coming, but he does not try to approach them; Shinroku cursed him and corrupted him with the Shadowlands Taint, and he is unable to speak coherently. He is ashamed of his defeat and hesitant to approach the PCs.

The land around Mushi Mura is hilly, with numerous patches of woods interspersing the rice fields. The road to the village is barely more than a wide trail, and it ends there. A mile beyond the village lies a sprawling old cedar forest, covering the rolling landscape. As the party approaches, everything seems normal: peasants are toiling in the fields or working in craftsmen's shops. If the PCs try to spot any oddities, an Investigation / Perception roll at TN 20 will allow them to notice there are no elderly and no children below the age of 6 visible in the town.

As they enter the village, a man who appears to be a samurai, presumably the yoriki, will approach them and introduce himself as Takashi. In truth, this is Toji, the maho-tsukai's henchman.





## MEETING TOJI (“TAKASHI”)

The PCs can quickly determine Toji is not happy to see them. He is not openly hostile, and he offers the PCs all the respect they deserve, but there is no warmth in his words and he is not especially hospitable. To the characters, he appears to be a somewhat proud samurai who takes their arrival as an insult to his ability to manage the village efficiently.

Once proper introductions have been made and the PCs explain the reason for their trip to Mushi Mura, Toji tries to reassure them that everything is under control. There is nothing unusual here, he says, pointing out the seemingly normal village activities. If the PCs mention the call for help, he dismisses it as the deed of a disgruntled ronin named “Kirou” who once worked for him. Toji says he was not satisfied with Kirou’s services and has dismissed him, and suggests Kirou sent the message to make him look bad.

If the PCs insist on seeing things for themselves, Toji grudgingly takes them on a tour of the village. During the day, most peasants are out in the fields – the few remaining in the village are craftsmen and artisans. Every time a character approaches a villager (especially in the presence of Toji), the PC is met with extreme wariness and anxiety. Peasants are usually subservient and quiet, but the GM should allow the PCs to feel there is an unusual amount of fear underlying their behavior here. If they are questioned, the peasants will support Toji’s story.

- ❶ Questioning the peasants and exploring the village should make it more obvious that there are no children or elderly in Mushi Mura. The PCs may also notice that a few houses are unfinished.
- ❷ If the PCs ask Toji about the fearfulness of the villagers, he replies he is very strict and punishes all unacceptable behavior. As a result, they fear him, which is just the way it should be in an efficiently run village.
- ❸ If the PCs ask about the lack of young children and elders, he claims a disease swept through during the last winter and took away all the younger children, along with several adults and many of the elders. It has been a painful blow, but it has not disrupted the village’s production capacity too much, so he does not think it is a big problem.

It should be apparent during these discussions that Toji does not care about the plight of the peasants. He is cold-hearted toward the heimin, but this is not a rare attitude among samurai. However, some PCs may feel this lack of compassion does not fit Hoshimitsu’s description of a highly honorable samurai – after all, Compassion is one of Bushido’s seven Virtues.

During the tour, the maho-tsukai Shinroku will observe the PCs while maintaining his pose as the village carpenter. It should eventually become clear that Toji’s behavior is too suspicious, and instead of sending the visitors back where they came from he is giving them reasons to stay and investigate further. At that point Shinroku takes matters in his own hands and tries to salvage the situation to his advantage. Toji will pretend he has other things to attend to, leaving the PCs to continue their tour alone – the PCs should perceive this as a welcome turn of events, since it should appear that Toji’s presence is cowering the peasants into silence.

## MEETING SHINROKU

After the glum faces of most of the villagers, it is a welcome change for the PCs to meet Shinroku. Although he initially mimics the others’ behavior, once Toji departs he will “relax” and start talking openly with the PCs about how Mushi Mura is living in fear. According to Shinroku, the village has been attacked several times in recent months by a small bandit gang, and “Takashi” seems unable to deal with them. Shinroku is careful to speak respectfully of “Takashi” and make his accusations unspoken, since he is posing as a heimin who knows his place in the social order. At this point it should become evident to the PCs that they need to take action (see Chapter 3).

