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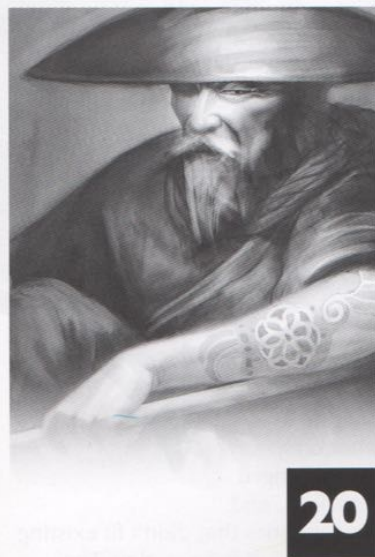
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THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY VOL. 2 / NO. 14



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Editorial

On Choosing
Wisely

The L5R crew is going all out to make story prizes more interactive with prizes like the Champions of Bushido and the Kotei Season. Yet, inevitably, this sort of freedom comes at a cost. What happens when the rare player doesn't have the best interests of the story at heart, or even has a personal agenda to "corrupt" a particular clan?

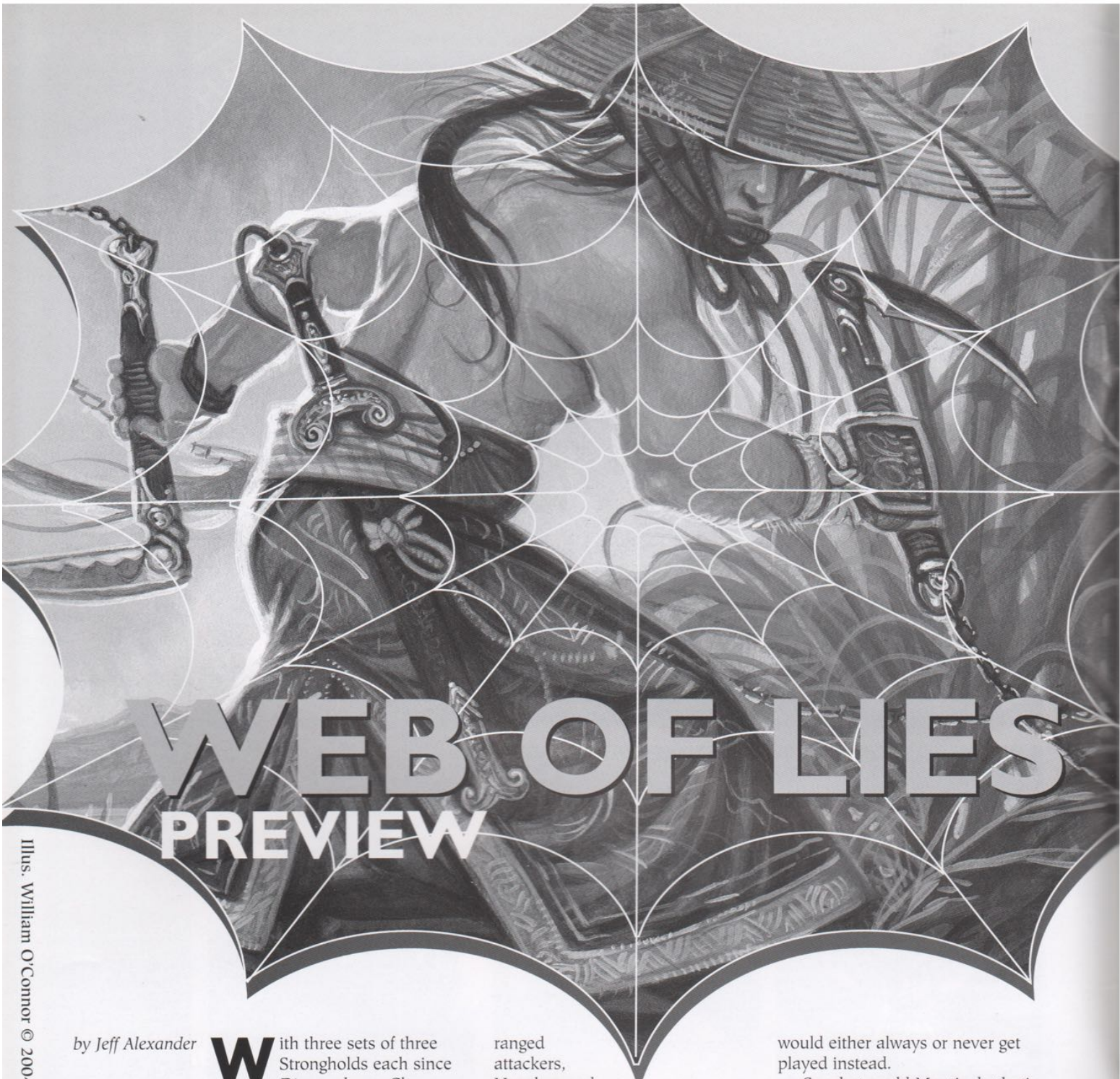
In the end, these dangers are hollow. When we offer flexible story prizes, we always have contingencies. Even so, if you should win the right to make a choice in the Empire's destiny, do consider the choice carefully. Is it because you care about what is happening or merely to get a laugh?

Remember, a story prize is a privilege, but also a responsibility to make a choice we can all live with.

Choose wisely.

Rich Wulf
L5R Story Guy





WEB OF LIES

PREVIEW

Illus. William O'Connor © 2004 AEG

by Jeff Alexander

With three sets of three Strongholds each since *Diamond*, one Clan — Mantis — was automatically going to be in *Web*. Phoenix, Unicorn, and Dragon were in contention for the other two spots. None of them had an overwhelming reason to be in the set or to get postponed, but one of them would have to wait for *Enemy of My Enemy*: Dragon.

So now we knew what Clans we'd have. It was time to decide what to give them. Mantis design was in a rut. Mantis Personalities were falling into one of four categories: Naval Personalities,

ranged attackers, Naval ranged attackers, and Personalities that didn't fit existing decks and didn't see play. The Honorable military Magistrate-based deck sponsored by their *Wrath of the Emperor* Sensei didn't give us much leeway to branch out, as it was also based on ranged attacks. Giving them a new Stronghold meant coming up with something new for Mantis to do, or else their Stronghold would just be a better or worse version of *Castle of the Wasp*, and

would either always or never get played instead.

So what could Mantis do that's, well, Mantis-y? In one way or another, they've always been pirates of a sort. There's definitely room for experimentation there. What do pirates do? They steal. Wealth in L5R comes from Holdings. Now, we know for a fact that permanently taking control of other players' cards is a very strong effect. We also know how un-fun a denial strategy Holding disruption is if carried to an extreme or allowed to happen early. And we know that putting an

ability on a Stronghold makes it stronger by making it reliable and reusable. How could we make Holding theft work on a Stronghold without being overpowered?

For one, we can't let it steal a

Holding the opponent has already played. That avoids the double jeopardy of "you lose, I gain". So the Holding has to be stolen from somewhere not yet in play. The natural choice for this is in a defending Province during an attack.

It just fits. There is no unwieldy revealing of cards still in the deck, and there's a built-in way

for the opponent to try to stop the theft.

Phoenix already have a Stronghold very good at Honor-running (*Morning Glory Castle*) and one that's become a sleeper Military stronghold (*City of Remembrance*). They have a general-purpose Stronghold supporting one of their primary mechanical themes. Once again, our choice was conflict with an

old Stronghold or emphasize something new. Fortunately, Phoenix already had something new. Bloodspeakers have received a lot of coincidental support in recent sets, insuring that maho-tsukai will have plenty of existing resources to build decks without us making a whole new set of Personalities to make sure it can do something out the gate.

Unicorn was toughest. In fact, at the time of this writing, we're still undecided what direction to

take Unicorn's Stronghold. We gave Unicorn some support for their Battle Maiden "Switch" decktype in *Wrath*, only to find mixed feedback from Unicorn players on whether they even wanted to be able to play Switch. Their military decks need to be stronger, but that shouldn't come purely from the Stronghold. Better military cards for all Unicorn military decks is the answer there, to give players more design freedom and avoid deliberately relegating an old Stronghold to disuse. For the Stronghold, we could continue on the Switch them, or we could give them something generally supportive, like a new theme on barbarian gold or on Regions.

The Sensei

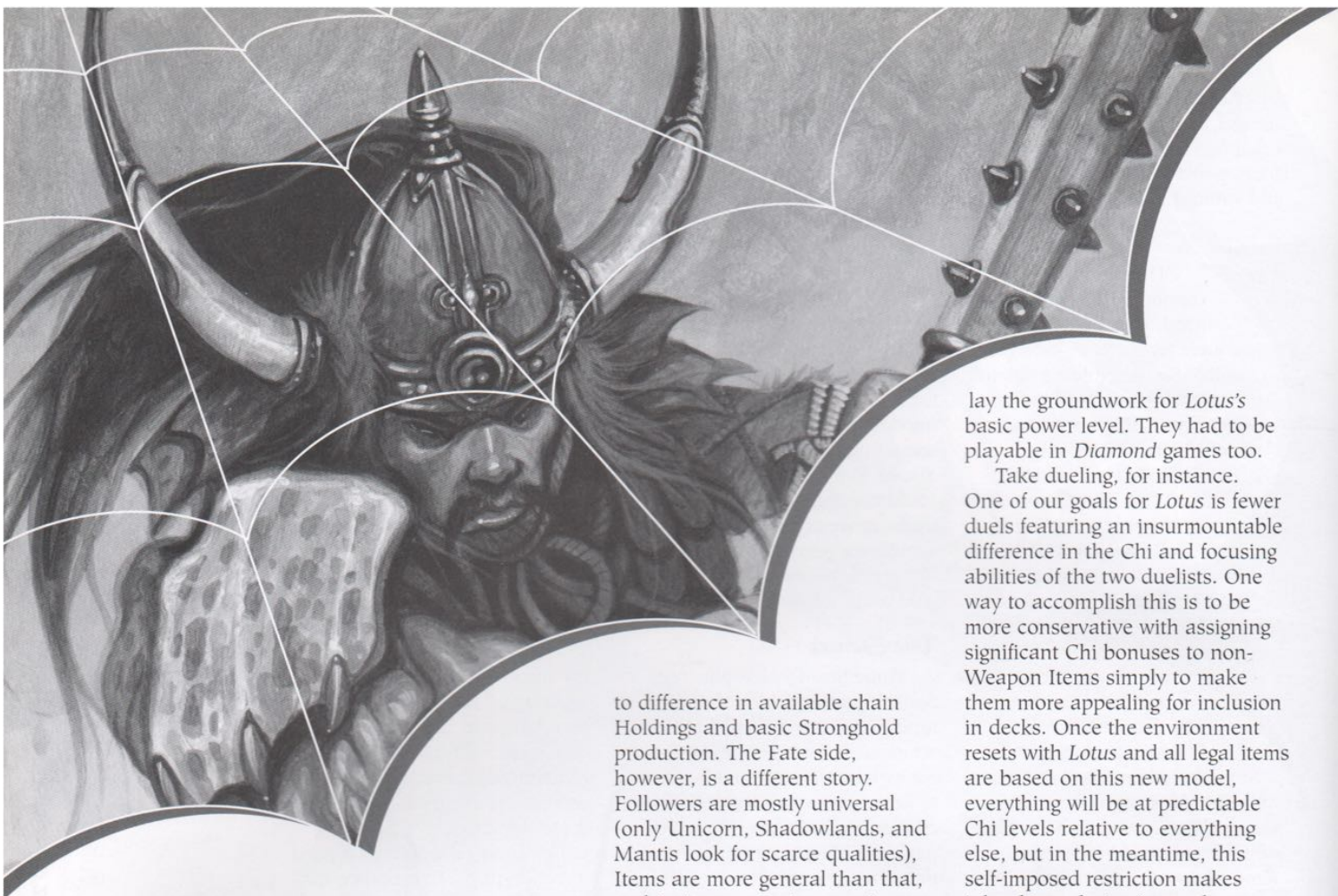
Three Strongholds plus ten Sensei is an awful lot of new deck type support to put in a set. And a new deck foundation like a Stronghold or Sensei really ought to have support right out the gate, or there won't be any reason to play it. That support may be cards that already exist, but when it isn't, it needs to be new cards

