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PREVIEW
L5R RPG 3.0

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OF
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THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY VOL. 2 / NO. 16

Editorial

Greetings once again from the land of Rokugan!

It's been a busy last couple of months. Though in theory it might have been fun to kick back and enjoy the holiday season, the L5R writing team and I had some much more pressing matters on our minds — Legend of the Five Rings Third Edition. I cannot stress how excited I am about this project.

I don't want to sound like a goober here or look as if I am scratching my own back, so let me be abundantly clear for folks who don't know me that well. I started this game as a player, as a fan like anyone else, and via an extraordinary chain of events I ended up in the position I am now as the head of the L5R Story Team.

Though I've done a lot of work on Legend of the Five Rings and like to think, in my more self-aggrandizing moments, that I've done a great deal to broaden the depth and scope of the setting, the simple fact is that a bunch of incredibly talented folks who came before me gave us a pretty awesome head start. In looking back at the earlier editions of the game and choosing what to incorporate and what to polish, I was reminded of a lot of what makes this game great and got me wrapped up in the setting originally.

So, to make a long story somewhat longer, I'm really pumped about Third Edition, and from what I've seen a lot of fans are too. It's really given me a chance to remember what made me such an L5R nerd in the first place.

I hope it does the same for you.

So make sure your d10's are ready and for the love of Hida, bring your own pencil this time. I'm not lending you mine again; you always lose them.

Rich Wulf
L5R Story Guy



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“LET’S DO A SET WITH ALL PERSONALITIES!”

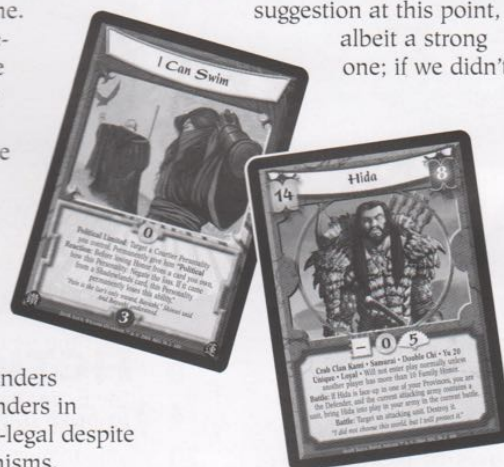
by Jeff Alexander

That’s more or less the idea Ray Lau had while talking with then-Marketing Director Mark Jelfo about doing something new and interesting with the next expansion. When a set has something unique about it as a whole, it’s easier to describe to people, and single out, and advertise. Since *Hidden City*, the driving forces behind design have been elevating the excitement level of the cards themselves and ensuring that all the Factions have distinct yet highly competitive deck archetypes available. That’s all well and good, but we can’t tout every set as “The set that has even more fun cards for everyone!” Actually, let me correct myself: we can’t tout even *one* set that way. That’s simply not a sufficient selling point on its own. Other than returning Sensei cards to the game in *Wrath of the*

Emperor, we hadn’t done much to sets as a whole that was appealing from a marketing standpoint.

Enter Ray and Mark’s plan to do a Personality-heavy set. It’s not hard to see their reasoning. Personalities are the card type that most tightly links the story of Rokugan to the game. They’re what storyline-conscious players care about most. While it’s true *I Can Swim* got a standing ovation at the *Dawn of the Empire* GenCon seminar, so did *Hida*. And his was louder. Even better is when the Personalities see heavy play. This is the reason all the Thunders and Great Family founders in *Dawn* are tournament-legal despite the resulting anachronisms.

Initial responses from the Player Design Team to an all-Personality set were varied but favorable. They ranged from “This will be hard.” to “This sounds interesting!” to “It looks doable if we approach it right.” to “This will be really hard.” It was still only a suggestion at this point, albeit a strong one; if we didn’t



think we could implement it at all, we'd have to work with Ray and Mark on thinking up a replacement strategy.

One factor spoke volumes in favor of this plan: *Lotus Edition*. One of the big problems we had back when we did the card selection for *Diamond* was finding Personalities that were just right at serving at the basis of each Faction. You'll notice many "Soul of" Personalities with deliberate, significant mechanical changes, like *Shosuro Maru* costing 1 Gold more than *Yogo Asami*, and *Matsu Ikari* lacking *Ikoma Ryoza's* Shadowlands taint. Since *Code* is the last set before *Lotus*, packing it with extra Personalities would give us a way to seed each Faction with core cards we couldn't find elsewhere. That means less of a burden of finding something close and tweaking it. Fewer cards with mechanical differences before and after reprinting also means less confusion at tournaments.

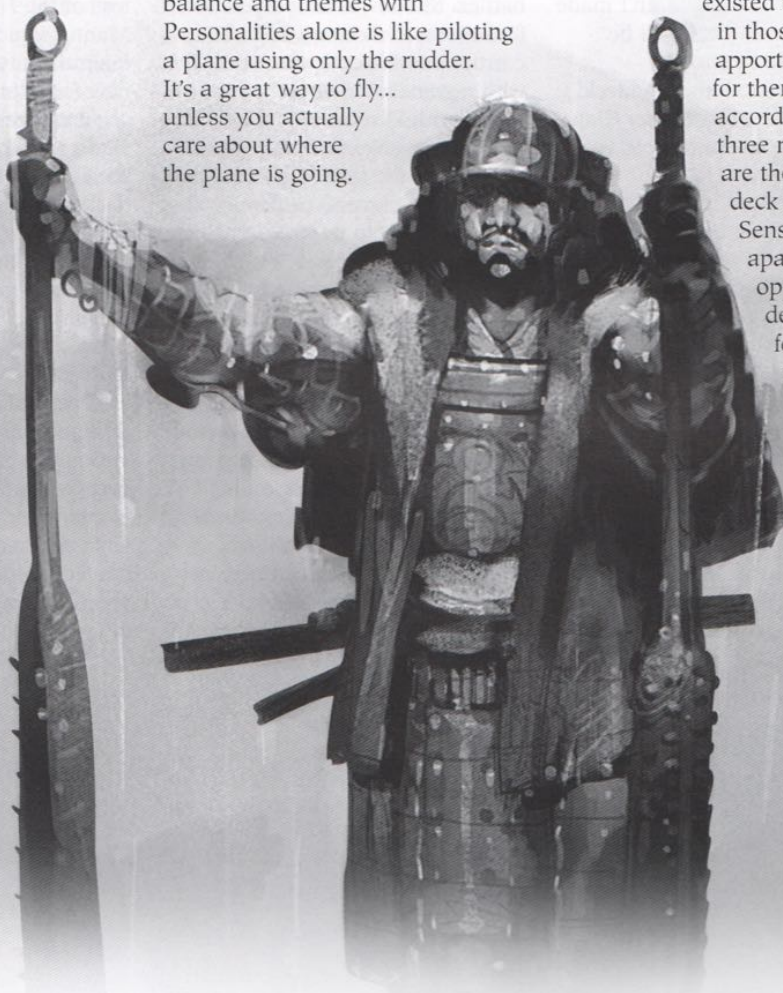
The one big issue we had was the word "all". A standard set has 153 cards total, not counting Strongholds. Making all of them Personalities would have meant about 15 per Faction and 3 Unaligned. Diving into some basic math: decks run about 8–10 different Personality cards by title. Swap out as few as 3 of those for different Personalities and you are effectively playing a brand new deck. If we print 15 usable Personalities for a Faction, it means completely altering at least 3 to 5 different deck archetypes. And that's just for one Faction. To do it for all ten? We don't have

enough resources to plan and test out the level of change that all those new cards would bring. Undoubtedly, too many of them would simply never see play because they would all be competing with each other for deck space. Many others would be obsolete immediately due to other cards in the very same set. Furthermore, 153 Personalities means 0 Fate cards. In particular, it means 0 Actions. That was just too restricting. Adjusting Faction balance and themes with Personalities alone is like piloting a plane using only the rudder. It's a great way to fly... unless you actually care about where the plane is going.

course of the game. Marketing was happy. Design was confident. We had a plan.

Featured Clans

At the dawn of the *Lotus* environment, our big goal is to have all ten Factions possess three solid deck types, two based off a Stronghold and one off a Sensei. We set down what those were long in advance of *Code*, so it was a straightforward process to look at how many Personalities already existed that worked in those decks and apportion designs for them accordingly. Lion's three main designs are the "harpoon" deck using Gohei Sensei that picks apart the opponent's defenses by forcing them to defend in



Illus. beet © 2005 AEG

So, we came to a compromise. We could, in fact, make all the Dynasty cards Personalities. And we would even have more Dynasty cards than normal, since the standard number of 78 would only give us 7 Personalities per Faction over the usual 6, which isn't impressive enough to warrant all the extra design effort. But we'd still have a relatively normal Fate side to give the Design Team the kind of control they need over the

counterproductive ways; a flexible and forceful Tactician-heavy deck; and a "synergy" deck that derives its advantages from mutual benefits across several small — to mid-range Personalities as well as actions that require large numbers of units, such as Formations. Their Stronghold in *Code* is designed with the latter deck in mind, as its existing Strongholds work better with the Tactician archetype.

Scorpion gets a very in-character mechanic partially inspired by the *Spycraft* CCG: a Stronghold that lets them hide units face-down to disguise their identity from the opponent. The nasty retaliatory Reactions to being targeted that various Scorpion Personalities have been getting lately are expected to work quite well with this, as well as in conjunction with the greater number of redirection actions we've also been giving them. The Scorpions in *Code* that aren't made for the face-down deck will be built instead for a strongly Political-supported military deck. Scorpion is not a big-bruiser Clan when it comes to martial prowess. Expect to include a few Courtiers pulling strings back home or a Ninja or two in your ranks to help your attacks succeed.

Shadowlands got a huge boost to a type of deck they haven't been able to successfully play since before *Diamond Edition*: the kind full of very large, very tough, very scary monsters from the deepest pits of Jigoku. Shadowlands players will find a couple more medium-large oni in

Code to fill out that deck, but that archetype doesn't need a new Stronghold. Instead, that Stronghold will provide a new look at the theme of corruption. With a much defocused emphasis on Chi reduction in our current design guidelines, we need something else to represent the more insidious ways the Shadowlands threatens Rokugan. Corrupted Personalities will often find themselves aiding their opponents against their will, especially when it comes to battles. Shadowlands players will find themselves involved in bitter corruption-vs.-corruption struggles within games. Policing the trait as we do with Dishonor — that is, disallowing any effect that gives the trait freely to other players' cards — will help us avoid the infamous "I make you Shadowlands / I kill you" combos that were plentiful back in *Hidden Emperor* days. Also, the lopsided, all-encompassing anti-Shadowlands metagame cards that exist in *Diamond* aren't being carried into *Lotus*, so the other half of the combo won't be tenable either.



Of course, these new Strongholds aren't the only ones we're working on! Phoenix gets much support for their *City of Blood* Stronghold, which came out of the gates rather weak. Crane gets more Harriers to support their *Kedamono Sensei*, including one very famous individual. Crab, Dragon, and Ratling all get Personalities tailored to their Strongholds in *Enemy*. Dragon also gets more Ring-related mechanics to compensate for the probable loss of the *House of Tao* in *Lotus*. Mantis, which still only has two main deck types, gains a brand new focus on their captive giant sea creatures and the Storm Riders who control them to complement their ranged attack and raiding decks. Unicorn's shugenja-heavy *Shinden Horiuchi* builds get re-examined and improved as part of that Clan's powerful Baraunghar Army.

Control the Roads

I've said before that we're trying to differentiate the way various Factions play the game, even when they pursue the same victory condition. Having cards such as *Tireless Assault* that get played in every military deck regardless of Faction is bad for diversity. One solution we've been



approaching is printing more cards that require certain Personality traits such as Samurai or Cavalry to play (or to work at peak effect). *Code of Bushido* sticks with that approach, and it adds two more traits to the list of ones we try to use on a consistent basis: Scouts and Magistrates.

