

Heroes of Rokugan™





Revealing the Ancient Wisdom

Once, it is said, there was a land known as the Jade Empire, which rested by the shores of a deep blue ocean. A powerful emperor ruled this land, known to those who lived there as "Rokugan," and kept it in peace for many years.

A samurai ambassador, Miya Mashigai, was sent from the Emperor's court to gather news. As he set out, however, he met with a terrible tragedy: his ship, battered by storms and thrown far out into the deep ocean, wrecked upon the shoals of a foreign land. There, peasants found the samurai and carried him to their barbarian lord.

"Tell me of your land," said the foreign lord as he knelt later beside the sickly ambassador's resting chamber. "Speak to me of the place from which you hail."

And so these ancient stories were written of the heroes and villains of that great Empire, brought across a storm-filled sea and into your hands. They are the tales of the long-ago Empire, the tales of those who made Rokugan a legend.

It is believed in Rokugan that wisdom can be taught even by those who know nothing. So, too, can great truths be shared, even when lands are as distant as the Empire of Rokugan from the small green island upon which the honorable Miya Mashigai's ship stumbled.

Somewhere, Miya Mashigai lifts his weary eyes from his scribe's final page. The scribe slowly rises and sets his feet toward his home, leaving Mashigai and the implements of his labors behind. Mashigai lifts the journal onto his lap and looks at the distant, blue-green mountains of the foreign shore. As the light flees from his eyes, the scribe's withered brush rolls gently in the ink of the stone and the wind turns the journal's pages one by one. Mashigai's body will forever rest there, on the shores of a distant land, but his spirit returns once more to the days of honor and glory in the Empire that he loved.

When the first page of the journal opens beneath his cold hand, the tales he recorded begin once more. Do you have the courage to read them, and become part of the tale?

"Once, there was a land of legends . . ."

The Steadfast Samurai

The Rokugani believe that, during childbirth, the mother is in close contact with the spirit world, and so it is the father's duty to distract evil spirits while she is giving birth. He wanders about the house, crying out, with a heavy mortar stuck under his kimono to give the illusion of pregnancy and labor pains.

The second of a pair of twins, Mirumoto Tokeru was initially named Omosa, which means "heavy." Takeru's twin was born with little difficulty, but Takeru, victim of spirits his father failed to distract, required much effort, nearly killing his mother. So, when he was finally born, his father gave him the name Omosa.

Upon his graduation, Omosa chose the name Tokeru and became his brother's most trusted lieutenant. Tokeru's brother, Ryudumu, was not much of a general or a commander. The soldiers admired and trusted Tokeru but ridiculed Ryudumu in secret. All through his life, Tokeru supported his brother, never once betraying him.

When Ryudumu married, he watched the way his lovely wife eyed his handsome younger brother and became instantly jealous. The jealousy soon turned violent and Ryudumu challenged his younger brother to a duel to the death. Tokeru could have easily killed his brother, but instead chose to lose the duel. His death is one of the most tragic, and heroic, in the Mirumoto family history, and he is remembered every year on the third day of the month of the Rat.



The Bright Warrior

One of the first great generals of the Naga race was known as the Qatol. His stories are told beneath the harsh glare of the Bright Eye, for he was known to be the soul most favored by its celestial gaze.



Qatol wished to unite his people, and he drove his armies across the jungles of that ancient land in order to conquer and subjugate the others. In a grove, the Five Bloodlines stood in the wilderness, prepared to bring their conflict to a bloody end. Then, the gaze of the Pale Eye fell upon a single Naga boy, his skin shining beneath the pale light of the heavens. He moved forward alone to

challenge the mighty Qatol for the future of their people. At first the Qatol laughed, thinking that the boy's challenge was a mockery. But then the Qatol looked again at the young Naga and saw the light of the Pale Eye shining through his dark eyes, even as the aura of the Bright glistened in his own. Without thought, Qatol extended his hand.

"Brother," he nodded, "you are wise. Together, and only beside one another, can we rule."

"No, Qatol," the boy said, "only together can we guide the people. Ours is not the place of rulers, not the purpose of war. For the Naga, there can be only peace." He reached out his child's hand to touch the Qatol's callused one, and when the Warrior of the Pale Eye met the Warrior of the Bright, all Naga across the land were gifted with a singular knowledge. Their voices spun and wavered, and visions beautiful beyond belief filled their minds. The Akasha, the singular mind of the Naga people, was at last revealed.