released at the same time as the foundation. The task of creating or otherwise ensuring enough content exists for thirteen new deck styles three times a year was beyond what the Design Team felt they could properly handle, so after the initial kick-off of a Sensei for every Clan to start everyone off with something, *Web* drops back to a less ambitious three Sensei per set.

As with Strongholds, the idea behind Sensei in the *Diamond* environment is strong support for alternate decktypes. And the Factions that deserve those most are ones that already have highly successful ones we don't wish to support too much further. Once we determined who was getting Strongholds, it was a simple matter to pick the three of the remaining seven to get Sensei. It would be the three with the best tournament showings. That means Crab, Scorpion, and Dragon.

Crab's least-used Stronghold is Kyuden Hida, and attachments in general are not used much in L5R these days. Clearly something Follower-based would be a good direction to go. Dragon needed something besides

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Illus. William O'Connor © 2004 AEG

Enlightenment, so they get a focus on Mirumoto-style dueling. With Scorpion, we take the same general course as Magistrate Mantis and Utaku Unicorn: a version of pure Samurai-based Military that does not rely on any dishonorable cards such as Ambush. Scorpion's strongest decks are heavy with dishonorable and tainted control elements. Such a Sensei would be a real change of pace for them, and cards we made for it would be very unlikely to end up supporting their stronger control decks.

You Must Focus...

Are you making a Lion Military deck? Put in three *Tireless Assault*. Crab Military? Three *Tireless Assault*. Unicorn? "3x *Tireless*" please.

The fact that L5R has one type of expendable resource — Gold — leads to a lot of decks looking the same. Dynasty decks aren't bad in this regard, since Personalities are quite Clan-specific. Holding schemes are more homogenous but still vary between decks due

to difference in available chain Holdings and basic Stronghold production. The Fate side, however, is a different story. Followers are mostly universal (only Unicorn, Shadowlands, and Mantis look for scarce qualities), Items are more general than that, and Actions are quite generic Clans wide.

The main new mechanical thrust of *Web* isn't a brand new mechanic like Formations or Senseis. It's a new restriction. Much of the set is Clan-specific cards, cards that only work or that work much better when used by one particular Clan. Aside from the usual six Personalities, each of the ten Factions gets an Item, a Follower, a Holding, and an Action for its own use, and many of the remaining cards have requirements that only some decks will meet, like having a Courtier or a Scout or a Tactician.

One Foot in Both Worlds

The biggest difficulty in designing *Web of Lies* was taking the future *Lotus* environment into account. As with the sets leading up to *Diamond*, every card in *Web* is going to be double-bugged. With an overriding design goal of producing as many strong and immediately-useful cards as we possibly can, we didn't have the option of printing cards merely to

lay the groundwork for *Lotus*'s basic power level. They had to be playable in *Diamond* games too.

Take dueling, for instance. One of our goals for *Lotus* is fewer duels featuring an insurmountable difference in the Chi and focusing abilities of the two duelists. One way to accomplish this is to be more conservative with assigning significant Chi bonuses to non-Weapon Items simply to make them more appealing for inclusion in decks. Once the environment resets with *Lotus* and all legal items are based on this new model, everything will be at predictable Chi levels relative to everything else, but in the meantime, this self-imposed restriction makes it harder to design Items that compare favorably to things like *Family War Banner*. Without coincidental stats, Item abilities will need to be stronger to compare favorably to existing Items of the same Gold cost.

More Famous People

Kaneka was so popular that we put two more ex-Winds in the set as Personalities. Look for the Voice and the Black Heart to appear in person this time. This is also likely the end of this trend. Tsudao won't be appearing as a Personality card for obvious reasons. Naseru won't be in *Web* and may not until he is replaced by Emperor Toturi IV. The prospect of putting the reigning Emperor on an actual card is just a little too intimidating to both the design and story teams.

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THE KEEPERS

by Jeff Alexander

The entire Path of Enlightenment promotion owes its inspiration to John Zinser. Once he and Ray Lau worked out the planning/pacing details, it was up to the Story Team to write the tournament fiction and plan for the storyline results. Next, it was the Design Team's deal to come up with cards that would be worthy as well as appropriate prizes.

For art, promotional, and thematic purposes, the Keepers were to be Samurai Personalities and the Books were to be Items. Ray put on his Brand Manager hat for a moment and set the course for our design with the following directives. Samurai and enlightenment are core themes in L5R, and Ray wanted to emphasize both. In particular, he wanted it stressed that balance of the elements is just as crucial to being a good samurai in Rokugan as balancing one's honor and duty. They could be Shugenja or Monks or Courtiers as well, but they would all have the Samurai trait. This would force some trait combinations we normally disallow except on particular characters

purely for storyline reasons, but that was allowable — these mysterious Keepers are as unique and

memorable (if not as powerful) Oracles and while mortal humans, are exceptional mortal humans.

The Books could not be Holdings, as a few of Rokugan's more historic texts have been represented in-game (*Akodo's "Leadership"*, *Tangen's Lies*). It would not fit the art.

Finding the Keepers

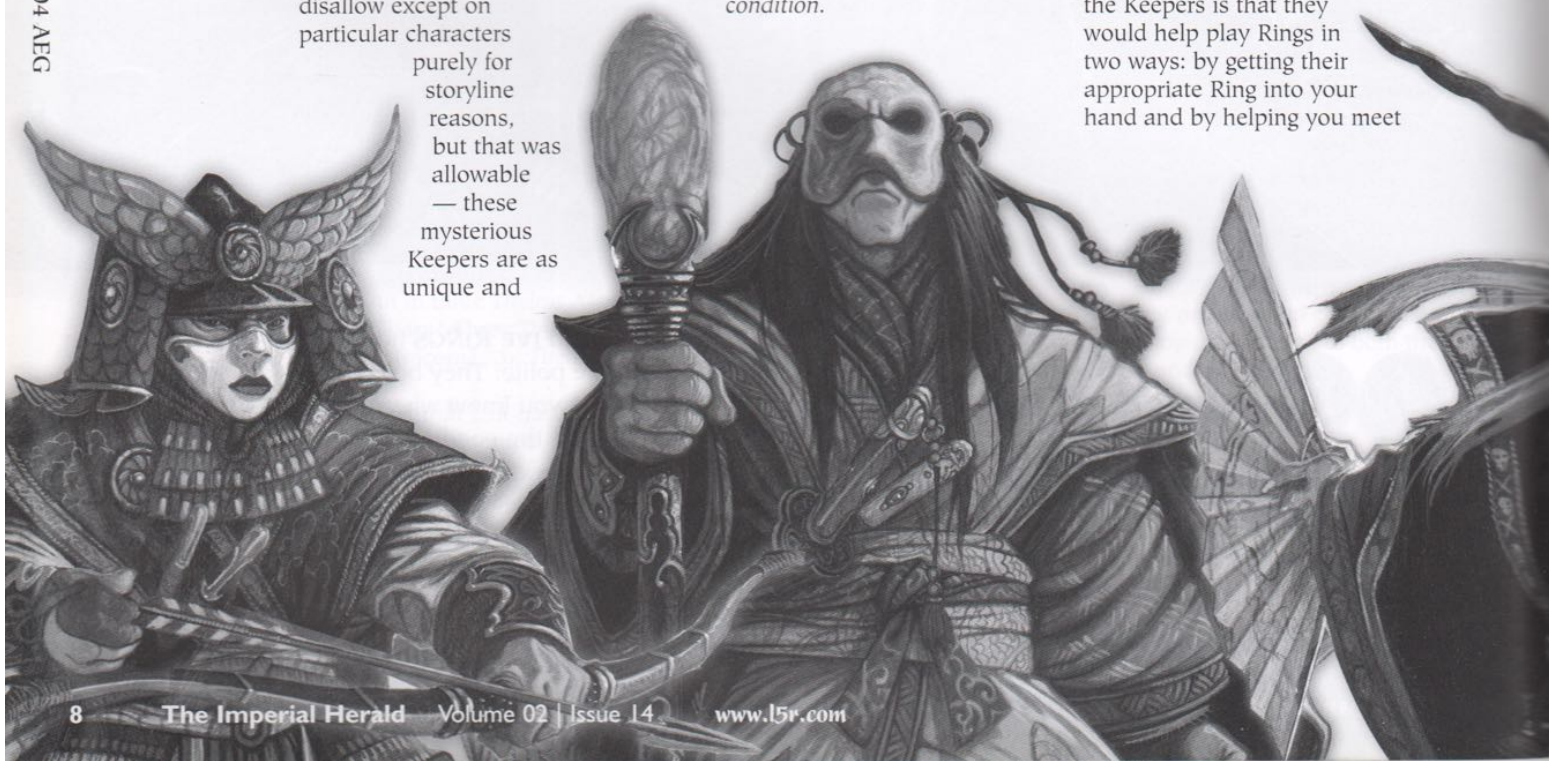
Now that we had the basic guidelines, we were free to start figuring what these cards might be able to do. How, exactly, did they interact with Rings and/or Enlightenment, if at all? Did they make Rings easier to play? Did Rings make them easier to play? Did one make the other more powerful, or vice versa? And what about the Keepers and Books together? How would they synergize?

