

THE  
IMPERIAL

# HERALD

VOL. 2 / NO. 3

SEASON OF THE  
**MANTIS**  
EXPOSED

Dark  
**Secrets**

*by Rich Wulf*

WAY OF THE

**SAMURAI**

SNEAK PREVIEW

L5R GOES  
**FRENCH**

*Full Story Inside*

**ALSO:**

ZEN'S CARD FOCUS

KOKU REDEMPTION







# KOTEI

**B**ONZAI! Kotei are here again. This is your chance to become a Regional Champion and win a seed into the L5R World Championships at Gencon 2002 in Milwaukee, WI.

This Year's Kotei will also be storyline tournaments where every participant gets the opportunity to affect the storyline, not just the winner. This is not an event you want to miss!

by Jeff Alexander

Note: Some Regions do not have a sanctioned Kotei at this time as not all the proposals were up to our standards. If you want or know some one in your region that would like to run a Kotei in one of those regions, the deadline has been extended to February 15th, 2002.

Visit [l5r.alderac.com](http://l5r.alderac.com) regularly for updates, schedule or location changes.

## Win a seed into the L5R World Championships at Gencon 2002.

**Region 1:** Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana

*Point of Contact:* Dan Tibbles

*Date:* TBD

*Entry:* TBD

*Location:* Everything to Gain II GAMES, 4701 Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105

*Phone:* 206-545-3544

*More Information:* Forthcoming

**Region 2:** California and Nevada

*Point of Contact:* Joe Guardalibene

*Date:* June 22, 2002

*Entry:* TBD

*Preregister by April 1st:* \$15.00 US

*Registration between April 1st and*

*June 21st:* \$20.00 US

*Door Registration on June 22nd:*

*\$25.00 US*

*Location:* A-1 Comics, 5800 Madison Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95841

*Email:* [a1comics@a-1comics.com](mailto:a1comics@a-1comics.com)  
[www.a-1comics.com](http://www.a-1comics.com)

**Region 2B:** California and Nevada

*Point of Contact:* Raymond Lau

*Date:* May 25-26th, 2002

*Entry:* Convention Fee required

*Location:* Gateway,

Los Angeles Airport Westin Hotel, 5400 West Century Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90045

*Email:* [godsfire@earthlink.net](mailto:godsfire@earthlink.net)

[www.strategicon.net](http://www.strategicon.net)

*Phone:* 909-390-5444

**Region 3:** Arizona, Utah, New

Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming

*Point of Contact's:* Glenn and Jody A. B. Godard

*Date:* Saturday 22nd, 2002

*Entry:* Preregistration before June

19th, 5PM: \$20.00

*Door Registration:* \$25.00

*Location:* Active Imagination 11200 Montgomery NE #10 Albuquerque, NM 87111

*Phone:* (505) 346-2232

**Region 4:** Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana  
None at this time.

**Region 5:** North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska  
None at this time.

**Region 6:** Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas  
*Point of Contact:* Jon Bancroft  
*Date:* May 31st, June 1st & 2, 2002  
*Entry Fee* (in addition to DieCon2 Convention Rate):  
Preregister by May 15, 2002:  
\$5 US, After May 15, 2002:  
\$10 US DieCon 2 Convention rates can be obtained at [www.gatewaycenter.com](http://www.gatewaycenter.com) or at (618) 346-2681

*Location:* DieCon 2 Gateway Center One Gateway Drive Collinsville, IL 62234

*Email:* [www.diecon.com](http://www.diecon.com)  
[ipw4@apci.net](mailto:ipw4@apci.net)

**Region 7:** Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Maryland  
*Point of Contact:* Joe Keyser  
*Date:* June 28th, 2002 June 30th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* Preregistration: \$20 US  
Door Registration: \$25 US

*Location:* Sheraton Meadowlands East Rutherford, NJ  
15 Minutes from Manhattan, NYC, More Information Forthcoming

*Phone:* (201) 896-0500

**Region 8:** Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, West Virginia  
None at this time.

**Region 9:** Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Brunswick

*Point of Contact's:* Eric Devlin and Earl Dempster

*Date:* May 4 – 5th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* Pre-Registration: \$17.50 US, Door Registration: \$25.00

*Location:* Unitarian Church, Meriden Ct., Adjacent to DJ's Comics

**Region 10:** Quebec and Ontario  
*Point of Contact's:* Jeff Kyer & Charlotte Ashley  
*Date:* May 11th, 2002  
*Entry Fee:* \$25 Cdn  
*Location:* Reilly's Bar and Grill

340 Yonge St. Toronto, Ontario CANADA  
*Email:* [Jakyer@sympatico.ca](mailto:Jakyer@sympatico.ca)

**Region 11:** Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida  
*Point of Contact:* Dennis Quearry  
*Date:* May 25 – 26th, 2002

*Entry:* \$25.00US

*Location:* The Largo Feed Store  
295 Central Park Drive  
Largo, FL 33771

*Email:* [bayushi@tampabayrr.com](mailto:bayushi@tampabayrr.com)  
[www.largo.com/play/index](http://www.largo.com/play/index)  
(choose Largo Facility)

**Region 12:** Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina  
*Point of Contact:* Scott Ilkenhons  
*Date:* June 15 – 16th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* \$10 US (does not include convention registration)

*Location:* HeroesCon  
222 South College Street  
Charlotte, NC 28202

*Email:* [scott\\_ilkenhons@rmic.com](mailto:scott_ilkenhons@rmic.com)  
[www.heroesonline.com/Convention/index.html](http://www.heroesonline.com/Convention/index.html)

**Region 13:** Hawaii  
None at this time.

**Region 14:** Alaska, the Yukon, NW Territories

*Point of Contact:* Moe Marin  
*Date:* May 18th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* Pre-registration: \$15 US  
Door registration: \$20 US

*Location:* Bosco's Eagle River  
Eagle River, AK 99577

*Phone:* (907)-696-5166

**Region 15:** Alberta and British Columbia

*Point of Contact:* Calvin Jim  
*Date:* May 25th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* \$30.00 Cdn

*Location:* MacEwen Student Centre, of U of C  
Calgary, Alberta CANADA

*Email:* [xiaolung88@yahoo.com](mailto:xiaolung88@yahoo.com)

**Region 16:** Manitoba, Skatchewan  
None at this time

#### **Australia**

*Point of Contact's:* Martin Friedrich & Paul Ryan

*Date:* June 22nd, 2002

*Entry:* TBD

*Location:* Grand Chancellor Hotel  
Tapestry Room, 1st Floor  
131 Lonsdale St. Melbourne,  
3000 AUSTRALIA  
More Information Forthcoming

#### **Greece**

*Point of Contact:* Manolis Trahiotis

*Date:* TBD

*Entry:* \$10 to \$15

*Location:* President Hotel

(Easily accessible location in the center of Athens)

*Email:* [office@kaissagames.com](mailto:office@kaissagames.com)

More Information Forthcoming

#### **Germany**

*Point of Contact:* Rob Bowman

*Date:* June 22 – 23rd, 2002

*Entry Fee:* 15 Euro

*Location:* Projekt Seiben  
Nuremberg, Germany

*Email:* [Hida-tetsuo@gmx.net](mailto:Hida-tetsuo@gmx.net)

#### **Spain**

*Point of Contact:* Dimas Miura

*Date:* June 29 – 30th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* Preregistration: 7 Euros

Door Registration: 10 Euros

*Location:* Rolling Dome of Alcobendas, Madrid

*Email:* [dimas.miura@olecenter.com](mailto:dimas.miura@olecenter.com)

More Information Forthcoming

#### **Central America**

*Point of Contact:* Jorge Muralles

*Date:* May 25 – 26th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* Q.150.00

*Location:* Game Arena, Computer Fair, More information forthcoming

#### **United Kingdom**

*Point of Contact:* Ed Procktor

*Date:* June 29th, 2002

*Entry Fee:* £10

*Location:* 51 The Queens Walk  
Community Centre, Queens Walk, Nottingham  
United Kingdom

*Email:*

[enquiries@hiddenfortress.com](mailto:enquiries@hiddenfortress.com)

[www.hidden-fortress.com](http://www.hidden-fortress.com)

#### **France**

*Point of Contact:* Dimitri Vidalenc

*Date:* May 11th, 2002 and May 12th, 2002

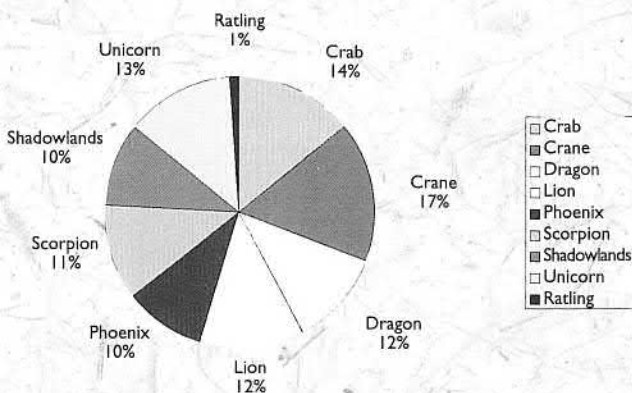
*Entry Fee:* 12 Euros

*Location:* Communal Hall of Fonbeauzard. For more information about this location, please contact Faonbeauzard's Town Hall: Maitie de Fonbeauzard, place Siman Meantariol  
31140 Fonbeauzard, FRANCE

*Phone:* (33) 5-61-70-23-38

# TOURNAMENT RESULTS

Seeds of War Attendance Chart



With all the tournaments and evolving storylines, it's getting harder and harder to keep up with what's going on. You'll find this new column in every Imperial Herald to update you on the results of recent storyline tournaments and voting results. Below are some of the first few results of last year.

A couple of notes of interest Crane won both tournaments and Phoenix turned out to be the lowest represented clan. Strangely enough here around the office, Crane decks poorly surprisingly

poor and overall in the larger tournaments, they don't tend to make the finals.

We suspect that they're accruing more points just due to their greater attendance, and as you all know, we are taking attendance into account in these types of tournaments. Speaking of attendance, where are you Phoenix players?

These are tabulated numbers for both tournaments. Check out on [l5r.alderac.com](http://l5r.alderac.com) for the storyline results of these tournaments.

## Seeds of War

**Winner of this tournament is Crane.**

Crab: 76  
Crane: 106  
Dragon: 49  
Lion: 88  
Phoenix: 42  
Scorpion: 67  
Shadowlands: 68  
Unicorn: 48  
Ratling: 3

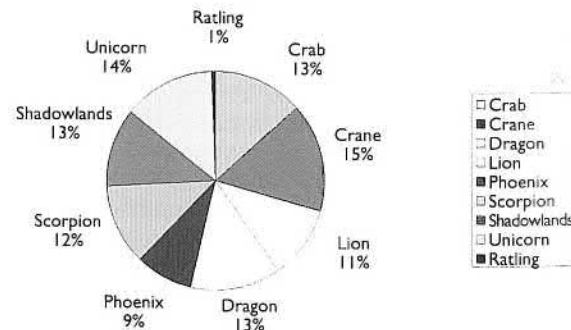
Attendance %'s: Lowest  
Attendance = Phoenix  
Crab: 14.07%  
Crane: 16.72%  
Dragon: 11.52%  
Lion: 12.44%  
Phoenix: 9.68%  
Scorpion: 11.42%  
Shadowlands: 9.89%  
Unicorn: 13.25%

## Season of the Unicorn Results

Total Points: Winner = Crane  
Crab: 77  
Crane: 111  
Dragon: 76  
Lion: 56  
Phoenix: 66  
Scorpion: 61  
Shadowlands: 67  
Unicorn: 92  
Ratling: 6

Attendance %'s : Lowest  
Attendance = Phoenix  
Crab: 13.48%  
Crane: 16.00%  
Dragon: 11.13 %  
Lion: 13.24%  
Phoenix: 8.61%  
Scorpion: 12.02%  
Shadowlands: 11.70%  
Unicorn: 13.81%

Season of the Unicorn Attendance Chart



Unicorn Clan Winners got to select a clan to Make War / Attack / Raid / Cause Trouble. It was a tight vote, but Crane got selected. In fact the voting was so close that Crane got selected over the 2nd highest voted clan(s) by only one vote. Three Clans were tied for 2nd place in this vote. They were Dragon, Shadowlands, and Lion.





