

THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

VOL. 2 / NO. 6

The Fall of
Otosan Uchi
SNEAK PREVIEW

THE SEASON OF THE
PHOENIX
EXPOSED

THE BREAK OF DAWN

by Rich Wulf

MAKING CARD ADVANTAGE

Hints Inside

ALSO:

L5R AT GENCON

KOKU REDEMPTION



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SEASON OF THE Phoenix

In the icy lands of the Phoenix, a fire burns. It is the fire of Isawa's Last Wish, a magic unlike any other. The Council of Masters is uncertain how to confront this power — should they embrace it or stand against it?

In either case, the Council cannot act until they have restored themselves to five.

Who will become the new Master of Water? Where will the path of the Phoenix lead?

You decide.



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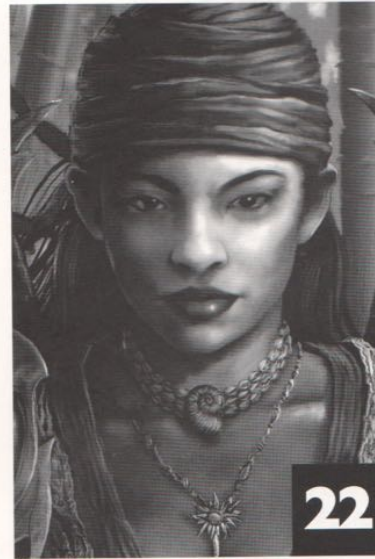
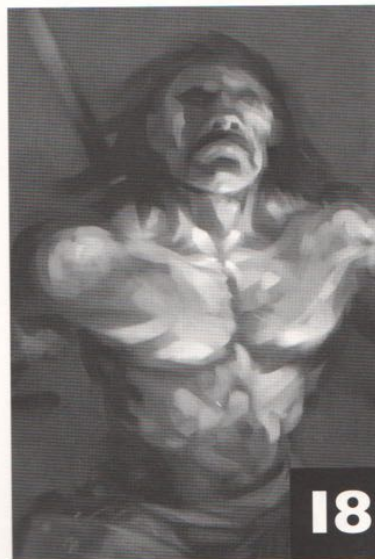
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THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY

VOL. 2 / NO. 6



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Editorial

With the milestone of Gencon 2002 come and gone, it's time to look ahead once again and we've got a great year coming.

1,000 Years of Darkness kicked off the release of Diamond Legal cards. From this point forward, nearly all new cards will be Diamond Legal in addition to Gold Legal. This way, when Diamond Edition releases in October of 2003 and Strict Diamond format begins, you'll have over a thousand cards already in your library to build from.

One of the lessons we've learned from a having an extremely large card pool is that the game eventually degrades to a point that no longer becomes fun or competitive. Look at the Open environment, where many games last only 4 to 5 turns and are typically one-sided. In addition, new players, regardless of skill, are often discouraged in large card pool environments since they don't have enough cards to compete with veteran players.

So before Strict Gold degrades to an unplayable environment, Strict Diamond will restore it to the strategic and competitive game we have come to love. For those of you who are worried about losing a bunch of your cards, fear not: we'll slowly reintroduce recent cards that you've already purchased back into the environment by including them in the new starter decks.

In other news, Organized Play is up and running. It's keeping score and doing it in real-time. You can find a calendar of sanctioned events, at <http://www.organizedplay.com/l5rconsole>. There are also ELO rankings for those of you interested in seeing who's at the top and who's not. Organized Play automates our tournament records and gives us the ability to get storyline results and tallies to you sooner.

We're also wrapping up the Gold storyline and getting close to finally choosing an Emperor... or Empress. Choose wisely throughout the year, because we're watching... and you're the one who's going to tell us which Wind it will be.

If that's not enough, we've added a few more Koteis to some heavily populated regions, more information is available at <http://l5r.alderac.com>.

I can't believe how far we've come with this game. I'd like to thank all of you who are playing L5R and sharing the experience with others; we couldn't have reached this level without your support.

All of us here: A safe and happy holiday.

— Raymond La
L5R Brand Manager





The fires have been set and Otosan Uchi



by Jeff Alexander

I already know the comment most Mantis players are going to make upon seeing their new Stronghold: "What? No ranged attacks?" That's right. Ranged attacks are very much a focus of the Mantis Clan, but they have also been difficult to make an effective offensive tool in an attacking military deck, the sort Mantis is most encouraged to play. I intend to give the Mantis a ranged attack-supporting Stronghold at some point, but it's more important right now that their performance relative to the other Clans improve across the board, and give them a somewhat new, flexible, general purpose Stronghold ability is more likely to accomplish that than trying to work with something we've had little luck with so far.

The Dragon gained more and more card-drawing abilities, and not just through Shiro Mirumoto. This set, we try to give Dragon a Stronghold on the other side of *Shiro Mirumoto* — one that lets them put this newfound talent to use. Our goal with *Shiro Tamori* is *flexibility*. We want to give Dragon players a minor benefit they could use no matter whether they're pursuing a Military, dueling-based Honor, or even an Enlightenment Victory. *Flexibility* is, after all, one of Dragon's older advantages (and it's closely tied to another: unpredictability). Boosting a Personality's stats opens up all kinds of clever combos, from something as simple as meeting the requirements of *Strength of Purity* or a *Dai Tsuchi* to sneaky *Honorable Seppuku* tricks. As an added benefit, *Shiro Tamori* lets Dragon play with more reactive, or "metagame," cards such as *Tomb of Jade* without the fear that they will be drawn against the wrong opponents and sit, dead, in the player's hand.

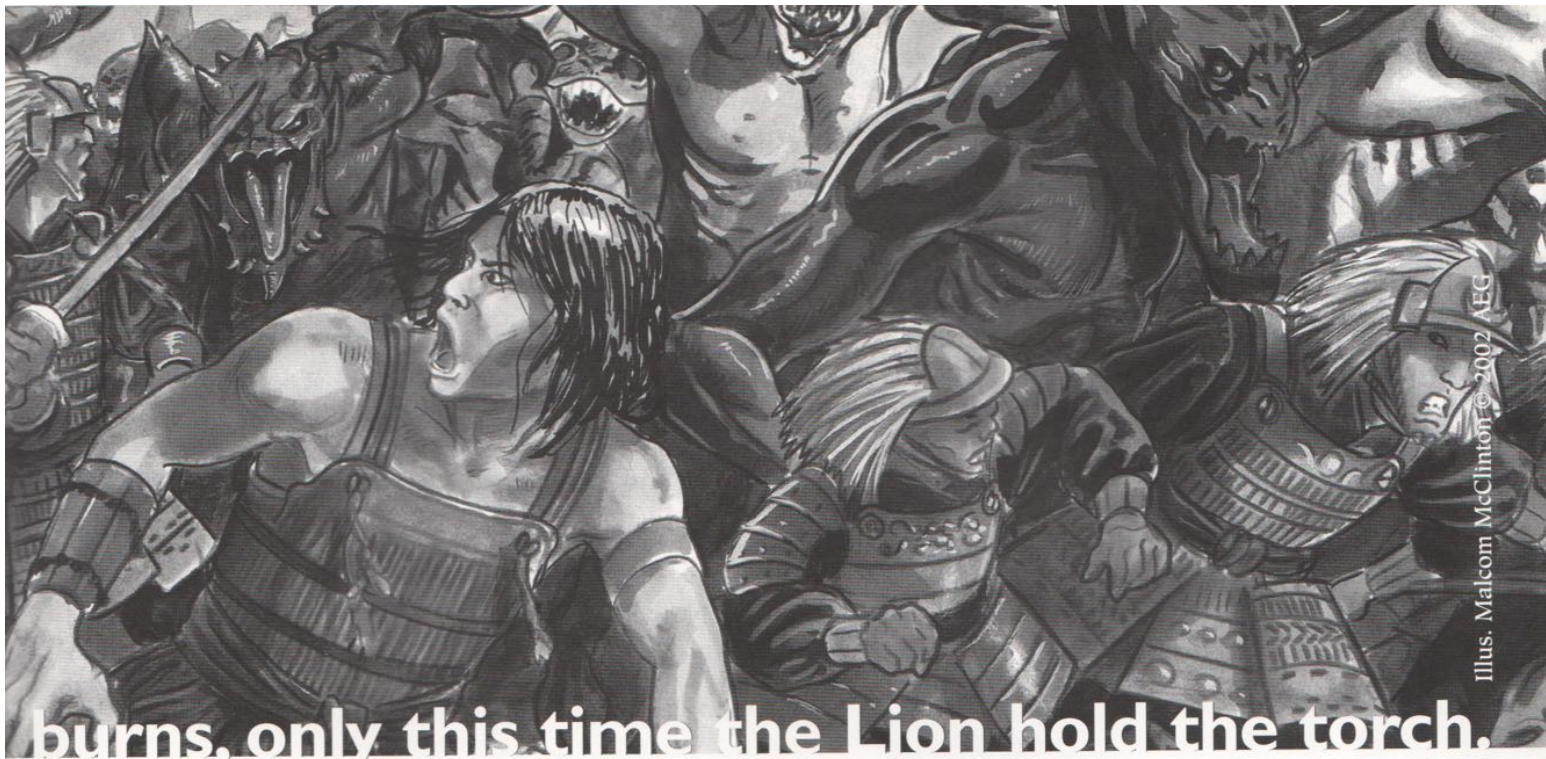
The Crane Stronghold proved the most difficult to design for this set. Crane has Strongholds that address its economic superiority and its nearly unrivaled mastery of dueling — two for the latter, in fact — so we wanted this box to

concentrate primarily on their political clout. Initially, we tried giving their courtiers the ability to send enemy units home from battle. It fits Crane's flavor, encourages them to play courtier Personalities, and at the very least would let people play an honor deck without automatically selecting *Toturi Tsudao* as their Wind every time, but this sort of ability ultimately proved too strong in playtest no matter how it was tweaked. We went back to our original basic desire: a Stronghold that revolved around the Courtier trait. Since the Crane has an excellent Personality base in general but are quite weak in the field of actual Courtiers, the ability to turn anyone into a Courtier rapidly presented itself.

Addressing Clan Balance

In addition to a second Stronghold, we're giving Mantis Personalities more of the qualities they've been lacking: built-in Naval traits, Personal Honors above 1, even a militarily-viable Courtier, in addition to their normal benefit to Tsuruchi family archers.

Crab, the other Clan struggling in the overall tournament scene right now, is getting big boosts in the realm of Followers, both in



Illus. Malcom McClinton © 2002 AEG

burns, only this time the Lion hold the torch.

playing them and in keeping those big, juicy units free from harm.

For Clans on top of the hill right now, like Scorpion and the Shadowlands, we will, as usual, present cards that don't fit directly into their currently-dominating deck types, like *Hitaka* and *Soshi Kiyo*.

We're also including House Guards in this set, like those in *Gold Edition*, and Clan-specific Unique Holdings like those in *An Oni's Fury*, to fill in the gaps for those factions that don't have any yet.

Something for Everyone

The storyline reaches a military peak with this set, with the Shadowlands decimating the capital city. Yet the Clan production cycle has rotated in Crane and Dragon, which are both heavy dueling factions. So, as much as we might like giving you a set of a hundred and fifty-odd slaving oni cards, we still had to set room aside for challenges, fancy duel maneuvers, and political scheming.

We tried to make sure every type of Personality had some kind of Action card he alone could use. Kihos are great for shugenja, and Courtiers are finding their place with more and more Political Actions, but what about Samurai?

What about cavalry? Scouts? Why are there special Actions that Tacticians can take, but none for characters with Double Chi? Fans spoke highly of *Relentless Assault* when they first saw it, and that's a reaction we liked. Look for *The Fall* to introduce more Actions that let traditionally "passive" traits work towards victory.

