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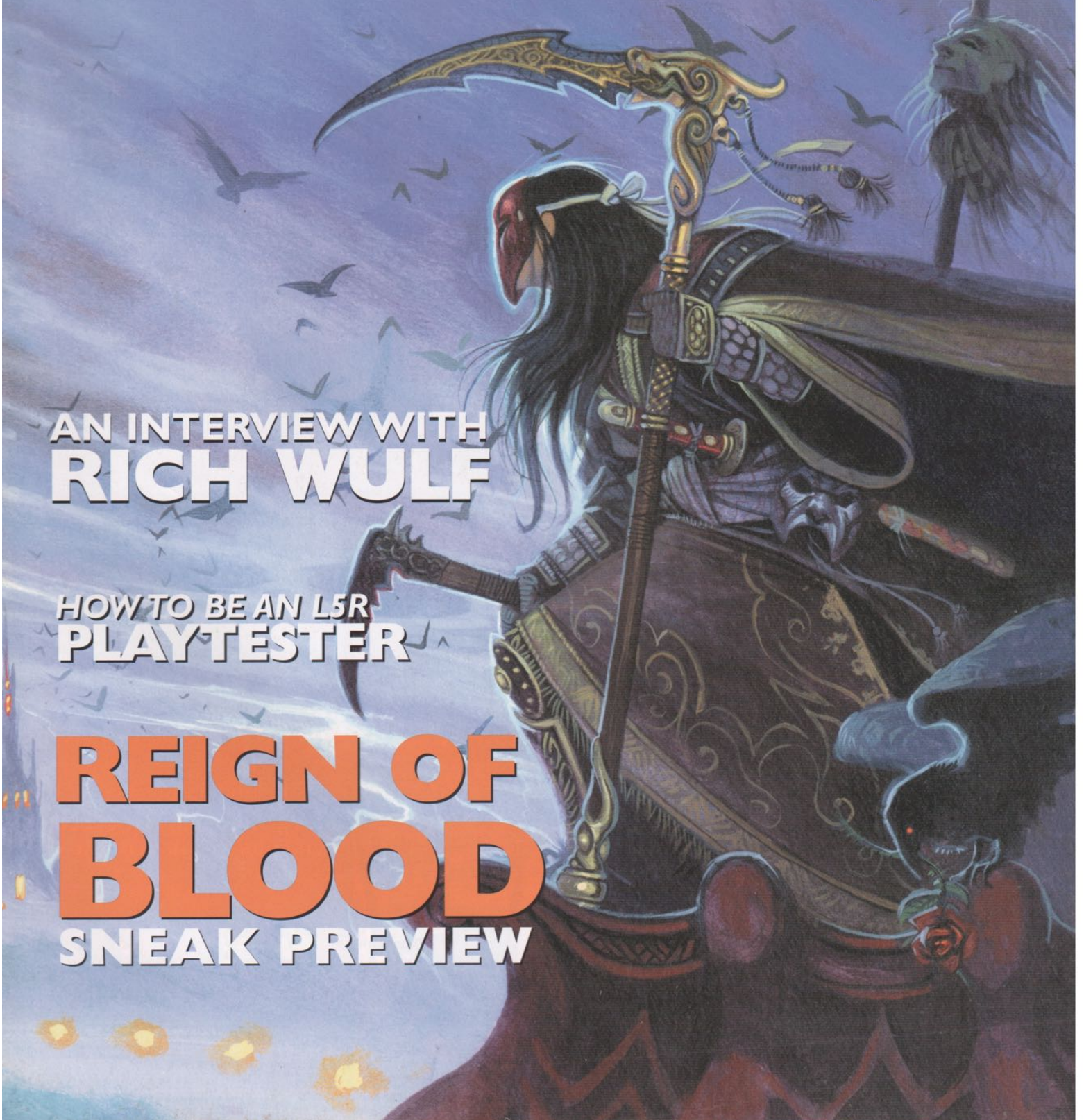
HERALD

VOL. 2 / NO. 10

AN INTERVIEW WITH
RICH WULF

HOW TO BE AN L5R
PLAYTESTER

**REIGN OF
BLOOD**
SNEAK PREVIEW



TIME TO FORGE
NEW STORIES...
...YOURS

Reign of Blood™

A NEW EMPEROR NOW REIGNS OVER ROKUGAN, and the Great Clans must find their place in the altered Empire.

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THE
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HERALD

THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY VOL. 2 / NO. 10

Editorial

Everybody wants to be a game designer!

Here at AEG, we get a great deal of customer feedback about L5R's marketing, art, visuals, and designs. Most of the comments that finally make it across my desk range from constructive criticism to complete card and mechanics ideas. As diverse as many of these suggestions are, they all come back to the same goal: make L5R better.

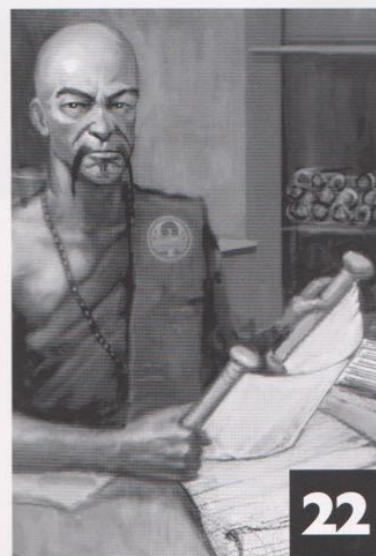
The mystery of design that every card player's solved for their favorite game is the secret line of balance. Since the birth of the game, we've gotten reports on the state of balance of L5R on almost a daily basis — most of which come to the same conclusion, the game is out of balance.

But the biggest dilemma my designers come across while constructing cards doesn't come from mechanical balancing. The toughest design of cards comes from its intrinsic value. Is the card fun?

Often when we choose to make a card fun, the card alls out of balance, especially in a game as expansive as L5R (10 Factions, 3 Winning Conditions, 1,000 – 2,000 card environments). But on the other hand, if we stick with the same, safe formulas we've used for years, the cards become stale and boring.

So, as a bit of insight into our thoughts and why some cards are unbalanced, when we come across the question of tweaking a card between the mechanically balanced side and the fun side, we're going to choose fun every time. L5R's a game that's entertained you for over seven years, and we intend to keep on doing that for many more to come.

— Raymond Lau
L5R Brand Manager



PREVIEWS

Reign of Blood	4
Reign of Blood Combos ..	6
Reign of Blood Strategies	19
Secrets of the Dragon ..	24

FICTION

Glimpse of Tomorrow	12
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THE REST

Life of a Card	8
Uncle Kisada Wants You! ..	15

Koku Redemption	16
An Interview with Rich Wulf	22
GenCon SoCal	26
L5R Casting Call	28
Zen's Card Focus	30



REIGN OF BLOOD

by Jeff Alexander

The Lucky First Three

Diamond started every faction off with a clean slate. Ratling and Mantis aside, every house could potentially get something new in this set. In *Winds of Change*, our choices were constrained by which clans needed something new in *Diamond*. So while the set as a whole was primarily devoted to Political actions (due to the strong lack of support they had at the time), *WoC* featured three almost exclusively military Strongholds.

The theme for *Reign of Blood* is magic — tainted magic and pure, and the people who use both. With no constraints driving our selections, we were free to pick the three factions that best suited a magically-themed set, so we naturally picked the three with the

greatest potential use for magic in Rokugan: the Phoenix, the Dragon, and the Unicorn. (Unicorn? Yes, Unicorn. Count the number of Shugenja they've received over the years.)

Phoenix's magical strong points are Shugenja with good built-in abilities and an affinity for Spells over Kihos. They already have a Spell-oriented Stronghold in *Kyuden Agasha*, so *Reign of Blood* addresses their innate abilities. Phoenix Shugenja have gotten the strongest innate abilities since the *Gold* era, often to the detriment of their Force and Chi. The *City of Remembrance* lets them use those abilities more easily, though not more frequently — preventing multiple uses helps keep Shugenja like *Isawa Ochiai* from becoming obscene.

Unicorn's Stronghold was trickier. Unicorn players have long voiced their dislike of their Clan's relatively new focus on Items throughout the *Gold* arc. They cite the inherent weakness that using swords instead of troops poses in an environment that still features threats like *Refugees* and *The Towers of the Yogo*. Adding a Follower with every Item seemed the easiest way of shoring up that weakness. Making it zero Force helps insure this magic-oriented Stronghold doesn't accidentally become better at the militarily game than a military one. Their Stronghold's other benefit reflects their knowledge of barbarian talisman magic and was influenced by the Phoenix's.

So if the Phoenix can use innate powers without bowing, and the Unicorn can cast Spells without bowing, why can't the Dragon use Kihos without bowing? Well, something we've noticed about *Shiro Mirumoto* is that no one uses the *House of Tao* to start with the *Ring of the Void* — it would effectively be the same thing, only with worse stats. It would be neither creative nor interesting for the next four Dragon Strongholds to be just like the *House of Tao* with one of the other four Rings built in. Dragon wouldn't gain any truly new Strongholds for years under that plan. No, the best plan for Dragon was to go at complete right angles to the *House of Tao* + *Ring of Air* starting combo. And so we have it, with something simple yet flexible and profound. Just like the Dragon.

Earth and Air, Fire and Water, Gold...

Magic in Rokugan is about the elements that make up the world. It's shugenja conversing with the elemental spirits that infuse every rock and cloud and tree. It's only natural that a big sub-theme on the magical effects in Reign is the five elemental keywords. The shugenja, particularly the Phoenix, have elemental keywords, and there are Spells and Kihos that work better when cast by someone with the appropriate predilection. Expect this trend to continue into later sets.

We're also experimenting with letting cards be bought in two different ways. Most Clans have a Personality they can bring into play with reduced cost or some other benefit at the expense of his stats. Games can be a little more tactical, for there is now a choice not only whether to buy a Personality, but how, given what they know about the environment in general and their opponent in particular.

...and Blood.

In *Imperial Edition*, corruption seduced L5R CCG players by offering them Shadowlands cards that cost less Gold than they would normally. This was balanced by a loss of Honor

upon playing the card or using its abilities (and sometimes both). The problem with this is that historically, the benefit of the lower price has always been more than worth the Honor hit. This accelerates the pace of the environment, and it skews the balance of power in favor of Clans that can inherently handle playing at low or negative Family Honor. And price isn't the only problem. Since corrupt cards were all Shadowlands, there is also a quandary designing metagame cards: any countermeasure to corruption will either be so expensive or narrow that it's not worth playing, or so affordable and reliable that it decimates legitimate Shadowlands decks.

Diamond Edition got rid of an entire suite of game-speeding corrupt Shadowlands cards that so many players understandably hated seeing. Re-introducing that model of corruption in the very first expansion of a new tournament format was completely out of the question. We needed a new model for corruption, one where:

Corrupt cards offer an advantage, but not speed.

Corrupt cards do not have a drawback that renders them unusable by certain Clans without completely changing their decks.

Corrupt cards have weaknesses that can be capitalized upon without resorting to specific metagame cards.

Any new metagame cards that do counter corrupt cards especially well don't coincidentally punish any one Clan along with them.

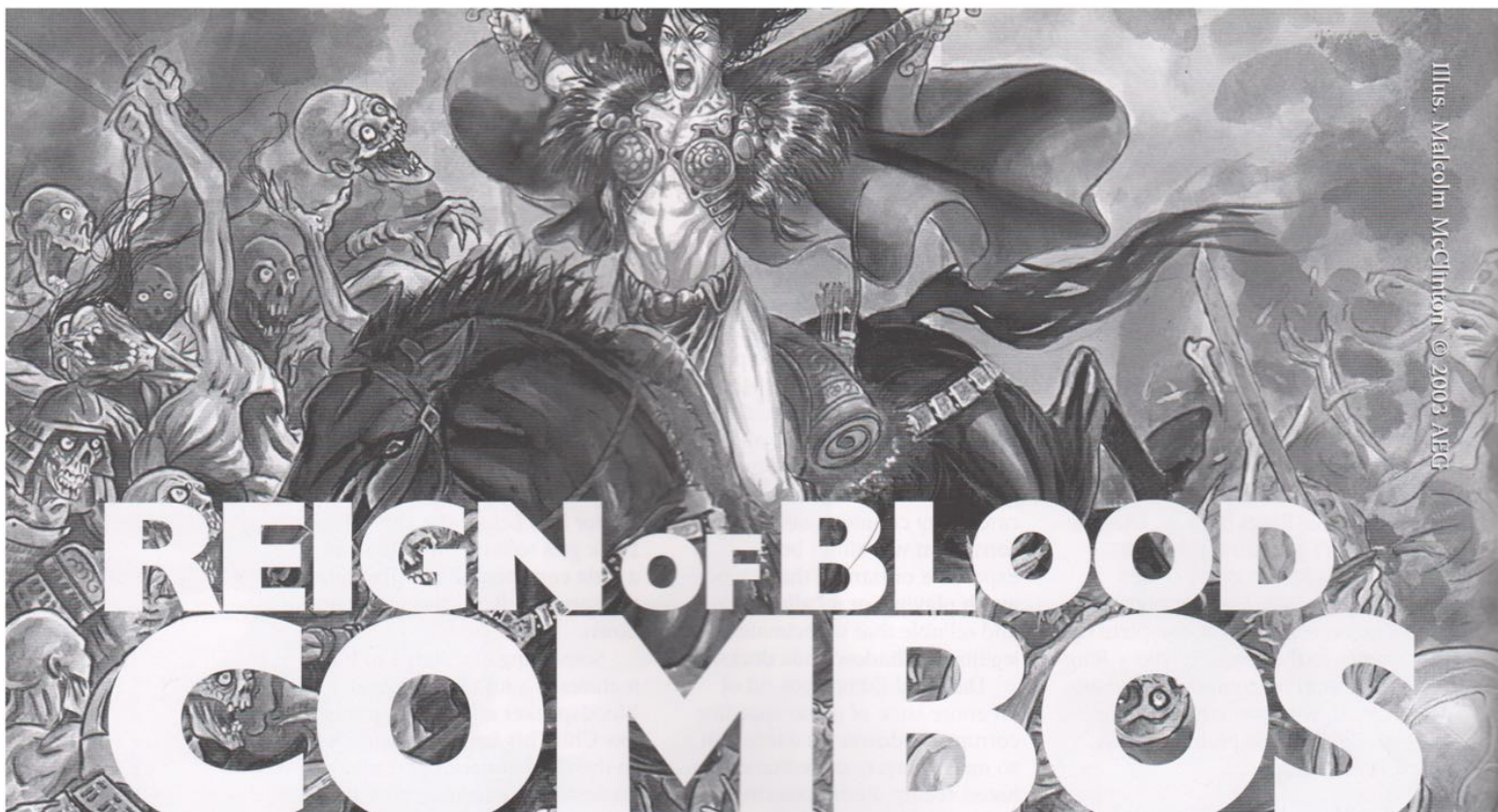
"Better, but not faster." That's hard, when you think about it. If a corrupt card is as strong as a pure one yet costs the same, there will be no reason to use it (and a very real reason to actively avoid it if focused meta exists). But if it costs less, it'll be faster. Alternate costs couldn't be a trademark of corrupt cards, which is why a lot of Bloodspeaker and Maho cards in this set are normally-priced and lack the familiar Honor losses associated with Shadowlands cards of old. Instead you'll find corrupt cards offering you something you normally can't find, like dash Honor Requirements, or

