

LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS • INTERACTIVE STORYLINE COLLECTIBLE CARD & ROLEPLAYING GAMES

THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

VOL. 2 / NO. 8

DIAMOND
INSIDER

WINDS of
CHANGE
DESIGN NOTES

L5R
CARD VAULT

NEW:
KOKU REDEMPTION

Clan Rivals

TM



Crab vs. Mantis

There are but a handful of safe routes through the Sea of Shadows, and the mercenary forces of the Mantis Clan recently uncovered another. Unfortunately, it is a prominent trade route used by Crab merchants, who are not pleased, shall we say, to have another clan draw attention to their well-hidden shipping lanes... When war breaks out on the seas, which of Osano-Wo's children shall emerge victorious: the resilient Crab or the adaptable Mantis?

To participate in this exciting Clan Rivals Tournament Crab vs. Mantis match up, get in touch with your local retailer today. Walk away with exclusive foil promo cards in hand, shape the future of Rokugan, and prove once-and-for-all who is worthy enough to be the true son of Osano-Wo! Coming in August!



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THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY

VOL. 2 / NO. 8

Editorial

We're in the middle of Kotei season, with another good summer ahead of us. By the time you get this, Origins should be just past, with GenCon right around the corner. As I write this, I've just returned from my third Kotei of the year, and plan on going to two more. During my travels, I've noticed a few things about the tournament scene.

I've never played in a tournament. I've run a lot of them — I've lost track of how many — but I've never participated in one. I joined AEG shortly after I started playing L5R so I never had the opportunity to play competitively. Over the past few years, I've watched players come and go and return again; some things have changed, and some things have not.

Things that have not changed: a remarkable love for the storyline, the emphasis of sportsmanship, and a player's fanatic loyalty to his chosen clan.

The main thing that has changed is the number of competitive players. Tournaments are getting larger. We had almost 450 individual players at GenCon last year. We expect about half a dozen Koteis to exceed 128 attending players, thereby seeding the top two players into the Saturday round at GenCon. We've got guys who love the game so much that they travel hundreds of miles to several Koteis.

L5R tournaments have become remarkable social events where we all know each other and look forward to meeting those we don't. I'm proud to be a part of a community where honor is stronger than steel.

— Raymond Lau
L5R Brand Manager



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PREVIEWS

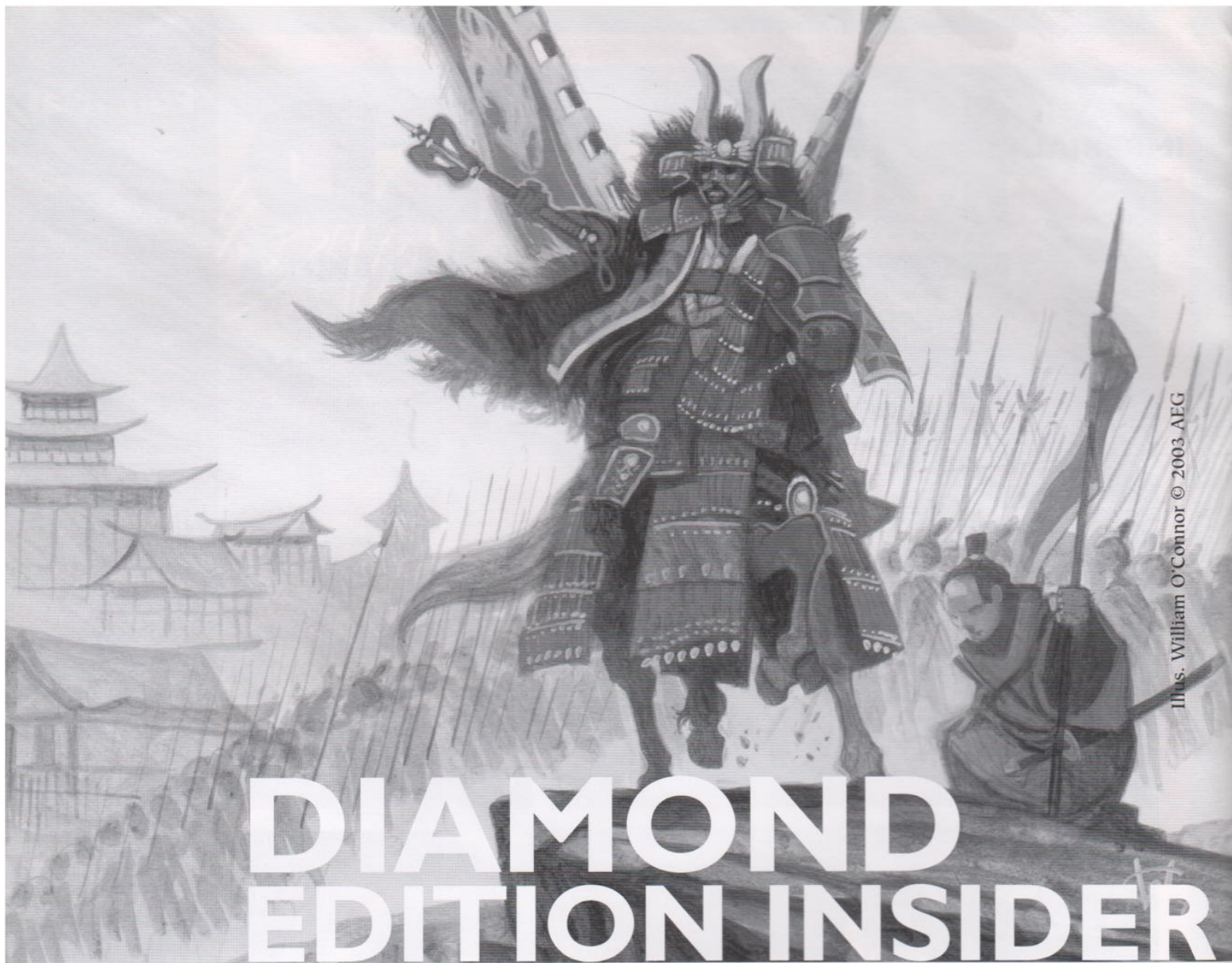
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DIAMOND EDITION INSIDER

by Ray Lau

October conjures little witches and bedsheeted ghosts. October crowns new MLB champions. October also marks the beginning of the new Diamond environment. A new Emperor will have been established in an evolving Rokugan, and the way you play L5R will reflect that change. Diamond becomes the fourth tournament environment, following Open, Jade, and Gold.

The Storyline

Rokugan has seen better days. Over the past two years, it's been without an Emperor, and the throne has been contended for by four heirs apparent. Its capital, Otosan Uchi, was razed by those appointed to protect it. The Dark Lord Fu Leng threatens to abolish

the very Heavens, as his avatar Daigotsu threatens the Empire here on the earth. These tales rumble to an end so another may begin.

The players at Origins 2003 will establish Rokugan's new capital. Three weeks later, players at GenCon US 2003 shall decide on the new Emperor of Rokugan.

As we close a chapter in Rokugan's history, Diamond Edition sets the next tale in motion. A new Emperor must quickly find allies to secure the government and fend off attacks on the throne. Century-old secrets slowly unravel, while a new power emerges from the darkness. Forgotten traditions return and unlikely samurai become heroes.

Our Goals

In designing Diamond, we established some goals for our vision. They include emphasizing some game mechanics while depressing others, creating an environment with multiple effective styles of play, and bringing back some of the favorite cards that weren't tournament legal in the previous environments. At the time of writing this we've nailed down some of those goals.

All clans shall have at least two deck styles by which they may win games. Gone are the days where facing a Crane definitely meant a race for honor or always losing to Shadowlands through sheer force. For example, the two Scorpion strongholds in Diamond are *The Shadowed Tower of the Shosuro* and a slightly tweaked

Yogo Towers. One stronghold caters to a Courtier and Political action deck, and the other emphasizes a militarized style of play.

Honor manipulation is changing. Historically, it's been the domain of shugenja, but no longer. It's now a courtier's job to work with honor.

Additionally, dishonored personalities are going to find themselves at substantially more risk as new cards are released in the Diamond environment. But don't worry, we're retooling how personalities get dishonored. Gone are the cards that cause dishonor without choice. Expect more cards like *Iaijutsu Challenge* where players must make hard choices where dishonor is a significant side-effect of the decision.

What Can You Expect?

We want players to experience L5R in a whole new way. Without changing the rules (OK, with one small change: you'll be able to target your own bowed

personalities), Diamond's new card mix will transform L5R into a brand new game. We're going to force you to make tough decisions in the game, change the way you conduct your attacks, and create more opportunities to pull off amazing combos.

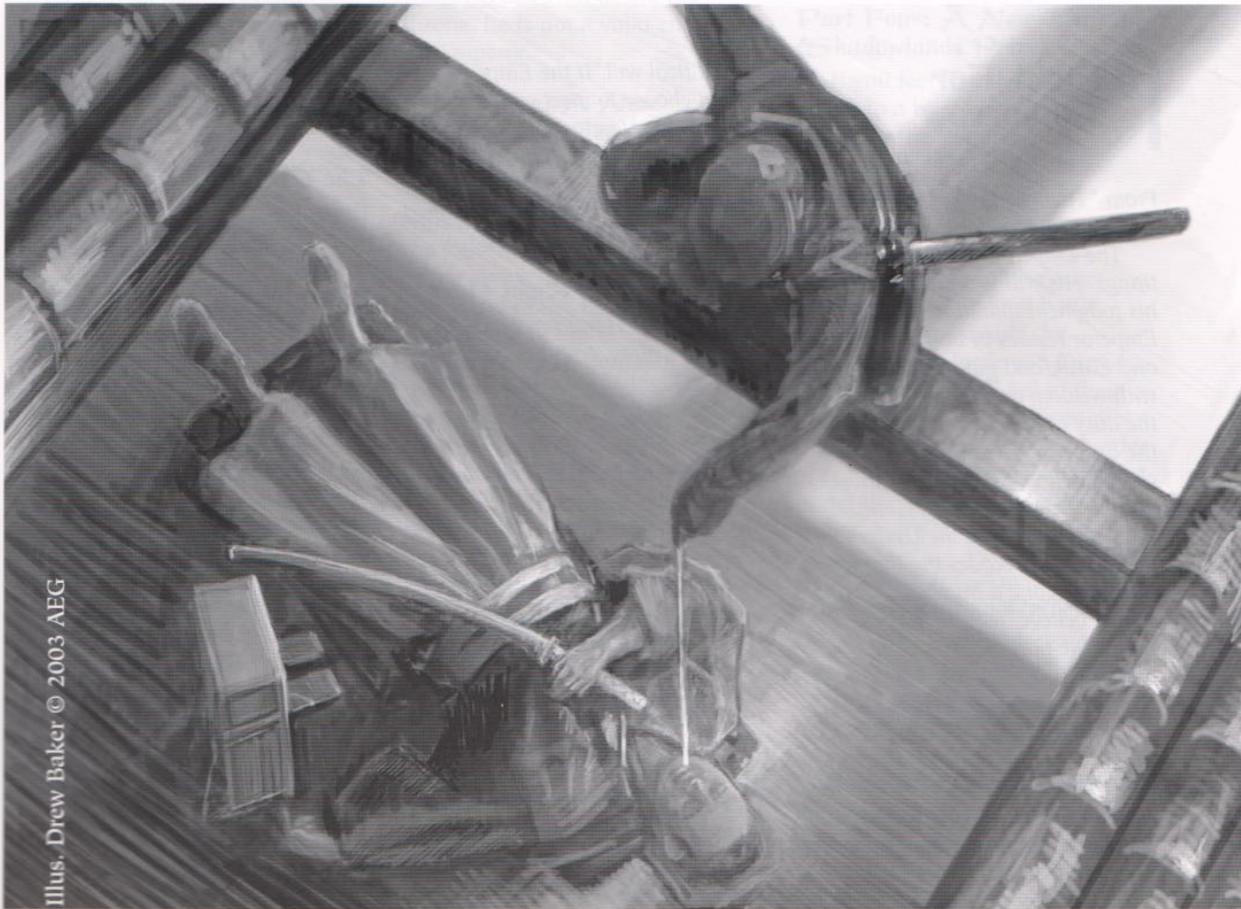
We're making dishonor far more lethal in Diamond. Refuse a duel? Suffer the consequences — and there are some doozies. In case you're wondering, it's not going to be easy to dishonor an opponent's Personality. Cards like *Secrets on the Wind* and other "automatic" dishonor cards are being shuffled out of the environment. In Diamond, personalities only become dishonored if their players choose the path of dishonor. New cards will put players between a rock and a hard place, much like *Iaijutsu Challenge*'s "die or become dishonored."