And as old as the game is, cards like *Unraveling* prove there will always be fundamental holes in the card set just waiting for something very, very basic to fill them. *Unraveling* does what *Counterspell* back in the *Imperial Edition* sounds like it should have

done: let one Shugenja stymie the efforts of another to cast a Spell.

The Last of the RST Personalities

The Fall will see the printing of the last few Personalities whose names, traits, and affiliation were determined by players who won Regional Storyline Tournaments in late 2000. Most of these were honored in *Broken Blades*, but there were still one or two unaccounted for. No longer is that the case.



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FALL OF OTOSAN UCHI CARD COMBOS



Menhari-gata + Perfect Attunement

Perfect Attunement lets you destroy an opposing Personality, but only if the caster's Force exactly equals the target's. Enter *Menhari-gata*, which gives its wielder the Tactician trait, allowing him to flexibly raise his own Force by up to four in most decks (or five or even six with certain key cards). Better yet, the *Menhari-gata* lets you lower an opposing Personality's Force instead, so you don't need to put both the item and the Spell on the same shugenja. *Perfect Attunement* also combos well with the sword *Naishi*.



Arrow of Purity + Yoshi's Fan

Yoshi's Fan increases the Personal Honor of its holder by 2... which will also increase the strength of the ranged attacks that *Arrow of Purity* can make from him.

Omoidasu + Tsutomu no Shiryo

Tsutomu no Shiryo allows you to change any duel involving his Personality to a duel of Personal Honor. The *Omoidasu* can increase a Personality's Personal Honor every time he wins a duel. Each time you win a duel, the next one gets even easier!



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Hoshi Chuichi + Facing Your Devils

If your opponent faces *Chuichi* in the duel created by *Facing Your Devils*, he will find *Chuichi* harder to beat with his 2 Chi bonus. Not only that, if he doesn't want to duel, he'll find that *Chuichi's* bonus also increases the total amount of focus values he needs to discard to refuse the challenge.



Matsu Reishiko + Luring Tactics

Luring Tactics is a key card in many Lion tactician decks, and one of the few Fate card methods of moving your opponent's units between battles. (There is a handful of Personalities that can cause this too, like *Isawa Riake*, but they're all from different Clans than *Reishiko* and are much harder to use in a Lion Clan deck than a free Tactician Action card.) In this case, the goal is to force the defender into discarding cards by moving his units into a Province you're attacking with *Reishiko*... or multiple *Reishikos*!

Hungry Ghost + Moneylender

Hungry Ghost self-destructs, and takes one of your Personalities with it, if you ever spend a turn without using it. To use it, though, requires removing a token from somewhere on the board — a token that *Hungry Ghost* didn't create. You could use a card like *Farmlands*, *The Kaiu Forge*, or *Moshi Hinome* to supply you with tokens, but those tokens already give you Force and/or Chi. There's no great benefit in sacrificing them to a *Ghost*. Tokens on a *Moneylender*, however, aren't boosting anyone's stats, and you can create more as needed, at an efficient and flexible price.



Dojo Raiden + The Hand of Thunder

Dojo Raiden can increase all numerals on all of one Mantis Clan Personality's Followers by 1. In L5R, a "numeral" is any number written entirely using digits instead of letters, like "5", or "1"... or the "2" on *The Hand of Thunder*, where it says "Battle: Bow the *Hand of Thunder* to bow all Personalities and Followers in this battle with less than 2 Force."



Moto Tsusung + Ambush

Moto Tsusung can straighten one unit from his army — including himself, and even if he's bowed — after his army successfully faces and destroys an opposing army. He can do double duty: *Ambushing* an enemy Personality and then participating in the main attack against that player's Provinces... assuming the *Ambush* goes his way.

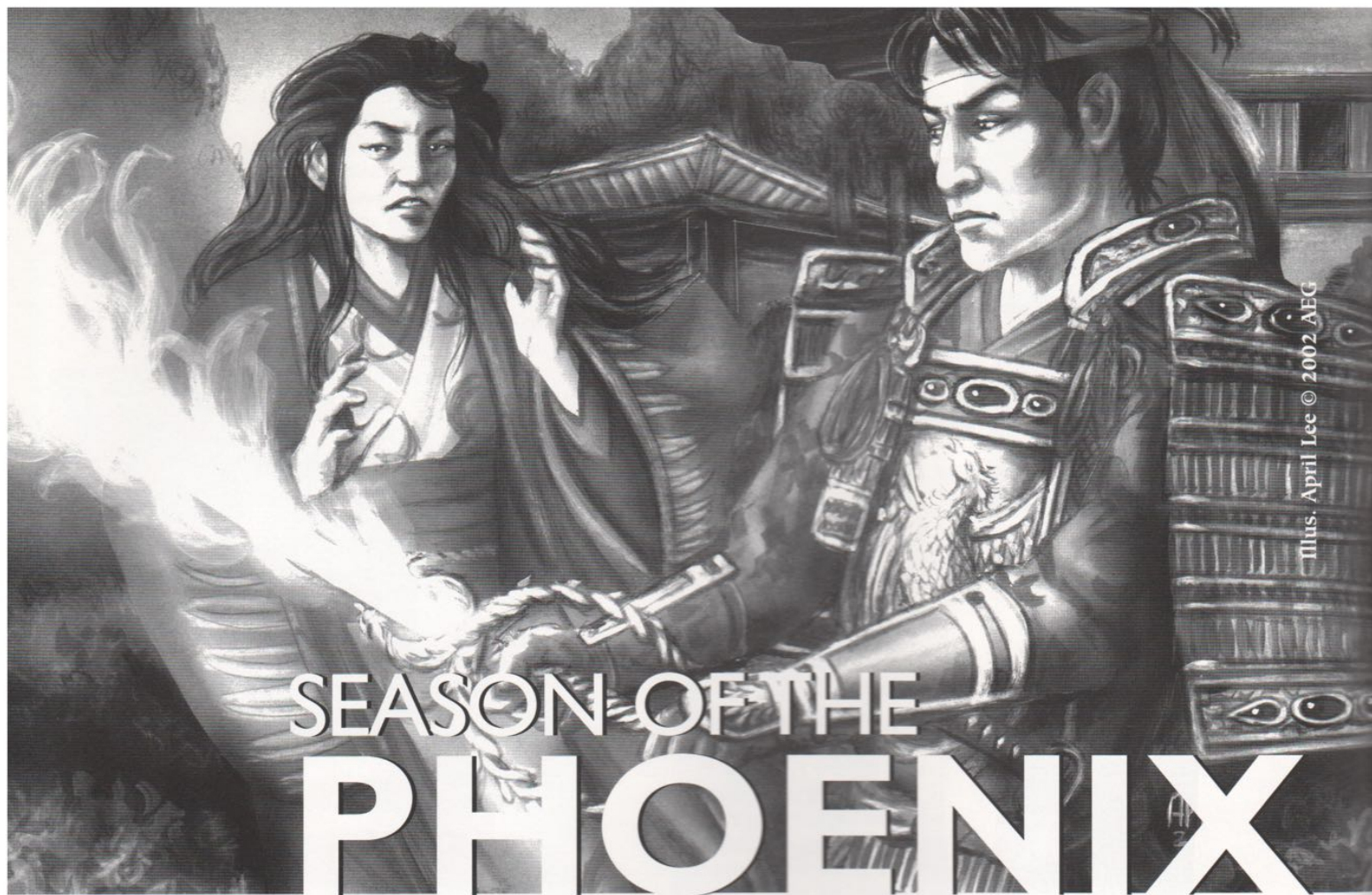


Illustration by April Lee © 2002 AEG

SEASON OF THE PHOENIX

As you already know, unless you've been living in a gaming vacuum of some kind, the "Season of" tournament kit promotions have been running for over a year now. They each feature one of the many factions in the Legend of the Five Rings world. Retailers can order their *Season of Kits* through their favorite distributors for their event organizers.

by Ray Lau

Each *Season of Kit* offers a storyline kit, exclusive promotional cards, and collectible clan card boxes. These components are commonly used as the prizes for local storyline tournaments, leagues, or in-store promotions and discounts.

We've already released a number of factions including Unicorn, Crane, Lion and many others. More details on those storyline tournaments and their results can be found in the fiction section of the L5R website at: <http://www.l5r.alderac.com/fiction>

Retailers can order their *Season of Kits* through their favorite distributors for their event organizers.

By the time you read this, your favorite stores and tournament organizers are gearing up for the Season of the Phoenix. Over the months of December and January, stores will be hosting Season of the Phoenix events featuring the promo card *Isawa Tekkan* (pictured below) and the storyline tournament, "Visions of Flame"

In "Visions of Flame," the conflict between the Elemental Masters and Shiba Aikune, master of Isawa's Last Wish, widen and come to light. For generations the Elemental Masters have guided and controlled the destiny of the Phoenix, but with two of their Masters lost, their council is perilously weak.

The son of the late Phoenix Champion and recent master of Isawa's Last Wish, Shiba Aikune, has changed all of that, threatening those in the traditional seats of power. Many of the Phoenix are

taking banner behind Aikune, forgoing the Elemental Council.

Such ravines in clan power never last long and neither will this one. Will the Masters and their unprecedented command of the kami be the guiding force of the next era. Or will Shiba Aikune and his unbridled arcane power dominate the future of the clan? This is a tale of power waiting to be told by you.



"In the icy lands of the Phoenix, a fire burns..."

The events that unfold from the Season of the Phoenix depend upon the clan or faction you choose to represent. Though the Phoenix Clan is spotlighted, all clans will be affected by the outcome of the Season of the Phoenix. The events resulting from this tournament affect not only the winning clan, but every clan...

Isawa recovered one of the dreaded black scrolls, artifacts used by Isawa to defeat Fu Leng. Even though these insidious documents once nearly destroyed the entire Phoenix Clan, the Isawa are keeping the scroll a secret; they fear that it may be the only way to destroy the Last Wish. Should the Phoenix have a greater number of wins than the Shadowlands, the Black Scroll will be purified of its Taint. If the Shadowlands has more wins, the guardian of the Black Scroll will be tainted.

Shiba Ningen, the Master of the Void, cannot see the future of the conflict with Isawa's Last Wish. He is concerned that the secrets of the Void magic, a secret known only to his clan, might be lost should the Phoenix fall. He has used his incredible power to lock the secrets of Void Magic inside the mind of another. An individual belonging to the faction with the highest number of wins in this tournament shall carry this hidden knowledge.

Isawa Tekkan

Isawa Tekkan is a relatively low-priced Personality for the amount of Force and high Personal Honor she carries. Although offset by a low Chi, attack Spell decks and honor running Phoenix decks should consider Tekkan in place of some of the other cards in their current decks. Tekkan's anti-Shadowlands ability, although not often useful, is a real threat against anyone who fields Shadowlands Personalities.