# L5R GOES FRENCH

**P**arlez vous Français? That may be the next thing you're asked at the next L5R tournament. For the past few years, Asmodee Editions, a manufacturer and distributor in France, has been translating Legend of the Five Rings role-playing game products into French. These books include some of the most beautifully designed RPG books to date. With the return of Legend of the Rings CCG to Alderac Entertainment Group, Asmodee was awarded the international translation contract to produce this award winning and interactive storyline game into French. This is L5R's first step to drawing non-English speaking players to the game.

At this time of this writing, Asmodée has already released Gold Edition (Édition Or), and A Perfect Cut (Un Geste Parfait) to most French speaking countries. The art is the same on each card as the English versions and the production quality rivals most CCGs on the market. Crisp color definition and registration only begin to describe how beautifully these cards turned out. Asmodee also included a beautifully bound, 4-color rulebook and a completely separate storybook in each starter deck.

Although storyline events and actual card mechanic design will still be handled by AEG, tournament and organized play in France is slated for support through Asmodee Editions. This dual support should accommodate nearly all the needs of L5R's new French players.

Asmodée also plans to translate the Imperial Herald and its promo cards to French. Although not yet finalized, there are discussions to produce some French-only promo cards in the future. Fortunately, like most other promotional cards, Imperial Assembly members will get them as part of their subscription.

No longer just a game, L5R is reaching more of the world than ever before. It won't be long before the player facing and bowing to you across the table won't be able to speak to you except through the cards he plays. With that in mind, when he challenges you to a duel, how can you refuse?

Asmodée also produces Demonworld, an exciting fantasy miniatures game. For more information about Asmodée Edition, visit them at [www.asmodee.com](http://www.asmodee.com).







Illus. William O'Connor © 2002 AEG

by Jeff Alexander

**T**he biggest news about Dark Allies is that it brings the Mantis Clan into the Four Winds story arc. The death of Yoritomo may have ended his Alliance, but the Mantis are still a Great Clan in the eyes and records of Otsan Uchi. The capable Tsuruchi and Moshi families are still with them, since the Minor Clans of the Wasp and the Centipede formally merged with the Mantis rather than lose their positions of power when the Alliance dissolved. And no other Clan has as much potential to make its presence felt through disrupting commerce or unexpectedly landing troops on a quiet beach. Always quick to seize the opportunity to show their worth, the Mantis, led by the ambitious Yoritomo Kitao, see no better time to assert their presence than during the military and political turmoil presently engulfing Rokugan.

## Dark Allies brings the reappearance of the Mantis

Mechanically, the Mantis are going to focus on the initiative inherent to the new rules defining the Naval trait, supplemented with the strong archery of the Tsuruchi family. In a nutshell, a player can declare any battle to be started by a naval invasion if his army is comprised entirely of Naval Personalities and Followers and the other army isn't. A naval invasion almost guarantees that the naval army's commander will take the first normal action in the battle, although it's not allowed to be a Terrain. (After all, it's very hard to choose your ground when you're just getting off a ship.)

Using the "Soul of..." mechanic, we were able to give the Mantis a large boost to its set of Gold-legal Personalities without giving them more new Personalities than any other Faction gets. We want Mantis to be as playable as the other Great

Clans and the Shadowlands, but we don't want to build their strength at the expense of the development of other Factions.

### First Turn Balance

Astute players may notice something while examining their Dark Allies cards. Certain Personalities can be brought into play on the very first turn by their respective Factions. We've looked at what Personalities each Faction has available to it in the Gold environment, and we're using DA to balance these numbers against one another so that all the Clans have the same options when adjusting their deck designs between large expensive Personalities and small cheap ones.

We've not forgotten that one of the stated goals of the Gold environment is longer games, which, among other things, means





keeping the number of Personalities affordable with the Stronghold alone low. You can rest assured we'll keep the Clans stable at this new equilibrium for quite some time.

### Politics More Important Than Ever

More Courtiers appear in this set, along with more reasons to use them. With no firm Emperor on the throne, the political battles in Rokugan's Imperial Courts are waged as earnestly as the ones on its fields. It's only fitting that a player's strength in the Imperial Court matters just as much as his force of arms. (If you don't believe me, just ask Daigotsu.) Even

more Courtier-related actions are planned in the future, with some requiring Chi and others Personal Honor, depending on whether trickery or political clout is more fitting to the task.

The Four Winds have not been idle either. In Dark Allies you'll find four new Action cards, one for each Wind. You may wish to think twice about which Wind to support since you can only benefit from one of these new cards.

### The Soul of a Samurai

Items have been lackluster for quite a number of expansions now. Unless they have powerful abilities like Bitter or give a huge bonus like a Celestial Sword or Porcelain Mask of Fu Leng, Items don't make their ways into very many decks. This is an ongoing repercussion from the increased strength Followers have been receiving ever since the early days of Refugees and Stand Against the Waves. There are one or two cards in Dark Allies designed to finally nudge the pendulum back and give Items, particularly Weapons, a place in decks once more.

### Stronghold Kyuden Hida Deck

This deck stat is straightforward to build and surprisingly fun to play. Kyuden Hida's Reaction plus the built-in extra draws from the Ashigaru Archers and Hordes keep your hand full. A full hand plus the large number of Personalities and Followers with abilities mean you won't just be assigning a pack of thugs to a Province, crossing your fingers, and hoping your opponent doesn't whittle you down with actions to the point where you lose the battle. That's a feeling many vanilla Force + Follower decks leave a player with, and it's not fun.

There's a good deal of attrition in the deck as well. Six Followers with ranged attacks combined with three copies of Hiruma Todori, who can straighten any Follower in his army immediately after it bows, plus a smattering of Yu mean your opponent is going to lose a good chunk of his army even if he wins the battle.

(Quick hint: If you attack and your opponent assigns a single defender and plays Entrapping Terrain, kill him with a ranged attack before you destroy the terrain. If you don't, he can just play another!)

Over a third of the Fate deck is Followers, which frees your Region spots up for something other than Farmlands (the Region of choice for many, many decks that use Stand Against the Waves). A Bushi Dojo and a Crab Recruiter give you extra money to help buy these Followers, but you still must make constant decisions between buying more Followers and attacking now versus buying Dynasty cards this turn and postponing your attack. Nothing will help with that decision except practice, and deciding correctly is one of the tests that separates good players from the others.

### Stronghold Kyuden Hida

by Ray Lau

#### Wind:

Toturi Tsudao

#### Personalities:

- 3 Hida Hio
- 2 Hida Reiha
- 1 Hida Sakamoto
- 3 Hida Yasuhiro
- 3 Hiruma Masagaro
- 3 Hiruma Todori
- 2 Kuni Utagu
- 1 Kuni Utagu Exp.

#### Holdings:

- 3 Blacksmiths
- 1 Bushi Dojo
- 1 Crab Recruiter
- 1 Emperor's Under-Hand
- 3 Iron Mine
- 3 Jade Works
- 1 Oracle of Earth
- 1 Sanctified Temple
- 3 Small Farm
- 2 The Hiruma Dojo

#### Regions:

- 2 Crossroads

#### Events:

- The Celestial Pattern

#### Actions:

- 3 Block Supply Lines
- 2 Counterattack
- 3 Deadly Ground
- 2 Night Battle
- 1 Ninja Thief
- 2 Poisoned Weapon
- 3 Rallying Cry
- 3 Sneak Attack
- 2 Stand Against the Waves
- 3 Superior Tactics

#### Items:

- 1 Celestial Sword of the Crab

#### Followers:

- 3 Ashigaru Hordes
- 3 Ashigaru Archers
- 1 Fallen Legion
- 2 Heavy Infantry
- 1 Hida House Guard
- 3 Hiruma Archers
- 2 Scout



Illus. Jason Engle © 2001 AEG



# DARK ALLIES CARD COMBOS



## Tsuruchi Ichiro + Followers + Blackened Sky + City of Lightning

Putting a large stack of Followers on Tsuruchi Ichiro to benefit from his bonus Ranged Attacks is usually risky. Odds are he'll be dueled to death or sent home from the battle before his troops are able to unleash all of their arrows. If your whole army is Naval, though, you'll more than likely get the first action, and one action is all you need to play *Blackened Sky*. At that point you have the leisure to use all your Ranged Attacks in the unit, in whatever order and combinations are most effective.



## Draw From Within + Iaijutsu Art

This gives you an almost guaranteed 6 focus from one card. That's even higher than a Focus, without the downside of *Burning Your Essence* or the high Personal Honor requirement of *Let Your Spirit Guide You*.

## The Future Laid Bare + Bayushi Tai

*Bayushi Tai* will let you see one card, but if it's not a Personality, you don't receive any further benefit. Fortunately, Tai can still be used if the card is face-up already. Enter *The Future Laid Bare*, which turns all of them face-up. You're guaranteed to know which Provinces, if any, you can weaken.



## You Are Weak + The Towers of the Yogo + 2 Scorpion Personalities

One Personality bows an opponent, another one kills him. It's card-intensive but it's completely independent of Force, Chi, or any other stats.





### Face Me, Dog! + Secrets On the Wind

This takes forethought since *Face Me, Dog!* only works when you're challenged, but if your opponent has just put *Judgement* or a *Celestial Sword* on someone, it's not hard to guess that some *Iaijutsu Challenges* will soon be coming your way. When that challenge comes from a Personality dishonored by *Secrets on the Wind*, *Face Me, Dog!* ends the challenger's life quickly and efficiently.



### Kawaru Coins + Gambling House

This combo takes the gambling out of the *Gambling House*. Not only do you know exactly how much gold the *House* is going to produce, you can arrange your deck so you don't lose any key Unique cards like your *Celestial Sword* to it.



## Sacrificial Lion

Built for mid-long term superiority with both honor and military potential, *Sacrificial Lion* routinely loses several provinces in the opening few turns to a fast deck before coming back for the win. By establishing a good economic base quickly, the decks versatility and high quality personalities can develop for good offence, defense, and honor. Nearly always throw away any non-holding cards for the first two turns while this economic base is built up. Once personalities start coming into play, use the natural mobility and versatility of the *Lion* to take as many provinces as possible in turns 4-6 without encountering defenders. From there, feel free to sit back and wait, building up a large enough force to crush any opposition in the last 1-3 provinces, or building up a large enough defense to enable the deck to win by honor. The big trick to playing *Sacrificial Lion* is not to defend early on and risk losing your personalities. They have better uses then saving your provinces.

## Sacrificial Lion

By Dan Tibbles

### Stronghold:

Ancient Halls of the Lion

### Wind:

Toturi Tsudao

### Dynasty:

### Personalities:

1 Akodo Ginawa Exp. 4  
3 Akodo Iijasu  
3 Akodo Tadenori  
3 Matsu Domotai  
1 Matsu Domotai Exp.  
1 Matsu Hataki Exp.  
1 Matsu Hitomi  
3 Matsu Hyun  
1 Matsu Nimuro

### Holdings:

3 Copper Mine  
2 Dragon Dancers  
3 Gambling House  
3 Jade Works  
3 Large Farm  
1 Lion Scout  
3 Small Farm

### Regions:

1 Farmlands

### Events:

1 Chrysanthemum Festival  
1 Imperial Gift  
1 Peasant Revolt  
1 Welcome Home

### Actions:

3 Counterattack  
3 Deeds, Not Words  
3 Iaijutsu Duel  
3 Rallying Cry  
3 Return for Training  
3 Slander  
3 Superior Strategist  
3 Superior Tactics  
3 Test of Might

### Followers:

3 Elite Spearmen  
1 Hunting Tiger  
3 Lion's Pride  
1 Matsu House Guard  
1 Spirit Legion  
1 Tsuko's Heart

### Items:

1 The Celestial Sword of the Lion  
1 The Imperial Standard

### Rings:

1 Ring of the Void





# DARK SECRETS

**T**hose who journey down  
Exile's Road never return.

This thought passed through the samurai's mind as he stood with his back to the overturned wagon, katana clutched in his left hand. His right arm hung limp and useless at his side. Blood streamed down his right cheek and his helmet had been torn away, now lost somewhere in the jagged mountain pass.