strong but double-sided effects with noticeable drawbacks, like causing Chi losses to your own people as you pay for your maho with their very blood.

Ah, yes. Chi loss. There is significant Chi loss in this set, mostly from Maho cards. True, some Clans are better able to stay in the game after suffering large losses, but every Clan can withstand a little bit of loss with little to no deck redesign. One or two points of Chi loss is not as crippling as one or two points of Honor loss before the Dynasty Deck gets rolling. Any Clan can go a little corrupt and still play nearly the same deck. Goal number two down.

Something else Reign of Blood features is a lot of Maho and Bloodspeaker effects that punish low Chi. This isn't a coincidence. In the *Gold* era corrupt decks had an easier time beating pure decks because the pure ones were slower. In *Diamond*, Maho-corrupt decks will have an easier time beating other corrupt decks, which puts a self-imposed limit on how much they can eclipse players who choose to stay pure. Even better, the low Chi that Bloodspeaker decks impose upon themselves means there are other ways to meta against them that don't involve narrow metagame cards that are dead draws in other matchups. Three down, one to go!

All who choose the path of the Bloodspeaker (and survive long enough...) eventually become tainted Shadowlands Shugenja, but they don't all start out that way, and the changes don't take place overnight. That's why you'll see Bloodspeakers that have neither of those traits. This is a windfall for the metagame issue. It means anti-Bloodspeaker cards aren't automatically anti-Shadowlands and anti-Phoenix cards, and that solves our last design goal.



REIGN of BLOOD COMBOS

Pit of Blood + Shukumei

Pit of Blood lets you store your Bloodspeaker Personalities under it as they die, then return them to play for free on later turns. That's good in its own right. What's better is when those Bloodspeakers have beneficial effects that trigger when they enter play, like *Shukumei* does.

by Jeff Alexander



Slaughter the Scout (DE) + Suitengu's Uncertainty + Left Hand of Emperor (DE)

Once you've played *Suitengu's Uncertainty*, each time anyone's unit leaves that battle for any other location, you can force it to move to an adjacent Province instead. With careful assignment of your other units, this card plus *Slaughter the Scout* will turn any "go home" card into a "die!" card. The most dependable choice would be the *Left Hand of the Emperor* Wind, since it begins the game already in play, but this combo also works with many Action cards that are good in their own right, such as *Refugees* and *Return for Training*.



Ride the Way OR Hidden Retreat + Suspended Terrain (DE)

Suspended Terrain is a great Terrain to play against a superior army. Playing it with a small, expendable force like a lone Koto is often a game-winning move. It's even better if you can do it without sacrificing anyone. *Ride the Way* gives you one more way to do that. Even better is *Hidden Retreat*, which doesn't blow itself up when you use it to retreat and save one of your own units.



Calculate Strength + Shosuro Higatsuku (DE) OR Temple of the Ninth Kami (DE)

Calculate Strength is normally a defensive card, designed to hobble your opponent if he builds one powerful duelist. If you spot this budding threat early, forcing him to challenge you before he is ready will let you hobble him before he gets built up, as well as let you restrict his damage against you to one Personality who is largely of your own choosing.

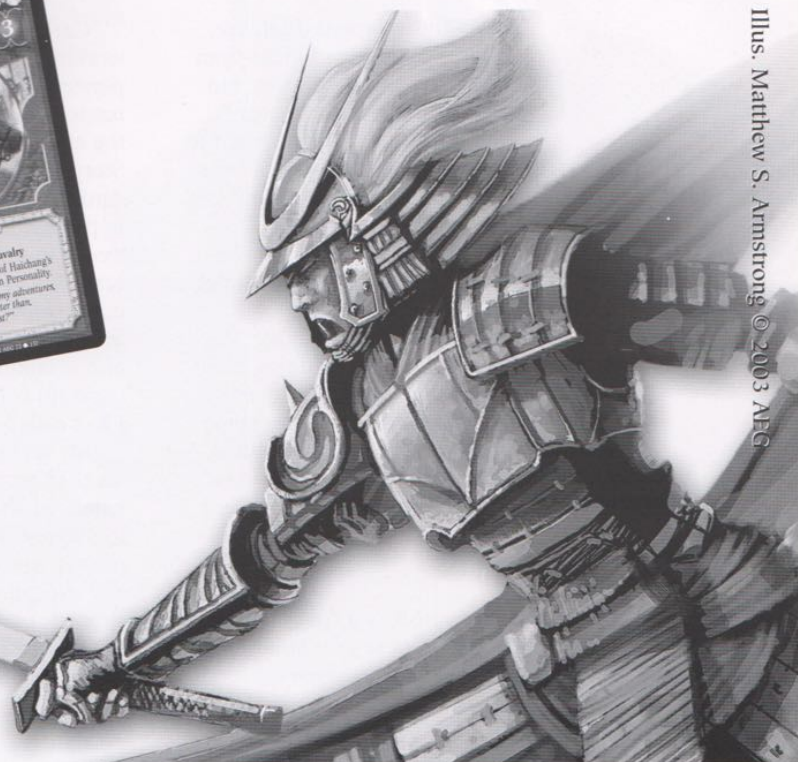


From Every Side + Essence of Gaki-do

From Every Side works better the more units you have. It's no surprise that it works well with cards that create units! If you have several Shugenja cast *Essence of Gaki-do* from outside the battle, you're effectively getting 3F units from that Spell. If you cast it with Shugenja in the battle, it's the same as getting 4F units (though you lose the Shugenjas' Force, so it may not be worth it). Bear in mind that if you're attacking, you need to out-Force the defending army before the Province strength matters.

Ide Haichang + My Father's Weapon (DE)

Give *My Father's Weapon* to Ide Haichang and attack with him and another Unicorn. At the end of the turn, *Haichang* straightens from the *Weapon's* attachment effect. Then, in your opponent's Action Phase, destroy the *Weapon* and use *Haichang's* action to straighten the other Personality too, before your opponent can attack you back.



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DOJO CARD

3G

BOW TO
PRODUCE
2 GOLD

THE LIFE OF A CARD

SKETCH BY STORM COOK



Illus. Storm Cook © 2003 AEG

**"Hey, Jeff," said Dave Williams.
"Here's an idea for a card: ..."**

by Jeff Alexander

This happens a lot. We get L5R card ideas from numerous sources: fan submissions, storyline events, environmental shifts we want to encourage, and Dave Williams haplessly saying, "Hey, Jeff" over my shoulder.

"How about a two-for-two Holding you can bow to straighten your Stronghold?"

It was understandable. We've been producing Holdings lately that cost 2 Gold and can either produce 2 or be used for some fancy ability. This was right in line, so I typed it into my nascent *Reign of Blood* developing card database, thusly:

2 g

Bow to produce 2 Gold.

Reaction: After your Stronghold bows, bow to straighten it.

Cards often have working titles during playtest. Putting a formal name on every card is done near the end of development, since the Story Team needs to see what the cards will look like with the art in place and that artwork takes weeks to produce, collect, and scan. But we need to call the cards something in testing so everyone knows what everyone else is talking about. Since Dave came up with this card idea, I just called it "Dave's Holding".

My first task as a designer on a set is to get a card into roughly balanced shape before it even goes to playtest. Rough ideas are rarely perfect, and *Dave's Holding* wasn't any exception. That ability was strong for 2 Gold. Each one was another copy of your Stronghold, in effect, for anything your

Stronghold could do, including produce 3, 4, or even 5 Gold. This would make it the best Gold-producing Holding in the game. Plus you could use more than one action in a turn that required bowing your Stronghold, which is powerful all by itself.

I raised the Gold cost to 3 and added the restriction that it couldn't straighten your Stronghold if you used it to make Gold. Without adding that restriction, *Dave's Holding* would have needed to cost at least 4 to avoid being a brainless inclusion in nearly all decks for its efficiency

alone. At 4, though, it would have been outside easy purchasing range of a couple of Clans, and I didn't want *Dave's Holding* to be that way — it combos with your Stronghold, and every Clan has a Stronghold!

So this is the card playtesters first saw:

Dave's Holding

3g

Bow to produce 2 Gold.

Reaction: After your Stronghold bows for any reason other than producing Gold, bow to straighten it.

The reports that came back were nearly unanimous: it was way too strong in multiples. Now, we could fix that by making it Unique, or better yet, Singular. Allowing no more than one to be used in a turn regardless of how many you control was also suggested, but that was much too wordy and artificial a fix to achieve pretty much the same change.

Dave's Holding

3g

Singular

Bow to produce 2 Gold.

Reaction: After your Stronghold bows for any reason other than producing Gold, bow to straighten it.

Back into playtest it went.

Some testers began reporting new issues with it then: with the Singular trait and three in the deck, they were getting two of them early and it was hurting their

card flow. I pointed out that this was true of any Singular card, and accounting for it was something that had to be done during deckbuilding. The trait was staying on. (For now.)

Another problem surfaced, though, and this one was more serious: *Kyuden Ikoma*. Even one *Dave's Holding* plus *Kyuden Ikoma* would allow a player to cancel two of his opponent's actions in a row. His foe would have to try to do three things against the *K.I* player to do anything to him at all.

Well...hmm. If the issue was being able to use the same Stronghold action over and over again, why not address that? It would be wordy, but this time there wasn't a brief alternative fix. We added the stipulation, "If it bowed to use one of its actions, that action may not be used for the rest of the turn."

Looking over *Dave's Holding* again, it began to show that it wasn't the capacity to bow your Stronghold multiple times in one turn that was abusive, it was the capacity to bow it for the same one key action over and over. *Dave's Holding* itself prevented multiple printed Stronghold actions now, the Stronghold-powered Wind actions were already limited to once per turn by their own wordings, any Action cards that include bowing your

Stronghold as a play cost are inherently limited by the number in your hand... There didn't seem to be a reason to limit players to one of this Holding any more. We could safely remove the Singular keyword.