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"Back to Basics"

by Ray Lau

Stronghold:

Eternal Halls of the Shiba

Wind:

Toturi Tsudao

Personalities:

- 2 Agasha Chieh
- 1 Agasha Hamanari
- 1 Asako Misao Exp
- 3 Asako Misao
- 1 Isawa Sayuri
- 3 Isawa Taeruko
- 1 Shiba Ningen
- 3 Shiba Tsukune

Holdings:

- 1 Emperor's Under-Hand
- 2 Fortress of the Dragonfly
- 2 Gifts and Favors
- 2 Jade Works
- 3 Mystic Dojo
- 2 Santified Temple
- 3 Silver Mine
- 3 Small Farm

Regions:

- 1 Campsite
- 2 Farmlands

Events:

- Chrysanthemum Festival
- Imperial Gift
- Test of the Jade Champion
- Welcome Home

Actions:

- 3 Fall on Your Knees
- 2 Night Battle
- 3 Superior Tactics
- 3 Focus
- 3 Flattery
- 3 Iaijutsu Challenge
- 2 Iaijutsu Duel
- 2 Block Supply Lines

Kihos:

- 3 Flee the Darkness
- 3 Purity of Spirit
- 3 The Wind's Truth

Items:

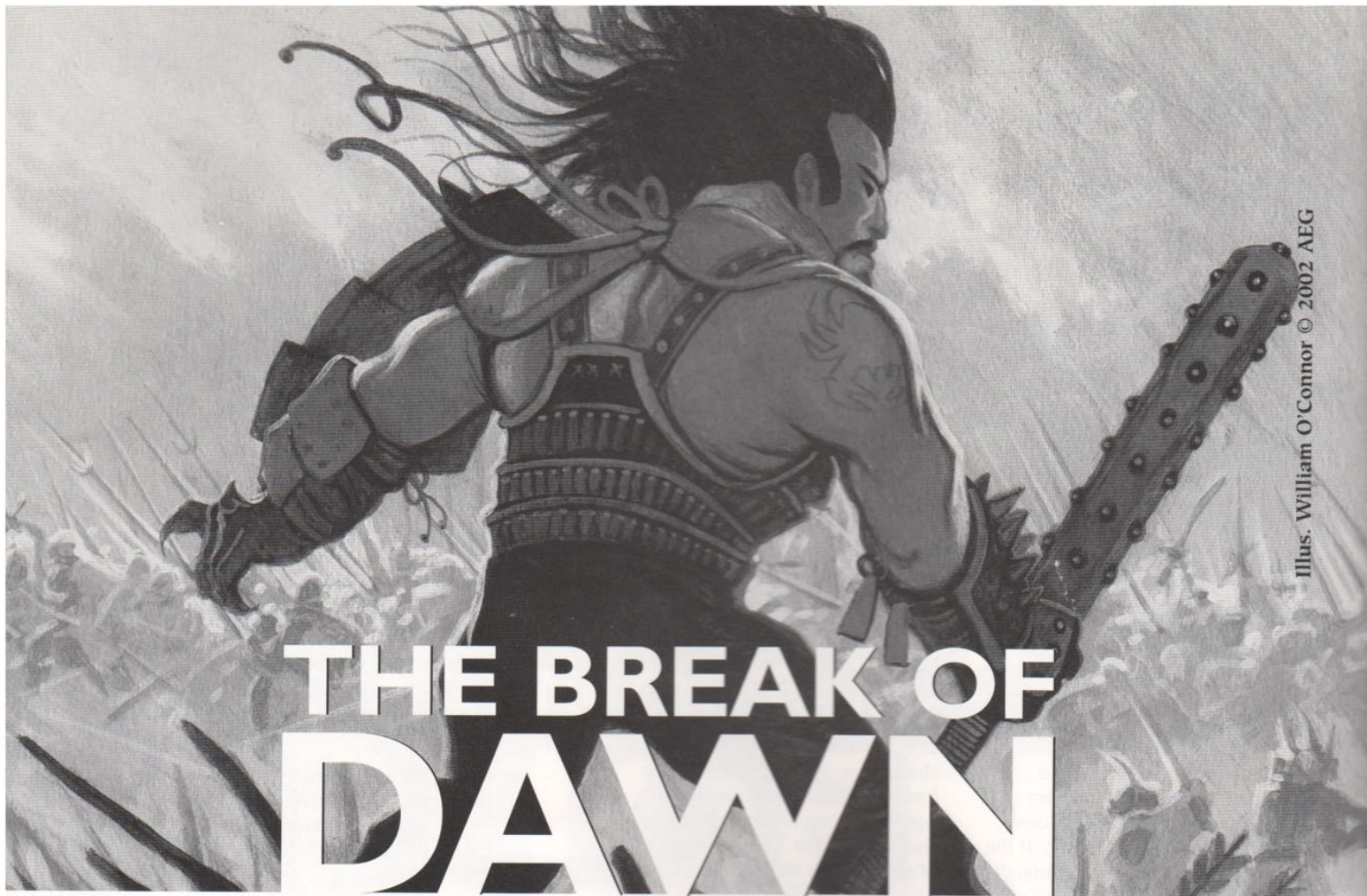
- 2 Celestial Sword of the Phoenix
- 1 The Imperial Standard
- 1 Bitter
- 1 Mantle of the Jade Champion

Rings:

- Ring of the Void
- Ring of Earth

Spells:

- 1 Importune Kami
- 1 Walking the Way



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THE BREAK OF DAWN

Flames belched from the sky in the reply as the Phoenix shugenja summoned the kami to smite down the archers.

by Rich Wulf

In the great expanse of the Celestial Heavens, a single samurai stood on a field of sky, watching the Empire below with a solemn scowl. His armor burned with a brilliant aura of flame, so bright that no mortal could stand to look upon it. Not even the great Elemental Dragons drew too close to Lord Sun. To the Sun's left stood his father, Kisada, the Fortune of Persistence. To his right stood another of his great ancestors: Osano-Wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder.

"Look at them," Lord Sun said, gesturing at the fields of Rokugan far below. "Were they always so small, so powerless? I do not remember them so."

"They are no different, my son," Kisada replied with a thoughtful frown. "I think it is we who have changed."

"We have not changed so much as you might think," Osano-Wo replied, folding his arms across his massive chest and studying his descendants carefully. "Surely you cannot have forgotten what it is like to be a mortal in such a short time?"

"I recall less with each day," Yakamo said, his voice troubled. "It is difficult to look back and understand why they act the way they do, their conflicts, their joys. Sometimes, I cannot remember what it was like to be a

normal mortal, and that vexes me. I cannot afford to become distant from them while Fu Leng's armies threaten Tengoku. The power of the gods flows from their belief. Should their faith in me falter, all will be lost."

"Tell me, my son," Kisada said in that slow, patient voice Yakamo knew prefaced a plan, "who is a more efficient leader? The general who leads from afar or the sergeant who fights beside his men?"

"In my experience, there are advantages to both," Yakamo said. "The general need not worry that his judgment will be flawed by failing to see the larger picture, while he sergeant fights harder because the fight is his own — he is an inspiration to his men."

"And that applies in Heaven, as well," Osano-Wo added. "As samurai, we protected the Empire. We still do; only the scale has changed. You can choose to rule from on high, remain distant, and govern with clarity, or you can lend your spirit to their cause directly, to experience the Empire through their triumphs and failures."

"And hurl lightning bolts at any who offend me." Yakamo raised an eyebrow at his ancestor.

Osano-Wo inclined his head and grinned. "Do not disparage that tactic until you try it," he said. "If you wish to understand those you protect, you must strike a balance between distance and understanding."

"But I cannot visit the Empire as you do, mighty grandfather," Yakamo said, holding out his arms to display his flaming armor. "The earth would burn. When last I visited, the mountains were torn from their very roots."

"Not a great tragedy, all in all," Kisada said. "The Unicorn enjoy the new pass very much."

Yakamo was hardly comforted by his father's words.

"Walking the earth is a luxury denied the Sun, but there are other ways to enter the Empire. You can visit mortals in their dreams, or send messages through others. As you said, I am fond of visiting Rokugan. I would gladly aid you, Lord Sun."

"Why does he need more followers?" Kisada asked. "The Hida honor us well. Are they not enough?"

"All samurai honor their ancestors," Osano-Wo replied. "True divinity requires something more. I suggest a display of power. Select a particularly devout individual and impress your will upon him. The rest will follow naturally. As your former clan is already loyal to you, you need to cultivate a power base elsewhere."

"Perhaps in the islands," Osano-Wo offered.

"I knew it!" Yakamo said, leveling a finger at Osano-Wo with an amused grin. "You would have me choose the Mantis! You have always favored them."

"I implied no favoritism," Osano-Wo replied in mock innocence. "However, the Mantis do have advantages. The Moshi family served your predecessor loyally, and their priestesses are exquisitely beautiful."

"The Moshi are indeed worthy," Kisada said, "but I think a more dramatic demonstration is required."

"Dramatic?" Yakamo said.

Kisada nodded. "When I wanted to strike fear into the Horde, I would attack where they least suspected. Behaving as expected surprises no one; without risk there is no appreciable gain. To gain true power, you must inspire faith in the faithless. Gain loyalty from those who have reason to show you none. Transform an enemy into an ally."

"But who is Yakamo's enemy?" Osano-Wo asked. "Outside of the Shadowlands, all respect and honor him."

"Not all," Kisada said.

"No," Yakamo said, his eyes suddenly fixing on the distant horizon.

Kisada and Osano-Wo followed the younger god's gaze. The three former Crab shared a mirthful grin when they saw what had captured the Sun's attention. It was the light of the moon, the symbol of Yakamo's counterpart. Hitomi.

Thunder crackled in the sky overhead, though no war came.

Today would be a fine day for a war.

Togashi Nyima stood at the crest of the hill, looking down at the advancing Phoenix troops with an expression of trepidation. He was young for an *ise zumi*, but the protracted war against the Phoenix was beginning to take its toll. Dark circles shadowed his eyes; his cheeks were hollow and gaunt. He had grown weary of fighting and killing. Now it seemed there was little point to the war at all. The volcanoes had ceased erupting. The starving refugees in his clan had been well fed; the supplies Toturi Sezaru had given them were more than sufficient to sustain them while they waited for the volcanoes to cool.

Now, sadly, the war had become more personal. Shiba Aikune — the new leader of the Phoenix Clan in all but name — had proven himself unstable and dangerously powerful. After the mad Shiba murdered several Dragon ambassadors sent to make an offer of peace, it became clear that diplomacy was not an option. Aikune would have to be stopped, and it fell to the Dragon Clan to do so.

The clarity of duty made Nyima's task no easier. He had slain many Shiba during the last few weeks of battle. Good and noble samurai, they sought nothing more than to protect their lord. Nyima wondered if he were in their position, would he do any less? As he summoned forth the mystic power that flowed through his veins and waited for the inevitable charge, the tattooed man could not help but wonder.

To either side of Nyima stood dozens of Dragon troops. Most were simple ashigaru, lightly armored and armed with long spears. The officers were samurai, clad in shining green armor and mounted on proud steeds. A handful of shugenja garbed in silken robes stood here and there beside the warriors, mystic scrolls in hand as they prepared to call forth the power of the kami. Nyima saw two or three other *ise zumi* like himself also amid the ranks.

Beside Nyima rode the small army's commander, Mirumoto Daisuke. Daisuke was a lean Dragon samurai with quick eyes and a narrow, sad face. He was perhaps the only person who hated this conflict more than Nyima. Though he was still relatively young, Daisuke had served his clan long enough to have been a veteran of the War of Spirits, serving in the Spirit Armies under Agasha Tamori. Daisuke sometimes told Nyima tales of the atrocities he had been forced to commit under the command of the Steel Chrysanthemum. The tales were never pleasant, save for those of Daisuke's relief when the Dragon returned their allegiance to Toturi, the true Emperor. Daisuke lived with many demons, and each time he faced the Phoenix he was reminded of them.

"What do you think?" Nyima asked, looking up at the mounted samurai.

"I think that this battle will not be easy," Daisuke said in a quiet voice. "Look there, Togashi-san. They have brought some of the Children with them."

Daisuke pointed at the Phoenix army. Near the front ranks Nyima could see many strange, ephemeral figures floating above the ground. These were the Children of the Last Wish, magical creatures created by Shiba Aikune's artifact. Nyima had fought them before, and did not relish the idea of doing so again. They were creatures of pure Void, and though their physical power was insignificant, their ability to disrupt the harmony of the mind and soul was fearful indeed. Nyima had seen skilled samurai fall helpless at a mere glance from one of the Children. Combined with the strength of Shiba steel, they were a force to be reckoned with.

"Our weapons will do little against the Children," Daisuke said. "It will fall to you and the shugenja to deal with them."