Personality killing is being toned down. In order to create more interactivity, we're putting less personality-kill into Diamond. Players will get a chance to

actually play their decks instead of watching them trickle into the discard pile.

We're re-releasing over 200 pre-Gold cards with brand new artwork, and every card is going to be useful. *Storehouses*: gone. *Heartbeat Drummers*: gone. *Setsuban Festival*: gone! Even the starters are getting lots of punch; a clan's Celestial Swords, new Champion, and new House Guard are packed in each starter box.

At the time of writing, we've already completed half of Diamond's design, and it's really coming together. Over 30 top players have already contributed to its design, and we expect that number to climb. Diamond is designed for the players by the players. Don't miss out!



STORY PRIZE GenCon 2003

Fight For Tomorrow

by Rich Wulf

From "The Makings of an Empire: the Journals of Ide Tadaji"

The Emperor rules over all things. His will is unquestionable, his judgment infallible. The Emperor resides in both Heaven and Earth, and guides the Empire with wisdom and honor. It is the duty of the clans to serve the Emperor. These duties are clearly delineated, with the most notable being the Right Hand, the Left Hand, and the Underhand.

In recent decades the Empire has undergone a number of changes that, I believe, require that we revisit the purpose and nature of these duties. In the new dynasty, I see the greatest powers in the Empire as follows:

The Emperor's Left Hand

The Left Hand serves as the Emperor's political aides. They draft laws in his name, issue edicts on his behalf, and exert

his political will. If the Emperor should choose to meet with dignitaries of foreign lands, they are his representatives. Traditionally, this has been the role of the Crane Clan, bolstered by the Emerald Magistrates.

The Emperor's Right Hand

The Right Hand serves as the Emperor's army. In times of strife, it is the Right Hand that enforces peace through weight of arms. In times of invasion by foreign powers, it is the Right Hand that defends our borders. Traditionally this has been the role of the Lion Clan, the Imperial Legions, and the Seppun Imperial Guard.

The Emperor's Underhand

Though they seldom speak of it, the wise do not deny the usefulness of the Underhand. They are the Emperor's spies and informants, ever vigilant for threats that the Emperor cannot deal with directly for fear of dishonor. This has traditionally been the role of the Scorpion Clan, though

the Otomo family also fills this purpose in the higher echelons of the court.

The Emperor's Voice

This role has not existed in the past, but I believe it would serve the Empire well in the future. The Emperor's Voice are the peacemakers of the Empire, those who maintain a friendly relationship between the Emperor and the common people and insure that the Great Clans do not resort to civil war. While the Left Hand creates legislation that prevents war, and the Right Hand's troops restore peace, it is the Voice's duty to bring a peaceable solution, rapidly and efficiently, when laws and force of arms fail. The Miya family has performed such duties for centuries, but I believe that it is time at last for a Great Clan to step forward and aid them in this noble effort.

The Black Heart of the Empire

Some would call me a fool for listing this among the others, but I say we would be a fool to ignore it. The Shadowlands, as foul and detestable as they may be, are a part of the Empire. They are a twisted reflection of Rokugan, even more so in recent years. Their purpose is to befoul and corrupt all that we hold dear, to bring war where there is peace, hatred where there is brotherhood, death where there is life. Deserving of destruction they may be, but their power and influence is as great as any power of the Emperor, and only by understanding the true measure of the threat they pose may we truly begin to fight them.

The Legend of the Five Rings 2003 GenCon Storyline tournament will feature the climax of the Four Winds Saga, in which the Four Winds and Daigotsu will confront one another to determine the fate of the Celestial Heavens, and a new Emperor will be chosen for the Empire of Rokugan.

As with all major Legend of the Five Rings tournaments, the players will determine the future of the Empire, though this tournament will be unlike any before. This tournament will feature unprecedented influence over the story arc.

Every player in attendance will have a say in the fate of the Four Winds.

Akodo Kaneka, Hantei Naseru, Toturi Sezar, Toturi Tsudao.

One Wind will become the Emperor.

One Wind will become the Voice of the Emperor.

One Wind will join the winning clan.

One Wind will die.

Part One: A New Voice (Attendance Story Prize)

All players in attendance, upon registration, will be allowed to cast a vote for one of the following Winds: Hantei Naseru, Toturi Sezar, Toturi Tsudao, and Akodo Kaneka. The Wind

with the greatest amount of votes will join the clan that becomes the Voice of the Emperor, the responsibilities of which are described in the above fiction vignette. If the top-voted Wind becomes Emperor (see Part Two), then the second most highly-voted Wind instead joins the Voice of the Emperor. This Wind is guaranteed to survive the Gold story arc in a position of great influence and power even if he or she does not become Emperor.

Part Two: A New Emperor (Top-Ranking Player Story Prize)

The top player in each clan, as well as the top eight players, will be allowed to cast a vote for one of the following characters: Toturi Tsudao, Toturi Sezar, Akodo Kaneka, and Hantei Naseru. The character with the most votes will become the new Emperor of Rokugan. The tournament winner's vote will count twice. The Wind selected as Emperor cannot be selected for Part Three. As Daigotsu does not desire the throne, he is not a valid choice for Emperor.

Part Three: A New Empire (GenCon Winner Story Prize)

The top Great Clan player wins the right to select one of the following roles (described in the above fiction vignette): Left Hand of the Emperor, Right Hand of the Emperor, the Emperor's Underhand, or the Voice of the Emperor. For the duration of the next arc, this clan will fulfill the role that player has selected. In addition, the player may select one of the two remaining Winds (not chosen in Part One or Part Two) to join his clan. (If the player selects Voice, two of the Four Winds will join his clan, including the Wind from Part One. Any of the four titles left unselected will be assigned by the Story Team.)



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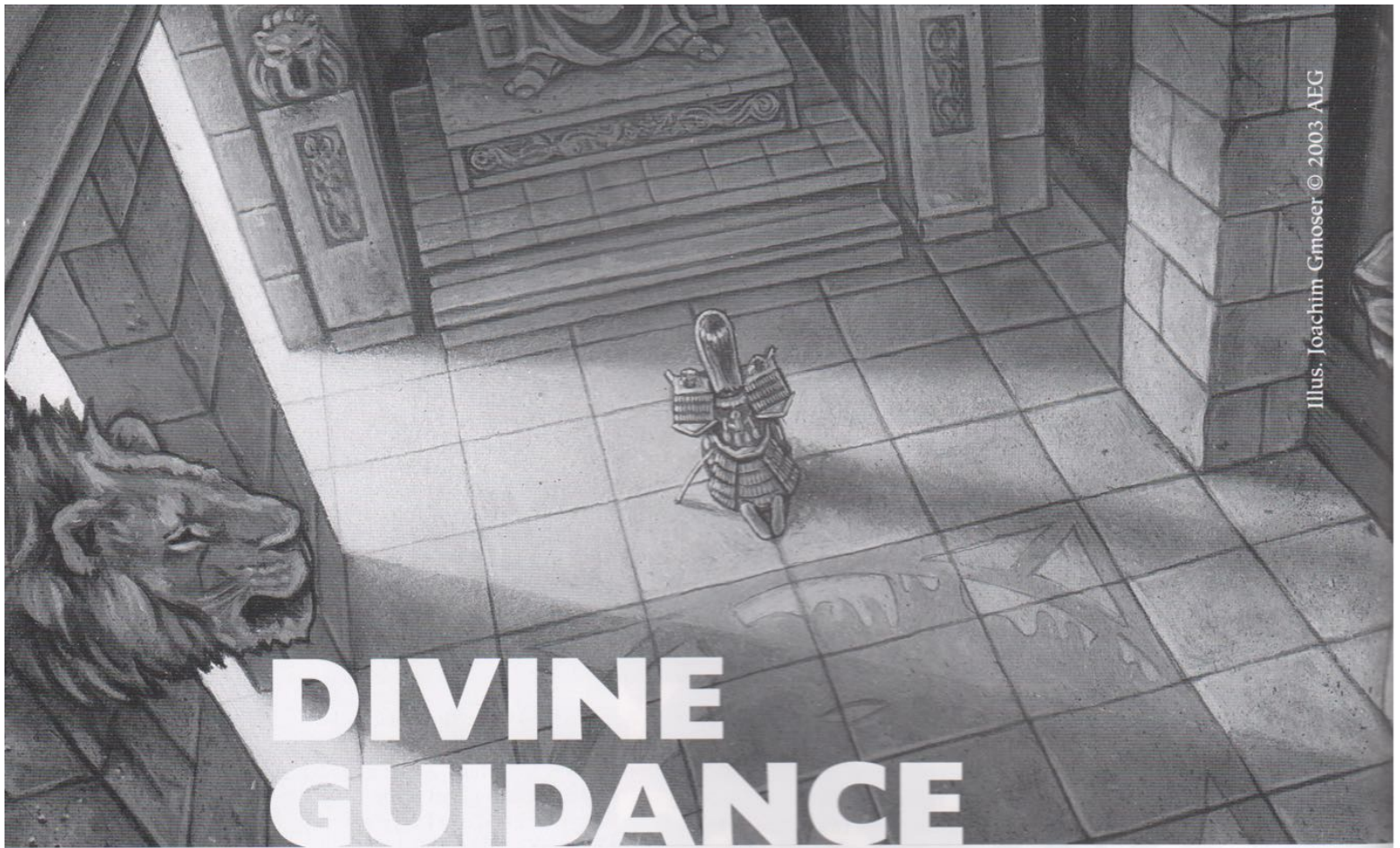
Part Four: A New Threat (Shadowlands Prize)

If you feel that the story prize points to a bright and hopeful future for the Empire, think again. Daigotsu, Dark Lord of the Shadowlands, will kill whichever member of the original Four Winds remains unselected in any of the other story prizes in the final battle.

In addition, should the Shadowlands Horde win GenCon, the Four Winds will fail in their quest to expel Fu Leng from the Celestial Heavens, and the borders of the Shadowlands will expand under the Dark Kami's growing power.

And So On: Anything Can Happen (Ratling Prize)

Should a Ratling deck win GenCon, the Ratlings will uncover a mighty lost Nezumi city in the heart of the Shadowlands. The Ratlings will retake this city, the first step in rebuilding their once-great Empire.



DIVINE GUIDANCE

by Shawn Carman

Akodo Tadenori shook his head in disgust. He had traveled often in his life, but he had never enjoyed it. Now, journeying south through some of the Empire's most rugged terrain alongside a Crane, he had to wonder why Ijiasu had asked him to undertake this mission. Omoni could sense life in all its forms. He could hear the rush of blood through a rat's veins twenty paces away. He could smell the complex processes by which a flower drew upon soil to find nourishment. He could taste a hare's fear as the wolf sank sharp teeth into its throat. It was too much to bear at times, and so he came here. This was a bleak, desolate place. It suited him.

"He hates you, of course."

Tadenori's head snapped around to glare at Doji Midoru. "What did you say, Crane?"

"The expression on your face. It's obvious what you were thinking. And the answer is equally obvious. Akodo Ijiasu despises you."

"Outlandish," Tadenori retorted. "What would you know of such things?"

Midoru turned away to take in the landscape around them. "What is there to know?" he replied. "He is younger than you. He outranks you. Yet other Lion look to you for leadership because of your experience. Your many victories over the Dragon eclipse his massacre at Kyuden Tonbo." He turned back to Tadenori. "How could he help but hate you?"

Tadenori scoffed. "You obviously know nothing.

We Akodo are above hate."

The Crane shrugged. "It matters little to me if you believe it or not. For what it's worth, I am certain he does not realize that he hates you. You Akodo place so much emphasis on honor that you forget emotion, even when it drives you to act."