The quartet of creatures stood in a semicircle around him. Each watched him warily through flint-black eyes. They were easily half again his height, with great horns that curved outward from their temples. Each wielded a broad black sword, and was garbed in gleaming ebony armor. A fifth member of their group lay on the ground nearby, limp and unmoving, his stomach torn open by the wounded samurai's sword.

"Well?" the samurai demanded. "Are you going to fight me?"

**The Tsuno lifted his sword, preparing to deal a killing blow to the wounded samurai.**

"We have already won," said the leader of the creatures, its voice remarkably clear and elegant. It's bestial snout split in a sneer as it gestured to the western horizon. Lord Sun blazed an angry red. "Can you see in the dark, samurai? Can you bleed forever? You will die here. Or perhaps you could run... and give us a good chase."

The samurai glanced back over one shoulder, then returned his gaze to the four creatures. No. He could not abandon his mission. There was only one recourse...

With a defiant scream, the dying samurai lifted his katana in one hand and charged.

\* \* \*

**T**his is boring," Shono grumbled, twirling his long spear absently in one hand as he led his steed down the rugged path. "It is necessary, my lord,"

replied Huang, riding at his side. "You know how important the caravan's safety is to Lord Chagatai. A scout team of Rojin's Wanderers reported Tsuno activity in this area."

"The Wanderers," Shono gave a derisive snort. "Amateurs, if you ask me. Shinjo Juro spends too much time with the geisha to be a proper sensei for that rabble."

Huang frowned. "That may be, Shono-sama, but if there is the slightest chance the threat is real —"

"I'm not a child, Huang, I know why we're here," Shono said. The gangly samurai glanced back over his shoulder with a wry grin. His left eye gleamed green in the pale light of the moon. "I know better than anyone where our path leads. It's just that sometimes I wonder at the turns we take along the way. For instance, I wonder why I had to make this trip with you and a band of swarthy Ide merchants instead of a gaggle of plump young Battle Maidens."

by Rich Wulf

"Clearly the Shiotome fear your presence would overwhelm their sense of virtue, Shono-san," Huang said, with no apparent trace of humor.

Shono rose an eyebrow at Huang, staring at the man for a long moment. The stony-faced scout simply studied the northern horizon.

"Did one of the Battle Maidens say something to you?" Shono asked, a faint note of hope in his voice.

"A joke," Huang said, finally grinning at his friend.

"Damn you, Shinjo Huang," Shono laughed out loud. "You could teach the Scorpion a thing or two about 'sincerity.'"

"Thank you, my lord," Huang replied, bowing his head soberly.

Shono turned suddenly, staring off toward the west with an intense gaze. "Did you hear that, Huang?" he whispered, his tone suddenly serious.

"Hear what, my lord?" Huang replied quietly. His hand rested on the hilt of his sword as he looked about cautiously. "I hear nothing."

"This way," Shono said, suddenly vaulting into his saddle and spurring his steed to a gallop.

Huang frowned, for he heard nothing, but followed his lord without any argument. They rode at full gallop for a full minute before Huang heard a chorus of metallic howls echo across Exile's Road.

"Tsuno!" Huang shouted, glancing at Shono as they galloped.

Shono only nodded.

"Shinjo's breath, how could you hear them from so far away?" Huang cried.

"How could you not hear them?" Shono replied; his crystal eye gleamed so bright it left a plume of sparkling motes in his wake. "Ride faster, Huang, before they kill whatever they've found!" Shono gave his steed a fierce kick and sped off down the road so swiftly it seemed as if Huang were not moving at all.

Huang did his best to follow.

\* \* \*

The samurai knelt in the road. He leaned heavily upon his katana, buried blade-first in the earth. For three hours the beasts had waited. Each time he attacked, they simply retreated, too quick for his blade to strike them. Always, he returned to guard the wagon. They waited with sinister, unyielding patience. Their strange echoing cries seemed to sap his will, weakening him as much as the wound the first had inflicted.

The leader ceased its howling and paused a moment, looking at the samurai carefully.

"You are strong, human," it said, tilting its head slightly as it regarded him. "You are worthy, but you are only human. Hurry up and die so we can see what you guard so fiercely."

"Forgive me, my lord," the samurai whispered. "I am sorry... that our enemies... were too cowardly to face me..." The samurai rose to his feet with a grimace, swinging his sword clumsily in one hand.

The Tsuno cackled among themselves with wicked amusement. The leader stepped forward, hefting his blade in one hand. "Only a foe attacks a wounded beast, and you humans are more pitiable than beasts. Animals know their place. You haven't the faintest inkling of the nature of the world in which you live, but arrogantly proclaim dominion over all." The Tsuno lifted its blade high. "Shall I show you how weak you are?"

The samurai found the strength to look up, to meet his enemy's gaze squarely.

"Why don't you show me instead?" shouted a voice from behind them.

The pack snarled and whirled about. A second samurai sat mounted on a black horse a hundred feet away bow drawn and aimed squarely at the Tsuno leader. His left eye glowed with a pale green light.

"Ignore him," the Tsuno leader snapped. "He shouts at the darkness. He cannot see us, let alone strike us." The Tsuno lifted his sword, preparing to deal a killing blow to the wounded samurai.

"You would be surprised what I can see," Shinjo Shono whispered.

The Tsuno leader fell quietly in a heap. Shono's arrow thudded into the side of the wagon, having passed cleanly through the creature's head.

The other Tsuno stood stunned. In that moment, another fell to Shono's bow. Two remained.

"Attack!" one yelled.

Both Tsuno fell to all fours, charging toward Shono at blinding speed. Shono knew he would never draw another arrow in time. He threw his bow aside and drew his spear from his saddle as the first Tsuno collided with his horse. Shono dropped into a roll as the animal fell, tumbling across the jagged earth. He glanced up in time to see the beast lunging at him, sword raised. With a single swift movement, Shono rolled under the creature's reach and braced his spear against his boot. The Tsuno yelped as it landed on Shono, spear piercing its midsection.

The remaining Tsuno howled in rage as it planted one foot upon the body of its fallen brother, pinning Shono beneath its weight. Shono grunted in pain, arms pinned, and looked up at the beast's blade. The Tsuno paused, staring down at the much smaller human.

"Your eye..." the Tsuno said, peering at him curiously. "Where did you find that crystal?"

"Everyone asks me that," Shono chuckled.

The Tsuno scowled and leaned heavily on the fallen Tsuno's corpse. Shono felt his ribs begin to bend. "Where did you find it?" the Tsuno demanded again.

"Shono-sama!" Shinjo Huang cried, his steed galloping around the bend in the pass. Huang charged at the Tsuno, blade flashing. The beast snarled as Huang's katana cut deep into its shoulder. The Tsuno took several steps backward, its own massive blade slicing the air in Huang's path. Huang's steed reared, terrified by the enormous monster.

For several quiet moments, Huang and the Tsuno watched one another, both waiting for the other to make a move. The Tsuno acted first. Seizing the body of its nearest fallen brother, it and raced away through the pass.



"What was that all about?" Huang asked, watching the Tsuno escape down Exile's road. The weight of the massive corpse barely slowed it.

"I really do not care," Shono said with a grunt. He heaved himself free of the other Tsuno's corpse and rose with a pained grimace. "I'm just glad he's gone."

"The Tsuno never leave their dead behind," said the wounded samurai, kneeling beside his dead horse and overturned wagon. "We must leave before they return..."

"Can you ride?" Shono asked, hurrying to the man's side.

The man collapsed face-first on the ground.

"I guess he can ride," Shono said. "Give me a hand with him, Huang."

"I don't think we should leave the cart behind," Huang said, watching the path for any signs of more Tsuno as he dismounted.

Shono looked up at his friend. "What are you talking about?" Shono asked. "It's just a cart. That Tsuno may return with others. We should regroup with the caravan as quickly as possible."

"Whatever was in that cart was important enough for this samurai to risk his life," Huang said.

Shono shrugged. "He's probably just an exile. That cart was all he had left."

"Perhaps..." Huang said noncommittally. He knelt by the side of the road and picked up the samurai's broken helmet. He turned it in both hands, revealing the crimson mask to Shono.

"Scorpion." Shono whistled. "I'll search the wagon."

\* \* \*

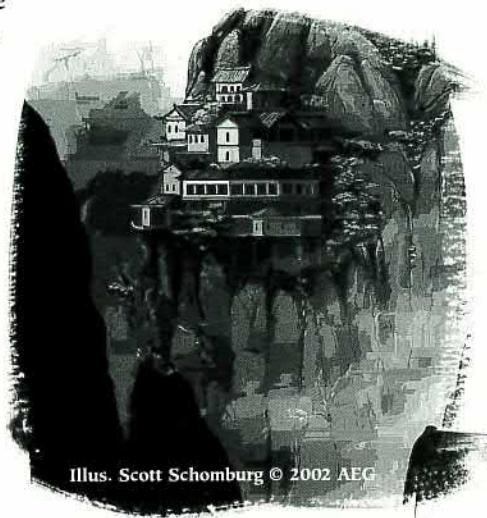
Shono paused at the opening of the tent. The Scorpion was awake now, sitting propped up on a heap of pillows. His hair was long in the style of the Scorpion, but his features were more squat and craggy than usual for one of his clan. For a moment, Shono thought he looked almost like his cousin, Sanraku. The

Scorpion simply sat and stared in awe at his right hand, watching his fingers clench into a fist then open once more.

"It is amazing," the man said, giving no indication that he had noticed Shono's entrance. He rose swiftly, smoothing his long black robes with one hand. "The finest healers of my clan could not have mended my arm so quickly. Please give my gratitude to your shugenja, Unicorn."

"It is good to see that you are awake once more," Shono said, "but my name is not Unicorn. Call me Shono." Shono extended his right hand toward the Scorpion with a smirk.

"Daimyo of the Shinjo house," the Scorpion said. He clasped hands with Shinjo



without hesitation, not even expressing a moment's distaste at the gaijin custom. "I guessed your identity from your appearance and demeanor, but considered it rude to use your name before you had given it to me. It is a pleasure to meet you, Shono-sama."

Shono frowned thoughtfully, then bowed. The Scorpion returned the gesture. "And your name?" Shono asked.

"I am Bayushi Shixiang," he said.

"A strange name, for a Scorpion," Shono replied.

"My mother was a member of the White Guard," Shixiang said. "She met my father during the Scorpion's exile, and returned at his side. I carry the name of my grandfather, a

great raider who once rode beside the father of Moto Gaheris."

"An impressive lineage," Shono replied with a faint smile. "I wonder if your Bayushi kin are as impressed."

"Should they not be?" he asked. "Their grandfathers are spies, assassins, and politicians. What ancestry do they have that can possibly compare to the glory of the White Guard, or the friendship of the Khan?"

"Hmm," Shono said. "I'll wager statements like that make you popular at home."

"I have always felt that honor is not a matter of popularity," Shixiang replied.

"True enough," Shono said. "Now that I know who you are perhaps you could tell me how you ended up on Exile's Road?"

Shixiang nodded. "My mission is to deliver a gift for Lord Yojiro," he said.

"What is your destination?" Shono asked.

"A crystal tower three day's ride north of the Great Wall of the North," Shixiang said. "It is the home of a man named Hojyn."

Shono grunted. "For a Scorpion, I must admit you're fairly forthcoming with answers to my questions."

"You saved my life," Shixiang said. "Were you my enemy, you could have left me to die and taken what you wanted from my cart."

"True enough," Shono answered.

"While we are on the subject, what of the chest that was in my cart?" Shixiang asked.

"It's safe," Shono said.

Shixiang gave a long sigh of relief.

"What's inside of it, if you don't mind my asking?" Shono asked.