Nyima nodded firmly. "*Hai, gunso*," he said.

"Let me deal with them," said a rough voice to Nyima's right. A short, stocky man covered with dark black tattoos stood scowling at the Phoenix troops. His general stance and demeanor were very similar to that of a beast being held in check by a rapidly fraying tether. He was Hitomi Hogai — once a Crab but now a proud member of the Dragon Clan.

"Do not act rashly, Hogai," Nyima said. "The Phoenix should not be underestimated."

"Recklessness is dangerous but caution is worse," Hogai barked. "Caution gives the enemy a fighting chance. I say we stop waiting here and charge!"

"We have the high ground, Hogai," Daisuke said sharply. "Maintain your position."

Hogai scowled in disapproval but bowed to his commander. Nyima found that he had unconsciously taken several steps away from Hogai. Not surprising, considering the differences between the two men. Hogai was *kikage zumi*.

The Dragon Clan's mystic tattoos affected each person differently. Some unfortunates could not handle the burden of power and either went mad or simply died. Others found focus and survived. Some, like Nyima, became *ise zumi*, able to draw strength from the harmony and order within themselves. Others, like Hogai, drew solace from the raw power of chaos within their souls; while most Hitomi were not truly evil, they were certainly quite unpredictable and often violent. Though *ise zumi* and *kikage zumi* disagreed with one another on many levels, both recognized that together they formed the yin and yang of the Dragon Clan — the harmony of dissonance required for their clan to find true enlightenment.

The unnatural calm of the chill winter morning vanished as a loud cry erupted from the Phoenix ranks. As one, the Shiba soldiers charged. The Dragon shouted in reply, and in a single motion every samurai simultaneously drew his twin blades. The sight was impressive, highlighting the skill and precision of the Mirumoto style. "May Bishamon guide our blades," said a shugenja somewhere to Nyima's right.

The battle began. Lightning flashed dramatically in the sky, painting everything white for a single ghostly second. Nyima fell into a *mizu-do* stance and drew his breath slowly, feeling the power build within him. Arrows rained down upon the Phoenix troops as they drew into missile range. Flames belched from the sky in reply as the Phoenix shugenja summoned the kami to smite down the archers. The smell of burning flesh singed Nyima's nostrils. His sharpened senses could sense every life around him like a small candle; he could feel each living being as it moved and sense every soul was snuffed out by the carnage. Nyima ignored the screams of his dying enemies and kinsmen, placing all his focus on the *itten*, the center of his body, mind, and soul. Nyima became a center of calm in the midst of the chaotic battle. Even when the Phoenix soldiers collided with the Dragon's front rank, he remained centered and controlled. All about him moved in slow motion. He stepped easily out of the path of an *ashigaru's* spear and drew the weapon from the startled man's hands as easily as drawing a blade of grass from the earth. Flipping the shaft in his hands, Nyima struck the soldier across the chin with the butt of his own weapon, knocking him senseless to the ground.

To his right, Hogai had surrendered himself to rage. The *kikage zumi* lunged into the Phoenix ranks, black energy boiling from the formless tattoos that covered his arms. A Phoenix swung his katana at Hogai's unarmored torso. Hogai moved more swiftly, dodging behind the Phoenix quicker than the eye could follow. Hogai pressed an open palm against each of the Phoenix's temples and squeezed his hands together with a sickening snap. Roaring in triumph, Hogai flicked the blood from his hands and let the Phoenix's mangled corpse fall.

Nyima was repulsed by Hogai's savagery, but on some level he found himself envying the *kikage zumi*. Hogai's techniques were swift, direct, and in a strange way merciful. He left no opponents wounded or maimed — all either died instantly or were wise enough to flee his wrath. Was he not, in a fashion, more honest? This was, after all, war. Each enemy left alive would simply return to attack them again later. Nyima pushed such thoughts aside. Doubt clouded one's focus; there was no room for such things in the heart of an *ise zumi*.

The sparkling figure of a Child of the Last Wish appeared before them, hovering over the heads of the Phoenix troops. Nyima could feel the power of the Void coming off the thing in waves, seeping into his mind, filling his head with strange and unfamiliar thoughts. In the corners of his vision he could see strange and unfamiliar shapes, things that were not there before and yet had always been there. He could see Hogai nearby, staring blankly at the Child. A trail of drool spilled down the *kikage zumi's* chin. Nyima fought off his own confusion and locked gazes with the Child. He transferred his focus from within to without, and opening his mouth he coughed forth a billowing cloud of yellow flame. The spirit shrieked as the magical fire tore through her form, reducing her to wisps of grey on the wind.

Nyima reeled, disoriented from the loss of energy. He fell to one knee, looking up helplessly as an armored Phoenix samurai charged toward him. Then Hogai was there, seizing the man by the chest and hurling him into the air. The unfortunate peasant landed with such force that Nyima could hear his steel armor crack. The body did not move, and Hogai smiled down at Nyima.

"Arigato," he said. "Her visions were pretty. Were it not a fight I may have enjoyed them longer."

"Thank you as well," Nyima replied, staggering to his feet and nodding to Hogai.

"We are winning I think," Hogai laughed, landing a solid kick to the throat of an unfortunate ashigaru. The Phoenix were now retreating en masse, abandoning the field to the Dragon.

"It seems so," Nyima said cautiously. "Still, I think it would be best if we—"

Nyima never finished his sentence, and whatever he had been about to say was almost immediately driven from his mind as an enormous explosion devastated the battlefield. The bodies of Dragon samurai and ashigaru were hurled into the air. Nyima rolled away from the blast instinctively; he could feel his skin blister from the terrible heat. The blast had been enormous, larger than any spell he had ever seen. As Nyima rolled into a crouch, he scanned the battlefield for any sign of the attacker. Daisuke stood to one side; he had lost his steed and his wakizashi. Blood smeared the side of the gunso's face. His eyes were locked on the sky as he said a single word.

"Aikune."

Nyima followed Daisuke's gaze. Above the battlefield hovered a samurai in brilliant orange armor, wreathed in flames. In one hand he held a sword made of pure white light. His eyes shone with madness. He pointed the blade at the battlefield and a second explosion erupted in reply, slaughtering more of the Dragon troops.

"I smell the darkness, I smell the foul!" Hogai growled, hunched on all fours with teeth bared. "I swear I will taste his blood, make him die!"

"Round up the survivors," Daisuke said, his voice desperate. "We must stage a counterattack!"

Nyima could sense no other life on the battlefield. "We are the only survivors, gunso," he said gravely.

"Then we make our stand here," Daisuke said, his voice quavering. "At least we will die as samurai."

Nyima nodded, though it was clear they could do nothing to harm Aikune. As the hovering samurai turned to face them, his eyes moved right past them as if they were not there. With a final defiant chuckle, Shiba Aikune vanished into nothing.

"What?" Nyima said, surprised. "What happened?"

"Darkness," Hogai snarled, growing less articulate by the moment. "Came from darkness, returned to darkness! Come to me again and he will die!"

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"Let us return to Lord Uso," Daisuke said with a heavy voice. "There is nothing more for us here."

The rainless storm continued its fury in the sky above, crying out in anger at the carnage it had seen.

The Dragon trio was silent as they huddled in their makeshift camp. Night was coming swiftly and they did not dare light a campfire so close to their enemy. None spoke of the day's battle, and none slept or ate. All simply stared quietly into the darkness and tried to absorb what had happened. The earlier lightning storm had ceased. With no moon in the sky, the mountains were soon shrouded in darkness and still they were silent.

The stillness was finally broken by the sound of footsteps on the road. A small light soon joined them, bobbing down the rough path toward the tiny camp. Nyima hissed urgently; he could hear Daisuke draw his sword. If this were a Phoenix patrol seeking survivors, the Dragon would not be caught unprepared.

The light soon resolved itself into a small paper lantern, hanging from a pole slung over the shoulder of a fat monk, whistling happily to himself as he strode down the path. The man's face was covered in thick cloth, the traditional veil of a sohei — a warrior monk. When he saw the three Dragon waiting in the darkness he paused only for a moment then veered toward them with a friendly wave.

"Togashi Nyima-sama," the sohei said. "Glad to see you are still alive."

"How do you know me?" Nyima said warily.

"I was there during the battle," the monk replied. "It was I who masked your presence from the pretender. I apologize for not acting swiftly enough to save more of you. I came as swiftly as I could."

"Who are you?" Daisuke demanded. "I did not see you in the battle, unless you stood with Aikune's army."

"You did not see me, yet I was there," the sohei said. With this statement, lightning flashed in the clear sky. "You saw Shiba Aikune, and yet he was not there. You

should work on your powers of observation, Daisuke-san."

"You are impertinent, monk," Daisuke snarled. "Aikune slaughtered my troops! We are the only survivors!"

"More true than you know," the sohei said. "For once the Dark Oracle finished with your army, he followed the Phoenix and slew them as well. The wretched demon that was once Agasha Tamori hopes that both sides will find the violence he has wrought and blame the other. He wishes for the Dragon and Phoenix to destroy one another."

"You did not answer Daisuke-sama's question," Nyima said. "Who are you? It is clear you are no simple monk."

"Are you both idiots?" Hogai said with a snarl. "He is Osano-Wo, my ancestor! The Fortune of Fire and Thunder!" Nyima realized that Hogai was nearly prostrate on the ground before the monk. Daisuke quickly fell to his knees as well.

"If you were at the battle," Nyima said, looking at the sohei calmly, "then why did you not destroy Tamori?"

"Just as in your realm, the celestial realms are governed by certain laws," Osano-Wo said. "And just as in your realm, with more power comes greater restriction upon how that power is used. The Dark Oracles are immune to the power of the Fortunes, so long as they obey the rules that have been placed upon them. A Dark Oracle may only act when he has been asked to do so, and can only unleash his power when called into a conflict by a willing participant. Though it was a Phoenix who first called upon the Dark Oracle, the Dragon have now compounded their crime. There are samurai of both clans who believe they command the power of the Dark Oracle, but his loyalty is only to himself. These mountains will lie in ashes before he is done."

"So what must we do?" Nyima asked. "How can Tamori be stopped?"

"Dark Oracle of Fire he may be," Osano-Wo said, "but some fires burn too hot for him to command. Climb the highest mountain in this range and build a shrine there in the name of Lord Sun. Choose six other Dragons, one for every day that the sun rises. Tattoo the image of the rising sun upon each of them and Yakamo will grant you his favor. Lord Sun has no love for the Shadowlands. Though the duty of destroying Tamori will ultimately be your own, he will help you if you are strong enough, Togashi Nyima."

Nyima nodded. "If that is what must be done, I will do it," he said firmly.

"Of that I have no doubt," Osano-Wo said. "Good luck, sons of the Dragon. You will need it."

With that, Osano-Wo continued on his way, taking his light and leaving them to find their own.

* * *

Characters and Terms

Agasha Tamori — A former daimyo of the Dragon Clan. He was driven mad by the Shadowlands Taint and coerced the Dragon armies into joining the cause of Hantei XVI during the War of Spirits. He later vanished to become the Dark Oracle of Fire, and drove the Dragon Clan from their homes into war with the Phoenix by detonating volcanoes over the Dragon Clan's farmlands.

gunso — A Rokugani military rank, roughly equivalent to a sergeant.

Fu Leng — The Lost Brother, the Dark Kami, a powerful evil god recently released from the realm of the dead into the Celestial Heavens.

Hitomi Hogai — A kikage zumi, one of a strange order of mystic tattooed men of the Dragon Clan. He was a member of the Hida family of the Crab until his tattoos spontaneously appeared during a visit to the Dragon lands.

Hantei XVI — A diabolical former Emperor of Rokugan who waged war against the true Emperor, Toturi, with an army of returned spirits.

