

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

THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

VOL. 2 ♦ NO. 25

THE RACE
FOR THE THRONE

THE ART OF WAR

L5R GRAPHIC NOVEL



Legend of the Five Rings



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SEP 2008



THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY ♦ VOL. 2 ♦ NO. 25



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Published by
Alderac Entertainment Group, Inc.

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Greetings Samurai,

Welcome to another edition of the Imperial Herald. Things have really been heating up in the Race for the Throne, and it only stands to get even more exciting as we near November. From the moment the first Assembly members received last issue and saw the ways the various Clans would target others at the end of the Race, L5R forums all over the internet have been buzzing with planning, finger pointing, theorizing, and more. This type of excitement is exactly what we hope to give you with L5R now and going forward. Though we won't be doing another Race for the Throne, we already have another great interactive mega-game in mind for the future. It will be played very different, but will still give all the great ways to represent your Clan.

In this issue you'll get your first look at the new Burning Sands RPG book, as well as an early look at the Art of War, our L5R board game (formerly known as Emperor), more adventures of the Gempukku Gang in our comic, and more cards for koku.

We'll see you at the shows this summer!

Todd C. Rowland
Brand Manager, Legend of the Five Rings



BY TODD C. ROWLAND

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

A LOOK BACK AT THE RACE SO FAR

The Race for the Throne has been a great source of excitement for L5R players. From eagerly watching for event results to keeping a constant update on Clan positions, L5R players cannot stop talking about the Race. Deals have been brokered among Clans, some bad blood has developed, and there has been more than a little diplomacy between certain members of Clans online. However, it all changed with the release of the last issue of the Herald.

It would not be a stretch to say the method of receiving the new Emperor's wrath sent some shockwaves through the community. Clans desperately tried to figure out how many points they would need to avoid being on the bottom in the various likely scenarios. There were even a few voices of dissent at the whole process, but we believe that putting this level of competition

between the Clans on a much larger scale, moving beyond simply the tournament competition, is a natural evolution of L5R.

Legend of the Five Rings has always been about being a member of your Clan. When you play Lion and declare them as your Clan, you are a Lion. And what do Clans in L5R do? They fight amongst each other. Now we have been able to come up with ways for the "Clans" to compete on a much larger level than they ever had as simply players in CCG tournaments.

THE SHOCKER

From the beginning of the Race, the Scorpion and Dragon have worked together. The Scorpion have been in the lead, closest to the Emperor position, while the Dragon work working for the lead in Spirit. However, upon the revelation that

Scorpion would target second place, this alliance was quite shaken. Several Scorpion online asked the Dragon players to back off in the Race, for their own good of course, to allow another Clan to take 2nd. The Dragon players were not happy at all with that suggestion, after the work they had put into the Race. They finally agreed to both fight for first place, and all teamwork appears to have come to a halt.

The other Clans easily look upon this as a chance to cut away at both of those Clans' points, and many new alliances have risen up as Clans make deals and jockey for position. When the current leg comes to an end, and Clans trade positions in the Race, expect to see a lot of alliances breaking and changing again as the threat shifts from Clan to Clan.

A very interesting turn of events was the fourth leg temptation, in which the Spider chose to accept a story event where the lowest ranked Clan in Knowledge during the fifth leg would publicly accept the Spider Clan as a Great Clan. The other Clans, upon learning what the Temptation offered, have since begun to scramble to gain Knowledge points, none of them wishing to be publicly associated with the Spider. Spider players, in the meantime, very much enjoy the spectacle.

AFTER THE RACE

Eventually, the Race will come to an end. A new Emperor will sit upon the throne of the Emerald Empire and one Clan will have suffered his wrath. Many have speculated on what the next "Race" will

be. We can say with certainty that it will not be another "Race.". The Race for the Throne has been a monumental event in L5R history, possibly the single greatest moment of player interaction ever. To attempt to catch that fire again would only leave disappointment. Plus, we at AEG prefer to keep inventing new things for the players.

We have already determined the structure of our next mega-event, and it will play very different from the manner in which you competed in the Race for the Throne. It will not follow immediately on the heels of the Race, the Emerald Empire needs a breather! However, 2009 will see the beginnings of the...



Come on, you didn't think we'd tell you yet. We did have a lot of fun crafting it, and we are very excited about how well it fits into where the storyline will be at that time.

Very exciting times ahead for L5R!

THE KOTEI

By Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

Every year it seems to come earlier, and it never fails to get everybody excited. No, I am not talking about Spring or the start of the football season, but about L5R's Kotei season. The Kotei season truly is one of those times when the L5R community comes together: players will sit in front of their computers for hours, hitting the F5 key every thirty seconds, rooting for a guy whose name they don't even know simply because he happens to be playing Phoenix; they will drive across state lines (or, for us Euros, across whole countries) just to play in a Kotei; in some extreme cases, they will fly across half the planet on their way to winning the South African event.

Of course, this year the Race for the Throne adds to the general excitement. Two whole weeks without a single Lion win? Will anyone take advantage of it to catch up with them in the military sphere? And what about the Scorpion's stranglehold over politics? Will their loss to Lion in leg 4 mark the end of their run for Chancellor, or is it just a temporary setback? Now more than ever, players rally around Clan loyalty, cheering for their Clan mates or, more and more often, for the underdog that suddenly finds itself with the opportunity to take down one of the leaders of the Race: it is not uncommon to hear "Go Spider!" coming from players who would otherwise never touch a Shadowlands or Dark Virtue card with a ten-foot pole.

When it comes to game balance, everybody agrees that Samurai is the best environment L5R has ever seen. As of this writing, about two thirds of the Kotei have taken place, and the only Clan that has yet to win an event is the Hare Clan (and I am afraid it will remain so until the end of the season). Of course, not everything is perfect: some Clans have scored more wins than others, and the Spider Clan had to wait until week 8 of the season to finally win in Moscow. However, there is no clear dominance by any one or two Clans, and even at the top tables of any given tournament, diversity seems to be the rule. So let us see who has won so far, and why.

