

THE
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VOL. 2 / NO. 13

DAWN OF THE EMPIRE

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THE DAWN OF EMPIRE SET

INTO SHADOW

THE NORIAKI TRIBE
VENTURES INTO
SHADOWLAND



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ENLIGHTENMENT

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THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY VOL. 2 / NO. 13

Editorial

Each year, as the L5R World Championships roll around, we're often asked to make predictions of who will make top 16, what clan will take first, or which sleeper will surprise us. But if I had any real intuitive skill, I'd have gone to the Vegas Kotei. That being said, I'm not afraid to forecast a few things you'll see this Gen Con.

10 things you're certain to experience at Gen Con Indy

1. Great prizes for all AEG of the events.
2. Our writer Rich Wulf listening intently to someone describing his tricked out character.
3. The Question Guy, raising his index finger while starting every other sentence with, "Question..."
4. Dozens of kimono wearing players ordering cheeseburgers from local food stands and greeting each other with, "Yo, wassup?"
5. Jeff Alexander, Lead Designer, leading a hellacious Utz-Banzai.
6. Mark Jelfo, our Marketing Director, screaming in frustration after every obviously bad move he makes playing L5R.
7. A Crab Clan player standing on top of some piece of convention furniture making drunken challenges that no sober man would dare take.
8. Players of every level furiously making last minute changes to their decks only minutes before Round 1 begins.
9. A Klingon patrol hunting down marked players in the name of charity.
10. At least one kilt. Our international reach knows no bounds.

— Raymond Lau
L5R Brand Manager



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DESIGNING WRATH

by Jeff Alexander

At this point there are only four Factions without a new Stronghold post-*Diamond*: Crane, Mantis, Scorpion, and the Shadowlands. Three of them were going to get a box in *Wrath of the Emperor*. They'd simply gone too long without a new Stronghold to be put off any longer. In fact, with new mechanical focuses not revolving around one particular class of Personality in this set, we were free to use the time each Clan had gone since their last new Strongholds as the only measure. It looks like Mantis gets to sit this expansion out (sorry, Kumiko).

Reign of Blood introduced a large influx of Bloodspeaker- and Chi-related cards. *Hidden City*

added Formations, but the mechanical themes *Reign* had brought in were nearly absent. This was a problem. One of the reasons behind basing expansions around coherent mechanical themes in the first place was to enable new styles of decks overnight. But players will be disinclined to experiment with new decks if they don't think they'll ever see cards for them again. So *Wrath* doesn't just introduce new themes. It pays a serious amount of attention to the ones that had gone before. Look for Formations focused on individual Clans, and watch out for more of those nefarious disciples of Iuchiban.

"Hai, Sensei."

Chances are you aren't as interested in old news as you are in new news, and the new news in *Wrath* is pretty big. Sensei are coming back. "What's a Sensei?" you ask. Sensei are special Fate cards you can search for and take from your deck after you see what Stronghold and Wind your opponent is using but before the game begins. They modify your Stronghold by adding actions or traits to it (good or bad), or by adjusting its numeric stats, or maybe both. They appeared in the five expansions prior to *Gold Edition* and haven't shown up since. Not a single one has been

legal in a *Diamond-* or even *Gold-*era storyline tournament.

So why bring them back? For one, lots of players want them back (and have ever since they left). Two, they're neat. Three, we think we have Playtest and Design Teams that are up to the harder-than-average task of putting them back into the game. Four, Stronghold-related mechanics are something we haven't touched on yet for a set's focus. And since we want to bring them back, now is the best time. We have a window of opportunity where the Stronghold counts are as equal as they're going to be until four more sets come out, and since Sensei effectively multiply how many different Strongholds each Faction has available, adding them now starts everyone off on a more or less level playing field.

When Sensei first came onto the scene, they had a wide range of intermingled philosophies behind their design. Some affected only your deck and gave you extra benefits you could use to pursue victory, like searching your deck for Elemental Rings. Included in these were a number of Sensei that allowed you to build a distinctly Minor Clan-themed deck by giving your Faction trait to every Magistrate, Suzume family, or Wasp Clan Personality you used. Other Sensei imposed harsh restrictions on the entire game that you and your opponent both had to work around, such as preventing all Events from resolving, or the infamous *Nio Sensei* that reduced the Gold Production of your own Stronghold (and of everyone else's that didn't start lower than yours) by 1... before the game started. And some Sensei were purely metagame cards, including *Kitsu Sensei*, which made your Personalities untargetable by other players' Spells and Kihos, and the ultimate generic meta card *Hantei Sensei*, which allowed you to name one Fate card that your opponent wasn't allowed to play all game. (Don't worry. You weren't allowed to name a Ring. And he got to name one card to forbid you from playing in return.)

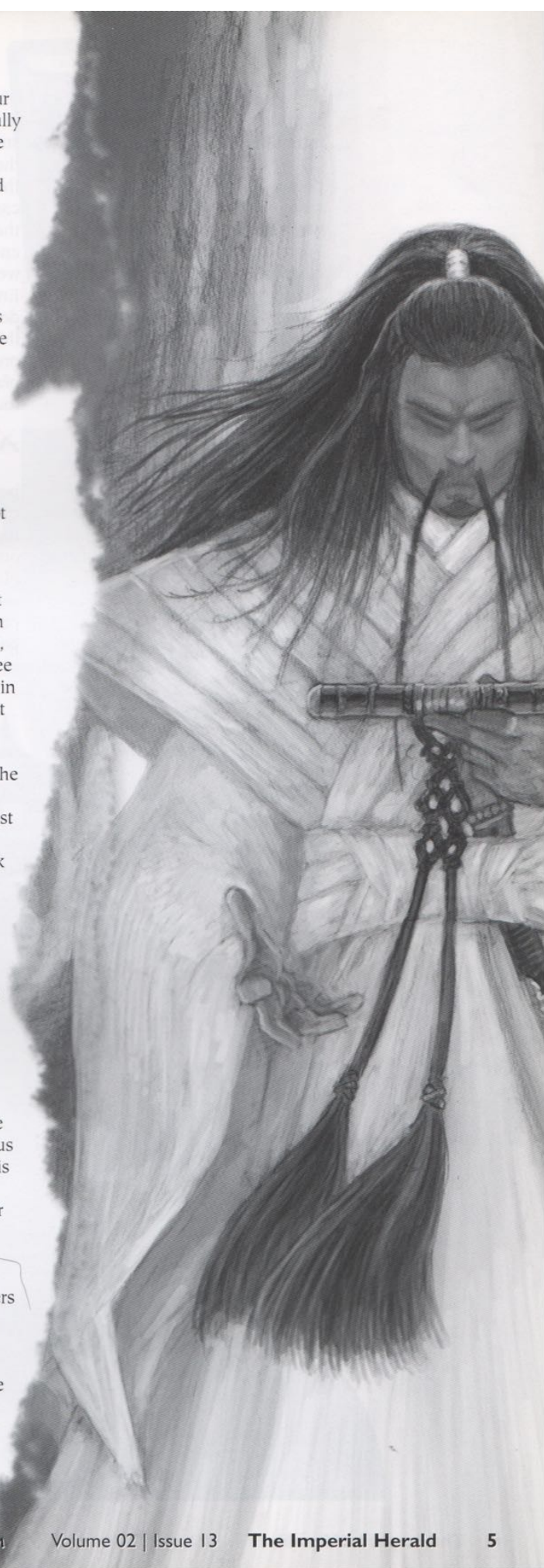
The Sensei in *Wrath of the Emperor* will be exclusively of the

first kind. Sensei that hinder your opponent are, in hindsight, usually a bad idea. It's not fun and more than a little unfair to have your entire deck's foundation wrecked by one card that your opponent can play for free, guaranteed, before the game even starts... after he sees your Stronghold.

Choosing not to go the metagame route with Sensei was more difficult. It's tempting, since they are suited to that role in ways no other card can be (they're 100% reliable when they're needed and don't take up much deck space when they aren't). But there was another wrinkle to consider that wasn't true the first time around. Except for a couple of generic ones, the Sensei in *Wrath* are all specific to one Faction. Sensei are a combinatorial nightmare when it comes to playtesting. Even when only one Clan can play a Sensei, that Sensei yields effectively three new *Diamond*-legal Strongholds in the environment. When they last appeared, each Sensei typically had a set of four to eight Clans that were allowed to play it! In the interest of keeping playtest even remotely feasible, we limited most to one Clan and one Clan only. These kinds of Sensei don't work quite as well as metagame cards because they're not broadly available.

The Middle of the Pack

Hidden City bestowed visible boons upon the four Factions faring poorest in tournaments overall. The prominent front-running Clans were simultaneously weakened via a combination of strong metagame cards in *Hidden City* and previous balancing errata. The net result is that the Clans in the middle — Unicorn, Dragon, and to a lesser extent Mantis — didn't receive a lot of modification either way. Unfortunately, this gave the impression to a lot of their players that these Clans were just being ignored. For balance reasons, it wasn't necessary to do much new with these Clans. They were already about where we want everyone to be. Now that the major rebalancing is done, we could turn our full attention



to expanding what these Clans can do rather than simply matching inter-Clan power levels.

Wrath tries to give the possibility of an Honor/Military switch deck back to Unicorn, with greater Honor gains more Force on the defense (or when counterattacking...). Since their Cavalry advantage runs afoul of metagame cards created to prevent easy early Province kills, Unicorns need more actions so they have options when they find their armies opposed. There are also more reasons than ever to find room for all those barbarian weapons and armor in your Fate deck.

Dragon could use more tools in its effort to build decks that pursue two victory conditions at once since they lack the single-minded focus to go

after one condition exclusively when facing an opponent who's strong on that path. *Wrath* gives them noticeable advancements in the areas of Honor, dueling, and card draw — all core aspects of their Clan that have been slowly encroached upon by others — as well as more synergy with the Enlightenment Victory. (Although don't expect too much more after this set. Dragon has already proven itself more than capable of playing five Rings in even the toughest competition.)

A Tough Act to Follow

Hidden City is amazingly popular with our players, as the quick sell-out clearly shows. This triggered some heavy introspection on our part mid-way through playtesting. So much of *City* is as strong as it is because the set's purpose was to put a serious competitive punch into a number of Clans. We did not start out designing *Wrath* in that mindset, and for a

legitimate reason: the Clans were supposed to be balanced going into it. There was no need to

turbocharge anything. But the appearance that the early *Wrath* design gave in comparison was decidedly anemic. We took a long, hard look at the set in the middle of testing and seriously tweaked close to half of it to make sure it met with the elevated expectations fans were sure to have after seeing what kinds of cards we could print for them. This is sure to affect future sets as well, probably for the remainder of the *Diamond* environment.

Branching Out

Playing, or playing against, the same decks all the time isn't fun. Yet conventional wisdom says there will never be more than any one Stronghold or deck style played out of each Clan at any given time — one will be "best" and the rest will go unused. So how do we get new decks into the environment?