The Last Secret of the Tao

When the great teacher, Shinsei, left the Empire, he walked for many days to the south. On the road, he met several travelers, each begging for some great secret to preserve them from the time of war to come. Shinsei refused them all, saying only, "You already know the answers. I have no more to give."

At last, as he took the last steps of his journey, he saw an old woman sitting by the road, offering rice balls to passing travelers. He stopped to take one, and she smiled when she saw him. "Little Teacher," she said, "I have heard you have no more answers. So, instead, I ask this: do you have any final questions for me?"

Shinsei laughed and clapped his hands at her wisdom. "I have one question, Someisa," he said to the woman. "But if I tell you, you can never tell it to any other creature who would repeat the tale."

"Of course, Little Teacher," the wise Someisa said.

And so Shinsei whispered a few words into her ear, passing along his final riddle.

Someisa lived for three hundred years, but she could not stand to keep the secret. During the first hundred years, she told the trees in her garden, and they blossomed a thousandfold. She whispered her secret to the river, and it bubbled with joy, and the waters ran silver.

The Emperor came to her humble hut by the river to order her to tell him Shinsei's Riddle. She bowed to the Hantei, but before he could command her to speak, her body changed, and where she had stood rested instead a magnificent Tortoise, the wisest creature under the Heavens. The Emperor, understanding, bowed and returned to his palace of gold.

From that day forth, Tortoise has never spoken another word, but instead makes patterns on the sand, remembering the riddle that only Someisa knew.



Innocence and Trust

The tale of Yasuki Kaneko should serve to remind us that even the most innocent faces can hide treachery. Kaneko was a young girl, the smallest of her peers, but her mind was as agile as any in the Empire. While her brothers planned to become powerful in the court, Kaneko studied the ways of poison, of treason and guile. She was infinitely successful, and some say that she became a Master higher than any in the Empire and served with the enigmatic secret society known only as the Kolat.

The Kolat's goals are mysterious, but their handiwork is always brutal. They fade into the shadow, and they cannot be found until they wish to come forward. Kaneko was among their master spies, reporting on—and controlling—the imperial court for a number of years. Though her skills were great, she was eventually implicated in a minor scandal, and her enemies planned to do away with her. But before they could come to escort her to her execution, she had vanished. At the time, she was only 17.

Tales of Kaneko continued to surface throughout the Empire. Some called her the Black Knife. They claimed she worked as an assassin, spy, and consummate actress for her mysterious Kolat lords. In time, however, the stories ceased, and no further word of Kaneko has ever surfaced in the Empire.

Still, there are distant travelers who claim that she traveled to a land of burning sand and flame, and became the wife of a mighty daimyo. If these tales are true, then Kaneko could still be alive, plotting vengeance on those who forced her to vanish beneath the surface of the Empire so long ago.



Steel and Words



Gusai was the first great daimyo of the Mantis Clan, the clan of sailors and merchants who live off the coast of our great Empire. Gusai was a powerful daimyo and a great lord, and he was called into the court of the Emperor to build trade through the Empire, for the Mantis were rich in those days.

But Gusai sat in the court and said not a word, while all the courtiers of the Empire chattered and negotiated. Days passed, and still Gusai would speak to no one but the Emperor.



"Speech and action," he said to the Hantei, "are the basis of governing. They can move heaven and earth, but they are not as strong as steel."

The Emperor said to Gusai, "Show me that steel is stronger, and I will make you a lord of my court."

With a warrior's motion, Gusai drew a blade hidden in his robes and leveled it at the Hantei's throat. "There is nothing that can take your life as easily as steel. If you do not know fear, then you do not respect steel."

The Emperor smiled, and Gusai removed the blade. "Very good, Gusai-san," he said, and called forth his guard. "You have proven your point. Steel is strong enough to make you a lord." With a wave of the Emperor's hand, Gusai was made the first daimyo of the Mantis, from sea to sea. "Your children shall bear your name, and your clan shall be welcome in my court.

"But, Lord Gusai, before you go," the Hantei smiled, "let me show you how much stronger words can be." With a pen stroke, he signed Gusai's execution warrant, and that day, the sun sank into a bloody sea.



The Dragon and the Nezumi

Stories tell that the Celestial Dragons saw the creation of the Children of the Earth and were fascinated. They offered gifts to those they thought worthy, and even brought mortal souls to live among them in the Celestial Heavens.