"And you are expert on emotion, I'm certain," Tadenori retorted. "I refuse to accept philosophy from a man such as you. I hear that the Shogun's soldiers refer to you as 'the Corpse.'"

A slight smile tugged at Midoru's lips. "How appropriate."

The old Lion shook his head again. Midoru was maddeningly unflappable. Perhaps it would be best to restrict conversation to the matter at hand, however distasteful that might be. "Ijiasu-sama's description of our mission was... brief. Would you care to enlighten me as to the details?"

Midoru nodded. "Your lord Ijiasu offered aid to his ally Hida Hitoshi. It seems that Hitoshi-san's home province has been besieged of late, constantly under assault by waves of the Lost. The Crab are holding their own, but they have requested additional troops to help stem the incursion."

"Hmph," Tadenori grunted, looking back at the small unit of men that followed them. "We seem fairly ill suited to crush the Shadowlands Horde..."

"Perhaps," Midoru agreed. "But then, you and

I are not exactly your average infantrymen, are we?" He peered at his Lion comrade. "You are the veteran of a hundred battles, if your reputation is to be believed. A leader of men and a peerless tactician. And I am... what I am. Unless, of course, your reputation is merely hearsay."

"No," said Tadenori gruffly. "I am no stranger to battle, nor victory."

"Excellent," Midoru said. "Then we shall get along famously."

Hida Kuroda snarled in fury and tightened his grip. The man's skull shattered with a sharp crack; the body that dangled from Kuroda's fist went limp. The samurai's corpse fell at Kuroda's feet, its black blood staining the Crab's hands and legs. He turned and regarded the other Lost about him with a fury that made many fall back a step. "I am not Hida Kuroda! I am Kyofu! Any fool who calls me that hated name will suffer this one's fate or worse!" He lashed out irritably and caught one of the closest men across the side of the face, sending him sprawling to the ground where he lay twisted and unmoving. "Destroy this village! I want nothing left but blood and ash!"

The Lost scattered at Kyofu's words, eager to be free of his tyrannical outbursts. Since the undead Crab Champion had been combined with the Onisu of Fear, it was the Onisu who held dominion over their shared corporeal form. Where Kyofu's menace was once methodical and brooding, now he frequently succumbed to rage and violence. As the Onisu of Fear, it was constantly driven to inspire fear in others, including the troops under its command.

Kyofu stormed across the blazing rice field that marked the outer edge of a small village in the southern Crab lands. Screams and the crack of burning timbers filled the air, but Kyofu barely noticed. He drew his obsidian blade and cut down the doors to the nearest building. Inside, horses were screaming in panic at the flames that had begun to engulf the structure. A lone peasant was there, trying desperately to calm the animals. Seeing the creature advancing toward him, the man began to scramble away, but stumbled over a gardening tool and fell sprawling to the ground.

The Onisu was on him in an instant. Kyofu grabbed the man's throat with a single hand and slammed him repeatedly into the ground. The peasant's eyes glazed over with pain, then oblivion. Kyofu lifted his blade to end the man's life, a cruel laughter bubbling forth from somewhere deep within him. Suddenly, the peasant's eyes cleared, and he saw that his life could be measured in seconds. His face contorted into a mask of hate in that moment, and he spat in Kyofu's face. "My lords the Hida will make you suffer, Shadowlands filth!"

There was no fear in this man. Roaring in outrage, Kyofu brought his blade down with inhuman force. The first strike clove the man's head into two pieces, but the Onisu did not halt its onslaught. Again and

again he struck until he was covered in the blood of his enemy. His rage passed, and Kyofu suddenly realized that his rage had consumed him for several minutes.

A dark, booming laughter suddenly filled the stable. Kyofu instantly dropped into a fighting stance, looking all about for its source. The Shadowlands were full of strange, maniacal beings that thought themselves the equal of any opponent they faced. Kyofu had personally dispatched no less than a dozen self-styled warlords, fools who believed they were above Daigotsu's laws. Each had laughed at Kyofu before he killed them, certain they would best him. This laughter, however, was altogether different. "Who dares mock Kyofu?" he snarled. "Who longs for a painful, tortured death?"

"A most ironic question, Hida Kuroda," came the response. The voice was everywhere at once. Unbelievably, Kyofu felt his demonic heart flutter with an almost alien feeling: fear. Fear was something he brought to others, not experienced himself. "Truly," the voice continued, "death is not for beings such as you and I, is it?"

The room darkened suddenly. The shadows grew longer, and the light shed by the flickering flames seemed to dwindle away to nothing. A dull roar like the distant ocean filled the room, and Kyofu had the sensation of standing at the end of a long corridor. A great, powerful presence swelled as if approaching, filling the space with its enormity. Then, without preamble, there was another being within the stables. In one instant, Kyofu was alone. The next, there was... something else.

A great suit of slate-gray armor, taller than even the largest Onisu, stood in the room's center. The armor was empty, yet hovered in place as if filled by an unseen foe. All sound was gone, leaving the chamber eerily silent. There was nothing beyond the room, only Kyofu and this mysterious visitor.

"Emma-O," Kyofu spat. "The Fortune of Death."

The empty helmet turned to look down at Kyofu. "Will you not bow down and pay homage to me?" it demanded. "Will you not honor a superior being?"

"I honor no pathetic Fortune," Kyofu growled. "Especially not one so weak as you, fool."

"I was not speaking to you, dream-beast," the figure said absently. "I speak to the one who knows of duty and respect." It waved a gigantic gauntleted hand toward Kyofu.

Pain. Unimaginable pain. Kyofu would have screamed had not his mortal form been so paralyzed with agony. Kyofu spasmed, then collapsed.

"Rise, Hida Kuroda," Emma-O said.

The unliving flesh that comprised Hida Kuroda's body ached with every movement, but the former Crab Champion struggled to his feet without complaint. His will had been bound to the Onisu for months without release. He had been a helpless observer as the demon committed countless atrocities in his name.

The knowledge that it was his fear feeding the Nightmare's power tortured his every moment. Yet now, after so long, he was free again. "I thank you, whoever you are," he rasped, staring down at his grey, undead flesh. "You have freed me."

"Not so, mortal," answered the thing before him. "I have merely altered the balance of power within your soul. You have control of your body now, but you are far from free."

Kuroda's shoulder's slumped. "I thought for a moment... perhaps my torment was over. I thought perhaps I could rejoin my brother. I suppose I should have known better."

"A fool's dream," Emma-O said. "I have done you a favor. I expect it to be repaid: To that end, you are of no use to me as a Crab."

"Use?" laughed Kuroda hoarsely. "How can a fallen champion be of use to you? Are you not the Fortune of death? Do your duty and end my misery."

Emma-O looked down at Kuroda silently for a long time. "What do you know of duty?" the Fortune asked.

"I am a Crab," Kuroda said.

"Oh?" Emma-O replied. The Fortune sliced one hand through the air and suddenly they stood upon a vast, barren plain, roiling with grey fog. Countless wandering souls milled about the landscape, constantly seeking escape, constantly seeking a release from the vast nothingness of Meido. "This is my duty, Crab. Your Wall is nothing compared to this. I am the steward of souls. Were it not for me the Spirit Realms would be torn asunder by these restless spirits. Yet there are no thanks for me. There are no rewards for me. None came to aid me when Daigotsu invaded my realm and unleashed Fu Leng upon the Heavens. Humanity owes me a favor for the insult they did to me in allowing Daigotsu to exist. I have come to see that favor repaid in full, Hida Kuroda." Emma-O waved his arm again, and they were back in the burning stables once more.

"That is not my name," Kuroda hissed. "I have no right to it any longer."

"I will call you whatever I please, Hida Kuroda," the Fortune said ominously. "Your soul is not fully lost to darkness, so long as I will it. Your mind is yet your own, and that is what makes your service to me so magnificent."

The former Crab frowned. "What do you require of me?"

"Few in the mortal realm honor me properly," the Fortune rumbled. "Humans rarely concern themselves with my power save during their funeral rites. Do they honor your ancestor, Osano-Wo, only during the thunderstorms he brings? Of course not. Yet I am forgotten, abandoned by lesser beings. One of your mortal princes even dared invade the sanctity of my realm not so long ago." Emma-O grew wrathful at the mention of such effrontery. "I will not endure such an outrage!" The Fortune's voice echoed within his empty armor. When he spoke again,

he was calm once more. "You compared your duty to mine before. It is an interesting comparison. The Crab Clan does honor me, with their actions if not their words. And you despise the darkness that has taken you, even as I hate your masters Daigotsu and Fu Leng." An enormous, gauntleted hand rose to point at Kuroda. "You and I share enemies, Hida Kuroda. And you bring my gift to them. I thank you."

Kuroda frowned. "What is it you want?"

"Only to bless you," Emma-O responded. "Only to give you a shadow of my power, that more souls might be ushered into my realm at your hands. You would retain Kyofu's power, but you would be the one in control. I would weave the magic so that none, not even Daigotsu, would tell what has been done unless you foolishly revealed yourself."

"Do as you like," the former Crab said weakly. "If I am to be a pawn, I would rather be a Fortune's pawn than Daigotsu's — even if that Fortune is insane."

Emma-O held out his gauntlet. Cradled in the palm was a netsuke, an amulet crafted from black metal.

A tiny golden chain spilled from the gauntlet's empty palm. "Accept my blessing."

"What is it?" Kuroda asked hesitantly.

"Nothing more than a physical symbol of our pact. Once you take it in your hand, there can be no reneging on our bargain. You will be blessed by my energy, and you will remain in control of your form."

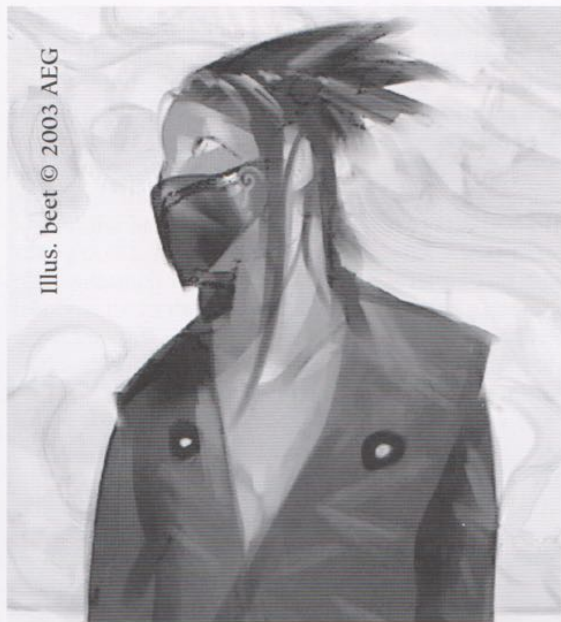
"What benefit do you gain?"

"So long as you retain my blessing, all the souls of those you kill will enter Meido, regardless of their destiny. My power will grow as your campaign continues. And when the time is right, I will punish Daigotsu and Fu Leng for their insolence." The Fortune regarded Kuroda inquisitively. "I trust you have no problems with such retribution."

Kuroda regarded the Fortune impassively. "No." He reached out and seized the amulet.

"Excellent," Emma-O said, hollow voice booming with pleasure. "You shall be my avatar in the mortal realm, Hida Kuroda. Serve me well, and cast aside that amulet lest any recognize its implications." With that, there was a swelling sound, again reminding Kuroda of the distant ocean. The Fortune seemed to recede into the shadows, and then was gone.

The light from the flames consuming the stable suddenly flared into being once again. Kuroda was alone in the ruins, a peasant corpse at his feet. He stared down at the blackened amulet clenched in his fist for long moments before throwing it to the earth. The roof's timbers began falling down around him, bouncing harmlessly off his obsidian armor. Hida Kuroda took up his blade and walked from the burning building back into the chaos outside.



Tadenori surveyed the devastation laid out before him. He had seen the ravages of two wars and countless border skirmishes. He had seen the ruin his lord Ijiasu had made of the Dragonfly Clan's meager territories. Yet he had never seen anything like this. "The men who did this..." he began, but the words stuck in his throat. "No man did this. This was the work of animals."