When Samurai Edition was first revealed to the public, some players feared that the emphasis put on the Attack Phase would turn L5R into what was dubbed "Bushido brawl": an environment where military decks would slug it out in battle and where Control and Honor would all but disappear. GenCon and the European Championships showed

that those fears were unfounded, with Scorpion Dishonor winning the whole thing in Indianapolis and coming up one game short of making a repeat performance in Madrid. The Scorpion Clan has posted some strong results so far this season and is currently tied for first place with six Kotei wins, almost all of which coming at the hand of Dishonor players. Scorpion is not the only Clan with a strong non-military deck though: the Dragon Clan is also standing pretty with five wins and countless top 4s so far, mostly thanks to its great Rings Honor deck out of Mountain Summit Temple. The deck relies heavily on Hoshi Masujiro to gain lots and lots of Honor quickly, and has access to some of the best defensive tricks in the environment with Strike of the Dragon and the Ring of Earth/The Elements' Path combo. With a fast clock that is hard to disrupt and a solid defence, it is one of the most solid decks around.

The environment therefore seems to be partly defined by its non-military decks: most decks have to be as fast as the Dishonor and Honor decks, or be able to disrupt them, to stand a chance against them. The best Clan at doing both is probably Lion, which is tied with Scorpion at six wins so far. With its high Starting Honor and its ability to gain Honor throughout the game (especially when played out of Vigilance Keep), the Lion Clan is well equipped to fight Dishonor decks and can sometimes outpace Dragon; its access to "harpoon" actions that drag the enemy into battle also allows it to dispose of otherwise annoying Personalities like Bayushi Saya and Hoshi Masujiro. Of course, the best army of the Empire is also able to take on military decks thanks to its high-quality Personalities and to its ability to "toolbox" some of the best actions in the game.

The Unicorn Clan has also had some great success this season, for not-so-different reasons. Thanks to its high-Force Cavalry Personalities and its easy access to attachments, it can threaten unopposed provinces early, giving it a speed akin to that of Lion's. And just like its nemesis, the Unicorn Clan can disrupt its opponent's ability to play the game by taking care of its Personalities, either permanently with Hired Killer, or temporarily with cards like Sake House Brawl or even Paper to Steel and Private Whispers in Shugenja-heavy builds. Against military decks, having access to the Cavalry keyword and to one of the best Strongholds in the



environment also gives the Unicorn an edge. Plus, a turn three Moto Chagatai is never good news for the opponent.

Trailing those four Clans, we have the Crab and Phoenix Clans, with three wins each. While the Crabs are formidable in military matchups thanks to their huge Personalities, their great Stronghold and their resilience to both destruction and bowing, they sometimes have trouble overcoming Honor and Dishonor opponents, not being as fast as Lion or as able to avoid early opposition as Unicorn. Phoenix's strengths and weaknesses are different: while they are able to field both solid Honor and military decks, they tend to suffer from some instability, relying too much on key cards or combos. However, well-built, well-played, and with the proper matchups, Brilliant Rebirth Temple can be a great military deck with access to some of the best Personalities in the environment.

Finally, we come to the Clans that have won once or twice only so far. The Crane Clan has won once in South America and once in Europe, a result that may seem surprising: with Shizuka Toshi, Crane players have access to an Honor deck that is almost as fast as Dragon's and less prone to self-destruction, and I have seen some scary Kyuden Kyoten Control decklists (including the one that won the Starplayer event in France right before the season started). Crane probably suffers from its vulnerability to Unicorn and, depending on the version, other Honor decks, as well as a certain weakness against Dishonor.

The Mantis is another Clan that has only won twice, which is not as surprising as Crane. While they have one of the best Strongholds in the environment with Eastern Hub Port as well as some great Personalities, their reliance on attachments

means that if their opponent is able to deal with a few big Personalities, the game is going to be difficult to win. With a large portion of their Fate deck dedicated to attachments, they also tend to have little access to meta to make up for their weaknesses.

In last place, we find the Spider Clan: as I am writing this, they just won their first Kotei in Moscow. The Spider Clan's main weakness is that it is aiming for the wrong environment: with The Spider's Lair and its big Personalities, it is a formidable opponent for other military decks, but seems to be too slow to reliably beat Honor and Dishonor decks — especially given its innate vulnerability to Dishonor. If the environment was dominated by military decks, Spider would be a top player; however, with Dragon Rings Honor and Scorpion Dishonor being as strong as they are, the Spider Clan finds itself in the uncomfortable situation of often having to face its worst matchup in the elimination rounds.

So what have we learned from this rapid overview? Given the strength of non-military decks in the current environment, it is almost impossible to disregard them during deck construction if you aim to win a major event. This of course does not mean that you should dedicate ten slots of your Fate deck to winning the Honor matchup: by doing so, you would end up harming your military matchup way too much. As usual, the key here is balance. If you can find a deck that consistently beats non-military and is still able to go toe-to-toe with military decks, you are golden. With Words and Deeds on the horizon, keeping those guidelines in mind while building with the new cards could help you get an early advantage in the last few legs of the Race.

Loki

Systems, Knowledge, Interactions

Systems

For those who have days, or months, or years of experience behind them, the process of designing, refining, and competing with a deck is less and less a breathless experience, fraught with incomprehension and wonder, and more and more the realised outcome of a number of interrelated factors. Nevertheless, a deck begins with an urge or an insight, each alternating with the other, possibly many times over, until a design takes form. But whatever the ultimate configuration, it will always be described in terms of the rules, mechanics, and cards that constitute the game system.

All games are goal-oriented systems. 'Goal-oriented' simply means that there is a condition that each player is trying to achieve, and, in Legend of the Five Rings, victory can be attained in one of four ways: Dishonor, Enlightenment, Honor, and Military. As all games are systems, they have rules, which determine how each element of that system interacts

with every other element. The cards themselves are the major focus of interactions within L5R, and can certainly be considered the main 'actors' within the game.

What this means in concrete terms is that it is important to realise you are dealing with

Jargon Definition: For the purposes of this article, think of an "actor" as anything within the game which either changes, or can change the current state of play, or which exerts a critical influence on a player's decision-making process. For example, the fact that a player has only province left can be considered an 'actor.' It's a strange notion to come to grips with, but with so many aspects of the game being inter-connected, it makes more sense as you go along.

systems, rules, and actors. This is not always an easily digestible perspective, especially not when it comes to a game with such a romantic and involving background. But being able to divorce yourself from more emotionally appealing factors will allow you to analyze the systems more dispassionately and effectively; and, ultimately, more successfully.