Scout-related cards already made a brief appearance in *Enemy of My Enemy*. They get more prominent in *Code*. Scout actions typically apply to a Province before an attack is even launched, and set up some kind of advantage for their own player (or hindrance for others) in battles that occur there later. This gives Factions that have good scout capabilities an avenue towards battles that others lack. Traditionally, Crab, Mantis, Ratling, and Unicorn have had the most scouts, but we're making sure the option also exists for other Factions who want to build especially for it.

Magistrates, traditionally the specialty of Dragon (and, at times, Unicorn) decks will focus on dishonored Personalities by challenging them, or denying them entry into battles, or perhaps



having effects they can use against anyone but with lower costs or stronger effects if the target is Dishonored. We are sticking to the current design rules moving into the *Lotus* environment: becoming Dishonored will remain a foreseeable

result of a voluntary choice on the part of a Personality's controller, and never something that another player can cause at will. (Now, that choice will often be between Dishonor and something very, very bad. No one ever said being honorable was easy.)

The Final Touches

The storyline credits that appeared on some *Enemy of My Enemy* cards were not a one-time deal. They are a permanent feature of L5R now. We want the world to know when a storyline outcome results in a card.

Finally, as many of you know, the code of bushido is very real in Rokugan. Though the Clans interpret them each in their own ways, the virtues of duty, honesty, compassion, sincerity, honor,

courtesy, and courage are central to the samurai way of life. There is no way we could name an expansion after them without including them in it.



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Name of Convention	Dates	City, State/Province	Country	Website
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Avalon	9/2/05 - 9/5/05	San Francisco, CA	USA	http://www.avalongamecon.com
Canadian National	8/26/05 - 8/29/05	Toronto, Ontario	CANADA	http://canadiannationalexpo.com
DexCon	7/15/05 - 7/17/05	East Brunswick, NJ	USA	http://www.doubleexposure.com
DieCon 5	6/3/05 - 6/5/05	Collinsville, IL	USA	http://www.diecon.com
Dragon*Con	9/2/05 - 9/5/05	Atlanta, GA	USA	http://www.dragoncon.org
Essen	10/13/05 - 10/16/05	Essen	GERMANY	http://www.comicaction.de
Gamescape 2005	6/10/05 - 6/13/05	Sydney, New South Wal	AUSTRALIA	http://www.gamescape.com.au
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RAMIFICATIONS OF GENCON INDY

A CHANCE TO CHANGE YOUR CLAN FOREVER • A CHOICE TO CHANGE THE GAME FOREVER

By Shawn Carman

Enlightenment is a goal that has been pursued by great minds for over a thousand years. Some believe that a handful have experienced it, while others believe that only the Little Prophet himself, the great Shinsei, could truly be said to have reached enlightenment. With a victory at the 2005 World Championships at GenCon Indy this year, one clan will find a path to that most elusive prize. They will learn

a fundamental truth of the Tao — that there is more than one path to enlightenment. Depending on who wins GenCon, the secrets of enlightenment will mean very different things indeed.

The heir of Shinsei, the prophet Rosoku, has seen that in the times ahead the Empire will require wisdom. He has set a series of challenges before the people of Rokugan. These challenges will lead the worthiest souls in the

Empire to step forward as the Keepers of the Elements. These men and women will embrace a great destiny, but theirs is not the greatest honor. There is one gift left that has not yet been discovered. The tasks performed to become a Keeper of the Elements were great indeed, but one shall emerge from the ranks of Rokugan's samurai and find a true path to enlightenment. This samurai shall become known as the Master of

the Five Rings, and shall lead his clan to greatness the likes of which it has never known.

The winner of the GenCon Indy World Championship will declare one samurai from within their faction to become the Master of the Five Rings. Their clan shall be the first to bear the new Enlightened trait, and what that trait means will ultimately be determined by the winning faction. One clan might find enlightenment through the glory of battle.

Another clan might find enlightenment through peaceful politics and diplomacy. Another yet might find it by embracing the secrets of magic. The guidelines for eligibility for this honor will be announced by the Story Team shortly before the tournament.

Yet the honor of becoming one of the Empire's spiritual leaders and earning a new Trait to strengthen one's faction in Lotus Edition are not the only enlightenment's only rewards. The clan of enlightenment will bring about a new age, stepping to the forefront of their brethren, destined to accomplish many great things in the coming arc. Some examples:

The Crab Clan do not believe in wasting away in a monastery, contemplating riddles. To the children of Hida, enlightenment is purity, and purity is a weapon against the Shadowlands. The Master of Five Rings and his disciples will form a new legion of warriors to march against the Horde, a deadly Legion of the Jade Hand that no oni or maho-tsukai can stand against.

The Crane Clan value understanding and empathy, and the Master of Five Rings shall achieve this like none other before him. A Crane GenCon winner may select a single clan other than the Shadowlands. From this clan, the Crane Champion will draw an allegiance so strong that these two clans will stand as allies throughout the Lotus story arc and possibly beyond.

The Dragon Clan will at last achieve that which they have sought for so many centuries: true enlightenment. With the Master of Five Rings' guidance, the Dragon

Champion Togashi Satsu shall finally unlock the full power of his grandfather's spirit, becoming a Kami in all but birth.

The Lion Clan shall benefit greatly from the teachings of their Master of Five Rings. With new insight into battle, the Master shall pen the greatest treatise on battle tactics written in a thousand years, and his New Leadership will give rise to a new generation of tacticians with skills unlike any ever seen in the Empire.

The Mantis Clan craves power, wealth, and above all acceptance. The Master of Five Rings can achieve all these things, although his reasons for doing so are not what the Mantis expect. The Master's influence and teachings among the other clans shall result in the Mantis being awarded more mainland holdings, including the Empire's greatest port city, to be built upon the ruins of Otosan Uchi.

The Nezumi do not understand the human concept of enlightenment, but Rosoku's wisdom is not lost upon them. A Nezumi Master of Five Rings will unite his people and strengthen the One Tribe, leading them to retake their lost city deep in the Shadowlands and destroy the ancient Suiteru no Oni that holds it.

The Phoenix Clan will use their wisdom to seek the ultimate truth behind the nature of magic, and use that truth in part to purify the Black Scrolls that remain in the Empire. The ancient power of these sacred spells will hearken back to the days of Isawa, and grant the Phoenix a power they have not known in a thousand years.

The Scorpion Clan understand that enlightenment is not simply a way of discovering the truth, but of hiding that truth from others. The Shadow Brands that once bound the Scorpion to the Lying Darkness are gone, but the Master of Five Rings shall create a new form of magic that replaces them, teaching his students the secrets of moving between the elements to find one's enemies and their hidden secrets.

The Unicorn Clan have always been regarded by strangers in their own homeland, outsiders who

practice strange barbarian ways. To the Unicorn, this is merely something they accept, but if the Unicorn gain enlightenment, they will gain greater acceptance among their fellow clans. A temple to the Lords of Death will be constructed in the Imperial City. The defamed Shinjo family will win back some measure of their tarnished honor by being declared the Emerald Champion's foremost magistrates, bringing justice throughout the Empire.

And if the Shadowlands wins, then enlightenment will take a darker path. Enlightenment victories will not be possible at all, and the sinister prophets of the Shadowlands will seed their mad influence throughout the Empire.

One sinister individual will master the secrets of dark enlightenment and serve as an example to the rest, a corrupted Fortune who will rise into the Celestial Heavens and spread his tainted wisdom for the duration of the Lotus arc.

Should the Shadowlands prove victorious...

The Crab shall find their resolve waning.

The Crane will find themselves without allies they can trust.

The Dragon will find that there are no answers to the riddles they have spent centuries contemplating.

The Lion will discover that there are some foes who cannot be defeated with steel.

The Mantis will find that they are insignificant in the grand scheme of the Celestial Order.

The Nezumi will realize that their enemies can never be defeated.

The Phoenix will see that there are powers they can never truly hope to master and remain sane.

The Scorpion will learn that they know nothing of the true secrets of the world.

The Unicorn will discover that their differences have set them apart from the world in a way they never imagined.

And the Shadowlands will discover that the Empire they have sought to destroy for over a thousand years can be defeated without violence.



TO SAVE A SOUL

by Rich Wulf

"Of the Crane, a fallen foe will prove to be their undoing. They will be led astray by a deceiver, and the true hero will arise too late to save them." — Doom of the Crane, the Prophecies of Uikku

Some Time Ago...

A single figure in battered blue armor stood at the edge of a windswept cliff. Once, he had been Champion. Once, he had stood above all others as the Emperor's foremost defender. Once, he had been one of the most powerful samurai in all of Rokugan.

Now, he was only a ghost.

Doji Satsume stared silently out at the sea, his dark blue eyes as cold and depthless as the water. His journey was nearly at an end. Somewhere, nearby, he would find Teinko, his wife. It was her fault that she had been driven to such a horrible fate. She had taken her own life dishonorably, damning herself to this place. Satsume, on the other hand, had died in service to his Emperor. He had died a samurai's death and thus

passed on to glorious Yomi, the Realm of the Blessed Ancestors. In the decades since his death, he had convinced himself that he deserved his reward, that Teinko's exile here was only just punishment for his own weakness.

It was not right. It was Satsume's cold obsession with duty, the impossible standards he enforced upon even those he cherished, that had slain Teinko. During his battles in the Realm of Thwarted Destiny, he had been forced to confront his past again. He had been forced to confront the truth. He was a murderer, as surely as if he had thrown her from the cliffs himself. In killing Teinko, he had destroyed all that was good and pure within himself. His hatred put his son, Hoturi, on a path that ultimately led to his own destruction.

It was a credit to Hoturi's strength that he had died a hero, burying his blade in the heart of the Dark God. But it did not make things right.

But was it possible to find her in this place? If he found Teinko, would she remember him? Would she

forgive him? Would his apology only deepen her endless torment? Why had he really come here? Did he truly wish to make amends or was it only to satisfy his own arrogant sense of honor?

He should turn back now, abandon this quest. Better yet, he should remain here, cease resisting the wailing despair that eroded him at every moment, and let the Grey Realm claim him. Satsume fell to his knees as he began to drift away, forgetting who he was, why he had come here. The old ghost buried his face in his hands. By all rights he should weep, he thought, though he could not remember why. The tears would not come. The fingers of his left hand traced his cheek and found the scar that twisted his lips and sliced across his face.

And he remembered. He was young then, but a newly recruited member of the Emperor's Guard. The assassins had appeared from nowhere, rushing from the bushes to surround the Emperor's palanquin in the outer courtyard of his own palace. In a matter of moments only Satsume and a handful of others remained, fighting in a tight ring around their lord and master. The ninja's blade slashed across his face, blinding him with his own blood, but he fought on, hewing about savagely with his grandfather's sword. Though he had been trained in the way of the samurai all his life, in that moment he learned what it truly meant. He had been fully prepared to give his life for another, to die only so that the Emperor might live for just one more instant. He had sworn an oath to defend the Son of Heaven, an oath he eventually gave his life to uphold. A samurai who did not uphold his oaths was less than nothing.

"Teinko," he whispered, hands tightening into fists. He had sworn an oath to her as well, and he had failed her. Now this place sought to make him forget.

"No," Satsume hissed, rising to his feet. He felt a great weight pressing upon his shoulders, encouraging him to remain as he was, to surrender. He shrugged the weight aside and rose to his full height. The gray fog of Meido seemed to twist and recoil from his presence. His blue armor shone again, as it had in life. He could see figures in the fog now, the shades of men and women drifting upon the still air. They wore the rich kimono and proud armor of samurai, but without any life or color, without any symbols of who they once were. They looked at Satsume with pained expressions, black eyes wide as they basked in his defiance.