Lady Sun and Lord Moon, however, soon grew jealous. Concerned that the Dragons' interest would lead to the destruction of the Empire, they lifted the Celestial Heavens away from the firmament of Rokugan and created Earth and Sky. But the Dragons still watch the lands and see the Empire as it grows beneath them. They know little of humans and their Empire, so they try to learn as best they can without violating the separation of Earth and Sky.

One day, a Nezumi was hunting upon the hills of the far South, deep in the heart of the Shadowlands. The Nezumi, rat-people who live in holes and warrens, long to be citizens of the Empire and often steal items from samurai homes to decorate their burrows. The Dragon, thinking that the Nezumi was a man who had become lost in the darkness of the Shadowlands, went to his assistance.

"You have fought bravely to come so far into such a dangerous land," the Dragon said to him, "and I will reward your courage by giving you eternal life within my golden palace in the Celestial Heavens." He took the Ratling in his sharp claws and began to fly toward the stars. As they neared the wonders of the Celestial Heavens, the Dragon spoke again.

"Are you from the Jade Empire?"

Planning to steal away the Dragon's treasures, the Ratling replied, "Oh, yes indeed. I am one of the Emperor's sons."

"Then of course you know Otosan Uchi," said the Dragon.

"Oh, yes," said the Ratling, who thought Otosan Uchi was the name of some distinguished samurai. "He is one of my very dearest friends."

Disgusted by so obvious a falsehood, the Dragon opened his claws and let the Nezumi fall. When he turned back to further punish the Ratling, however, the creature had burrowed deep into the earth to hide from the Dragon's wrath.

Because they fear the Dragon could be watching from the heavens, the descendants of the Nezumi have ever after have lived in burrows deep beneath the ground, hiding from the anger of the Heavens.



The Finest Poet

The Cherry Blossom Festival is the celebration of beauty and elegance, and all of the finest ladies of the Empire come to the Emperor's garden to see the many li of cherry trees that shed their white blossoms like snow. One year, the samurai fell to arguing in good spirits about the beauty of the maidens who walked among the sweet blossoms, attempting to determine which of the unknown maidens was truly the most fair.

At the end, a Doji and a ronin fell to arguing, and the ronin demanded a duel to determine the outcome of the affair. The Doji claimed that a lady of his line was surely the most beautiful, while the ronin argued for an unknown maiden who hid her hair beneath a scarlet veil. The contest drew the attention of the entire court, for the ronin, a man named Rezan, was known to be the greatest warrior in the land. The Doji tricked Rezan into agreeing that the duel would be of words—settled by poetry rather than a swift sword.

Shortly before the contest was to begin, the assembled nobles of the imperial court discovered that the unknown girl was the daughter of the Emperor, his favorite child and most beloved. If the ronin were to fail in the contest, then the Emperor's own daughter would be shamed.

Without speaking a word to the court, the Kakita knew what must be done to save the Emperor's honor. At the conclusion of the contest, the Crane conceded that the ronin's poetry was by far the greatest in the land. The Doji who had stood against Rezan took his own life in shame, and the ronin was rewarded by the Emperor with the hand of his daughter. Rezan joined the line of the Miya, and his poetry ever after was considered the finest in Rokugan.

Not only was the ronin the greatest warrior in the land, but, because he was also married to the Emperor's most beloved daughter, he was therefore under the Emperor's direct protection. Under such esteemed auspices, Rezan's humble poetry became the subject of whispers throughout the court, and Rezan's name became renowned through history as that of the greatest ronin poet who ever lived. Even today, many samurai hide their poems behind Rezan's name, saying that they found the poetry in some lost notebook of the great Rezan, and many of the greatest works of the Empire are attributed to his composition.



War of the Dead

The story of the lost family of Goju is unknown to the Empire; even the Ikoma cannot tell the tale. Goju's lost work on the Living Darkness, the *Celestial Agonies*, was never shared with the clans. The Scorpion have no record of it among their secrets, the Ikoma libraries do not know of it, and even the Emperor's records do not contain a copy of the Black Text.

Little is known of the Goju, save for small mentions of a mortal by that name who lived at the beginning of the world. When the kami chose their Great Clans, Goju fled in terror, hoping to escape their influence. Perhaps it was Goju's weakness that drew the Darkness to him, or perhaps the Darkness recognized Goju's fear as kin to its own.