One really obvious way is to make them. It's something the past few sets have tried to do by being themed, but they've been falling



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short of the mark. Getting a typical player to abandon something he or she knows and is successful with requires a very large incentive, so we really turned up the volume knob on new deck themes in *Wrath*. There's obviously a new deck waiting to be built out of the Mantis Personalities in this set. Same with Ratling. And Crab. They're novel and noticeably different from what these Clans have been fielding — without crossing Faction boundaries — and a lot of work went into making sure they would put up a good standing right out the gate.

Everyone's a Winner

GenCon U.K. top-of-Clan winners once got to name a family from which would be drawn a Commander in the Imperial Legions. Those storyline results appear in *Wrath of the Emperor*. Also making an appearance is what the Design Team calls "Stronghold Heroes": aligned Personalities that are playable out of any of that Clan's Strongholds but provide some extra benefit to one in particular. Eventually, such a Personality will be made for every Stronghold, but we are starting with the ones that appear to be most in need of help getting chosen over their counterparts.

Something else you may notice is that each Faction gets six Personalities this set instead of the usual five. The added Personality slot gives the Design and Story teams more mutual elbow room, and will be the standard number from now on. Too often in the past (and especially in *Hidden City*) someone that our writers or our fans wanted to see in a set had to be omitted to give Design all the room it needed to give a Clan the full set of new tools required to help its performance. Well, no longer. Now Design and Story fight less for elbow room, and I get the added benefit of assigning rarities a little more easily.



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DAWN OF THE EMPIRE

by Jeff Alexander

The Empire. Rokugan. The valiant wounding of Lord Moon by the blade of his heroic son. The fall of Hantei and his divine brothers and sisters from the Celestial Heavens. The contest to see who would lead in the mortal realm. The formation of the Great Clans. The rise to power of the tragically corrupt Fu Leng. The spontaneous appearance of Shinsei. The first Day of Thunder. Fu Leng's defeat. The beginning of the Thousand Years of Peace.

What an interesting story to create a game around!

1,000 Years of Darkness, released in September of 2002, was a "What if?" set... a premium playset of 93 cards and 1 Stronghold exploring what might have happened if the Second Day of Thunder had seen the forces of Jigoku triumph. It was an unequivocal success. *Dawn of the Empire* is instead a "What was" set, exploring Rokugan's fascinating beginnings. To be precise, *Dawn* covers the time from the fall of the Kami up to and including the first Day of Thunder, a span of some forty-two years. In this time, the Sons and Daughters of Heaven escape imprisonment in their father's stomach, fall to Earth, establish the foundations of a new society, compete among themselves to determine who will lead it, and take on the rules and duties that characterize their Clans to this day. Their lost brother Fu Leng, mad with jealousy and corrupted power, tries to destroy the budding empire, only to be defeated by the combined might of Rokugan's inhabitants and a band of seven mortal warriors led by an enlightened teacher who is a mystery even to the Kami.

The title of the set comes from our Bounty Hunters. Each was allowed to submit a possible title; our Story Team reviewed all the

entries and picked a winner. Currently, the set is planned to be the same size as *1,000 Years*: a full play set comprised of two hundred individual cards and around ninety different titles. Also like *1,000 Years*, the set will feature dual-bugged cards that will be legal in both the *Diamond* environment and in the future *Lotus* tournament scene. We want to bug as many *Dawn* cards as we possibly can.

At the time of writing, the Design Team is only a week into putting the basics of the set together. There are a lot of fine details we haven't determined yet, but the broad strokes are clear. We already know we want to have the Seven Thunders and the Kami — maybe nine, maybe all ten. And that right there is the only serious problem we're going to face. Sure, there are issues concerning how we're going to make this version of Shosuro different from the one we printed in *Dark Journey Home*, and whether we'll resurrect the **Inexperienced** trait to print "new" versions of the original *Ancestral Swords*, but those are nothing compared to the conundrum of how you print a card for a minor god. Making them ordinary Personalities, even amazingly powerful and expensive ones, doesn't do them justice. Here are a few of the rough first ideas we've brainstormed to try to fit cards of this potency within the scope of the game. We may choose one of them, or some variant, or something else entirely; it's still very early in the design cycle.

- *Kami are Personalities that either have incredibly high resource and opportunity costs or are simply incapable of entering play. They have powerful actions that are activated by discarding them while they sit face-up in one of your Provinces (basically*



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making them Events with resolutions you can delay for an arbitrary time). Kami's stats and traits would be appropriately godlike to give the correct feel for their stature, but this will be irrelevant to gameplay.

- Kami are exceedingly powerful Personalities. They may not go in decks. They may only enter play from outside the game through specific support cards also in the set, which can only be played when one is on the verge of losing and/or when one's opponent is in a much more advantageous position.
- Kami do not exist as individual cards. Instead they are represented by a small suite of cards corresponding to aspects of their teachings and equipment. Each of these cards becomes more powerful as more cards from that suite enter play (as the Kami becomes more manifest).

Setting an expansion this far back in the storyline means careful attention to what was different back then. The Yasuki are still Cranes. The Agasha are still Dragons. The founder of the Yogo family started out a Phoenix. There are no Crab Witch Hunters or Lion Deathseekers. The Unicorn aren't even the Unicorn yet —

they won't get that name until they come back from their centuries-long journey outside the Empire — but are still the Ki-Rin Clan. And Utaku is still spelled with an "O". Fu Leng has not yet learned how to make the Taint so contagious, and the only undead are those that he personally has animated on a whim or as an example.

Mechanics aren't the only thing this affects. The Story Team is working with Art Director Jim



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pinto to make sure Rokugan looks older in the artwork. Samurai armor is less elegant. Sword-making technology is still primitive, so some weaponsmiths craft straight blades. The Uni — er, the Ki-Rin, don't dress in such barbaric gear. Minor Clan mons shouldn't appear on background war banners or courtier kimonos because the first Minor Clan won't be founded until years after Fu Leng's defeat. Goblins, ogres, and trolls are still being subjugated, so some of their earlier incarnations may appear.

Close coordination with the Story Team is crucial for a project like this. Rich Wulf and Shawn Carman, who normally work from their homes in far distant states, were flown to AEG World HQ in Southern California. They spent a whirlwind week meeting with Design, planning and organizing everything from *Wrath of the Emperor* and the summer convention storyline events to the 2005 releases and role-playing line. It was a mad, mad week that left them little time to enjoy the balmy spring weather.

Of the Factions besides the seven original Great Clans, Mantis is the only one that will be tricky to work into the set. The Nezumi had an advanced civilization in the area that would become the Shadowlands. That right there provides plenty of ideas for Personalities, Holdings, and other cards to give them a presence in this set. The Shadowlands itself obviously has a starring role. Mantis, however, pose a unique challenge. The first person to set foot on the Islands of Silk and Spice and call himself a "Mantis" doesn't do so until forty years after Fu Leng's defeat, naval warfare is unheard of in this day and age, and it will be a thousand years before Tsuruchi is born. It shouldn't be too hard to extend the set a little past the Day of Thunder to include the Mantis's founder, but it will be interesting to see what methods Story and Design devise to give the eventual descendants of Yoritomo equal coverage.

INTO SHADOW

by Rich Wulf

The Dawn of the Empire...

A chill wind blew over the sea cliffs this morning, raising a mournful wail in its wake. The eerie sound disturbed Mutsuhito, for it was an ill omen following on the heels of the sight he had seen earlier this morning. Fire had rained from the sky onto the shoreline. An earthquake had shattered the morning's peace. The war party that had been preparing to raid a poorly defended settlement had pulled back, fearing this dark omen might be the work of a powerful god.

Yet even their fear had only held them for a while. Winter would come soon, and the tribe of Noriaki did not fish and dig in the grass like these pathetic Seppun. They were warriors. They took what they needed. Mutsuhito peered out from the low vegetation that clung to the edges of the cliffs, watching the village below. A small circle of huts clung to a large hill.

The people of the village were not toiling at the earth or hurling their spears into the water as they usually did. Today they were all gathered in large numbers around the hill at the center of the village. They all knelt in a circle, gathered around eight striking figures. They were dressed in clothing and armor the likes of which Mutsuhito had never seen, but there were only eight of them. The people of the village were unprepared, exposed. The time to strike was now.

Mutsuhito whistled, signaling to his kinsmen hiding nearby. With a riotous cry, they all charged forth from the rocks, spears and knives held high. Mutsuhito charged forward as well, but moved too quickly, without watching where he placed his feet. The earth slipped out from beneath him. He fell forward with an

anguished grunt, chin striking a stone before him. His mouth filled with blood and stars swirled before his eyes. He lay dazed for several moments before rising to his feet. He chuckled to himself, wondering if in so short a time he had already missed the battle below. When he looked back down at the hill, he could not believe what he saw.

The Seppun were fighting. One of the warriors, a tall man in brilliant gold armor, was leading them, hewing about with a brilliant sword. With each stroke, two of Mutsuhito's kinsmen fell. Most were already dead. The survivors were fleeing back into the hills or begging for mercy. Within minutes it was over.

Mutsuhito crept forward as quickly as he could without drawing notice. Clinging to the bushes, he searched the battlefield for any sign of his father. He soon found the old man. Kazuhiro and a handful of others knelt on the earth, battered and disarmed, before the eight warriors who had defended the village. The leader spoke, and Mutsuhito leaned forward to listen.

"Raiders of these lands," he said in a clear voice, echoing over the village and cliffs. "Your time is over. This land is no longer a land of chaos, but a land of order. Our order. I am Hantei, and the Seppun are under my protection!" He leveled his sword at Kazuhiro with a stern expression. "Yet I find that I am not without compassion for those who have known no other way of life. There is a place for you among us, if you will bow to our law."

"Anything," Kazuhiro whimpered, "just spare my life."

Hantei looked down at the man with a strange, disappointed expression. Mutsuhito felt rage and disgust boil in his stomach. He stood and hurled his spear with all his strength, then turned and ran as swiftly as he was able.

He was gone before his father's body struck the ground.

Mutsuhito was chief now, for what that was worth. Only a handful of the raiders had survived and found their way back to the camp. In the weeks since the rout at Seppun Hill, the tribe of Noriaki had been fleeing Hantei and his brethren. Other raider tribes like their own had been destroyed or had joined forces with these so-called Kami. The tribe of Yobanjin, which he had hoped would join forces with him against them, had vanished into the northern mountains. Mutsuhito realized that he would find no allies, none to help him take vengeance against the Kami, unless he was truly desperate.

And he was desperate.

His father had taught him early in life that only a fool travels too far to the south. Those lands were ruled by beasts that defied description: powerful ogres and trolls, twice as tall and four times as strong as a man, and bakemono, small, swift, and intelligent. Yet these were not the most fearsome. These races both bowed to another, the mysterious Nezumi, a powerful and mysterious race of creatures. These monstrous creatures were hostile, and few who entered their lands returned. As what lay in this place was lost in shadow, it was rightly called the Shadowlands. As a curious boy

Mutsuhito had scouted these lands, but had turned back at the first sight of one of the monolithic ogre cities.

Yet perhaps, with luck, these creatures might be willing to listen to Mutsuhito. At this point he had nothing more to lose. Death awaited him in the lands of the Kami. To die in the Shadowlands would at least be

a death in a manner of his choosing. His followers were of like mind, courageous men who had survived a score of raids. Like him, they had no intention of kneeling before Hantei as Kazuhiro had and building a world of "order."