"Well done, Grinning Crane," said a mellow voice. A tall warrior in sleek black armor stepped forth from the fog. Satsume recognized him at once, but a slow sneer creased his weathered face.

"What are you?" Satsume demanded. "Some demon sent to torment me?"

He chuckled. "I am Hoturi, Satsume-sama," he replied. "I am your son."

"You bear my son's face, but you are not him," Satsume retorted. "There is too much murder in your eyes. You are something else."

"It is as you say," the stranger replied. "I am your son, yet I am not. I am the creature of Bayushi Kachiko's creation. I am Daigotsu Hoturi."

"The Doom of the Crane," Satsume hissed. As he spoke he noticed more of the lost, gray souls. They gathered at the fog's edge, like moths swarming about a flame.

"I have been called that, yes," Hoturi replied, "yet what the prophet Uikku wrote was not to be. I waged war upon our people. I burned all the houses of the Crane and offered my soul to the Dark God. And do you know why?"

Satsume only stared at the shadow silently. His hand moved toward the hilt of his blade.

Hoturi's eyes fixed on Satsume's hand for a moment, though he did not reach for his own weapon. "When Kachiko created me using the Egg of Pan Ku, I possessed all of Hoturi's memories, all that he was. She commanded me to be her weapon of vengeance against my own clan, and the magic that made me would not allow for disobedience. I was Hoturi, in all ways. How could I murder my people? How could I find the strength to do such terrible things? How could a man like Hoturi endure such betrayal? Yet there, in Hoturi's memories, I found the tools I needed to become the monster Kachiko wished me to be."

"Speak no more, demon," Satsume hissed, drawing his sword. "I will not let your lies turn me from my path."

"Your path?" Hoturi asked with a laugh. "What interest do I have in your path? Succeed or fail, it makes no difference to me, you will aid me just the same."

"Then what do you want from me?" Satsume demanded.

"Only to hear my tale," Hoturi replied. "How could a man like Hoturi, even a copy of Hoturi, become a monster? Simple enough. I remembered what my father taught me, that a man should not endure weakness, that a man must sacrifice all that he is to obey the oaths he has sworn. I embraced what you taught me. I set out to purge all that was weak within my clan. You claim that I am not your son and in blood perhaps I am not, but know before I leave you that I am truly your son in a way that Doji Hoturi never was."

"So you wish to taunt me?" Satsume demanded.

"Honestly, I cannot say," Hoturi said, tilting his head slightly as he studied Satsume. "Perhaps I truly wished to see you suffer, as petty as it sounds. I know that Hoturi hated you for what you did, for killing his mother. I know he wished you pain, but you died fighting the Scorpion and his vengeance was forever denied. Perhaps what is left of Hoturi within me wished only for me to seize upon this last chance to inform you that it was you, not I, who was truly the Doom spoken of in prophecy."

"Last chance?" Satsume asked. He noticed that some of the spirits had ventured out of the fog, closer to him. Faint hints of color had begun returning to their clothing and armor.

"Yes," Hoturi replied with a cold smile. "He is coming for you even now, and he does not take intruders lightly."

The tremor passed through the earth beneath their feet. The still air of Meido began to stir, turning the fog into a gentle mist. The wandering souls that flocked around Hoturi and Satsume began to wail and shriek, flailing their arms like beasts. The False Hoturi offered a mocking bow and stepped back into the mists, fading quickly away.

Satsume held his sword steady in both hands, watching the flailing spirits for any signs of attack. They only continued their manic howling and swirled about him in mad circles. What was this mad place? Was Teinko doomed to become a creature such as these? He was resolved more than ever to remove her from this place.

"Who are you, to intrude here?" roared a metallic voice that seemed forged from the very essence of Meido. "Who are you to judge ME?"

An enormous warrior in blackened armor stepped out of the mists, looking down at Satsume. The Crane looked up in horror as he realized there was no man within the armor at all; it merely hung in the air as if worn by an invisible figure. The space behind the helm was filled with inky shadow, and he could not help but feel as if the darkness itself was glaring at him. The warrior held a massive obsidian spear in one hand, leveling the blade at Satsume's chest.

"I am Doji Satsume, Emerald Champion to the Hantei Dynasty, lord of the Crane Clan!" Satsume proclaimed in a defiant voice.

"Seek to impress another with your titles," the warrior replied. "Your Emperor holds no power over me. I am the Fortune of Death. I am the warden of lost souls. I am Emma-O, Lord of the Gray Realm, and light such as you bring is not welcome here. Your soul shines with the light of memory, and in a place such as this, it is better to forget. Be forgotten, Crane." The Fortune of Death lifted his spear high, prepared to drive it through Satsume's chest.

Satsume had always valued strength and considered himself a strong samurai. He had always chided his son, Hoturi, for his weakness. He had mocked Hoturi's compassion, his willingness to give himself to others. Yet in that moment, without hesitation, Satsume found the strength to do that which surprised even himself.

The Grinning Crane fell to his knees before the Fortune of Death, placing his sword upon the earth. He bowed his head in shame, and Emma-O held his spear in check.

"Please, mighty Fortune, I beg your mercy," he whispered. "I do not mean to blaspheme this place or intrude upon the sacred duty entrusted to you by the Celestial Order. It is not my intent to judge your methods nor bring your subjects pain. I only seek a single soul."

Emma-O scoffed. "I am impressed by your sincerity, samurai, but why should I give you what you seek?" the god asked. "All who intrude here seek only one soul. Were I to oblige them all, the Gray Realm would be empty. The Celestial Order would fall to chaos as souls out of balance ran unchecked throughout the realms."

"This soul is different," Satsume said. "It is not her fault that she has come to this place. It is mine."

Emma-O lowered his spear. "Truly, you do not understand, mortal," Emma-O said in a sad voice. "Sin is a burden that is rarely one's own, but in the end all must be accountable for their own actions. It may be as you say. It may be that your actions drove the one you seek to an unwelcome fate, but the fact remains — the karmic debt must be repaid, and Meido must have its due."

"Then take me instead," Satsume replied quietly. He looked up, dark eyes staring fearlessly into the void that was Emma-O. "For I have a greater debt to repay. It was I who drove my wife to her death. It was my hatred, my violence that gave birth to the Doom of the Crane."

"You speak of Uikku," Emma-O replied, and his voice seemed almost amused. "You are confused, Crane, as most mortals are. Your people believe Uikku's Dooms have come and gone, that their fate has been averted. Fate cannot be denied, only forestalled for a time. The Dooms Uikku prophesied have not yet come to be."

"Yet the truth remains," Satsume retorted. "I have wronged Doji Teinko, and she suffers for my misdeeds. Please, mighty Fortune, let me take her from this place."

Emma-O said nothing for a long time. He stared silently at the Grinning Crane. Satsume felt as if the god was weighing his soul, judging the value of his entire existence. At last, Emma-O shook his head.

"The balance must be retained," the god said. "Sin demands atonement. A soul must remain here."

"Then take me," Satsume said without hesitation. "My shame is greater."

"You are a hero, Doji Satsume," Emma-O replied. "Your place is in the green fields."

"No," Satsume said. "All that was good and noble in me was born of love for my family and clan. If you would judge Teinko for my arrogance and hatred, then you must honor her for my deeds. Release her into the green fields of Yomi, and let these mists claim me."

"Do you realize the weight of what you ask, Satsume?"

Satsume remembered briefly when the mists had sought to claim him, when he had forgotten all that he was. He would become like the lost souls that surrounded him now, desperately hungry for any memory of the living world. It was a bleak fate.

"It is no less than I deserve," he said, rising to his feet and sheathing his blade.

"It is within my power for you to see Teinko one last time," Emma-O said. "To speak to her before she departs for Yomi and you become one with this place. I will summon her now."

"No," Satsume said sharply.

Emma-O looked down at Satsume, the void within his helmet radiating surprise and confusion.

"To know that I suffer will only bring her pain," the Crane said softly. "Tell her only that her debt is fulfilled, and send her to meet our sons."

"Very well," the Fortune said.

He turned his spear in one hand, and in an instant it was done. The mists rolled over Doji Satsume. The color faded from his face and armor. His dark blue eyes widened in the last moment before all memory faded from him, then he drifted into the fog with the others.

Emma-O stood silently where he was for a time, contemplating the peculiar nature of mortals. Then, suddenly, his hand tightened on the haft of his spear. A savage bellow, the sound of unfathomable rage, welled up from within him. The Fortune of Death sped away through the mists with all the divine speed he could muster, though he already knew he was too late.

The Shadowlands, Present Day

The City of the Lost was a flurry of activity, as it had been since the Bloodspeakers were defeated. The corrupted samurai and peasants who made their home here had set their sights to rebuilding what had been destroyed. Old enmities had been forgotten, as those once compelled into Bloodspeaker service now obeyed their Dark Lord again.

Though they served the Dark God, Fu Leng, with every fiber of their being, these men and women had learned a peculiar sense of honor from Lord Daigotsu. They followed his example dutifully, for he had lead the Lost to glory as none other had before. Years ago, Daigotsu restored the bound essence of Fu Leng to his rightful place among the gods and earned the Fortune of Death's enmity. Though Daigotsu foresaw his own death and stored a portion of his soul in trust with his ally, the Shadow Dragon, that part of him which had died remained bound in Meido.

The Fortune of Death's vengeance was a particularly harsh; he shielded Daigotsu from the dark powers of Jigoku, barring him from the Taint that fueled Fu Leng's minions. What most souls might find a blessing was a horrible curse to the Dark Lord. Though he still served Fu Leng loyally, he was unable to draw upon the dark powers that once let him rule unopposed. Weakened by Emma-O's vengeance, he was unable to prevent Iuchiban from usurping his rule and claiming many of his former followers. Now, however, all of that had changed. Iuchiban was dead. Daigotsu had returned to his proper place in the Temple of the Ninth Kami, and old loyalties were renewed.

And within the Temple, new loyalties were born. As the Dark Lord paced his chambers, he listened to the end of his visitor's tale. A small smile twisted Daigotsu's handsome features as he unraveled the details aloud.

"So you entered into a bargain with the Shadow Dragon, as I once did," Daigotsu said.

"Yes," the man replied. "The Dragon knew where your soul was bound, though a being as powerful as he leaves ripples through the elements that would have been detected by the Fortune of Death. I helped the Dragon find the opportunity we needed to send one less... obvious. Satsume merely provided the distraction we required."

Daigotsu held a hand before his face, studying the black flame that danced between his fingertips. It was a simple trick of blood magic, but even magic such as this had been beyond him until recently. "You are a student of irony, my friend," Daigotsu said. "I wonder if Hoturi enjoyed watching his 'father' consumed by Emma-O's realm."

"I doubt he saw anything at all," the other answered. "He was most likely busy escaping Meido before the Fortune noticed."

"Point well made," Daigotsu mused. "Now let us move on to other matters. The favor you have performed for me cannot easily be repaid."

"I ask only two things from you, Dark Lord," the other replied. "Your mercy, and the opportunity to continue to pursue my art in your service."

"You ask for a great deal," Daigotsu answered. "There are many here who remember how you served Iuchiban."

"You know what I offer cannot be denied. You know that with my help the City of the Lost will become even greater than it was before. My fealty is no small gift, Dark Lord."

"It will be difficult to earn my people's trust," Daigotsu said.

"Then to Jigoku with them," the man spat. "I need only your favor, and my tools. I will take your name and swear fealty if such is required; your service is far greater freedom than Iuchiban ever offered me. My art is everything. Give me work to do, and that is all I will ever ask." The man kneeled deeply before Daigotsu, long white hair spilling over his broad shoulders.

"Well said," Daigotsu said, letting the fires fade from his fingers. "I accept your offer... for there is much work to do. Rise, Daigotsu Yajinden, and join the ranks of the Lost."