It is certain that the Goju are not a true family; at least, not anymore. Although they all may have once been descended from the original Goju, they are no longer composed simply of relatives. Instead, the Goju include those transformed by the Darkness who desperately seek to retain their name, as well as Goju's descendants.

The tale of Yume is one of the few that has survived. He is said to have once been a great warrior, even before he became the servant of the Shadow, and his war is against all of the souls that have lived in the past. He fights not to destroy the samurai who tread upon Rokugan's soil, but to destroy the spirits of the past, the ancestors who guide their children in the ways of bushido and the spirit. He fights for the Shadow that is his master, and he fights to destroy the Empire of Rokugan by killing its past. Called the spirit-killer, Yume stands at the gate to Jigoku and slaughters the souls of the dead.

Against him, it is said, fight a legion of samurai from Rokugan's past, their swords blazing with honor. For a thousand years, the war has raged between Yume and his dark warriors and the Spirit Legion, and for a thousand years, the Tenth Kami and his legion have beaten back the Goju.

But that time is ending, and the ancestors speak no more. The Tenth Kami has fallen, and his blood stains the arch to Jigoku. Yume and his minions hold back the tide of the dead, and even the Empire's Jade Throne is threatened by the Darkness of the Shadow.



The First Oni

"Shiba trudged onward through the blasted landscape, eyes level with the horizon. He couldn't afford for them to shift, or the dark influence of this place would seize them and never let go. He walked in the same stance he had assumed so many days before, carried his sword in the same defensive position. He could not afford to stop, or sleep, or think. If he did, Fu Leng's realm would destroy him.

"Ahead, within the shelter of two great and jagged spires of rock, Shiba heard the sounds of combat. A blast of fetid air suddenly exploded from among the spires, lighting the sky for miles in every direction. Fighting down the urge to turn back, Shiba forced his way up and into the mouth of the unnatural structure.

"Within, curled into the apex of the stones, was a multi-limbed creature whose skin seemed to have been flayed away, leaving only rancid strips of grey membrane strapped over its pulpy underskin. An oni, but just not any demon-spawn. This beast was the first of its kind and the most powerful creature in Fu Leng's realm. Behind it stood two figures, one Shinsei and the other unrecognizable behind a mask of blood. As Shiba strained to see, the creature twisted toward him, observing the new arrival with startling objectivity . . ."

Shiba's battle with the oni is legend among the people of Rokugan, both for the kami Shiba's valor and for the ferocity with which Fu Leng's first child fought. They battled for a hundred days, it is said, until, at last, Shiba died from the other's attack, bleeding into the ground in the faraway wastes of the Shadowlands.

Legend says that the oni may still live somewhere deep in the wastes of the South, but that its wounds have never healed. It remains with the bodies of those it killed, searching for purpose in the skull of the mighty kami it killed. No other samurai has ever given it a challenge, and it longs for the day when it can again turn its claws to battle against a true child of the Sun and Moon.



The Land of the Dead

More than a physical path, the road to Jigoku is a spiritual journey. Every man and woman in Rokugan, from the lowest eta to the greatest Emperor, makes the trip to the land of the dead. Each person's path to Jigoku is different. To some it is an actual road, well-traveled and easy. To others it is a rushing river that batters and drags the traveler over sharp rocks and foaming rapids. But always the destination is the same: a tremendous arch guarded by a spirit who has never known life.

This spirit stands in the great arch, watching as spirits pass beneath it.

Rokugani culture is filled with stories of spirits returned uneasy from the lands of death, hungry or lost. These lonely few cut themselves off from Jigoku, although they continue to dwell there. They form a living history of Rokugan, an invaluable resource to the generations that follow them. Some drift among the living because they cannot find their way; others, because something important in life calls them back. These spirits, known as ancestors, hold the ancient history of our land in their words. The Rokugani revere them, and from them, we learn of our past.

Rokugan's history and folklore are filled with tales of ancestors who stay to serve their descendants or who appear to help in times of great trouble or hardship. These individuals, by sheer force of will, choose to retain themselves and to stay on this side of the veil, to finish work they perceive as undone. Such individuals come from every clan and every class. But however strong their force of will, should the living begin to neglect or forget them, they slowly forget themselves and are finally drawn across into the afterlife forever.