It is the capacity to manipulate the interactions between available cards to best effect that will determine the winner or loser

in any given game. These manipulations begin before any game even starts, with the design and construction of a deck; and the best chances of consistent victory are established now. Unfortunately, a great degree of awareness of other clans' capabilities is a key component at this stage, meaning that decks constructed without it are less likely to be competitive at the highest levels. Once you have constructed a deck, you will then pit it against other decks to see who is king of the heap. A successful deck will almost always focus



on trying to monopolise a specific set of dynamics to set up a game-winning advantage. That is not to say that a

deck that looks to work across many dynamics will fail; nevertheless, it is reasonably true to say that the most dynamic-specific decks are generally the most successful.

At the play level, when you get down to it, you are looking to manipulate the interactions that appear on the table before you. The cards on the table represent shared information that all players have access to. The cards in your hand represent information only you know for certain.

At the start of the game, the number of possible interactions and choices is very small: there is only a small number of ways that every available card can change how the game is proceeding. As the game develops, and more and more cards become relevant, the number of possible interactions between those cards grows, and so the state of the game becomes more complex and demanding. So, while deck construction will determine the range of possible interactions, the cards on the table and in hand very much determine the range of actual interactions

If you understand the importance of those interactions, which improves the more environmental knowledge you have, you can focus on the key weaknesses of your opponent's deck. And, with an advanced understanding of the principles at work in the game, and a steady nerve, it is even possible to defeat odds that are stacked against you.

Jargon Definition: "Environmental knowledge" is knowing what other clans can do, how they do those things, and may extend to how each clan can (or cannot) counter each strategy. "Meta-gaming" is the specific application of that knowledge in trying to anticipate and best adjust to what you expect to face.

Knowledge

Interactions



HEROES OF ROKUGAN 2008 REPORT

By Claudia Hall

What's going on with HoR?

2008 promises to be an exciting year for Heroes of Rokugan (HoR), as the campaign is growing and events are heating up. For those of you that have not heard of HoR before, it is a role-playing campaign that uses Legend of the Five Rings, 3rd Ed. It is set 350 years ahead of the current card timeline, in a divergent timeline from the actual canon, and it gives players the chance to create a personality in Rokugan, role-playing out the tragedy and triumph of being a Samurai in the Empire. While it may not be part of canon L5R storyline, such as having a continued Toturi Dynasty, it does allow us to craft the storyline to the events of the Heroes of Rokugan events rather than forcing it to follow the main storyline.

Where's the action?

HoR will be at Origins, GenCon, DragonCon and CogCon this year, and GenCon looks to be our biggest yet with lots of new tabletop modules, a LARP, and a battle-interactive where the players get to impact the war between the Clans. Additionally, if you can't wait for the next con to get your fix, we do authorize certain modules for home play. Details for that are on the website <http://www.heroes-of-rokugan.com>.

How can I play?

Players do not play card personalities, instead they can choose to create a character according to the rules on the website, <http://www.heroes-of-rokugan.com/charactercreation.html> or they can grab a quick-play template and get started right away. *Please note, the life of a samurai is filled with difficult moral conflicts about how to live out Bushido. Because of this mature tone, we discourage players under 18.* Having said that, the basic mechanics of the game are very simple. Only 10-sided dice are used, and all of our GM's are happy to work with you to help you understand the rules. We do not insist that people know all the rules before they play, just that they come and have fun.

What's the story thus far?

It is the year 1502 of the Imperial Calendar, the nineteenth year of the reign of Toturi XII, the Joyous Prince, sometimes called the Sapphire Emperor. After the chaotic early decades of the Toturi dynasty, the Empire has in recent years enjoyed an age of stability and relative peace. The threat from the Shadowlands has faded, the Gozoku are a scandalous rumor expunged from the Imperial histories, the ruins of Otosan Uchi have been cleansed, and the terrible trials and struggles of the Four Winds are a tale fading into the mists of the past. In the last three decades, even the "normal" wars Rokugan is used to have stopped under relentless diplomatic pressure from Miya Shikan, the Imperial Herald.

But all golden ages are destined to end...

Indeed, it seems it has. At the moment in our timeline, the Crab and Scorpion stand at the brink of war, and the other Clans are negotiating to see whose side they will be on when war breaks out. Various leaders have gone missing or are demonstrating bizarre behaviors, and there are rumors of a great force beginning to marshal deep in the Shadowlands. All this happening at a time when Oracles and shugenja are warning that the favor of Heaven has waned from the land. Also worrisome, Gaijin influences are spreading across Rokugan and many fear that the entire Celestial Order is in grave jeopardy. This is a time for ordinary men and women to come forward, serve bravely, die gallantly, and become Heroes of Rokugan.

Which Clan will you serve? How will live out the Code of Bushido in such conflicted times? Can you choose between right and wrong when everything is shades of gray?

Come join us at our summer conventions and see if what Shinsei said is true "Even one can turn the tide of destiny."