The former Bloodspeaker rose, shoulders squared with pride. Slinging his heavy blacksmith's hammer over one shoulder, he bowed to the Dark Lord another time and set out to join those repairing the broken city.

Illus. Franz Vohwinkel © 2005 AEG

3D STRONGHOLDS

by Leon Phillips

A lot of people are wowed by 3D stronghold cards and fascinated by the end results. While I take pride in my work, I do have to admit... they're not particularly difficult. Oh sure, it takes a 3D or two to practice techniques, but after those initial efforts, you can be producing clean cut pieces to keep, give away, or trade. I'm serious about the learning curve on this one... it's just that quick to pick up the nuances (there are already three other people in my area that now make 3Ds and I've lost count of those who have shown me their handiwork at conventions and the like). I was not the first to make 3Ds (shadowboxes have been around for centuries) and not even the first to make them for L5R (someone known as Sunshine from the Philippines was the first I believe). However, I've kept at it long enough that I've found a few useful techniques that might help you with your own.

Here's what you'll need:

A cutting knife: Exacto™ brand preferred; I'd suggest one with a rubber covered handle as well.

A cutting mat: Look for a self-healing mat available at many hobby stores.

Safety goggles: People chuckle when they see me working with the goggles on, but every time a small shard from the tip of a blade snaps upwards and bounces off of the lens, I tell myself I'll live with the laughs.

Extra blades: I go through about 3 to 5 blades per 3D that I make.



Double sided mounting foam tape: I use this as spacing between layers. Alternatively, you can slice up old cards as filler or use thin balsa.

Strongholds: A typical 3D stronghold uses 10–15 layers. I highly suggest you get the real thing as paper copies tear too easily and usually appear grainy even when copied with a high end copier. Don't go for strongholds with too much detail! Trees are okay as long as they're not peppered with loose branches. To begin with, I'd aim for a stronghold with boxy buildings such as *The Towers of the Yogo* or *Kakita Dueling Academy*.

Plastic 50 count box: Some people use wooden frames, but to start, I'd suggest you stick with the plastic box.

Decorative chord: Hit the local fabric store and you'll find lots of different colored chords that you can use to "frame" your image once it's in the box.

Glue: Common tacky glue from your hobby store is great for attaching the chord to the card.

Black paint pen: Once you have the 3D in the box you'll notice you can see the sides. While this effect looks cool on analog watches, it's a visual drawback on a 3D. The pen allows you to darken the sides of the plastic box.

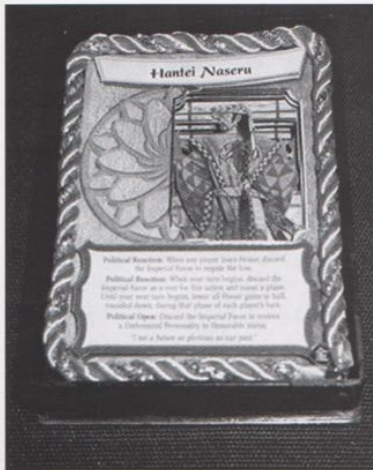
Assemble your tools and sit down in a comfortable chair in a well-lit area. (Be careful about nearby munchies — you might



reach for the bag of chips while you still have the knife in your hand and subsequently accidentally stab your upper lip. I came close a couple of times.)

Before you begin, pick up the stronghold you plan on working on and just visualize different layers. Imagine the image as an actual place you might visit, and think of what would be in the foreground, what would appear as the main structure, and what would be so distant as to really not be 3D at all.

Then just choose a building to cut. It doesn't have to be refined, and nowhere near to perfect. You're just getting the idea of slicing a card right now. Cut out the space around a building and leave the building AND the card frame intact. Then drop that cut-up card onto an uncut one. Immediately you should be able to see some layering. From there, you should get an idea of what you want to cut out next... then pick up a new card and do it. Keep cutting out different parts of cards until you are satisfied that you have created the 3D layering you want. And you thought there was some methodical rule! The gist of it is this... fill in gaps in the 3D.



When you make cuts, angle the blade slightly as if trying to cut under the picture. If you hold the blade too vertical, you'll leave white "fluff" on the edge of the card.

Suppose you do make a mistake? Some people are worried that they'll ruin a card. Here's the neat thing though... just use that card for a different layer. Oops! You cut the flag off the top of the *Kakita Dueling Academy*! No big deal. Just use that card for a lower part of the building, or the wall. In fact, I often suggest that you start with the most difficult layer first. That way, you'll make mistakes early on and simply recycle those cards for easier parts of the 3D. Patience though. Don't rush through the cutting. This is the most time consuming part of the process, and you need to be patient.

Once you have the layers cut out, cut the mounting tape into strips about 1-2

millimeters wide. Put the strips on the sides and the top of the card and then layer the 3D. Be ready to separate and put the 3D back together until the cards line up. If you're using filler cards instead of mounting tape, I'd advise using spray adhesive (in a well-ventilated area) instead of regular glue.

If you have a paint pen, darken the sides of the plastic box and then drop the 3D into the container. You don't have to make the penmanship perfect as the 3D

will prevent most light from getting through anyway. Then glue a length of chord around the top of the 3D and you're done!

Again, be patient. Don't expect a masterpiece on your first few tries. If you want extra tips on making 3Ds or have questions, feel free to contact me at sphynx@aol.com (being sure to put "3D strongholds" in the subject line.)





著書

3RD EDITION RPG PREVIEW

by Shawn Carman
& Rich Wulf



The Third Edition of the *Legend of the Five Rings* Role-playing Game will be released in May of this year, and it is safe to say that everything about the entire system has been analyzed, dissected, and put back together again at least once, sometimes far more than that. The design team for this game went into the writing process with the intent to make it the most thorough and detailed version yet, giving players all the options they need to create heroes that can change the face of Rokugan, without being excessively complex or bogging people down with rules.

In every incarnation of Rokugan, including the RPG, the CCG, and even the long-lost Clan War miniatures game, Void is a key element in the game's theme. It is the fifth Ring, an element taken from the writings of Miyamoto Musashi, author of *The Book of Five Rings* (the work from which the brand takes its name). Void allows RPG characters to achieve greater results, adding to their dice pools and increasing the success of their rolls by making successful Raises. In the CCG, Void is often represented by focusing and card draw. Similar abilities were available in Clan War.

In Third Edition, we wanted to expand how characters could use Void in order to make it more useful and prevalent in a character's day-to-day activities. Truly honorable samurai are spiritual and pious beings, after all, and should Void not play a role in that distinction? A character with a high Void Ring should definitely have an advantage equal to that possessed by other characters who spent their Experience Points on Traits, Skills, or Advantages.

Before examining the benefits of Void, however, we should first look at exactly what Void is. Or at least, the best understanding that the people of Rokugan have of the enigmatic and mysterious Element.

Rings and Traits: Void

The fifth and final element is Void. Void is poorly understood by mortals, who seek to quantify all things. Void is everything and nothing, the binding that holds the other four Rings together, and yet at the same time it is the nothingness that exists between them. It is the divine spark that all humans possess as a result of their descent from Amaterasu's tears and Onnotangu's blood, representing their state of unity with the universe.

Unlike the other Rings, Void does not have Traits associated with it. Instead, characters gain a number of Void Points per day equal to their Void Ring. Void points have many uses (see the *Book of Fire* for more information), but their most basic use is to enhance the number of dice a character rolls and keeps on any given task. At the beginning of a round, before dice are rolled, a character may declare that they are spending a Void Point. This allows them to roll and keep one additional die for whatever roll they are making. For example: Trevor's character Bayushi Shinai is attempting to use Stealth to sneak past a sentry. With an Agility of 3 and Stealth 2, he will roll 5k3. Concerned that this is not enough, Trevor declares that he is spending a Void Point, increasing Shinai's dice from 5k3 to 6k4. This phenomenon is experienced by a character as a moment of incredible clarity and oneness with the world, a flash of insight, or something similar.

A high rating in Void indicates that the character has a deep spiritual connection to the world around him. Though some may exist in this state with a blithe ignorance to their unique nature, more often those with a high Ring are shugenja, monks, or particularly devout bushi, such as the Shiba. Conversely, a low Void Ring indicates a self-centered individual who has not opened himself up to the things around him. Because of this, his lack of Void Points will strictly restrict his moments of epiphany as described above.

Once Void has been explained, players are immediately going to wonder how it is used. Void is the only Ring that can be improved directly with Experience Points, after all, and doing so can have a dramatic effect on a character's Insight total. Given how expensive it is to increase Void, however, is it really worth it?

The most common use of other Traits is to combine them with different Skills, allowing different rolls to accomplish a variety of effects. As always, Void is different, with only two Skills tied directly to it.

Meditation (Void)

Emphases: Fasting, Void Recovery, Zanjī

By spending an hour in uninterrupted meditation and making a Meditation/Void (Void Recovery) roll vs. TN 20, you regain two Void Points.

A Meditation/Void (Fasting) roll may be made to ignore the effects of going without food (allowing you to recover Void while fasting). The TN for this roll is 10, but increases by 5 every day since you last ate or slept.

Emphasis Abilities:

Zanjī: This Emphasis grants an almost supernatural awareness of one's surroundings. By meditating for an hour and making a Meditation/Void (Zanjī) roll vs. TN 15 you gain a Free Raise on your next Perception related roll.

Mastery Abilities:

Rank 5: You now recover four Void Points (total) from Meditation.

Rank 7: You gain 5 Insight. You gain an additional Free Raise when using Zanjī.

Rank 10: You now recover all of your Void Points from Meditation. You gain an additional Free Raise when using Zanjī. The TN for fasting increases only by 1, not 5, per day since you last ate.

Tea Ceremony (Void)

Performance Skill

Far from the consummation of a common beverage, the tea ceremony is an ancient and revered tradition, an opportunity for any soul to find the peace and harmony in a simple, perfect act. A true Master of the Tea Ceremony will be met with respect and deference throughout the Empire.

Use of this skill requires at least an hour in an undisturbed, quiet location and the use of a tea set. A successful Tea Ceremony requires a Void/Tea Ceremony roll vs. TN 20. All those involved in the ceremony regain 1 Void Point.

Mastery Abilities:

Rank 5: The Tea Ceremony now recovers 2 Void Points. One unskilled participant is considered to have one Rank in this skill.

Rank 7: The Tea Ceremony now recovers 4 Void Points. Up to three unskilled participants are considered to have one Rank in this skill.

Rank 10: The Tea Ceremony now recovers all Void Points. All unskilled participants are considered to have one Rank in this skill.

Group Skill Rolls: Tea Ceremony is always a Cooperative Skill Roll when more than one person is involved.

Now we know what Void is, and have an idea how it can be recovered through the use of different Skills. Other than the bit of info in the Ring's explanation, however, we still don't know exactly how the use of Void Points benefits characters other than to add one rolled and kept die to any roll. It seems like Void can be very expensive for a minimal benefit at first glance.

In previous editions, that may have been true. In Third Edition, however, Void Points have become one of the most versatile and fluid mechanics in the entire system, which is exactly how they have always been intended. How will a samurai's connection with the universe around him — the purity and focus of his spirit — affect him in his everyday life? That was only one of many questions used to determine the new direction for Void Points. The results of the redesign make Void Points almost like a new Technique or Spell that every character possesses: one that can radically change the outcome of any encounter if used properly.

Void Points

The element of Void represents your inherent understanding of the dance of the elements, as well as your ability to draw upon the harmony between all elements to achieve greatness. From your character's point of view, this is rarely seen for what it truly is. While you realize that your character is drawing upon the Void, the character may simply see it as a moment of concentration, a burst of heroic effort, or simple dumb luck.

On any given roll, you may spend a single Void Point to enhance the results. Spending a Void Point can have a variety of effects, but the most common is to enhance the results of a dice roll. Spending a Void Point allows a player to roll and keep an extra die on any roll. Spending a Void Point can have a number of other effects as well, listed on the table below.