We brainstormed into a discussion to last most of December. Here are a few:

- They should help you play their respective Book.
- They should have an ability that helps satisfy their Ring's play condition.

- They should let you search your deck for their Ring when they enter play, or as a Reaction to playing another Ring, or as a Limited action by sacrificing the Keeper itself.
- They should enter play more easily if you accomplish an Elemental-themed task first, similar to their respective Rings' play conditions.
- They can interact somehow with all cards that share their Elemental trait.
- They should give you an alternate way of playing their Rings via a Battle action.
- They should **not** play Rings as Battle actions because that goes directly against the idea that samurai are more than just really deadly warriors.
- They should be worth putting in typical decks even without combos with the Rings or Books.

As an entire promotional effort, the Path of Enlightenment is about, well, Enlightenment. For that reason, our final decision on the Keepers is that they would help play Rings in two ways: by getting their appropriate Ring into your hand and by helping you meet



its play condition. The latter would be accomplished with an ability that was worth having in its own right.

"But what if Enlightenment becomes too strong?" someone asked. It was an important question. These cards were being designed well in advance of much of the future *Diamond* environment. We needed to build some kind of failsafe into these cards so they would help play Rings but wouldn't further strengthen any dominant Enlightenment decks that might develop before these promos released. The precaution we devised was to prevent the Keepers' Ring-search effects from stacking. The Keepers can start you on the path to victory with their card draw, but past that, they only help you play Rings. The beauty of this is that it doesn't coincidentally weaken decks that use one Ring for its benefits and don't try to Enlighten. It only hurts those that go for more than one. Plus, it stops them from working extra-well with the *House of Tao*, which was the most likely candidate for potential future Enlightenment balance issues.

So now we had a framework for their effects. What we needed now were their numbers. In order to be even considered in competitive decks, they either needed to rival the Clan Champion level of power (like Kaneka does) or they needed to be affordable. Again, Ray donned his Brand Manager hat. "They will not rival Clan Champions." Well, that was easy. Affordable it was.

But what's affordable? As with any Unaligned Personalities, the Keepers' Gold

costs needed to take into account the fact that no one can buy them for 2 Gold less. "8 gold maximum, probably more in the 6-7 range" was one offered guide. We chose 7 Gold as the baseline cost so they would reliably be Stronghold + Holding purchases for most decks. To go past the breakpoint between two Gold sources and three means a Personality needs to be noticeably stronger to see real use. We needed to stay under that break. From there, we simply went with baseline stats of around 4F/4C and tweaked as appropriate given the other traits of the card. A Personal Honor of 3 was the least we could envision giving these Personalities based on their standing in the Celestial Order. Dash Honor Requirements are something we try to put on all promo Personalities to keep them as universally playable as possible.

Scribing the Books

There isn't much new to say about the *Books*. They and the *Keepers* were developed alongside one another, and most of the ideas made for how the latter would work were made for the former as well. We decided to make them a counterpoint to the *Keepers*. Where the *Keepers* helped you get Rings into play, the *Books* became more powerful once you had them.

Putting a standard cost of 3 on all the *Books* again helped them stay equally affordable for

everyone. Four Gold would bias them in favor of the Strongholds that produce more than 3. Two Gold is also nigh-universal, but the *Books* would have to be weaker than we wanted them to get that cost. Basic stats of +1F/+1C and moderately high Focus values of 3 standardize the *Books'* numbers, and abilities that let you bow their wielder even if you don't have the right Ring in play stop them from being completely useless outside combos.

All Have Their Own Path

You'll notice none of these cards are Unique. There are a couple of reasons for that. These cards, especially the *Keepers*, are participation prizes. The prize kits weren't going to contain one of each card for the first place winner only. They would contain several copies so fewer players would go home empty-handed. We want players to expect something from our tournaments (besides a good time!) even if they don't think they'll take top prize. Even more encouraging would be a prize they can get again and again and still have a use for besides trade bait, which hopefully will provide some incentive to attend more than one Trial tournament.

The other reason is purely thematic. One cannot obstruct another's journey to self-improvement by striving for it oneself. Like the Rings themselves, we did not feel it right that a player should be denied use of these cards because another player drew them first.





CONSPIRACY

by Shawn Carman

Doji Jurian rose with the sun, as had always been his custom. His servants knew his routine well, and had taken all the necessary steps. His clothing was immaculate and properly prepared. Hot water had been drawn for his first bath of the day. His writing desk was supplied with the proper implements, including fresh scrolls of the highest quality, delivered regularly from the Asahina lands to the northeast. Fresh candles were lit and incense burned in the small shrine devoted to his ancestors that Jurian maintained in his private estate. He may be trapped in this wretched city, but he need not suffer the same drudgery as those who knew no better.

In moments of personal honesty, Jurian had no choice but to admit that his lot here was not as bad as he imagined it to be on many an occasion. Sunda Mizu Mura was a large city, and one that was crucial to ongoing relations between his clan and the Crab. His post was among the highest-ranking of all Crane in the city, and the quarters provided for him were nearly the equal of those he had received during his short stint in Toshi Ranbo. Despite the brevity of his stay there, however, Jurian often thought of his time in the capital with pangs of regret. He understood that his talents were put to better use here, where he could easily

manipulate the court to suit his clan's needs, but he missed the exhilarating pace of the Imperial Court. Even as a minor functionary, the sensation of participating in some great endeavor was truly intoxicating. Still, this was his place for now, and from here he could best serve the Crane.

To say nothing of the others whose interests he served.

Sunda Mizu Mura was pleasantly warm most of the year, with surprisingly mild winters considering its location in the mountains. During the summer, however, there were times when the heat was nothing less than stifling. Even wearing his lightest silk kimono, Jurian found it almost unbearable. Fortunately, his business today would take him to the Pleasant Evening sake house, where the owner had young women stirring the air with large fans for much of the afternoon. The breeze was most refreshing, and the tea and sake were exceptional. Say what one might about the Yasuki lands, but their sake houses were always exquisite. His business here today was equally interesting. Jurian stepped into the sake house and made a show of straightening his clothing. While doing so, he scanned the room for his prey.

There. Sitting alone, as usual. She looked up to see who had entered, and Jurian met her eyes with a warm, genuine smile. She smiled demurely and returned her attention to the scroll in her lap, but he took a slight glance back to see where he would sit. Excellent.

Jurian glided over to her table quietly. "Namika-san, so lovely to see you today. How does the day find you?"

"Well, Jurian-san," the Yasuki woman answered with a coy smile. "I had wondered if I might see you here today. I understand you and I share a taste for their special blend of tea."

"Oh yes," Jurian agreed, sliding into a seat across from the Crab courtier. "I find the flavor unlike anything I've ever had before. I fear if I'm ever moved away from this city I shall have to purchase a private estate simply so I can return and enjoy it."

"Well, I will hope that you aren't moved away," Namika said. "Who else would I discuss the happenings of our illustrious court with?"

Jurian's smile widened. "I found Moshi Burekan's speech on the dangers of restrictive trade agreements yesterday particularly enlightening."

Namika stifled a laugh. "That man was drunker than I've ever seen anyone in court, and living in Crab lands I can assure you I have seen a few court drunkards."

"Surely not!" Jurian returned with false indignation. He laughed for a moment and took a cup of tea from the serving girl. They knew his preferences well here. "I saw something similar in the Imperial Court once."

Namika's eyes widened in surprise. "I would never imagine such things would be tolerated in the Emperor's court."

Jurian smiled slightly and shook his head. "I'm afraid you might be surprised, Namika-san," he offered with a sigh. "Things are not what they once were under the Emperor's father."

She frowned. "How do you mean?"

Jurian made a show of looking uncomfortable. He glanced around casually to see if anyone was paying close attention to their conversation. "I merely mean that I have seen mistakes made, even at the highest levels of our court." He ran his finger around the edge of his tea cup. "Sometimes it leads to uncomfortable situations."

Namika's expression was somber. "I have always imagined the Imperial Court to be some grand affair, but your stories rarely make it appear such. My experiences with Yasuki Hachi and his magistrates led me to look favorably on the Emperor, but I must confess that our discussions have left me with somewhat cold feelings toward his court."

"The men and women who make up the court are by and large good and honorable people," Jurian assured her. "The court is just...

it is very chaotic. There is no real leadership among them."

"Where should the Court look for guidance?" Namika questioned. "The Chancellor? The Imperial Advisor?"

Jurian shook his head. "I fear Tanitsu-sama and Kaukatsu-sama are kept very busy with their duties for the Emperor. They have little time to steer the affairs of court, even when they are as important as those discussed in Toshi Ranbo."

Namika's expression hardened. Jurian had grown accustomed to the expression in the Crab court. It was an expression of disquiet and irritation. The Crab did not suffer foolishness lightly. "Where is the Emperor, then?" she asked quietly. "If his duties keep the court's leaders busy, then should it not fall to him to set the pace for those who enact his will?"

"The Empire is vast, and the Emperor is but a single man. Even the Son of Heaven cannot do everything that is expected of him. No one man can."

Namika's expression remained grim. "Your company is always enjoyable, but the tales you recount are troubling, Jurian-san."

"We must keep the faith, Namika," he assured her. "The Emperor will see us through these difficult times. Or perhaps we will see him through."

The young Crab shook her head slightly. "I hope that is so, but we are not all as optimistic as you, my friend."

On the outside, Jurian kept his mouth poised in a thin line and nodded wordlessly. Inside, his smile was as broad as ever.

*



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It was late in the evening before Lord Sun's relentless heat finally abated, leaving the city mercifully cool. Jurian was grateful, having spent the day moving from place to place, engaging any number of other courtiers in spirited discussions. Some were a legitimate part of his duties on behalf of the Crane within the city, while others were merely a façade to further his secondary motivations. A handful were purely for recreational purposes, but he rarely permitted himself to enjoy those. Attachments and friendship were ill at odds in the end given his goals.