A massive plume of smoke rose on the horizon, and Mutsuhito watched it with a wary eye. As the tribe drew closer, he realized what he was seeing. The ogre city that he had glimpsed before now lay in burning ruins. His men paused, looking to him.

"There may be loot," he said. "We need supplies. Move in."

They fell into a rough formation around him, fearless in the face of destruction. The ogre city was unlike any human settlement. It was far older, far more advanced. The buildings were made of wood and stone, the roads paved with neatly cut cobblestones. A high wall surrounded the city to keep out intruders, but its gates hung open. One lay shattered on the ground.

They passed through the gates, skirting the dead bodies of several ogres. They were impossibly large, larger even than the tales had suggested. The creatures looked as if they had perished in terror. Several were burned beyond recognition. A bestial grunting noise drew Mutsuhito's attention.

One ogre was still alive. It hunched on the ground, its back to them. Mutsuhito quickly gestured for the party to stop moving. One of his men stepped on a loose cobblestone and the creature looked up quickly. Its mouth was filled with uneven fangs and dripped with blood. Its eyes gleamed an angry red. He realized with disgust that the beast had been feeding upon one of its brethren.

The ogre stood, turned, and roared at them in defiance, beating one thick hand against its heavy chest. It lifted a heavy piece of shattered stone in its other hand and hefted it, prepared to throw it if they drew closer.



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Mutsuhito looked at the creature with morbid curiosity. "Can you understand me?" he shouted to it. "Can you speak in my tongue?"

The creature only threw its head back and wailed inarticulately. The cry was echoed throughout the city by other ogres they could not see.

"A city of beasts," one of his men whispered, taking a step back.

"No," Mutsuhito said. "Not always. Beasts could not have built this. Something not only destroyed their city, but reduced them to this."

He gave the signal to retreat, but as his men began to withdraw toward the city gates, the ogre lunged forward and hurled his stone. The boulder struck with deadly accuracy, crushing two of Mutsuhito's followers. His men began to run.

"No!" Mutsuhito shouted. "Blood has been spilled! You stand and fight or you will face me!"

The warning was well heeded. Mutsuhito's men knew him well, and feared his anger more than they feared the ogre. His spear in one hand, he charged the ogre. The creature began to heft another stone but Mutsuhito hurled his spear, taking the beast in the throat. A plume of bright red blood showered forth, and it clutched its wound with an anguished cry.

It flailed out with its other arm, knocking one of the other raiders off his feet. Mutsuhito drew his knife and rolled under the creature's attack, between its legs, and cut deep into the flesh at the back of one knee. The creature howled again, staggered, and fell back with a heavy thud. The other raiders ran forward with their spears. In seconds, it was over.

The cries of the other ogres quickly drew closer. Mutsuhito moved to his fallen warrior. He frowned as he realized it was Kano, his comrade since childhood. Kano's right leg was twisted beneath him, shattered, useless. They could not carry him and escape the ogres.

Even if they did, he would never walk again.

"Mutsuhito," Kano whispered hoarsely, a trickle of blood escaping his mouth.

Mutsuhito handed the man his spear. "Do not make their meal easy, old friend," he said.

Kano smiled fiercely and nodded, looking toward the sounds of the howling ogres.

Mutsuhito and the others fled as swiftly as they could, never looking back at the ruined ogre city.

* * *

The Noriaki had wandered the Shadowlands for weeks and seen many cities like the first: strongholds of the ogres, bakemono, trolls, and Nezumi, now ruins inhabited only by feral beasts. They had even seen a few of the creatures' former Nezumi masters, and Mutsuhito was surprised to find that they were small, rat-like creatures rather than the powerful beasts he had imagined. The Nezumi they saw were invariably dead, usually burned or torn apart by some terrible force. Whatever had taken over these lands, it seemed, had no love for these creatures.

At dawn of their thirtieth day in the Shadowlands, Mutsuhito awakened to find one of his men, Soseki, skulking out of the edge of their camp. He rose quickly and lifted his spear, stopping the man with a shrill whistle.

"Soseki," he called out. "Where are you going?"

Soseki looked back with a terrified expression. "Away from here, chieftain, and I beg you to follow," he said in a terrified voice. "Do you not sense it? These lands are dead, haunted by the beasts and ghosts. The thing that killed them is still here somewhere."

"I know," Mutsuhito said. "I feel it as well."

Soseki's eyes widened in even greater fear. "We are in danger, my chief. There is nothing here to help us against the Kami. We should escape before we all die."





"Soseki, come here," Mutsuhito said in a calm voice.

The man returned, glancing left and right in terror.

"Terauchi," Mutsuhito said, calling to one of his other men. "Do you feel the presence here?"

"Yes, my chieftain," came the reply.

"Kitaro," he continued. "Do you feel it as well?"

"Hai."

He looked back at Soseki. "Does it call to each of you as it does to me?" Mutsuhito said. "Do you feel it inviting you, drawing you deeper into the Shadowlands?"

"Hai," said Terauchi.

"Hai," replied Kitaro.

Soseki only shook his head nervously.

Mutsuhito sighed, nodded somberly, and rested one heavy hand upon Soseki's shoulder. "You are a good man, Soseki," he said, "but it seems you have not been chosen. And for that, I am sorry."

Soseki opened his mouth to say something, but the words never came. He fell to his knees choking, his throat slashed by Mutsuhito's knife. The chieftain helped ease his dying friend to the hard earth, covered him with a thick fur blanket, and moved on.

* * *

In the valley beneath them lay the ruins of the largest city Mutsuhito had ever seen. The center was cored out by an enormous crater, a gaping wound in the earth. Even as he watched, the fissure slowly expanded, causing the buildings at the edge to slowly crumble and topple inside.

It had now been almost three months since they had entered the Shadowlands. The bizarre landscape no longer disturbed Mutsuhito. The fact he had not seen the sun in weeks also no longer frightened him. The beasts that dwelled here no longer gave him pause. After dealing harshly with the first creatures that had

opposed them, the others had moved out of his path. He felt more confident than ever in his life. He felt energized, drawn to this place. He felt that this was meant to be.

Thus it came as little surprise when they found the solitary figure waiting for them on the road to the city. He was a small man, dressed in fine robes of black velvet. A white porcelain mask covered his face. Despite his stature, he radiated power and command.

"You are the raider, the ones my siblings sought and failed to find," the man said in a velvet voice. "But now, I have found you."

Mutsuhito stepped forward and knelt. His followers did the same.

"You kneel to me?" the man said, a hint of amusement in his words. "Yet you were so defiant to Hantei. Do you fear me as you did not fear him, or are you merely tired of running?"

"Hantei would create an Empire of order," Mutsuhito said. "We have no desire to live in such a place. We are warriors."

"I see," the man said. "Yet I am Fu Leng, the greatest of the Kami. What need have I for sheep such as yourselves? Why should I not destroy you as I destroyed the Nezumi?"

"If you attack us, we will fight," Mutsuhito warned.

"You will die," Fu Leng said.

"That may be," Mutsuhito answered. "Yet one day soon, when your brothers and sisters come for you, you will remember our skill, and you will wish that you commanded it. Let us serve you, Fu Leng. If we humans must serve a god, then let it be a god worthy of our respect."

Fu Leng chuckled. "So be it."



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PREVIEW

LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS LIVE ACTION ROLE-PLAYING

you'll be buried at court, so it is better to know how to behave, and how to properly attire your samurai. For formal occasions, especially Winter Court, most samurai will wear what is traditional. To start, an under-kimono called a nagajuban and tabi socks are put on. The nagajuban is worn crossing the left flap over the right. This is then tied closed with a

datejime (a stiff belt that helps prevent the obi from getting wrinkled) for women; men use a small sash called a koshihimo. The kimono goes on next, still using the principle of left over right. The front bottom edge of the kimono should touch the feet. It is acceptable to fold the kimono over a koshihimo to make sure the length is correct and the kimono doesn't drag on the floor or trip the wearer. Then the front is smoothed out and flattened against the body. The folds of the kimono should now hide the koshihimo. A datejime is tied around the kimono to secure it, and give a flatter surface for the obi for women. Men can just use their thinner obi to tie their kimono closed. The extra length of kimono that was smoothed down should now show as a neat horizontal fold below the obi or, if there wasn't that much surplus, not show at all. Women tie an obita (a flat board attached to a sash) on so that their obi will remain unwrinkled and flat in front and tie their obi on top of this. An obiage (scarf) is then tied around the waist and tucked in to top of the obi so that some of it peeks out. The obijime (cord) is then tied around the center of the obi.

There are two types of obi that women use, the fukuro-obi and the nagoya-obi. Fukuro-obis have a design only on one side of the material and nagoya-obis are narrower in the middle to make them easier to tie around the body. In either case the average obi can be up to twelve inches wide and six feet long. The most popular bow used by Rokugani women is the taiko-musubi, or "drum bow."

It is tied in back and puffs out like a pillow. The complexity of the bow attests to the creativity and artistic nature of the woman wearing it. Over time, tying an obi into different shapes and knots became popular. Now it is a necessary skill for any accomplished female courtier. Both men and women will use a netsuke (small carved bead) and ojime (sliding bead) on their obijime. Netsuke beads are carved into fanciful designs and range from erotic to religious in form. They can be made out of any material, but are usually shaped from bone, wood, or a precious stone. Some netsuke are even passed down as heirlooms, from parent to child. Objects such as koku, inros (small boxes that hold seals and medicine), and kinchaku (bag) can be strung on the obijime and firmly secured using the netsuke and ojime. Inros are elaborately designed, and varieties of jade, ivory, or a simple black lacquered wood with mother of pearl inlays.

Men wear a thinner obi, with plain designs and a simple box knot as well as an obijime. When they are wearing hakama (a seven-pleated skirt sometimes divided in the center as pants), they need not wear an obi at all. Wearing hakama is also a symbol that they follow the tenets of bushido, as the seven pleats represent the seven virtues. For formal occasions, men wear a hakama and haori. Haoris will normally have the mon of the samurai's clan on one shoulder and the mon of their family on the other. Naga-bakama (split hakama with overlong material in the leg meant to trail behind) and a kataginu (a sleeveless, wing-shouldered vest) can be worn in court. A naga-bakama is a sign of high rank and wealth, and only the upper echelons of Rokugani society wear them. It is said that past Emperors required their subjects to wear this garment in court to make assassination attempts more difficult as the pants make quick movements nearly impossible.

The sleeves of a kimono are a good way to tell the age and marital

For those of you who prefer to live out your experiences in Rokugan in a more active manner, the Legend of the Five Rings Live Action Role-Playing book is for you. If you're not familiar with Live Action Role-Playing (LARP), it's a style of RPG that is somewhat more involving than a typical RPG — more like acting out an actual role in a movie or play. You are invited to dress up like your character and interact with other players as if you were really in the setting of Rokugan. The following excerpt from the book covers one of the most basic concerns when planning to participate in a LARP — costumes.