"I did not presume to unlock it," Shixiang replied. "Though I carry the key."

"You don't know what's inside," Shono said, "yet you were willing to die to protect it?"



# THE IMPERIAL ASSEMBLY

## News

It's good to be back! As you've probably noticed, the Imperial Herald has a whole new look. It's the first of many improvements planned for the Imperial Assembly Fan Club. Look for more in future issues.

## Membership Number

Your new membership number is located on the address label of your Imperial Herald. For those of you with a DCI #, please take note of it; we're working DCI #'s out of our system.

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The Emperor is no more and chaos is slowly infecting the Empire. Delay no longer; the time has come to gather your forces! Without support your clan is doomed to failure and death. Call together your samurai and speak as one. The time is now. For a limited time, when you

refer a new player who joins the Imperial Assembly, *your own subscription will be extended for an additional 2 issues (6 months)*. When they fill out the form below, just make sure your name and membership number or DCI # is included in the space provided.

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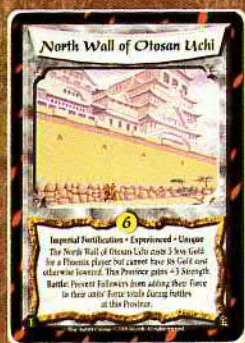
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**AFFILIATION (CIRCLE ONE):** CRAB CRANE DRAGON LION PHOENIX RATLING SCORPION UNICORN SHADOWLANDS RONIN



# KOKURENPTION









"Such was Lord Yojiro's command," Shixiang answered. "It is neither my place nor my desire to pry into Lord Yojiro's secrets."

"Your lord is fortunate to have such a loyal retainer," Shono replied. "The chest is waiting outside, guarded by my comrade, Huang."

"Again, I thank you," Shixiang said with a low bow.

"Think nothing of it," Shono replied. "If my caravan can assist you in delivering your burden, don't hesitate to ask."

"You are too generous, Shono-sama," Shixiang said.

"That's what they tell me," he replied, turning toward the tent's entrance. "I will leave you to your rest, Shixiang-san. We depart in the morning." Shono paused for a moment. "Oh... there is one more thing."

"Yes?" Shixiang asked.

"Huang found this at the site of the battle," Shono said. He reached into the satchel at his hip, drawing out the tasseled red memento. "Your helmet was destroyed, but I felt perhaps you would want this nonetheless."

"Hai," Shixiang said quickly, accepting the mask with gratitude. "Arigato, Shono-sama!"

\* \* \*

"What do you think?" Huang said, waiting outside the tent as Shono exited. The pair quickly walked out of earshot, amid the clamor of the caravan's morning preparations. "Should we trust him?"

"I'm not sure," Shono replied, his tone mild and thoughtful as he squinted into the morning light. "Shixiang seems unusual for a Scorpion."

"Shixiang?" Huang asked. "What sort of Scorpion name is that?"

"He claims to be half Unicorn," Shono replied. "By his looks and accent, I believe him. In fact, he seems generally trustworthy. He admitted he was a Scorpion even before I told him we had discovered

his mask. He told me his entire mission; he has been sent beyond the northern mountains to seek a man named Hojyn, apparently some ally of Bayushi Yojiro."

"Hojyn?" Huang asked. "That is an Ashalan name. How does Yojiro know an Ashalan?"

"He is Yojiro," Shono said, as if that explained it.

Huang nodded slowly.

"At any rate, Shixiang seems too honest by far, and too incurious. He did not ask what we were doing so far north. He did not even ask me about my eye... and everyone asks me about my eye. Then again, perhaps that is why he is here. Perhaps Shixiang's clan sent him on this mission to rid themselves of him..." Shono turned this thought over in his mind. "Or perhaps that is simply what they wish us to think," he added.

Huang stared blankly for several moments. "I hate Scorpion," he said finally.

"Of course you hate them," Shono said. "The Bayushi are liars, deceivers. Treachery is in their blood. Not one of them is to be trusted. Much like that other untrustworthy family I cannot recall the name of presently... oh yes... the Shinjo."

Huang looked at his lord with some surprise.

"We have been judged our entire lives for my father's crimes," Shono said, his expression grim. "Are you prepared to judge this Scorpion in return? The only crime I have seen him commit is foolish bravery in the face of overwhelming odds."

"So you think we can trust him?" Huang asked.

"I find it difficult to believe that every member of the Scorpion Clan would live up to their stereotype as deceivers," Shono replied. "I may as well believe that every Unicorn is a dim-witted barbarian." He paused for several moments, then grinned. "Perhaps that is a bad example."

Huang chuckled. "So what will we do with him, Shono-sama? He has seen our caravan. Even if Shixiang is trustworthy, we cannot expect him not to report what he has seen to his superiors. If the Scorpion discover that we are trading with the Senpet... it would be unfavorable for our clan."

Shono laughed out loud. "Huang, you are truly a master of understatement. Wearing last year's kimono to Winter Court is 'unfavorable.' Trading with gaijin in violation of Imperial Edict is treason. However, I disagree. The discovery would not be unfavorable for the Unicorn."

"It would not?" Huang asked, confused.

"Of course not," Shono said. "It would simply be unfavorable for you and me. Chagatai would execute us personally, and cleanse his hands of the matter."

Huang frowned.

Shono sighed deeply. "Huang, why do you think we were chosen for this mission? If we are discovered, Lord Chagatai will let the entire blame fall upon our shoulders. We will be executed, and join my father's soul in Toshigoku. No one would spare a second thought for two more fallen Shinjo."

"Chagatai thinks we are disposable?" Huang hissed, eyes narrowing in anger.

"I commend him for his skills of observation," Shono replied, selecting an apple from a half-opened crate and chewing thoughtfully. "A lesser daimyo might not realize what a resource he has in a family of samurai both skilled and expendable. I am proud to serve a man who is not afraid to take advantage of the tools he has at hand... though in truth I do wish I were not the tool in question."

Huang folded his arms against the mountain wind and scowled.

Shono laughed. "Huang, such is our family's fate," he said. "Some men are forced into undeserved greatness; so are others forced into



infamy. We must bear it with strength, or the Shinjo truly have been defeated."

"We deserve better," Huang said.

Shono rose one eyebrow and grinned. "Obviously. But if the gods gave us all that we desired, life would be a stale meal indeed. Hardship is the spice that makes life more interesting. So shut up and eat, that's what I say."

"I have had enough 'spice,' I think," Huang replied.

Shono shrugged. "Things could be worse," he said.

"How?" Huang asked. "As I see it, my lord, we are faced with two choices. On one hand, we help Shixiang complete his mission and the Scorpion learn that we are trading with gaijin. On the other, we finish what the Tsuno started, and murder a brave and honorable samurai."

"That was never a choice at all, Huang," Shono said, his green eye gleaming fiercely.

"Then what will we do, my lord?" Huang asked.

"Leave it to me," Shono said after a moment's consideration. "I think I have an idea..."

\* \* \*

Two Months Later...

Shixiang never felt fully at home within Kyuden Bayushi. The walls seemed too narrow, too cramped. The labyrinthine tunnels made him uncomfortable, as if he were slowly drowning in shadow. Shixiang stood at one of the few windows and looked out at the mountains surrounding the great castle. His Unicorn heart called out to explore those mountains, but the Bayushi blood that pumped through it reminded him that his place was here. Heart and blood warred with one another. He knew that he could not tell his lord of what he had seen in the northern mountains; such an act would seal the fate of the Unicorn who had saved his lives. Nor could he show disloyalty by concealing the matter from Lord Yojiro...

"Shixiang," whispered the voice of an invisible servant. "The Master of Secrets will see you know."

Shixiang did not bother to search for the source of the voice. He knew better. He turned from the window and stepped forward, sliding the shoji screen aside and stepping into Bayushi Yojiro's chamber. The Lord of the Scorpion awaited him, seated on a small stool as he regarded an unfurled scroll. A single candle burned on a small table beside the Master of Secrets; all else was shadow. Yojiro was dressed in full armor, complete with his terrifying demon mask. Most Scorpion preferred the comfort of a silken kimono, regarding armor strictly as attire for the battlefield. Yojiro, on the other hand, wore his armor frequently. Some thought he did it to appear intimidating. Shixiang suspected that his daimyo merely intended to remind those that followed him of their true role — warriors.

The truth, as usual in matters regarding Bayushi Yojiro, was anyone's guess.

Shixiang bowed deeply and awaited his lord's acknowledgment.

"Greetings, Shixiang-san," Yojiro said, gesturing at the mat in front of him. "Sit. Tell me of your journey."

"Hojyn-san sends his regards," Shixiang said, kneeling. He drew a bright crystal scroll case from his robes and offered it with both hands. "He sent this message, my lord."

"My thanks," Yojiro said, nodding at the small table. Shixiang placed the case there. "Did you encounter any trouble along the way?"

Shixiang paused for several moments, head bowed. "There were Tsuno, my lord. A pack of them attacked me on Exile's Road."

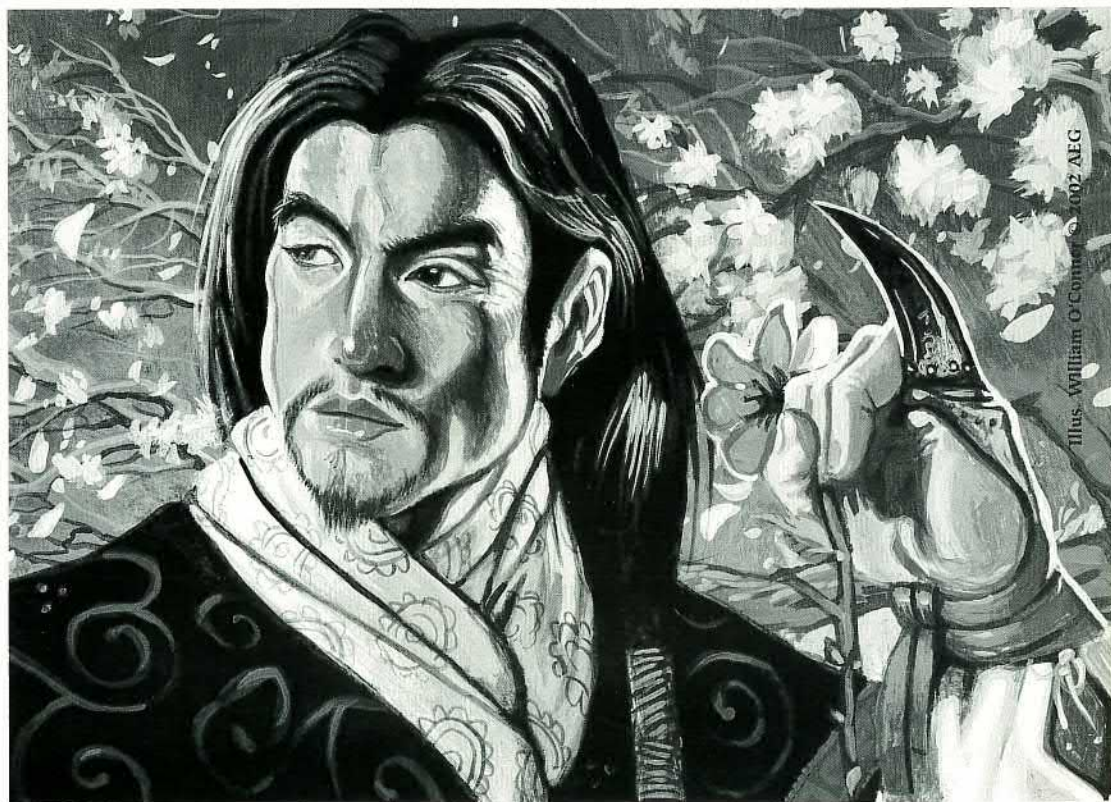
"A full pack?" Yojiro asked. "A miracle you survived."

"No miracle," Shixiang replied. He paused again.

"Is there something you wish to tell me?" Yojiro asked, turning his full attention to the young Scorpion.