Midoru said nothing. The horrors that had been visited on the village were still evident in many ways. Indescribable stains marked the ground and many of the ruined structures, leaving no doubt in the two samurai's minds that the villagers had endured unimaginable torture at the hands of their murderers. Death did not disturb Midoru; indeed, it had been his constant companion. Tadenori had been right, however. This was not death. It was malicious, murderous slaughter. "Have you ever served on the Kaiu Wall, Tadenori-san?"

"No," the Lion said flatly. "Lord Ginawa deemed me too valuable to be squandered on such a detail." It was not arrogance or boasting, merely recitation of fact.

"You requested such duty, then?"

Tadenori nodded. "I believed that in facing an inhuman opponent, I would be better prepared for the horrors of war." He surveyed the ruins a second time, his face ashen. "I doubt anything could have prepared me for something like this."

"Any man who can be prepared for such as this is beyond redemption," Midoru said quietly with a glance over his shoulder to their waiting Hiruma guide. "We must instead steel ourselves in preparation for punishing those responsible."

"Hmph," Tadenori grunted. "Very well."

Disgusted, Tadenori stalked off to examine other parts of the village. He found the Crane's presence infuriating. The man was perfectly calm in every

circumstance, no matter how bizarre or unexpected. What infuriated Tadenori the most was his inexhaustible resolve. The duelist had not once faltered during their trek, even when they viewed the carnage that had overtaken the village. It was maddening.

Minutes passed into hours as the two men and their troops scoured the village separately. Neither knew what they were looking for, but each secretly hoped for some sign that would show them how to track their prey, some hint of weakness that could be used against their inhuman foes.

Tadenori had begun to lose heart, his resolve eroded by the decimated village's spectacle, when he stumbled across an oddity. Amid the ruins of one particularly large building, there was a perfect circle where the ash had not been disturbed. The Lion warrior frowned. In the days since the village's destruction, there had been the typical mountain winds and at least one brisk rain. Yet this small pile of ash could have been created by fire not an hour previously. He knelt, curious, and waved his tessen briskly before it.

Nothing. Not so much as a single flake of ash stirred despite the wave of air the iron fan pushed before it. Tadenori's frown deepened. He reached his hand out as if to touch the tiny pile, then withdrew it, feeling a small pang of fear.

"Bah," muttered the Lion, angry with himself for succumbing to such foolish emotion. He reached out cautiously and touched the ash with the tip of his tessen. It fell away from his touch instantly, the entire pile disappearing as if blown away by a strong breeze. The fingers that held the fan tingled strangely.

Beneath the ash, obscured until the moment of Tadenori's touch, lay an amulet. It was blackened, but not by fire. It did not appear to be stone or metal, but some unidentifiable material that resembled both. Tiny characters adorned its surface, but not in any language Tadenori recognized. His curiosity aroused, he reached out to take the amulet.

"Leave it be, Tadenori," Midoru's voice was harsh, unyielding. He stepped into the Lion's field of vision, his dark eyes bright with concern. "I recognize the symbols engraved on that netsuke. It is powerful, but more dangerous than you can imagine."

Tadenori's brow furrowed. "Is this a thing of the Shadowlands?"

The Crane shook his head. "No, it is not," he said, eyes narrowing. "It was forged by the Fortune of Death. Nemuranai such as those are dangerous for those not strong enough to wield them properly."

"If strength is required, then it belongs to the Lion," Tadenori said, his voice harsh. He reached out and took the amulet, tucking it absently into his obi. "There is nothing else here for us, Midoru. We should go." He turned and stalked off toward the Hiruma mountains, back toward where their guide waited.

Doji Midoru watched the Lion recede, his mouth a grim line. After a few moments, he followed.

WINDS of CHANGE

PREVIEW

You, you, and... you.

by Jeff Alexander

Winds of Change is our last expansion before we print our next base set, the much-anticipated *Diamond Edition*. Our standing design philosophy behind base sets is that they do not introduce any brand-new cards other than the spiffy deck-only cards that don't appear anywhere else. That design rule applies to Strongholds as well. Since *Diamond*, like *Gold*, will feature two Strongholds for every faction in it, and since *Diamond* is going to include Ratlings from the outset, one of our choices was locked in. We absolutely had to put a Ratling box in *Winds*. They were a likely candidate for a Stronghold anyway, having gone the longest time since receiving their last one.

That criterion didn't help quite so much in deciding the other two factions to feature in *Winds*. Not counting Ratling, there's a three-way tie for longest time without an update: Crab, Scorpion, and Unicorn have seen nothing new since *Broken Blades*. That helps a little, though we'd still have to arbitrarily pick one of those to omit. Pre-empting that choice, though, was the need to start off *Diamond* on a good foundation. This need set us on a different course entirely. We want each clan in *Diamond* to have two good but different Strongholds. This goal had a much higher priority than filling simple time gaps, so the second clan to be awarded a Stronghold was a clan whose only Strongholds so far fit neither desire: the Mantis.

We used the "Longest Time Without a Stronghold" list to fill our final spot, and now the choice was easy. Of the three clans

mentioned, the Crab clearly needed the most support. They got the third slot, and we were set.

Function Follows Form

Great! We now knew what clans would be getting Strongholds. On to the next step: what would they do?

Mantis was easy. The Mantis Clan's two mechanical focuses are the Naval trait and ranged attacks. They'd had two Strongholds so far involving the former and none with the latter. Ergo, Mantis get a Tsuruchi Stronghold. And if I could make arrows work in an offensive military deck, people would actually use it, too!

Crab was harder. All their clan specialties had already been embodied by a Gold-legal Stronghold, including some that we no longer wanted to emphasize. All, that is, except the Yu trait. But the Yu trait is a

reactive, almost defensive one. We deliberately made Fortifications drastically less important to the Crab, because they weren't something Crab could use to win games in traditional military fashion. We've kept Yu low on the list of current Crab strong points for the same reason. Also, although I understood their reasons, I was not happy with the way Lion and Mantis players zealously constructed decks entirely of natural Tactician and Naval Personalities to the point where they blindly discounted everyone without those traits. I did not want to push Crab in the same direction. So, while a new Stronghold could and should involve the Yu trait somehow, it would not be an exclusive focus.

The Ratlings... Ah, the Ratlings. We ended up having to develop a new focus for them to grow into. The "pack mentality" aspect is fine, but one-dimensional. Quantity-based Force bonuses are manageable on cards, but Strongholds with them run the risk of producing overpowered blitz decks, or at the very least becoming the dominant Stronghold for a clan so it's difficult to design less-brutal but still attractive alternatives. (Take a look at The Spawning Grounds and you'll see what I mean.) The new direction we chose was the Ratlings' scavenging nature. These folk are nothing if not resourceful and care not one whit about the dishonor that comes from touching corpses or wielding stolen weapons. Mechanically it was also novel, and just annoying enough in real life to illustrate how Rokugani must feel in dealing with them.

Themed Sets

When the first Shadowlands Stronghold, *Yogo Junzo's Army*, was released, players needed to scrounge cards from three different expansions and a base set to make a truly good deck for it. Likewise, when *The Dark Path of Shadow* was printed, there was a mad dig for *Ninja Strongholds*, *Ninja Kidnappers*, and *Ninja Shapeshifters*.

And look at Tsuno. The first

Tsuno didn't fit into existing decks, and there weren't enough other cavalry cards that worked in a Shadowlands deck to make one where Tsuno did fit. Releasing one or two Tsuno per set is good if you don't want to crowd out the established card types, but then it's a long time before enough Tsuno and other honorless cavalry cards exist to make a cohesive deck... and by then, there is once again the necessity of searching trade forums and singles bins for those first Tsuno, who are now months out-of-print and weren't saved by anybody when they were new.

This is really the same problem, viewed from two different angles. As it turns out, there is a great way to solve it: put a theme to a set. But the benefits don't stop there!

Themed sets provide a huge boon to new players by suggesting ready-made deck blueprints. This is especially important to a game like L5R, which has always sat at the upper end of rules complexity among trading card games. Themed sets make it easier for new players to build decks whose cards work with instead of against one another. Just as importantly, these decks will be more competitive for the same reason. One of the barriers to entering a new game is the belief that you simply cannot win using just the latest cards. Seeing a set's cards readily combo with one another lessens that discouragement.

Themes entice even existing players to try something new by presenting them right up front with both an idea and the means to build it. There will be more players making brand new decks and fewer cases of someone simply taking a proven winning design and, oh, maybe taking out an old 8-gold samurai in favor of a newer 7-gold one with the same Force and a weakness he doesn't care about. This keeps the environment fresh.

Themes make sealed deck and booster draft events more interesting because you're virtually guaranteed that even a small selection of random cards will interact with one another.

The best part is, none of this has to come at a price. Themes, when picked correctly, do not squelch interactivity between different sets. The odds of finding a key card from three sets ago that fleshes out a killer combo don't go down just because a set is full of Political actions, or cool Items, or Oracles and Elemental cards. It's no harder for the Design Team to focus on one mechanic; in fact, in a way it's easier, since you can let yourself get on a roll. And the Story Team — well, those guys are the real professionals. They can work with anything.

Outmaneuvered In Court

Otosan Uchi lies in ruins and a new seat of government must be chosen. The elevation of one of the Winds to Emperor is imminent. Courtiers are still a distant third to Samurai and Shugenja in terms of mechanical importance, despite major advances from cards like *Show of Good Faith*. It is only fitting that the overriding theme for *Winds of Change* is political actions. And by that I don't mean just cards with "Political" on them, but also cards that require having Courtiers to play, or that work better with Courtiers. Cards that make it easier for you to get Courtiers, if you're the sort of Clan that finds them in short supply. Cards that affect lobbying and the Imperial Favor. Cards that work better if you have a certain Wind. Cards that work better if an opponent has a certain Wind. Cards that make wielding political power the double-edged sword it's supposed to be.

Dan's Corrupt Lion

By Dan Tibbles

The Ancient Halls of the Lion
Hantei Naseru

Dynasty: (40)

Holdings: (14)

- 3 Small Farm
- 1 Gifts and Favors
- 3 Private Dojo
- 3 Copper Mine
- 3 Jade Works
- 1 The Festering Pit of Fu Leng

Regions: (3)

- 3 City of Gold

Events: (4)

- 1 Imperial Gift
- 1 The Shogun's Fealty
- 1 Welcome Home
- 1 Solar Eclipse

Personalities: (19)

- 3 Ikoma Tadenori
- 3 Matsu Masutaro
- 3 Akodo Ijiasu
- 1 Ikoma Fujimaro
- 1 Matsu Kenji
- 3 Ogre Bushi
- 3 Ashura
- 1 Kyofu
- 1 The Maw

Fate: (40)

Rings: (1)

- 1 Ring of the Void

Items: (2)

- 1 The Porcelain Mask of Fu Leng
- 1 The Porcelain Mask of Fu Leng
Exp.