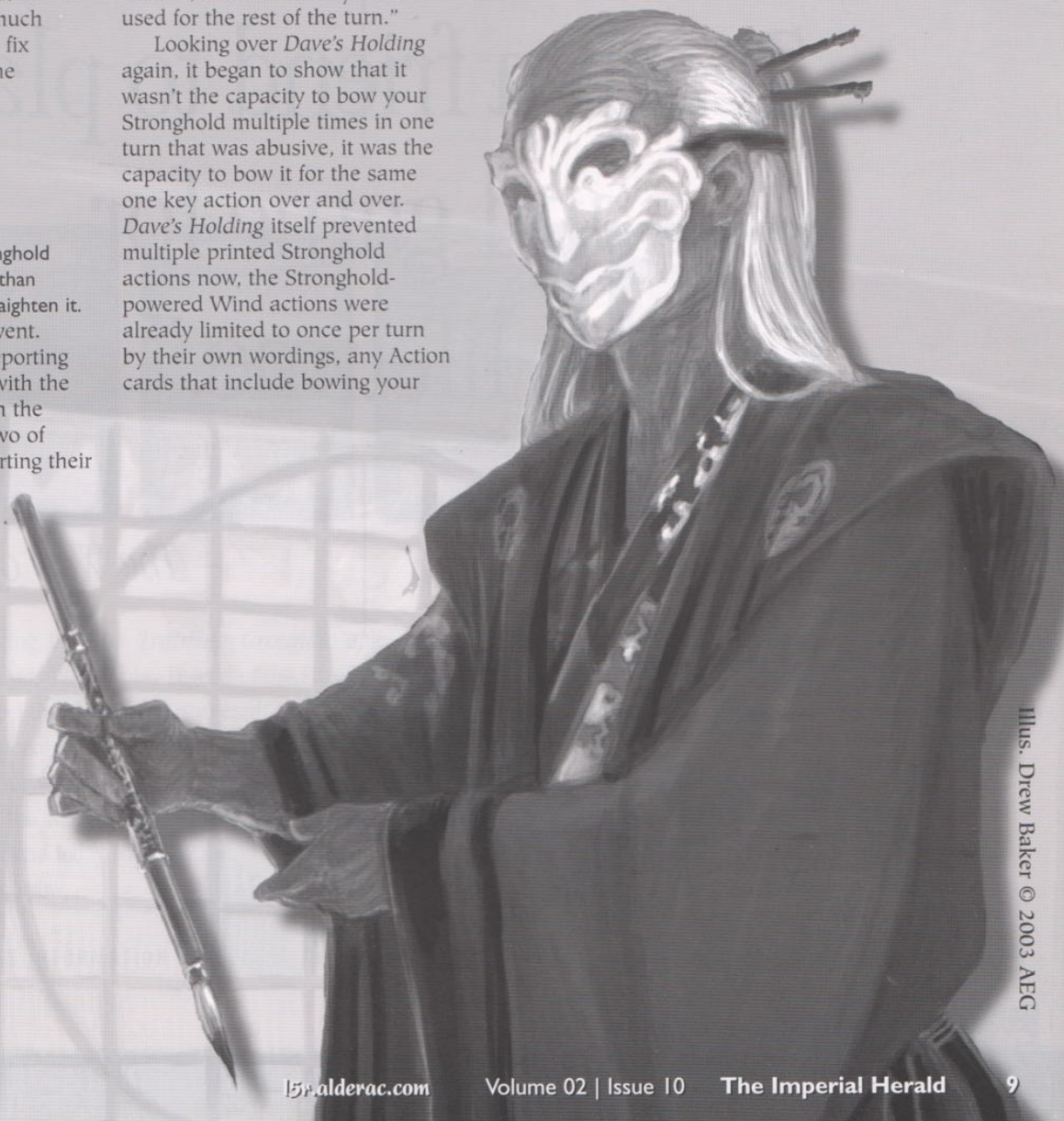
Dave's Holding

3g

Bow to produce 2 Gold.

Reaction: After your Stronghold bows for any reason other than producing Gold, bow to straighten it. If it bowed to use one of its actions, that action may not be used for the rest of the turn.

All we needed now was a real title from Rich and Shawn and a quick pass-through to make sure it conformed to our grammar templating rules, and *Hero's Grave* was ready for print.



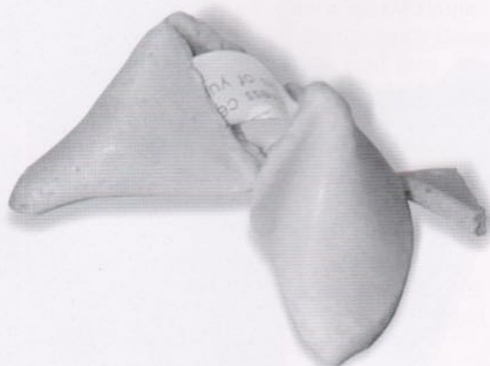
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“Give a friend a deck,
and game for
just a day...

Teach a friend to play,
and game for
a lifetime.”

— *The Way of Shinsei*



Diamond Edition™

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GLIMPSE OF TOMORROW

Kodotai Mura was a minor outpost at best, and even that description was a bit flattering. To tell the truth, it was little more than a way station for traveling magistrates and misplaced wanderers that marked the northern edge of the Utaku provinces, where the Unicorn lands met the northern mountains. Winter had not yet come to Rokugan, but in the northern foothills, frost could be seen on the ground each morning and near evening as well. With the lone watchtower and its scattered surrounding outbuildings standing in stark contrast to the mountains in the north and the endless plains to the south, a fine sheen of white frost covering the late evening grass, it was one of the most serene vistas the Empire had to offer.

by Rich Wulf

Moto Najmudin smiled and spurred his horse onward. Rider and steed had both been irritable for the past few days, a result of having spent nearly a week in the wilderness with nothing to show for it. The bandits he had been chasing seemed to have melted into the mountains, and not even Najmudin's gift for tracking had been able to find them. The rapidly approaching winter weather made the matter far worse, as the bandits would likely go underground and stay hidden until spring, when they would reemerge to threaten the Utaku provinces again. They would be destroyed in short order,

Najmudin had no doubt of that. The only reason they had survived thus far was that the Khan had a large portion of his armies committed to the eastern border against the Lion. Once that conflict met with conclusion, the Utaku forces would come home. The bandits would survive less than a week once that happened.

A grimace threatened to overwhelm Najmudin's newfound good cheer. Happy though he was to be back to civilization, such as it was, he despised coming back empty-handed. Even after serving the Emerald Magistrates for nearly five years, he constantly worried that he would disappoint those whom he served. It was childish, perhaps, but he did not wish to disappoint his immediate supervisor Isawa Kurasu or, even worse, Doji Jotaro, the man who had initially given him his position.

The Unicorn magistrate's fur-trimmed boots made a distinct crunching sound as he dismounted outside the stable. He patted his horse reassuringly and led him into the stable for fresh hay and water, tossing a warm blanket over him and brushing him thoroughly before heading into the watchtower. Trail rations were all well and good, but Najmudin was ready for something hot and even so, preferably something with beef. How the other clans survived without eating beef he would never understand.

As expected, the outpost was mostly deserted. This was Najmudin's eighth visit to Kodotai Mura since his posting in this region six months ago, and he had never seen more than twelve people here at one time. Today, there were only a half-dozen, most of whom were magistrates and sentries that he recognized from previous visits. He nodded and exchanged polite greetings, then accepted a hearty bowl of stew from the cook and retired to a quiet table to enjoy his meal.

Halfway through his second bowl, Najmudin looked up to find a servant hovering near the table, obviously waiting to be recognized. He raised his eyebrows at the old man questioningly, at which point the man bowed deeply and held forth a scroll. It bore a chrysanthemum mon — the mark of the Emerald Champion and his magistrates.

Najmudin took the scroll at once, nodding half-heartedly to the servant as he broke the seal and opened it, his meal now forgotten. He pulled the scroll open eagerly, wondering if he had some new assignment or duty that was required of him. He enjoyed his work here, of course, but always hoped for something a little more meaningful. The message within, however, was not at all what he expected. 'Meet me at once in the northwest corner room on the top floor. Say nothing to anyone.'

The magistrate frowned. This was decidedly irregular. Still, the scroll bore an imperial seal, and if there were any in this region who could reproduce them accurately, he would be more than surprised. Glancing around for anything suspicious, he rose from his seat and headed for the stairs.

The outpost at Kodotai Mura was technically an Utaku holding. That family maintained it and gathered taxes, but had little to do with the magistrates' way station other than to ensure it was well stocked. The upper level was reserved for Utaku visitors or important high-ranking magistrates, although to Najmudin's knowledge neither had set foot inside the aged wooden building in years. He walked to the designated room cautiously, well aware of the many dangers that could await inside. In the end, though, he was a magistrate, and trusted that those he served alongside of would not have allowed a traitor in their midst. With a deep breath and a determined mind, he pushed open the door and strode confidently inside.

"Close the door, Najmudin," came a familiar voice.

"Kurasu-sama?" Najmudin said softly, sliding the door back in place quickly. "Is that you, sir?"

The man who stepped out of the dim shadows was indeed Najmudin's superior, but barely resembled him. His usually splendid robes had been replaced by drab, shaggy clothing that was brown rather than orange and gold. "Hai, Najmudin-san," he said. "But you must tell no one that we have met here. I am supposedly tending to personal affairs in the Phoenix lands.

The Unicorn frowned. "What's going on, sir? This is... unusual."

"It is indeed," Kurasu agreed. "I have traveled all this way to meet with you, for you have knowledge that we need."

"We?" Najmudin said, scanning the shadows.

"Yes," came a woman's voice. Najmudin could see nothing, despite his finely honed hunter's senses. "Are you certain he is trustworthy, Kurasu?"

"Yes, my lady," the Phoenix confirmed. "Najmudin is perhaps my most impeccable magistrate. You can depend on his word of honor."

Najmudin looked at Kurasu in surprise. He had always believed the Phoenix officer disdained him, both for his gaijin name and his admittedly strange blend of Unicorn and traditional culture. To hear him say such a thing was truly an honor. "Thank you, my lord."

"Enough of this," the woman said again. There was a sudden shifting in the room, as if a wind that could not be felt had blown through. The shadows in one section of the room vanished, and a beautiful Phoenix woman with raven tresses stepped forward. "We are here for a purpose, not to exchange pleasantries, please!"

"Najmudin," Kurasu offered, "this is Agasha Chieh, acting governess of the Agasha provinces and former Imperial Magistrate."

"Not former," she corrected. "I retain my full rank, thus whatever I ask of you, Unicorn, is not an abandonment of your duties, but rather supercedes them."

"As you say, my lady," Najmudin said with a bow.

"You have served the magistrates for nearly five years, ever since your victory at the Topaz Championship in 1152," Chieh said. "During that time you have served in a wide variety of places, but chiefly among the Crane and Unicorn lands." She looked at him expectantly.

"Um, yes, Chieh-sama," he managed, still confused and uncertain what was expected of him.

"Are you familiar with this?" she asked, nodding to Kurasu. The man held forth a scroll, unrolled so that Najmudin could see the kanji painted across the front of it.

The magistrate's heart sank. "Yes, Chieh-sama, I am familiar with it."

"Tell me everything you know about it," she insisted eagerly. "Leave nothing out."

Najmudin rubbed his chin. "I am afraid there is little to tell you, my lady. My associates and I discovered a maho-tsukai operating in the Crane lands roughly a year after we began serving the Emerald Champion. When he was finally defeated, we found that symbol featured prominently among his belongings. It seemed to be some sort of marker, although neither the Asahina nor my Kuni companion could decipher it. I believe the eta who examined her body indicated that she had it tattooed across her torso several times."

Chieh only nodded, her eyes narrow and thoughtful. "And your report on the incident mentioned something further. Did you recognize the symbol at all, Najmudin?"

The magistrate frowned again. "I merely observed in my report that it bore a passing resemblance to a symbol from the Burning Sands. An ancient nomad pictogram. It was among my first assignments. I have since been cautioned to leave idle speculation out of my reports."

"What did this nomad pictogram mean?" Chieh persisted.

"A mythical beast," he answered. "A legendary animal, similar to a flaming horse or a ki-rin."

The two Phoenix exchanged a quick look, then Chieh turned back to him. "Other agents serving Kurasu recently ferreted out and disrupted a blasphemous sect of monks operating out of an old monastery on the Dragon Heart Plain. This symbol was repeated many times throughout their belongings."

"Then the maho-tsukai was not alone?" Najmudin asked. "She was part of a group?"



"Perhaps," Kurasu said. "We have little to go on at this point. The matter is as yet very confusing."

"But there is enough to know that something is amiss, and it is far too close to the Phoenix lands for my liking," Chieh said. "I require this matter to be investigated, preferably with discretion. You will do this for me, Najmudin," she nodded at him. "You must prepare to depart immediately. The Shrine of the Ki-Rin is where you will begin."

"You will need aid," Kurasu offered. "I have men that I trust, but are there any you would prefer?"

"My old companions," Najmudin answered at once. "They serve all across the Empire, but they are the finest men and women I have ever known. They are both dependable and discreet. They would serve you well."

"Done," Chieh said. "They will be summoned to join you near Ootosan Uchi."

Najmudin frowned. "This isn't right."

The Phoenix woman's hardened exterior cracked for the first time, showing surprise. "I beg your pardon?"

"Something isn't right," Najmudin repeated. "A simple symbol is not sufficient to reassign important personnel with such abandon, even for such a powerful magistrate as yourself, my lady," he added quickly. "There is more to this than you are telling me. I do not ask for you to be forthcoming, so long as you understand I can only serve you at my best if I am aware of all that may oppose your will."

Chieh stared at the Unicorn for several moments, as if calculating his worth. "If you are to be trusted," she finally said, "then you must give your word that no one, not even your precious companions, must know of what I am to tell you."

"Of course," he said instantly. "Upon my honor and life, I give you my word."

"My lady," Kurasu began...

The Phoenix shugenja waved his concerns away. "The Agasha daimyo, the venerable Agasha Hamanari, is among the finest seers in all Rokugan. Several months ago, during a meditation, he screamed and collapsed into a terrible fever. It has raged unabated for months, and he only becomes lucid long enough to scream about blood. I fear he is mad, as Isawa Norikazu once was, but I also fear that there was something terrible that drove him so." She lifted an eyebrow at the magistrate. "And I am convinced that somehow this is related. The only other comprehensible thing Hamanari-sama has voiced in the

past three weeks has been the word Ki-Rin." She fixed the man with a piercing glare. "Is that sufficient for you, or is your boundless curiosity still unsated?"

"Forgive my arrogance," Najmudin said with a deep bow. "I only wish to serve."