An Honest Ant

Shosuro Furuyari wrote three of the most important plays in Rokugani history: *The Death of Hantei*, the tale of the death of the first Emperor; *The Mask*, a history of the only Scorpion daimyo who never wore a mask; and *Father and Daughter*, a three-part epic about Bayushi and Shosuro. He was a cunning man, one who knew that loyalty to one's lord must be paid for with the blood of all those who would work against the lord.

Once there was an old man named Seppun Murayasu, a veteran warrior who lived in the golden city of the Emperor. He was a poor man who had sold the services of his sword for money in the past. Though he was far distant from any noble line, he was a samurai. He served a small post in the Emperor's city, far from the palace gates. He was poor, and he was but a simple soldier, but he stood at his post as though he had been given the greatest honor in the world. Even without gold or bright armor, he would walk the streets of Otosan Uchi as if he were the greatest noble in the city, and all who knew him spoke well of his loyalty.

"There is Murayasu," the heimin would whisper, "the man who owns the world."

Furuyari thought to ruin Murayasu for his pride, and brought Murayasu to speak with the Bayushi daimyo. He tricked Murayasu into visiting his palace within the glorious capital. Behind a screen, the Emperor of Rokugan rested, listening while the Bayushi spoke to the simple guard.

The Scorpion said, "Kneel before me, Murayasu, and call me master. If you do, I will give you a hundred pieces of golden Koku."

"No, thank you, gracious daimyo," Murayasu bowed. "I already have a master."

"Sit before me, Murayasu," Furuyari tried once more, "and tell me your secrets. If you do, I will give you a thousand men and women to call your own and a place of honor in my noble guard."

"I am sorry, noble Bayushi," Murayasu refused again, "I cannot betray my master."

"Who do you serve, Murayasu?" asked the Scorpion, angered.

"I serve the Emperor," said the poor guardsman.

Shosuro Furuyari laughed. "The Emperor does not even know your name, pitiful old man. How can you serve the Shining Prince?"

Murayasu smiled. "The queen of ants cannot count her servants, but she knows that they are loyal. Though the Emperor does not know of me, still, I know of him. And it is the Emperor, and Hantei alone, that I follow. With every word and deed, I do his bidding. Even the ants in the field can say as much, though they do not know their queen."

Hantei, Lord of Rokugan, heard the poor guardsman's words and brought him to the palace to live his last days in loyal service to the imperial line.



Iuchiban's Legacy

The Scorpion Clan records present three different versions of the sorcerer Iuchiban's origin; any or none of them may be correct. Acting in secret, even from his own followers, Iuchiban forged a quartet of swords, their blades christened in blood and forged from the souls of Rokugan's greatest samurai. Through hellish sacrifices, he forged the swords upon an altar of blood and fire, a stone made of an oni's skull covered in flesh, fire, and the molten steel of the Moon's own hatred. This foul stone was known as the Anvil of Despair, and the cries of the souls it has devoured can still be heard on the darkest nights in the Twilight Mountains; its hunger has not yet been sated.

Using this dread artifact, Iuchiban bound the spirits of four great champions into his blades, twisting their souls to match his designs. He imbued them with a thirst for blood, a thirst that could never be quenched. He embedded their martial prowess within the steel of the blades, allowing whoever wielded them to channel their power. Finally, he took their vaunted code of Bushido, which the champions had practiced and embodied all their lives, and warped it into a dark reflection of itself. The souls were bound now by the blackest aspects of their personalities, rather than the brightest. Iuchiban named the weapons Passion, Revenge, Judgment, and Ambition, and sent them out through his spies as gifts from the imperial court . . . to the daimyos of the Crane, Lion, Crab, and Scorpion Clans.

In the hands of their respective "owners," the Four Bloodswords struck with devastating effectiveness. The Crane daimyo, given Passion, flung himself into the sea after confessing his love for a geisha less than half his age. The leader of the Lion Clan, possessed of Revenge, launched an ill-conceived assault on the Dragon fortresses for some imagined slight; she died before the gates of Mirumoto Castle. Judgment, the most feared of the four blades, drove the Crab daimyo to seppuku after convincing him to murder his own children in their beds.

Only Ambition, the sword given to Bayushi Rikoji of the Scorpion Clan, did not drive its recipient to death. Therein lay the beginning of Iuchiban's undoing . . . but that is another tale.