Huang folded his hands in his lap. "Yes, my lord," he said, his voice sorrowful. "I did not fight the Tsuno alone."

"Shixiang-san downplays his own accomplishments," said a voice from behind Yojiro. "The first Tsuno was dead even before we arrived. The others feared to approach Shixiang, lest they share their brother's fate. We simply helped clear away the rest of the rabble."





Shixiang glanced up in surprise. Shinjo Shono stepped out of the shadows.

"Shono-sama?" Shixiang said, surprised.

"Thank you, Shixiang," Yojiro said, his tone unreadable. "I will hear the rest of your report in the morning. For the time being, there is much that I must discuss with Lord Shono. You are excused."

"Hai," Shixiang said, rising and bowing deeply to the two daimyo. He turned and exited the chamber as quickly as possible, feeling very confused but also very much relieved.

\* \* \*

"It is a pity," Yojiro said as the shoji screen slid closed. "I wonder if he would have told me the truth, given the choice. It is rare I have such a fine opportunity to test the character of my retainers."

"No need for a test there," Shono said, green eye shining in the candlelight. "Shixiang showed great courage in the mountains, and he completed your mission."

"Ah, his mission..." Yojiro nodded. The Scorpion rested one hand upon the crystal scroll case. "My old friend Hojyn. It has been too long since I heard from him. An extraordinary creature. Did you chance to meet him, Shono? Did he appreciate his gift?"

Shono tilted his head slightly. "We both know it was no coincidence Shixiang found us, even though Shixiang himself knew no better."

"You think I dispatched him to investigate your caravan?" Yojiro asked mildly.

"Whether he knew the truth or not, yes," Shono said. "And you knew we would treat him with respect, the blood of the White Guard."

"I must be a clever man indeed, to planned all that," Yojiro mused.

"You certainly didn't send him out there to deliver an empty chest," Shono replied.

"Disappointed?" Yojiro asked. "Did you look inside hoping to find something you could use against me in return?"

"Of course," Shono said.

"I am sorry I could not be more compliant."

"Not at all, Yojiro-sama," Shono replied. "You've been most reasonable."

"Do not tell my enemies," Yojiro said. "I would not wish to soil my reputation as a treacherous blackguard."

Shono bowed in acknowledgment. "If there is nothing else, Yojiro-sama, I must return to my estates and make arrangements for the first shipment."

"Of course," Yojiro said. "I have only one more question."

Shono nodded.

"Does Lord Chagatai know that you are here?" Yojiro asked.

Shono looked at Yojiro. "What do you think?"

Yojiro rolled up the scroll he had been studying, turning his piercing gaze toward Shinjo Shono. "I think that it is unfortunate your house fell, Shinjo Shono," Yojiro said. "You would have made a most intriguing adversary."

"Will there be anything else?" Shono asked.

"I am tempted to ask you about your eye," Yojiro said, "but there have been enough secrets tossed about today. You may go."

Shono bowed to Yojiro a final time, and exited.

In the darkness of Kyuden Bayushi, the Master of Secrets smiled.

\* \* \*

## Glossary of Characters and Terms

**Bayushi Shixiang** — A Scorpion samurai with Unicorn ancestry.

**Bayushi Yojiro** — The Master of Secrets, lord of the Scorpion Clan.

**Moto Chagatai** — Grandson of the famous raider Moto Gaheris, lord of the Unicorn Clan.

**Rojin's Wanderers** — A brotherhood of scouts and explorers, part of the Unicorn Clan.

**Senpet** — A nation deep in the Burning Sands, beyond the borders of Rokugan. Interaction with gaijin is outlawed by Imperial Edict.

**Shinjo Huang** — A loyal retainer of Shinjo Shono.

**Shinjo Shono** — Daimyo of the Shinjo family, the eldest son of the dishonored former Champion of the Unicorn Clan, Yokatsu. Though Shono played no part in his father's crimes, he carries the weight of his family's dishonor. He gave his left eye to the shugenja Moto Vordu in return for a magical eye that Vordu claimed would grant him the wisdom to cleanse his family's name.

**Shiotome** — The formal name of the Utaku Battle Maidens.

**Tsuno** — A race of horrifying creatures that recently emerged from the Shadowlands.



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# HOW TO PLAY SPEED MILITARY

**T**he basis for constructing an attack deck is fairly simple: design is straightforward and allows for a lot of flexibility. With a few cards to overcome weaknesses you can make your deck run smooth and deadly.

First we can look over the Dynasty side of attack decks — more pointedly the personalities. When choosing your personalities, look for low gold cost, high Force or force gaining abilities, and personalities with strong abilities. Some traits to watch out for include: Honor Requirements that are higher than your Stronghold's starting Family Honor and gold costs that generally exceed what you can buy with your Stronghold and your average gold producing holding. By keeping your Gold costs and Honor Requirements low, you can keep your deck speed high and not run into problems early. Not every Clan has personalities that match these guidelines but some out of faction personalities can help fill in the gaps. Figures like Hida Wakau, Yoe'rr, and Voitagi are good choices. When looking at more expensive personalities, experienced personalities with useful non-experienced versions are great for the free overlay. Most decks tend to have around 17 to 20 personalities — it is important to regularly bring personalities out to build up force.

Holdings will take up at least 15 cards in your dynasty. You should stick with holdings that will make a good amount of gold and can also, in combination with your stronghold, bring your entire deck into play. If your Stronghold produces 4 gold and your holdings produce 3 gold, use personalities that cost no more than 7 gold. Make sure your holdings are reliable early and do not rely on combinations that may not come up in a pinch. Use corrupt holdings for Clans with low honor requirements.

The best regions to put into almost all attack decks are Farmlands. The constant force, protection from Refugees, ranged attacks, and the ability to use cards like Stand Against the Waves makes this region the best out there.

With Events you want to make sure to only use those that help you, or hurt your opponent. Events like Carpenter Wall Falls and A Plague Spreads are good examples. Welcome Home can help corrupt decks stay high in honor. Imperial Gifts keeps honor high and has the ability to retrieve your Clan's powerful Weapon. Also, you keep Honor Decks from gaining the honor from these events. Events that can slow the gain of Honor such as In Time of War and Proposal of Peace can be effective.

When designing the Fate deck you should provide extra force to smash provinces as well as ways to prevent defensive decks from stopping you, and other means to keep your game going. Followers provide permanent Force to take provinces, or ranged attacks to kill defenders as well as protection from defensive actions and ranged attacks. Choosing followers that have gold costs close to your Stronghold's gold production (and with honor requirements that match most of your personalities personal honor) recommended. Expensive large followers can be a boon of force in any game but should use sparingly. On average, you should be using followers with a cost of around 3 or less to help keep your deck speeding along. By attacking with followers and having the force needed before a battle starts it is easier to use actions that can stop a defensive deck from playing cards such as: Deadly Ground, Stand Against the Waves, and Snowy Fields. You can also simply kill the defenders before they get a chance to play their Actions by using cards with ranged attacks.

Cards like Arrows from the Woods can help also. Sneak Attack can be even more powerful if you can kill them before they have a chance to stop you. With Superior Tactics you can move to different provinces for an easy kill, or gain the first action.

If you face a defender, A Test of Courage will keep your personalities in the battle. Force bonus actions like Charge!, Strength of Purity and Frenzy are free ways to keep your force high, though not as reliable.

Most defensive honor decks run duels, which are trouble for attack decks, since your opponent kills your personality and gains honor for it. A couple cards like Another Time, or Kharmic Strike can address this problem. Other reactions that will always help include Rallying Cry and Counter Attack, both have high focus value and will help beat other attack decks as well as preventing defensive decks from destroying your bowed units after a battle.

Free action cards like Ambush can help deal with annoying personalities, defensive personalities or help kill another attack deck.

When playing a fast attack deck, remember that you need to attack. Keep the personalities cheap and potent. Your holdings should be fast and affordable. Your fate deck should support winning through attack all the way. And remember, if you lose, Blame me!

by 'Akodo'  
Daniel Moenster



# L5R NOVELS

*The Winds of Change  
sweep across the Empire...*

*The Clan War is over,  
but the struggle for the  
throne goes on.*

**T**oturi has united the Clans and brought peace to Rokugan, but the Taint infects the land, threatening to corrupt all that he has fought to build. There is only one way to cleanse the realm, but his final sacrifice may destroy everything he holds dear.

In March 2002, *The Steel Throne*, by Edward Bolme, will bridge the gap between the Clan War series and set the stage for the Four Winds Saga. It tells the story of Emperor Toturi I and his conflict with Hantei XVI, who has returned from the dead, determined to reclaim the Empire... by any means necessary.

The Four Winds Saga tells the story of Toturi's four children and the roles they play in preserving their father's Empire.

**August 2002** — *Wind of Honor*, by Ree Soesbee. Tsudao, "Lady of the Sword" and eldest legitimate child of Toturi seeks to arbitrate a conflict between bickering clans, but she soon realizes that the root of the hostility reaches farther than even she could have imagined.

**December 2002** — *Wind of War*, by Jess Lebow. Akodo Kaneka, eldest son of Toturi, struggles with the legacy of his illegitimacy and fights for survival against an enemy who has forsaken all the bounds of honor.

**June 2003** — *Wind of Justice*, by Rich Wulf. Sezar, "the Anvil," son of Toturi and one of the most powerful shugenja in all of Rokugan has often shunned the intrigues of the Imperial Court, but he soon finds that, despite his own ambitions, a higher destiny may be thrust upon him.

**December 2003** — *Wind of Truth*, by Ree Soesbee. Naseru, called "the Wolf," was trained by the Scorpion and adopted into the House of Hantei, Toturi's enemy. Will he or one of his siblings gain the Steel Throne? All will be decided in this conclusion to the Four Winds Saga.





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# SEASON OF THE MANTIS

**O**ur 5th installment of the Great Clan promotion, Season of the Mantis brings back one of the most popular clans in Legend of the Five Rings history. After generations of abuse and indifference, Rokugan must recognize the Mantis as a Great Clan, and don't think the Mantis are going to let anyone forget it!

Season of the Mantis offers a brand new storyline tournament, with even more storyline control to participating players. In fact, all players get to affect the L5R storyline regardless of who wins the tournament.

This special package includes new promotional and participation cards for running leagues, tournaments, or in-store promotional events. These include a Foil version of the Celestial weapon of the Mantis found in the Mantis starter deck.

## Season of the Mantis offers a brand new story line tournament with more storyline control.

We're also including a promotional Mantis personality and another promo card never before released. That's three different cards that you can't get anywhere else.

You'll also find gripping new fiction written by Rich Wulf with an open ending determined by the desires of your participating tournament players.