The Basics of Dress in Rokugan

In the Emerald Empire, what you wear and how you act has a lasting impact on how people will forever remember you. Is your obi badly tied? Are you gauche enough to show the bottoms of your feet to those of higher rank? Bente forbid you are actually wearing your kimono crossed the wrong way in front. Sometimes the Fortunes think if you are dressed for your own funeral, they might as well oblige you. In any case

by Kim Hosmer

station of a woman. Typically men do not have long cumbersome sleeves, and there is very little variation in length. A young unmarried girl will often have sleeves that nearly reach the floor. As a woman matures the sleeves get shorter, and more boxlike. Female bushi will normally forego the more frivolous styles and opt for practicality, and they will normally wear hakama as well. To complete their outfit, women wear an uchikake, which is a formal robe that trails behind, and is unbelted. Rokugani only wear pure white kimonos at funerals, and

Before the reign of Toturi the First, cosmetics were commonly used by both genders. From his time spent in the monastery, Toturi learned to scorn excessive ornamentation and frivolous attire. As the Emperor himself preferred simple, utilitarian clothing and shunned the use of makeup, many male courtiers emulated his style to gain favor. Even with the Emperor's passing, it is rare to see men wearing cosmetics, save the occasional Scorpion, who use them as masks.

While they do not wear cosmetics, men do wear hats

left outside when entering an abode. It is customary to also tuck a sensu fan into the obi as it serves many purposes. Sensu play an important part in the tea ceremony, as well as communication, especially for purposes of courtship.

Only bushi should carry a katana, as it is a calling card that you have studied kenjutsu. One can tell how great a person's station is (or how highly they think of themselves) by how they tuck their katana into their obi. If it is thrust into the obi in almost horizontal fashion, they are usually of very high rank, as they are indicating

The Practical Guide to Rokugan Live-Action Costumes

One of the largest challenges in LARP is finding an appropriate costume, and Rokugan Live-Action is no different. Many of the kimonos available are made for sizes that the average person will not conform to, especially Western men. When it is impossible to dress traditionally and garb your character in vintage kimonos and obis, there are some easy ways to bypass this obstacle. The easiest and cheapest way is to purchase a non-terrycloth robe that goes down to your ankles. Cut off the belt loops and take a large winter scarf and wrap it around your waist trying to make a square knot at the front. You may also wish to buy an actual obi, which are easy to find online. While a vintage kimono is a more problematical fit, most obis will fit just about anyone.

There are also several seamstresses that can custom-make a kimono for a person of any shape and size. This is the best option for those who wish to have an impressive costume but lack the skills to make one themselves. A simple search on the Internet will turn up over a dozen people capable of making a costume to your specifications. Custom-made kimonos are a wonderful option for those who wish to garb themselves in the colors of a specific clan.

The last option is making the costume on your own. Fabrics made of silk or satin that are one solid color or a neutral pattern are recommended and can be found in just about any fabric, craft, or hobby store. For those who know how to follow a pattern these can also be found in the Pattern section of these stores. Typically they will be viewed as Halloween or Crafts when looking through a pattern book. For those who have trouble following a pattern we are including brief instructions on how to make a kimono. This should be easy to follow for someone who knows the basics of sewing.

Tabi are easily made from white socks that have been cut and sewn so that the big toe is separated from the other toes. Simple sandals complete the look.

brides wear them when getting married. To wear this at any other time is considered bad luck.

The most important part of a woman's beauty care is maintaining a shining head of hair. Kanzashi (hair ornaments) are then used to style their hair. Married women will wear smooth and neatly coiffed dos, usually focusing on volume around the crown of the head. Maidens wear their hair down or in a foxtail, with combs ornamenting, and keeping the hair back from the face. A white foundation of rice flour is applied to the face and various body parts to give a pale shade that is considered elegant. Lips are then painted with rouge or the juice of the beni flower. Some women also redden their cheeks, but a fair complexion is more fashionable.

called eboshi. Those possessing rank in court wear tate eboshi to signify this status. It stands tall, with an indentation in the front to help it sit up straight. There are many variations on the style of the hat, but it retains the tall cylindrical shape, rounded at the top. The ori eboshi is a flattened and folded back variation of this hat and ties onto the head under the chin. The most common color for hats is black with a pattern that depends on family and clan. The finishes on eboshi vary from matte for young men, and a high gloss lacquer for older samurai.

Both genders wear zori sandals indoors. It is important to not walk around barefoot, as it is considered an insult to let someone of higher rank see the soles of your feet. Geta are only worn outdoors, and

that they need more space. When kneeling to speak with someone of higher rank, it is customary to take off the katana and put it edge-in on the right side. Placing the katana on the left for ease of draw is a deliberate insult, as it indicates distrust of the person. Touching someone who is not your spouse in public is also a grave insult.

Not all samurai are required to know the intricacies of dress and behavior. This does not mean it is acceptable for them to bring shame on their family and clan's name by committing some huge social gaffe. Court can be a dangerous place for the uninitiated, and the unwary samurai can find himself dishonored simply because he had the effrontery to blow his nose in front of the wrong person.



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COMPETITIVE STORY PLAY

by Fred Wan



Many players have story goals that go beyond that month's story prize. For example, it was all very well and good to have a favorite character nominated to the Legion of the Dead during this year's Kotei season, but if the player doing so had to run multiple Shadowlands cards and 3 *Kolat Assassins* to do it, just how "revered" will that ancestor be? L5R is ultimately a competitive game, with players vying against each other for story prizes. At the same time, most players feel some involvement with the story, and want to influence it as much as possible, even in subtle ways such as making "story" in-game decisions and "story" deck-design decisions. Still, by choosing to make story choices, you are choosing to forego options, and by choosing to forego choices from the get-go, you are making it more difficult to win. Reconciling the two objectives of "winning" and "higher story objectives" is not easy, but every player has to do it.

The first thing to recognize is that any time you make a blanket

decision like "no *Kolat* cards," "no *Shadowlands*," "nothing that causes me an honor loss," or one of the most popular story choices, "I will only play *Clan X*," you are constraining yourself. No matter how skilled you are, you have added an extra obstacle. As a player, you must decide whether or not this tradeoff is worth it — is remaining "clan loyal" more important to you than winning *GenCon*? What about a *Kotei*? The local GST that you play with your regular gaming group? Some players make this decision implicitly — "Yeah, I'm playing a switch *Shiranai Toshi* deck this Saturday" — while others are more methodical — "Well, *Corrupt Jade Sliver* would help my *Crane* deck a lot, because then I could use *For the Empire* more easily" — but everyone makes this decision, even if it's as simple as saying "I'll do whatever it takes to win." For every player, this threshold will be different, and the decisions they make vary as well.

It is also important to distinguish between story choices you are making as story choices, such as refusing to play any *Shadowlands* cards, and choices that you make because they are the best way to win, such as refusing to play cards that cause you an honor loss in an honor-win deck. Although this does not make one iota of difference to your opponents, it makes a difference to you: one choice is a self-imposed limitation, the other is simply smart design. More importantly, if you are playing your story deck with the hopes of having it affect the story, make a point of letting people — particularly your tournament TO and any official story representatives — know how and why you made these choices. If you are making a story deck to accomplish story goals, make sure the right people know it! (But do keep in mind that there is a difference between "informing people" and "being a pest.")

Once you have made these decisions, the rest of your deck design and play still follows the same process as any other deck. Make sure the gold production flows well and can pay for your *Personalities*; make sure the *Fate*

deck supports the themes and strategies your *Dynasty* deck enables; and so forth. Just because it's a "story" deck does not exempt your deck from competitive reality. In a sense, your deck is more subject to competitive pressures, since you are fighting with a handicap.

Always remember that this is a handicap that you have imposed upon yourself of your own volition. Winning big tournaments with theme decks is the stuff of which L5R legends are made, and are the kind of victories that players talk about for years. At the same time, keep in mind that your opponent might have other feelings about the story (i.e., a *Kolat* supporter probably does not share your loathing of *Kolat Assassins*), or none at all. Respect that difference, and appreciate the fact that the highest form of respect in a competitive event is to try your utmost to honorably best your opponent.

Fred Wan has been an active tournament competitor since Time of the Void. He attends Seattle's annual events, and has placed in the final 16 every year. He won Nothing to Lose, the event that started the Everything to Gain series of tournaments. Fred has served on both the CCG Playtest Team and as a freelancer for many of the RPG books.



ZEN'S CARD FOCUS

Illus. Matthew S. Armstrong © 2004 AEG

GOZOKU SENSEI

by Zen Faulkes



So you want to support the mysterious secret society of the Gozoku? Instead, you can just take a lesson from *Gozoku Sensei*. You heard right. After a long absence, sensei cards are back! Surprised? (I know I was!)

Gozoku Sensei is listed as an "all factions" sensei. Given that both abilities of this card are have the Political trait, however, it's unlikely that Shadowlands players will take advantage of it. Even so, this is a highly versatile and flexible card that can work in many decks.

Like all Sensei, *Gozoku Sensei* has some cons to balance out the pros. The first drawback is that it reduces your starting Family honor by one. As you'll see, though, one of its abilities compensates somewhat for that initial penalty.

There is another stiff penalty to play *Gozoku Sensei*: you can't have a Wind. Because you can't change Winds between rounds of a tournament, you're making an irrevocable decision not to use the standard Winds when you add this card to a deck. Although one of the advantages of Sensei is that they provide a chance to metagame against particular deck types, not being able to use a Wind if you

switch to another sensei probably means that few players will switch between *Gozoku Sensei* and another sensei card.

The lack of a Wind is okay in some respects, however, because *Gozoku Sensei* functions very much like the Winds. One ability requires you to discard the Favor to use it, and the second ability can be used either by bowing your Stronghold or a Courtier to use.

If you discard the Favor, you can bow a Personality as an Open action. Right off the bat, this gives you a fairly big club to wield. It can tie down a heavy unit before battle, regardless of whether your attacking or defending. You can hold it back to bow a potentially damaging card in battle. And, of course, there are always Courtiers and Personalities with damaging abilities that you can keep bowed.

To make matters more serious, the bowed Personality can't straighten at all — not even with card effects (e.g., *Dying Effort* or *The Pull of Destiny*) — until that Personality's controller pays 6 gold as an Open action or until you use the Favor again. Of course, you can pretty easily see how much gold your opponent can produce at any given time, which gives you

some certainty that this bowing effect will stick. To make matters juicier for you, just because the opponent's Personality can straighten by paying 6 gold doesn't mean that he or she does straighten immediately. If you bow a Personality in battle and the opponent pays the gold cost, he or she will still need both another card effect and another action to straighten that Personality.

The second ability allows you to bow your stronghold or courtier to reduce the amount of an honor change by 2. You can only do this once per turn, but the ability to minimize gains and losses allows you to work in several directions.

First, you can certainly hinder honor runners by reducing honor gains by 2 each turn. This can give you a few more turns of attacking if you have a military deck.

If you have an honor deck, this keeps another honor deck safely under your honor total, giving you Favor control.

Second, this ability can help you to survive against a dishonor deck. Given that most current dishonor decks in the environment are built around the so-called "Kaukatsu bomb" and a few huge losses, reducing a loss by 2 may only be a minor chip in the assault.