Followers: (6)

- 3 Lion's Pride
- 3 Omoidasu

Actions: (31)

- 3 Rallying Cry
- 3 Superior Tactics
- 3 Superior Strategist
- 3 For the Empire
- 3 Iaijutsu Duel
- 3 Counterattack
- 3 Ambush
- 1 Arrows From the Woods
- 1 Block Supply Lines
- 1 Test of Might
- 1 In Search of the Future
- 1 Deadly Ground
- 1 Overwhelmed
- 1 A Desperate Act
- 1 Return for Training
- 1 Refugees
- 1 Come One At a Time

L5R

PROMO CARD LIST

Card	Release Location	Date Legal
A Perfect Cut	Inquest Magazine	12/10/01
A'ichtr'foo	Week of the Ratling	04/21/03
Akasha	Season of the Unicorn	09/04/01
Akodo's Shrine	Season of the Lion	04/08/02
Armor of Osano Wo	Herald 2.3	Legal Immediately
Bayushi Ryo	Season of the Scorpion	04/21/03
Bayushi's Shrine	Herald 2.7	04/21/03
Benefits of Experience	Herald 2.6	12/09/02
Celebration	Tournament Kit	12/10/01
Chiang-Tsu	Welcome Home pack	06/01/01
Dark Oracle of Earth	Season of the Shadowlands	12/10/01
Dark Oracle of Fire	Herald 2.3	08/19/02
Defend Your Honor (Gold Border)	Special Event	Legal Immediately
Doji's Shrine	2003 Kotei Events	04/21/03
Dragon Puzzle Box	Broken Blades	08/19/02
Enlightenment	Herald 2.3	Legal Immediately
Feared Duelist	Herald 2.5	08/19/02
Hanabi	Herald 2.4	08/19/02
Hatamoto	Season of the Crane	04/08/02
Hida Utaemon	Season of the Crab	12/09/02
Hida's Shrine	Dark Allies	04/08/02
Hunting Tiger	APC boxtopper	09/04/01
Imperial Assembly	Herald	06/01/01
Isawa Tekkan	Season of the Phoenix	12/09/02
Isawa's Last Wish	An Oni's Fury	12/10/01
Kihei	Herald 2.7	04/21/03
Kuso	Herald 2.2	12/10/01
Make A Wish	L5R Website	04/21/03
Matsu Satomi	Season of the Lion	04/08/02
Mirumoto Shiryu	Season of the Dragon	08/19/02
Moshi Mineko	Season of the Mantis	08/19/02
Not Another Step	Season of the Mantis	08/19/02
Porcelain Mask of Fu Leng (Exp.)	FOU boxtopper	12/09/02
Rallying Cry (Gold Border)	Special Event	Legal Immediately
Rikugunshokan	Season of the Lion	04/08/02
Shousa	Herald 2.4	08/19/02
Superior Tactics (Gold Border)	Special Event	Legal Immediately
The Council Reforms	Imperial Assembly	06/01/01
The Power Resides in the Mountains	Herald 2.1	09/04/01
Warrens of the Nezumi	Herald 2.3	08/19/02
Welcome Home	Gold Edition	06/01/01
Where Respect is Due	Herald 2.2	09/04/01
Wise Investment	Tournament Kits	12/09/02
Zokusei	Herald 2.2	12/10/01



Illus. Tony Moseley © 2003 AEG

On the blasted plains beyond the City of the Lost, a solitary figure sat on a stony outcropping and enjoyed the silence. Many assumed that the Shadowlands was a place devoid of life; Omoni knew better. The Shadowlands teemed with an endless variety of flora and fauna, life constantly vying for survival, for sustenance, for dominance. Omoni often came here to escape the endless heartbeat of living things.

Omoni could sense life in all its forms. He could hear the rush of blood through a rat's veins twenty paces away. He could smell the complex processes by which a flower drew upon soil to find nourishment. He could taste a hare's fear as the wolf sank sharp teeth into its throat. It was too much to bear at times, and so he came here. This was a bleak, desolate place. It suited him.

The sculptor of flesh was a hateful, twisted little man. His lank hair hung unevenly, torn from his scalp in places by his own hand. His dark eyes gleamed with a near-feral madness mixed with devious intelligence. He shuddered with every breath, as if the act of breathing caused him great pain. He stared blankly at the broken earth, enjoying the dreary solitude and trying not to think too much upon his own existence.

"Omoni," hissed a sibilant voice. A sinuous black dragon wove itself from the shadows, coiling in the air above Omoni. The little man shrieked in surprise, turning and falling off his stone.

"Where did you come from?" Omoni snarled, staring up at the creature in disbelief. "I sensed nothing. I still sense nothing."

"Of course you sensed Nothing," the dragon said with a chuckle. The word had a different feel when the dragon said it, as if it meant something else altogether. "You have heard of me."

Omoni nodded quickly, though the dragon seemed to be stating fact rather than asking a question. "You are the Shadow Dragon," Omoni said. "You are the one who brought Kyoden back to life." All who lived in the City of the Lost knew of the Shadow Dragon. Once a servant of heaven, the dragon had fallen prey to the Shadowlands Taint. Now it was a powerful being of pure darkness.

"I saw you in Kyoden's memories, Omoni," the dragon said, circling about in the air to get a better look. "You are an intriguing creature. You are one of the Dark Lord's closest confidantes, yet you choose to live among the bakemono rather than in Daigotsu's temple. Why is that?"

"I feel more comfortable there," Omoni said, rising into a crouch. He watched the dragon warily. "It is... simpler among the goblins."

"Because not all value you as Daigotsu does," the dragon said with a leer. "The others... Shahai, Mishime, continued on page 19..."

by Rich Wulf

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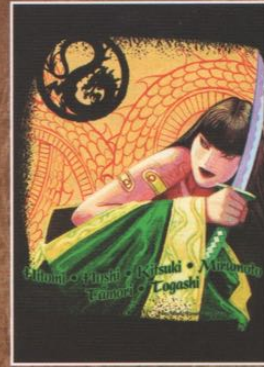
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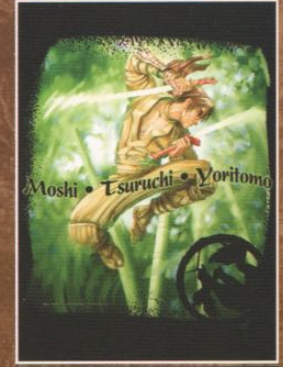
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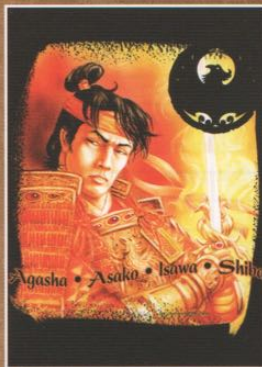
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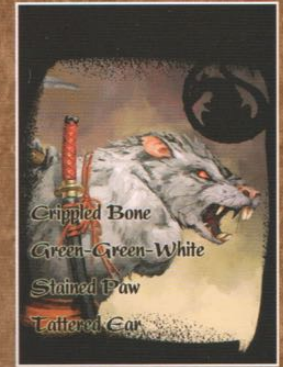
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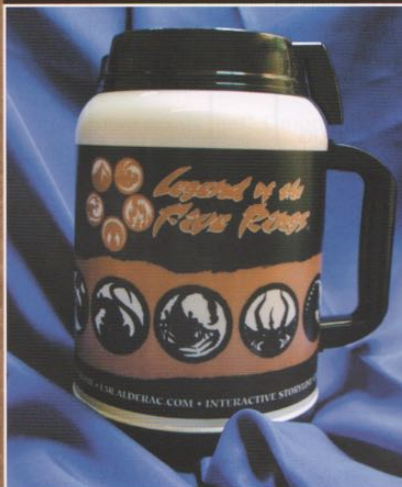


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... continued from page 17

Tsukuro, Hoturi... they see you as a beast, no better than the goblins who serve you."

"I do not care about them," Omoni snarled. "They are weak, all of them. They all fear Daigotsu."

"And Daigotsu protects you," the Shadow Dragon said, its hollow gaze fixing on Omoni's.

"Of course he does," Omoni said fiercely. "Daigotsu is my friend. He gave me my great power. He has made me what I am."

"Has he?" the dragon asked in a mild voice. "Strange. According to Kyoden, it was the Bloodspeakers who created you."

"That is a lie," Omoni said nervously.

"You were an experiment, a failure in their attempt to create a perfect being by binding a human child with a Shadowlands spirit," the dragon added. "They accidentally summoned an errant bakemono spirit rather than the demon they required, and you were the result."

"That is not true!" Omoni snapped.

"You were the first, and the weakest, of their three creations," the dragon continued. "Daigotsu saved you from the Bloodspeakers. He removed the memories of your uncomfortable origins to blunt the edge of the pain that is your life. He did these things because he pitied you, not because he valued you."

"No," Omoni said, his voice now echoing with an inhuman growl. "I am valuable to him. I helped him build his armies. I helped him sculpt the bakemono. I helped him create the Onisu. I helped him find the Tsuno!"

"Helped..." the dragon mused. "Implying that none of those are things he could not have done without you..."

"Daigotsu needs me!" Omoni roared. He lashed out at the dragon, clawed fingers swiping harmlessly through its smoky form. "He is my friend!"

The dragon's eyes narrowed. "Is that so?" it asked. "And what if he were gone? What then would become of you, sculptor of flesh?"

Omoni's chest heaved with anger. Long spiky hairs stood out on his back, like an enraged animal. Drool spilled from between his sharpened teeth. "Are you threatening the Dark Lord?" Omoni demanded, his voice nearly inaudible between angry growls.

"What if I were, goblin-man?" the dragon asked, the tip of its nose hovering mere inches from Omoni's face. "If I wished to destroy your lord, what would you do to stop me?"

Omoni's mouth twisted in frustration. His hands balled into fists, his sharp claws digging into his palms. He closed his eyes and bowed his head in shame. "I... do not know..." Omoni said. He fell to his knees and sobbed quietly, covering his face with his bloody hands.

The Shadow Dragon watched the curious little man for a long moment. A sinister smile twisted its reptilian

features. It hovered closer to the sobbing wretch and whispered in his ear. "I see now why Daigotsu values you so highly," it said. "For all your madness, for all your weakness, your loyalty is absolute. You truly believe that the Dark Lord is your friend."

"He is my friend," Omoni whispered.

"And you fear what would happen to you should he ever fall," the dragon continued. "You wonder what place there would be for one such as you in a world without your master."

Omoni nodded quietly.

"You wish only to protect your lord," the Shadow Dragon said.

Omoni nodded again.

"Then give him this gift," the Shadow Dragon said. The shadows around Omoni parted to reveal a massive sword in a golden saya, lying on the broken earth.

Omoni looked at the sword suspiciously, then at the Shadow Dragon. "What is this?" he asked.

"The sword of the Hantei," the Shadow Dragon said. "My Goju recently acquired it."

"If you have cursed this sword, Daigotsu will know," Omoni warned. "He has been blessed by Fu Leng. Even you are not beyond his power, dragon."

"I know that," the dragon chuckled. "I serve the Dark Lord as you do. My statements earlier... well, think of them as a test. The sword is safe for Daigotsu to wield."

"Why give this sword to me?" Omoni demanded. "Why not deliver it to him yourself?"

"Because I, too, pity you, Omoni," the dragon said. "Tell Daigotsu how you truly came upon the sword, but invent whatever lie you like to tell the others and increase your own standing. Think, for a moment, of the reaction when you bring this treasured artifact into the Temple of the Ninth Kami. Think of their faces. Shaha! Tsukuro. Mishime."

Omoni shrugged. "Tsukuro does not really have a face. He wears the flesh of others."

"You know what I mean," the dragon said with an amused laugh. "Think how jealous they will be, if only for a moment. Perhaps they will realize how greatly they misjudged you, and why Daigotsu values you as he does."

Omoni looked at the sword cautiously. "What is the price?" he asked. "Kyoden says that your favors always come at a price."

"Kyoden spoke truly," the dragon said. "All I ask is that once you give the sword to Daigotsu, that you forever serve the hand that wields it."

Omoni considered this. "So long as it is Daigotsu's hand, or his chosen heir, I so swear."

"Fair enough," the dragon said. It receded into nothingness once again, leaving Omoni alone with the sword.

The Temple of the Ninth Kami was quiet today. The chanting monks and worshipful samurai had been dismissed. Now only Omoni and the Dark Lord remained. Omoni had considered doing as the Shadow Dragon suggested, unveiling the sword before Daigotsu's court and stunning them all. Instead, the sculptor of flesh decided to tell Daigotsu in secret. Better to be safe in case the sword was truly cursed.

Daigotsu sat on the stairs before the mighty statue of Fu Leng, studying the golden no-dachi he now held in one hand. Omoni looked on eagerly, watching as his master turned the sword in a complex kata. The golden sword sputtered with uneven black flame, as if the spirit of the blade was uncertain whether it should serve this new master.

"How is the arm?" Omoni asked curiously. "Working well, I hope?"

"Much better than the last one you made for me," Daigotsu said, squeezing his right shoulder. "It feels quite natural."

"That one will not decay as quickly as the others," Omoni said proudly. "It should serve you well for many years. Even if severed from your body, it will continue to obey your commands."

Daigotsu smiled faintly. "I do not intend to let anyone sever my arm again," he said, "but I applaud your craftsmanship nonetheless, Omoni."

"What of the sword?" Omoni asked. "Is it safe? The Shadow Dragon said that it would be, but I do not trust him."

"The Shadow Dragon is a strange sort of creature," Daigotsu said. "It has taken on many aspects of the shadow that it has become. It is a being of deceit, corruption, and destruction. Even so, it is still a dragon. Though it will cloud the truth and seek to deceive you, it will never lie. It cannot. If it told you the sword is safe, then it is. My magic confirms that. I sense no danger here."