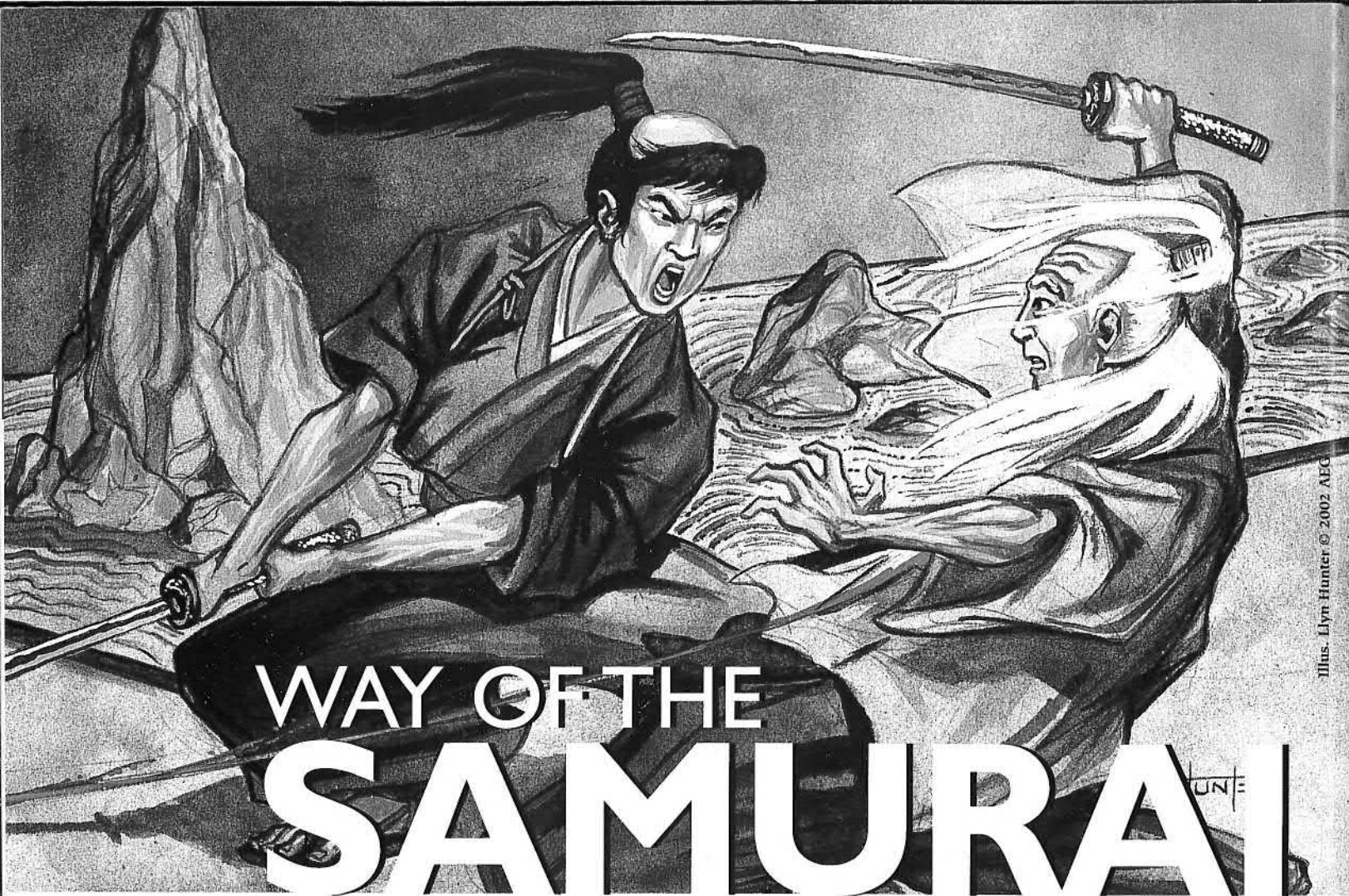
Just as with our previous "Season of" programs, we're including Mantis clan card boxes and posters. So if your local store hasn't pre-ordered one of these kits, let them know it's going to be out soon.

This is the loudest bang you can make to usher in a new era of Legend of the Five Rings gaming. It's an event you don't want to miss.



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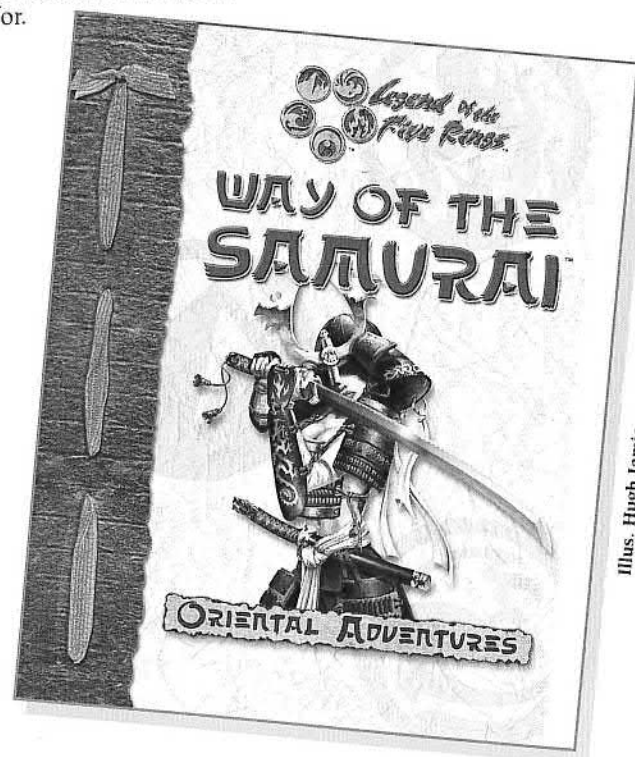
# WAY OF THE SAMURAI

**W**ith much anticipation, the Way of the Samurai is coming to a store near you. This is the first in a series of hybrid mechanic books that support both the L5R RPG 2nd Edition rules and the d20 Rokugan game systems.

This bold step is intended to satisfy players of both systems, doing away with cumbersome conversion rules. Players from both systems will get world and game information at the same time.

The Way of the Samurai introduces brand new kata/feats and techniques/prestige classes, including extensive "power-ups" and "finishing moves." Dozens of unique dojo are described in detail in addition to the sensei who run them. To top it off, there are tons of new toys for your samurai to play with.

A preview segment has been leaked for you to check out on the next couple of pages. This is the book your samurai have been waiting for.



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## NEW MECHANICS

The Legend of the Five Rings game setting has been officially presented in two separate game systems, the Legend of the Five Rings RPG 2nd Edition System (presented in the Player's Guide and Game Master's Guide) and Wizards of the Coast's d20 System™ (presented in Rokugan, the official supplement to Oriental Adventures™).

Generally, when a new rule or mechanic is presented, whenever applicable we will present equivalent d20 System™ and LSR RPG 2E System versions in close proximity.

Rules and options for the d20 System™ look like this.

Rules and options for the LSR RPG 2E System look like this.

## KATA

Kata are special practice maneuvers learned by all bushi. They are typically used as training exercises or a focus for meditation, though some have practical applications in combat as well. Though many of these kata limit one's ability to react spontaneously, they can be very useful in the proper situation.

Like Techniques, major bushi schools all claim their own unique kata. Many contests of a samurai's skill involve performing one or more kata for show.

Learning a new kata requires as much time and energy as learning a new Technique or feat; the GM is encouraged to use his own judgment in determining how long it will take a character to master a new kata.

All kata have a preparation time. If this preparation time is interrupted for longer than a minute, the preparation is ruined and must begin again. Kata have a limited duration, but a kata can be extended for another full duration by spending three Void Points. Kata that end instantly after an attack roll or other stimulus may not be extended this way. A kata's preparation time and duration are the same in both systems.

As kata require very precise, choreographed movements, a character may only be affected by one kata at any given time, unless noted otherwise in the description of a particular kata. There is no limit to the number of kata a character may know.

If a character wishes to cancel a kata currently affecting him, he may do so with a moment's thought, but cannot regain the kata's benefits without undergoing the preparation ritual once more. A character who is rendered unconscious loses all effects of any kata he was using at the time.

In the d20 System™ kata are a unique new ability exclusive to Rokugan. Though they may require certain feats or class abilities before they can be learned, they are not feats nor class abilities, and can be learned by any character who meets the requirements. Learning a new kata requires a significant expenditure of spiritual energy; all kata have a cost (in experience) that must be paid when the kata is learned.

In the LSR RPG 2E System all kata have a Rank requirement. Kata with a School Rank requirement require a level of familiarity with a particular fighting style before they can be learned. Kata with an Insight Rank requirement require no particular fighting discipline, only a certain

level of competence to learn the maneuver. These kata can be learned by any character with the appropriate amount of experience.

Kata have a cost (in Experience or Character Points) to learn.

(The rules for kata in this book supersede those presented in Time of the Void.)

## THE THOUSAND YEARS OF STEEL

Decades ago, the samurai Kakita Kaiten and Mirumoto Uso met for a duel of respect — the bloodless challenge between masters of the Mirumoto and Kakita schools that occurs almost every generation. Having seen two major wars during their lifetimes, Uso and Kaiten understood the value of peace between the Clans. The two swordsmen conspired to settle the differences between their families, designing kata that united the two traditions instead of setting one against the other. Through intense practice, innovation, and patience, these masters of the blade devised five kata that share the vision of both Mirumoto Hojatsen and Kakita.

Kaiten and Uso encouraged the spread of these kata throughout the Empire, especially in the lands of their own clans. Following their example, the Kakita and the Mirumoto have come to a new appreciation of each others' styles, and come a step closer to uniting the genius of the two greatest swordsmen to ever live.

These kata, collectively known as the Thousand Years of Steel, are practiced by all major bushi dojo of the Great Clans.

### THE EMPIRE RESTS ON ITS EDGE

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Duration: 120 minutes

Special: Must be used with a katana or daisho.

The first common truth that Uso and Kaiten discovered about their ancestors' styles is that both men applied the art of the sword to every aspect of life. Each endeavor requires devotion, training, purpose, and a goal. Those who learn this kata realize that everything must be treated as if it rests upon the edge of a sword.

Requirements: Void Use

XP Cost: 450

Effect: When you learn this kata, choose a single Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom-based skill you know. While using this kata and rolling to attack, you gain a circumstance bonus equal to one-fourth of that skill's modifier. For the duration of this kata when the chosen skill is used, its modifier is halved (round up).

Rank: Insight Rank 1

Cost: 2

Effect: When you learn this kata, choose a single High Skill. While the kata is active, you keep a number of dice equal to half of that High Skill (rounded down) when making Kenjutsu rolls. The character's rank in that High Skill is considered to be half (rounded up) of its normal value if he uses it while this kata is active.

### STANDING ON THE HEAVENS

Preparation Time: 35 minutes

Duration: 180 minutes

Special: Must be used with a katana or daisho.



The ultimate lessons of Kakita and Mirumoto teach that the blade is a living thing, guided by the soul of a samurai. Like anything that is alive, it is bound by the will of the Heavens in action — though a truly skilled samurai can stand above the Celestial Pattern to get a better understanding of destiny. It is this view of the world and its patterns as a whole that leads to ultimate mastery not only of the sword, but of one's own destiny. This kata primes the samurai's soul to be an indomitable force that is assured of the outcome of a fight — his victory.

**Requirements:** Depths of the Void, Knowledge (Shintao): 10 Ranks, Void Use

**XP Cost:** 3000

**Effect:** Whenever you would be struck in combat, you may spend a Void Point to force the attack roll to be rerolled. If you ever have zero Void Points while this kata is active, you suffer a -4 circumstance penalty to AC for the rest of the day, and cannot inflict critical hits.

**Rank:** Insight Rank 5

**Cost:** 7

**Effect:** Whenever you would be struck in combat, you may spend a Void Point to force the attack roll to be rerolled. If you ever have zero Void Points while this kata is active, your TN to Be Hit is reduced by 10, and you may not reroll dice that roll a 10 for the rest of the day.

## THE VICTORY OF THE RIVER

**Preparation Time:** 30 Minutes

**Duration:** 180 minutes

**Special:** Must be used with a katana or daisho.

Central to the master's control of swordplay is the relaxation of mind and body. This kata helps the samurai to adapt to the changing tides of warfare and the art of combat. Once the kata is complete, the samurai's strikes flow beautifully and cleanly; ten strikes blend together in one flowing arc of steel. The strikes this kata favors flow together, causing one effective attack to create another, and then another. These bold attacks even sacrifice defense for fluidity.

**Requirements:** Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack

**XP Cost:** 2250

**Effect:** For each successful attack you make on an opponent, all additional melee attacks you make against that opponent in the same round receive a cumulative +5 insight bonus. You may not declare total defense while this kata is active, and you are denied any Dexterity bonus to your Armor Class (making you vulnerable to sneak attacks).

**Rank:** Insight Rank 4

**Cost:** 6

**Effect:** When you successfully attack an opponent, his TN to Be Hit is reduced by 15 for the remainder of your attacks during that same round. You may not declare Full Defense while using this kata, and your TN to Be Hit drops by 10.