Spending Void to enhance a roll must be declared before the roll is made. Only a single enhancement may be made on any given roll. Certain effects may increase the number of Void Points that may be spent on a single roll.

To recover Void, you must get a full night's sleep. If you go without food, water, or restful sleep for more than one day you cannot recover Void Points.

TABLE — VOID DIE ROLL ENHANCEMENTS

Enhancement	Void Cost
Extra die, rolled and kept	One Void Point
Free Raise (this Raise may not be used to lower TN)	One Void Point
Gain one Rank in a skill for one roll	One Void Point

OTHER USES FOR VOID POINTS

Void Points have a number of uses outside of enhancements on rolls. A number of Advantages, Techniques, Kata, and Kiho require Void Point expenditure. In addition, there are a number of other ways that all characters can spend Void Points.

Encouragement

As a comrade performs an action, you may encourage them in some manner so long as they can see or hear

you. You spend two Void Points and they immediately gain a Void Point that they must spend to enhance their next roll. Your comrade may still spend his own Void to enhance the same skill roll normally. A single individual may not receive more Void Points to spend in this manner at one time than his own Void Ring.

Final Strike

If you are reduced to the Down, Out, or Dead Wound levels, you may spend three Void Points on your next turn to make a single action before you fall. You suffer a +30 TN penalty for this action. If you are actually killed, you must spend five Void to perform a Final Strike.

Gain an Action

You may spend two Void Points to gain an additional action on your turn. This may not be an attack, but may be used to perform any other actions you could normally perform in one turn.

Switch Initiative

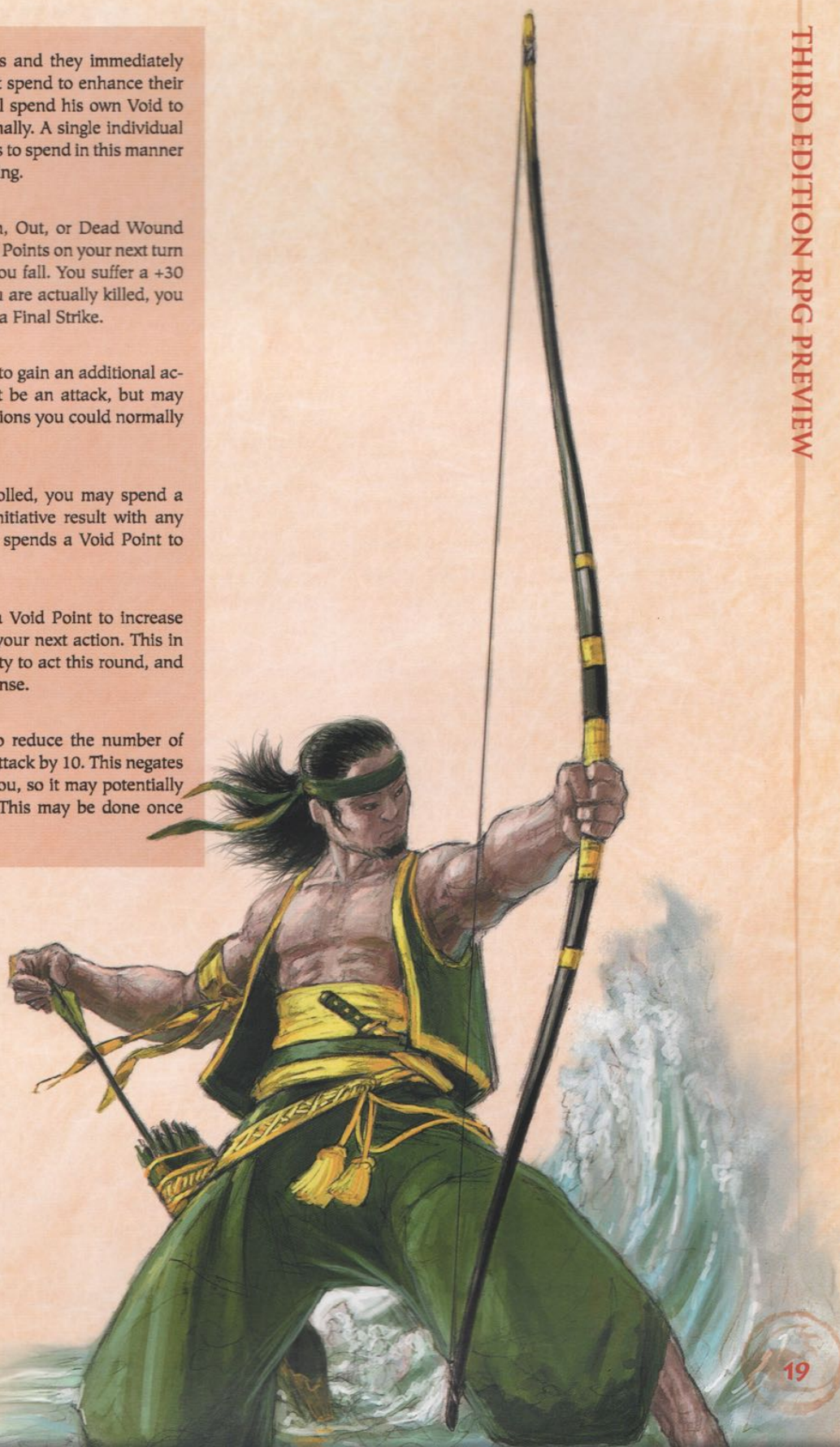
Immediately after Initiative is rolled, you may spend a Void Point to exchange your Initiative result with any other willing comrade who also spends a Void Point to do so.

TN Increase

On your turn, you may spend a Void Point to increase your TN to be Hit by +10 until your next action. This in no way interferes with your ability to act this round, and may be combined with Full Defense.

Wound Reduction

You may spend a Void Point to reduce the number of Wounds you take from a single attack by 10. This negates the Wounds before they affect you, so it may potentially save you from a grisly demise. This may be done once per round.



NEWS OF ROKUGAN

CIRCA CODE OF BUSHIDO

By Rich Wulf

Emperor Toturi-sama,

At your behest, my brethren and I have traveled far and wide throughout the lands of Rokugan, seeking word of the latest developments in your Empire. These have been difficult times indeed for all true servants of the throne, an era of tragedy as well as an era of heroes. The loyal heralds of the Miya family have worked long and hard to gather all news of consequence in the lands of each of the Great Clans since the Rain of Blood. This is what we have to report; all that you now read shall be entered into the Imperial Histories.

— Miya Shoin, Imperial Herald

The Lands of the Crab Clan

The Crab seem to have weathered the time of the Blood-speakers surprisingly well, considering their proximity to the Shadowlands. Their encounters with our Tainted foes were few and far between. The Crab generals theorize that the internal division within the Shadowlands brought this unexpected security. Both Daigotsu and Iuchiban know well from past experiences that the Crab are their most implacable foes. After a single assault on Hiruma Castle — easily repelled by the Crab's crack forces — Iuchiban rethought his strategies and withdrew to seek easier prey.

Many disturbing rumors surround this mysterious withdrawal, however. The herald who surveyed Crab lands heard many peasants whisper that the Dark Lord, Daigotsu, offered his subtle assistance against the Bloodspeaker. It is said that a pact of non-aggression was made between the Crab Clan and the former Dark Lord's servants. If there is any truth to this rumor, my heralds did not find it, for it is quite difficult to even broach the subject of Daigotsu in the presence of Crab samurai without risking their wrath. The memory of the death and corruption of their

previous Champion, Kuroda, is still all too fresh in their minds.

Yet when one Champion falls, another always rises. As you already know the Great Bear, Hida Kisada, has returned from the dead. Drawing upon the last traces of magic within Oblivion's Gate, this hero of the Clan War returned to Rokugan with crucial information that led to Iuchiban's destruction. Though his actions were indisputably heroic, many are still suspicious of the Great Bear's return. After all, it was not so long ago that another conqueror emerged from Oblivion's Gate and sought to impose his will upon the throne. In his own time, Hida Kisada conquered Otsan Uchi and would have slain the last Hantei if not for the intervention of Fu Leng. Though Kisada claims to regret his past actions and has publicly denied rulership of the Crab, there are nonetheless many who would eagerly follow him into battle, in preference even to their rightful ruler, Kisada's grandson Hida Kuon.

Of all the clans, perhaps only the Crab can truly say they have no enemies. During the rise of Iuchiban, few were willing to challenge the clan that knew how to fight the Taint best. The Unicorn still stand as the most vocal supporters of the Crab Clan, and the Crab have repaid their friendship by dispatching Kaiu engineers to fortify the swiftly growing Unicorn village of Sukoshi Zutsu. Work on the Khol extension of the Kaiu Wall also proceeds with the Khan's blessing.

It is not unusual for children of a Clan Champion to train in the household of another clan, but in an impressive display of trust, Hida Kuon has made arrangements for his eldest son, Ichiro, to be trained as a Unicorn. Both the Moto, who rule the Unicorn, and the Shinjo, former rulers of the clan whose ancestry Ichiro bears, sought the right to train the boy and argued

vehemently for the Crab Champion's favor. In a deft political move, Kuon's wife Reiha avoided angering both powerful families by arranging for the boy to be trained by the Utaku family. Since both the Moto and Shinjo are on friendly terms with the Utaku, neither could truly take the move as an insult.

The Utaku were deeply honored by Reiha's request, but politely demurred at first. The Unicorn are known, after all, for their cavalry, and the Utaku do not train men to ride into combat due to family tradition. Reiha replied with a request that the Moto dispatch a sensei to instruct Ichiro in cavalry combat, and that the Shinjo dispatch a sensei to teach him tracking and survival. In the coming spring, Ichiro will be sent to the Utaku Meadows where he will begin his training.

The Lands of the Crane Clan

The Esteemed House of the Crane has weathered these trying times with the poise and balance of the creature from whom they are named. While others have suffered war, death, and destruction, the Crane have made only new allies. Their unlikely friendship with the Crab Clan persists, to the benefit of both clans. I remember the scorn and disdain the samurai of these two houses showed one another in their youth, and to see them still working to mutual benefit even after seven years is astounding. No doubt the Crab have seen the virtue of having such wealthy allies and the Crane have learned not to scorn those who defend their southern border from the Shadowlands — at least not in public. Whether this alliance can possibly persist is anyone's guess. Members of the Yasuki family are fiercely split among clan lines, united only in their loyalty to Hachi, their daimyo. I fear it is only a matter of time before some mutual enemy of both Crab and

Crane seeks to tear this powerful alliance apart.

Of course the Crane are no fools, and take steps to protect their interests. They have sought to secure their position in the court by forging alliances with other powerful individuals as well. They recently opened the doors of the Asahina libraries to the Dragon Clan, allowing the Mirumoto nemuranai seekers unprecedented access to long-hidden records regarding the Bloodspeaker, Yajinden, and his foul craft. A recent minor border dispute with the Lion Clan was quickly smoothed over with a surprising political marriage. Doji Domotai, daughter and heir to the Crane Champion, will be wed to Ikoma Kusari, son of the Ikoma daimyo, Korin. Kusari intends to take the Doji name and join the house of the Crane.

A match equally as fortuitous for the Crane (if less than elegant in its execution) was that between Doji Yasuyo and the Shogun, Kaneka. This is obviously no news to Your Majesty as the marriage took place simultaneously with your own, but deserves mention here so that it might be remembered in the histories. It was long debated in the courts as to whether Yasuyo would swear fealty to the Phoenix or whether Kaneka would assume the Doji name. Both husband and wife are individuals of extraordinary reputation, and precedents were brought forth for why either should be compelled to be subservient to the other.

In the end, it seems that heroes such as these will not be bound by tradition — they define it. Neither Kaneka nor Yasuyo have sworn fealty to the other's house, only to one another. It is rumored that a private challenge was declared between the Shogun and his bride, and at the end of this challenge one would finally swear fealty to the other. The nature of this challenge, if indeed it exists, is unknown.