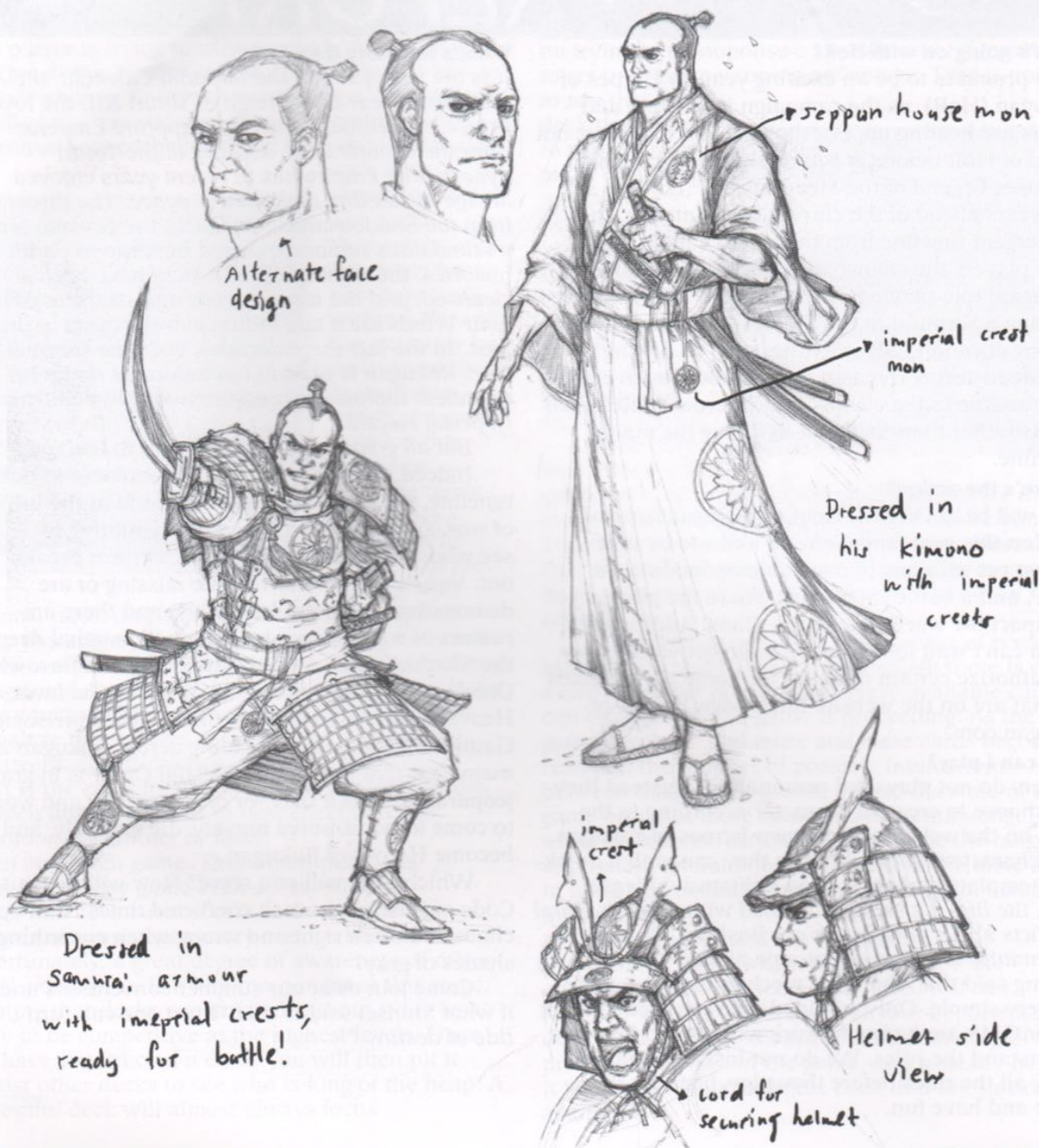
THE L5R GRAPHIC NOVEL

BY TODD C. ROWLAND

At Gen Con 2008, L5R fans who attend the L5R Seminar will be treated to a sneak preview of the first ever L5R Graphic Novel. They will see color pages, as well as a look at the various characters in the story, among the many other upcoming L5R products they will learn about.

The Graphic Novel is slated to release in early 2009. Yes, this is a change from the date of November previously announced. This is our first graphic novel,

and we're experiencing the growing pains of adding a new product to our resume. However we couldn't let another issue of the Herald go by without giving you a look at the awesome artwork we have received so far. Please note that these are early development drawings; the final novel will be full color. We hope you enjoy this sneak peek and that it makes you anticipate the finished novel as much as we do!





THE ART OF WAR

BY jim pinto

The rumors are finally coming true. Art of War is coming.

No.

We mean it this time.

AEG has spent two years to bring you the best board game adaptation of the Legend of the Five Rings game world. As you might suspect, Art of War reflects the conflicts of the great clans on a Strategic level. Everything you are used to is in the game — archers, bushi, cavalry, daimyo, shugenja, and even important strongholds and holdings — with more surprises to come in 2009.

But maybe we're moving too fast. I'm sure you'd like to know about the game that's coming in 2008 first. Right?

Okay. Let's see.

Digging through box.

This little shrine thing looks like an objective token. Okay. I'll explain that first.

Each player takes on leadership of one of the six great clans.

Did he say six?

Yeah. Scorpion are in hiding at the beginning of the Clan War. Remember?

Oh. Right. Go on.

The objective of the game is to control five objective markers. Each clan starts with two, but

these can be lost to your enemy if you're not careful. Three more are hidden on the board in nine different locations. So you have a lot of work ahead of you to find them all.

And you can't just send in adventurers to find them, either. Armies have to go in to secure them. But don't worry, too much. The imperial favor reveals one per turn.

That's right. The imperial favor is also in the Art of War board game. Bidding for and gaining the favor is similar to what you're used to, except that it costs Koku... and one of your units. I really can't say much more than that right now. You want to read it yourself, right?

What else is in this box?

Oooh. Six different miniatures for each of the clans. These are nice. No. I'm not going to show them to you, either. Are there no surprises left in the world.

Okay. Here's a picture of part of the map. Notice how the Scorpion are on the map, but you can't play them yet. That's important. It means no clumsy map sections later in the expansion process.

We did that for you. You can thank us later.

Oh. There's strategy cards, too. 10 for each clan. And because of the way the game works, you can have as many as you want. Really. Buy 20 copies of the game and give yourself a 200 card deck, we don't care.

Seriously, though. You have to "purchase" strategy cards in order to play them, so no matter how big your deck, it doesn't affect playability. Which means there will be more strategy cards in future expansions.

Expansions? Plural?

Yes.

We have at least two expansions planned for 2009, alone. You didn't think the Board Game would stop giving you the most of Rokugan, did you?

What else can I tell you about the game? Clan screens. You'll see those when you get the game. Dice. Meh. Dice are dice, right? Tray. Tokens. Oh. Right. The clans? I assume you like the clans, right?

Let's see. Each one plays a little different and while there will be strategy tips in future issues of the Herald, I'm just going to wet your appetite with the basics for now. You can ask Todd more later. He loves e-mail.

The Crab protect the wall. You know that much. But their leaders are hard to kill and their units are generally stubborn. It takes a lot to kill these guys and one Crab unit is certainly worth two of anyone else. But, they don't have a lot of money and their Daimyo do not work cheap. Expect to move slowly from the gate.