Third, *Gozoku Sensei* can provide you with an opportunity to use more dirty tricks, simply by reducing your own honor losses. Lots of Shadowlands cards have seen increased honor losses, for instance, to prevent non-Shadowlands players from taking advantage of them. *Gozoku Sensei* can help put those cards back into reach for players who choose to use them.

The best part of using *Gozoku Sensei*, though, is that if you want to show support for the Gozoku, you no longer have to type the horribly long URLs for <http://www.gozoku.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/nest/gozokuhome.html> or http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/gozoku_alliance/ into your web browser.

FIRST ENLIGHTENMENT

by Shawn Carman

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The Dawn of the Empire

The Quiet Stone monastery barely warranted the name yet. It was still a loose confederation of tents and huts surrounding a great stone outcropping near the southern edge of the Dragon Heart Plain. Construction had begun on a large building that would serve as the monastery proper, but it might be years before it would be completed.

Tsumiko sat on a flat plain of rock on the western edge of the stone outcropping, where she could feel the fading rays of the setting sun on her cool flesh. It had taken some time to grow accustomed to the sensation on her freshly shaven head, but she was now comfortable with her appearance. There were, after all, far more important things in this existence.

The sound of distant hammering from the construction site reached her ears. The crack of metal on stone had become a constant companion. Tsumiko was still not certain that the monastery was even necessary, much less that such time and resources should be devoted to it. Shinsei had visited the spot perhaps six months ago, shortly before he disappeared into the Shadowlands alongside the Seven Thunders. The wisdom he had imparted to those following him had been vastly enriched by the natural beauty and serenity of this place. Tsumiko had been among those followers, although she had gone by another name at that time. When Shinsei had departed, many had remained, including her.

Lengthy periods of meditation and study had followed. Other students of Shinsei joined them, until finally several dozen had remained in place for weeks on end. They had decided that they must honor the Little Prophet and his teachings in the only way they knew how: by devoting themselves to the study of his works.

For Tsumiko, the process of devotion was a simple one. She had been fasting for several days, and had eaten only a meager meal of rice and water for days before that. She had cleansed her system of impurities through vigorous exercise, and had now prepared her body for lengthy meditation.

The sound of hammering receded, becoming a droning, constant tempo that mirrored Tsumiko's own heartbeat. The cold stone beneath her, the rhythmic metal beat, the sensation of flesh exposed to the natural environment... these were the spirit of earth.

The wind blew gently across the plain, rippling the coarse fabric of her clothing. The scent of distant blossoms on the wind, the carrying smell of stone dust, the sensation of breath coursing in and out of her lungs... these were the spirit of air.

An acrid tang of smoke carried from the workers, the scent of simple fires used to cook simple foods. Tsumiko felt the warmth of sunshine on her skin, and the inner fire that burned within the soul of every physical body. These were the spirit of fire.

Finally, Tsumiko turned her awareness inward. The roaring of blood in her ears as it coursed through her body, bringing life and carrying away poison. The scent of rain on the air, preparing to bring life to the earth once more. These were the spirit of water.

Four elements. The rings that encircled and comprised all things, according to Shinsei's wisdom. The Little Prophet had shared this truth, but none of his followers yet understood. He had spoken of a fifth ring, a final element that existed in tandem with the others, yet outside them, uniting and dividing them. Tsumiko had spent many days contemplating this statement's meaning, but had failed to comprehend it.

Now, however, the young monk had resolved to empty her mind until the answer came. Shinsei had said that truth could not be sought, only discovered. Therefore Tsumiko did not focus on that which she sought. Instead, she emptied her mind of everything save the sensation of the elements around her.

Minutes stretched into hours without her notice. She lost herself in the emptiness of the moment, her only connection to the physical world the subtle influences of the elements on her entranced physical

body. Tsumiko found herself adrift in a sea of nothingness, a boundless void without shape or form. She focused on it, willing herself to merge with the void, to dissolve into it, losing herself and becoming a small part of a vast, uninterrupted whole.

Then, suddenly, she was gone.

Tsumiko no longer existed as a single person. She was acutely aware of the sensations filling the universe all around her. She could feel the last vestige of heat from the sun fading from the rocks on the plain in front of her. She could feel the wind moving across the delicate surface of a single flower growing on the inhospitable plain. She could even feel the wind itself.

The monk was suddenly brought back to her senses by a sensation of incredible energy coursing through her body. Strength and surety filled her limbs. Incredible clarity and serenity filled her mind. All at once, the mysteries of the Tao seemed simple and laid out before her. She opened her eyes...

And it was gone.

Tsumiko took a deep breath as the sensation faded. With a shaking hand she reached out and took the bowl of water, sipping it carefully. What had happened? She had merged with the void, becoming one with everything and nothing all at once. She had been a part of everything around her, and yet was removed from it all.

The void. It was the only name that fit. And it was all elements and none. The fifth ring.

Tsumiko smiled and stood on shaking legs. The others would want to know of this new truth.

One year later, the Quiet Stone monastery had become one of the finest monasteries in Rokugan. It was the progenitor of the philosophy of the void, a theory also espoused by the Phoenix Clan to the east. Tsumiko was a revered sensei among its monks, and taught thousands of Shinsei's followers. Upon her death, her name was recorded among the Brotherhood's annals as among the few truly enlightened souls to have followed Shinsei into the next world.

The Present

The lands south of Dragon Heart Plain saw sparse but regular traffic on most days. Once there might have been more, particularly during this time of year, but relations between the Dragon and Phoenix clans had cooled in recent years. The river of trade caravans between the two lands had become a small trickle of independent merchants seeking to capitalize on the situation.

The stranger in the hooded cloak watched the travelers along the Emperor's road from afar. It saddened him to see so few. The Dragon and Phoenix were wise and noble clans, and that they had allowed petty disagreements to interrupt a centuries-old tradition of alliance and cooperation was a terrible tragedy. If two clans such as they could be so removed from harmony, what chance did the Empire truly have? It was not encouraging.

He glanced north toward Quiet Stone monastery, the last bastion of civilization before the empty

Dragon Heart Plain that stretched onward, seemingly forever, toward the northern mountains that marked Rokugan's border. It seemed a shame for such a vast expanse of land to lie fallow when there were people without homes, food, or comfort. But evil things had happened in that vast plain, and even the desperate would not make their home there.

The stranger sighed and rose from the stone where he had rested. Adjusting his cloak carefully, he set forward across the plain separating him from Quiet Stone monastery. Even from here he could make out the great stone outcropping from which Shinsei had supposedly spoken to his followers. The stranger smiled at the thought. If every monastery that made such a claim was to be believed, then Shinsei spent a great deal of time sitting and talking. It was miraculous that he ever managed to gather the Thunders and defeat Fu Leng.

The stone at Quiet Stone had indeed been visited by Shinsei, and those who studied his wisdom within were among the wisest of the Brotherhood's sects. The stranger was confident that there he would find the assistance he needed to complete this last and most dangerous task. If not... it would make things substantially more difficult.

A short time later, he walked quietly through the monastery's open gate and into the courtyard. As he had expected, there were dozens of monks meditating in its center. It was a common time of day for such practices, he had discovered, and even the wisest student of Shinsei could prove predictable in certain matters. Still, the sun's light felt warm and inviting, and the serene atmosphere was more appealing than he wished to admit. He had been traveling for months on end, with little opportunity to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Perhaps soon he could rest, if his task was finished.

"Pardon me, good sir," a young monk said softly, bowing deeply as he approached. "Welcome to Quiet Stone monastery. What brings you here on this glorious day?"

The stranger bowed deeply. "I wish to speak with the abbot, brother."

The monk smiled apologetically. "I am afraid the abbot is taking private meditation, and cannot be disturbed. You understand how important his spiritual pursuits are."

"Of course. His search for wisdom bears great importance, as does every soul's in Rokugan." He smiled warmly. "So I will not delay his search any longer. Please inform the abbot that a visitor has arrived and that I must speak with him."

The young man glanced down and looked decidedly uncomfortable. "Please understand, sama, that I have been instructed to permit no interruption. I have been at the monastery only a very short time, and would prefer not to prove myself unable to live in harmony with my brother monks."

"I understand." The stranger drew a scroll from within the folds of his cloak. "I think, however, that the abbot will excuse your lapse once he sees this scroll."

The young monk frowned and shifted his weight from foot to foot. He reached to take the scroll,

then withdrew his hand and rubbed his chin for a moment. Finally, he reached out again, more decisively this time. Then he saw the seal it bore, and his eyes widened. "This is impossible," the youth said in a stunned whisper. "This is the Emperor's personal seal."

"Is it?" the stranger answered. "I had thought it looked familiar." He raised his eyebrows. "I imagine it must be urgent, don't you?"

The monk nodded enthusiastically and bowed so deeply it looked for a moment as if he might fall over. He rose just as quickly, beckoned for the visitor to follow him, and walked swiftly into the main temple.

The monastery's interior was undecorated save for the few trappings that marked individual shrines and the Fortunes or ancestors they revered. The monks of Quiet Stone maintained the ascetic lifestyle they had adopted over a thousand years ago.

The abbot's quarters were in a secluded portion of the monastery. The stranger waited for several long moments before the young monk reappeared and bowed deeply once again. "The abbot will see you now, sama."

He bowed and entered the chambers, which were no larger than any other monk's accommodations. The stranger had often found that the private meditations of a pious individual could confer harmony more surely than any shrine or temple, and he felt a sense of peace in the abbot's presence. The chief monk sat within the chambers, sitting on a simple meditation mat and surrounded by smoldering sticks of incense.

"Good day, friend," the abbot said with a smile. He was not yet old, but his eyes bespoke the weight of experience. "I am called Sojuni. You are welcome here. May I ask your name?"

"You may," the stranger answered, "but I may not give it. The power of a name is great indeed, and to protect my line I must keep many things secret." He considered for a moment. "In the last village I stayed in, the children called me Rosoku, after one of their brothers lost to the Rain of Blood. If it pleases you, you may call me thus as well."

"As you wish, Rosoku-sama," the abbot replied. His smile did not falter. "I understand you have something you wish to show me?"

"Yes." Rosoku withdrew the scroll once again from the folds of his robe and offered it with a bow. "I hope that you will accept it."

The abbot took the scroll and returned the bow, then examined the seal carefully. "This is indeed the Emperor's seal." He regarded the visitor with curiosity. "Forgive my impertinence, friend, but you do not appear to be a herald."

"Not a herald, just a messenger," Rosoku replied.

"This is related to the Emperor's contest, then," the abbot surmised. "And if you are not an agent of the Emperor, there is but one possibility." He rose and stepped forward, then knelt before the stranger. "We are honored to have you among us, son of Shinsei."

"Rise, friend." Rosoku took the older man's arm and helped him to his feet. "You and yours need

not bow to me. I am simply a traveler." He paused. "I have come to ask of you a favor, if I may be so bold."

"Anything," the abbot said instantly. "There is no boon you can ask that we will not gladly fulfill."

Rosoku gestured to the scroll. "The quest for the Books of Air, Fire, Earth, and Water have already begun. I have only to place the final scroll, and I may once again withdraw from the affairs of Rokugan. But I fear I may have revealed myself for too long. The Shadowlands would benefit greatly from the destruction of my line."

