

*All the people of Lung Shu belong to the same ancestry, but generations of infighting and resource/land-driven conflict has separated them into 4 distinct tribes: **Blue Moon Tribe, Scarlett Dragons Tribe, Heaven-Bestowed Lions Tribe, and Snow Blossom Tribe.** The Scarlet Dragons and Blue Moon Tribes are archrivals whilst the Heaven-Bestowed Lions Tribe is a rising threat for both. Meanwhile, the Snow Blossom Tribe vows to only fight in order to end the bloodshed as they strive for peace on Lung Shu. The only way for one tribe to up the other is controlling the resources of their continent; for such dominance will give the possessor a clear advantage over who takes Lung Shu for themselves. But across the landmass lies another continent: **Jenjo.** The local tribes there are also at war with Lung Shu, repeatedly crossing over and coming into conflict with the continent's various groups to dominate the land completely and retain all resources for themselves...*

In the early dawn of a chilled morning containing a brisk, blue sky and gusting pollen, the **Blue Moon** tribe of **Lung Shu** marched onto a battlefield below the Plateaus of Shey. Their focus was repelling the formidable and bloodthirsty **Karikita** tribe from the continent of **Jenjo** who outnumbered them 2 to 1. Hopes weren't high the night before, for Recruiter Ho had taken control, the only leader available following the passing of previous decorated generals. This was an unfortunate contributor to the low morale, as a Blue Moon footsoldier testified, "...*He was a stern man with those dark, piercing eyes; always bragging about his 'exploits' against the Scarlet Dragons and Heaven-Bestowed Lions, though he'd never faced those from Jenjo before. Still, this didn't stop him from talking about himself to others and how he should've been made a superior prior and not as a last resort. Recruiter Ho felt that he walked on water and everyone should've treated him as such. Despite these boasts, he was quite handy in battle with his sword and knife. He did understand strategy to a certain extent as well, but it was obvious on the eve of battle that he was in over his head, making rash choices for our infantry and cavalry. This didn't stop him from crowing about his armor, draped in its flowery and colorful design. If the enemy was going to search and take out our leader first, it would be quite easy for them with Recruiter Ho dressed in his garb.*"

Confidence remained stunted as the Blue Moon army marched onto the field that following morning, its surface strewn with yellowing turf, to face the Karikita. The sun was just peaking above the snow-capped mountains to the latters backs, providing a natural inhibitor to the Blue Moon, though **Recruiter Ho** neglected this fact. Unable to spot the Karikita's cavalry, he ordered a full charge against the enemy with their own horses. Storming onto the field, the Blue Moon's cavalry became blinded by the sun and was taken out swiftly by the Karikita's perched archers hiding in alpine evergreens and rock formations close to the mountains. The slaughter allowed the Karikita to bring out their cavalry hidden behind the tree line and rush the Blue Moon army, unabated. With their archers dwindled to a dozen, the Blue Moon was unable to slow the advance. Ho, apparently, commanded the spearmen at front to stand ground as the Karikita's cavalry slammed into their line, though many later said that the voice they heard did not sound like their recruiter. The Blue Moon spearmen, at the cost of their lives, took out the horses, limiting the cavalry's effectiveness and saving the second line from inevitable doom.

The Karikita ordered a full charge of its infantrymen while their archers fired over the field to take out as many Blue Moon soldiers as possible. Ho shouted for his army to follow suit, many soldiers dying from incoming arrows. The Blue Moon army strode across the raging field, to meet in full combat. As the venerated infantryman, **Chen Li**, lamented, “...*It was hell. Horses crashed on top of bodies amongst gargled screams, the air warming considerably with the spillage of warm blood. Fires blossomed and scorched patches of already souring grass while plumes of black smoke filled the open sky and obscured the vision of those present. Wind gusts would shift on a moment’s notice, bringing the scent of death to the battlefield and causing many to retch. Arrows rained down on us like fiery drops, some in such great mass that they dimmed the sunlight. Injured men littered across the battlefield were shouting for their wives and mothers while trying to pull arrow shafts from their bodies. Many were struck again with multiple barrages and finally ceased screaming altogether. Over time, our feet felt like we were walking through the swamps but it was actually blood staining the field. The glimpse caused many to break down. It was a sight observing the medics at work, though; one of them, **Yue**, led the charge. He’d always put others in front of himself, a kind and gentle soul. Seeing him trying to patch up the injured was inspiring for some of us who wanted to abandon our posts. His face was becoming stained with flecks of blood, the majority of which clung to his beard, while his robes became caked with dirt and mud, yet this did little to stop him. He’d been an ex-soldier after all, so death was a normal sight. I can’t imagine what that does to a man...*”

While the Karikita’s archers moved from their positions and relocated to protect their generals, the Blue Moon bowmen rushed onto the field and participated in the hand-to-hand combat. Chen Li went on to recount, “...*Watching everyone coming together was a sight to behold, including our archers. **Suu Li** was one of the best bowmen in our military and had survived every encounter up until that point. He was on the field, brandishing his custom-created bow as if it wasn’t specifically made for long range combat. The feathers from his helmet swayed almost rhythmically as he dipped and dodged incoming attacks, firing arrows into the chests and heads of his assailants. His face remained composed and unfazed, a stark contrast to us, screaming and swinging wildly at the enemy. It was no surprise seeing him in such motion, however; he’d been trained in these ways since the age of 4 and was nearly two decades into his profession as an archer...*”