Jurian returned to his private chambers after dismissing his servants for the evening. His days were spent in endless conferences with others, and he often preferred to spend his evenings alone with his thoughts, the quiet stillness of an empty house helping him to clear his mind and focus on his objectives. The Crane courtier stepped into his chambers with plans to write a few important letters, then stopped in his tracks. He glanced once around the room carefully, his mouth set in a thin line. "I'm quite certain I've asked you not to enter my home uninvited. Several times, actually."

"Jurian-sama, I'm hurt by your insinuation." The dry voice had no clear origin. There was a stirring of air in the chamber, like a breeze that gently lifts the fallen leaves, then a black and red clad form appeared near the closed window. "I would think that I was always welcome in your home."

"Think as you wish, Natsuo-san," Jurian said in the same cross tone, "but my home is private. Please remember that."

Soshi Natsuo bowed slightly in an apologetic, almost comedic manner, but his expression showed neither remorse nor amusement. His features were as cold and solemn as always, a fact that Jurian continued to find disturbing. Not that he would ever reveal his discomfort. "What progress have you made?"

"It is going well," Jurian replied. "I have arranged for several changes to be made in the local trading policies that should benefit our efforts. Several agents loyal to our cause have been installed into the local bureaucracy as well. They should be able to continue our infiltration. We should have a foothold within the Crab Clan in a matter of months."

"Months may be too long," Natsuo observed dryly. "The Shogun is moving faster than we anticipated. If he forces an open conflict with the Emperor's forces, we will need support in all the clans if we are to have any hope of success."

"Open conflict?" Jurian said incredulously. "I thought that was only to be used as a last resort. We can only truly benefit if the Emperor remains on the throne."

"Agreed," Natsuo answered. "However, should our hand be forced, and Kaneka find himself on the throne, I imagine he will prove far easier to manipulate than Naseru. He seems... somewhat less politically inclined."

The Crane shook his head. "Underestimating Kaneka is a mistake. This is not what I expected."

"Expectations are for the foolish," Natsuo replied with a hint of a smile. "Now, what of young Yasuki Namika? She is of keen interest to our mutual superiors."

Jurian smiled. "Things are proceeding extremely well. Already my discussions with Namika have fostered seeds of doubt. I predict she will join our cause with great enthusiasm in the near future. She possesses a great deal of loyalty to the Emerald Champion due to some mutual adventure in Shinsei's Last Hope but I doubt it is anything so important she will deny an alliance with us." He looked at the shugenja with satisfaction. "Who will be making the initial contact?"

Natsuo raised an eyebrow in surprise. "You, of course. Who else?"

The Crane frowned. "That may not be the best idea."

"Why do you say that?"

"Namika is more intelligent than I initially believed," Jurian answered. "If she suddenly learns I am part of some vast conspiracy, she may well come to the conclusion that our discussions were intended to steer her toward that end."

"Then you will not have done your job well enough," Natsuo said casually.

"She is yours to recruit one way or another, Jurian."

The courtier's eyes narrowed slightly. "An easy statement, considering I do all the work in this endeavor."

The Scorpion grew still and turned his expressionless eyes on Jurian.

"Do not mistake our familiarity for friendship, Jurian," he said quietly.

"Our cause is just, but discretion must be foremost in our minds.

If you cannot accomplish your assigned duties, then you become a liability." He shook his head sadly. "And at this point in our great endeavor, liabilities are something we simply cannot afford. Do you understand?"

Jurian paled slightly. "Of course, Natsuo-san. Forgive me." He had no wish to anger someone such as Natsuo, who seemed without remorse or inhibition of any sort. "I will deal with Namika personally, as you say."

"You are a wise man, Doji Jurian," Natsuo replied calmly. "It would very much be in your best interest to remember that none of us, not you, I, or even your sensei Munemori, are more important than the cause we serve."

ORDER FORM

"The Empire above all," Jurian replied with a short bow. "I will remember."

"Well said," Natsuo agreed. "Yasuki Namika is not only responsible for all the tax collection throughout the Yasuki provinces, but also the influx of koku coming from Crane lands to aid their Crab allies. A woman in her position on our side could permit us to manipulate the entire economic landscape of this region to our

The letter had arrived at his home at dusk, only a few short hours ago. Namika wished to meet him in private, naming one of the city's smaller, less popular gardens as the meeting place. In his experience, those who wished for such private meetings had one of two intentions. The first was to make some confession, unburdening the soul to a trusted confidant. Based on the conversations Jurian and Namika had had over the past week since Natsuo's unpleasant visit, he expected her to admit her doubt concerning Naseru's rule. Naturally, she would turn to her good friend, the more experienced and delightfully charming Crane who opened her eyes to such matters. And, of course, if her intent was also the second most likely motivation, he would be happy to oblige her that as well. Namika was an attractive woman, after all.

There was a rustling from the bushes that threatened to grow over one of the darker garden paths. Jurian turned and assumed one of his most sincere and welcoming expressions. Namika emerged from the path, an expression of surprise on her face. "Namika-chan," he said warmly. "I was so delighted to receive your..."

The look of empty surprise halted Jurian mid-sentence. The smear of color on her lips was too bright to be cosmetic. It could only be blood. A cold sensation settled in Jurian's chest. He had not even brought his wakizashi, not that he had any real skill in using it. He was defenseless.

Namika fell face-first on the garden's stone path. A red stain marred the back of her silken kimono. She stirred slightly for a moment, then was still. Jurian took a step backwards, his mind racing to find the quickest and most direct exit from the garden and into the more heavily-populated section of town. A tea house or sake house would be ideal. Intoxicated samurai were always eager to ingratiate themselves into any violent endeavors.

"Be at ease, Jurian," a rough voice came from the shadows. A small man, his features twisted with age, stepped out from the path where Namika had appeared only seconds before.

"There's no reason for alarm." He paused for a moment. "Not as long as your loyalty remains intact, at least."

Jurian stared blankly for a moment. "Ide Haichang?" he said at last, unable to keep the surprise from his voice. "What... what are you... why?"

"Oh, be quiet," the old man snapped irritably. "You sound like an idiot."

"What is this?" Jurian demanded suddenly. "What have you done, you fool?"

The Unicorn merchant gestured toward the Crane with a long knife, its blade still stained with blood. "Careful, young man. I may pretend to be oblivious to you and your sycophants' barbs in court, but I have no patience for that nonsense otherwise."

"Do you know what you've done?" he hissed at Haichang angrily. "You've ruined everything!"

"I did what you should have done in the first place," Haichang returned. "I investigated your recruit far more thoroughly than you ever did."

advantage, and hungry men tend to blame those who rule them for their circumstances. And I would not discourage her admiration for the Emerald Champion. Instead, she might one day prove useful if we need to pry Hachi's loyalty away from the Emperor."

*

The Yasuki gardens were lovely in the moonlight. Nothing to rival the beauty of those found in Doji lands, of course, but in the absence of his home comforts, Jurian would gladly accept these as a suitable replacement. At least for the time being.

Jurian drew back, blinking in surprise. "Recruit? You know? Are you...?"

"Yes," the old man answered. "I serve the same masters you do, and a far sight better. Do you know anything about this woman?" He gestured towards Namika's lifeless body.

"I know she would have been invaluable to our cause," Jurian hissed. "You've undone months of work in a single moment."

"Fool," Haichang spat. "Namika is from a minor branch of the Yasuki family. She rose to prominence when she turned her own father in for stealing from the family to further his personal ambitions. He was executed, and she was granted a more prestigious post for her loyalty and honor." He shook his head. "She would never have betrayed her daimyo, the Emperor's Emerald Champion. Do you even have any clue what the two of them went through in Shinsei's Last Hope?"

"No," Jurian disagreed. "She was very open to our ideas. I led her to her own conclusions. She would have joined us."

"You were manipulated!" Haichang shouted, mere feet from Jurian's face. "She played you for a fool, and you allowed it! You endangered our entire presence in this region with your idiotic reliance on your charm and good looks." He sneered at the Crane in disgust. "I should scar your face so that you might learn to trust your other talents, assuming you have them."

Jurian discovered the cold sensation from moments before now replaced by anger. "Try it if you wish, little man," he snarled. "We shall see what happens."

Haichang's expression lightened somewhat, and one corner of his mouth curled up in a smile. "Perhaps there is more to you than I thought," he admitted. "But now for the true test of your loyalty." He gestured to the body. "We must dispose of her, and you will play the part of the mourning friend for the court over

the next few weeks. You will be above suspicion, naturally." His smile widened. "And who would suspect a doddering old merchant like myself?"

"What of the letter she sent me?" Jurian asked.

"I sent the letter," Haichang answered, "and one to her as well. I will deal with them. Do not concern yourself with such things."

"And the tax collection?"

Haichang nodded. "Mindful of your duty. My estimation of you increases by the moment." He smirked again. "Never fear. I have ensured that Namika's replacement will be more receptive to our overtures. Wait one week, then approach him. He will be expecting contact from someone within our organization." He wiped the blade on Namika's clothing, then placed it in his obi. "Now, we must dispose of this corpse. Get the feet."

Jurian paled at the thought, his gullet rumbling. "For the Empire," he croaked, and reached to comply.



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KILL THEM ALL

PLAYING THE SHADOWLANDS HORDE IN DIAMOND

Illus. Steve Thomas © 2004 AEG

by Connor Alexander
Origins Champion
2004

When Diamond started, each faction was presented with two major themes. As one might expect, the Shadowlands took the dual roles of overwhelming force from The Spawning Grounds and Personality-Kill, or PK, from the Temple of the Ninth Kami. Both had their strengths and weaknesses, but as Reign of Blood and The Hidden City made their way into the environment, it became quite clear that the PK was the stronger strategy.

Focusing on the PK type deck became my goal as a Shadowlands player, having recognized its strength. While it was a semi-competitive deck during early Diamond, the deck did not truly

blossom until after The Hidden City hit the tournament scene.

The Hidden City gave the Shadowlands an amazing economy, strengthening it with cards like Pillar of Flesh and Daigotsu Dojo. The latter also provided a powerful PK engine, especially when strengthened with Sezar's Gift, which gave you more bang for your buck. Between these two cards, the base of a gold scheme forms, and can be filled in with obvious inclusions like Obsidian Mine, Shadowlands Bastion, Gifts and Favors and A Favor Returned. I also like to use Shrine of Daikoku, as the odd gold helps meet gold costs without wasting a penny.