The Crane have blistering leaders who cut down their enemy before they can act and their Koku production is unparalleled in the game. But, they are near the center of the board and that makes growing out difficult. When the Scorpion show up, their work will be doubly difficult.

The Dragon are good at everything and great at nothing. This means they must strike balance in gameplay. Surrounded by mountains, they are hard to kill, but once they are pinned down, they are hard to breakout as well. Which means the Dragon have to be smart about their opening placement and allies.

The Lion have a unique game set-up. Since they are the Austria-Hungary of Rokugan, they are surrounded on all sides by enemies and therefore start with a number of units based on the number of other players. The bigger the game, the more territory they can start with, but the more enemies they start with. They also have access to Strategy cards cheaper than anyone else and have leaders who rely on a wide array of tactics.

The Phoenix shugenja are obviously the most powerful in the game, attacking some units half a board away. And even their daimyo and bushi buffer these magical abilities. Which is key, since the Phoenix start so far from the rest of empire. But against enemies with deep armies or high defense, the Phoenix are most vulnerable.

The Unicorn posses the fastest movement and the ability to break through enemy lines. A vitally important ability on a board filled with enemy units. But extended too far,

the Unicorn cavalry can be cut down by masses of reserve and rear-echelon units. Their true weakness is enemies like the Crab, who can stop their advances and absorb their blows.

Art of War takes the L5R experience to a new level, eliminating some of the tactical elements, while broadening the strategic macro view of the Emerald Empire.

Designed for 3-6 players, Art of War's sweet spot is 4-6. But really, the more clans that challenge the throne, the better.

Expect to pay more than \$2 for a game like this.



THE FIRES OF PEACE

By Rusty Priske

Hida Haruko stood at her post, looking across the low, wide valley. She could see the Crane encampment in the distance. It was far enough that neither side could span the distance with an arrow and any advancement could trigger an equal reaction without any chance of surprise. Thus, she watched and waited.

Haruko knew little of why the Crab fought the Crane. She only knew that Lord Kuon demanded it and it was her duty to obey. There was talk that they fought over the Yasuki, but it did not matter to her. She was not afraid to die at the orders of her Champion, but she also knew that she should, that she would, take many Crane down before she fell. That there would be much death the next day was not in question. The outcome was also assured, and that was a victory for the Crab. There were no doubts in her mind.

As focused as she was, Haruko could not hide her surprise when the large warrior appeared seemingly out of nowhere a mere ten yards from where she stood. It was not possible for the Crane to get that close without her seeing them, and this brute of a man did not have the bearing of a Crane anyway.

"Do not take another step or you will learn what it means to be an enemy of the Crab!"

The large man extended his hands, open palms forward, in a gesture of peace, or at least non-hostility. "I am no enemy of the Crab. I bring an envoy to your general."

As Haruko watched the mysterious man, a much smaller figure stepped out from behind him. The fact that the Crab did not see the second figure was no surprise as she was a fraction of his size. Her clan colors and mon gave her identity away immediately but she left no doubt as she announced her presence, "Please tell Hida Sozen that Isawa Ochiai would have an audience with him. It is of the greatest importance."



Normally Masakazu, Isawa Ochiai's hulking yojimbo and the former advisor to the shogun, Kaneka, was the largest person in the room. In this tent, the distinction was not so clear. Hida Sozen had the ability to fill a tent with his presence, beyond what his already large frame would indicate. He was possibly second only to Hida Kuon in this regard.

"And what business would an Elemental Master have on any field of battle, much less one that has no bearing on the Phoenix?" Sozen preferred to dispense with pleasantries and he clearly did not appreciate the presence of the shugenja. Though she had no appreciation for the Phoenix, the sheer enormity of the distaste in his voice forced her to look away.

"I have come to offer my aid in mediation."

Sozen thought for a moment and then said, "Mediation? I do not think this is the place for that. Leave that for the courts."

Ochiai looked up at the much larger man, not intimidated. "Would the words of the courts stay your hand? Would the Crab trust that a court mediated accommodation would have their best interests at heart?"

Sozen snorted. "Between the Crane and the Scorpion, we have no friends in court."

"Then let me help you end this war."

"You make a big assumption, Phoenix." Sozen placed his hand on the hilt of his katana. "You assume that we seek an end to this war. There will be peace once the Crane withdraw completely from our lands. Or there will be peace when those Crane left have been separated from the burden of life. I appreciate what you are trying to accomplish, but not all paths are for all people. I bring war to this land at the order of Hida Kuon. My reason for existing is to fell my enemies. I am a bringer of death and my purpose will not be thwarted."

Ochiai looked up at Sozen. "I am sorry to hear that. War may be a burden for bushi to bear, but the Empire is not served by the wanton destruction of this war."

"The Empire? The Empire is a construct of man. Strength of arm and the edge of blade are gifts given to us from our ancestors. How is the Empire not served by using what our ancestors have given us? Can you tell me that the Crane wish peace? Do they not want to join in arms across the field of battle and find their own way to enlightenment? Your mission will be fruitless, Phoenix."

"Enlightenment? I know many who would be appalled that you equate your bloodlust with enlightenment. It is no more enlightenment than fire is sky or water is earth."

Sozen smirked slightly. "Are they not? I was once a Dragon and I was taught that all things are one. The sky is fire and the earth is the sea, no?"

Ochiai shook her head slowly. "Do you truly wish have a discussion about the nature of the world and the kami in all things?"

Sozen laughed. "I know when to concede to a better. There is no question that you have a better understanding of such things than I have. However, if you wish to discuss the meaning and purpose of death, I defer to no one, shugenja or samurai." He paused before saying, "We are not going to stand down. If you wish this war to end, convince the Crane to withdraw their claim to our lands."



Daidoji Teruo sat on the floor of his commander's tent. He looked over the reports of the make-up of the Crab troops. He tried to find flaws for the Crane to exploit. Every army had its strengths and weaknesses. A general who understood this could increase the effectiveness of his own force greatly. Strength against strength gave victory to the strongest. Strength against weakness gave victory to the smartest.

"Teruo-sama?"