"Be certain that you do," she said coolly. "Now. Where are these companions we are to summon? We have little time for frivolity."

"Tsuruchi Fusako is the first," Najmudin said instantly. "She currently serves alongside her Wasp brothers and sisters in the mountainous Mantis lands."

Chieh nodded to Kurasu. "See to it that she is reassigned to Najmudin at once."

"Kuni Jiyuna is currently serving atop the Kaiu Wall. If this is truly a matter of maho, she will be indispensable."

"A Kuni, always a Kuni," the Phoenix muttered under her breath. "And the last?"

"Matsu Takenao. I am not certain, but I believe he is stationed near the fighting at the City of the Rich Frog. I could ride down and collect him myself, if you wish."

Chieh laughed. It was a soft, bitter sound. "A Unicorn, ride into the Lion encampment outside the City of the Rich Frog? You are as brave as I have been told." She nodded a third time to Kurasu. "And you believe these three are trustworthy as well?" she asked.

"I trust them all with my life," Najmudin said.

The woman nodded again. "Yes, you do, though you may not yet realize it." She took a seat and reclined, her body posture suggesting exhaustion. "You are free to go, ex-Topaz Champion," she said with a wave. "May the Fortunes lend you speed and the Tao lend you guidance. I fear you will need both."

UNCLE KISADA WANTS YOU!

How to be an L5R Playtester

It wasn't long after I started playing L5R that I heard about playtesters. If you're reading this article, you've probably heard of them, too. Most likely, you heard about them when someone looked at a newly published card and said, "What the heck were those playtesters thinking?" Well, the answer to that is...complicated, but if I answer some other questions about playtesting, maybe you'll be able to figure out the answer to that question out on your own. Playtesting L5R has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my gaming life, and I think it's a small tragedy that people outside the playtest groups don't understand what it's really about. So, let's start at the beginning, and try to give everyone a little insight into the mind of a playtester.

A playtest team is a group of players, usually five or so, who feel they have enough experience with the game to get themselves involved in design. Every group has a team leader, a person who guides the discussion and testing that the group does. Not only that, but the team leader represents the group on the playtesting list. The leader has to be the most experienced, most knowledgeable person on the team, because he's the one who'll have to defend all of the team's ideas against the inevitable critiques of the Design Team and the other playtesters et al.

The ideal playtester is someone who plays on both a casual level and a tournament level, and has real play

experience with a number of Clans. Playtesters need to be able to look at a card from multiple angles – sometimes, a card that will have little effect on casual games can ruin the tournament scene, and vice versa. Playtesters also need to have a solid grasp on how a card will affect different Clans. Sometimes, a card that would never see play in a Crab deck would be godlike in a Crane deck. Don't confuse Clan expertise with Clan bias, though. Clan expertise is desired, because it means that a player can be counted on to give accurate and expert opinions on how a card will affect his Clan. Clan bias is the second worst quality to be found in a playtester, because it gives you the exact opposite expectation – you'll get inaccurate opinions that are intended to make one Clan or another stronger. Balance has to be the first commitment of a playtester, above any Clan, above any type of deck, above personal favoritism.

Once the cards get to the playtesters, everyone needs to take a long, hard, critical look at what each card does. In doing this, you need to simultaneously have a mental separation from the intent of the card, and keep the intent of the card in your mind at all times. A lot of times, critical changes have been missed because everyone was focused on what a card was supposed to do. That's dangerous. At the same time, everyone needs to keep in mind the original intent of the card, making sure that all changes are in line with the effect that the card was

originally supposed to have (as well as the art that's already been commissioned for the card. The artwork can actually have a bigger influence on playtesting than you might think.)

So, what are the pitfalls of playtesting? Well, there are at least two big ones. The first one is the tendency of playtesters to play designer. Although it is the job of all playtesters to use their wisdom and experience to change the cards, it's easy to get wrapped up in the job, and go too far. Time that playtesters spend acting like they're designers is wasted time, and because every playtest session is so short (usually around 6-8 weeks), wasted time is a luxury that cannot be afforded. The second pitfall is security. Everyone who isn't a playtester would, I'm sure, like to know the complete layout of the next two sets right now. You only have to take a look at the thirst for spoilers that happens around prerelease tournaments to know that. For playtesters, who do know what the next few sets are going to look like, the temptation to leak just a little bit of that information is compelling.

Unfortunately, this is the cardinal sin of playtesting, and more than one skilled group of testers has been cut because they couldn't keep quiet about the cards.

So, after all that hard work, the job of the playtester is done, and they can sit back and wait for the eventual reward – the cries and moans of the public as they look at the new set and say, "What the heck were those playtesters thinking?"

Playtesting – it's not a job, it's an experience.

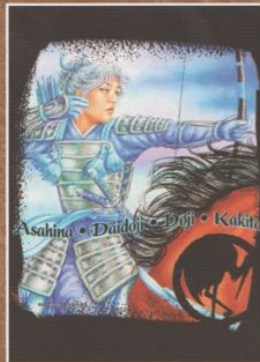
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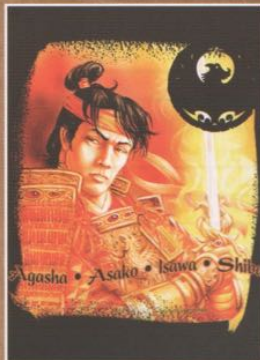
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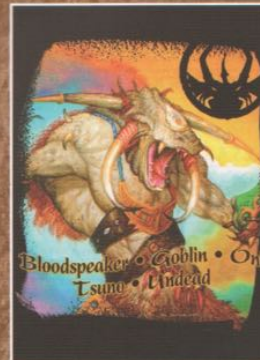
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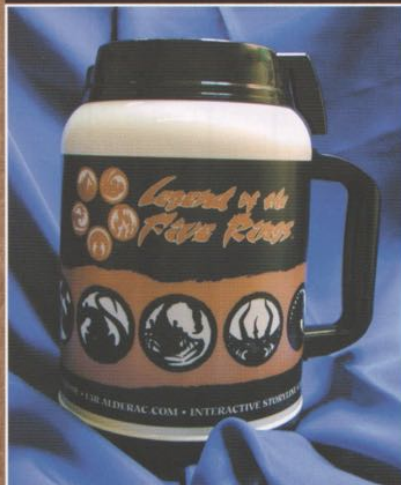


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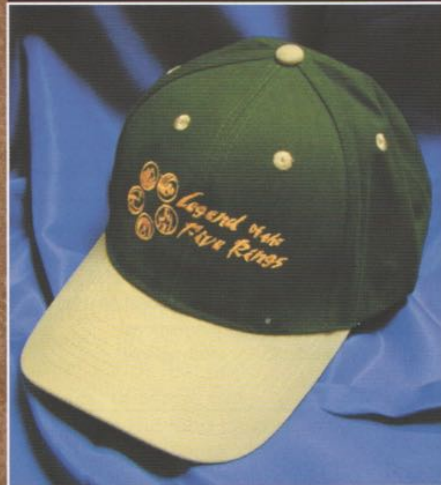
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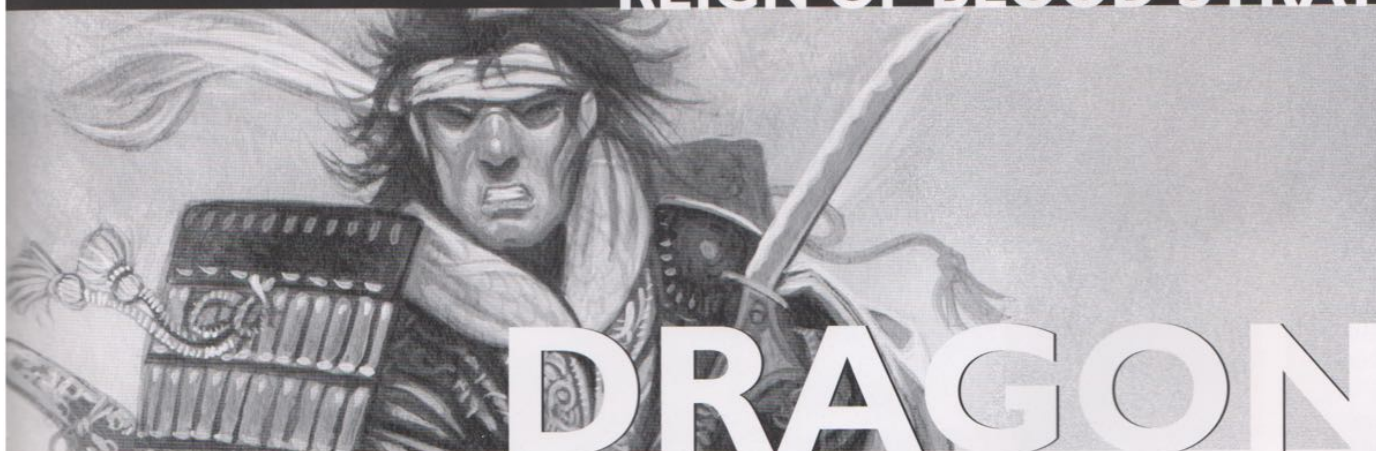
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We began playtesting a Dragon stronghold significantly different from what you know as The Temple of Hoshi. It began as once per turn, after casting a kiho, you could place it face down under the stronghold. You could then bow the stronghold to allow the casting of a kiho from underneath it, as if it were in your hand, removing it from the game after the casting. This combined for a stronghold with the look and feel of the both the Eternal Halls of Shiba and Kyuden Hitomi strongholds. However, the playtesters felt that creating something that was substantially similar to two prior strongholds would take away from the "shock and awe" traditionally expected from cards in the Diamond Environment. We went through a few suggestions, the first being a courtier flavored Kitsuki stronghold that was quickly dismissed because, as courtiers are not Dragons current strength, it would introduce a stronghold without a card base to support it. The consensus then focused on designing a magic themed stronghold substantially different from the already solid House of Tao, and give players an incentive to explore other cards and another deck style. The Temple of Hoshi gives players just that opportunity. The stats are equal to Shiro Mirimoto, but it is the ability that gives this stronghold its exciting potential; "All your Dragon Clan personalities cast kihos as if they were Monks." Wow.

Obviously, the way to maximize this ability is to play powerful kihos and personalities that now wield some of the best kihos in the game. Cards like Fist of the Earth, Purity of Spirit, Feeding on Flesh, Chasing Osano Wo, Flee the Darkness and Palm Strike can bow out your opponent, remove cards from your opponent's army, or increase your overall force. It encourages interaction between you and your opponent, while adding in some neat tricks. Lending Strength, Prayers and Blessings, and the new Blessing of the Dragon can be used to increase chi or force. The increased chi can cause for some lopsided duels, or create enough chi to Purity of Spirit even a sword bearer!

Although strong versus most military decks, it is vulnerable to a dedicated honor runner packing lots of send home, or a Shadowlands deck, which would refuse the challenges with impunity. Mantis range attacks, during a naval invasion, could also decimate a poorly prepared Dragon army. Cards like Imperial Edicts and Test of Magic can easily shut down the kiho casting, limiting your army's effectiveness. Although the following deck focuses on big samurai casting kihos, a very different deck can be built using shugenjas and spells, adding to Dragon's flavor for versatility in deck types.

Stronghold:

The Temple of Hoshi

Wind:

Right Hand of the Emporer

Personalities

- 3 Mirumoto Kyoze
- 3 Hitomi Daisetsu
- 3 Mirumoto Gonkuro
- 3 Mirumoto Tsuge
- 3 Mirumoto Kanasuke
- 1 Hoshi Wayan (Exp. 2)
- 1 Hoshi Chuichi
- 1 Mirumoto Mareshi

Holdings:

- 3 Gold Mine
- 3 Hiruma Dojo
- 1 Shrine to Diakoku
- 2 Akodo's Grave
- 1 Shrine to Hotei
- 1 Gifts and Favors
- 3 Sanctified Temple
- 1 Shrine of the Sun
- 1 Shrine to Ebisu
- 1 Shogun's Barracks
- 1 Grove of the Five Masters

Events:

- 1 Imperial Ambassadorship
- 1 Birth of the Sword
- 1 Regions of Rokugan

Regions:

- 1 Farmlands
- 1 Sacred Grove

Items:

- 1 Celestial Sword of the Dragon

Actions:

- 3 Palm Strike
- 2 Purity of Spirit
- 3 Flee the Darkness
- 2 Chasing Osano Wo
- 3 Lending Strength
- 3 Prayers and Blessings
- 3 Tireless Assault
- 3 Blessing of the Dragon
- 2 Test of Might
- 2 Steel on Steel
- 3 Ijatusu Challenge
- 3 Ijatusu Lesson
- 3 Spearhead

Followers

- 3 Ashigaru Spearmen

by Kevin "KC"
Christopher

Stronghold:
City of Remembrance

Wind:
Voice of the Emperor

Events:
Birth of the Sword
Wisdom Gained

Region:
1 Sacred Region

Holding:
3 Silver Mine
3 Hiruma Dojo
3 Devout Acolyte
2 Sanctified Temple
1 Shrine to Daikoku
1 Shrine to Benten
2 Shrine to Ebisu
1 Shrine to Hotei
1 Shrine to Bishamon
1 Gifts and Favors
1 Military Advisor

Personalities:
3 Shiba Raigen
3 Agasha Serumu
2 Isawa Ihara
2 Isawa Junichiro
1 Isawa Ochial
2 Ryouko
Air Dragon
Fire Dragon
Void Dragon
Water Dragon
Thunder Dragon

Actions:
3 Overwhelmed
3 Return for Training
3 Loyal Yojimbo
3 Sneak Attack
3 Spearhead
2 Retribution
1 The Egg of P'an Ku
3 Introspection
3 The Path of Wisdom
3 Tireless Assault

Spells:
2 Kuro's Fire
3 Walking the Way
1 The Kami Watch Over Me
2 Contemplate the Void

Followers:
1 Isawa House Guard

Rings:
1 Ring of Air
1 Ring of Earth
1 Ring of Water

Items:
1 Celestial Sword of the Phoenix

Strategy:

Get to 10 honor as quickly as you can, then start pumping out cheap Dragons and crush your enemy. You can run for honor if you need be, though it is probably best to try and take a Province or two first if you can. Look for the Rings that you need, Earth against the Left Hand, Water against any kind of mobile enemy, and Air can be useful as well. Use Path of Wisdom to keep the Rings on the table or to fuel Isawa Ochial's duel. Kuro's Fire can win you games with the Sword and House Guard, and it shouldn't be too hard to put the combo together with Walk and Introspection. Danjuro should give you the protection you need to rake any army with a huge number of ranged attacks and to keep those Dragons alive. Mostly though, it is all about those Dragons. Get them on the table, and cut your enemies down before your righteous fury.