Hitomi — Lady Moon, once Mirumoto Hitomi of the Dragon Clan.

ise zumi — An order of mystic tattooed men whose powers commonly involve enlightenment, movement, and energy.

kikage zumi — An order of mystic tattooed men whose powers commonly involve darkness, violence, and chaos. See also ise zumi.

Kisada — The Fortune of persistence, once the Champion of the Crab Clan.

Mirumoto Daisuke — A gunso of the Dragon Clan who fought in the War of Spirits, reluctantly aiding the armies of Hantei XVI.

Nyima — An ise zumi, one of a strange order of mystic tattooed men of the Dragon Clan.

Osano-Wo — The Fortune of Fire and Thunder, also once the Champion of the Crab Clan.

Shiba Aikune — A powerful young samurai of the Phoenix Clan who wields a dangerous magical artifact known as Isawa's Last Wish.

Steel Chrysanthemum — See Hantei XVI.

Tengoku — The Celestial Heavens.

Toturi — The late Emperor of Rokugan

War of Spirits — A conflict in which Hantei XVI returned from the Realm of Toshigoku and organized an army of spirits in an attempt to overthrow the reign of Toturi.

Yakamo — Lord Sun, also once the Champion of the Crab Clan.

THE IMPERIAL ASSEMBLY

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

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

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

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- Special offers exclusive to Imperial Assembly members.

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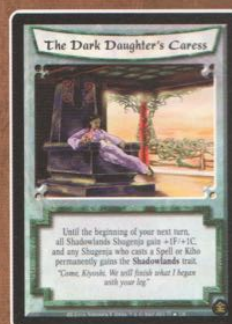
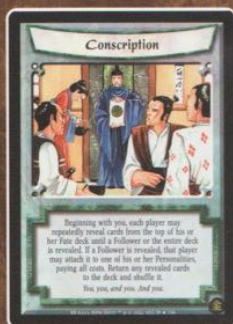
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- ☐ WE WILL HAVE REVENGE
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MAKING CARD ADVANTAGE

There are 3 concepts that can typically be found in any CCG, at varying levels: card advantage, board control and tempo.

Card Advantage: When boiled down to its basics, card advantage is using fewer cards to do more. If I can kill your Personality with just one card, that's better than if it took me three cards to do that same thing.

Board Control: Board control is a fairly complex concept, but it typically boils down to who has the most control on the action taking place in the game. The easiest time to see board control in action is when an honor player is trying to defend himself against a military player. If the honor player has a full hand, Torrential Rain or some other battle prevention/send home cards on the table and the Favor, he has board control. On the other hand, if the military player has a bunch of beefy Personalities in play, a few ranged attack Followers and a full hand, he probably has board control.

...card advantage means using fewer cards to do more.

Tempo: Tempo refers to the flow of the game. If one player has more resources out than the other player and consistently uses those resources to both increase his production and his position in the game, tempo is with that person. In *L5R*, tempo typically belongs to whoever has the best gold production going and sees the most useful things (Personalities, better Holdings, Followers or Spells) coming out of his deck. Tempo can usually be measured in turns, e.g. "He's two turns ahead of me because he got a great start."

All of these concepts affect how the game proceeds and are not truly independent of one another. However, it is easier to talk about one concept at a time instead of trying to discuss them all at once. This article mainly discusses card advantage.

Legend of the Five Rings uses two decks of finite resources: one Dynasty deck filled with holdings, Personalities, events and regions, and one Fate deck filled with Actions, Ancestors, Followers, Items, Kihos and Spells. They are both limited resources, though the Fate deck has a higher premium, considering that it is much slower to renew than the Dynasty deck. With such a limited resource, we must get as much out of it as possible. This is where the concept of card advantage comes in.

Consider the following: I have one Defender unit, you have one Attacker unit. Both units have two cards in them. We'll assume that the Attacker would take the province if it was undefended. If you use one card to destroy my two-card unit, you've gained an advantage in the

by Jed Carlson

number of cards still available to you. You are also destroying part of a card resource I can use to win the game: the province and the Dynasty cards that could be in it. However, if it takes you 4 or 5 cards to take the province, you are at a card disadvantage, if only temporarily.

At a most basic level, drawing more cards is card advantage, since it gives you more resources to use. This is why *Shiro Mirumoto* has catapulted the Dragon from the depths of weak clans in L5R to being close to the top of the game. Drawing cards alone will not win you the game though. This is where the distinction between types of card advantage comes into play.



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There are typically three forms of card advantage: card economy, card selection and card efficiency. Card economy means the sheer number of cards used and available. Card selection means having the correct cards available to take care of problems. And card efficiency is measured in how wide an effect one can get for one card.

A good example of card selection is *Walking the Way*. We trade one card to go get another, so we're not losing card economy, but we're not gaining it either. We are, however, going and getting a card that will serve us better than the *Walking the Way* would have on its own. We're getting a card that will take care of a problem. The same can be said for *Tamori Chieko's* ability, *Scroll Cache* or the Spell *Look into the Void*. Each of these effects doesn't net us any

effects that only cost a player one card and are immediately effective.

If you remain aware of these different types of card advantage, you can keep an eye out for them when making decisions on what cards to include in a deck. One efficient Battle Action that destroys a Personality is much more desirable than a four card combo that does the same thing.

L5R is more often about tempo and board control than card advantage, especially considering the "all-or-nothing" aspect of battles. However, being aware of card advantage is important and can help us to make better deck-building and game-playing choices.

"Cards, Cards, Cards"

The idea behind this deck is to draw on card advantage to work for you. Almost every card in this deck is there to destroy your opponent's Personalities with as few cards as possible, or to draw cards. The exception is the *Secrets/Shame/Judgement* cards, which are used to slow down honor decks. However, if *Judgement* is attached to *Tsuge*, you can get a lot of card advantage with it, drawing a card each time he challenges a dishonored Personality and hopefully destroying that Personality. That nets you at least +2 cards (1 you draw from *Tsuge*, 1 from destroying your opponent's Personality) without spending any cards yourself.

Every Personality except *Chieko* can draw cards from the Stronghold ability and she makes up for that with her card selection ability.

Tsudao is used as a Wind simply because the deck needs the defense against aggressive opponents and gives you a free *Block Supply Lines* whenever you need it. *Sezaru* can be used as well, but only if some of the cards are removed for send home cards, like *Block Supply Lines* or *Refugees*.



"Cards, Cards, Cards"

By Ray Lau

Stronghold:

Shiro Mirumoto

Wind:

Toturi Tsudao

Personalities:

3 Tamori Chieko
3 Tamori Hiroko
3 Tamori Chosai
3 Mirumoto Tsuge
1 Asako Bairai
1 Doji Reju xp2
1 Togashi Satsu
1 Tamori Shaitung xp
1 Kaelung

Holdings:

3 Gold Mine
3 Jade Works
3 Hiruma Dojo
3 Mystic Dojo
3 Sanctified Temple
1 Trading Grounds
1 Gifts and Favors

Regions:

2 Campsite

Events:

Imperial Gift
Imperial Ambassadorship
Welcome Home

Actions:

3 To Do What We Must
3 Ambush
3 Shame
3 Scroll Cache
2 Overwhelmed
3 Kolat Assassin

Items:

1 Judgement
1 Celestial Sword of the Dragon

Kihos:

3 The Wind's Truth
3 Facing Your Devils
3 Ratling Pack
3 Ratling Scout

Spells:

3 Touch of Death
3 Cascading Fire
2 Secrets on the Wind
3 Walking the Way
1 Purity of the Seven Thunders
2 Look into the Void

2002 GENCON

Once a year, without fail, we gather in sweaty, humid Milwaukee to attend and participate in our greatest tradition, the L5R World Championship Storyline Tournament. This past August, 420 players gathered to play in "The Revelation of the Dark Lord."

This was Gencon, so one tournament, regardless of size, would never have satisfied our gaming hunger. In fact, over the course of four days, we saw two sealed deck tournaments, one live-action RPG, a Midnight Madness tournament, one Strategic L5R tourney, and two invitee events!

We pre-released *Broken Blades* at Gencon, which we used for the sealed deck tournaments. Over 40 people attended the first sealed deck and over 60 people played in the second tournament. Even with Unicorn's better gold production and cavalry advantage, they didn't dominate the tournament scene as expected. Crab won one tournament and Unicorn won the other.

Last August, 420 players gathered to Play in "The Revelation of the Dark Lord"

The Storyline Challenge Booth was run by Brent Keith and as with tradition, all of its proceeds went to the Make a Wish Foundation. This year, the challenge booth got to resolve two separate storylines. In the first, players determined whether Kitao or Kumiko would take over Kyuden Gotei, a major city in the Mantis Isle. Kumiko defeated Kitao in a very interesting and exciting final game. In the other storyline tournament, players named the new trade pass between the Scorpion and Lion lands in honor of Shamate, the deceased Scorpion love of Matsu Hataki.

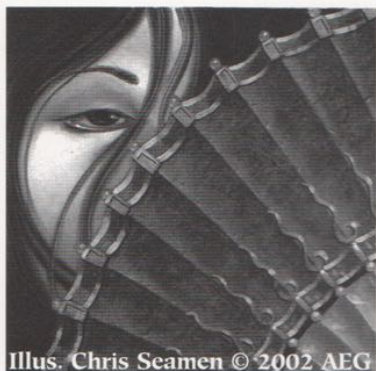
What's a gaming convention without a good old-fashioned, live-action RPG (LARP)? Thanks to Kim Hosmer and her team, we were able to put one together for everyone. The event played out

the marriage between Ikoma Otemi and Shosuro Yasuko, but like most LARP's nothing was as it seemed and chaos ensued.

Bayushi Kwanchi loudly picked a few fights and Kiyomi won the poetry contest (it was rigged). Also the Nezumi stole an Imperial family heirloom quite by accident and a Ratling Shaman (Te'tik'kir) was forced to use some powerful Name Magic to wipe out all memory of the item to prevent the rats from getting in big, big trouble.

Mike Colson, a Team Fate member, ran this year's Midnight Madness. Since Midnight Madness is run in Open format 30/30, everybody got to break out and dust off their old L5R cards. Everyone had a blast using the old Favor rules and wacky combos. In the finals, Spirit beat Phoenix.

by Jed Carlson



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Even with all these cool L5R events, the meat of the convention was the Storyline World Championships. Because of the huge turnout, we split the event into four qualifiers: two on Thursday and two on Friday. Out of the starting 400+ starting players, we culled that number down to the top 140 players and advanced them to the Saturday tournament. Eugene Earnshaw-Whyte, playing Scorpion, finally took the tournament, beating Conrad Jackson playing Shadowlands in a 2-out-of-3 match.

Storyline-wise, Daigotsu, the Dark Lord, had taken his Shadowlands army across hundreds of miles of Rokugan straight into the heart of Otosan-Uchi. In unprecedented fashion, the Shadowlands horde moved with military precision, feinting left, flanking right. Causing as much chaos as he could muster, Daigotsu sent his demons throughout the city with no other direction than to kill and destroy. Of course Daigotsu had more than just fire and carnage in mind: his goal was the Steel Throne itself to use in a ritual to bring Fu Leng back to life.

As a result of the tournament, Toturi Tsudao recovered the Steel Throne from Daigotsu, interrupting the ritual, with the aid of Bayushi

Tai, and relocated it to Kyuden Suppen, which she declared the new capital of the Empire, a declaration that her fellow Winds disputed. This fiction, "Revelation," can be found on the L5R website. The win represented a successful Scorpion player using Tsudao as his Wind.

The Onisu were also destroyed by heroes selected by the top ranking players of each faction. The top ranking Horde player got to choose a hero to corrupt and the Ratling player got to choose a hero to give a treasure to the Ratling tribe. This fiction, "Nightmare," can also be found on the L5R website.