He glanced up at the Crane samurai entering the tent. "What is it?"

"Our camp has been approached by an envoy from the Phoenix."

Teruo looked up. "The Phoenix?"

"Yes, Teruo-sama. It is Isawa Ochiai and her yojimbo."

"The Master of Fire? What does she want?"

"She requested an audience with Daidoji Zoushi."

Teruo mulled this for a moment. "Escort her here, but stall. Bring her in five minutes."

The samurai sentry bowed and left the tent. He moved through the encampment to where he left Ochiai and Masakazu, guarded but not threatened by three samurai. "Isawa-sama, I am to escort you to the command tent. I am afraid the invitation was extended to only you. Your yojimbo can wait here until the meeting is concluded."

Masakazu pulled himself to his full height. "That is unacceptable."

Ochiai motioned for the great man to remain quiet. "I am afraid, Doji-san, that Masakazu must accompany me. He has sworn an oath and I would not want him to feel that he has violated it."

"I assure both of you that you are in no danger in this camp. If you do nothing to work against Crane interests, nothing will threaten you here."

"That is appreciated and understood, but I am afraid that Masakazu's oath does not allow such distinctions. He must maintain his vigil, whether

there is an apparent threat or not."

The sentry considered Ochiai's words and then bowed. "I am sure that my commander does not wish to stand in the way of such an important oath. If you will both accompany me, I will take you there directly."

As they made their way through the encampment Ochiai quickly realized that their path was anything but direct. They followed their escort as they wound through the rows of tents and cook fires. At one point she realized that they had passed a certain tent more than once. She kept her revelation to herself, though the look of unease on her Masakazu's face made her aware that he had come to the same conclusion. The Crane were stalling.

Finally they reached the command tent. Their escort announced them and they were ushered in to see someone other than who Ochiai was expecting. After bowing, Daidoji Teruo introduced himself.

Ochiai returned the bow and said, "My apologies, but I understood that Daidoji Zoushi was commanding this army."

Teruo bowed again. "The apologies are mine, Ochiai-sama. Zoushi-sama has other duties at the moment, which do not allow him the luxury and honor of receiving you. I hope I can be of some service in his stead."

Ochiai suppressed a frown. "I do not know if that will be possible. Do you have the authority to negotiate the cessation of fighting?"

As much as he tried to hide it, the surprise was apparent on Teruo's face. "Cessation of...? I am not sure what you are asking."

"I have come to attempt mediation between the two sides of this war before violence escalates any further."

"I'm afraid that..." Teruo tailed off before asking, "If you do not mind me asking, Isawa-sama, what is your interest in this matter? I had thought that if the Phoenix were to enter into the conflict, it would be on the side of the Crane, not as a mediator."

Ochiai shook her head. "My goal is to limit violence, not take part in it. I wish to help the two sides find a way towards peace."

A curtain at the back of the tent parted and a broad-shouldered man in heavy armor walked through. "A noble, yet fruitless cause."

Teruo bowed but Ochiai did not. "Zoushi-san. Other duties?"

"I am sorry for the deception, Isawa-sama, but wartime breeds caution." Zoushi turned to Teruo, "Thank you. I will continue this meeting with the Master of Fire." Teruo bowed and departed.

Ochiai never moved. "Now, Zoushi-san, can we discuss ending this war?"

The veteran shook his head. "We cannot. The Crab have done too much for us to allow it to go unpunished. Hida Kuon has spoken out against the word of Doji Kurohito. We can not allow him to accuse our former champion of deceiving the Splendid Emperor."

"Yet when I speak to the Crab, they claim this war is about your claims over Yasuki soil."

"That may be what it is to the Crab, but we have more important concerns."

Ochiai stared at Zoushi for a moment. "So nothing short of an apology from Hida Kuon would suffice?"

Zoushi shrugged. "An apology that will not come. Even if it were to come today, I am not sure we would not still fight tomorrow."

"Your pride is worth more than the lands over which you battle and the lives of your men? The Crane weaken themselves for little reason."

Zoushi shook his head. "Little reason? We have many reasons. We may march because Kuon insulted Doji Kurohito, but we fight because we fight. This war started when Kuon questioned the word of the Crane Champion, but we fight because no insult can go unavenged. The glory of the Crane Clan is, as always, paramount. Have you not heard of Sozen's violation of Shinden Asahina?"

"That was at the behest of the Jade Champion, not the Crab."

Zoushi eyed Ochiai levelly. "Do not consider me so naive, as I do not consider you such. The Crab have struck blows that ache and fester. A simple apology will not dress those wounds."

Ochiai sighed. "So you will not accept peace?"

"Is peace offered? Are you telling me that Hida Kuon has come to apologize to the Crane? Has he come to apologize to Doji Domotai and the spirit of her deceased father? Has he come with the head of Hida Sozen as an offering of peace?"

Ochiai said nothing.

"And what would Kuon ask in exchange for such an apology?"

"The Crane would need to withdraw all claims to the Yasuki and its lands."

Zoushi's mouth was a grim line. "So an apology for Kuon's accusation that Doji Kurohito lied about the Crane claim to the Yasuki in exchange for the Crane admitting it was a lie, in action if not in word."

"It is not so simple. Is peace not worth a compromise?"

Zoushi stared at Ochiai for a moment before saying, "Is not honor worth all our lives? I am sorry that your efforts have gone for naught, Isawa-sama, but there will be war tomorrow. There will be bloodshed. There is nothing you can do to stop it."



"Have they learned nothing from Toshi Ranbo?" Ochiai's expression was one of grieved resignation.

Masakazu shrugged and appeared as if he was going to say something but stopped.

"I cannot abide senseless death."

Her yojimbo was finally unable to refrain from speaking. "Maybe they do not see it as senseless."

"They are so eager to shed blood for honor, and so eager to forget the greater honor lies in victory without war. We have offered our aid and it has been refused. They clearly are unwilling to make the attempt."

Masakazu shrugged again. "There are worse reasons than theirs to go to war."

"That does not make it acceptable. I will not stand by while death fills these fields — not when there is yet something that might yet be done to stop it."

Masakazu's eyes narrowed. He fingered the hilt of his sword in its saya and said, "What will you do?"

"Your charge is a wise woman," a voice said. "She knows what must be done."