REIGN OF BLOOD STRATEGY



Illus. John Donahue © 2003 AEG

by Justin Walsh

Stronghold Design: From the outset, this was to be a stronghold about Innate Abilities something that nearly all Phoenix Shugenja have, but as a theme it has to date seen little support. Next on the list was a way of reinforcing the thematic differences between the Dragon and the Phoenix. Both are exceptionally magical clans, often leading in the past to detracting from the other's focus. The answer here lay in emphasizing the different manifestations of magic within the two Clans: the Dragon Clan possesses a stronger affinity for Kihos, while the Phoenix concentrate on Spells and Innate Abilities. By forbidding Shugenja to cast Kihos, both the Phoenix and Dragon themes are reinforced. Anyway, who wants to cast Kihos? It's all a bit... heimin, really.

This is all well and good, both thematically and mechanically, but the result was lacking something. The stronghold needed some sparkle, some real identity. "Hey!" someone said. "Elemental Dragons are pretty cool." An ability to encourage the use of Dragons and other heavenly creatures was devised, and playtest began in earnest.

Strategies Elemental Dragons will likely form the basis of most strategies coming out of this stronghold, whether in overtly military decks or more control-based strategies. They are powerhouse personalities, although not without weaknesses. Peasant Vengeance and other cards that have strong effects against personalities with

no attachments will wreak havoc against Dragons and, without Flee the Darkness to cancel problem actions, mistakes will be costly. Shiba Danjuro offers a degree of protection, but only in opposed battles. Generally, Dragons will want to avoid those as much as possible. Furthermore, with the increase in Province Strengths across the board, Phoenix players will have to work that little bit harder to destroy provinces. Force pumps will be needed to take the majority of Provinces. Thankfully, cards like Military Advisor and Shrine to Bishamon will allow you to boost force on successive turns. The Dragons are also some of the few units that can use Retribution well.

The ability to use an Innate Ability once per turn without bowing, at its most basic, increases the utility of the personalities you have in play. In the case of specific personalities, the Fire Dragon being a good example, the Innate Ability is significantly transformed, from mediocre to potent. Rather than immediately suggesting a strategy in and of itself, this stronghold ability implies complementary approaches. Isawa Junichiro, for example, may now use his Ranged Attack while remaining unbowed for To Do What We Must or Overwhelmed. As the number of Innate Abilities expands, so players will discover new synergies.

Honor decks may wish to forego the Dragons in favor of Ryouko, an 8 honor-requirement Personality with 3 personal honor for 6 gold off this stronghold to compliment Isawa Toshiji in the mad dash for 40. Ryouko can

also be used in combination with Dragons, its 2 Cavalry force being enough with most Dragons to take Provinces. You will still need to monitor your honor requirements.

The choice of Wind will be significant in how you pursue victory. For Dragons, The Right Hand offers both additional mobility and a means of keeping your Dragons in battle. The Left Hand may see play in honor-running variants and some Dragon control variants. The Underhand seems to offer little, but Courtier power in the limited phase followed by Dragon hammer blows could prove powerful. Probably the most interesting Wind for the deck is The Voice, allowing you to utilize the power of Elemental Rings to tailor your strategy to developing board positions as well as offering great card draw and the power of introspection.

Meta: You will need to watch for Personality kill which will turn your powerhouse units into mush. This is bad enough in the limited phase, but will probably be catastrophic in massed battle. Danjuro will help, but your opponent will likely deal with him quickly while saving the decisive actions for your Dragons. While they are cheaper and more powerful off this stronghold, your Dragons are also more fragile with the loss of Flee. Build with this in mind, and you should be able to overcome unexpected setbacks. Remember: you're fighting alongside the avatars of the elements themselves.



Illus. Chris Seaman © 2003 AEG

UNICORN

by Sigfried Trent

When developing Shinden Horiuchi we wanted to play to one of Unicorn's primary themes, mobility or items. Many complained that items were clearly inferior to followers so we set out to create a stronghold that would encourage item use and compensate for their perceived weaknesses. Another group of avid Unicorn players wanted something new and pointed out that unicorn was unique in having cavalry shugenja and a little something to encourage their use would be a nice change of pace. Melding these ideas together resulted in a versatile and unique stronghold.

Taking advantage of this stronghold means using items and/or spells to good effect. Followers are generally a military advantage, but a good military can be useful for attack or defense so this stronghold is not limited to military decks. Honor decks can benefit from followers by protecting defending units so they can duel or provide presence for defensive battle actions.

Because the stronghold has two essential benefits there are two deck building strategies that follow from it. The first is to use the free followers that come along with items you play and include a large number of items in your deck. While they only have 0 force, the followers offer protection

for your personalities from actions like refugees and ranged attacks. Furthermore there are a number of actions and items that give followers a force bonus such as Imperial Standard and Kamoko's Charge. Finally a number of actions require you to bow or have followers. Peasant Vengeance is a perfect example and is likely a staple for Shinden Horiuchi decks.

The second deck archetype is to take maximum advantage of Unicorn shugenja. Most of the shugenja available to unicorn are cavalry, and have a fairly high force and chi. The ability to cast without bowing is a godsend for these personalities, and the bonus follower serves to protect them long enough to use their spells in battle. You can also take advantage of the fact that spells are considered items by using cards like Unicorn Marketer, or other cards that key off items. Even with non-battle spells you have the advantage of casting while keeping your shugenjas unbowed for defense.

Shinden Horiuchi doesn't really have weaknesses and the nature of its advantages are to compensate for weaknesses inherent in playing spells and items. Its abilities are not as immediate or easy to take advantage of as strongholds like Yogo Towers or Castle of the Wasp, but you would be hard pressed to find a chink in its armor. If anything Shinden Horiuchi only suffers from the weakness of Unicorn as a clan. Their personalities are vulnerable

to dueling and dishonor effects. You may want to try to compensate for that in your design.

Keep in mind that the free follower ability is a reaction and to use it you will need to have your stronghold unbowed, which means you should plan on paying for your items and spells with holdings and using the stronghold during the dynasty phase. Also because you cannot use actions on bowed cards you cannot bow the spell you are casting to prevent the shugenja from bowing so you will need a second spell or another item to take advantage of it.

This deck was designed to take advantage of all of the strongholds abilities. It is primarily military, looking to get a lone cavalry personality capable of taking a province out early without sacrificing development. It has a number of powerful battle actions and cards that let you attack constantly and maintain a strong defensive army. Dueling and dishonor are the deck's biggest weaknesses. Wise use of the Blessed Swords and the chi bonuses from the weapons would help a bit with these soft spots.

From this base you could modify the deck to focus on whichever strategy or combination you like best. With a few substitutions it could become an honor deck, a shugenja focused deck, or an aggressive military deck. At the moment it intentionally has a little of any of these so you can decide which you prefer by trying them out.

Stronghold:

Shinden Horiuchi

Wind:

Kaneka

Personalities

1 Moto Chagatai Exp. 2
1 Shinjo Nakaga
1 Shinjo Shono Exp. 2
1 Shinjo Xushen Exp.
1 Utaku Etsumi
1 Iuchi Yue
3 Utaku Tama
2 Shinjo Reizo
3 Moto Chagatai
3 Iuchi Najato
3 Moto Tsusung

Holdings:

3 Stables
3 Silk Works
3 Hiruma Dojo
2 Sanctified Temple
2 Trading Grounds
1 Gifts and Favors
2 Shrine to Daikoku
1 Unicorn Marketer
1 Shrine to Fukurokujin

Events:

1 Imperial Quest
1 Boundless Sight

Regions:

1 City of Gold

Rings:

1 Ring of earth

Items:

1 Celestial Sword of the Unicorn
1 Imperial Standard
1 Tetsubo of Thunder
1 Armor of Earth
3 Blessed Sword
3 Bronze Lantern
3 Fan of Command
3 My Fathers Weapon
1 Blade of Thorns

Followers:

1 Utaku House Guard

Spells:

2 Earthquake
2 Kuro's Fire

Actions:

3 Kamoko's Charge
3 Retribution
3 Call to Arms
3 Peasant Vengeance
3 A Test of Courage
2 Crippling Blow

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICH WULF



IH: You've been the lead writer for L5R for two years now; would you say that the L5R storyline is where you want it to be?

RW: At the moment, yes. I'm always trying to improve my work so I never let myself get too lazy and satisfied, but I was very pleased with how Gold Edition turned out and am looking forward to what we have planned for Diamond.

IH: How did you become the lead storyline writer?

RW: I lost a bet. Oh wait, the 'official' story. I did L5R fan fiction on the internet for some time and eventually got work on the L5R RPG. From there it was just being in the right place at the right time as L5R moved back to

AEG and the previous storyline writer, Ree Soesbee, was already busy with Warlord at the time.

IH: How do you write up results after a big storyline tournament and what's the hardest part of your job?

RW: The hardest part is actually coming up with the prize itself. We always try to make sure that we've got a prize that can deal with every eventuality, though of course it's impossible to account for everything. The crush at the end where we try to customize the story to the particular result

IH: Yoritomo Kumiko vs. Bayushi Sunetra in a WWF Grudge Match. Who'd you pick?

RW: Sunetra.

IH: What made you fall in love with L5R in the first place?

RW: It was the story. It may sound cheesy but it is absolutely true. The characters and the world drew me in straight off. The design of the game is excellent, a great tactical strategy game, but it's Rokugan itself that keeps bringing me back.

IH: What's your favorite part of being an L5R writer?

RW: Getting paid to write stories about a world and characters that I care a great deal about.

IH: How do you decide what will happen next in the storyline? Do you have a bigger plan, or just write as you go?

RW: Some of both. The fans influence everything a great deal, so the further you get out from the current date, the less detailed and realized the story is out of necessity - the story has to remain flexible or it's not L5R anymore. For Diamond, for example, we know the beginning, we know some of the major events along the way, and we have an idea of what will happen at the end - but now how it will happen. The fans fill in the rest, and we're along for the ride.

IH: Who is your favorite character in L5R?

RW: Toku. The idea of a hero who is not particularly strong, intelligent, or powerful triumphing above all odds merely because he is brave and determined is one that has always appealed a great deal to me. There's an innocence to Toku that can't be denied, but there's also an indomitable strength that no force in the Empire can ever truly conquer.

IH: What got you started on writing?

RW: Comics. I wanted to be a comic artist and after a while I realized I was better at coming up with the stories than I was at illustrating them, so I eventually developed into a writer.

IH: What are some of your interests (besides L5R obviously)?

RW: I'm a gamer geek in general. RPGs, video games, computer games, what have you. I also occasionally draw, play the drums, and sometimes write when I'm not being paid for it.

IH: Anything you can tell us about the Diamond Edition storyline in advance?

RW: The Diamond storyline is very much about giving the fans what they want, but not in a way that they would expect. Fans have been expecting Iuchiban to return ever since his story was first told, and it felt like it was finally time for that to happen. The twist comes with exactly how and why it happens, and

what will result of his return. Some of those you might expect to be on his side are not entirely happy about it, and some folks you might not expect to be on his side are eagerly anticipating his rise to power.

IH: What was it like to write your first novel, (insert title here), and would you do it again?

RW: It was a lot of work but I'd do it again in a heartbeat. I'm very proud of how Wind of Justice came out and think it would be a blast to write a story of that scale again.

IH: What's the worst part of being an L5R writer?

RW: Well I make my own hours, but the other side of that is I'm essentially on call at all times. If I'm not done with my work at five o'clock, I don't clock out and go home and leave it for tomorrow - a deadline is a deadline. Sometimes that can be pretty tight, especially around conventions, but it's worth it.

IH: What elements of the samurai drama make L5R so appealing and what parts don't work?