This strong gold scheme allows

a Shadowlands player to run a killer personality lineup, filled in with several key Uniques. Start, however, with the obvious: Shukumei is one of the most powerful mid-costed shugenja in the game, acting as a PK card and a personality. Suiteiru no Oni is quite frankly the best personality in the environment, allowing you to kill stolen personalities as well as laterally transfer force across the board. Ashura is another powerful PK personality, and your economy can easily afford him as soon as turn three. I like Goblin Wizard for early Sezar's Gift and Written in Blood casting potential, but his low chi can give you some trouble using the ability on Temple of the Ninth Kami.



The real strength comes, however, in the Uniques. Powerful Uniques like *Iuchiban*, *Yajinden*, *Fushin*, *Seppun Jin* and *Naka Tokei* can all be employed, and early ones can be pitched with confidence that several others are waiting to come out.

Fate support is obviously key in a Personality Kill deck, and some cards are no brainers. *Kolat Assassin*, *Remorseful Seppuku*, *Ambush*, *Written in Blood* and *For the Empire* are all powerful kill cards. *Force of Will* is an auto-kill once your stronghold ability dishonors someone, and can work in brutal conjunction with *Jama Suru Exp* and *Yajinden*. *Sezaru's Gift* is, as mentioned above, an incredibly strong card when combined with *Daigotsu Dojo*, granting you larger Chi penalties to hand out.

A sprinkle of defense is a requirement, as your game takes a few turns to set up. *Outer Wall* is one obvious one, and is one of the strongest anti-blitz cards in the environment. *To Do What We Must* doubles as an early to mid-game defense system and an extremely powerful PK card when combined with *Ashura*, letting you take down two opposing personalities in battle. *Feign Death* is a nice follow up to this, and has always been a Shadowlands staple anyway.

The few remaining slots can be filled in with some powerful unique items such as *Yakamo's Claw* and the *Porcelain Mask of Fu Leng*. The *Ruby of Iuchiban Exp* is another strong item, effectively a PK card on its own. Finally, 2 or 3 copies of *Walking the Way* help you get the cards you need, when you need them.

These are but a few suggestions that will bring you towards a powerful Shadowlands deck. When used in proper conjunction, you should be able to clear the board of personalities with ease, then rush in with your high force hordes and smash multiple provinces at once. As always, build to your play style, adding and removing as you see fit, and you will march to victory in the name of Daigotsu!

Sample Decklist

By Connor Alexander

Stronghold:

Temple of the Ninth Kami

Wind:

Dark Heart of the Empire

Dynasty

Personalities

- 3 Ashura
- 1 Bayushi Kamnan
- 1 Fushin
- 2 Goblin Wizard
- 1 Hakai
- 1 Iuchiban
- 1 Jama Suru Exp
- 1 Naka Tokei
- 1 Seppun Jin
- 3 Shukumei
- 2 Suiteiru no Oni
- 1 Yajinden

Holdings

- 1 A Favor Returned
- 2 Corrupted Dojo
- 3 Daigotsu Dojo
- 2 Gifts and Favors
- 3 Obsidian Mine
- 3 Pillar of Flesh
- 1 Shadowlands Bastion
- 1 Shrine to Daikoku

Regions

- 1 Grove of the Five Masters
- 1 Oracle of the Void
- 1 Refuge of the Three Sisters

Events

- 1 Doom of the Dark Lord
- 1 In Time of War
- 1 Proposal of Peace

Fate

Actions

- 3 Ambush
- 1 Desperate Wager
- 1 Egg of Pan Ku
- 3 Feign Death
- 3 For the Empire
- 3 Kolat Assassin
- 3 Outer Walls
- 3 Remorseful Seppuku
- 2 To Do What We Must
- 3 Uncertainty

Spells

- 1 Fist of Osano Wo
- 3 Force of Will
- 2 Walking the Way

Kiho

- 3 Sezaru's Gift
- 3 Written in Blood

Items

- 1 Porcelain Mask of Fu Leng (Exp)
- 1 Ruby of Iuchiban (Exp)
- 1 Yakamo's Claw



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THE VILLAGE OF CHIBASU

by Brian Yoon

WAY OF THIEVES PREVIEW

We've fielded a lot of questions about Way of Thieves, the newest supplement for the Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying game. What is Way of Thieves? What possessed us to write it? What purpose does it serve in your L5R Campaign? The answers are simple. Rokugan is a land of where honor is a guiding force; samurai are expected to adhere to the highest laws of bushido and any deviation from the warrior code and tradition is punished without mercy. Yet in such a land, crime is not unheard of. Who are these men and women who flourish as criminals in a land where law cuts as swiftly as the edge of a sparkling katana? Way of Thieves describes a number of these criminal organizations. Some, like the Kolat, you've already heard of. Others, like the pirate wako based in the village of Chibasu, described below, are entirely new. These groups make excellent adversaries for any player character... or excellent benefactors for a player character who does not wish to walk the path of honor.

HOW TO USE THIS INFORMATION

Each of the major areas in both strongholds is presented here with all the information a GM needs to use it. Each section contains a heading entitled "At a Glance", which summarizes all the components of the area. More specific portions of the strongholds are given their own descriptions, which may be read aloud to players if the GM so desires. Individual GMs are encouraged to expand upon the information presented here.

Anyone who has heard of Sanada would be surprised by his choice of headquarters. Given his flamboyance and his complete disregard for safety, one would expect him to choose a secret island hideout, hoard his treasure in typical story fashion. Sanada believes the village of Chibasu suits his purposes. After all, Sanada has successfully led a wako for three years. One day perhaps he would have an island hideout, but not for now.

Chibasu is one of many villages on the Crane coastline. A cursory evaluation confirms there is nothing that makes Chibasu any different from any other peasant village in the Crane lands. Chibasu is built on a hill next to cliffs near a bay. The villagers tend to paltry acres of barley fields next to the river Chibakawa. The governor of the province, Doji Junburo, raised the taxes and takes the majority of crops from the village. The villagers survive by sending out fishing boats every day, and by accepting the donations Sanada occasionally makes to the town.

The villagers of Chibasu are stuck in a curious fix. The bounty for Sanada has grown significantly over the years. If one of the villagers turned in the location of Sanada's secret base, the village would no longer be on the edge of starvation every winter. However, the reason they are currently not starving is due to the secret donations Sanada offers the village headman for their silence. Further, Sanada settled in three years ago; the governor would surely suspect the peasants knew of his presence and punish them for their negligence. The villagers must help hide the Serpents of Sanada's activities, or suffer along with the notorious wako.

VILLAGE FORCES

Chibasu has the same defenses as all other heimin villages — that is to say, Chibasu has no defenses at all. Inexperienced heimin patrol the village at night armed with kama, but that is no deterrence to any determined opposition. Those who threaten the village and arouse Sanada's ire will meet with much stronger resistance, as the Serpents protect their homeland fiercely. Sanada's pirates are indistinguishable from normal peasants, though better armed and much better soldiers. No bandits have successfully threatened the village since Sanada's arrival; Governor Junburo attributes this to his own sterling reputation as a skilled ruler. Sanada's houses in the village are guarded by heavily armed and trained pirates waiting just inside the door, even on those nights where the pirate chief resides at the hidden

port. The hidden port is guarded at all times by at least ten Serpents of Sanada.

HEIMIN GUARDS

Human War2: CR 2, Medium-size humanoid; HD 2d8 + 2; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (touch 11, flat-footed 13); Attack kama +1 melee (1d6 + 1 damage); AL N; Honor: 0.5; Glory: 0.5; Status 0.5; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 9, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 9; Height 5 ft. 3 in.;

Skills and Feats: Speak Language (Rokugani), Handle Animal +2, Swim +4; Dodge, Void Use

Possessions: ashigaru armor, kama

SERPENTS OF SANADA PIRATES

Human Ftr6: CR 6, Medium-size humanoid; HD 6d10 + 6; hp 38; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (touch 12, flat-footed 14); Attack 2x kama +7/+2 melee (1d6 + 3 damage each); AL NE; Honor: 0; Glory: -1; Status -1; SV Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8; Height 5 ft. 8 in.;

Skills and Feats: Speak Language (Rokugani), Climb +8, Move Silently +7, Profession (sailor) +8; Ambidexterity, Serpent's Coil, Two-Weapon Fighting, Versatile (Move Silently, Profession).

Possessions: 2x kama, +1 ashigaru armor

HEIMIN GUARDS

Earth: 2

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Air: 2

Void: 2

School/Rank: None (Insight Rank 1)

Glory: 0.5

Status: 0.2

Honor: 0.5

Skills: Athletics 1, Defense 1, Nofujutsu 1, Sailing 1

Disadvantages: Heimin, Obligation (Serpents of Sanada)

Weapons & Armor: one peasant weapon (kama, sai or tonfa), light armor.

SERPENTS OF SANADA PIRATES

Earth: 3

Water: 3

Perception: 4

Fire: 3

Agility: 4

Air: 2

Awareness: 3

Void: 2

School/Rank: Serpent's Coil (Insight Rank 2)

Glory: -1

Status: -1

Honor: 0.5

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 1, Commerce 1, Defense 3, Hisomu 3, Kenjutsu 2, Kuenai 2, Nofujutsu 4, Sailing 4, Stealth 2

Advantages: Large

Disadvantages: Greedy (3 points), Obligation (Serpents of Sanada), Social Disadvantage (ronin)

Weapons & Armor: katana, kama, light armor

THE VILLAGE

AT A GLANCE

Chibasu is a standard heimin village. The buildings line one unpaved street that runs through the town to the village headman's house. Each building is identical to the next. The village chief's house is slightly larger than the others, and functions as both courthouse and jailhouse when necessary. The road passes the village headman's house and eventually leads to Chibakawa and the villager's barley fields. The road passes the docks at the coast, follows the bridge, and heads deeper into Daidoji lands. The home of Doji Junburo is in the nearby hills, well protected from the stench of the peasant village.

The Serpents of Sanada does not have a strong presence in the village itself. Every villager worries about the wako's presence every day, but the pirates do not interfere with daily business. Sanada has not forced the villagers to pay tribute, and except for the port, has not intruded into village property. This perplexes and worries the village headman; the pirate king must have a secret plan coming to fruition, and he worries that if Sanada is caught and his headquarters discovered, the entire village will suffer.

SANADA'S HOUSE

Nothing distinguishes Sanada's house from the other houses in the village. His place is essentially a wood-framed cabin with the interior rice paper walls, the third house down from the village chief's house. The floors of the houses are bare and a couple futons are set directly on them. There is no other furniture. A pile of weapons is pushed in a corner, where some Serpents of Sanada pirates placed them last. This house is the closest house to the port, and the Serpents of Sanada pirates believe that is why Sanada has kept the house. They are wrong.