Masakazu turned toward the voice with a frown. He made a show of bowing, but not as deeply as was proper. "Shiba Tsukimi-sama," he said. "It is generally unwise to sneak up on me."

"My yojimbo means no offense," Ochiai said. "He considers his duty sacrosanct. There was no threat implied in his statement."

Tsukimi did not smile. "I was not concerned."

Ochiai's smile was thin. "Masakazu, please excuse us for a moment."

The giant man turned and glanced at Tsukimi, then shrugged. "As you wish."

Ochiai watched him retreat. "I know what must be done, you said. I am not certain that is true."

"I have no doubt that it is," Tsukimi returned.

"You know exactly what must be done. You simply wish that it were not so. You would not be who you are, you would not be the leader that you are."

The little Master of Fire shook her head slowly. "I have spent the entire day among the populations of two clans, preaching against violence. How can I embrace it now? How can ordering the intervention of the Phoenix military be the right choice?"

"You did it once before," the Champion reminded her. "You sent the Phoenix into Toshi Ranbo. What was the result?"

"We earned the disdain of virtually an entire Empire," Ochiai said, a faint hint of bitterness to her voice.



"That is not what I mean, and you know it," Tsukimi said reprovingly. "Lives were lost, but how many fewer than would have been if you had not made the choice to intervene?" She pointed to the field that would become a battlefield at first light. "How many will die out there tomorrow? Thousands?"

"Possibly more," Ochiai said, her voice just above a whisper.

"We can stop that. We can reduce it to hundreds. Perhaps even dozens." Tsukimi placed her hands on her hips. "That choice cannot be wrong."

"They will find another reason, on another day, in another field," Ochiai said. "They have told me as much. The death cannot be prevented, only delayed."

"I will die one day," Tsukimi said. "That is inevitable. I suppose then, since it cannot be changed, that I should simply return home and wait for it." She brushed her hair back from where the wind had blown it in her face. "Even if these men must kill one another, even if this war will not be easily put aside, or even if there is another that will take its place, what will happen if this battle is not halted?"

"It will lead to another, and then another," Ochiai said. "The land they fight over will be damaged beyond repair, and will be rendered infertile for generations to come."

"How many lives beyond those of the soldiers will be lost?"

The Master of Fire lowered her head. "I do not know."

"They will stop of their own accord until one clan is crippled," Tsukimi said. "And the victor, such as they will be, will be in such poor condition that they might as well have lost the war themselves. Two clans brought low, and thousands starving in the process." She shook her head. "Can you turn away from something like that, knowing that we might have been able to prevent it?"

"We will fail," Ochiai said.

"Then we fail knowing that we were true to the soul of the Phoenix." The Champion waited for a moment. "My forces are a day's travel from here. If we march through the night, we can be ready to intervene when they take the field at first light."

Ochiai was silent for several long moments. A tear rolled down her cheek. "Give the order," she said softly.

A Look North

This summer AEG proudly releases the Legend of the Burning Sands RPG Sourcebook. This is the first look at the strange lands to the north of Rokugan, and the many varied cultures and creatures that inhabit this inhospitable place. We invite you now to look at this sneak preview of the Senpet, the glorious empire of the Pharaoh and the Ten-Thousand Gods.

The Senpet Overview

The Burning Sands is a dangerous wasteland of fire and death. Those who survive in that land must find a source of water and a way to hide from the heat of the Sun. The Senpet Empire, located on the western edge of the desert, is a civilization that grew and flourished despite all the circumstances that would threaten its existence.

Half of the Senpet Empire, or the Empire of the Scarab as they are also known, exists on the desert itself, while the rest of the Empire exists on arable land. Occasional rainfall and two large rivers have kept the people of the Scarab alive for over a thousand years. They have built a sophisticated civilization around the worship of the Ten Thousand Gods. The Senpet believe that the Ten Thousand Gods control all aspects of the world, and each attempt to advise the people on how to live. It is simply a pity that only the Senpet are wise enough to listen to their words.

The Senpet do not do anything without consulting the gods and asking for their approval. They will do anything to appease their gods, and the Senpet do not shy away from the most grotesque rituals and ceremonies

to earn the favor of the gods. They deal with human sacrifices, for the gods are bloody and cruel. This practice is gruesome and has given the Senpet many problems in the past. As the ceremonies to the gods involve heavy use of magic, the Senpet have dabbled (both accidentally and intentionally) in necromancy. They were the first to develop the powers that would allow a sahir to remove his heart from his chest to gain a form of immortality. While the Senpet sahir have this great power in their hands, they do not misuse it for fear of angering their gods.

The Senpet Empire is highly militaristic and constant training and evolution of their skills has turned them into a force within the Burning Sands. Over the years, if the Senpet had decided to assault their neighbors, there is little doubt that they could have conquered and killed all the lands between them and the sea. However, the Senpet have little aspirations for expansion and tyranny. Despite the fact that the Senpet had the largest armies in the area, they have been peaceful neighbors.

In the last 50 years, the Senpet Empire has been subject to one tragedy after another. A serious drought takes over the land and significantly reduces the amount of water available to the Senpet. Though her priests begin to proclaim that it is the sign of the



disfavor of the gods, the Pharaoh Hensatti takes steps to guarantee the safety of her empire. With great expense she imports water from her neighbors and decides to take over Medinaat al-Salaam, City of the Desert, using the economic power of her rich country. She allies with the undying Caliph of the city and purchases countless shops and businesses that operate in the haven of the desert.

While the Senpet brought the water issue under control, a more dire issue overtook them. The Yodotai Empire set its eyes on the Empire of the Scarab and decided to bring it under their control. The foreign legions marched on Senpet lands less than a decade after they arrived in the region. Hensatti and her armies were not fully prepared to defend against the assault because of several betrayals among her inner staff. The Senpet armies fought

tooth and nail to eject the Yodotai from their borders, but they seemed to know all of the Senpet maneuvers and strategies even before the Senpet used them. The war lasted for two decades, destroying much of the natural resources that still existed in the land, and the Yodotai stood victorious over this ancient civilization.