## VICTORY OF THE WIND

**Preparation Time:** 20 minutes

**Duration:** 120 minutes

**Special:** Must be used with a katana or daisho.

In both the art of iaijutsu and in a skirmish, the master of the sword understands that it is not he who strikes first who is

victorious, but he who strikes first with perfect form. This kata enforces the idea that a hindered man strikes slowly and poorly, and the man who can attack with precision and speed is to be feared. By focusing on disabling the opponent instead of overpowering him, this kata's quick, shallow strikes take advantage of opponents who attack with sheer force.

**Requirements:** Expertise, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw

**XP Cost:** 500

**Effect:** Each time you deal 10 or more points of damage with a single melee attack against an opponent, you gain a +1 insight bonus to attack that opponent for the remainder of this kata's duration. These bonuses are cumulative, but may not exceed half your class level (rounded up). You suffer a -2 penalty to your damage rolls.

**Rank:** Insight Rank 2

**Cost:** 3

**Effect:** For the duration of this kata, you gain a Free Raise to every attack made against an opponent for each Wound Rank your opponent has dropped below +0. You may not gain more Free Raises per attack from this kata than your Insight Rank. You roll one fewer die on all damage rolls.

## THE WORLD IS EMPTY

**Preparation Time:** 25 minutes

**Duration:** Special (Maximum 60 minutes)

**Special:** Must be used with a katana or daisho.

Both Mirumoto Hojatsu and Kakita were mortal men, but ones who walked alongside the Kami in the armies that defeated the Dark Brother Fu Leng. Even though they were not as powerful as the Kami, they found that seven mortals could reach within to find a point of perfection: the Void. Both men sought to hone this ability through training with the sword. This kata, a natural outgrowth of their styles, draws out and expends this inner power in a swift display of awesome skill. The focus of this kata is more intense than most, and it cannot be maintained for very long.

**Requirements:** Depths of the Void, Void Use

**XP Cost:** 1500

**Effect:** When this kata is completed, you may choose to activate it as a free action at the beginning of any round in the next sixty minutes. When you activate it, you gain a Void bonus to all of your attack and damage rolls during that round equal to the number of Void Points you have remaining. All of your remaining Void Points are spent by this action, and you are considered fatigued. You cannot recover Void or recover from this fatigue until you rest for at least one hour.

**Rank:** Insight Rank 3

**Cost:** 5

**Effect:** When this kata is completed, you have sixty minutes to choose to activate its power. When you activate it, you gain an extra number of dice for attack and damage rolls on your next single attack equal to the number of Void Points you have remaining. After using this kata, its effects end. You cannot recover Void Points, and you roll two fewer dice on all attack and damage rolls. An hour of rest restores you to normal and allows future recovery of Void Points.



# NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE



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Excerpted from *Way of the Samurai*, this is designed to keep you up to date on events that have happened in the Empire since the release of *Rokugan*, especially those centering on the recent expansion, *An Oni's Fury*, and appearing in weekly stories on the Alderac Entertainment Group website. (These stories can be accessed at <http://15r.alderac.com/fiction/>)

At a final attempt to sow peace between her siblings, Toturi Tsudao arranged a meeting of the Winter Court at Kyuden Miya. It ended in tragedy due to the meddling of a Pekkile no Oni dispatched by Shahai.

Unbeknownst to the Winds, a second Pekkile was also sent, in the guise of a shisha named Miya Gensaiken. The herald has attached himself to Toturi Sezaru as an advisor, and has privately begun to plot the ruin of his new master.

Sezaru was later attacked in the Twilight Mountains by none other than Daigotsu himself, in the body of a powerful demon known as an Onisu. Sezaru's aide, Asako Ryoma, was slain during the battle. Only the quick action and brave spirit of Sezaru's yojimbo, Toturi Koshei, kept the Wolf from losing his life as well.

In a duel with the Elemental Masters, Tamori Shaitung surprised both Phoenix and Dragon by defeating all five Masters in a desperate, all-or-nothing attack. The six shugenja were swallowed by the earth, and then seen no more.

Beneath the crust of the earth, the Masters discovered none other than Shaitung's Tainted father, Agasha Tamori. Now serving Daigotsu as the Dark Oracle of Fire, it was Tamori who apparently caused the volcanic eruptions in Dragon lands and instigated the war between the two clans in order to distract the Phoenix-Lion alliance from their planned assault against the Shadowlands.

Master of Water Isawa Riake was killed in the battle to follow. Only Master of Air Isawa Nakamuro and Tamori Shaitung escaped intact by fleeing into the volcanic tunnels. The remaining masters were sealed in a stone prison deep within the earth and left for dead by the Dark Oracle.

Asahina Sekawa won the Test of the Jade Champion, winning the position as foremost shugenja magistrate of the Empire. During the test, an Onisu known only as Hakai staged a horrific attack upon Kyuden Nio, the site of the tournament. The castle was destroyed and many on the site were killed, including Asahina Tamako and Asahina Kimita, the uncle and sister of the new Jade Champion. Luckily, the intervention of Naka Tokei, Grand Master of the Five Elements, combined with the power of the new Jade Champion, was enough to drive Hakai from the scene.

The Shadowlands Horde staged a surprise attack upon the Kaiu Wall, with a large number of their forces appearing within the boundary of the Wall itself. It is unknown how these troops appeared, but their surprise attack in broad daylight overwhelmed six of the Wall's twelve major guard towers before help could arrive. Crab Champion Hida Kuroda was apparently slain during the attack, leaving the mantle of leadership on the uncertain shoulders of his twin brother, Kuon.

Hantei Naseru charged the Dragon magistrate Kitsuki Remata with investigating the mysterious lineage of Akodo Kaneka. In doing so, Remata discovered that Kaneka was in fact related to the central family line of the Yasuki family, and bore a closer relation than Yasuki

Hachi. When he learned of this, Akodo Kaneka led an army of Lion (with the support of the Scorpion) to seize the Yasuki lands himself "in the name of peace." The Crab were allowed to draw upon the land's resources so long as they did not contest Kaneka's presence. The Crane were ordered to leave the lands immediately.

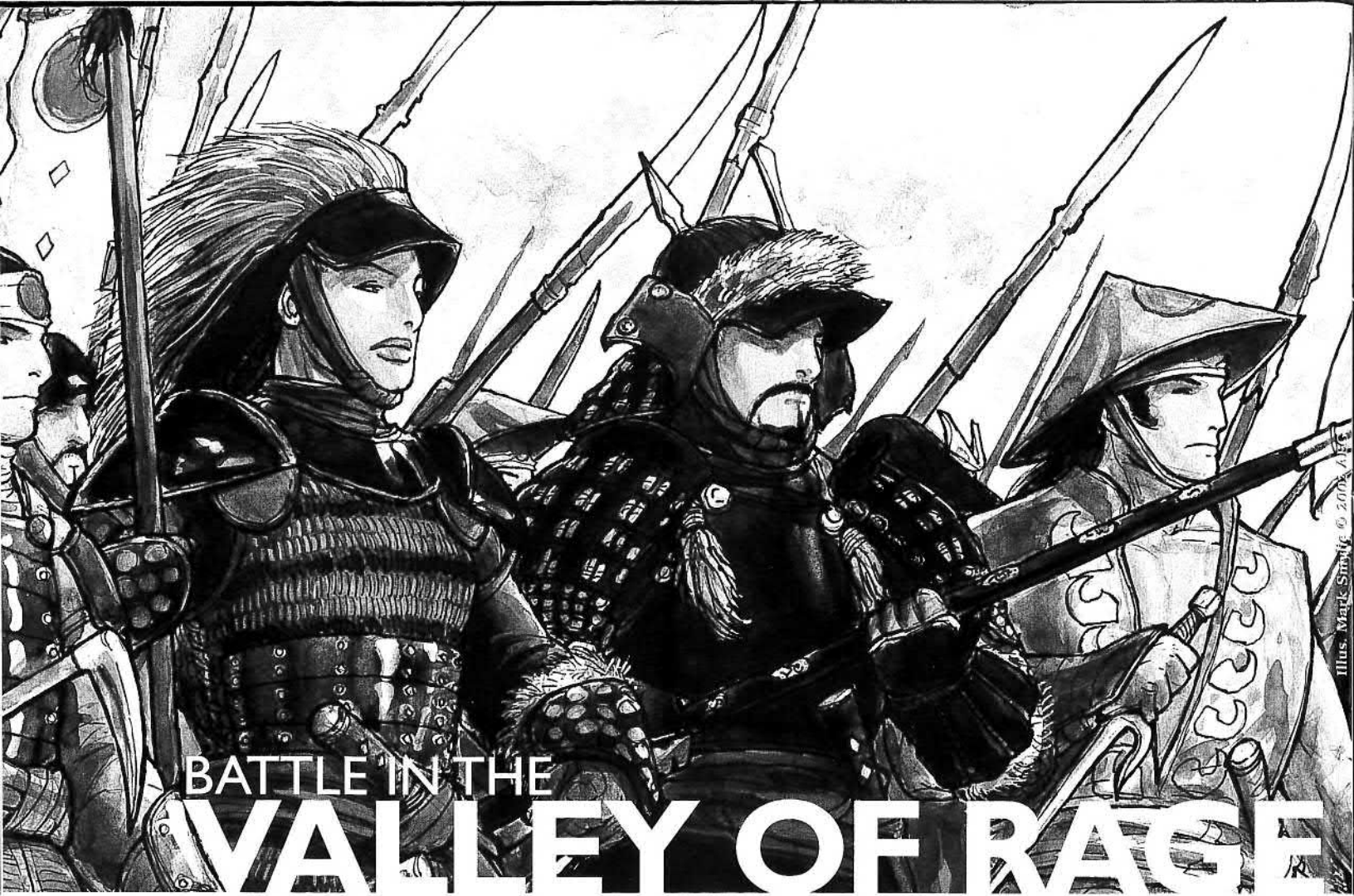
Yasuki Hachi and Kitsuki Remata both suspect there is more to this than it seems, and continue to investigate the matter.

Phoenix Champion Isawa Tsukune answered the call of Osano Wo, Fortune of Fire and Thunder, and ascended into the heavens as the new Fortune of Rebirth.

The Tsuno staged a savage attack upon the Kitsu Tombs, looting all of the sacred magical texts therein and kidnapping Matsu Domotai, brother of Lion Champion Matsu Nimuro. Nimuro immediately demanded retaliation against the Shadowlands, recalling the majority of Lion units committed to assist the Phoenix against the Dragon.

Without a Champion or the Elemental Council to guide them, and lacking strong aid from the Lion Clan, the Phoenix began to lose ground in their war against the Dragon. Desperate for any edge against his foes, Shiba Aikune, son of Shiba Tsukune, found and unleashed the power of Isawa's Last Wish, a lost artifact created by the Phoenix Thunder. Though the power of this relic is unimaginable, Aikune seems fully capable of controlling it.





# BATTLE IN THE VALLEY OF RAGE

## Three Months after the Test of the Jade Champion...

**S**hadows stretched like dark fingers across the blackened earth as Amaterasu descended beyond the broken canyon walls. Rubble-strewn and desolate, the narrow Valley of Rage spread before Chui Koshi's forces. The volcano to the north of the valley hadn't erupted for many hundreds of years, but the Valley of Rage, scorched and blasted, remained a testament to the awesome power of the sleeping giant.

Koshi's men murmured unhappy thoughts to one another as the lifelessness of the valley slowly penetrated their senses. A sharp rebuke from the Chui restored silence to the ranks of disciplined fighting men. Koshi didn't like the setting for this battle any more than his men, but after weeks of pursuing an elusive enemy force, that enemy had finally chosen to stand its ground... here.

With night drawing near, the Chui set his forces about the task of setting up a simple camp among the pocks and spires of the strange valley, preparing for a dawn battle. A small shrine was erected and the men made their invocations.

When the men had mostly retired and the sentries at their posts, Koshi quietly approached the shrine and said his own prayer.

## Scenario Rules

This scenario is designed for two players and can be played one of two ways:

- 1) Players field forces that are equivalent in koku value for the scenario.
- 2) One player suffers a 25% reduction in starting force (using only 75% of the koku value available to his opponent) but his forces have an in-depth knowledge of the terrain and are therefore able to ignore the Movement Restriction rules below.