The Sanada also owns the two houses that neighbor this house. When it is time for operations to begin, the pirates live in these houses until nighttime; then they sneak down into the ports. On those days, Sanada resides alone in his house, with no guards, no advisors, and no friends. Everyone wonders what their fearless leader does alone on those evenings; there has been some speculation, but none of them are correct.

On those days, Sanada sits down in the middle of the room, on the dirt, and recalls his own legend. He remembers the man he once was, Ikoma Shinchiro. It was here that Ikoma Shinchiro died. He remembers the night the Kitsuki ambassador revealed how he had altered his family's histories to bring greater glory to his family name. He remembers killing the Kitsuki in a fit of inexplicable anger. He remembers running from the magistrates, from the fallen Kitsuki's brother, and finally coming here. Here, in this village, he finally became tired of running. He sat down in the middle of the room, and pressed his wakizashi to his abdomen, preparing for the traditional three cuts. He remembers hearing a village crone just outside; something in her voice gave him pause. She recited a tale of pirates to village children, a tale of glory and adventure. With nothing else left to him, he had nothing else to lose — perhaps he could be a legend too. He remembers, and smiles knowing that he has changed his own destiny as surely as he once changed his ancestors'.

THE DOCKS

The port is small and unimpressive, built of strong, stable wooden planks. The docks are structured to safely moor three kobune at a time. One of these three ships belongs to the villagers of Chibasu, and the other two belong to the Serpents of Sanada. The pirate king allows the villagers to use one of the boats moored at the docks as a thank you for housing his kobune. The villagers are allowed to use the ship on all days except those days when the Serpents start an operation. On such days, Sanada always leaves a white pennant at the edge of the docks. Seeing this pennant, the villagers give all the ships a wide berth.

THE SERPENTS SECRET BASE

AT A GLANCE

The Serpents' hidden base can be found on the other side of the cliff from Chibasu. Only a forest, a hill, and a slowly degrading cliff separate Chibasu from the Serpents of Sanada base. Powerful illusions trick the few hikers braving the hill into thinking that the base simply does not exist. Ships are confounded by this same mirage. The beach next to the base is sandy, with a simple grave marker near the docks. The base itself is composed of three major rooms: the throne room, the barracks, and the storage room.

THE HILL

Anyone could walk to the Serpents' hidden base by walking through the forest and braving the slippery hills. The cliff is slowly degrading, and the paths have become increasingly dangerous. Many people died by slipping along the path and falling over the cliff before Sanada ever arrived in the area. Now, few people attempt to travel over the hill.

This is perfect for the Serpents' purposes. With the help of a ronin shugenja that joined Sanada two years ago, the Serpents of Sanada created their hidden stronghold. Mori, skilled at talking to the Earth kami, reinforced a section of the hill to create a stable path. The secret base of operations is lodged in against two cliffs and a hill, hidden by clever construction and carefully tended camouflage.

These solutions are temporary, at best. Mori has warned Sanada that the Earth kami grow weary of stopping the natural erosion of the cliff. Soon, they will move downward, toward, the sea, carrying his path and perhaps his base with them. Sanada has thus far placated the kami by offering a generous share of his tribute to Mori's small temple, but he knows this is a temporary solution.

THE DOCKS

These hidden docks are both larger and sturdier than Chibasu's small port. Up to six kobune can anchor at home at the same time, enough to harbor the entire fleet of the Serpents of Sanada. The port is well protected by treacherous reefs that make it difficult to navigate and unsuitable for profitable fishing. At least three guards are on watch at all times, looking out for random ships that slip through the defenses. At a call, up to fifty pirates could come running to help chase down any that try to escape.

Though the port can fit the Serpents' entire fleet, Sanada has ordered two of his ships placed at the Chibasu port. It is a simple safety measure. In the unlikely case of an invasion or an attack on the base, there would be more than one way for the pirates to escape.

GRAVE OF THE FEARLESS HUNTER

The grave is a small, simple black stone with the kanji "Fearless Hunter" carved in the front in beautiful calligraphy. Kitsuki Ketto was the younger brother of Kitsuki Motoko, the woman Sanada murdered before running from the law. Ketto followed Sanada's trail for two years, and was the only one to realize that Sanada, pirate king, and Ikoma Shinichiro were the same person. Blinded by his desire for justice, Ketto was relentless in his pursuit of the pirate king. Sanada killed Ketto after the magistrate discovered his secret headquarters in Chibasu.

Sanada instructed his men to mix Ketto's ashes in with the beach sand and to commission a master sculptor to create the grave marker. Sanada respected the young magistrate; Ketto came closer to ending Sanada's career than anyone else. Only Ketto's brash attempt to stop Sanada personally rather than summoning reinforcements prevented Chibasu from being exposed. In a strange way, Sanada regrets the Kitsuki's death. Ketto had been Sanada's most formidable enemy. His hunt had, to a large degree, been responsible for the growth of Sanada's legend. Sanada only hopes he can find another enemy so worthy.

THE BARRACKS

The first of the three rooms in the hidden base is the barracks. It is a spacious room, where up to seventy pirates could reside at one time. The kitchen is placed at the end of the same room, and crates and crates of food line the pantry walls. All this fits in the room comfortably. The barracks room, like the rest of the hidden base, is made of wood and is kept well organized by the pirates.

THE STORAGE ROOM

The storage room is half the size of the barracks, and empty. The room is completely bare. Sanada believes that it is more prudent to unload stolen goods as quickly as possible, and that there is no point in hoarding it. The storage room is only full directly after any successful operation, before the items are shipped to Sanada's buyers. Sanada has connections in Mura Sabishii Toshi, the closest Crane port city, and the Golden Carp Marketplace in Shiro Kaotsuki no Higashi. With their help, Sanada sells the goods he raids at seventy-five percent of market value, an unusually good profit margin for a pirate operation.

SANADA'S THRONE ROOM

Sanada meets with his captains here, a large room where a huge dais allows him to sit higher than all, like the king the legends paint him as. His quarters are connected to the throne room door hidden by a painting.

Sanada's throne room looks surprisingly cultured. The walls are lined with lovely works of art, most frequently depicting the activities of famous pirates and famous battles. Scrolls of well known and wonderfully written plays are displayed. Barrels of koku and jewelry line the walls, but they are tastefully closed. It is a symbol of the

power Sanada has earned, the fruits of his labor and the strength of his legend. Sanada uses this room to greet new members to his wako and to oversee the execution of traitors.

GM INFO

Sanada believes himself the greatest pirate who ever lived and the reincarnation of Yasuki Fumoki, the spirit of Nakano, with the cleverness of the original Yasuki and the cunning of his greatest ancestor, Ikoma. He is vain, arrogant, selfish, insufferable, but not entirely without some twisted sense of honor. In the beginning, Sanada needed the money from the piracy to survive. Now, he leads the Serpents of Sanada to build his legacy and to feel the exhilarating rush of stepping onto a subjugated merchant vessel. He taunts magistrates because he wants good opponents for his raids (and an appreciative audience, of course). He also does what he does to support the village of Chibas, a poor and overtaxed place that he knows would succumb to poverty and hopelessness without the support he offers them.

Appealing to the pirate king's vanity is a good way to quickly get on Sanada's good side, though insincere flattery will only anger him. Other than his blinding vanity, Sanada is a reasonable and courteous man — he retains some sense of the bushido the Ikoma taught him and believes only a strong warrior capable of displaying courtesy to a foe or inferior. Insulting his wako, his past exploits, or threatening the villagers is the quickest way to raise Sanada's ire, and find that beneath his flamboyant and honorable façade beats the heart of a cold-blooded killer.

THE LEGENDARY SANADA, PIRATE KING

Male human Ftr10: CR10, Medium-size humanoid; HD 10d10 + 20; hp 70; Init +5; Spd 20 ft.; AC 21 (touch 12, flat-footed 16); Attack +1 katana +16/+11 melee (1d10 + 4 damage); AL NE; Honor: 1; Glory: -6; Status: -1; SV Fort + 10, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 16; Height 5 ft. 7 in.

Skills and Feats: Speak Language (Rokugani), Bluff +6, Diplomacy +12, Jump +5, Profession (sailor) +12, Swim +14; Armor Focus (lamellar), Cleave, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Serpent's Coil, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Versatile (Diplomacy, Profession), Void Use, Weapon Focus (katana).

Possessions: +1 katana, +1 lamellar armor, Sanada's Triumph kobune (keel-boat), amulet of natural armor +1

THE LEGENDARY SANADA, PIRATE KING

Earth: 3

Water: 4

Fire: 3

Intelligence: 4

Air: 3

Void: 4

School/Rank: Serpent's Coil (Insight Rank 4)

Glory: -6

Status: -1

Honor: 1.5

Skills: Athletics 5, Battle 4, Commerce 4, Defense 3, Hisomu 4, Kenjutsu 5, Kuenai 3, Lore (Pirate Legends) 4, Nofujutsu 2, Sailing 5, Stealth 3, Torture 2

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Benten's Blessing, Great Destiny, Luck (6 points), Tactician

Disadvantages: Bounty (Serious), Dark Fate, Overconfident, Social Disadvantage (ronin), Vanity

Weapons & Armor: katana, kama, Fine light armor



THE
VILLAGE
OF
CHIBASU
HERALD
#14

SPECTER OF YESTERDAY

THE IMPERIAL HISTORIES

CHAPTER THREE

Illus. Christopher Appel © 2004 AEG

by Rich Wulf

Welcome to the latest chapter of player interaction for Legend of the Five Rings. For those of you who are just now encountering the Herald and who aren't familiar with the Imperial Histories, we'll go over the rules.

In each Herald we will feature a new Imperial History extended adventure hook. These will be written in classic Challenge Focus Strike format, but will also contain pointers for how to flesh the hook out into a full-scale adventure. Each will also include some new mechanical tidbit for both systems, a feat, Advantage, magic item, spell, or some other cool, new option. All of these hooks will also feature some character or place from the L5R canon fiction. The specific details will be left for the individual GM to flesh out to suit his campaign (and in fact doing so in a clever and unique manner is essential to the contest).

GM's are encouraged to take these adventure hooks, use them as inspiration, and expand upon them. For example, the GM may

decide when running the following adventure hook that the murderer is a relative of a player character, or perhaps Kyoso has possessed a player character and they are the unwitting murderer. In this way, both players and GM's will have a chance to influence events (and players with a subscription to the Herald who take a look at this article won't necessarily know what's going on when they play the adventure).