The abbot's face fell. "If it is protection you require, my friend, I and all those who follow me would gladly lay down our lives to protect yours. But I fear we are no warriors."

"No, no," Rosoku insisted. "To ask that of you would be to have betrayed all that my ancestor once accomplished. No, the task I have for you is far simpler, though possibly no less dangerous than my own." He gestured to the scroll still in the abbot's hand. "That scroll contains the secrets of Void, the final secrets my ancestor withheld from his followers and that his descendants have contemplated for a thousand years. More than any other, this scroll truly holds the secrets that can aid the spirit in reaching enlightenment. It can be a powerful tool for mastery of spirit, but in the wrong hands it could bring terrible insight."

"What would you have me do?" the abbot asked sincerely.

"Keep it here. Guard and protect it." Rosoku glanced to the north. "I will go and prepare the final challenge. I only hope that it will be sufficient to dissuade those who are not ready to learn that which it holds."

The abbot looked confused. "How will I know the one who deserves to bear this book? How will I know who has met your challenge?"

"You need not," Rosoku replied. "He will know you."

The abbot bowed. "It would be our great honor, Rosoku-sama."

The descendant of Shinsei smiled. "The honor is mine, friend."

Somewhere far south of Rokugan

The herald's final scream was a long, jagged one. Perhaps it was exacerbated by the knowledge that he had failed, that he had betrayed the trust placed in him by his lord, his Emperor, and his family. Rigori smiled at the thought. Betrayal and treachery were the most delightful of all punishments to visit upon the fools who called themselves samurai.

Rigori absently wiped the blood from his scarred fists as he left the chamber. The Miya's corpse would be gone when he returned, he knew. There were things within the monastery that dealt with such nagging details. He was not sure exactly what they were, and it was better that way. They dealt with problems, and that was all he needed to know. They left him free to focus on spiritual pursuits.

He went to his master's chambers immediately, as he had been ordered to do. The revered sensei was

deep in meditation, but his eyes opened as soon as Rigori entered, despite the monk's silent approach. His face, impossibly lined with the weight of too many years, drew awake and alert. Bloodshot eyes keen with intelligence glared down at Rigori. "What news?" he demanded.

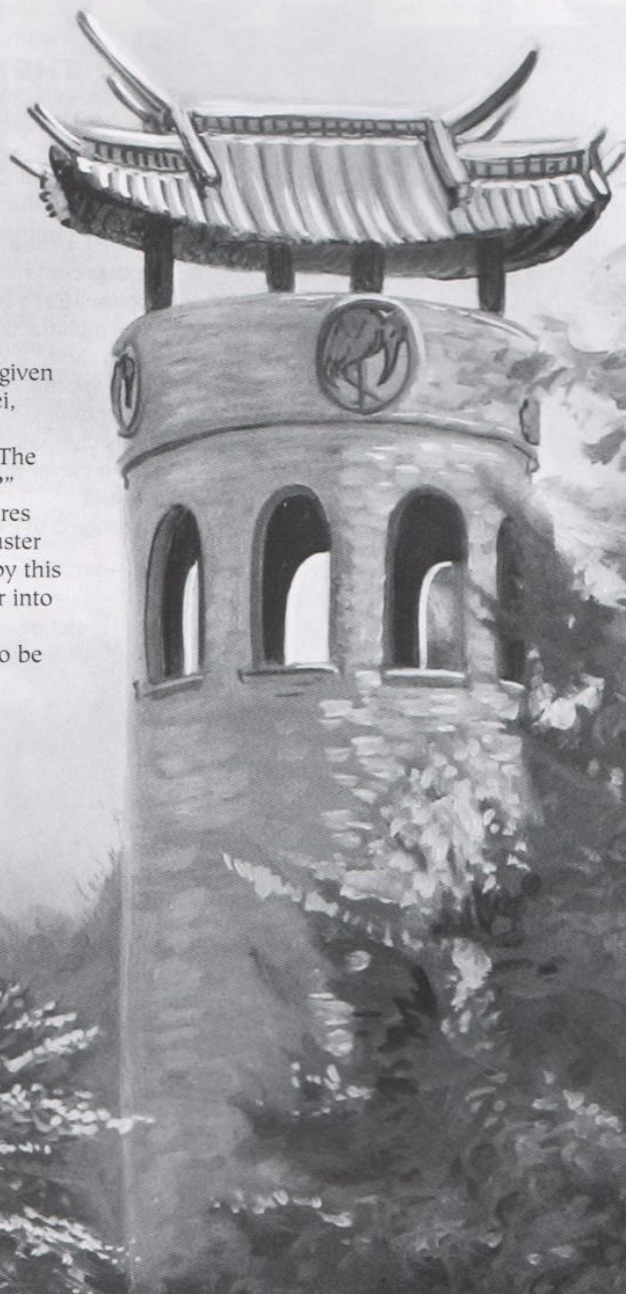
"Success, master Bunrakuken," Rigori hissed. "The scroll the herald carried is authentic. The Emperor has declared a contest, some pitiful distraction for the cattle who follow him, for five scrolls that supposedly contain the secrets of each element within them. The goal is enlightenment."

"Enlightenment," Bunrakuken snorted with derision. "What do they know of true enlightenment? Enlightenment is not found in a book."

Rigori smiled broadly. "The scrolls were given to the Emperor by the descendant of Shinsei, master."

Bunrakuken's eyes blazed. "Interesting. The Little Prophet's heir has come out of hiding?" At Rigori's nod, his blackened, twisted features split in a wide grin. "How delicious. Our master the Shadow Dragon will be most intrigued by this knowledge. Let us throw our own challenger into this contest."

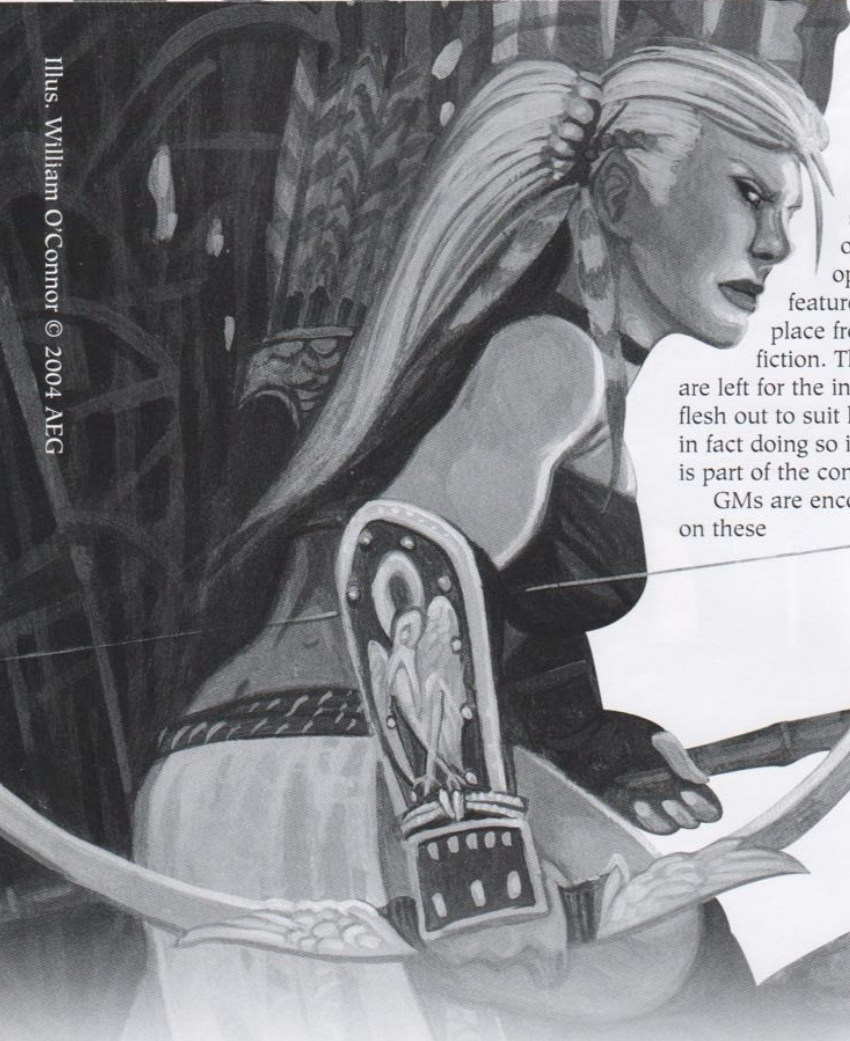
"Enlightenment, after all, is not a prize to be spurned by learned men."



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LOST LOVE

THE IMPERIAL HISTORIES CHAPTER TWO



spell, or some other cool new option. Each hook features a character or place from the L5R canon fiction. The specific details are left for the individual GM to flesh out to suit his campaign (and in fact doing so in a clever manner is part of the contest).

GMs are encouraged to expand on these

Adventure Hook from its original form, and how the game turned out. Pay special attention to any particularly clever or resourceful actions by the players as well as the resolution of the game. These reports should be no longer than 3000 words and should be emailed directly to Rich Wulf at rwulf@alderac.com with the subject

"Imperial Histories Report."

The L5R writers will look over these submissions and select one that stands out as the most interesting or extraordinary (and probably pick a runner-up for humor value). This adventure will be retold in the form of a short story in the next Imperial Herald. All of these stories will be considered canon, although the story team reserves the right to edit for space and content. (For example, if your character is the reincarnation of the Fortune of Stone destined to return to his place in the Celestial Heavens, that's fine for your campaign, but we probably won't mention it in the fiction.) The names of the GM and all players will also be listed in that issue of the Imperial Herald, so that your names may be recorded in the Imperial Histories for all time among the greatest of Rokugan's heroes.

It's time to get down to business. Good luck everyone and, most importantly, have fun.

"Destiny finds us all in time, whether we like it or not." — Koto

Welcome to the newest chapter in player interaction for Legend of the Five Rings. For those of you who are just reading your first Herald, who missed last issue, or who just don't like to read things over and over again, we'll go over the rules first.

Each Imperial Herald will feature a new Imperial History extended adventure hook. These are written in classic Challenge-Focus-Strike format, but also contain pointers for how to flesh out the hook into a full adventure. Each also includes some new mechanical tidbit for both systems — a feat, Advantage, magic item,

adventure hooks. For example, the GM may decide when running the following adventure hook that the corrupted samurai is closely related to a player character; or perhaps Naosuke's agents approach a party member with Kolat connections, seeking his aid in eliminating that same samurai. In this way, both players and GMs have a chance to influence events (and players with a Herald subscription who take a look at this article won't necessarily know what's going on when they play the adventure).

When the adventure is done, the GM should write up a short report listing the names of his players and their characters, his own name, how he altered the

Background

This story begins in the small Crane city Musume Mura. Its name, "Daughter Village," refers to the "Daughter of the Crane" Doji Mioko who became the first Empress when her simple beauty caught Hantei's eye. Many Crane began to view the city as a fortuitous place to arrange marriages, blessed as it was by the First Emperor's union.