The Karikita developed an advantage and began forcing the Blue Moon back, causing many to drop their weapons and flee. With Recruiter Ho knocked unconscious on the battlefield, the army was leaderless and without hope, but it was at that moment a man stepped forward and began regrouping the Blue Moon soldiers. Chen Li recounted his visage as “...*Utter confidence; a sturdy, tall individual with piercing, brown eyes that spoke of a love for Lung Shu I didn’t think possible. He grabbed our flag and began to run toward the enemy, rallying our fighters at the same time. The man’s hair band had broken during the heat of battle and his black locks flowed almost majestically as he charged forward. His bravery was such, we couldn’t help but feel inspired. Nearly every soldier who had turned to flee doubled back around and faced the Junjo army head on again. He thrust the tip of the flag into the nearest Karikita soldier and picked up the bow of a fallen comrade. He emptied arrow after arrow into those who*

*ran up to meet him in combat. When they were depleted, the soldier took his sword and began to swing furiously. Such was the might of **Xian Zhi**...*

Suu Li expressed amazement as the reinvigorated army pushed back the Karikita, especially Xian Zhi. *"...Xian had been in the archery division for years but was also turned down by superiors who believed he either wasn't ready or too ambitious. He was amusing and witty off the battlefield, but cold and ruthless to those who were proclaimed enemies of the Blue Moon tribe. He took it upon himself to train in the ways of the sword for hours on end, even after everyone had gone to bed. None of us never really knew where he received the instruction from, but rumors started to abound that an old Scarlet Dragon was responsible. Xian wouldn't tell us, not that it was any of our business, but there were those who looked up to him, most notably that keen recruit **Chai** who was on the field as well, fighting with his fists after Xian told him specifically to stay behind. Hearing Xian shouting at us to follow him made it clear that it had been he who had called for the spearmen to intercept the Karikita's cavalry earlier, not Recruiter Ho. He continued to mow down any unfortunate Karikita soldier that got in his way, his armor peeling with each strike and revealing bulky, scarred arms that told their own stories. His determined face was dealt with blows and tears that shed blood, but this didn't stop him. He engaged in combat with several skilled Karikita warriors, only to force them back in shock as he refused to relent and matched them in skill."*

As the Karikita army began falling left and right, Xian began eyeing the Karikita generals at the far back of the field surrounded by their archers. Understanding that he couldn't get to the generals without risking further harm, Xian ordered a formal retreat. While this caught the Blue Moon and Karikita by surprise, it became apparent that even a formal retreat was going to be a pyrrhic victory for the Karikita. Seeing that they had no army to continue marching forward into Blue Moon territory, the generals reluctantly pulled back and turned around into the frigid mountain pass, its howling wind only a vague reminder of the once proud Karikita army.

*As if a mirror reflection to **Lung Shu**, the **Jenjo** continent has been ravaged by war between varying tribes as well, but whereas Lung Shu contains plentiful resources that led to conflict, Jenjo possesses little of these land-based riches. Hundreds of years of infighting between the Jenjo tribes has created an irreversible situation in which the pillaged land is reminiscent of a dried up husk. As a result, the most aggressive and bloodthirsty of the Jenjo tribes, the **Karikita**, has decided to advance on Lung Shu to garner these resources for themselves for self preservation. The hope is that the tribes of Lung Shu have been depleted and worn down from their own infighting and will not pose a stiff resistance to the Karikita. After much reconnaissance, the Karikita generals decide to attack the nearest and most diluted of the Lung Shu tribes: the **Blue Moon**...*

Under gloomy skies and through ancient mountain passes covered in retreating snows, the Karikita army marched into Lung Shu while its commanders took a measured approach. This couldn't be said for **Commander Ikari**, however, one of the Karikita's more ambitious leaders. His yearn for battle ruffled even the most noble of soldiers. According to the accomplished foot soldier, **Nanto**, "...The man was built out of steel. Having been a royal guard before working his way up into the military, the fear he inspired equated nearly to those who worried about his violent temper. He'd been labeled the 'dominator', and for good reason. His armor of fire and rage burned like a thousand suns with curling spikes jutting in every direction. His mempo, in particular, was startling with a demonic design meant to inflict terror in those who faced him. He was barbaric and would slay anyone who dared question or opposed orders with his giant katana, its rumored name being 'The Slit in the River Valley'. Soldiers also swore of another method he utilized: his female companion, **Jinso**. Unbeknownst to many in the Karikita, Jinso had trained from a young age in the deadly art of assassination, her nimble celerity proving a valuable asset, not just for Ikari, but the Karikita at large. She largely agreed with Ikari's way of thinking but kept the facade of a weak, silent concubine to ward off suspicion. Still, many in the army were terrified of crossing her personally in fear of what kind of retaliation she would unleash. It was no secret that he desired complete control of the Karikita clan..."