While the Yodotai claim dominion over these lands, a small but dedicated rebellion still foments trouble for these tyrants. Led by Keseth, a powerful sahir, the Senpet struggle to destroy the Yodotai and reassert the power of the fallen Empire of the Scarab. They send for aid to all known parts of the lands, preaching the evil of the Yodotai. They hope that this small rebellion will be just enough pressure for the Yodotai Empire to come crumbling down.



History

The First Age: established pre-calendar

The Senpet believe that at the beginning of the world, nothing was there except for Shilah and Kaleel, the Sun and the Moon. They existed together during this First Age, an Age of power, magic, and mystery. The events that occurred during the First Age cannot be understood by mere mortals, and it serves as a foundation of all creation and magic in the empire.

The Sun and the Moon create the earth and everything that lives within it. Humanity rejoices as they begin to eke out a happy existence in the land their gods created for them. The area currently known as the Burning Sands is a lush paradise of vegetation, water, and forests.

The Second Age

Shilah and Kaleel create the stars and the fundamental truths that govern each life. Deception, truth, love, justice, and death form and gain power based on their strength in

every day life for mortals. The Senpet call these the Ten Thousand Gods.

The First Jinn War

The gods create the Jinn with power unsurpassed by the mortals. Shilah wishes to rest after her creation of the world and wanted the jinn to become the new gods of these strange mortals. However, the jinn revolt. They ally with Kaleel to imprison Shilah and the gods. They begin a rule of terror and pain.

Mortals and Ashalan alike band together to combat this evil. With the use of an artifact called the Hakhim's Seal, they break open the Sun's prison. However, Shilah had been driven insane by her imprisonment. She blasts the land with the fury of her magic, turning all that was verdant into a wasteland of heat and fire. The jinn are defeated in the face of her might.

Creation of the Senpet Empire: year 30

The first mortals band together at the edge of the devastation wrought by the Shilah. They vow that they will not be cowed by the

goddess's display of anger, but will instead create the most magnificent civilization that will ever exist. They call themselves the Senpet Empire and take the emblem of the scarab, one of the few animals that survived Shilah's Wrath.

Because the founders of the Senpet took part in the First Jinn War, they are acutely aware of the presence of gods in the world. The founders create thousands upon thousands of shrines and altars to honor their power. This is the basis of the Senpet religion of Ten Thousand Gods.

In a great irony, the Senpet sahir learn how to harness the power of the jinn to use them against their enemies.

Creation of the Book of the Dead: year 30

There are several contradictory stories that speak of the creation of the Book of the Dead. One thought believes that Shilah, in her madness, created the book with the intent of luring mortals to their doom. Another myth states that the jinn created the Book before the Sun destroyed them. The jinn wanted to seal the power of the Ten Thousand Gods into the book so that they could one day regain power. No one knows which story is true, yet there are kernels of truth in both stories. The Book of the Dead holds the true names of all Ten Thousand Gods inside its pages. It is said that if a mortal reads aloud all of the true names without pausing, he would herald the end of the world. It is said that the book holds the consciousness of all the gods who have died in

the First Jinn War and that they would give the reader knowledge beyond what is possible in the mortal realm.

Once the gods placed the Book within the grasp of the Senpet, the first Pharaoh of the Senpet reads it. Unfortunately, he drives himself mad with the power placed within the book. Before he commits suicide, he orders the creation of a sacred city to house the relic. The servants of the Pharaoh seal the book once more and bury the book with him in his pyramid on the outskirts of the Senpet Empire. They construct the City of the Dead around his great pyramid. Myths say that only a devout man can travel through the City of the Dead without repercussions from the gods.

The Great Eye of the Desert: year 60

The Senpet begin construction of the largest city the world has ever known on the banks of the most massive river in the region. The capitol of the Senpet Empire must reflect the grandeur of the entire people, the Pharaoh declared. The Senpet spare no expense in creating this hub of life in the outskirts of the desert.

While the Great Eye of the Desert is originally the size of a large village, the Senpet refuse to halt their work on their capitol. Work continues at a slow pace over a thousand years. By the year 1130, the Great Eye of the Desert is twice the size of any other city in the world.

We hope this peek into the world of the Senpet has caught your imagination. The Burning Sands book will cover not only the Senpet, but the Ashalan, Jackals, Ra'shari, Ebonites and more. Ghuls and jinn, warriors and sahir, all you need to take your samurai north of the border, or to play all new Burning Sands PCs. The Legend of the Burning Sands sourcebook releases this August. Ask for it at your local game store or book retailer!

Panel 1: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit stands in a doorway, looking back over his shoulder. A green mouse-like creature (Nezum) is on his shoulder. A speech bubble says: "YOU THERE! DON'T MOVE!!!"

Panel 2: A man with a topknot and a green mouse-like creature (Nezum) are shown. The man says: "HELLO SAMURAI, I AM DAIGO... ER, I AM GYOKEN". The Nezum says: "IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH MY NEZUM FRIEND?"

Panel 3: A close-up of the man's face. He says: "THAT IS NOT A NEZUM!"

Panel 4: A close-up of the green mouse-like creature (Nezum). It says: "YES I ARE!!! SQUEEK, SHINY SHINY AND... ER... STUFF"

Panel 5: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "YOU QUESTION MY WORDS? COME ONE AT A TIME!"

Panel 6: A man with a topknot asks: "IS THIS LEGAL?"

Panel 7: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit says: "WELL, I GUESS ONE OF US HAS TO ACCEPT HIS CHALLENGE."

Panel 8: A man with a topknot says: "INDEED."

Panel 9: A woman in a red and black outfit with a mask is running. She says: "BEWARE, COMPANIONS, BEHIND US!"

Panel 10: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "A THREE - HEADED MUJINA!!!"

Panel 11: A man with a topknot says: "WHAT? WHERE?"

Panel 12: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "HEY, NO, I SAID..."

Panel 13: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "I DON'T SEE ANYTHING."

Panel 14: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "MY MISTAKE, THEN. MEANWHILE, ERIKO-SAN WON THE DUEL."

Panel 15: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "THAT WAS CLOSE, WE WERE EQUALLY MATCHED."

Panel 16: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "OH?"

Panel 17: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "P'KK' THINKS: TIME TO GO."

Panel 18: A man in a green and gold samurai outfit is shouting. He says: "TO BE CONTINUED..."

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