In subsequent generations Musume Mura became home to many of the Crane Clan's most talented marriage arrangers, men and women who made a career out of selecting unions that would be as honorable, profitable, and comfortable as possible for both parties involved. Even those outside the Crane came to view Musume Mura as a good place to arrange a lucrative and glorious betrothal, and the city soon saw a thriving tourist trade of ambitious parents seeking a future for the next generation. The city is known for its luxury and hospitality. Those who seek the aid of the village's experts are not turned away — so long as they recognize the valuable favor that they now owe the Crane Clan.

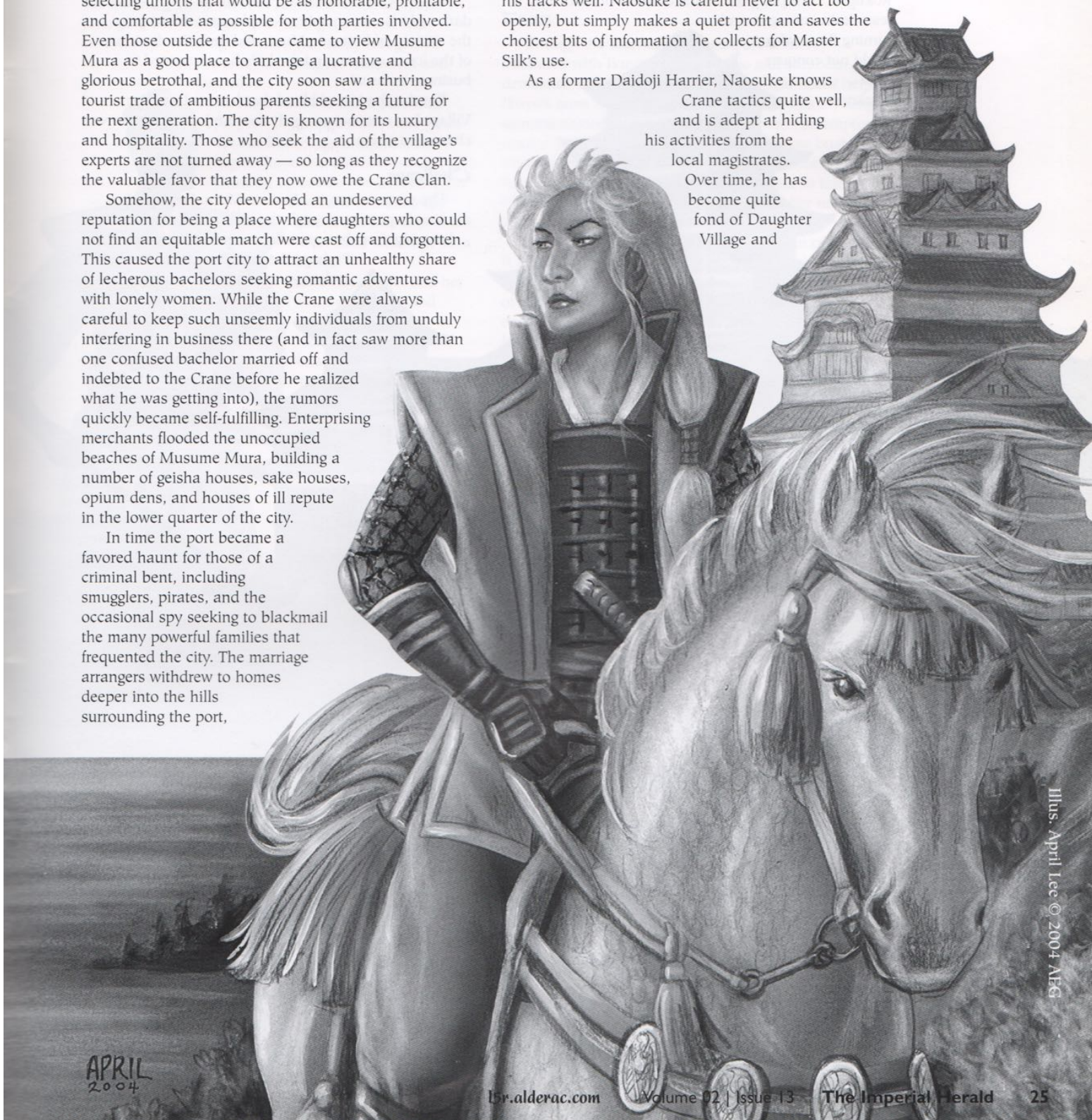
Somehow, the city developed an undeserved reputation for being a place where daughters who could not find an equitable match were cast off and forgotten. This caused the port city to attract an unhealthy share of lecherous bachelors seeking romantic adventures with lonely women. While the Crane were always careful to keep such unseemly individuals from unduly interfering in business there (and in fact saw more than one confused bachelor married off and indebted to the Crane before he realized what he was getting into), the rumors quickly became self-fulfilling. Enterprising merchants flooded the unoccupied beaches of Musume Mura, building a number of geisha houses, sake houses, opium dens, and houses of ill repute in the lower quarter of the city.

In time the port became a favored haunt for those of a criminal bent, including smugglers, pirates, and the occasional spy seeking to blackmail the many powerful families that frequented the city. The marriage arrangers withdrew to homes deeper into the hills surrounding the port,

creating a strict division between the affluent and seedy areas of Daughter Village. Though Crane magistrates regularly patrol the city seeking to wipe out the corruption and decadence that have taken root there, they have found it impossible to completely wash away the criminal stain on Doji Mioko's former home.

Unknown to the Crane, the lower quarter has recently become a bastion of the Silken Sect of the Kolat. Yasuki Naosuke, oyabun of the Kolat, rules the criminal underworld here. He sponsors many of the more popular businesses in the lower city and hides his tracks well. Naosuke is careful never to act too openly, but simply makes a quiet profit and saves the choicest bits of information he collects for Master Silk's use.

As a former Daidoji Harrier, Naosuke knows Crane tactics quite well, and is adept at hiding his activities from the local magistrates. Over time, he has become quite fond of Daughter Village and



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APRIL
2004

finds stability and peace useful for his purposes (clients talk more when they are relaxed). Whenever a rival gang or new criminal overlord grows too powerful, Naosuke reports their activities to the Crane authorities and allows them to remove his competition. Naosuke likes Musume Mura a great deal, considers it his home, and his agents have subtly stepped forward to eliminate threats to the village on numerous occasions.

A prime example of such an occurrence was during the recent Rain of Blood. Iuchiban the Bloodspeaker invoked a terrible ritual that rained cursed blood upon Rokugan, corrupting the hearts of those burdened by fear, desire, or regret and turning those who could not conquer their weakness

into his devoted followers. Musume Mura was hit particularly hard, with several dozen denizens of the lower city going mad from the Taint and rioting through the streets. Naosuke's agents formed a peasant militia and put down the most dangerous rioters. Working with the Crane magistrates, they ushered survivors into their homes where they could wait out the storm in safety. Though some local magistrates were surprised that a local businessman could swiftly coordinate such military precision among his employees, they were too grateful for his aid to ask many questions.

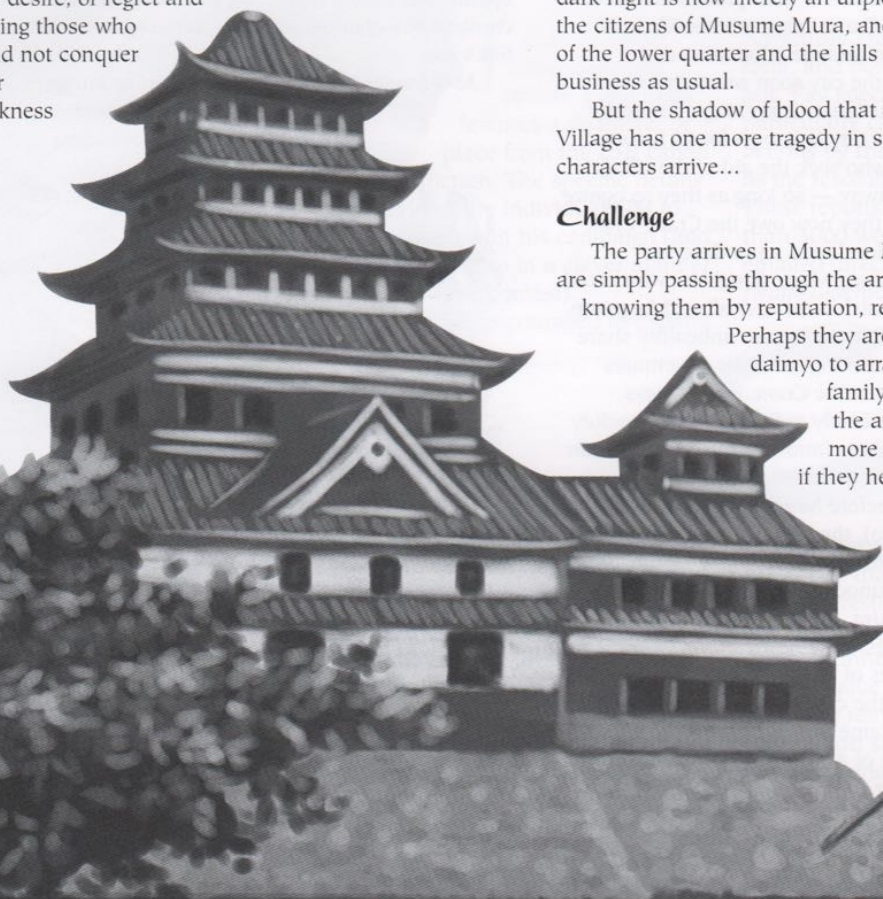
It is several months after the Rain of Blood. That dark night is now merely an unpleasant memory for the citizens of Musume Mura, and both the denizens of the lower quarter and the hills have returned to business as usual.

But the shadow of blood that haunts Daughter Village has one more tragedy in store just as the player characters arrive...

Challenge

The party arrives in Musume Mura. Perhaps they are simply passing through the area and a magistrate, knowing them by reputation, requests their aid.

Perhaps they are dispatched by their daimyo to arrange a marriage for a family member, and the arranger offers them a more equitable arrangement if they help her deal with the problems Hida Ogai, another client, is experiencing. Perhaps they



are acquaintances of Hida Ogai and, not trusting the Crane to solve his problems in the village, he has drawn upon the player characters for help. Cruel GMs might even send the party there to arrange a marriage between Hida Ikuyo and a player character, and then watch the fireworks ensue.

Hida Ogai is a troubled man. A brave defender of the Kaiu Wall, he had but a single child late in life before his wife's tragic death during the War of Spirits. This child, Ikuyo, is now sixteen and is the old warrior's entire life, the only light in a life shadowed by unrelenting combat. So great is his love for her that he delayed arranging her marriage. After losing his sword arm on the Wall at the age of sixty, he finally recognized that the time had come for retirement and hurried to

Musume Mura to make sure that proper arrangements were made for her future. Unfortunately for Ogai, Ikuyo is a difficult match.

Growing up beside her father on the Wall, she has inherited the brash manners of a Crab. She wishes to be a warrior, not a housewife, and her stern demeanor and brash temper have ruined many likely matches. If introduced to the party, Ogai is a polite if somewhat absent-minded old war veteran who obviously dotes upon his daughter.