RW: Samurai drama is so appealing because samurai are such a contradiction. They are fierce, trained killers, yet they are men of honor, and it's an interesting dichotomy to explore. What sometimes doesn't work about it is the fact that it's an Asian setting aimed purely at a western audience. For this reason, certain sacrifices are sometimes made so that the world might be more easily understood. While this makes it more commercially appealing, it also makes Rokugan arguably less accurate. This is a distinction I find rather annoying, that Rokugan need be 'accurate' somehow merely because it is not western. Does anyone ever demand historical accuracy out of Dragonlance or the Forgotten Realms? I'm not sure why so many people seem to feel that just because a culture is not familiar, you cannot create a fantasy based upon it.

IH: What storyline is hanging out there that isn't finished that you would like more time to work on?

RW: Rokugan 2000, the story I started long ago on the internet that got me this job in the first place.

IH: How do you determine which characters get featured in which set?

RW: Some characters are featured because they are powerful cards and frequently used. Some characters just seem to take a life of their own and leap into importance as if they had a life of their own. Mirumoto Junnosuke is a perfect example. When he first appeared we did not expect the players to react to him the way they did, and though he was not around for very long he's still quite a notable character from the Gold arc, so much so that we're going to explore his tale further as we follow the career of his son, Kenzo.

IH: How much of the RPG is in the CCG and vice versa?

RW: All of it, technically. It's the same world, the same continuity. We try to use ideas developed in the RPG in the CCG, such as some of the dojos that have been popping up as holdings. Likewise, characters seem to hop back and forth. Characters established in the CCG have appeared in RPG sourcebooks, and characters introduced in the RPG have been given personality cards. While a player need not play both to understand what is going on in Rokugan, I think that experiencing both games gives a deeper and more layered understanding of the Empire.

IH: How often do you have to retcon fiction you've written because of what players are doing in the present?

RW: Never! We plan for everything! We are never surprised! Nothing to see here.... move along....

The following is an excerpt from the upcoming Secrets of the Dragon supplement for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-Playing Game. This new sourcebook, as the name suggests, reveals a wealth of as yet unrevealed information about this most mysterious of clans and offers new mechanical options for Dragon Clan characters. Among the most unique and fascinating of these is Enlightened Madness. Now, no two tattooed madmen will be alike.

The mountains have become a much more interesting place...

ENLIGHTENED MADNESS

"Those who fail to understand our magic often fall to madness... as do those who understand too much"

—Hitomi Kagetora

All members of the Three Orders who bear any sort of mystical tattoos, whether they be tsurai zumi, ise zumi, or kikage zumi, bear some power descended from the Kami Togashi. The divine nature of such power can often be more than mere mortals can handle, and madness is not an uncommon result. Enlightened madness can take many forms, from the extraordinarily dangerous to the merely curious.

All forms of Enlightened Madness effectively alter the character's personality and behavior until the GM deems that the madness has ended. Typically, these periods of madness only last a few hours though it is not unheard of for the rare tattooed monk to be lost entirely to madness permanently.

Amnesia: The tattooed monk forgets who he is, and is unable to draw upon any skills which rely upon mental abilities. He will still trust close friends, but will not remember who they are or why he trusts them.

Amorous: The tattooed monk immediately falls in love with the first person he sees, and begins professing that love at great length. Note that this may or may not necessarily change the tattooed monk's other feelings toward his target, possibly leading to the monk loudly lamenting his love for his enemy even as he continues to fight.

Bestial: The tattooed monk regresses to a feral, animal state, operating entirely on instinct. Though he still recognizes former friends and enemies, he is unable to speak or draw upon complex skills, and reacts to any threats with outright violence. When the madness has passed, the monk remembers nothing of what happened during that time.

Brash: The tattooed monk becomes extremely sensitive to any threats to his honor or ability, and reacts to any such threat with immediate violence. Close friends may be given a warning before the tattooed monk attacks.

Catatonic: The tattooed monk lapses into a stupor, only dimly able to perceive the world around him. He will answer questions if asked, and will attempt to move (slowly) away from sources of danger, but cannot actively use skills or abilities. If attacked, there is a 50% chance he will temporarily erupt from the stupor long enough to defeat that opponent (but will still be unable to speak or otherwise react actively to his surroundings), then return to the catatonic state. When the madness has passed, the monk remembers nothing of what happened during that time.

Confused: The tattooed monk forgets exactly where he is and why, misplacing events and faces entirely. Different from

amnesia, the tattooed monk retains his memory - it is simply wrong. He may believe that he was in Phoenix lands while he is deep in the Twilight Mountains, or be absolutely certain that his Crab bushi friend was an Isawa shugenja only yesterday.

Contemplative: The tattooed monk will reply to any question with a question, and will view any dialogue posed toward him as an opportunity for philosophical debate. This debate becomes his primary concern; if someone speaks to him in combat, there is a 50% chance he will cease to do anything but act defensively while he turns his full attention to the conversation at hand.

Fearful: The tattooed monk is stricken with powerful, overwhelming cowardice. He will run from any source of danger, hiding as soon as possible. He will fight only to defend himself, and even then escape will be the ultimate priority.

Mad Prophet: The tattooed monk begins spouting mad prophecy at random. This is similar to the Contemplative state, except that the tattooed monk also has a 50% chance of immediately attacking anyone who ignores him or questions his prophecies. On the plus side, there is also a 10% chance that the mad visions the tattooed monk spouts actually contain some (confused) shred of future happenings. When the madness passes, the monk remembers nothing of what happened during that time.

New Personality: The tattooed monk becomes convinced that he is someone that he is not, either an invented personality or a famous person such as the Emperor, Doji Hoturi, or perhaps Osano-Wo. Though the monk can still utilize his tattoos, he cannot draw upon his skills unless the personality he has created also should be able to use them. In addition, he will attempt to utilize skills his new personality possesses, even if he does not possess them. Thus a burly Hitomi kikage zumi may attempt to stealthily sneak past a guard if he believes he is a Bayushi ninja. Once the new personality is chosen, the tattooed monk always takes that same personality whenever he falls to Enlightened Madness. When the madness passes, the monk remembers nothing of what the other personality did.

Random: Randomly select one type of Enlightened Madness from this list each time the tattooed monk falls to madness. The tattooed monk never falls to the same sort of madness twice in a row.

Regression: The tattooed monk regresses to an immature, childish state. He will behave in a playful and childlike manner, and will be submissive toward commanding authority figures. In such a state, the tattooed man is prone to inane pranks and foolish, shortsighted behavior. When the madness has passed, the monk remembers nothing of what happened during that time.

Remorseful: The monk is immediately overcome with remorse for any sin or fault that he has performed, past or present. If he is in combat, there is a 50% chance each round that he will fail to attack, but will instead spend his action apologizing for his violent thoughts and behavior. In such a state, it is also likely that the tattooed monk will confess any crimes that he has performed and loudly announce any secrets that he currently holds. When the madness has passed, the monk remembers nothing of what happened during that time.

Reversal: The monk's alliances and beliefs undergo an immediate and complete reversal. Friends are now foes, and those he once loved are now fiercely hated. Note that unlike the Violent type of Enlightened Madness, Reversal still allows for a great deal of subtlety. If the monk is normally

brash and impulsive, he might quietly plot the downfall of his comrades once Reversal sets in while they remain quietly oblivious.

Violent: The monk immediately becomes violent and dangerous to everyone around him. He will attack the nearest target until they are dead, and then move on to the next with no concern for his own safety. When the madness has passed, the monk remembers nothing of what happened during that time.

TREATING ENLIGHTENED MADNESS

Once put in place, the Dragon's mystic tattoos cannot truly be removed. As the madness they cause is part and parcel of their power, it can never truly be cured. Instead, the Dragon will seek to aid dangerously insane brethren, hoping to grant them the strength of will that they will require to fight their madness.

A tattooed monk who possesses the Iron Will feat is assumed to have undergone the training necessary to help him overcome his madness temporarily. A tattooed monk who spends an hour in meditation and makes a Concentration check (DC 15) gains a +4 to all saves vs. Enlightened madness for a number of hours equal to his level.

ADVANTAGE: EDGE OF MADNESS

(1 POINT)

The tattooed monk has undergone the training necessary to help him resist Enlightened Madness temporarily. If the monk spends an hour in meditation and makes a Meditation/Void roll (TN 20) he gains a free Raise on all rolls to resist Enlightened Madness for a number of hours equal to twice his tattooed school rank.

MADNESS AMONG THE TOGASHI

Enlightened Madness is most common among the order of ise zumi, perhaps because their bloodline is closest to Togashi's power. The most notorious mad ise zumi, Kokujin, was originally a Togashi, and the Order points to him as a deadly example of what can befall an ise zumi who does not keep a close vigil on their sanity. Any ise zumi who believes he has developed Enlightened Madness can turn toward the order and expect aid, compassion, and understanding. Dangerously insane Togashi are given sanctuary in a small monastery deep in the secluded Dragon mountains. This temple is known as Shinden Kanashimi, the Temple of Regret. The Togashi rarely ever speak of it even within their order, and never speak of those outside of it, even to other Orders of tattooed monks.

Any ise zumi who becomes violently insane and refuses aid, or even worse revels in madness and destruction as Kokujin did, can expect none of the traditional Togashi mercy as his former brethren hunt him to the ends of the Empire.

MADNESS AMONG THE HITOMI

Despite their reputation as dangerous lunatics, Enlightened Madness is extraordinarily rare among the Hitomi. When the Hitomi do lose their sanity, it is almost invariably violent and dramatic. Made kikage zumi do not live long, tending to ini-

tiate violent killing sprees and die soon thereafter appropriately on the point of a samurai's sword. The kikage zumi always deeply regret when one of their number falls to madness. If any kikage zumi begins to display aberrant behavior, the Order generally assigns two or more other kikage zumi to watch over them, to make certain that if someone needs to deal with the monk's madness in a permanent manner, it will be a kikage zumi who does so.

Unlike the Togashi, the Hitomi have no facility for treating their dangerously insane, as the majority of mad kikage zumi do not survive.

MADNESS AMONG THE HOSHI

Enlightened Madness is so rare among the Hoshi as to be almost unheard of. Perhaps the tsurai zumi's philosophy of balance and harmony causes them to be more stable than other tattooed monks, or perhaps their indirect connection to the Kami's power causes their tattoos to be easier to control than most. In any case, as the Hoshi never become dangerously insane, the other orders sometimes look to their wisdom in treating their most dangerous cases.

ENLIGHTENED MADNESS GAME MECHANICS

Any character who bears magical Dragon tattoos may choose to have Enlightened Madness. Likewise, a tattooed character who later undergoes a traumatic experience or loses faith in the Way of the Dragon may develop Enlightened Madness at the GM's discretion. Generally a character should only have one form of Enlightened Madness at any given time. Once a character develops Enlightened Madness, there is no true way to get rid of it, though a character may eventually become strong enough that resisting the madness is no longer a problem.

W20 SYSTEM:

A character who develops Enlightened Madness must make a Will save every time they actively use one of their tattoos. The DC of this save is equal to 12 + 2 per each additional time the character has used his tattoos that day. For tattoos that are constantly in use, the tattoo is considered to be used once per hour. A tattooed monk can voluntarily end the effects of any or all of his tattoos at will.

LSR RPG 2E:

The forms of Enlightened Madness shown here are considered to be more specific variations of the Enlightened Madness Disadvantage in *Way of the Dragon*. Any of the following forms of Enlightened Madness may be chosen as a Disadvantage, granting the character 2, 4, or 6 character points. Each time the tattooed monk uses one of his tattoos, he must make a Willpower roll vs. a TN determined by the amount of points gained from the Disadvantage (2 points: TN 10, 4 points: TN 15, 6 points: TN 20). For tattoos that are constantly in use, the tattoo is considered to be used once per hour. A tattooed monk can voluntarily end the effects of any or all of his tattoos at will.



SO CAL GENCON

THE BEST FOUR DAYS IN GAMING!

December 11-14th, 2003
Anaheim, California
Anaheim Convention Center

Illus. Eric Polak © 2003 AEG

For those of you who don't already know, AEG headquarters is located in sunny, Southern California. This year, lo and behold, Gencon makes a showing in our very own backyard and we want you there.

We are supporting SoCal Gencon as if it were Gencon Indy. We're running a ton of events and giving out thousands of dollars in prizes. But, what's a Gencon with a cool storyline event? So this is what we've got planned for you there:

Court of the Righteous

(SoCal Gencon Storyline Event)

Winter has once again covered the lands of Rokugan. The roads are choked in ice and snow. The wise do not venture far, for few know what dangers lie upon the frozen plains. Even Toturi the Third, the Righteous Emperor, has withdrawn until the spring. He has gathered about him the wisest, the strongest, and the most favored, and you are invited.

The clan with the largest amount of participation in this tournament shall be selected to host the Emperor's first Winter Court, gaining the opportunity to make alliances and gain favors from all the clans.

And while the land sleeps, great minds plot the future of the Empire. The Emperor knows that he has already sat upon the throne without an heir for too long. The time has come for him to select a bride.

The clan with the best overall performance in this tournament shall gain the chance to select a bride for the Emperor. Players of that faction will determine the bride's identity in a future Imperial Herald. If the Nezumi or Shadowlands win, the prize will instead go to the Great Clan with the best performance. Should the Ratlings win, a Ratling warrior will be appointed as guardian to the Emperor's bride. And should the Shadowlands win, a powerful curse will be laid upon the Emperor's marriage.