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I'm writing this almost three weeks after Gencon and still I'm recovering from the trip. I'm getting over a sore throat from all the yelling and screaming. I'm deadbeat tired, but I sure as hell would do it again tomorrow if I could. And for those of you who have never been to Gencon, I hope that I see you there next year so you can empathize with this gaming withdrawal I'm feeling only weeks after its conclusion.

Below is the list of characters that the top-ranking players of each clan chose for their storyline effect:

Crab – Yoe'e'trr
Dragon – Kaelung
Mantis – Rezan
Scorpion – Bayushi Kwanchai
Shadowlands – Daidoji Megumi

Crane – Shiba Mirabu
Lion – Matsu Hyun
Phoenix – Doji Okakura
Unicorn – Bayushi Shixiang
Ratling – Asako Hirariko

The Voice of a Samurai

by Jeff Alexander

The voice of a single samurai will make a band of goblins drop their stolen weapons and flee in terror.

The voice of ten samurai practicing in unison late into the night echo through ancient dojo halls and make noble ancestors proud.

The voice of a hundred samurai crosses the battlefield faster than any charge, defeats the enemy before the first blow is struck.

The voice of a thousand samurai will be heard now! Utz!

Secrets of the Mantis

The Tsuruchi — by Shawn Carman

Illus. Cris Dornaus © 2002 AEG

The new *Secrets* series are going into a lot of heretofore unexplored detail with the Great Clans, none more so than the Mantis. As the only current Great Clan to have never had a sourcebook to themselves (they shared *Way of the Minor Clans* with many other clans) *Secrets of the Mantis* has a lot of ground to cover.

Part of that includes the dark forests of the Tsuruchi, where one might find the brotherhood of warriors known as the Kenkyaku.



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THE TSURUCHI KENKYAKU

The Tsuruchi family and the Wasp Clan from which they sprang have been regarded as masters of the bow since their inception half a century ago. In fact, it was their devotion to the bow over the blade that brought them under scrutiny for many years, perhaps contributing to Tsuruchi's eagerness to join Yoritomo in an attempt to gain recognition for his clan's prowess.

Now, though, the first generation of true Tsuruchi have come to adulthood, and some eschew the traditional ways of the Wasp in order to embrace the martial mindset of their Yoritomo clansmen. Elder members of the clan, particularly daimyo Tsuruchi Ichiro, have expressed concern that the members of the younger generation seem so disinterested in the traditions of the Wasp. There are only so many Tsuruchi, after all, and abandonment of their ways could lead to the family becoming a mere reflection of the Yoritomo. To many, that outcome is unacceptable.

The younger members of the Tsuruchi who choose the blade over the sword usually do so after learning the basics of the Tsuruchi school and not finding it to their liking. These young samurai instead prefer to exploit their athletic training in a new style of kenjutsu that favors speed and precision over power. In many ways, the kenkyaku merge the Lion and Scorpion styles from which the Wasp Clan emerged.

TSURUCHI KENKYAKU (PRESTIGE CLASS)

The young Tsuruchi who identify themselves as Kenkyaku are neither duelists nor swordsmen, but a hybrid. Their fighting style emphasizes speed and athleticism, yet when an opportunity presents itself, they can exploit it with the power of the burliest samurai. Like so many among the Tsuruchi, the Kenkyaku are a dichotomy, split between two extremes.

Most members of the Kenkyaku are very young, a few years past their gempukku. Although most of them are Tsuruchi, a handful from other Mantis families have embraced their ways: Yoritomo who disdain life upon the sea and male Moshi samurai looking to escape the matriarchy of their family. There are others in the Empire with fighting styles similar to the Kenkyaku, most commonly among small, obscure dojo in the lands of the other Great Clans.

Hit Die: d8.



REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a Kenkyaku, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Clan: Mantis.

Skills: Tumble (6 ranks).

Feats: Cleave, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack.

CLASS SKILLS

The kenkyaku's class skills (and key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Hide (Dex), Intuit Direction (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Cha), Tumble (Dex), and Wilderness Lore (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the Tsuruchi Kenkyaku prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Kenkyaku are proficient in all simple and martial weapons, and in light armor. **Strike and Move:** For every five ranks the Kenkyaku possesses in the Tumble skill, he gains a +1 dodge bonus to AC. This applies only when the Kenkyaku is wearing light armor or no armor.

Darting Wings: The style of the Wasp is an agile one. Beginning at 1st level, the Kenkyaku gains a +2 competence bonus to all Tumble checks and Reflex saves. This bonus increases to +3 at 3rd level and +4 at 5th level.

TABLE 3-1: THE TSURUCHI KENKYAKU

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+0	+2	+0	Strike and Move, Darting Wings +2
2nd	+2	+0	+3	+0	Bonus Feat
3rd	+3	+1	+3	+1	Darting Wings +3
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Bonus Feat
5th	+4	+1	+4	+1	Wasp In Flight, Darting Wings +4

Bonus Feat: At 2nd level, the Kenkyaku may select one of the following feats: Ambidexterity, Great Cleave, Skill Focus (Tumble), Spring Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse (any), or Weapon Focus (any). The Kenkyaku must meet all prerequisites for these feats, and gains another from the list at the 4th level.

Wasp In Flight: Once per round, whenever the Kenkyaku would be the target of an attack of opportunity, the Kenkyaku may make a Tumble check (DC 25) to automatically dodge the attack.

THE TSURUCHI KENKYAKU (NEW PATH)

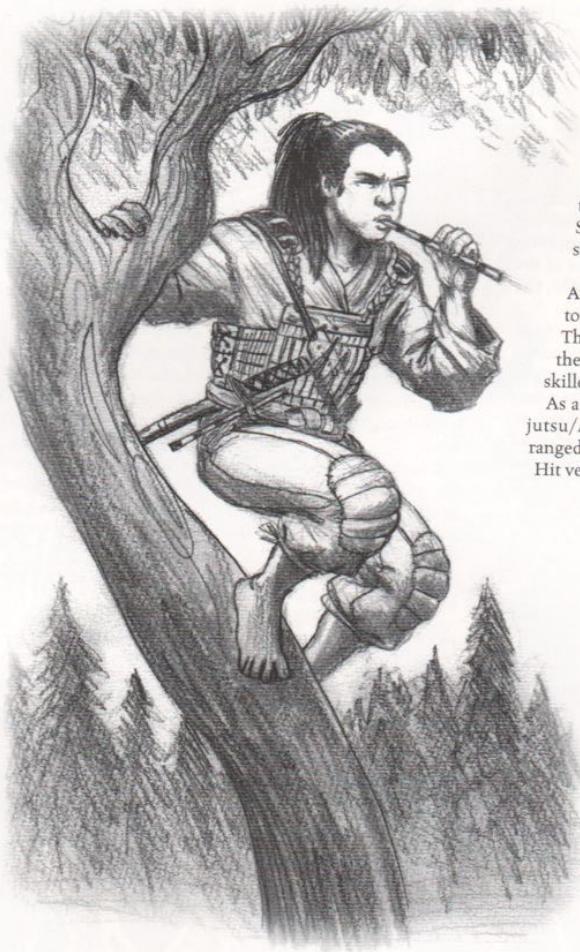
Technique Rank: 2

Path of Entry: Tsuruchi Archer 1

Path of Egress: Tsuruchi Archer 2 or Yoritomo Bushi 1

Technique: Darting Wings — A Kenkyaku's gift for fighting is instinctive, not inculcated. The Kenkyaku must select one melee weapon in which to focus his fighting style. The Kenkyaku may add his rank in Athletics to the die total for all melee attacks using that weapon.

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YADOMEJUTSU

Yadomejutsu, or "arrow cutting," is an uncommon but highly respected skill typically found among samurai who regularly face skilled archers. The practice originated centuries ago with monks who honed their minds and bodies until they could catch arrows fired at them. This was considered a demonstration of the clarity and focus that one could achieve through study of the Tao and purification of the body, and was often displayed to others in hopes of encouraging them to embrace Shinseism. At some point, samurai adopted the practice and eventually translated the ability to use the katana rather than their bare hands.

Yadomejutsu is not common. It is generally considered time-consuming to learn and is of only limited use when compared to, for example, kenjutsu. A handful of Lion dojo teach the skill, as the Lion prefer to rush their enemies rather than soften them with ranged fire. The Crane, too, occasionally teach it, as it is considered one of the most difficult elements of the single strike to master. Some particularly skilled Kakita duelists enjoy demonstrating their skill through the use of yadomejutsu.

Yadomejutsu is represented in the d20 System™ by the Deflect Arrows feat.

NEW SKILL: YADOMEJUTSU (BUGEI SKILL, AGILITY)

Yadomejutsu is the practiced ability to cut down arrows in flight, preventing them from striking their target. It is exceptionally difficult to master, and it is taught in only a handful of dojo across the Empire. Samurai wishing to study the skill typically must find someone skilled in the practice and willing to teach.

Yadomejutsu may be used in two ways. With a Full Attack, a samurai may roll Yadomejutsu, keeping Agility, to cut an arrow shot at another individual within ten feet. The TN for this roll is the archer's roll to hit. If successful, the arrow is sliced in two and inflicts no damage. Yojimbo skilled in this practice are rare, but extremely popular.

As a Full Defense maneuver, a character may roll Yadomejutsu/Agility and add the total to his TN to Be Hit for all ranged attacks. This does not increase an individual's TN to Be Hit versus melee attacks.

UNFORGOTTEN

Ryoko Owari Toshi, thirty-five years ago...

A dark man ran his hands across the stone altar in the center of the shadowed chamber and laughed softly. There was a grand table deep beneath the castle of his birth, far to the northeast. He had known since long before his gempukku that he would never sit at that table, even if his elder brother had long since taken a place there. But if they would not give him what he deserved, then he would take it. His smile broadened at the sound of a door opening. Beyond, he could hear the muted sounds of screaming in the streets. "Musagi," he said, addressing his lieutenant, "how are things progressing?"

"Not well at all," came an unfamiliar voice. The dark man looked up from the altar to see a young man dressed in blue with long, flowing white hair. "I am afraid your assistant is in no condition to report to you. I hope that you do not take offense."

"Who are you?" the dark man demanded.

The man bowed slightly. "I am Doji Oruku, magistrate of the Crane Clan. And you must be the man who calls himself Isawa Orimono, though I suspect that is not your true name. Shall I call you 'O-Sama,' as your followers do? It's a rather pretentious name, if I may say so."

"The Crane," sneered Orimono. "Always so quick-witted. You will not goad me, Doji. You may have bested Musagi, but he was little more than a loyal simpleton. You will not fare as well against me."

"Enough bravado," Oruku said, drawing his blade. "Your plan has failed. Your ritual is being disrupted as we speak. All that remains is your punishment."

"No!" exclaimed Orimono. "I can hear the screams from the street!"

"Those are your followers. The Dragon Orb is ours. I say again, you have failed. I give you this one chance to surrender."

"I offer you the same, Crane," Orimono said. "Allow me to flee, and when I return I will show you mercy."

Oruku sneered and lunged at the Phoenix just as the man began to speak words of magic. The two came together with a ringing of steel and a crackle of dark energy, and then there was only silence. Moments later, a resounding crash came from the top of the stairwell. A huge Crab samurai rushed down the stairs, followed shortly by a young Dragon with both blades drawn. "Oruku!" shouted the Crab. "Are you here?"

"Here," came the weak reply. The two rushed to the center of the room where a bloodied tangle of bodies

by Shawn Carman

lay in the floor. One still moved and struggled to rise, but failed. The others reached down to pull him to his feet.

"Orimono?" asked the Dragon.

"Dead," replied Oruku, pointing to an open-eyed corpse. "Sadly, he managed to leave his mark." He gestured to the green, oozing wound on his shoulder. "The color matches poorly with my wardrobe, I'm afraid," he added, drawing a chuckle from his Crab friend.