Daughter of Dragons

Isawa Ijime was raised as the youngest daughter of a large, poor family, but they were not her parents. They found her among the fields of the village, a babe unaware of her true heritage. Growing without love or attention, Ijime built imaginary places in her mind, an entire world that she could manifest and manipulate. Then, one day, as she sat alone in her small portion of the hut, her beloved dreams became real, and the images danced upon the ground with feet as light as rose petals.

Ijime hid her talent away, fearing scorn and hatred. But she was discovered, condemned for using evil magic, and sentenced to be stoned to death by her family. Only the intervention of an imperial magistrate saved the young girl's life . . . but the spirits that plagued her mind continued to gather close around her.

At the age of 16, when she was prepared for her gempukku, the Celestial Dragon came to her in her dreams and offered his hand. "You were never meant to be alone," he smiled, and placed her among the stars.

But before Ijime followed the Dragon, her true father, into the heavens, she opened the portal of her mind. Seventy evil spirits—one each for the horrors that had been visited upon her—came forth from her hands. Each represented some evil, a wickedness that had been brought about by the world. "Let them know," she whispered softly, "the evil that they have brought upon themselves." From her torment came greed and lechery, division and dishonor, and many things more. These are the vices of humankind.

Yet among the horrors and evils of Ijime's life, a single bright mote flew. It was the spirit of Hope, the one virtue that had been given her. The face of the kind magistrate leapt to her mind, and from Ijime's hands flew a shining orb filled with goodness and faith. "This too," she whispered, "is the fate of mortals." With that, she died, and her body was found by the Phoenix Clan.

She was given honor upon her death, and it is said that the brightest star in the dawn is the spirit of Isawa Ijime, following her celestial father as he holds the world in his coils. Each morning, the folk of Rokugan bow to that small, bright light, remembering how, without the hope brought by the unknown magistrate, our Empire would be a much darker place.





One Man's Courage

The first Hida had two wives, and each gave him a son. The first son, Atarasi, gave his life in battle against the Shadowlands, the ancient enemy of the Empire. The second, born of a kami and a Dragon, was Osano-Wo.

Osano-Wo stood beside his father, young, powerful, and never-aging. When Hida finally left his position to his son, Osano-Wo was ready to lead the clan.

Osano-Wo's first action was to attack the Kingdom of the Trolls, which lay just south of Hiruma Castle. His war against the trolls was so complete and terrible that the entire race—what was left of it—was forced to abandon the cities and live in the dark moors and swamps of the Shadowlands, where Osano-Wo could not find it.

Osano-Wo tore the fire from the heavens when his sword broke, hurling it at his enemies. He built a palace from the stone of a single mountain, carving it with thunder alone. He long refused to believe that his brother, Atarasi, was dead in the Shadowlands, and built a suit of armor for his return, made of steel taken from the mountains that hold aloft the sky itself. That armor has never been worn, but the legends say that one day a hero with Atarasi's eyes will claim it. Until then, it remains within Hida Castle, awaiting Atarasi's return.

Osano-Wo married a wealthy Matsu, a fiery warrior of the Lion Clan, and, with her, had a son of his own. During the celebration, however, he also fell in love with a young peasant girl, and she, too, bore him a child. Osano-Wo acknowledged both children as his sons: the peasant child was brought to the castle to be raised alongside his brother. As the boys grew, their father and his Matsu bride encouraged them to compete against each other. One, a samurai, won nearly every contest . . . but not by much. As the two boys neared their gempukku, the court began to ask the inevitable question: "Which boy will be the next Champion of the Crab?"

Finally, the day of the boys' gempukku arrived. Osano-Wo took the ancestral sword of the Crab in his hands and turned to his peasant son. With a proud smile, he offered it to the boy, who bowed and accepted it. As Osano-Wo turned to leave, his bride stepped in front of him, blocking the door.

"Why?" she shouted. "Why do you insult my family in this way?"

"Because your son wins almost every contest he enters. He is a fine warrior. A fine Lion. He knows what it means to win. But he does not know how to lose . . . and keep trying. In the Shadowlands, there is only one lesson: survive. My brother died in the Shadowlands, and he proved only one thing: Fu Leng cannot be defeated; his servants cannot be destroyed. A Crab must fight battle after battle, war after war . . . and a Crab must know that the greatest duty is not to win. It is to fight, and to continue fighting until the last drop of blood has fallen from the veins of the last Crab."