"Is it truly as the dragon said?" Omoni asked. "Is it truly the Hantei sword?"

Daigotsu shrugged. "If the Shadow Dragon believed it was so, I have little reason to doubt him. This sword's past is quite complex. It is named Akkuai-uo, or sometimes Kunshu. It was forged by Doji Yasurugi for the son of the first Emperor. The fifth Hantei wielded it in defense of Kyuden Hida, personally guarding the gates beside the Lord of the Crab Clan. Hantei Fujiwa's victory that day granted the blade great powers against the Shadowlands. I find it ironic that it was this same sword that our god, Fu Leng, drove into the stomach of another Crab Champion centuries later. Or that that Champion's son lost the blade again when the mahotsukai, Kuni Yori, captured and slew him."

"I know the stories," Omoni said. "You mean Hida Kisada and his son, Hida Yakamo."

Daigotsu nodded. "Yes," he said with a sneer. "Two men who were such brilliant failures that the Rokugani

elevated them to the Celestial Heavens so that they could be the gods of all failures. After Yori's defeat the sword lay discarded and forgotten in the Shinomen Forest until it was discovered by a band of Monkey Clan magistrates. They returned the sword to Otosan Uchi, where it remained unused until it was set in the heavens beside the other Ancestral Swords. If any could steal this blade from the Heavens amid the war that rages there, it would be the Shadow Dragon. I suppose he found it ironic that I should come to possess the blade. Am I not the last true member of the Hantei line?"

"You said that it was a weapon against darkness," Omoni said. "Is it not dangerous for you to wield?"

"Perhaps," Daigotsu said, staring into the sputtering black flames that covered the blade. "It does seem as if the sword is uncertain whether it should acknowledge me as its master. Perhaps we should seek a higher counsel on this matter."

Omoni scowled. "Not the Oracles again," he said sourly.

"No," Daigotsu said, a strange gleam in his eye. "Not the Oracles. I think, instead, we should seek the counsel of the last true Emperor who wielded this sword." With that Daigotsu sheathed the no-dachi, turned, and rested the sword in the outstretched hands of the statue of Fu Leng. The Dark Lord bowed his head and fell respectfully to his knees. Omoni quickly did the same, turning his eyes to the floor just as a horrible, numbing cold filled the Temple of the Ninth Kami. Omoni could feel a powerful presence radiating from the statue. He could hear words spoken, though he could not understand them. They were the words of Fu Leng himself, intended only for Daigotsu. After several minutes the cold faded and Omoni dared to look up again.

"Here," Daigotsu said, handing the sheathed sword to him. "Draw the blade."

Omoni took the sword obediently, wincing in frustration as the blade jammed in its saya. "I cannot," he said. "It feels frozen in place." Daigotsu nodded, took the blade from Omoni, and drew it easily. The golden sword erupted in a brilliant aura of white flame. "Fu Leng has decreed that only I or a member of my line can draw this blade and wield it. By the Dark Kami's power, it shall forever be a weapon against my enemies. Even should my closest allies turn against me, this blade shall remain forever true."

Omoni looked at Daigotsu, left eye twitching in confusion. "Turn against you?" he asked. "Why would we do that? You are the greatest leader we have ever known, Dark Lord. Like the sword, we are forever true."

"I hope that you are correct, my friend," Daigotsu said, eyes flicking from the sword to Omoni and back. He sheathed the blade with a swift movement. "I thank you for the blade, Omoni."

With that, Daigotsu turned and left the temple, leaving the tormented little man to his thoughts.



ENLIGHTENMENT

by Jeff Alexander

Building a successful Enlightenment deck can be a rewarding experience without equal. However, with the demise of Finding the Harmony, the path to Enlightenment has once again become long and difficult. So, you may ask, "How would one such as I achieve this worthy goal?"

Sit down, young one, and meditate upon these thoughts. The path before you, long as it may be, will soon become clear.

1. Prepare yourself. Before you start building your deck, think carefully about the things that will be required for the play of all five Rings. For the Ring of Air, you're going to need a few Shugenja (preferably some with Innate Abilities) or Monks. You'll need some nifty tricks to get the Rings of Water, Earth, and Fire into play, and you'll need to take into account how difficult it will be for you to drop your hand for Void. These may all sound like simple

considerations, but a lot of people forget to take them things into account when building their deck. Think about the clan you want to Enlighten with, and whether or not that clan has access to all the things that you need. Making a wrong decision here can make the next four tips pointless, so choose wisely.

2. Be self-sufficient. Three of your Rings require some level of interaction with your opponent, so it's important for you to make it available. The Armor of Osano-Wo is your best friend, because it ensures that you don't have to wait around hoping that your opponent will get twitchy and attack you. Ambush is great for Water, because it always gives you an opposing army to beat up on. Think carefully about putting a Wandering Monk or two into your deck. Tossing a Wandering Monk over to your opponent guarantees you a bowed personality that you can both duel for Fire and Ambush





for Water. Bring everything you need for Enlightenment with you to the table, and you'll never be disappointed that your opponent doesn't have a crucial component.

3. Be ruthless. More so than with any other deck, your card choices will define your success. Every single Personality, Event, Holding, and Fate card that you use has to be perfect, because there is no room for a sub-optimal card on the path to Enlightenment. Using the *Kiho Double Chi*? Good. Using a Personality with *Double Chi*? Better. A Shugenja with an innate ability? Good. A Shugenja with an Innate Ability that discards a card for an effect? Better. Be ruthless in your card choices, and you will be rewarded with success.

4. The more resources you have, the better. All five Rings are Fate cards. Most of the ways you have to play your Rings are very likely Fate cards. So, the more ways you have to draw Fate cards, and the more Fate cards your draw, the more options you have. Unlike a lot of



other decks, you can't afford to tie yourself to the one card per turn the rulebook entitles you to. Don't be afraid to grab a few unconventional ways to draw some cards, like *Interesting Sticks*. Also, take every opportunity to trade a Dynasty



card for a Fate card (*Glimpse of the Unicorn*, *Imperial Ambassadorship*, *Wandering Monk*).

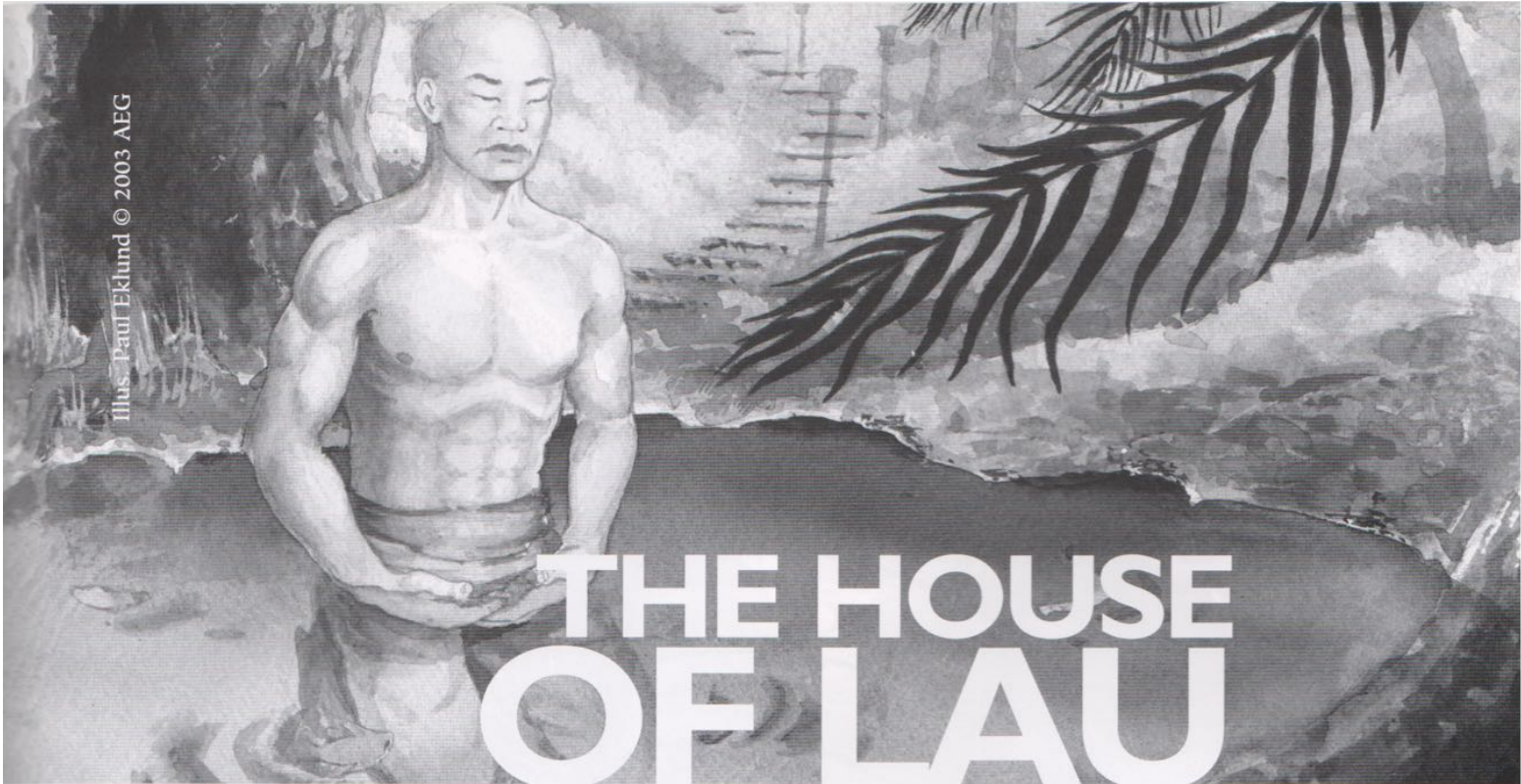
5. Walk the long road. Your first build of an Enlightenment deck will never be as good as

the fifth build, and the fifth build will never be as successful as the tenth build. When you start on the path to Enlightenment, be prepared for rigorous testing. Be prepared to rethink your basic assumptions. Be prepared to get frustrated and throw your deck against the wall. There's only one way to make this deck work, and that's practice. If the secrets to Enlightenment were available on every street corner, everyone would be doing it.

Finding the Harmony had a lot of effects on the tournament environment, but one of them was the complete destruction of respect for the Enlightenment victory. With the MRP and fall of Finding, that respect is slowly coming back. Today, it really means something to Enlighten. An Enlightenment victory at a major tournament will once again get you a standing ovation. The designers have become more aware of what Enlightenment should mean. It is, and always will be, the most difficult victory condition.

The road to Enlightenment is long, but at the end lies a reward without peer. GenCon, the jewel of the L5R tournament scene, has never been won by an Enlightenment deck. Can you be the first?





THE HOUSE OF LAU

From time to time we're asked a few questions on how we produce L5R: what it takes, and if it's genuinely as difficult as it appears. Although the process can be a little overwhelming, when we break it into manageable parts you'll see that the experience of publishing a card game is everything you might think it is: fun, fulfilling, tedious, and unpredictable.

Ring of Water (Design):

The start of any thing good begins with a good idea. During this almost religious period, we closet ourselves in tiny unventilated rooms and subsist on day-old pizza and cans of flat Coke. During the initial design, we always start out by looking for trends in the current tournament environment.

Keeping the tournament environment in mind, our attention shifts to fixing problem areas of the game. These problems include play styles that are too aggressive and deck types that are too weak. Sometimes it takes just one card to bring a faltering clan back up to speed, and sometimes it takes a series of cards to accomplish our goals.

Ring of Fire (Playtesting)

You've heard of them, you might have even seen them — the mysterious players who we've recognized as above average players with good analytical

skills. These guys are your personal playtesters. Accruing about as much credit as grips for a blockbuster movie do, playtesters are critical to the success of collectible card games.

They're the backbone of our design process; they take our unrefined ideas and help give our card ideas shape. Mostly, though, our playtesters make sure that we don't make cards that are too powerful for the game.