"Is it over? Is the threat ended?" the Dragon asked.

"For now," replied Oruku. He pulled his kimono over the mark, wincing as he did so.

"What did he want here?" asked the Crab.

"We might never know," Oruku said. "Let us return to the temple and see if the shugenja can undo what he has done to me."

Kyuden Isawa, present day...

Asako Bairei flipped through the pages of the ancient manuscript. For hours he had pored through the scrolls, eagerly searching for the information he required. He did not notice how the inks had stained his fingertips black, nor the creaking of his weary bones as he shifted in his seat. Now, as always, he noticed nothing save the thrill of the hunt. In his mind there was no difference between his search for knowledge and the triumph of a bushi on the field of battle. It was a service to his clan. It was his passion. It was his life. He ran a hand through his tangled hair and pushed on.

"Bairei-sama," came a soft voice from the chamber's entrance. The scholar turned suddenly, wincing at the pain in his neck and blinking at the light of the lantern. His vision swam for just a moment before he focused on the figure standing in the doorway. "Yuya-chan," he smiled. "How nice to see you. I thought you weren't returning until tomorrow?"

"It is tomorrow, Bairei-san. You have worked through the night. Again."

"Oh," he responded, eyes widening as he glanced at the window. "I did not notice."

"Aren't you tired? Or even hungry?" she asked, her pretty face creasing with concern. "How can you sit in once place reading for over a day?"

"Well," he said, somewhat embarrassed, "it was very compelling reading."

The young shugenja shook her head in exasperation. Bairei was a good man, more fiercely intelligent than anyone she had ever met. She had little doubt that he could become one of the most powerful shugenja in the clan, if he but devoted himself to the task. But that was not his desire. Hidden lore, forgotten knowledge... these were the things that fired his soul.

Bairei turned to the young woman as they walked down the corridor toward the library's exit. "How was your visit to Otosan Uchi, Yuya-san? Did you enjoy yourself?"

Yuya stopped short in the corridor, horrified. "You... you don't know?"

The scholar looked perplexed. "I do not understand. Has something happened? Was there another earthquake?"

A single tear rolled down Yuya's cheek. "An earthquake. Yes, of sorts. You might say... you might say that it was the final earthquake."

Bairei was focused now. "Tell me."

Yuya laid one hand softly on her friend's shoulder and continued down the corridor. The tale was difficult, and it would take time.

* * *

It was late, but Bairei could not sleep. The thought of Otosan Uchi's fate, of how much knowledge was lost forever, was too much. How easy it must be for others to think him a fool, that something so important could have gone unnoticed for a week. It had always been easy to become engrossed in his research. There were often things that went unnoticed. Perhaps that was why others found him so unsettling. They thought him oblivious to such things, but he was no fool. He was simply passionate about his duty.

Bairei sighed and rose from his mat. He had promised Yuya he would not return to the library until morning, but he did not know what else to do. There were so many matters to attend to. The one that weighed most heavily upon his mind was the rumor that Yuya had told him. The Elemental Masters believed that Fu Leng's spirit had ascended to the Celestial Heavens. If such horrible news was true... the idea was so terrible Bairei could not begin to imagine what it could portend.

The scholar lit a lantern and sat at his desk. He drew out a blank scroll and began jotting down random notes to aid him in his research. What threat might Fu Leng pose to the existing balance of power in Tengoku? As one of the Kami, Fu Leng had been made mortal by his fall to earth. Theoretically, his mortal power would be inferior to the power of the Elemental Dragons, but the Lost Brother had never seemed quite so limited as the other Kami. Perhaps his complete corruption by Jigoku granted him more potent abilities. Fu Leng was perhaps the only being in existence that had seen both the Celestial Heavens, and the Pit of Jigoku. He had mastered both darkness and light, and as the Phoenix well knew experience bred knowledge, which in turn bred power. Who else in all the realms had walked the paths of light and dark and could match power against Fu Leng?

Bairei chuckled as the answer came to him. Hitomi, the Lady Moon, had been one of the Seven Thunders — those destined to defeat Fu Leng. After fulfilling her destiny she had become seduced by the power of the Obsidian Hand, and would have led her entire clan into the embrace of the Lying Darkness had the wisdom of the Dragon not saved her. Surely Hitomi could stand against Fu Leng, and if Bairei could gain some insight into her power perhaps the Phoenix could somehow add to her might. Sadly those who knew Hitomi best — her own family — would be unlikely to aid him. The Dragon were at war with the Phoenix and members of the Hitomi family tended to be the most bloodthirsty and violent of the lot. In fact many in Bairei's clan would scoff at the idea of aiding Hitomi, a former Dragon. In Bairei's mind, threat of the Dragon Clan paled in comparison to Fu Leng.

Bairei's mind drifted back to half-forgotten accounts of moon cultists that he had read in his lifetime of research. He had not deliberately delved into the topic, but had come across only occasionally, and then only by happenstance. Perhaps the library's records held something that could help him understand the nature of Hitomi's power. He could not identify what cause him such disquiet, but he had long since learned to trust his subconscious memory.

He rose to collect his things and go to the library, then suddenly sat back down and sighed. He hated it when Yuya forced him to make promises, and she had demanded that he return to a normal sleep schedule. He could deny her nothing. With a shake of his head, he returned to his tatami mat to wait for the sunrise. Perhaps by then he would remember whatever forgotten account troubled him so.

Bairei left the library very little in the next few days. Yuya forced him to leave to rest or eat every so often, but it was always a brief reprieve, no more than a few hours at most. The other denizens of the library remarked at the scholar's uncharacteristic intensity and left him to his own devices.

After a few short weeks, he found the information he had been seeking. He had expected it to take longer given the sheer volume of information contained within the library, but Fukurokujin clearly smiled upon him. There were two separate accounts of an event in the Scorpion lands nearly forty years ago. One had been filed by a Shiba magistrate shortly thereafter, and told of the untimely death of an Isawa shugenja due to illness during a visit to Ryoko Owari. The other, however, was far more interesting.

The second account was duplicated from the Scorpion records. How such a document found its way into the Isawa libraries, Bairei did not know. Perhaps the Phoenix had captured it from that sinister clan's lands in the aftermath of the coup in 1126. Regardless, the account came from a Shosuro member of the family who spoke of a moon cult that had attempted some dire ritual of unknown origin during the Bon Festival. A Phoenix, not specified by name, supposedly stood at the head of the cult. The date was the same as the death recorded in the previous document.

Bairei reclined and clasped his fingers together, lost in thought. Other than some suspicious and unconfirmed encounter between a Fox patrol and a band of heretical monks deep in the Spine of the World Mountains, this was the only substantial account of recent moon cult activity that he could find. It held more information on the moon god, of course, documenting Onnotangu's role in the Empire's struggle against the Lying Darkness and his death at the hands of Hitomi. Clearly, the Cult of the Moon was the key. If Bairei could find them, he could gain insight into the goddess they served.

The scholar rose to his feet just as Yuya approached his table. She smiled in surprise. "Have you actually decided to take a break on your own, Bairei-san? That would be a first."

"Yuya-san, can you see to it that a horse is readied? I need to leave as soon as possible."

The young shugenja's smile turned into a slack-jawed stare. "You're leaving?"

He nodded. "I must conduct some research, and I cannot do it here."

"But where are you going?"

Bairei glanced down at the genealogical record he had been studying, as well as a handful of recently written scrolls detailing the events in Otosan Uchi. "Kyuden Seppun," he answered. "There is someone there I must see."

The journey to Kyuden Seppun, while hardly pleasant, was mostly uneventful. Numerous units of soldiers patrolled around the ruins of Otosan Uchi and the Seppun lands, but Bairei was an unassuming man with the proper travel credentials, so they gave him little trouble. The wait to gain an audience with Doji Jotaro was far more troublesome. In the grand scheme of things, Jotaro was not so much more important than Bairei, but his position as one of Toturi Tsudao's chief lieutenants made him a busy man. It was difficult to gain access to him without more notice than he had been able to provide.

On the sixth day of his stay at Kyuden Seppun, Bairei finally met with Jotaro. It was not a glamorous or even formal meeting. Bairei found himself in the meager Seppun library when the soft clearing of someone's throat drew his attention. "I believe you wanted to see me?" asked Doji Jotaro. "I apologize for the delay, but my attention has been diverted elsewhere."

"Your apology is appreciated, but not required," smiled Bairei. "It is I who arrived requesting an audience with no notice in the midst of what must be a busy time for you. I offer you my apology."

Jotaro waved his hand absently. "Nonsense. Now, what is it that I can help you with?"

"Your uncle," answered Bairei, "was a magistrate, was he not? Doji Oruku? Assigned to Ryoko Owari?"

The Crane frowned slightly. "Yes. He and my father Ryoma both served in Ryoko Owari during their careers, although they each went on to other things eventually. Why do you ask?"

Now Bairei had a chance to frown. "According to my research, your uncle was responsible for disrupting a moon cult ritual during the Bon Festival. Are you familiar with this incident?"

"I am," the magistrate answered. "The honor of the deed allowed my uncle to advance within the clan to serve Doji Hoturi directly. He was very proud of his achievements."

"Deservedly so," admitted Bairei. "But I suspect that the story held more than he reported to the Phoenix. Not that he was a dishonorable man," he added hastily. "Far from it. I believe that he kept certain... sensitive information from the public eye in order to spare the honor of the Isawa family." He paled carefully at Jotaro. "Would you know anything about this?"

Jotaro's expression grew cold and emotionless.

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"My uncle's affairs were just that: his affairs. It is not my place to second guess his motives or actions, nor would I wish to do so."

Bairei shook his head. "You do not understand, Jotaro-sama. I am not here to cast doubt upon your uncle's achievements. I am here because I need to know the truth about the moon cult. I believe that your uncle was cursed during the battle. In return for healing him, the Phoenix demanded his silence. If this is true, then the dishonor would not be your uncle's, but the Phoenix's."

The magistrate still did not seem convinced. "What you are asking... it could create problems, even after all these years."

"Yes," agreed Bairei, "but I will be the one to bear the brunt of them. Your family's honor will remain pure, as it should be."

Jotaro paced back and forth across the small room for several minutes, rubbing his chin and thinking carefully. Finally, he glanced sidelong at Bairei and frowned. "The man whom my uncle killed was indeed a Phoenix, and he was the leader of the moon cult. Few knew then, however, and even fewer know now that Isawa Orimono was merely an alias. Although I do not know his true name, I do know why his involvement was concealed." He stopped, and stared at Bairei as if assessing him.

"Please," the scholar said. "You must tell me. For the Empire."

"I am not a man who trusts others easily, Asako Bairei," Jotaro said. "My duties have shown me far too many willing to say what others wish to hear in order to benefit themselves. There are many who will make promises to gain the favor of those who have what they want. My instincts tell me that you are an honorable man, and that there is no deception within you. Yet I am hesitant. What can you offer me to set my mind at ease?"

Bairei shook his head. "I have nothing. I can only offer you my word."

"Then that must suffice," said Jotaro. "The man who my uncle called Orimono was a very high-ranking member of the Isawa family. His involvement, if made common knowledge, could have damaged that family's reputation beyond repair."

"Who was he?" breathed Bairei. "I must know."

Jotaro told him; the answer was everything he feared.

* * *

"There is one further matter we must discuss," Shiba Ningen said to his associates. The Council of Elemental Masters held parley at least once every month. In recent times, they had found the need to meet far more often. The safety of the clan demanded it.

"What is it, Ningen?" asked Isawa Taeruko tersely. "I have no time for trivialities."

"Unfortunately, I suspect this is not a trivial matter," the Master of the Void replied. "One of the Asako librarians has requested an audience with us. His name is Bairei. Normally, we would dismiss his request out of hand, but I feel that it is important we meet with him. The Void speaks through me."