When the adventure is done, the GM should write up a short report listing the names of his players and their characters, his own name, how he altered the Adventure Hook from its original format, and how the game turned out. Special attention should be put on any particularly clever or resourceful actions by the players as well as the resolution of the game. These reports should be no longer than 3000 words and emailed directly to Rich Wulf at rwulf@alderac.com with the subject "Imperial Histories Report" as the subject line.

The L5R writers will look over

these submissions and select one that stands out as the most interesting or extraordinary (and probably a runner up to satisfy a humor coefficient). This adventure will be retold in the form of a short fiction in the next Imperial Herald. All of these stories will be considered canon; however, the story team does reserve the right to edit given specific space and content concerns. (For example if your character is the reincarnation of the Fortune of Stone destined to return to his place in the Celestial Heavens, that's fine for your campaign, but we probably won't mention it in the fiction.) The names of the GM and all players will also be listed in that issue of the Imperial Herald, so that your names may be recorded in the Imperial Histories for all time among the greatest of Rokugan's heroes.

And with that said, it's time to get down to business with the first Adventure Hook. Good luck everyone and, most importantly, have fun.

Background

All things in Rokugan follow a certain hierarchy. Even in the deepest pits of Jigoku, things are no different. The sinister oni have a rank and file of their own, and at the top of their ranks stand the incomparably evil entities known as the Oni Lords. There are seven of these Oni Lords, each of whom clawed their way to a place of power along a different path of corruption, betrayal, and murder.

Like all oni, an Oni Lord first gains true power when it gains a name. This name must be taken from a mortal, either given voluntarily, given by one to whom the possessor of the name owes his life, or given when the subject voluntarily accepting a part of the oni's essence (usually in the form of an eye, hand, or tooth that carries part of the oni's power).

Taking a name is a delicate balance, for an oni draws its own power from the strength of its host. Should the host be weak-willed and cowardly the resulting oni will likewise be undistinguished. Should the host be too strong-willed, he will resist the temptation the oni offers and the demon's growth will ultimately be limited. The finest hosts are those with great strength of character marred by some terrible flaw. Only seven times in history have such extraordinary individuals seen their destinies intertwined with oni, and seven times an Oni Lord has risen to power.

The tale of Kyoso no Oni is perhaps the most tragic of all the Oni Lords. Agasha Kyoso was a brilliant and beautiful young shugenja, deeply in love with Asahina Anzai. When her rival, Kakita Ryo, shamed Kyoso and exiled her to the outer provinces, Anzai was forced to make the classic choice between love and duty. A marriage to a shamed, outcast shugenja would not benefit his clan, so he chose Ryo. Angered and humiliated, Kyoso succumbed to the dark voices that whispered in her dreams. She summoned forth the demon that spoke to her, not merely giving it her name but her physical body as well.

To its surprise the oni found it did not have the strength to overcome Kyoso. Instead, Kyoso controlled the demon and they dissolved a single being. The resulting creature was no less powerful for being subject to a human mind, and no less evil. Kyoso murdered all those who had wronged her and fled into the Shadowlands.

Kyoso often ventured forth into the Empire, sometimes pretending to be a minor Fortune, a patron of love and justice. She was particularly fond of women with broken hearts, striking down their former lovers with vicious, merciless efficiency. Kyoso was heartless, unpredictable, and calculating, a master of vengeance. Even the other Oni Lords feared her, uncertain when her savage whims may turn her against them.

When Daigotsu rose to power in the Shadowlands, he demanded that all denizens of the Shadowlands bow to his rule or be considered an enemy. Kyoso no Oni openly defied him, but underestimated Daigotsu's Onisu. Wielding the power of Kyofu, Onisu of Fear, Daigotsu slew Kyoso and sent her screaming back to Jigoku.

Since that time, Kyoso has been trapped in the Realm of Evil. Most banished Oni Lords cannot return

to the mortal realm until such time as a mortal summons them, but Kyoso is a special case. In places where many souls are torn with feelings of frustration, anger, and resentment, Kyoso can have some limited influence in the mortal world. If she finds a heart as consumed with vengeance as hers once was, she can visit that person in dreams, seduce them with promises of revenge, and consume them as she was once consumed. If the process is not halted, the unfortunate soul will become the new Kyoso no Oni, and start along the path of murder and destruction that will not cease until she reaches the City of the Lost and faces Daigotsu again.

The city of Beiden is just such a place. Once, Beiden was a thriving center of trade for the Empire. Built near the mouth of the pass that shared its name, all major land caravans were required to pass through Beiden at some point or other during their business ventures. It was a place where many powerful merchants built their personal empires. Beiden was the heart of trade, the pulsing heart of Rokugan's economy.

At the end of the War of Spirits, the forces of Hantei XVI and Toturi I faced one another in Beiden. Toturi's forces fell back, allowing the Steel Chrysanthemum to take the pass. In what seemed the Hantei's greatest moment of victory, Toturi's shugenja unleashed an unprecedented spell, crumbling Beiden Pass upon their enemies. The war

was won, the Chrysanthemum's armies crippled, at great cost. Rokugan's primary trade route was now gone.

In time, many of the more powerful merchant houses found other routes. The Seikitsu Pass and the prowess of Mantis sailors allowed northern and southern Rokugan to trade again... but this meant little to Beiden. Many of the poorer merchants were unable to relocate. Peasants who once survived by selling their wares to tourists now fell victim to poverty and starvation. Beiden was a pale shadow of itself, a ghost town. A new trade began to thrive here — smuggling. The city of Beiden is now a haven for those seeking a quiet, out of the way area to unload stolen or illegal goods. Such a well developed city so far from Imperial patrol routes is a rare thing, and Rokugan's underworld has taken advantage of the situation.

It is to the city of Beiden that Kyoso no Oni has come, seeking a gateway back into Rokugan.

Challenge

The party arrives in the city of Beiden. If they are magistrates, perhaps they have been dispatched here to investigate one of the many smuggling rings currently operating out of the city. If they are less honorable sorts of characters, perhaps they are smugglers in town to trade cargo. If neither applies, then they may be in town to visit a friend who lives in the area (a few honorable samurai still call Beiden home) or are merely passing through when harsh

weather conditions require that they find lodging for the evening.

The characters find shelter in a small inn on the outskirts of the city. The inn is owned by Yogo Tamaki who lives here with her daughter Mana and several servants to tend to the day-to-day work of the inn. Tamaki is generally beloved in Beiden (as beloved as one can be in such a grim place, at any rate) because she chose to maintain her inn and support the city even after many others had moved on. She is a pillar of the community, such as it is, and though she is quietly disappointed at the current state of Beiden she does not plan to abandon Beiden any time soon.

In the middle of the night, a sudden clamor echoes through the inn. It seems a priest at the temple next door has been murdered and crudely dismembered. Bloody footsteps lead away from the temple, in the direction of the inn. A handful of other such grisly murders have occurred in the city recently, and the victims have unilaterally been shugenja. This is the first time such an obvious clue has pointed to the culprit. Though no magistrates are yet investigating (assuming the player characters are not magistrates) an angry mob of local citizens has gathered outside the inn and is prepared to search the establishment if not stopped. In a town as rough as Beiden, such an action could break out into a large scale riot whether or not a culprit is found, unless quickly stopped.

As samurai, of course, the player characters have the sort of political power and physical intimidation to quell the mob if they act swiftly and decisively. Whether they are agents of justice or here for their own nefarious purposes it would behoove them to restore order (or at least get out of the way, which the mob won't let them do if they're grouped among the suspects).



Focus

The killer's identity is not difficult to determine. Tamaki's daughter, Mana, has bloodstained feet and has hidden a bloodstained kimono and dagger beneath the floor boards in her room. She seems dazed if questioned, as if in a dream. She does not recall killing the shugenja. The evidence that she did so is overwhelming, but Tamaki insists that is not enough to accuse her daughter. She refuses to believe Mana could be responsible. Some of the other villagers also become violently defensive. Tamaki is village hero — if she believes her daughter is not a killer then they are prepared to support her whether or not it is the truth.

Any character who is knowledgeable in Shadowlands Lore or skilled at communing with spirits can tell that something is seriously wrong with Mana upon examining her. The girl is pale, gaunt, and her hair is beginning to fall out in clumps. She shows symptoms of the Shadowlands Taint, though she is not actually Tainted and it is uncertain how she could become Tainted so far away from the Shadowlands.

Strike

Mana is the current host of Kyoso no Oni, the Oni Lord. Mana was deeply in love with a Lion bushi by the name of Akodo Yoshiharu, who was stationed in Beiden for many years. When Beiden Pass collapsed, Yoshiharu made every excuse possible to keep his families interests in Beiden, but eventually the smuggling and vice caused them to recall him to other duties. Mana believes that Yoshiharu left to marry another, and her dreams are filled with anger and vengeance. Kyoso has fed upon these, driving her to murder local shugenja.

The Oni Lord has convinced Mana that shugenja were responsible for destroying the pass, they are responsible for her current loss. (In truth Kyoso merely wants to eliminate as many local shugenja as possible so that there are fewer experts in the village who can recognize Mana's possession). Kyoso can possess Mana's body for brief periods of time while she sleeps, and has been surreptitiously murdering shugenja.

Kyoso no Oni is extremely close to consuming Mana's soul and returning to the mortal realm with a vengeance. At this point she merely needs to cause the death of one more innocent for her possession of

Mana's body to be complete. This is, in fact, why she was so sloppy with her recent killing. If Mana is accused and executed, not only will Kyoso have slain the last innocent soul she needs, but she will no longer need to contend with Mana's soul for dominance of her body.

Resolutions?

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this situation, with perhaps the most horrifying being the return of a banished Oni Lord to Rokugan. If the player characters can discover what is truly happening (by observing Mana until Kyoso possesses her again or by having an expert study her condition) they may be able to stop Kyoso. The easiest way to do so is for Mana to simply leave the village; so long as she is outside Beiden or any other area sown with deep feelings of bitterness and frustration, Mana is immune to Kyoso's possession. This will require Mana to leave her beloved home, however, and only drive her more deeply into sorrow and grief (making her an easier target for the Oni should they cross paths again).

A more permanent method of resolving this would be to discover what became of Mana's love. Yoshiharu is a low-ranking member of his clan; it is likely he remains unmarried even after all this time. Perhaps he still harbors feelings for Mana and wishes to be reunited with her. This option is left to the GM; if he decides Yoshiharu has remarried or never loved Mana it may make a bad situation worse and drive Mana to accept Kyoso's domination.