Rumors abound that a samurai resembling the legendary Daidoji Uji — shadowy hero of the Clan Wars — has recently been seen at large in Crane lands, but they cannot be confirmed. None of my

heralds sighted any such individual.

The Lands of the Dragon Clan

As always, the Dragon are the exception, the contradiction. Their lands remain forever open to visitors, but are strangely inhospitable. I sent three heralds to Dragon lands, Makashi, Kayoko, and Oda. Makashi reported he was deeply disturbed by the confusing ways of the mystics he met, and begged never to be sent to those mountains again. Kayoko reported that she was entranced by the beauty of the Dragon castles, and the polite etiquette of their samurai. Oda, whom I scarcely recognized for his shaven head and brilliant tattoos,

returned
only long
enough to
deposit his final

report before returning permanently to the Temple of the Celestial Wanderer.

It cannot be argued that the Dragon clan has suffered more than any other during the past two years. When the Rain of Blood fell and once noble samurai succumbed to madness, it was the Dragon Clan who accepted Your Majesty's command to purge the fallen. Their quest took them to the lands of the Phoenix Clan — so recently their most bitter enemies — where many Dragon warriors perished in the Battle of Gisei Toshi. When the Lion and Unicorn, two of the mightiest armies of the Empire, fell to civil war in the City of the Rich Frog, it was the Dragon who intervened for the sake of peace. It was their impossible duty to make the conflict too costly for either side to pursue, and in the end they triumphed.

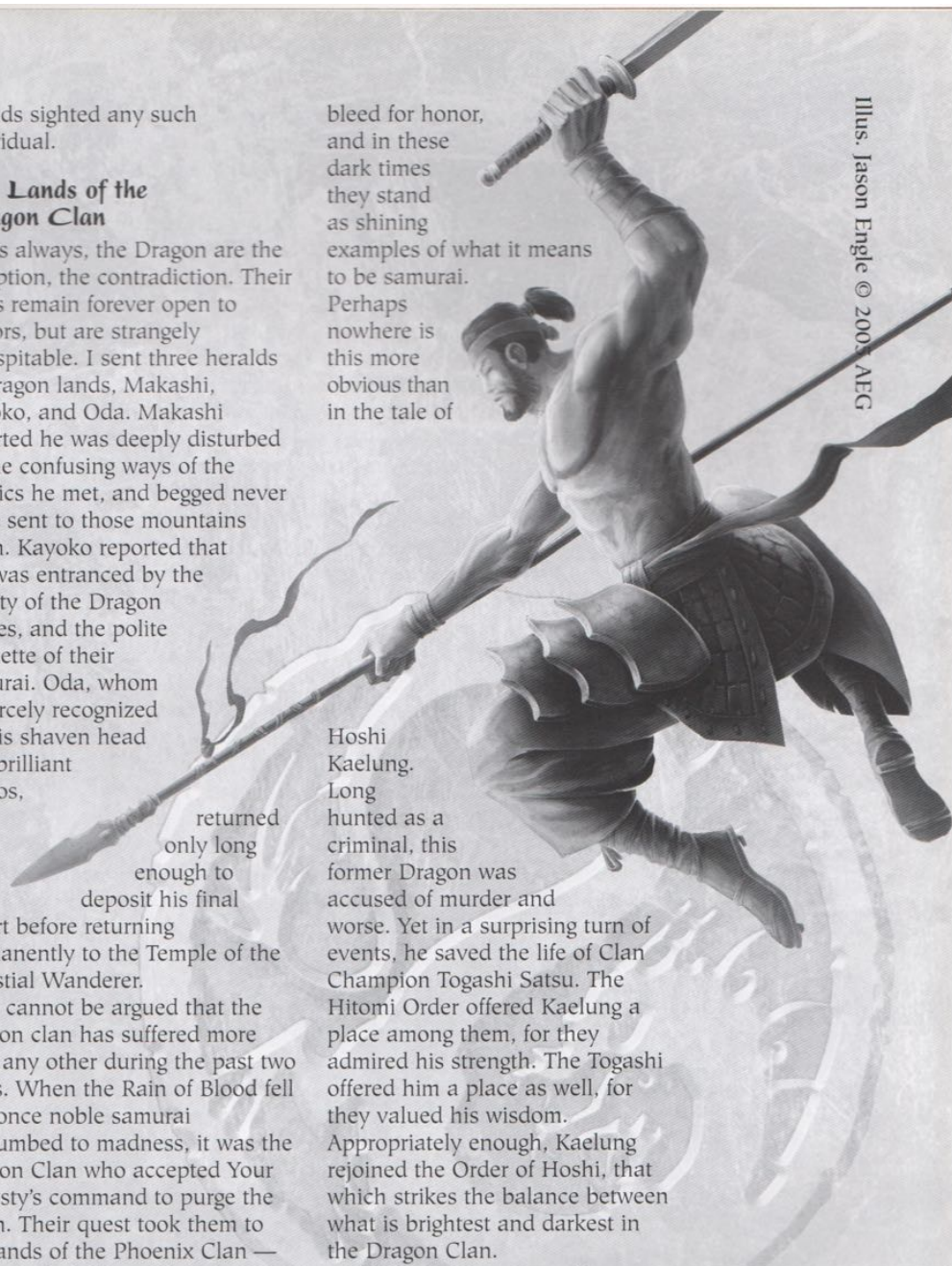
For all their losses, the wounded Dragon carry themselves with fierce pride. The Clan is many things, my lord, but they are no victims. Their suffering came not as a result of some unexpected attack or sinister manipulation. Though the Dragon bleed, they

bleed for honor, and in these dark times they stand as shining examples of what it means to be samurai. Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than in the tale of

Hoshi Kaelung. Long hunted as a criminal, this former Dragon was accused of murder and worse. Yet in a surprising turn of events, he saved the life of Clan Champion Togashi Satsu. The Hitomi Order offered Kaelung a place among them, for they admired his strength. The Togashi offered him a place as well, for they valued his wisdom. Appropriately enough, Kaelung rejoined the Order of Hoshi, that which strikes the balance between what is brightest and darkest in the Dragon Clan.

For many years now the alliance between Dragon and Scorpion has stood as the strongest in the Empire. During the War of the Rich Frog, these two allies came into conflict, and many wondered if their alliance would be broken. In the wake of the war, it seems such is not to be. Following the Scorpion's reclamation of Ryoko Owari, the Three Orders dispatched a large contingent of their monks to re-consecrate the city's temples in the name of the Scorpion. The revelry and intense fireworks displays that followed seem to have renewed the friendship between these two most mysterious of clans, at least for the time being. To the Scorpion, who I suspect realize

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that the Dragon owed them nothing but suspicion for their manipulations during the war, such a gesture of friendship is a favor they will not be able to easily repay.

The Lands of the Lion Clan

The Akodo family has a peculiar curse — “May you live in interesting times.” Sadly, it seems as if their clan has suffered more interesting times than any. The Lion have long been respected as the most fearsome warriors in Rokugan. Those who face them in the courts do so with great caution, for any insult to the Lion’s unquestionable honor might result

in ten thousand Matsu samurai marching upon your homeland. They are the Emperor’s strong Right Hand, the backbone of his Legions and the enforcers of his will.

Yet now we have seen a war the likes of which even the great histories of Rokugan strain to recall. We have seen the Lion challenged in their own homelands. We have seen the Unicorn Khan turn their own tactics against them. Though the Lion did not technically lose the War of the Rich Frog, neither can it be said that they won. The Golden Lion of Toshi Ranbo has been slain, and if not for the untimely coincidence of the Rain of Blood during the Unicorn’s initial

assaults, perhaps the

Khan’s army might be marching upon Shiro Akodo even now.

Yet the Lion Clan still maintains some measure of hope. Their allies in the Crane have brought relief and support to their war-torn western lands.

Ikoma Otemi, a respected hero throughout the Empire, has risen to leadership of the clan. And lest any doubt the courage and prowess of the Lion Clan, let them remember that the armies who marched beside Hida Kisada in his quest to slay the undying Iuchiban were mostly Lion.

Sadly, it seems that the shadow of corruption never fails to haunt the Lion. During the final battle with

Iuchiban, forces identified as bearing the Daigotsu family mon were identified in the city. Though your

brother Sezaru commanded that the Dark Lord, if he were present, not be allowed to escape alive, somehow these forces fled by ship to the east. Some have turned their suspicions toward the Lion, whose duty it was to seal off Golden Sun Bay. When my herald questioned Matsu Aoiko on the matter, she flew into a furious rage, and only his status as an Imperial servant led her to spare his life.

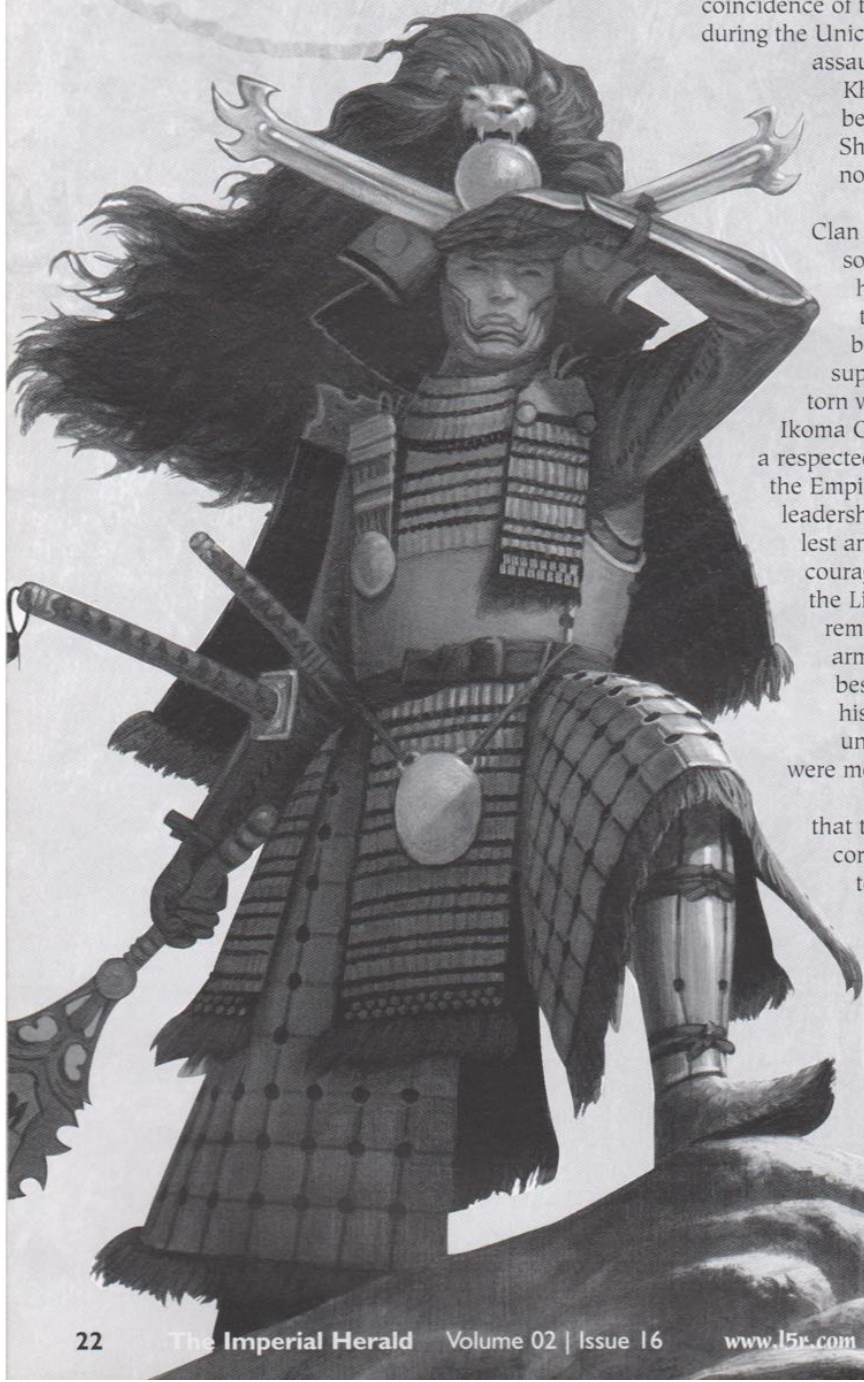
Though the Right Hand is obviously no longer as invincible as it once was, neither are the Lion weak. In fact, I think that the Lion Clan’s experiences in the City of the Rich Frog might ultimately benefit their clan. Those who were once calmly confident in their clan’s superiority realize now that they must strengthen themselves anew. It is no longer enough to rely upon the Emperor’s favor as the greatest warriors in the Empire — they must *prove* that they are the greatest.