And in the heart of the Shadowlands, Iuchiban the Heartless watches in envy and resentment. He sees the throne that he knows should be his alone, and he makes his plans to turn the Clans against one another just as he did once long ago. He has dispatched one of his most wicked servants, a Bloodspeaker in disguise, as an emissary in the Winter Court. This emissary carries a gift, a gift that Iuchiban wishes to be bestowed upon the faction that proves itself the strongest. To a member of this faction, this gift will be given, an artifact with the power to recreate the Empire's greatest warriors, most powerful shugenja, and wisest diplomats.

The Egg of P'an Ku.

It is an item that has always brought chaos in its wake, but it has always brought power to its user as well. Sometimes chaos is well worth the price, but that decision is left to you.

The winner of this tournament shall be given the Egg of P'an Ku, to do with as they please. Will you copy the most powerful hero in Rokugan as your willing servant? Will you set the Egg aside so it cannot be used foolishly? Will you attempt to destroy it? Will you give it to another so that its curse might consume them instead?

Choose your destiny, but choose it wisely, for in Rokugan a warrior who makes his decisions with honor can conquer any obstacle.

For more information about Gencon visit www.gencon.com

L5R Events Schedule

L5R Reign of Blood Sealed Deck Tournament

Get a starter deck and a few boosters from the Reign of Blood expansion to build your deck and compete for great prizes.

Thursday 2:00 pm

L5R Three-Man Team Tournament

Do you work well with others or better without? Face multiple opponents in this alternative play style and find out for yourself. Your team faces off individually against your opponents and the team with the most victories in each round comes out on top!

Friday 10:00 am

L5R Booster Draft Tournament

Test your wiles against your luck in this unusual style of play. Get a bunch of boosters to pick from and pass the rest down to other players to build your deck.

Friday 2:00 pm

L5R Live Action Roleplaying Game

Exclusive L5R Live Action Roleplaying event with costume rules which will be provided on site. Throw away your dice and bring your costumes and acting voice in this fun-filled evening of roleplaying and laughs.

Friday 7:00 pm

L5R "Winter Court" Storyline Event

A samurai from the clan that wins this tournament will become the Shogun's general, and will aid in building the Shogun's mighty armies. If the Shadowlands or Ratlings win this tournament, the Shogun's general will instead come from the highest-ranking Great Clan. If the Shadowlands win, this individual will be a spy for the Bloodspeakers. If the Ratlings win, a Nezumi will prove his worth to the Shogun and gain a place among his council.

Saturday 10:00 am

L5R "Winter Court" Storyline Finals

This is a continuation of the tournament started on Saturday. Only players advancing through the swiss rounds will be invited to this event.

Sunday 10:00 am

L5R Skirmishes

Strict Diamond. Sign up as an L5R CCG Skirmisher and take this opportunity to challenge any other L5R skirmishers to a match. This event runs all weekend. The winner is determined at the end of the convention by the # games they've won.

Thursday 10:00 am

L5R Diamond Sealed Deck

Get a starter deck and a few boosters from Diamond Edition to build your deck and compete for great prizes.

Saturday 2:00 pm

L5R Diamond Deckbuilding

Join some of L5R's top players as they share secrets on top-notch deckbuilding in the new Diamond environment.

Thursday 6:00 pm

Friday 6:00 pm

Saturday 6:00 pm

L5R 2nd Edition RPG Introductory Adventure

Return to the Age of Heroes. Learn to play the L5R 2nd Edition RPG, which offers a completely revised look at the culture, history, and background of the Emerald Empire. In a gaming system where samurai live the line between life, death, and honor, you adventure in a world rich in flavor. Characters will be provided.

Friday 2:00 pm

Saturday 2:00 pm

L5R 2nd Edition RPG Advanced

Return to the Age of Heroes. The L5R 2nd Edition offers a completely revised look at the culture, history, and background of the Emerald Empire. In a gaming system where samurai live the line between life, death, and honor, you adventure in a world rich in flavor. Bring your favorite character.

Thursday 7:00 pm

Friday 7:00 pm

Saturday 7:00 pm

Sunday 10:00 am

Rokugan/Oriental Adventures D20 Introductory Adventure

Return to the Age of Heroes and experience a world where honor is a force more powerful than steel. Where noble samurai and mystic shugenja rule over an empire in chaos. You may battle evil minions or command them and take the empire as your own. Rules will be taught. Characters will be provided.

Thursday 10:00 am

Friday 10:00 am

Saturday 10:00 am

Sunday 10:00 am

Rokugan/Oriental Adventures D20 Advanced

This game is intended for experienced d20 players. Knowledge of the D20 system recommended. Return to the Age of Heroes, and adventure in the Emerald Empire, a land where honor is a force more powerful than steel. Characters will be provided. Please bring your own rulebook (Oriental Adventure/Rokugan) and dice.

Thursday 2:00 pm

Friday 2:00 pm, 7:00 pm

Saturday 2:00 pm, 7:00 pm

Sunday 10:00 am

Living Rokugan Premiere "The Way of Deception"

While on your first trip to the Imperial capital, you are asked to investigate the disappearance of a Unicorn magistrate. Who or what is behind this incident, and why are so many people interested? An introductory level adventure for Living Rokugan by Robert Hobart.

Friday 10:00 am

Saturday 2:00 pm

Living Rokugan Premiere "The Nature of Peace"

The Isawa hope to cool the tensions between the various clans. You are invited to a festival and contest extolling the softer side of bushido. But not everyone wants peace... An introductory level adventure for Living Rokugan by Robert Hobart

Friday 2:00 pm

Saturday 7:00 pm

Living Rokugan Archive "Darkness Beyond Darkness"

Something has gone wrong in the lands of the Badger Clan. Investigators arrive from the Empire, but will they be able to learn what is happening before it is too late? Written by Robert Hobart.

Thursday 10:00 am

Living Rokugan Archive "Kuro's Fire"

A strange new shrine has appeared in Crane lands. Samurai from across the Empire have come to what this means. The wisdom, mystery, and danger of the sacred Elements await them. Written by Robert Hobart.

Thursday 2:00 pm

Living Rokugan Archive "A Flower's Kiss"

A Unicorn magistrate's son is kidnapped in Ryoko Owari, the City of Lies. Your search for the boy uncovers a sinister conspiracy by an enemy the Empire thought defeated. A Low/Mid-rank adventure written by Robert Hobart..

Saturday 10:00 am

Living Rokugan Archive "Duty on the Wall"

A visit to the Crab lands is a simple but unpleasant duty... One that could turn deadly when you are sent into the Shadowlands on a scouting mission. Written by Robert Hobart and Parvez Yusufji.

Thursday 7:00 pm

Living Rokugan Archive "Scorpion's Sting"

The Clans gather at Kyuden Seppun to pay court on the new Emperor, Hantei the 39th. The Lion have plans for a major announcement, something to do with the Scorpion Clan and the opium trade. Will you help or hinder them? Written by Robert Hobart.

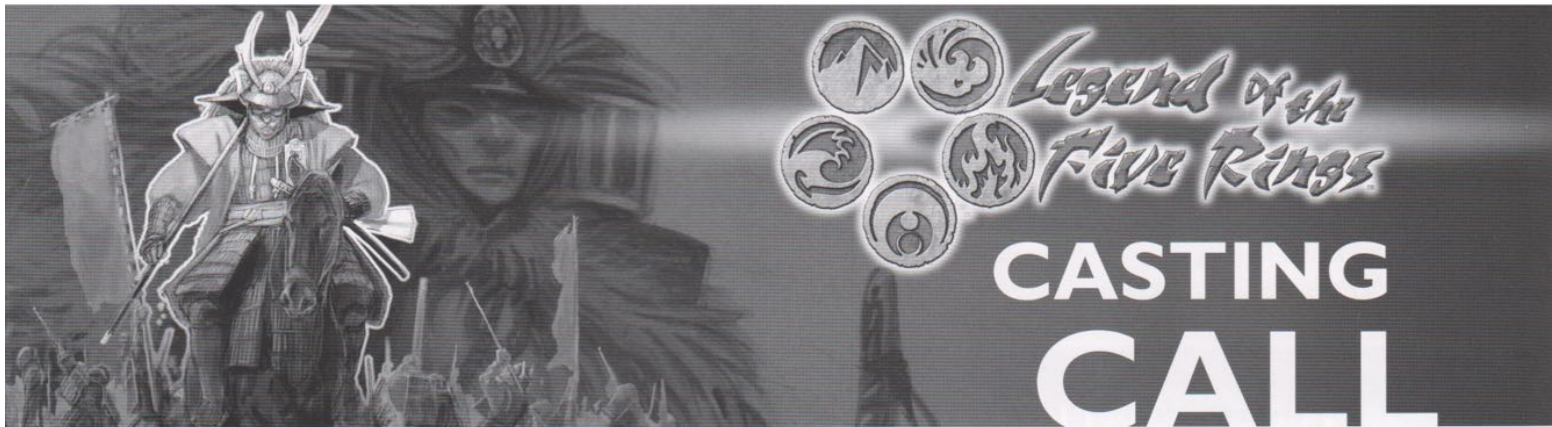
Friday 7:00 pm

Living Rokugan Archive "Day and Night, a Rokugani Ghost Story"

A fierce storm strands you in the castle of a remote Crab daimyo. Why is that Kappa hanging around? For Low Rank heroes. Written by Robert Hobart.

Association

Sunday 10:00 am



The genesis of L5R involved regular exposure to the movies — specifically the samurai films of Akira Kurosawa, but also other directors like John Woo, Yuen Wo-Ping and Yimou Zhang. Their work helped shape and influence Rokugan's development, and over the years, fans and designers alike have wondered how L5R would look on the silver screen. So we decided to pull together a "Rokugan Casting Call," presenting our ideal cast for a *Legend of the Five Rings* movie.

In gathering our cast, we set down three specific rules (two of which we managed to break, but no matter) for who we would choose and which roles would be up:

1. *Clan War Personalities only.* L5R has grown to encompass several unique eras and thousands of specific characters. For that reason, we decided to limit the story to the first — the Clan War — and the personalities to the two or three major figures from each clan.

2. *Asian actors only.* The days of cringe-inducing white pantomimes are long gone, and Rokugan would not be Rokugan with some round eyes gaijin pretending to be a Clan Lord.

3. *Contemporary actors only.* While a fantasy cast could include actors from any era, we want to stick with people whom our fans might recognize, and who — let's face it — are still among the living. We were willing to back date a few performers by a decade or so, but everyone we name — with one notable exception — can be considered "contemporary."

With that in mind, we present to you The List, our ideal cast for the Clan War motion picture. (Naga and Shadowlands monsters will, of course, be achieved through CGI.)

Crab

Hida Kisada — Chow Yun-Fat. Fat's searing charisma was put to incredible use in John Woo films like *The Killer*, and his smoldering good looks are tempered by a palpable dark side. Simply put, nobody can brood like Chow, which makes him the ideal choice for the indomitable, tragic Great Bear.

Hida Yakamo — Rick Yune. Yune is best known to western audiences as the sinister Zao in *Die Another Day*. His physicality is quite impressive, and he has the right temperament to play a tormented hero like Yakamo. He can ooze menace for the bad guys, so it stands reason he can ooze it for the good guys too.

Hida O-Ushi — Kelly Hu. Hu has yet to take on a truly challenging role, but she gave Hugh Jackman all he could handle in the *X-Men* sequel. If she could kick Wolverine's ass, then she'll do just fine as our Crab Clan Bully.

Crane

Kakita Toshimoko — James Hong. Everyone knows Hong as Lo Pan from *Big Trouble in Little China*, and that role put him in serious contention Yogo Junzo's slot. But the actor also has a quiet grace and dignity, seen in films like *Chinatown*, that made us rethink our casting. He's the right age for the Iron Crane and his face carries oceans of silent authority, which no other actor we found could match.

Doji Hoturi — Chen Chang. Chang rose to prominence with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, where he played the wild bandit leader Dark Cloud — a warrior with a pure and somewhat naïve heart. It makes for a perfect match with the Crane Clan Champion.

Dragon

Togashi Yokuni — The Rock. Yes, we said only Asian actors, but in this case, we had to make an exception. Yokuni's superhuman frame demands an actor the size of Gibraltar, and his slightly-menacing air would be right at home in the wrestling ring. With his face glowering behind that darkened helm and his voice rumbling through the digitally enhanced speaker, the once and former Dwayne Johnson is the only man for the job.

Mirumoto Hitomi — Joan Chen. Chen has appeared in numerous projects from *Twin Peaks* to *Judge Dredd*, and has the chops to handle Hitomi. We love her for her petite flower girl exterior... and for the streak of pure mean hiding behind it like a snarling dog. Also, we're pretty sure she's not afraid to go bald, which anybody playing this bad girl would have to agree to.

Lion

Matsu Tsuko — Zhang Ziyi. Chang's young paramour in *Crouching Tiger* has the right mix of impetuosity, youthful inexperience, and inflexible will to play the Lady Lion... and the blessing of her biggest fan to boot. Tsuko has always been Dave Williams's girl, and when we asked him for his choice, he didn't hesitate for a second.

by Rob Vaux

Isawa Tadaka — Carter Wong. Back to *Big Trouble In Little China* and Yen, who played the unholy Storm known as Thunder. Why him? Because nobody else can look that scary in Tadaka's big hat.