Ikuyo is a fierce and spirited daughter of Hida who regards the player characters with as much contempt as she can muster. A rare Hida born with the gift of the kami, she is trained as a Kuni shugenja and knows *precisely* how rare and valuable to her clan she is. If and when she marries, she

expects her husband to take the Hida name and guard the Wall beside her (a fact that makes Ogai quite proud even if it infuriates the marriage arrangers).

For all of her arrogance, Ikuyo is respectful to any Crab player characters as well as any who can claim service on the Wall. Those who meet her sharp tongue without fear and can match her wit will gain her respect, though she will see such an act as a challenge and continue to subtly insult the character in increasingly bold (and possibly flirtatious) ways for as long as the character seems to be enjoying it.

Focus

Though the marriage arrangers are certainly frustrated with Ikuyo's sharp tongue and stubborn demeanor, this is not the reason why Ogai needs help. Ikuyo's most recent prospective husband was a young samurai named Suzume Tabito. Ikuyo was contemptuous toward Tabito at first, but the young Sparrow bushi's sincere demeanor and boundless patience seemed to have won Ikuyo's heart, as did his promise to take the Hida name and fight the Shadowlands in her name so long as he drew breath.

Suzume Tabito vanished during the Rain of Blood. It has since been learned that Tabito had inherited a large debt to a local gambling house upon the death of his father seven months ago. It is believed that his enemies took advantage of the chaos to eliminate him for his inability to pay. Since that day, Ikuyo has been disappearing for extended periods. Ogai fears that his daughter is quietly seeking revenge. For the record, if she were seeking revenge, he'd gladly help her, but he can no longer fight. He wishes the party to either talk some sense into his daughter or help her avenge Tabito and find closure. Ikuyo fiercely denies any allegations that she is seeking revenge for Tabito's death, and refuses to discuss her lost fiancé.

To make matters worse, some of the guards have reported sighting shadowy figures skulking about the marriage arranger's house at night.

Strike

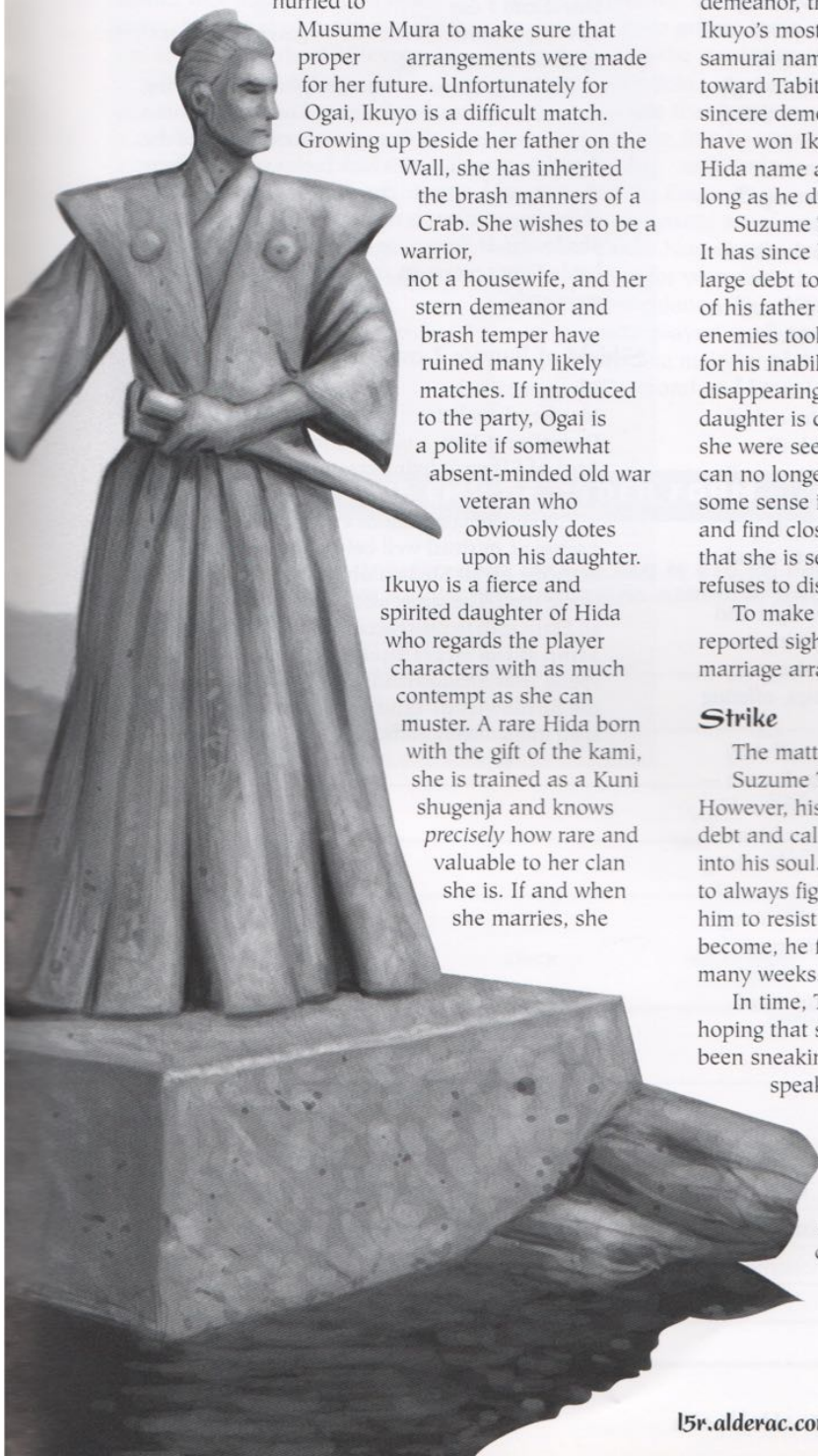
The matter is much more complex than it appears.

Suzume Tabito did not die during the Rain of Blood. However, his fear that Ogai would learn of his gambling debt and call off the marriage allowed the Taint to seep into his soul. Even so, his love for Ikuyo and his promise to always fight the Shadowlands in her name allowed him to resist Iuchiban's call. Realizing what he had become, he fled into the hills and remained there for many weeks.

In time, Tabito dared to make contact with his love, hoping that she might be able to help him. Ikuyo has been sneaking into the hills to meet Tabito at night, speaking prayers to help him resist the

corruption that daily tempts him toward darkness. Though her efforts have kept

Tabito sane, she knows that one day he will become truly Lost, and fears on that day she will have to destroy him. She has concealed Tabito's existence from everyone, hoping against all possible hope that she will find a way to cure his Taint.



Unfortunately Tabito is not the only Tainted soul to have fled into the hills, and the others are far more malicious than the honorable Sparrow. Yasuki Naosuke's Kolat agents have been hunting such corrupted souls for months. Naosuke suspects that Tabito was corrupted in the Rain, and has set his agents to monitor Ikuyo's comings and goings so she might lead them to him (whereupon they will slaughter him without mercy). So far she has covered her tracks from Naosuke's agents, but it is only a matter of time before she makes a mistake.

Resolutions?

What will the characters do in this delicate situation? Will they keep Ikuyo's secret and attempt to help her find a cure for her lover's Taint? Will they destroy Tabito and risk Ikuyo's wrath? At this point Ikuyo still believes Tabito can be saved, and would fight to the death to defend her love. Still, by knowingly harboring the Shadowlands Taint, Ikuyo is committing a crime of the highest order.

If Ikuyo dies (whether by the player characters' hands or due to Naosuke's agents) Tabito is enraged. He is closer to losing himself to the Taint than even Ikuyo suspects, and should she die it will be the final catalyst that causes him to become a Shadowlands madman. Hida Ogai will also be crushed if his daughter dies. Even if presented with overwhelming evidence, Hida Ogai is unlikely to believe his daughter took a Tainted lover and died defending him. If the heroes are not careful they might be blamed for the entire ordeal and make a very angry enemy within the Crab Clan.

And what of Naosuke's agents? If the players realize that they stand between well-meaning criminals and an honorable but corrupt samurai which side will they choose? Will they even choose a side or simply stand aside and let them destroy one another? If the players help Naosuke quietly dispose of Tabito they might end up winning the oyabun's respect without realizing it. The crime lord might approach a member of the party who seems amenable to dishonorable activities, offering an exchange of favors.

If the players choose to help Tabito, how will they do so? One option is to simply let the truth be known — that at least one soul was corrupted in the Rain but his honor allowed him to retain his soul. Even if he ultimately cannot be saved from the Taint, the idea that such a thing can happen might shine a ray of hope upon in the wake of the cataclysmic Rain of Blood. Perhaps the Kuni might offer to grant Tabito sanctuary in one of their monasteries for the corrupted, or he might seek to die honorably fighting in Ikuyo's name alongside the grim forces of the Damned.

Shield of Ikuyo's Love (New Spell)

This unique spell is a prayer that Hida Ikuyo originally created to help her keep her composure in the face of increasingly infuriating suitors (the title was meant ironically). She has found that it is quite useful in helping her Lost lover, Tabito, in resisting the siren song of the Taint.

Shield of Ikuyo's Love (d20 Version)

Abjuration

Level: Shu 2 (Earth)

Components: V, S, DF

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One living creature

Duration: 1 day

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

The shugenja summons a helpful kami to bring a sense of spiritual well-being. The spell grants a +2 luck bonus on all Concentration checks for the duration, as well as a +4 luck bonus vs. any effects that would grant the Shadowlands Taint. If the target attempts to cast any maho spells, uses Shadowlands Powers, or draws upon the Shadowlands Taint's power in any way, the spell immediately ends.

Shield of Ikuyo's Love (L5R 2E Version)

Element: Earth

Mastery Level: 2

Duration: 1 Day

Area of Effect: 1 living creature

Range: Touch

The shugenja summons a helpful kami to bring a sense of spiritual well-being. The target rolls an extra die on all Meditation rolls for the duration of the spell. The target also rolls two extra dice on all Earth rolls to resist accumulating Shadowlands Taint. If the target attempts to cast any maho spells, uses Shadowlands Powers, or draws upon the Shadowlands Taint's power in any way, the spell immediately ends.

ORDER FORM

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You know these names. These are names all samurai know, names that many samurai bear today. But what of those that were the first to bear them? Eleven centuries ago, a mighty duel occurred in the Celestial Heavens, a conflict between father and son, a battle between the brave Hantei and the sinister Onnotangu, fought for the lives of Hantei's divine brothers and sisters. Though Hantei saved his siblings — the Kami — they also fell from the Heavens, rendered forever mortal and unable to return to their former home.

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without merit. They organized the fledgling human tribes into clans, and in time a mighty empire was born. It was a time of beginnings, a time of hope and triumph, a time of heroes.

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VOLUME 2 / Issue 13

Published by Alderac Entertainment Group, Inc.

Brand Manager Ray Lau

Assistant Production Manager ... Mark Jelfo

Typesetter Mario Rivas

Editors D. J. Trindle, Katie Yates

Operations Manager Mary Valles

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