It is a challenge that the Lion have thus far met unquestioningly.

The Lands of the Mantis Clan

As one war draws to a close, another begins. The circumstances that led to the current dispute between the Mantis and Phoenix Clans are hazy at best. It is known that the two clans have never been particularly friendly to one another. The Mantis Clan’s unofficial founding began with an assault on Shiro Shiba, and relations between the two clans have only continued to degrade since.

Some Mantis claim that their Clan’s attempt to conquer the Phoenix Lands during the War Against the Darkness was Yoritomo’s only true failure. Many who now bear the Son of Storms’ name have long wished to wipe that failure away. Though pacifistic by nature, the Phoenix are quite vehement in their disapproval of the Mantis Clan’s mercenary philosophies and willingness to consort openly with gaijin. The two clans rarely see eye to eye and only the great distance between their territories has prevented them from coming into conflict with greater regularity.



Their past peace is irrelevant. The time has come for war. Rumors abound of the reasoning behind these sudden, brutal confrontations between Phoenix and Mantis. I have heard Mantis claims that the Phoenix Clan have granted refuge to Kitao, the corrupted leader of the Dark Wave Fleet. I have heard Phoenix claims that Mantis pirates have used hideous magics to wipe out Phoenix villages for easy looting; the sudden presence of orochi sea beasts lends this claim a disquieting weight. When my herald sought to inquire further, he was met by stern-faced Inquisitors who recommended that he drop his investigation.

Mantis Champion Yoritomo Kumiko seems particularly frustrated by the recent turn of events. She believes that Kitao still hides somewhere along the mostly uninhabited coasts of Phoenix territory, and has somehow manipulated these events to make her search more difficult. While her clan continues to fight on the beaches and islands of northern Rokugan, the Daughter of Storms has made her way to Toshi Ranbo. She has been seen frequently in earnest discussions with members of the Lion Clan, though neither party has revealed the reason for these meetings to anyone.

I recall that several years ago, an alliance between the Lion and the Phoenix caused the near destruction of the Dragonfly Clan and crushed the eastern defenses of the Dragon Clan. When the Lion Clan withdrew to deal with Tsuno attacks in their own land, Shiba Aikune branded the Lion as cowards and killed many of the Lion reserve troops in a blind rage. The Lion were forced to set aside the insult, in the interests of peace, though I doubt it has been forgotten. Perhaps Yoritomo Kumiko has found some leverage on the Lion that encouraged them to remember this old insult? Only time will tell. For now, there is only one other fact that can safely be said about Kumiko's dealings in Toshi Ranbo. She has been carefully avoiding the man who was at one time among her strongest supporters — the Shogun, Kaneka, now a member of the Phoenix Clan.

The Lands of the Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix are beset with tragedy. For a clan that values peace so highly, it seems to be their destiny to be dragged into pointless war, first with the Dragon Clan, then with the Bloodspeakers, and now with the Mantis Clan. It is a tragic irony that the same clan that suffered the fewest losses during the Rain of Blood also claims the largest casualty rates of any clan from Bloodspeaker attacks. If there is any positive side to the suffering the Phoenix have endured, it is that they of all the clans have proven themselves free of any Bloodspeaker manipulations.

The Elemental Council has undergone an upheaval in leadership. After the death of Master of Earth Isawa Taeruko, Master of Water Doji Akiko became the new spokesman of the Council. With her unparalleled experience and heritage as daughter of the original Isawa, few can doubt her worth. Though she is a returned spirit, those who might distrust her for that reason have put their fears to rest — largely from the support of the new Master of Earth, Isawa Sachi. Sachi was an extremely fierce and valiant opponent of the Hantei's armies during the War of Spirits. If he is willing to trust and accept Sachiko's leadership, then many other Phoenix are willing to follow her without question.

I find it odd that those who have been on the Council the longest are now the least visible. Master of Air Isawa Nakamuro has retreated to his libraries, pursuing some mysterious research that he will share with no one, perhaps not even his fellow Masters. Master of the Void Shiba Ningen is still quite visible, but remains as enigmatic as ever. He has spent a great deal of time in the Phoenix woodlands of late, collecting the mythology and legends of the Green-Green-White Nezumi for reasons of his own. This leads the Masters of Fire, Water, and Earth to determine the Phoenix Clan's path, and though it would be untrue to say that they never squabble, it seems that the three seldom disagree on matters of true

importance. For instance, the Council was unanimous in politely refusing Kaneka's aid in the Phoenix Clan's war against the Mantis. It was Akiko's belief that Kaneka served the Empire more efficiently in the capital, lending his strength to the Emperor's. As I am sure you know, of course, Kaneka ultimately follows no counsel in such matters save his own — so it remains to be seen if he will choose to become involved in his adopted clan's newest war.

The Lands of the Scorpion Clan

A new leader has stepped forward to lead the Scorpion Clan, amid much controversy. The full details of why Bayushi Sunetra set aside her position and embraced the life of a ronin are, as befits the clan of secrets, a mystery to all save the highest ranking members of her clan. All that my heralds have discovered is that she has truly and completely vanished from the face of Rokugan. For one as talented in the arts of stealth and espionage as she reputedly is, it is quite possible that she might live out the rest of her days without ever being discovered.

Much slander erupted in the courts following Sunetra's disappearance; the Clan's enemies claimed that by shirking her duties, she proved that the Scorpion Clan's vaunted loyalty was as much a sham as the rest of their honor. Bayushi Paneki, the new Champion of the Scorpion Clan, stepped forward to personally confront many of these insults. He stated clearly that, as Your Majesty had not issued any censure or condemnation to Sunetra for her actions, that any others forgot their place in seeking to do so, and had issued an unforgivable insult to the Son of Heaven. One wise Crane courtier immediately issued a public apology on the behalf of his clan. A low ranking Crab courtier tried to politely laugh off Paneki's accusations. The new Scorpion Champion dueled and killed the Crab that same day. The whispers surrounding Sunetra's appearance did not cease, though they have become much quieter since the duel.

In other courtly developments, it seems that the Scorpion, who ruled the courts virtually unopposed several years ago, have accepted the Crane Clan's growing power with remarkable calm. They have made no overt gestures to undermine the Crane's burgeoning alliances with the Dragon, Crab, or Lion Clans. They have, in fact, made sweeping diplomatic gestures to open their doors to the Crane, including offering the Daidoji family favored trade status in Ryoko Owari. The Crane have cautiously accepted this gesture of peace, but whether it is a sincere alliance or simply the opening move to the newest Bayushi power play is still unknown.

The Lands of the Unicorn Clan

It is a difficult time to be a Unicorn. Though their warriors carry themselves with pride after issuing the Lion the humiliating defeats in Kaeru Toshi, the their actions in that war have irreparably damaged their reputation in the courts. Ide Tang's loose interpretations of Imperial Law led to the justification of a bloody civil war and the deaths of many samurai in the Lion, Unicorn, and Dragon Clans. Though he was appointed daimyo of his family for his loyal service to the Khan, the Ide family is split in its loyalty to him. Some obey him without question. Others feel that his actions are a blasphemous betrayal of their family's ancient philosophies, using the skills of a diplomat to rationalize warmongering and murder.

In the meantime, the militant families of the Unicorn have quickly turned their attention toward strengthening their clan's borders. The Khan is a canny leader, and realizes that in issuing a challenge against the Lion Clan, he has opened himself to possible future attacks from any number of enemies. One can scarcely travel down a road in Unicorn lands for more than an hour before spying a patrol of Shinjo scouts, Moto heavy cavalry, or the rare unit of Shiotome Battle Maidens on the horizon. The Unicorn have become extremely suspicious of

intruders, and will turn back any who do not possess the proper travel papers. The Scorpion Clan, who may have covertly aided the Unicorn during the War of the Rich Frog, are now regarded with extreme suspicion. One Scorpion magistrate was detained by the Moto White Guard for three days, even though his papers were in perfect order.

The notable exception to this rule is the Crab Clan, with whom the Unicorn continue to share friendly relations. Though no Crab troops fought in the War of the Rich Frog, the Unicorn received support from the Crab in the form of siege engines and strategic advice. The Unicorn repaid that favor by granting the Crab a large portion of their surplus rice crop. Since the Crab always have sore need of military supplies, such a gesture will not soon be forgotten. Thus it seems that whatever fate awaits the Unicorn, they will have at least one loyal ally upon which to call.

The Tribes of the Nezumi

Though they are certainly not a Great Clan and more than a few would consider them barbaric savages, the Nezumi have proven at the very least that they merit our attention. These strange creatures have not only earned a place in the Imperial Court but have also earned the friendship of the Great Clans on many occasions. They are worth note, if for no other reason than they hate the Shadowlands with an intensity that surpasses even our own. I dispatched a herald to visit the Tattered Ear Tribe, and the stories that he gathered from their bright eye Rememberer are quite astonishing. It seems that the Ratlings have been facing quite interesting times indeed.

According to Ratling history, these creatures once stood as a single tribe and ruled a vast civilization in the lands that are now the Shadowlands. When Fu Leng fell from the

heavens, he destroyed this civilization, reducing the Nezumi to a scattered, barbaric state. The Nezumi believe that the mightiest of their cities faded into the Realm of Dreams, and remain there waiting to be found.

Imperial historians would of course laugh at this story, and whether it is true or not is not my concern – what is important for this report is that the Nezumi believe the tale with all their hearts. A Nezumi referring to himself as the “Tomorrow Chieftain” (for the Nezumi, the word “Tomorrow” means both “the future” and “death”) appeared, allying himself with both the twisted Stained Paw and the malevolent Tsuno. Ancient ruins arose from the Shadowlands at his command, ruins that he claimed were the Nezumi cities returned from dream. He demanded that the Nezumi tribes ally under his rule once more, or be destroyed and forgotten. The Crippled Bone, a tribe of fierce warriors, denied the Tomorrow Chieftain and were brutally attacked by the Stained Paw and their Tsuno allies.

The Nezumi were deeply shaken by these events, until a clever thief named Ik'krt stole into the Tomorrow Chieftain's city seeking the truth. He learned that the Tsuno used their own mastery of the realm of dreams to forge a creature out of nightmares, piecing together the shattered dreams of the Stained Paw Tribe and infusing them into one of their own kind, creating the illusion that was the Tomorrow Chieftain. Upon learning how the Tsuno had lied to them, many of the most powerful Nezumi tribes rose up

as one, attacking the ruins. The Tsuno, realizing their ruse had failed, withdrew into the Realm of Dreams, abandoning the Stained Paw to their enemies. The Stained Paw Tribe suffered heavy losses and, broken and demoralized, retreated deeper into the Shadowlands.

As a result of this climactic battle, a powerful alliance known as the One Tribe has formed between the formerly divisive bands of the Nezumi. It is my belief that Rokugan would do well to foster good relations with this One Tribe, as they will serve as a potent enemy against the Shadowlands.