An especially fiendish GM may wish to have Kyoso explore the possibility of possessing one of the player characters instead. Anyone with a great desire for vengeance, especially regarding a possible lost love, will be seen as a delicious prize for the vindictive Oni Lord.

Kyoso's Possession

(d20 Version)

When directly possessed by Kyoso no Oni, Yogo Mana gains the following abilities: Damage resistance 20/+5 (jade), +6 Str, +4 Dex, +4 Con, +10 natural armor bonus and a +6 insight bonus to all attack rolls. She also gains the hit dice of a samurai equal to the average player character level plus two. She is normally an average 1st level aristocrat.

(L5R 2E Version)

When directly possessed by Kyoso no Oni, Yogo Mana gains Invulnerability and all of her physical traits (Strength, Stamina, Reflexes, Agility) are increased to 4. Her TN to be hit becomes 30. She rolls 5k4 to hit and inflicts damage by whatever weapon she wields, taking her increased strength into account. She has ten Wounds on each Wound Level. She is normally an ordinary girl with no school techniques or significant advantages.



Konnichiwa!

This is not Ray Lau, but it's an incredible simulation!

You may be noticing changes in the Herald. One shift you might have taken note of is my name and meanderings filling this noble space once perused by The Incomparable Ray Lau. As Ray gets busier and busier with managing the phenomenon that is L5R, I've been graciously handed over the duty to govern the growth of the Herald.

Along with the One-and-Only Kristy Mack, we're making plans to turn the Herald into something truly special. (Actually she does most of the work, but I got in on this editorial so I'll go ahead and steal the credit.)

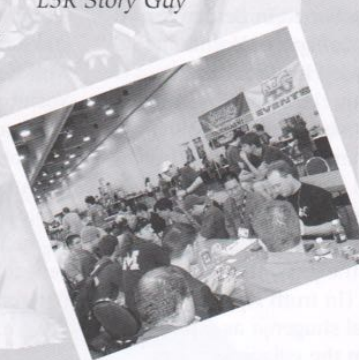
You've no doubt already been noticing changes in the Herald content of late, and can expect to see more. We're doing our best to expand player driven content, interactive RPG articles, strategy written by top-ranking Five Rings players, and include photos of our top players in action.

Our goal is to make this very exclusively your magazine. All of the content is somehow or another influenced and driven by you, the

players. We just have to do the dirty work of putting it together, laying it out, and attaching the pretty Five Rings art that we all know and love.

Anyway that's enough out of me. Time to stand back and let the Herald speak for itself.

Rich Wulf
L5R Story Guy



“KRISTY, WHERE DID YOU GET THAT CARD?” “YOU MEAN YOU KNEW SHE EXISTED?” “YES, WHERE DID YOU GET HER?”

“Kristy, where did you get that card?”

Those words still make me laugh as I can easily picture Brandon Flores sitting across the table from me asking that exact question. *That card* was Someisa. I had found her in a Heroes of Rokugan set and immediately stuck her in my Lion deck, which featured eleven other uniques with unsightly gold costs. Still not quite aware of B’s unfathomable knowledge of all things Legend of the Five Rings, my question was dense.

“You mean you knew she existed?”

Brandon and Spags, along with the rest of the crowd at Adventure Games Plus in Milwaukee, had the unfortunate task of teaching me to play L5R.

“Yes, where did you get her?”

I knew where this was going, the long speech about how she didn’t fit in the deck, cost too much gold, and the fact that I liked the card didn’t mean it actually worked in any deck, and particularly not the one I was playing. Exasperated, this was the last speech like this I ever got from Brandon.

“I like the picture and people can’t Kolat her. See, it says ‘Other players cannot target Someisa with Action cards, Political actions, Kihos, or Spells’, and she has 6 Chi.”

It was all very obvious to me why she was the best card ever and that I was always going to have her in my deck. They built me decks without her in it, so I just added her.

“It had 40 cards, what did you do with Fujimaro?”

“I don’t like him. Someisa has more Chi and *Way of the Minor Clans* says she’s a giant tortoise, what’s cooler than that?”

“I can’t argue.”

I’m positive he could have, but after me imploring him to ask someone important at AEG why Someisa was a little old lady and not a tortoise on her card, I think he gave up.

When I first started playing L5R at AGP, I was instructed to pick a Clan.

“You need a Clan. The RPG books upstairs have info about all of them.”

Sweet. After a computer tried to tell me I was a Unicorn at GenCon 2000, I was going to have my revenge on the little man who wouldn’t give me the button I wanted. Mr. “You have to have the button for the clan the machine picked.” As if there was some undisclosed rule?

Of course, the first book I pick up is ‘*Way of the Minor Clans*.’ No one tells me that there are only eight Clans in Gold to be played. The Tortoise were awesome, and I loved the stories about them. I happily marched downstairs and announced that was the Clan I wanted to play.

“You can’t, they don’t have a stronghold in Gold.”

“Okay I’ll use the old one.”

“They didn’t ever have a stronghold except for when they were part of Yoritomo’s Alliance.”

“Alright, fine, Yoritomo’s Alliance. No wait, that’s the bug. I don’t like the bug.”

“Obviously, it’s a MANTIS. You can’t play them either, they’re not in Gold.”

Sometimes Brandon isn’t really that funny.

“It really shouldn’t be in this book if I can’t play it. Well, what isn’t anyone else playing and what can I play?”

“They exist in the RPG. You can play Lion.”

So that’s how I became a Lion player in Gold. You can imagine my excitement when they started working on Diamond. You can probably also imagine the exchanges about Someisa that I had with Ray Lau.

“Is Someisa in Diamond?”

“Who?”

“Ray!”

“No.”

“Can she be dead so someone can be her Soul of?”

“She can be turtle soup.”

Ray isn’t always very funny either.

I gave up on lobbying for my favorite personality because at times you can’t be sure if Ray is serious or not.

Far from soup, Someisa is the new Dragon Sensei in *Wrath of the Emperor*. This Tortoise is off to build a Dragon deck without shugenjas.

Kristy Mack



THAT CARD WAS SOMEISA!

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TIME TO FORGE
NEW STORIES...

WEB OF LIES™

...YOURS

THE EMPEROR IS
DEPOSED, AND A
CHANCELLOR IS
ELECTED.

Falsely blaming Iuchiban's return on the Emperor's weakness, the Gozoku depose Naseru and replace him with a Chancellor under their control (to be named later, but most likely Ka-neka). Naseru flees, and from hiding begins planning to restore his rule. Iuchiban searches for a way to destroy Isawa's Last Wish.

The second expansion in the Diamond story arc, *Web of Lies*™ introduces over 150 new cards, exciting new mechanics, and the return of Sensei cards. Explore the new Mantis, Unicorn, and Phoenix strongholds, or power up your existing decks with this landmark expansion set.

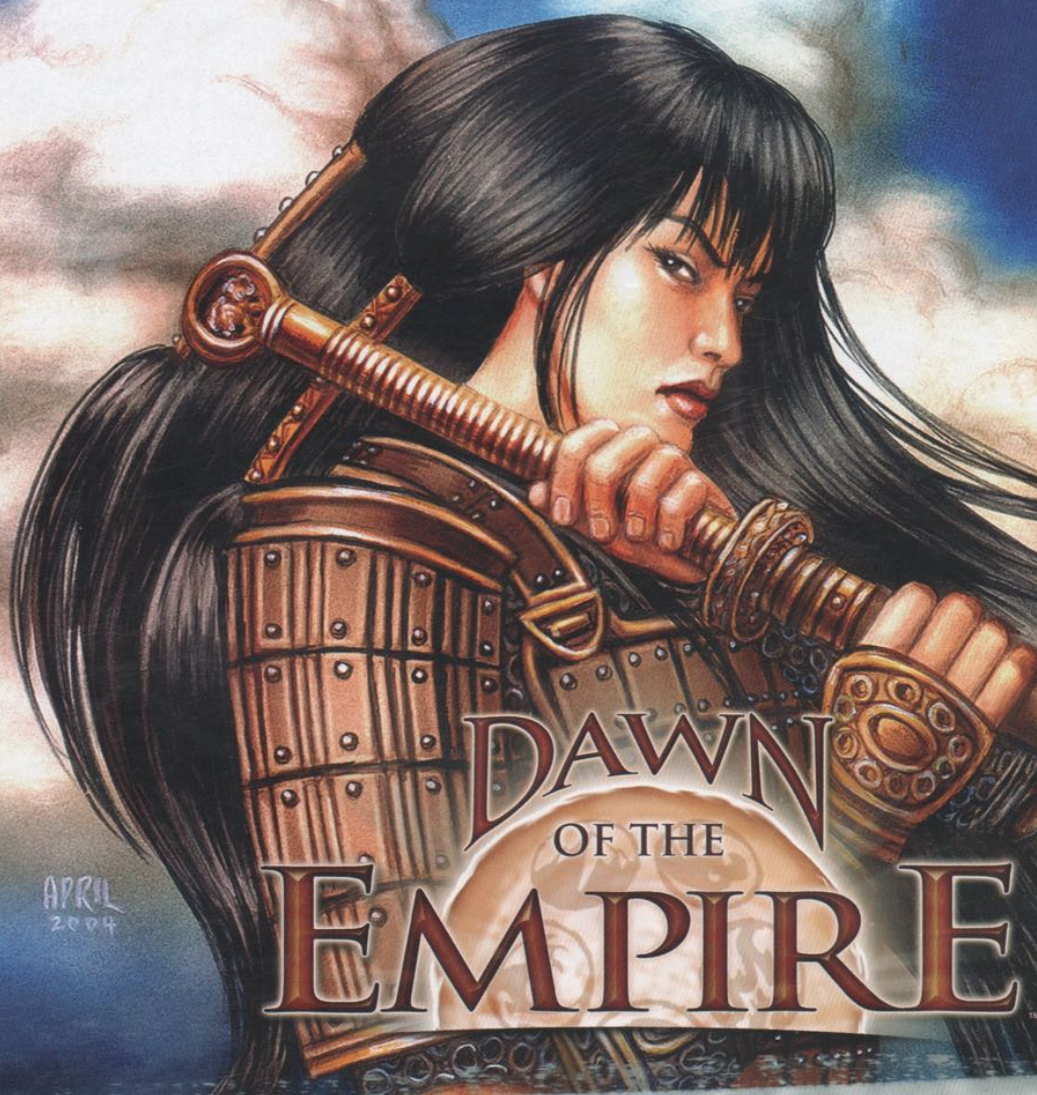
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