"May the Fortunes spare us from pretentious Ishiken," muttered Taeruko.

"Enough," said Isawa Hochiu finally. "Admit him Ningen. Let us make this as quick as possible."

Ningen nodded and waved absently toward the large stone doors that sealed the chamber from the lower levels of Kyuden Isawa. The doors swung open easily, revealing Bairei's small, hunched figure. "Enter, Asako Bairei," commanded Ningen. "State your purpose swiftly."

Bairei bowed very deeply. "Honored Masters, the rumors of Fu Leng's return to Tengoku have upset the members of my family very greatly. We believe that this crisis may change the Celestial Order as we mortals understand it if the Lost Brother is not stopped."

"Brilliant," said Taeruko. "Did you discover that in the library?"

"At first I could not specify why this troubled me so," Bairei continued without acknowledging the Master of Earth's insult. "In time, however, I realized that it was my admittedly limited knowledge of the former moon god, Onnotangu. The possibility of another such celestial entity tormenting the Empire was extremely disconcerting."

"Your insight is nothing we have not already considered," said Hochiu tersely. "If that is your only concern..."

"I'm afraid it is more complex than that, Hochiu-sama. My concern has caused me to delve into many ancient theological texts. I believe that the security we all feel in the stability of the new Lady Moon is a false one."

"You are making no sense, scholar." Ningen's tone was very stern, reprimanding.

"The Moon and the Sun are equal and opposite," began Bairei. "Their power stands in opposition to one another, just as yin and yang are balanced. The Sun is order, law, and honor. The Moon is chaos, madness, and discord. One need look no farther than the Hitomi order to see the reflection of what Hitomi has become as Lady Moon."

Hochiu frowned. "What are you saying?"

"I am saying, honored masters, that the power that Hitomi has gained can and will corrupt her. She will become just as Onnotangu was before her, a threat to the Empire. If we allow this to happen, then she could conceivably side with Fu Leng and throw the Celestial Heavens into complete chaos. Fu Leng could emerge victorious in Tengoku, with Hitomi sitting at his side. However," Bairei glanced around at each of the masters, "if we can protect her from becoming corrupted, she will be our most powerful ally against the Ninth Kami."

Ningen returned Hochiu's frown. "Even if what you are suggesting is possible, how would mortals hope to affect the happenings of the Celestial Heavens? Such a thing is even beyond the power of this Council."

"I believe otherwise, Ningen-sama." Bairei laid several scrolls on the Council's large stone table. "I have discovered several accounts of so called 'moon cultists.' During the reign of Onnotangu, such groups were rare, but not unheard of. The cultists supposedly possess

bizarre mystical abilities that cannot be attributed to conventional shugenja spells. I believe that Onnotangu could hear and answer his followers in a very direct manner. I believe that the moon god's power is connected to the mortal realm in a way we do not yet understand. One must look only to the Hitomi family, to incidences of her followers spontaneously developing the tattoos of the kikage zumi, to see the truth in this."

Understanding dawned in Taeruko's eyes. "And you believe that if the Phoenix worship Lady Moon using the rituals of the moon cult that we can prevent her from succumbing to the power she now wields?"

"I do," said Bairei.

"Why not allow the Dragon to deal with this?" Hochiu snapped. "She is one of their own."

Bairei bowed his head respectfully. "I was under the impression that the Phoenix Clan held domain over all matters of theological and mystical importance. To put it simply, I do not believe this is a problem the Dragon can solve."

Hochiu smirked suddenly. "Well said."

"I do not approve of this," Taeruko said. "The Cult of the Moon was a bloodthirsty, violent organization. Their rituals will lead us to corruption and madness."

"Naturally we must modify the rituals," Bairei said. Many of them involved unsavory acts of sacrifice that I believe would do little to calm Hitomi's tormented soul."

"Madness," Taeruko said. "I will not allow it. You walk a dangerous path, Asako. The Inquisitors must be informed of this."

"Then I shall make them aware of all of my research," Bairei said, drawing up his courage and staring down the Master of Earth without fear. "Including the tale of Isawa Muchito, otherwise known as Isawa Orimono."

"I know that name," said Ningen.

"Yes," Hochiu said quietly. "He was my uncle."

Bairei bowed his head respectfully to the Master of Fire. "I wish no shame upon your house, Isawa-sama, but should the Inquisitors interfere with my efforts to save Hitomi's soul, I would be obligated by the oaths I swore at my gempukku to correct this oversight in the historical records of our clan."

Hochiu raised an eyebrow. "But if your duties to this shrine you hope to build keep you otherwise occupied..."

"As a Phoenix, my first duty is to the Celestial Order," Bairei said.

"I do not believe this," Taeruko snarled. "Hochiu, do you plan to allow this Asako to blackmail you so blatantly?"

Hochiu shrugged. "And why not?" Hochiu said. "He conducted his research with wisdom and cunning, and I find that his leverage makes it easier for me to agree with his argument, which I already found quite persuasive." He waved dismissively toward the scholar. "You have our thanks for brining this matter to our attention, Bairei. You have my permission to pursue this matter, but do so with caution."

"One moment, Hochiu," Ningen added, "While this sounds logical, I have a further requirement for this shrine. Those members of the Hitomi family who wish to enter without violence must be allowed access."

Taeruko and Hochiu both looked at the Master of the Void in shock.

"The Dragon?" laughed Taeruko. "You would allow our most vicious enemies into our very homes? I think not."

"I am willing to accept the risk," Bairei said quickly. "I think their insight would make our duties easier, and perhaps present an opportunity for peace with the Dragon."

"Small chance of that," Hochiu said. "Nonetheless, your mistakes are your own to make. I wish you well, Bairei. Inform our builders of what materials you require. Place this shrine in the Asako provinces, close to Dragon lands. That way if the Hitomi prove impossible to control at least they will not harm anything important."

"I am humbled by your generosity, Masters." Bairei bowed deeply. "I thank you for your time."

"Be certain that if you draw our attention again that we approve of what you say, Asako Bairei," Taeruko added as the scholar turned to leave. "You will not find me a forgiving sort."

"Of course, Taeruko-sama," he said. "I shall not trouble you again." With that, the solitary scholar disappeared down the corridor and into the darkened hallways of Kyuden Isawa.

Characters and Terms

Asako Bairei — An unassuming scholar and librarian with an unbridled passion for lost lore.

Asako Yuya — A young and heroic but idealistic shugenja of the Phoenix Clan.

Doji Jotaro — An imperial magistrate attached to Toturi Tsudao's forces, Jotaro has become one of the Sword's chief advisors.

Fukurokujin — The Fortune of Wisdom.

Fu Leng — The ninth child of the Sun and Moon and the corrupted lord of the Shadowlands who recently ascended to the Celestial Heavens through a ritual conducted by his followers.

Hitomi — The former Champion of the Dragon Clan who killed Onnotangu in a duel and ascended to take his place as the Goddess of the Moon.

Isawa Hochiu — The Elemental Master of Fire and the leader of the Council of Elemental Masters. One of the most powerful men in the Empire.

Isawa Taeruko — The eldest of the Council and the Master of Earth. The death of her daughter during the War of Spirits has made Taeruko bitter and vengeful.

Ishiken — A shugenja who practices Void magic.

Shiba Ningen — The Master of Void and the first Shiba to sit upon the Council of Masters in centuries.

TRAVELING RONIN



A little background behind *Traveling Ronin* first. It was originally designed for *Broken Blades*. We typically design a few extra cards for every set than we know we'll use, as a safety measure in case we find we need additional promo cards, or an unforeseen production problem forces us to cut a card. *Traveling Ronin* is one of those extras that wasn't needed (we like those kind!), which is why you're not seeing it until now.

So I didn't just select it for this article because I like the card. I picked it because I've had months and months to think about it.

First, let's look at its gold cost: 7. That's rather hefty for a Follower. *Untested Troops* gives you the same Force for 6 Gold, coupled with a risk that's a non-issue against most opponents. *Ashigaru Hordes*, at the same price, offers one less Force but an additional card draw (which could be a *Rallying Cry*, *Stand Against the Waves*, *Deadly Ground*, or any other game-winning Action). Dropping down one Gold and one Force, we find *Veteran Samurai* with their mighty 4 Focus Value, **Yu**, and *Hiruma Dojo* discount. Fencing us on the other side we have good old *Heavy Infantry*, at one Gold and one Force higher.

On pure stats, we see *Traveling Ronin* does not stand out in the crowd. The biggest advantage of their 7 Gold cost is that it breaks down much more favorably than *Heavy Infantry's* 8. For most decks, *Traveling Ronin* can be bought with the Stronghold plus a *Jade Works* or Clan Holding, or with two such Holdings plus a *Small Farm*. Since a *Traveling Ronin* plus one Personality is still often enough to take down an undefended Province without further help,

that's a strong point in their favor — they can replace the Infantry and make the deck run more smoothly. On the other hand, 7 Gold is still out of reach of a solitary *Bushi Dojo* or *Yasuki Yukinaga*. It's not perfect.

Of course, *Traveling Ronin* was never intended to be "pure stats." That would be boring!

The single largest advantage behind *Traveling Ronin* being in your hand except when you need it is that it's much harder for your opponent to kill. *Kolat Master*, *Kolat Assassin*, *Geisha Assassin*, *Touch of Death*...none of these can destroy a *Traveling Ronin* played by way of its Open Action on your own turn.

Coming back to your hand also lets the *Ronin* sidestep any bad effects other than destruction that might befall it, like being unable to straighten due to *Peasant Revolt* or *Suspended Terrain*. If it's your turn, you can play the *Ronin* and a *Frenzy* on the same unit and, when the turn ends, choose to resolve the *Ronin's* "return to hand" effect before *Frenzy's* "destroy all Followers" effect, sparing them from death. The *Ronin* even works like a very localized and expensive version of *Rallying Cry*, getting back into your hand and back into play before your opponent attacks you on his turn (thought not quite fast enough to beat a *Counterattack*).

If you attack with an army of single-Follower units and fear your opponent will strip one of them off with a ranged attack before you can play *Stand Against the Waves*, *Traveling Ronin* can save the day by filling the gap after it opens. More commonly, you can ride out your opponent's wave of *Block Supply Lines* and *Iaijutsu Duels*, then attach the *Ronin* to whoever is left.

Is your opponent playing *Inferno* to screw up your card-playing plans? Play the *Ronin* as an Open Action and feel smug about it. (Don't try this against *Yokubo* or *Muchitsujo* though; it won't work.)

Unicorn and Mantis players, take heed: waiting to play the *Ronin* until after a battle begins effectively gives them both the **Cavalry** and **Naval** traits.

There. I've waxed eloquent about this card's upsides. No card is perfect. What sort of things is this one vulnerable to?

Widespread dishonor, for one. The *Ronin* won't attach to anyone with 0 Personal Honor, including dishonored Personalities. Their trick Action becomes useless in the face of heavy *Secrets on the Wind* use — you're better off attaching them normally while you still have a commander they'll follow.

And, let's face it, their trick is expensive. In the right deck, a *Strength of Purity*, *Charge*, or even *Frenzy* provides 3 Force, and those are free. Planning to use the *Ronin* just as an in-battle Force bonus is silly. Their true strength is their flexibility, not their surprise.

In using the card right, there are two things you have to remember about its playability. One, you can take an Open Action during battle or during any player's Action Phase. You can play it sneakily during battle for some unexpected Force, or before the battle and still use tricks like *Sneak/Deadly*. Two, you don't have to attach them as an Open Action. You can play them like a normal Follower too. You lose their trick but you don't have to pay for them ever again.

Last but not least, *Traveling Ronin* makes for a really sneaky combo with *Recruiting Drive*. "Nothing up my sleeve..."

by Jeff Alexander

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