So it takes a thick skin to be a designer. We love our ideas, yet we ask our playtesters to make a mockery of them by finding card combos that are just plain abusive.

Ring of Earth (Printing)

Hot dogs are an all-American favorite, but no one really wants to know how they're made. Printing is the same way when it comes to game publishing; everyone dreams about designing card games, but nobody leans back and thinks, "I bet I could come up with a foiling process that would look better and cost two-thirds as much."

Printing a card game takes approximately three months from start to finish. We have to be done designing a card expansion at least 12 weeks before you see it in your stores. The first four of these weeks is work here at the AEG offices. We scan all the art into our computers, fit it into blank card frames, and lay text on top of each

card. The digital computer files we build are sent electronically to our printers, and they take 8 weeks to print, cut, and collate (package) your cards into boosters and decks for point of sale.

In other words, on the day you get your new cards, we've already finished designing the next expansion. Pretty insane, huh?

Ring of Air (Distribution)

The printers send finished product to distributors all over the world, who have barely two weeks to get cards onto your store shelves. At this time, L5R is distributed in over 30 countries, including France, Germany, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Greece, and Russia. Next time you look for an L5R opponent, it's quite possible they don't even speak English.

Ring of Void (Playing)

This is you. This is the most fulfilling part of the entire process: watching and playing L5R with all the fans out there. When you tell us you like one thing or hate another, we listen, so we can make L5R better. And coincidentally enough, it brings us back full circle to designing a better L5R.

by Ray Lau

CARD FOCUS REND THE SOUL

by Zen Faulkes

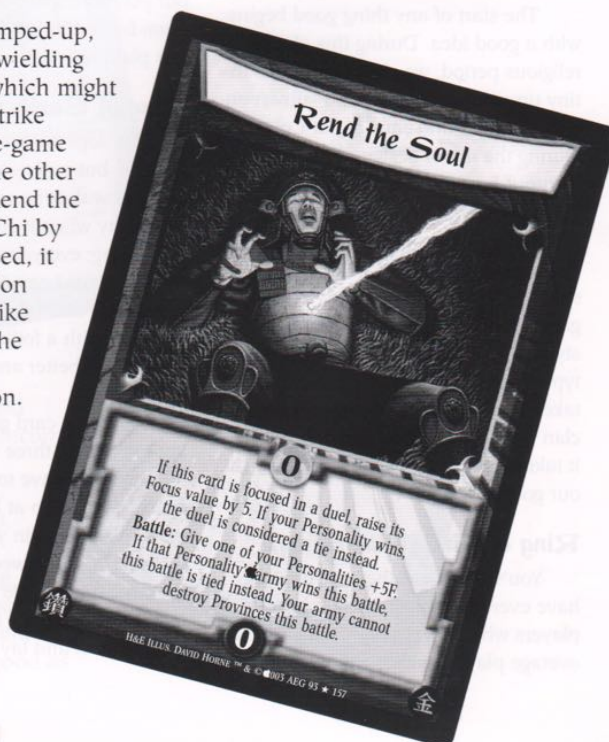
The card *Rend the Soul* is worth looking at because it's built on what I call "the Superior Tactics principle": it has two rather different uses. A card with both battle and duelling functions is going to be flexible, and flexibility is becoming an increasingly desirable feature in a card.

Is *Rend the Soul* just another Kharmic Strike as far as duels are concerned? To a large degree, yes. A lot of cards that combo with *Kharmic Strike* will work with *Rend the Soul*; the Experienced Isawa Hochiu and Shosuro Higatsuku come to mind.

But there are differences between the cards, subtle though they may be. *Rend the Soul* won't allow a wimpy 1 Chi Personality

to take out a pumped-up, Celestial Sword-wielding master duelist, which might make *Kharmic Strike* preferable in late-game situations. On the other hand, because *Rend the Soul* does raise Chi by 5 when it's focused, it provides protection that *Kharmic Strike* doesn't against the always popular *Poisoned Weapon*.

The battle action on *Rend the Soul* is more interesting,



because there are more ways that a player can actively exploit it to win battles (and from that, games!).

First, the restriction on destroying Provinces obviously doesn't matter when you're defending. Since few cards pack +5F bonuses, and many defensive decks are perfectly happy to sacrifice Personalities to stay alive, *Rend the Soul* can allow low-force armies to take out higher-force armies in a tie. And there are ways to save defending armies in case of a tie. You can fight behind *Trenches*, or simply *Pick Your Battles*.

Some of those tricks like *Pick Your Battles* work if you're attacking too, but you can be much more aggressive with this card.

If you're attacking, there are two things to remember about how this card works. First, you can only "win a battle" if there's an opposing army. No army? The "tie" clause and subsequent auto-destruct doesn't happen. Second,

the restriction against destroying Provinces only applies to the battle where *Rend the Soul* was first played. The card says "your army cannot destroy Provinces this battle," not "an army with this Personality cannot destroy Provinces this turn."

Because the +5F lasts until the end of the turn, it's particularly sweet if you can survive the first battle: your Personality will still be pumped up and ready to do some damage. I'm sure there are some clever *Shiro Matsu* players who can take advantage of this.

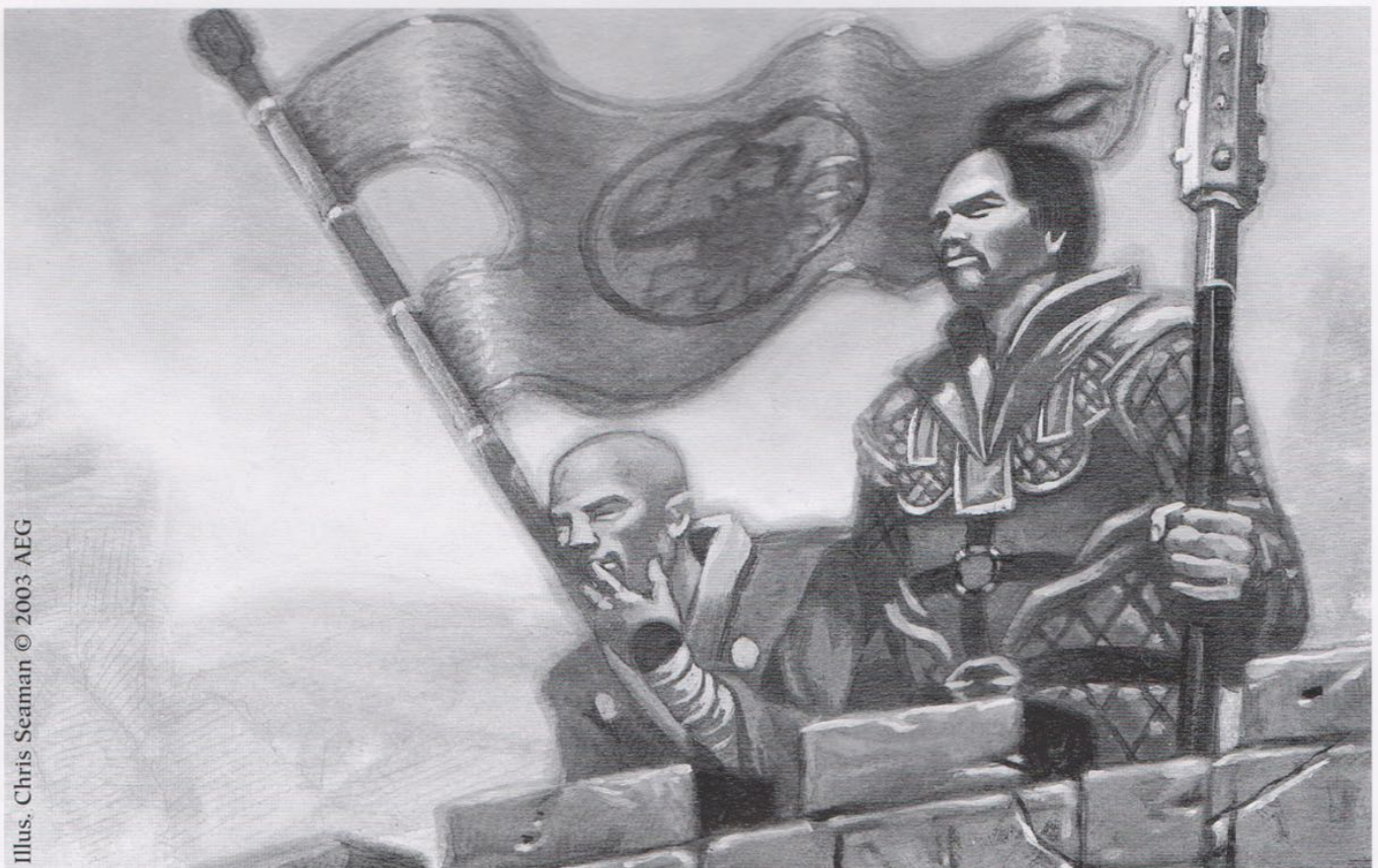
The bottom line is simple. If you have mobility, *Rend the Soul* is a Province-killing sledgehammer of a force boost.

Think about this. *Shinjo Rao*, with 3 Force, is assigned to a Province in the Infantry phase. *Rend the Soul* takes him to a Province-busting 8 Force, and then he simply slides over to an undefended Province. While Rao's ability has always been excellent, there haven't been too many cheap action cards to turn

him into a credible threat to a Province; you've had to build him up with attachment cards or multiple force boosts.

The trick is that you don't want to have any defenders against your pumped Personality, since the "tie and die" clause is linked to that force boost. This, unfortunately, lets out mobility cards like *At Your Command* or *One Sword*.

Shinjo Rao is a convenient example because he has a built-in move, but there are lots of other options. To name a few, there's *Master of the Rolling River*, *Drum of Water, Fire and Air*, *Gift of the Water Dragon*, *Naga Tattoo* or... *Superior Tactics*. As *Superior Tactics* is the card I compared *Rend the Soul* to at the start of the column, the circle is complete.



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THE UNABRIDGED LEGEND CARD VAULT FOR L5R

by Edward Bolme

When it launched, Card Vault was hailed as the ultimate CCG accessory (don't believe me? Check the sidebar). Now *Card Vault* promises to be invaluable to L5R players. Why? Because we now have the complete L5R database. Want to know the flavor text on the 77 reprint cards that appeared in the C&J decks? We got you covered. Never read the pre-Imperial cards? Now you can. Need to track those French cards in your collection? No sweat. And *Card Vault* offers much, much more:

Building Decks

Card Vault easily handles deck construction and analysis. It checks for format legality, allows for offbeat deck restrictions like the *Heart of Shinomen Forest*, and performs a variety of potent analyses.

- Draw test hands
- Calculate odds of drawing your key combo
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- Compare decks against inventory
- Print deck lists with a validation report

Inventory

With *Card Vault*, you can track your collection in as much detail as you like. The Batch Edit feature allows you to enter hundreds of cards with a few clicks.

- Track cards owned, excess cards, and cards wanted
- Set "target numbers" and Card Vault calculates your wants and needs
- Rate cards by quality... or not
- Generate exchange files of your trade and want lists
- Automatically compare exchanged files, simplifying trades

Partner Sites

Card Vault is integrated with various partner sites around the globe. *Scrye* is already hosting Card Vault deck files on its website. Other sites will host deck libraries, trading engines, price downloads, shopping carts based on your exchange files, and even auctions (we've already lined up

sellers who have pre-Imperial cards to sell).