Osano-Wo's wife was infuriated. The next morning, she and her servants gathered up all of their belongings and left the Crab territories, never to return.



Code of Bushido

Kakita Rensei was a famous bushi of the Daidoji school, forsaking his heritage and family to follow the way of the Daidoji rather than attend the Academy of the Kakita. Rensei lived a simple life and followed his heart in all matters, living on faith and instinct rather than training and discipline. Despite his simple way of living, Rensei had an uncanny knowledge of his opponents' weaknesses and constantly defeated any opposition in duels. Although he was approached more than once to be the Master of Kakita Academy, he repeatedly refused, saying that he did not want to live his life in a cage, no matter how beautiful the view.

Rensei lived his days traveling from village to village, learning the ways of the other clans of Rokugan and defeating the best they could offer. At the battle of the Day of the Falling Stars, he offered his services to Daidoji Yuzan as a shireikan—commander—of the Crane forces. On the field, none could match his brutal style of iaijutsu, slicing through armor and bone as if they were water beneath



his blade. It is said that, in one battle, his sword cut through a man on horseback . . . and continued, to cleave the horse in two with the same stroke. His strength and resilience were legendary, and his desire for freedom has become the topic of many sagaic poems and plays.

His death is a source of mystery to historians. The last account of Kakita Rensei hails from shortly after the fall of Shiro no Yogin, when Rensei declared his intention to travel alone to the palace of the Matsu and challenge the Lion Champion to a duel. Whether he reached the castle or not remains a mystery; his body was never found, and the Champion of the Lion vanished three months after Rensei left on his quest. Neither death is recorded to the content of modern historians, and much debate still occurs about whether that fated duel ever occurred.

The Final Sword

Matsu Hitomi was the most famous samurai-ko of the early Empire. Though trained for other duties, she broke with tradition and donned her brother's armor to avenge his death, unwittingly blazing a trail for women for centuries to come. Her fierce devotion to war caused her to be granted command of her late brother's unit, and the soldiers obeyed her word without question.

During a war between the Dragon and the Crab, Mirumoto Turan, daimyo of the Mirumoto, came to the Lion Champion and asked for military assistance. The Mirumoto asked that the great Matsu Hitomi lead the allying unit, because her acts had already become legend and he hoped to demoralize his foes. Hitomi and her unit were placed under the command of the Dragon daimyo and led several assaults against the Crab armies and their Scorpion allies.

Then one day the daimyo sent Hitomi to attack the castle defended by her lover. Although details are sketchy, it is known that Hitomi refused the order and dueled the Dragon daimyo in his tent, killing him. She then led her troops away from the field of battle.

Her death has become as legendary as her life, as she fought to escape the overwhelming Dragon forces and other Lion forces led by Akodo Godaigo. Godaigo and his forces eventually trapped her troops near a small peasant village now known as the Omoidoso Toshi, the City of Remembrance. Though the Dragon offered rewards and titles, Godaigo refused them and left for the wandering life of a ronin. He was never seen again.