Shiba Tsukune — Rosalind
Chao. Trekkies know her as Keiko O'Brien from *The Next Generation*, though she's also appeared in *The Joy Luck Club*, *What Dreams May Come*, and many others. Sweet, unassuming and intelligent, she nonetheless radiates inner strength that Tsukunes has in spades.

Bayushi Kachiko — Gong Li. We thought long and hard about this one, the most important — and difficult — role in the entire game. Kachiko is a noble villainess or a tragic heroine, depending on who you ask: a ruthless assassin, martyred wife, callous femme fatale, and the savior of Rokugan all rolled into one. Who but the exquisite Gong Li — star of *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Shanghai Triad*, and countless others — would have the right mixture of emotional depth and unearthly beauty to take her on?

Bayushi Aramoro — Jet Li. On the other end of the spectrum, there's Aramoro, the loyal good soldier who strikes from the shadows then vanishes into thin air. Jet was on the short list actors we HAD to have, and as the roles started to narrow, his became crystal clear.

Otaku Kamoko — Michelle Yeoh. Like Jet and Gong, Yeoh was someone we absolutely wouldn't make this movie without. No one else felt right for Kamoko, and her physical gifts — seen in films as diverse as *Crouching Tiger, Tomorrow Never Dies*, and Jackie

Otaku Kamoko — Michelle Yeoh. Like Jet and Gong, Yeoh was someone we absolutely wouldn't make this movie without. No one else felt right for Kamoko, and her physical gifts — seen in films as diverse as *Crouching Tiger, Tomorrow Never Dies*, and Jackie

Chan's *Supercop* — meant that the stuntwork would be a snap. He acting skills, of course, need no justification.

Shinjo Yokatsu — Vince Crestejo. We had a tough time pinning this one down, for Yokatsu is as enigmatic as the Kolat he serves. We finally settled on Crestejo, who has a recurring role as the System Lord Yu on the *Stargate SG-1* TV show. Sinister? Plotting? Multiple schemes hidden up his floppy sleeves? Yeah, Crestejo's got it covered.

Yogo Junzo — Li Baotian. Junzo required nothing less than pure evil on a stick, the kind of evil that makes you want to hide under your bed. Baotian snagged the role for his part as the unspeakably hateful gang lord in *Shanghai Triad* — the final scene of which cemented our opinion that this guy takes villainy VERY seriously.

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Toturi — Toshiro Mifune. Mifune passed away a few years ago, but his legacy is too towering to ever eclipse. The staple of Kurosawa's masterpieces and a legend of Japanese cinema, he almost single-handedly provided inspiration for this game. The number of characters influenced by him is staggering — Hida Kisada from his treacherous warlord in *Throne of Blood*, Ginawa and Dairyu from his scruffy ronin in *Yojimbo*, the entire Lion clan from his fearless general in *The Hidden Fortress*. Of all of them, it was Toturi we settled on for him: the redeemed hero which restored Rokugan's soul. It's only right that he would form the heart of any L5R movie. Without Mifune, there would be no Toturi... and there probably wouldn't be a *Legend of the Five Rings*, either.



Illus. Drew Baker, Steven Billedin, Ed Cox, Jason Engle, Jon Hodgson, David Home, April Lee
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YAJINDEN

You thought Iuchiban was scary?

Allow me to introduce you to the smith who forged the four bloodswords.

Iuchiban's Dark Hand. Mr. Blood Arrows himself. Lay-deez and gentlemen, Yajinden.

Oh. My...

His gold cost is double digit, yet he has good stats (4F/6C), he's a shugenja, and he has two amazing abilities. Those abilities definitely make Yajinden "Egg worthy."

Copying him with the Egg of P'an Ku will surely give your opponent fits.

If you thought Informant was pretty useless since Kolat Master got taken out of the base set, well, you might

want to start trading for new ones at this point. Yajinden has a Kolat Master-style ability. He can bow to steal anyone with less than 3C.

Every turn. Admittedly, he bows to do this, and he can't straighten outside the straighten phase due to one of his traits. A smart (corrupt and evil, but smart) non-Shadowlands player may be able to get around that problem with a Water Dragon plus a little trickery. There are ways to straighten out a dragon, who doesn't have the annoying trait that's holding back Yajinden; Shrine of Stone, for example.

Uncertainty puts a lot of personalities within his reach in the Diamond environment, just as it did for Kolat Master in the Gold environment. Since Yajinden is a Bloodspeaker, a bloodspeaker deck is more than likely to have spells and the shugenja to cast them. Grab those Chi dropping spells Doom of Fu Leng and Darkness Rising. Take advantage of the rarity of high personal honor personalities with Force of Will, which will turn most personalities into personalities which will turn – on you! Poisoned Thread and Poison Marsh may also reduce an opponent's margin of error.

Ironically, one of the best sources of fodder for Yajinden's abilities is the player's decision to inflict chi loss on their own personalities. Many personalities in Reign of Blood can be brought out more quickly by ignoring honor requirements or reducing gold cost. They do this by making some sacrifice, typically taking a permanent –2 chi hit. Be wary of skimping on your gold costs, lest your weakened personalities come back to haunt you.

Yajinden does have to bow to do this, but recall that stealing a 3F personality is a 6F shift in the force totals on table. And he can

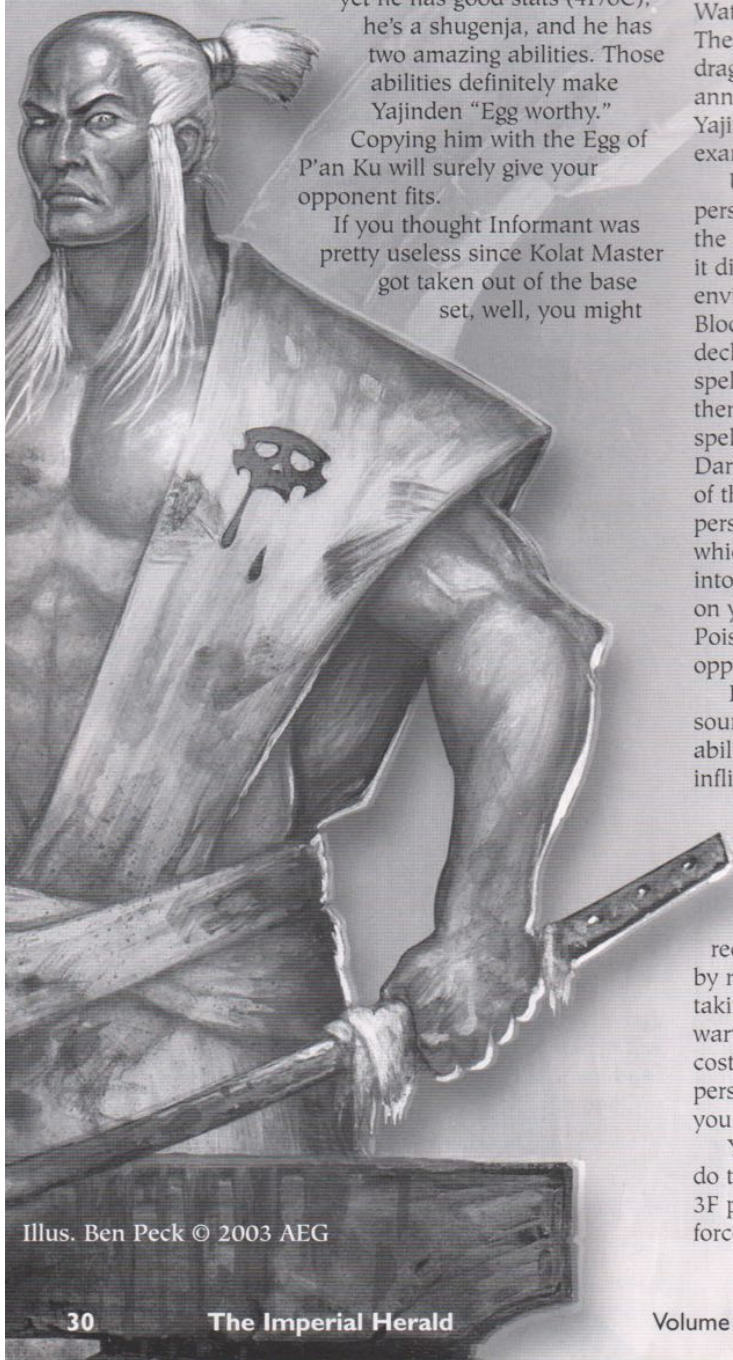


do it every turn. Slowly but surely, opponents will find their army converting to the other side.

And there's Yajinden himself. He can redirect chi loss from maho cards on your personalities to anyone else once a turn without bowing. Playing with Madness has some possibilities, as it makes every kiho a personality cast into maho (though not much non-maho magic causes chi loss). Otherwise, there are only two maho cards so far that cause chi loss, Feeding on Flesh and Written in Blood. But don't be surprised if the number of cards that combo with Yajinden's second ability rises after Reign of Blood comes out.

Both of Yajinden's abilities have the Maho trait, naturally. This little fact makes it possible for various other cards to key off him in both good and bad ways. Vengeful Kami might be able to slow him down (but barely), and Yajinden's arrival on the scene makes Tear Away the Darkness look a lot better than it did a short while ago. Reign of Blood features a new item to prevent a Personality from being targeted with maho actions, and a cool little action that reminds Yajinden's controllers that bloodspeakers are a nasty little piece of work that turn on you when you least expect it.

Still, even with those, Yajinden's abilities are so strong that he is one of those personalities who completely changes a game when he hits the table. Just as when he forged the bloodswords on the Anvil of Despair, Yajinden leaves a trail of pain behind him. Guaranteed.



Illus. Ben Peck © 2003 AEG

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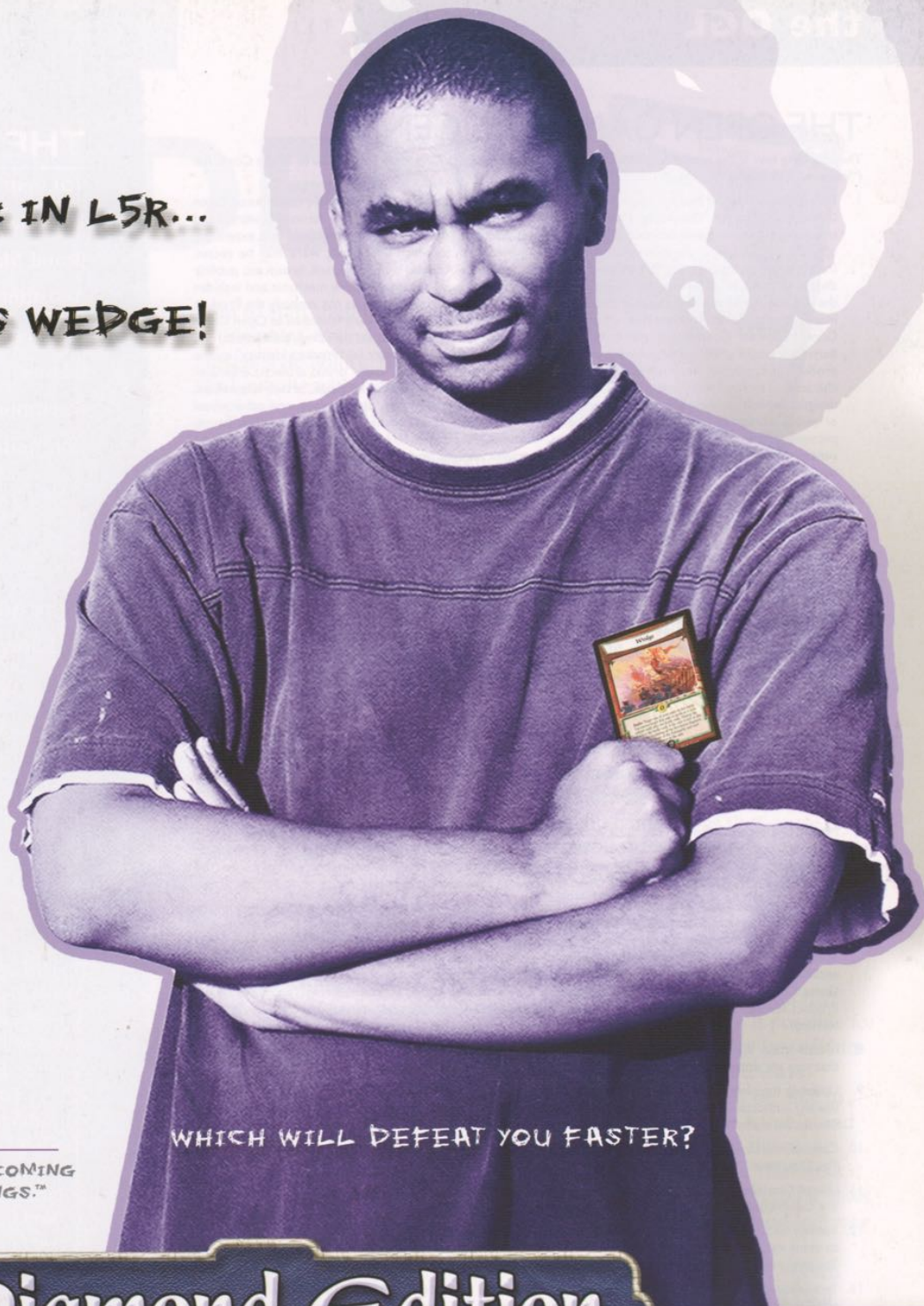
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