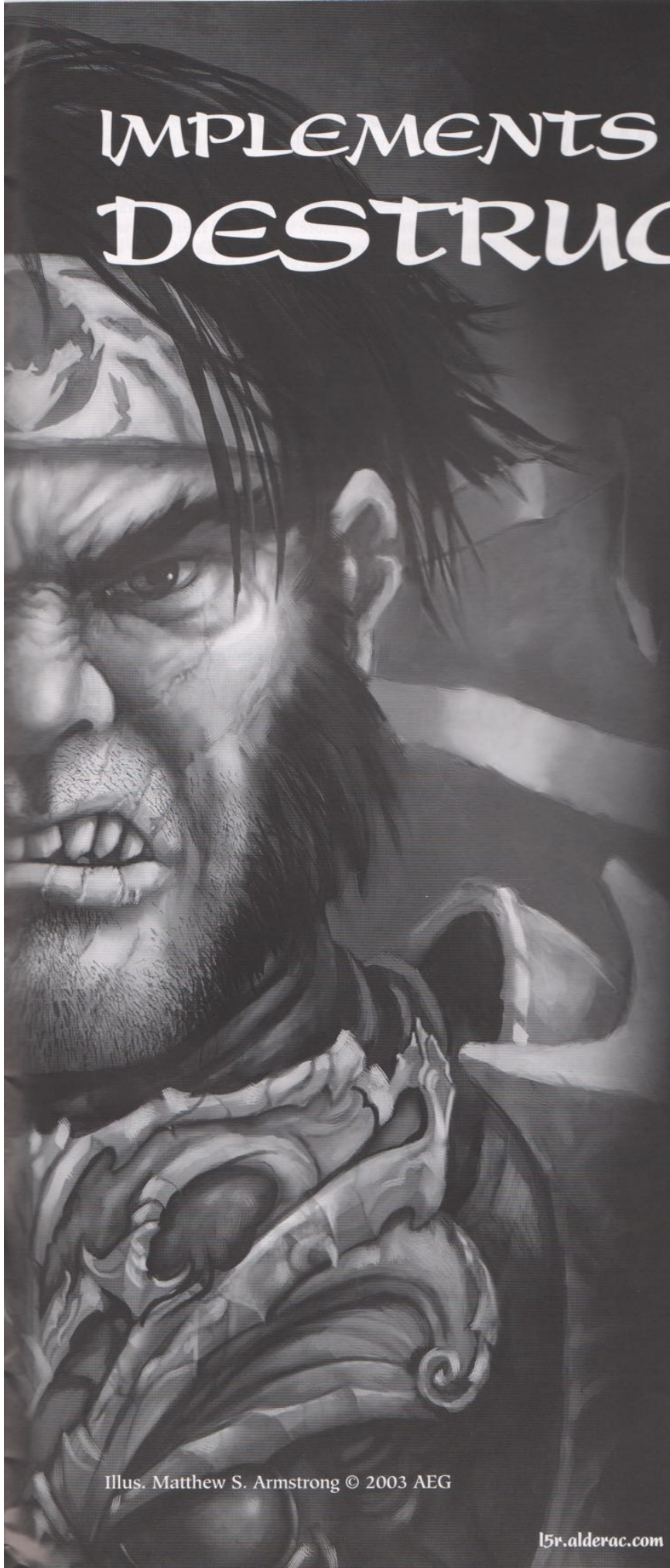
And More

We're dedicated to service. If you want new calculations added to the L5R files, or you spot a typo or omission, just contact the data file author, and it'll be fixed. In the future, you can expect to see *Card Vault* downloads with the preview cards from upcoming sets, so you can add them to your decks and see how they affect your calculations.

And, of course, we support *Warlord*, and we will support *Initial D* and any other game AEG comes out with. Just because we love 'em.

SPECIAL OFFER

For a limited time, AEG is generously sponsoring a special offer for IA members: buy Card Vault for just \$19.99, a savings of 33%! To take advantage of this offer, just visit www.alderac.com/imperialherald/specialoffer/cardvault.html. Place your order online, and your copy of Card Vault will be unlocked immediately.



IMPLEMENTS of DESTRUCTION

by Shawn Carman

The sound of stone crushing stone was like thunder in the mountains. The earth shattered where the boulder struck, the flaming pitch that covered it engulfing the diseased plants all around its point of impact. Bakemono shrieked in pain and fury as they were cast aside by the wave of force accompanying the stone's impact, their flesh blackening from the terrible heat. The dozen or so creatures scattered in all directions, their inhuman shrieking reaching across the plains to the Crab samurai standing atop the Great Carpenter Wall.

"And that," said Kaiu Mitaru, running his hand lovingly along the wooden frame of the catapult that he commanded, "is how you handle goblins." He looked up at the young samurai gathered around him. "Any questions?"

The Crab are a warlike clan, having endured an endless siege for over a thousand years. The Kaiu family has made many innovations, including the massive engines of destruction that sit atop their wall. Discover the secrets of the Kaiu and their Crab brethren here, and in the pages of the soon to be released *Secrets of the Crab*™ for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-Playing Game, Second Edition, and the d20 System™. (The following section was removed from *Secrets of the Crab* as we simply had too much cool stuff to fit in. It is presented here as an Imperial Herald exclusive.)

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SIEGE ENGINES

KIKKOSHA ("TURTLE SHELL WAGON")

The use of siege engines in warfare is generally limited among clans outside the Crab. Even the brilliant leaders of the mighty Lion armies consider them time-consuming to construct, difficult to transport, and of limited effectiveness in battle. They do see use in almost any large-scale conflict, to be sure, but they are still regarded as specialized implements of war. The Kaiu regard them much differently. To the Crab, they are tools that daily preserve the lives of soldiers upon the wall, and that destroy creatures that would otherwise be immune to harm. Siege devices are a common sight along the Great Carpenter Wall.

FIRING A SIEGE WEAPON

In the d20 System™, siege engines utilize the rules found in the DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide. In L5R Second Edition, each type of siege engine that produces a ranged attack has a set number of dice that it rolls to attack. Before each attack can be made, the engine crew commander must succeed at an Engineering or Siege roll versus a fixed TN. Every successful Raise made on this roll grants one Free Raise on the engine's next attack. For example, a light ballista typically rolls 4k3 for attack and requires an Engineering or Siege roll at TN 10 to fire. A Kaiu engineer who declares a Raise on his Siege roll, then succeeds with a 16, may add 5 to the total of his next attack roll using the ballista.

Siege Engine	Attack	Siege/Engineering TN
Tosekiki	3k3	15
Ballista, light	4k3	10
Ballista, heavy	3k3	15

CREATING A SIEGE ENGINE

Siege engines can be very expensive because they often must be tailored to the task at hand. They are nearly impossible to transport, so they must be constructed at the site of a siege, draining valuable manpower and resources that could be otherwise used during prolonged fighting. The exception, of course, is the vast array of weapons found atop the Great Carpenter Wall. These engines see frequent use and are carefully maintained by the Kaiu Engineers. They are elegant, precise, and powerful where most engines constructed hastily for a battle are awkward, clumsy, and undependable. This perhaps explains the Crab Clan's faith in such technology when other clans see it as little more than an unpleasant necessity.

The following siege engines are the types most commonly found in Rokugan.

Perhaps the simplest and oldest siege engine, this device is a large wagon with a thick wooden or leather roof that allows a dozen or more soldiers to march underneath it. This protects them from most forms of ranged fire and some of the more unpleasant means by which defenders discourage troops at the base of their walls. Many clans find kikkosha distasteful to use because some variants incorporate leather in their design. Again, this is an issue that the Crab do not consider as important as other clans.

Effect: Provides three-quarters cover, reduces movement to one-third normal rate

Hardness 12, HP 75

Cost to Create: 400 koku

Time to Create: 8 hours (with a minimum of 6 workers)

Requires: Craft (Siege) or Craft (Carpentry) check (DC 20)

Effect: Increases TN to Be Hit by 10, reduces movement to one third normal rate

Wounds: 90: Destroyed

Time to Create: 4 hours (with a minimum of 6 workers)

Requires: Siege or Engineering roll, TN 20

KURUMA DATE

This simple device can trace its roots not only to the gaijin shields occasionally carried by Unicorn infantry, but also to the thick carapaces possessed by many oni and other fiendish creatures in the Shad-owlands. These large wooden shields are hardened by fire and mounted on crude wheels, so a soldier can push them across the battlefield. Behind such a barrier, the soldier is protected from all but the deadliest archery attacks and spells.

Effect: Provides nine-tenths cover, reduces movement to one-fourth normal rate

Hardness 18, HP 75

Cost to Create: 100 koku

Time to Create: 4 hours (assuming 1 person per shield)

Requires: Craft (Carpentry), Craft (Siege), or Craft (Armorsmithing) check, DC 20

Effect: Increases TN to Be Hit by 15, reduces movement to one-fourth normal rate

Wounds: 80: Destroyed

Time to Create: 4 hours (assuming 1 person per shield)

Requires: Armorer, Craft (Carpentry), or Siege roll, TN 20

KURUMA SEIRO (SIEGE TOWER)

These are constructed on-site and must be customized for the particulars of each conflict. Typically, these towers are twenty to thirty feet tall, with up to three ten-foot stories. Each story can hold up to ten soldiers. The wheeled towers are pushed along by men on the ground while the soldiers within remain safe

from archer fire. The tower is pushed against an enemy fortification's walls, and the soldiers within can easily cross from the tower to the upper levels of their target. Ladders allow soldiers on the levels below to follow suit. A kuruma seiro requires ten men to push it, plus an additional man for every two soldiers contained within it. They are not quick constructs, and can only move at a speed of roughly 10 feet per round.

Effect: Provides total cover for soldiers within; base speed 10 ft. Allows soldiers on the top floor direct access to the top of an enemy fortification, letting them gain entry with a Jump check (DC 10).

Hardness: 10, HP 125

Cost to Create: 600 koku

Time to Create: 4 hours (with a minimum of 6 workers)

Requires: Craft (Carpentry) or Craft (Siege) check (DC 15 +5 per level above 1)

Wounds: 180: Destroyed

Time to Create: 4 hours (with a minimum of 6 workers)

Requires: Siege or Engineering roll, TN 15 + 5 per level above 1

TOSEKIKI ("STONE FIRING CATAPULT")

A combination of Kaiu engineering and Unicorn innovation, the tosekiki are powerful catapults that utilize counterbalances to achieve remarkable results. The catapult used by the Crab requires a crew of six and is only effective at long range. The Kaiu upon the Great Wall typically use it to weaken Shadowlands forces before they come within arrow range, switching at that point to bows.

Tosekiki are identical to heavy catapults as described in the *GAME MASTER'S Guide*.

Range: Minimum 200 feet, maximum 600 feet

Damage: 8k6

Wounds: 100: Destroyed

Time to Create: 8 hours (with a minimum of 10 workers)

Requires: Siege or Engineering roll, TN 30

BALLISTA

Generally speaking, samurai consider the bow to be a secondary weapon. It is used in battle to weaken an opponent's front line, or when one's opponents cannot be engaged in melee combat. In almost every instance, the katana is far preferable. The Crab, on the other hand, are very much in favor of a weapon that allows them to kill Shadowlands creatures without coming near them. After all, the Taint can rarely be transmitted over distances of more than a few feet.

The first ballistae the Kaiu developed, based loosely on the dai-kyu, were crude and fairly ineffective. The Kaiu recognized the value of such a weapon, but it needed further research before becoming a useful device. At some point, the family came into possession of a crossbow that had once belonged to Yobanjin raiders to the north of Phoenix territory. The Kaiu immediately incorporated several design changes to their fledgling ballista, improving its effectiveness more than tenfold.

Ballistae soon began appearing on the Great Wall. Other clans consider them crude and offensive given their resemblance to gaijin weaponry, but the Crab care only that they are effective. Ballistae come in two sizes: smaller versions that require a crew of 2, and larger models that need at least 4 crewmen.

Range Increment: 125/250

Damage: 4d6/5d6

Hardness: 10/12, HP 65/90

Cost to Create: 500/750

Time to Create: 12 hours

Requires: Craft (Siege) check, DC 30

Maximum Range: 200 feet / 400 feet

Damage: 6k5 / 8k6

Wounds: 80: Destroyed / 100: Destroyed

Time to Create: 6 hours / 8 hours

Requires: Siege or Engineering roll, TN 25/30

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Brand Manager Ray Lau

Assistant Production Manager . . . Mark Jelfo

Typesetter Brendon Goodyear

Editors D. J. Trindle, Katie Yates

Operations Manager Mary Valles

Contributing Writers Jeff Alexander,

Edward Bolme, Shawn Carman,

Ray Lau, Rich Wulf, Zen Faulkes

Cover Artist Matthew S. Armstrong

Additional Art . . . Matthew S. Armstrong, beet,

Drew Baker, Thomas Denmark,

Pam Eklund, Joachim Gmoser,

David Horne, Hugh Jamieson,

Tony Moseley, William O'Connor,

Chris Seaman, Franz Vohwinkel

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