Among the most vocal opponents of Ikari was **Kenzo**, the Karikita's most decorated warrior who held the reins of command as well. Nanto went on to contrast Kenzo to Ikari as, "...Never boastful, nor haughty; indeed, he was the complete opposite of Ikari. But he was stern, startlingly so. Commander Kenzo was never seen without his trusty katana and board-tipped spear, both of which he was rumored to have carried since he became a venerated warrior decades prior. His facial features held a firm jaw and wellkept mustache that emitted a fatherly aura, though it was noted by everyone that his son, **Kai**, was almost always by his side as well. The boy couldn't have been more opposite of his father: full of himself and quite rude to those he believed inferior to him. Kenzo chastised him frequently, but Kai was built of his own mindset. He, too, was tall like his father, toned and talented with the sword he possessed. It was obvious all the boy wanted was to impress not just Kenzo, but his infatuation as well: **Princess Shuri** of the Karikita. No one had seen her in months, however, leading them to suspect she'd either been captured by Jenjo's rival tribes or taken into Lung Shu. The Karikita used this as an excuse to move on Lung Shu territory, but we suspected otherwise. Whispers

abounded, though, of a mysterious girl in our main camp who tended wounded soldiers with herbal medicines that seemingly eclipsed the healing properties of even the most senior of medics. The kasa contained a netting that surrounded her face, making it nearly impossible to identify the girl, yet this didn't stop many in the garrison from speaking of the figure's real identity: a run-away princess who had grown tired of trivial, vapid palace living. Her sudden appearances and departures, along with the red robe concealing her entire visage, led many to the nickname, "The Maiden in the Mist..."

The Karikita's spirit remained high the following morning as they exited the mountain pass and onto the battlefield proper where the Blue Moon army could be seen across the way. Ordering the archers into their respective positions and keeping their cavalry hidden behind the treeline, the Karikita used the rising sun to their advantage in blinding the Blue Moon. Sensing their enemy would make a brash move, the Karikita generals were proven correct and witnessed a cavalry charge on their location. The perched archers took out every Blue Moon horse and rider before the Karikita launched their own cavalry forward. With insufficient numbers from the Blue Moon's archers, victory seemed within reach before the spearmen of the Blue Moon suddenly stepped forward and took the brunt of the charge, killing every Karikita horse in the process while sacrificing their lives to halt the advance. The generals, including Kenzo and Ikari, were shocked and ordered a full infantry charge onto the battlefield while their archers were to continue firing at the enemy. Their troops were met by the Blue Moon's own infantry, fully colliding on the battlefield proper and unleashing hell according to Nanto. He described the ruthlessness of the Blue Moon as, "...Startling, for we'd been told they were among the most docile of Lung Shu's tribes. Their warriors slashed and screamed, determined to defend their land from our soldiers. Of course, we fought valiantly in return; it would be the greatest marker of shame if we lost and were forced to retreat back to Jenjo, especially since we had outnumbered them 2 to 1. The drunk, **Buno**, was holding his own most admirably. He was known to only fight for money, but the inebriated warrior was rallying the Karikita to push forward and force the Blue Moon back. He hacked and diced through enemies like butter, a disturbing but gratifying sight, his headband drenched in blood and orange robe turning redder with each passing second. It had been said that he and Kenzo were close friends from childhood and that the latter didn't want him fighting out of concern his drunkenness would lead to a gruesome demise. But nothing of the sort was happening, almost as if he was a forgotten Ronin warrior with skills reminiscent of Kenzo's..."

The Karikita began forcing the Blue Moon back with Buno and Kai leading the effort. With the Blue Moon's leader unconscious and their even the most skilled archers needing to recuperate, triumph seemed nearly assured once more; that was until an unknown soldier unexpectedly rallied those retreating and urged them back into battle. It halted the Karikita's push while Buno and Kai came into personal conflict with the soldier who had brought the army back together, but was unable to best him. The duo took command and started ordering their soldiers back to the treeline as the male who had taken control of the Blue Moon called for a formal retreat and left the battlefield with his soldiers. Nanto professed confusion and, "...Was unable to fathom why such a declaration had been made on their end, for it gave us the official victory! Yet, as I looked around the battlefield, its burnt, crisp surface littered with mangled

bodies, broken weapons and petering fires, it became obvious our triumph was short-lived. My own left leg had suffered severe gashes that ran the length of a sword up my femur and into the pelvic region. Blood blemished my uniform and I was compelled to limp as the perspiration from my face stung both eyes and clouded my vision, although this could have been attributed to the billows of choking smoke I was forced to plunge through. Wisps of grass crackled under each step while the screams of those around me filled the sickening air, causing great discomfort to all those still living. My armor was shattered in several areas, having been dealt blows from the enemy and my weapon was lost amongst the debris. It was apparent that this was a narrow, offset victory with no real gain. I trembled at the thought of Ikari and his uncontrollable rage; the man had always frightened me more than I cared to admit, but this would go beyond the pale...

The Karikita generals understood they had no remaining resources to chase after the Blue Moon army and take their land. With morale low and tensions running high, the Karikita army made their own formal retreat back through the mountain pass and into Jenjo, reeling from the events of that day.