## Special Terrain Rules

### Movement Restriction

The terrain in the Valley of Rage is very unstable. The surface is centuries old hardened lava — once a bubbling mass of molten rock. Small bubbles in the surface often crumble under the weight of a soldier, exposing razor sharp edges to the feet and leg. Not only does this serve to slow movement, but soldiers who move at a pace exceeding a careful walk can be injured by the dagger-sharp lava.

The terrain has the following effects on movement:

- A) Maneuver Penalty: All units suffer a -2 penalty to maneuver tests.
- B) Terrain Attack: Any unit that moves faster than its normal movement (4" unless otherwise indicated on the force profile) during any appropriate phase is

by Ken Carpenter



subject to an attack by the terrain. The attack uses a number of attack dice equal to two times the number of additional inches moved during the phase. The printed TN for the unit is ignored for this attack — the TN for these attack dice depends on the armor worn by the moving unit: TN 5 for no armor, TN 6 for light armor, TN 7 for heavy armor. Effects which modify the TN of a unit or modify Attack rolls made against the unit, such as Strength of the Earth, function normally against attacks made by terrain. Damage dice are rolled normally.

- C) Reserve Restriction: ANY movement made during the reserve movement phase is considered in excess of normal movement for all units for purposes of the terrain attack (see B above) — meaning that any unit which performs movement during the reserve movement phase suffers a terrain attack using a number of attack dice equal to two times the movement made by the unit.
- D) Maneuver cost: For purposes of determining movement distance for the terrain attack (see B above), all maneuvers except free maneuvers are considered as 1" of movement. Example: a unit decides to move during the Reserve Movement phase, moving forward 1", then turning to the right (maneuver), moving forward another 1", then turning back to the left (maneuver). There are no free maneuvers during the Reserve Movement phase, so the unit, which only actually moved 2", is considered to have moved 4" for purposes of the Terrain Attack.
- E) Morale Test: Casualties inflicted via terrain attack are treated as if they were inflicted by enemy Ranged Attacks and may force a Morale test at the end of the movement phase. If a unit takes casualties both from a terrain attack and enemy Ranged Attacks in the same phase (via reactionary fire), the casualties are added together to determine whether a Morale test is triggered.

### Hills in the Valley of Rage

There are no gentle, rolling hills in the Valley of Rage. The hills in this scenario are solidified gouts of volcanic rock jutting up from the surface of the glassy valley. As such, all hills are considered impassable terrain. They also break line of sight as normal.

These jagged growths of rock are fairly common in the valley, so numerous small hills (4"-6" in diameter) should dot the battlefield (numerous hills are necessary for this scenario in order to prevent archer units from ruling the battle as infantry pick their way across the battlefield at a slow pace).

### Deployment and Setup

Because the terrain is so inhospitable to movement and maneuvers, it is necessary to reduce the size of the battlefield. For this scenario we recommend a table size of 5' x 3', with force placed on opposite sides of the long edges. With normally sized placement areas (8" from the edge and 12" from each side), each player has an area 36" x 8" for setup and forward units can be as close as 20" from each other at the start of the battle.



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Again, we recommend a number of hills to break LOS and force some maneuvering. If hills are not used, archers will be extremely deadly and units will advance in a straight line... more like European troops of the 17th and 18th centuries than samurai troops of a much earlier period.

### Objectives

Players should agree on a number of turns for this game. Five or six should allow the game to progress to the point where a winner can be determined via VP, but seven turns will allow a clear winner to emerge.

### Army Composition (Optional)

In order to recreate the modest circumstances of this battle, it is necessary to restrict the forces available to each player as follows:

- a) No player may spend more than 25% of their army's total koku on leader (personalities or Leadership Packages).
- b) No player may spend more than 25% of their army's total koku on troops that have a Ranged Attack.
- c) No player may include troops with a cost greater than 26 koku per model (including tattoos, etc.).

We recommend that forces be restricted to 1,200 or 1,500 koku per player for this battle, making it a hard fought conflict between two smaller forces and excluding the high rank personalities that were elsewhere dealing with other problems in the Empire.



# IT'S A TRAP!

**Any Card whose title is as fun to yell as "It's a Trap" warrants close inspection.**



**I**t's a Trap! cancels the first action taken by a Cavalry army during a battle. In most cases, that's also the best action, since players invariably play their best card first. What makes *It's a Trap!* more than an "I hate Unicorn" card is that it does the same thing against a Naval army.

A Naval army?

The Mantis Clan is back in *Dark Allies*, and they're bringing a new speciality with them. The Naval trait, which appeared in the past here and there as a "flavor" trait, is going to do something now.

Have you missed *Daikua*, Mantis players?

Here's what the Naval trait does: if you have only Naval cards in your army and your opponent doesn't, you can press the naval advantage — which lets you take the first Open or Battle action. The sequence of play doesn't revert back to the Defender, but goes clockwise from the Naval commander, which should make for some interesting dynamics in multi-player games when Naval armies are present.

Before you military players start drooling about the possibility a built-in *Sneak Attack*, there are several limitations. You can't play a Terrain until after your opponent takes a Battle or Open action (no sliding in a *Deadly Ground!*). Nobody can perform Reactions or put cards in play before that first Naval action.

This means there's not going to be any futzing about with timing issues, but more importantly if you're defending with a Naval army, nobody can take that first action away from you.

Unless, that is, one of your opponents (or a particularly treacherous ally!) happens to have *It's a Trap!* in hand. It'll probably happen routinely in a *Dark Allies* sealed deck environment, since everyone has a one in three chance of facing a Mantis. But Yoritomo fans can take heart in knowing that unless they're facing an opponent with a particular and peculiar hatred for Mantis or Unicorn, *It's a Trap!* is probably not going to appear in many constructed decks, because the Naval trait has a long way to go.

The challenge of making a good Naval attack deck lies not in the selection of Personalities. Not only are Yoritomo Kitao, Moshi Kalani, and Yoritomo Katoa joined by a good selection of other Gold-legal Naval Mantises in *Dark Allies*, the set also introduces cards that bequeath Personalities the Naval trait.

The challenge of making a Naval attack deck is that only two Followers — have the Naval trait not just Gold-legal Followers — in the entire game! *Mantis Bushi* quietly gained the Naval trait in Gold Edition, and their bowing ability is great to use as a Naval army's first action. *Mantis Raiders* joined in *An Oni's Fury*, and

despite their substantial limitation of preventing their unit from assigning on defence or offence for an entire round, their gold cost is low enough that you might have the opportunity to wait. But while these are good followers, they're the only ones available, and most military decks need followers. With such limited options for Followers, Naval decks are probably going to need lots of Weapons and force boosting actions to get forces equivalent to other attack decks.

On defense, Mantis players can take advantage of *Coastal Region* to give an extra +3F to those Naval Personalities. Combine that with an attacker's inability to do anything before a Naval army gets an action, and Mantis provinces may be tricky to bust.

For those of you who enjoy Open play, there are a few extra cards worth thinking about if you want to make an Open Naval deck: For My Clan (a *White Shore Plains* that doesn't cost gold!), Keda, Shipyard (costs 2G, makes 4G for Naval cards), the region Mantis Isles (-1F for most non-Naval attacking cards), and the only non-Mantis Naval Personality, *Ramesh*.

But for those building Naval decks and looking forward to using that first action in Battle, *It's a Trap* reminds the Mantis that water floats ships, but can also capsize them.

by Zen Faulkes



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Production Manager . . . . . Ray Lau

Assistant Production Manager . . . Mark Jelfo

Typesetter & Layout Designers . . Mark Jelfo,  
Justin Lawler

Editors & Proofreaders . Rob Vaux, D.J. Trindle

Operations Manager . . . . . Mary Valles

Contributing Writers . . . . . Jeff Alexander  
Jed Carleton, Shawn Carman,  
Ken Carpenter, Zen Faulkes, Scott  
Hadsall, Raymond Lau, 'Akodo'  
Daniel Moenster, Justin Norman,  
Rich Wulf

Cover Artist . . . . . Jonathan Hunt

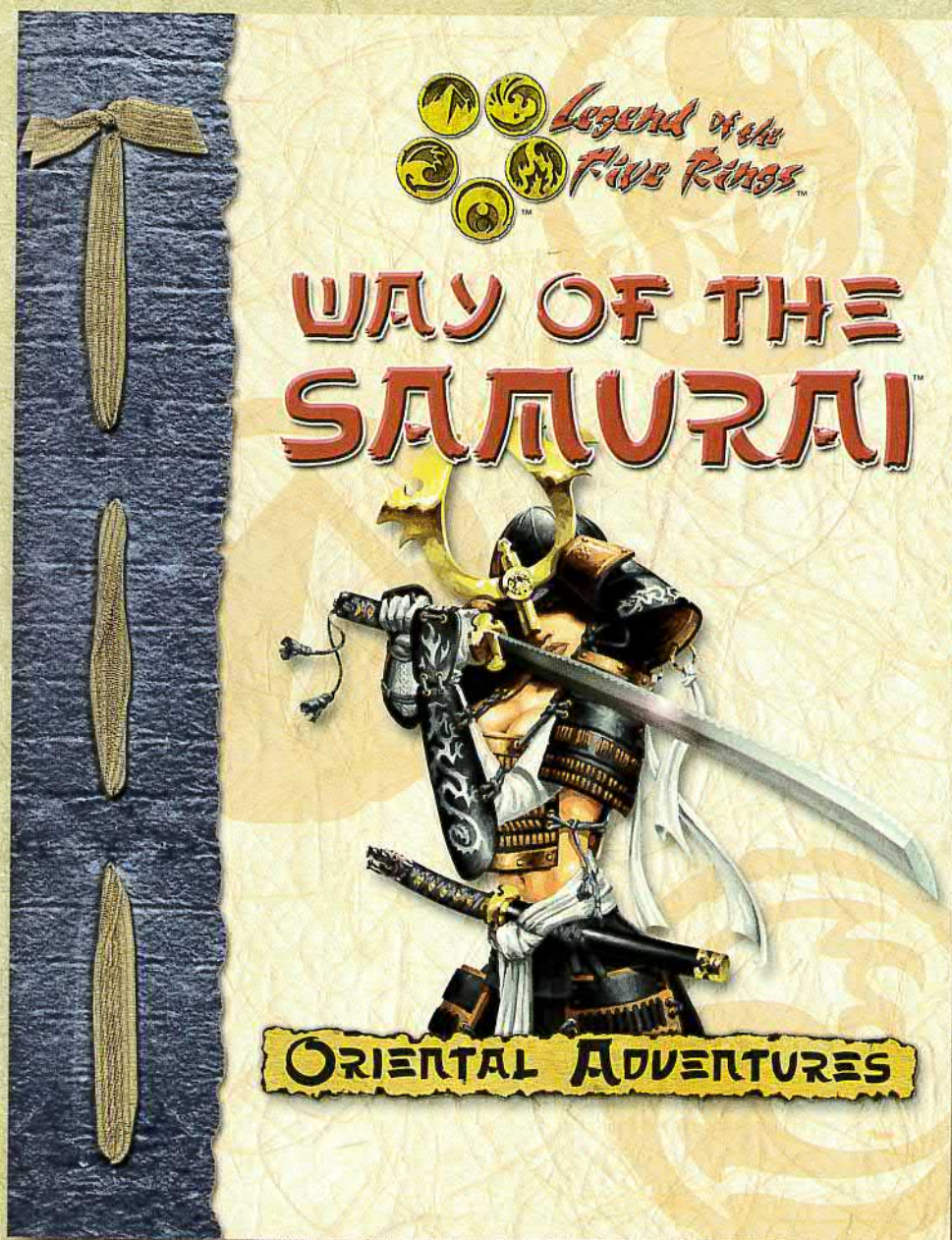
Additional Art . . . . . Christopher Appel,  
beet, Jason Engle, Llyn Hunter, Hugh  
Jamieson, April Lee, Craig Maher,  
William O' Conner, Jim Pavelec, Ben  
Peck, Scott Schomburg, Mark Smylie,  
Luis Vazquez

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