Fortunately it seems that the Nezumi also see the wisdom of such an alliance, and have already learned much of human culture and politics. They continue to serve the Crab Clan loyally as scouts and warriors. The Dragon Clan have formed an alliance with the Grasping Paw, a tribe of Nezumi that have proven quite adept at finding and recovering the nemuranai with which the Mirumoto family are so obsessed. My scout also heard several

rumors among the tribes that Shiba

Ningen, Master of the Void, had been using Nezumi spies to gather information on the Mantis Clan. This information cannot be readily confirmed, but seems to match with the previously

reported information regarding Ningen's curiosity and local Nezumi tribes.

The Shadowlands

I would not be so foolish as to dispatch any of my heralds beyond the Kaiu Wall to seek knowledge of our enemy. Such a duty is better suited to more experienced defenders of the Empire. However, my heralds have thoroughly interviewed many Crab samurai, as well as many Lion warriors who fought in the recent battles in Otosan Uchi, and we have learned much about our hated enemy.

The most important news to report of the Shadowlands is, obviously, the death of Iuchiban, leader of the Bloodspeakers. This seemingly immortal sorcerer plagued Rokugan for centuries. In the past he could not be slain, only temporarily defeated and contained. Even from his imprisonment, he led the Bloodspeaker cult into savage conflict with the true servants of the Empire again and again through the generations.

Thanks to the efforts of many noble samurai, this evil has been brought to an end. The Great Bear, Hida Kisada, returned from death with knowledge of the Bloodspeaker's weakness. Your own brother, the Wolf, returned from his own mysterious wanderings with the knowledge needed to put this information to use. In the lands of the Lion Clan, they found the key to finding and destroying Iuchiban's Hidden Heart, and with the aid of Matsu Aoiko's armies, these brave heroes marched upon Iuchiban's iron citadel in the ruins of

Otosan Uchi. Your brother himself dealt the killing blow, forever laying to rest this threat to the Empire.

Though the mastermind behind the Rain of Blood and Battle of Gisei Toshi is no more, the danger posed by the Shadowlands remains dire. In the City of the Lost, the fallen Dark Lord, Daigotsu, has returned to his place of power. Even now he gathers his strength once more. Though Sezar is eager for revenge upon the man who once slew your beloved sister, the Wolf is wise enough not to fall into whatever traps Daigotsu may have in wait. The time will soon come when the Empire must deal with the returned Dark Lord, but it seems that day is not today. For now, we must recover from the wounds Iuchiban has dealt us, and gather our strength as well.

It seems that Daigotsu's followers are content to maintain this fragile peace. One tale my heralds gathered even claims that Daigotsu expressed his gratitude toward the Crab by returning the ancestral armor of the Hiruma family, lost for centuries to the darkness. The Hiruma were elated but cautious, passing the armor to their Kuni brethren to study in order to be certain it bears no Taint or other foul trap left in place by the Dark Lord. Speaking for myself, I almost hope that there is some foul design in place, and that the Crab uncover it before it brings harm to anyone. Somehow the idea that a servant of Fu Leng would have the capacity to bestow such a gift with no ulterior motive is an even more chilling prospect. Our honor has long been our strongest weapon against our adversary. If the corrupted souls that serve the Ninth Kami learn to understand bushido as we do, perhaps they would become even more dangerous than they already are.

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CHOOSE YOUR FATE

By Rich Wulf

Last issue, we featured a Choose Your Fate Poll, offering players a chance to vote on the fate of Toturi I's daisho. This month, we continue this trend, allowing players a chance to decide another important story point.

This time around, the players can do what everyone loves to do – pick who lives and who dies. Here's how it works. Pick two characters from the following list, one "Fated to Live" and one "Fated to Die."

The character with the greatest amount of "Fated to Die" votes will die in an upcoming Imperial Herald Fiction – with one important exception. The character with the greatest amount of "Fated to Live" votes is immune to this fate, and the death will then pass on to the character with the second greatest amount of "Fated to Die" votes. The character with

the greatest amount of "Fated to Live" votes will appear in the same fiction (though they will survive).

Email your choices to rwulf@alderac.com with the subject header "Choose Your Fate."

Emails that do not have this exact subject header will not be counted so please check your email before you send out your vote!

Here are your choices:

- 1) Hida Reiha, Lady of the Crab (Crab Clan)
- 2) Kakita Munemori, Gozoku conspirator (Crane Clan)
- 3) Mirumoto Mareshi, son of Daini and Mara (Dragon Clan)
- 4) Ikoma Sume, retired master spy (Lion Clan)
- 5) Yoritomo Yoyonagi, Mantis Clan poet (Mantis Clan)

- 6) Shiba Tsukimi, hero of the Battle of Gisei Toshi (Phoenix Clan)
- 7) Zin'tch, Nezumi courtier (Ratlings)
- 8) Bayushi Kwanchai, student of the Tengen technique (Scorpion Clan)
- 9) Kyofu, Onisu of Fear (Shadowlands)
- 10) Akasha, Legacy of the Naga (Unicorn Clan)

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

In this space, we'll be answering actual questions we've received in emails from L5R fans. This time around, Shawn Carman and Rich Wulf will be answering a slew of Ratling-related questions.

Q. I know that sometimes the LARPs influence story, sometimes they don't. Someone playing Yoe'trr in one of those RPs managed to acquire the Hiruma name (or maybe we should say Name with a capital N considering the meaning it has for Nezumi) and rumors have flown speculating on whether that's true. So I figure I'd like to know one way or the other...is that aspect of the RP going to be official(meaning that storywise we'll see Hiruma Yoe'trr) or no?

Rich: It depends. I would like to represent this particular story prize in the cards, but dual-aligned characters are always something that we do very cautiously. Sometimes characters that by all rights should be dual aligned (such as Doji Akiko) cannot be due to mechanical considerations. I'll look into this, however, and see what we can do.

Shawn: I might also point out the obvious and say that even among the Crab, who are very chummy with the Nezumi, the idea of granting your ancestor's name to a non-human creature is pretty difficult to wrap your mind around. That happens... well, almost never.

Q. Is the alliance against the Tomorrow Chieftain also devoted to eventually forming the One Tribe or is that dream basically just Te'tik's hope at this point — a hope which he hopes that the remainder of the Nezumi will share?

Rich: Well, Te'tik'kir would like to see the Ratlings reunited. Optimally, it would be under better circumstances than this, but if the One Tribe must form to defeat a common enemy then so be it.

Shawn: If you are familiar with Te'tik'kir's background from *Way of the Ratling*, this whole scenario smacks of irony! That isn't lost on him.

Q. I have to say, that one thing that really brings me closer to the fictitious realm of L5R is the death of characters. That truly helps me feel the game is alive. Whether their death is through battle, illness, or shame, it truly brings the story to life. The only faction that I can really say that hasn't had a death in a story is Ratling. Now I'm not saying I want anyone to die, but a great battle with Stained Paw is waging. Can we expect some casualties?

Rich: Sure we'll kill some of your characters for you. (evil grin)

Shawn: Paging Daigotsu Rid-X.

Q. Obviously you have to be unbiased when writing things, but do you or Shawn have any particular favorite tribes among the Nezumi?

Rich: I am particularly fond of the Grasping Paw, because they're scummy little thieves. I also like the Third Whisker, because they were smart enough to burrow into that nice, sturdy Wall and make a home there.

Shawn: The Crippled Bone are by far my favorite. They were among the first major ideas that I developed and saw incorporated into the storyline after Rich and I took over the RPG line.

Q. What tribe was Snak a part of and are either of the 1KYod rats around in the current timeline?

Rich: Snak was a member of the Grasping Paw. Due to the greatly abbreviated lifespan of Ratlings (oddities like Te'tik'kir being the exception) neither of these Nezumi are currently alive.

Shawn: In RPG terms, they possess the Disadvantage: Dead.

FAN FAVORITES

By Shawn Carman

Like a lot of people, the strongest feelings I have about Rokugan were formed shortly after I first discovered the world of L5R. I think things are always the most exciting when you first discover them, when everything is new and fresh from your perspective. My first exposure to Rokugan was at GenCon 1997, on the Day of Thunder, when I bought the *Legend of the Five Rings* Role-playing Game, First Edition.

Reading through that first book, I found a world like nothing I had ever experienced before. I knew of samurai, of course, and had read of their warrior culture, but this took everything I had thought admirable and respectable about that culture and that period in history, and breathed life into it. The clans were rich and exciting, each with their own unique purpose and outlook. It was captivating.

Then I found the section discussing the Minor Clans. The idea piqued my interest, even among all the other new ideas I was discovering. I read further, and then I came to the description of the Wasp Clan. There was virtually nothing there, just a little blurb about them being "the finest archers in all of Rokugan." I was pretty much hooked. I did some research into the CCG, which I didn't really know anything about at that point. I read about Yoritomo's Alliance, so I went out and picked up a starter deck. And what did I find?

Tsuruchi. Wasp Clan Master Bowman.

To be honest, I have no idea why I was so taken with Tsuruchi and his clan, but I was. The first work I ever did writing for the RPG was my home-brewed version of the Wasp Clan Bushi School. I worked up a whole background for them based on all of two sentences that I hunted down in the main book. Personally, I thought I was being very logical. I mean, the Bayushi family lived in Kyuden Bayushi, right? And the Doji lived in Kyuden Doji? So where did the Wasp live?

During the first RPG session I ever ran, I was introducing the players to the different NPCs when my favorite, the Wasp, came up. I was met with blank stares.

"What did you just say?" demanded my brother.

"Ashinagabashi Ichiro," I explained. "He's the first born son of the Wasp Clan daimyo, out exploring the Empire as a magistrate from Kyuden Ashinagabashi."

"Why do you keep saying that word?" my friend Matt asked.

"Well, it's his family name," I replied.

"Let me see the book." My brother held out his hand. "I want to see how you spell that, because I'm sure not going to try and pronounce it."

"Uh... the family's not really in the book."

"What? Where did you get that, then?"

"See, I just figured that it was logical to assume that if it's common for ruling family's to share a name with their castle, then that must be their name."

"Oh, okay." Matt seemed placated. "Are all castles named after a family?"

"Uh... no." There was a moment of silence, and then the group as a whole began demanding to know what exactly was wrong with me as they pelted me with ten-sided dice.

I still don't know what's wrong with me, exactly, but eight years later I'm a principle author on most of the RPG line, and it was my great honor to determine what Tsuruchi's final fate would be. For those of you who haven't read *Secrets of the Mantis*, he currently lives a simple monk's life in the Moshi lands, now joined by his former successor Tsuruchi Ichiro, once known as Ashinagabashi Ichiro.

See, this is why you should never ask me to tell you about my character.

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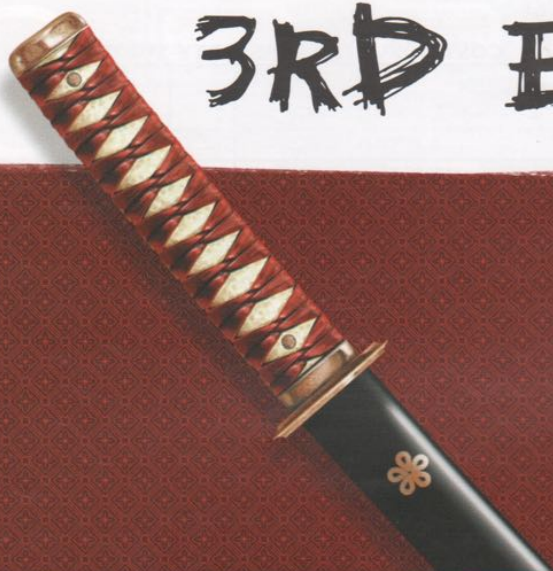
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