Shinroku will also try to establish himself as a prominent leader of the peasant community. If the party needs any kind of help during the investigation, he suggests they come back to him and he will make sure that they have the whole village’s full cooperation.

If the PCs ask Shinroku about “Kirou the ronin,” he mostly confirms the story of “Takashi.” If pressed for more details, he claims Kirou was a good man who perhaps was starting to become too popular in the village. Kirou often pushed the limits of his station, such as by suggesting they needed more men to deal with the bandits. This could be the reason why “Takashi” dismissed the ronin. (Of course, Kirou is a fictional character, invented by Shinroku and Toji to explain the call for help.)

PCs who suspect falsehood by “Takashi” or Shinroku can make Contested Rolls of their Investigation (Interrogation) / Perception against the villains’ Sincerity (Deceit) / Awareness to try to get a sense of their truthfulness. Of course, figuring out they are lying does not necessarily tell the PCs how to continue their investigation.

## OTHER VILLAGERS

There are about 60 people in Mushi Mura, most of them normal farmers. Notable individuals are listed below. They are not used to seeing strange samurai, and even before the arrival of Shinroku they were easily scared by the arrival of samurai, whose presence usually meant bad things – taxes being collected, men drafted into the clan’s armies, and so forth. Now that the village has been corrupted, they are equally afraid of both the maho-tsukai and the PCs, since they know their life is forfeit should the PCs learn of their Taint.

- ❶ **Kurata:** Kurata is the village’s headsman. He was a good leader before the maho-tsukai’s arrival, when there was little pressure on him. Now he is so scared for his life he barely talks to anyone. He is afraid for himself and is such a coward he will not hesitate to push other villagers into harm’s way to protect himself. He is fully committed to Shinroku’s cause, hoping his cooperation will save him in the end.
- ❷ **Minami:** Minami is a 15-year-old girl. She is so scared by the whole situation that she will try to flee during the first night the PCs are in Mushi Mura. If she is caught by the PCs she will remain mute, too frightened to speak. If they do not catch her leaving, Toji will catch her and kill her.
- ❸ **Okomi:** Old Okomi is the village’s midwife. Although she looks disheveled and alarming, almost like a



witch, she is harmless. She has a gift (although she would say it is only the result of years of experience) that allows her to predict the weather for the next few days. However, she has lost the ability since she became Tainted.

- **Shizu:** Shizu is a young farmer. His first son and his pregnant wife have been taken away by Shinroku (they are now dead, though he does not know this). He is on the verge of mental collapse, and if it looks like the PCs are going to discover the truth, he will break down and try to tell them all he knows. He does not care about his own life but he still desperately hopes the PCs might be able to save his family.
- **Sochuro:** Sochuro is an eta and a hunter. He spends a significant amount of time outside the village fishing and hunting small game. As a result, he is quite knowledgeable about the lands surrounding Mushi Mura, and the woods in particular. He knows about the Naga ruins (although he has no idea of the builders), and has a good feel for where “bandits” might be hiding. Since he is an eta, he feels no compulsion to help or protect samurai, and will readily guide the PCs to Takashi’s hiding place if Shinroku asks him to do so.

## CUTTING TO THE CHASE

It is possible for the PCs, either via smart investigation, a hunch, or just impatience, to push Shinroku to end his charade and attack them before they have a chance to go after the “bandits.” If that happens, and the PCs survive the maho-tsukai and his zombies, the curse on the real Takashi and his men will be lifted when the spell expires. A few hours later, they will come back to Mushi Mura and explain the situation to the PCs. Understanding what Shinroku’s defeat and Takashi’s imminent return mean for them, most villagers will flee to the woods as quickly and discreetly as they can.

From there, the PCs will have the same choice as presented at the end of the adventure: go after the Tainted peasants and hunt them down to the last, or let them flee. Some of the running heimin will regroup with the cultists at the maho-tsukai camp in the Naga ruins. Takashi will help the PCs to exterminate the remaining cultists and their followers. Takashi will then commit seppuku to atone for his failure to protect Mushi Mura.