The First Battle-Maiden

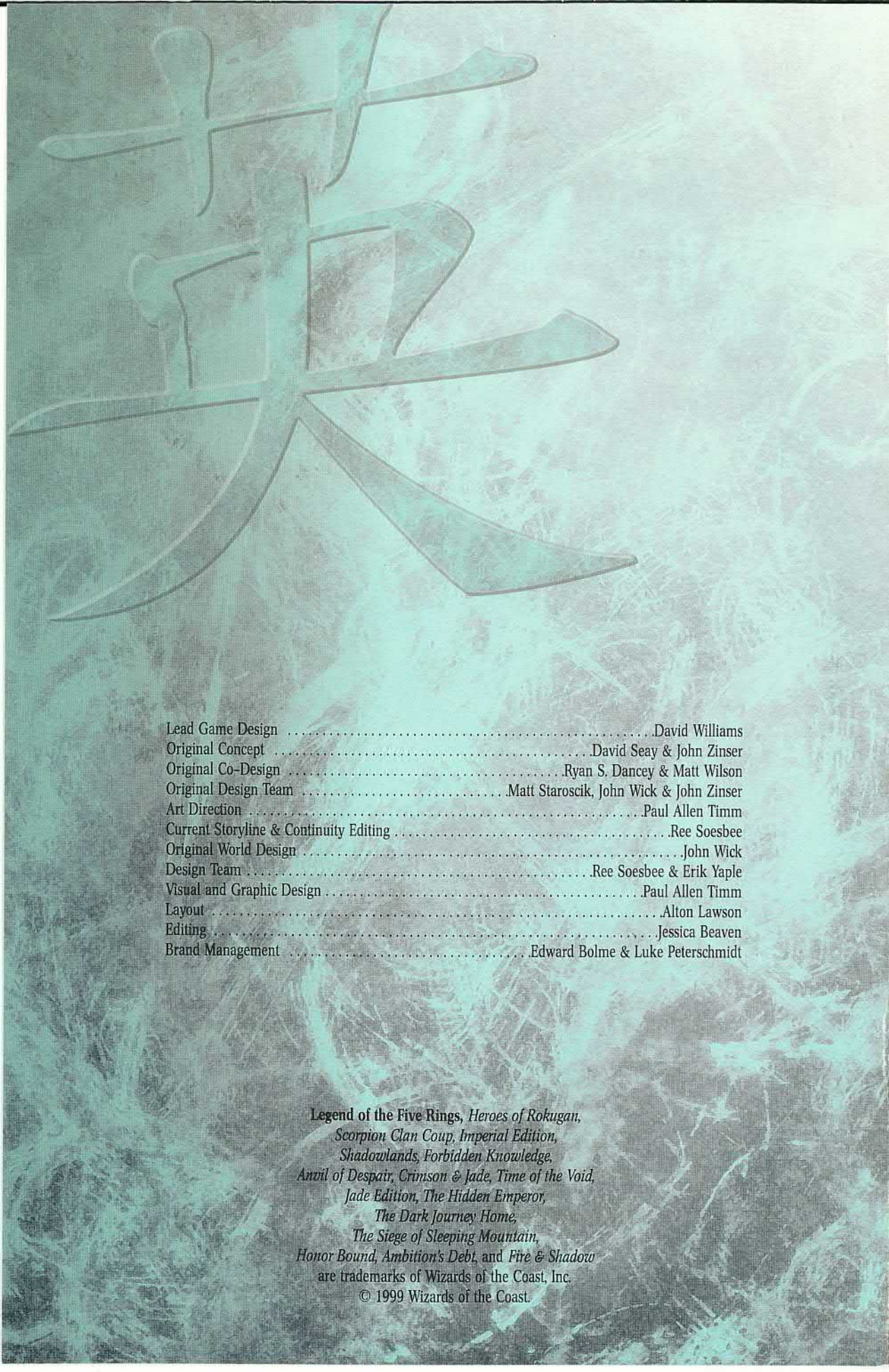
When the original Otaku left to fight by Shinsei's side, she left behind a small daughter, Otaku Shiko. Raised by her wise father, Ide, Shiko grew into a fine, strong young woman. Her mother's fiery spirit burned in her veins, tempered by the calm eloquence of her diplomatic father's nature. She was skilled, bright, decisive, and inventive.

Near the beginning of the Empire, Shinjo gathered the Ki-Rin Clan together and announced that she would go on a quest. Otaku Shiko was one of the first to step forward to offer Shinjo her loyalty, protection, and friendship. Taking her mother's armor and swords, Shiko followed Shinjo into the unknown.

She stayed by Shinjo's side until the day the Ki-Rin Clan split up in order to find a way back to Rokugan. Shiko proved an excellent leader, combining the strength and skills of a warrior and the tact of a diplomat to steer her followers through many perils and adventures.

While her mother is considered the first battle maiden, Shiko was the founder of the battle-maiden tradition. During her travels with Shinjo, she realized the enormous potential of the saddle and stirrups of the Ujik-hai. She began to practice riding with the new device, to experiment with different techniques of riding and fighting. She called her new style of fighting "freehand riding." With the saddle and stirrups, she was able to ride much faster and farther, and with more maneuverability. With her hands free, she could use many different kinds of weapons. She developed techniques for using almost any weapon from horseback at thundering speeds. She taught these new ways to her family, encouraging others to experiment as well. She knew in her heart that this new form of mounted battle would be a great advantage to her clan, perhaps their key to survival. She encouraged the qualities of loyalty, swift action, and fierce determination in her students.

Shiko's fighting techniques, refined and perfected by her descendants, are taught at the Otaku battle-maiden school to this day. Her fierce warrior's code shapes the spirit and attitude of one of the finest and most feared fighting forces in all of Rokugan.



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