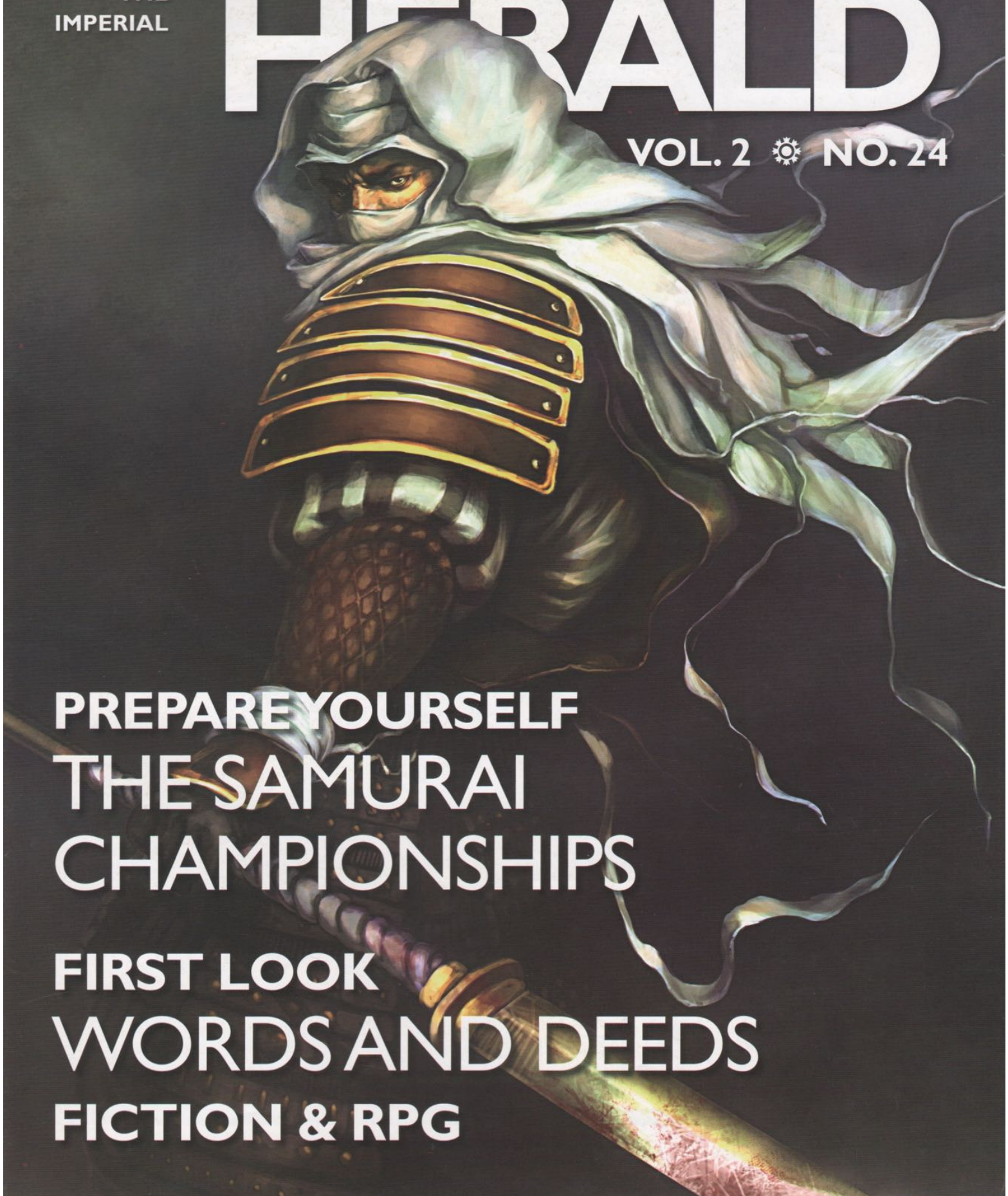


THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

VOL. 2  NO. 24



**PREPARE YOURSELF
THE SAMURAI
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**FIRST LOOK
WORDS AND DEEDS
FICTION & RPG**



L5R™ Clan Token Sets

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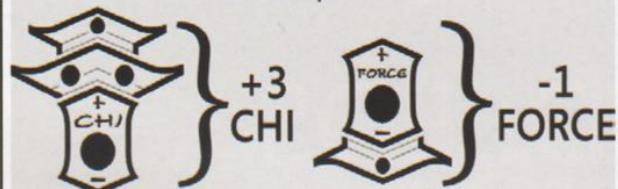


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Welcome to a new issue of the Imperial Herald. We hope that you are having a great time this Kotei season, fighting for your Clan in the Race for the Throne. The Race has been the largest interactive experience in L5R history. In many ways it has changed how we design the game and write the story. In this issue, L5R's Designers and Writers reveal their thoughts on the Race and your feedback of the game, all of which has helped make L5R the strongest it's ever been.

We also look back at the Jade Championships with an all new story and information so your RPG campaign can include these events and characters.

We hope to see you at the Kotei events as well as the Samurai Championships this summer.

Banzai!

Todd C. Rowland

Brand Manager, Legend of the Five Rings

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Race for the Throne

BY TODD C. ROWLAND

As we approach the second half of the Race for the Throne, the playing field changes. The Phoenix, hard-pressed to earn a point in the Military Sphere, are finishing in the tops of several tournaments. The Spider have all but taken over Knowledge, and the Crane have even posted up a strong Military start in the fourth leg. The previous powerhouses of Scorpion, Lion, and Crab should be on alert; the other Clans are coming after you!

The upcoming legs feature several Level 10 store events as many more stores reach that level. The Kotei season continues into leg 5, and leg 6 will see even more events including the beginning of the summer conventions and the Samurai Championships qualifying events. More online competitions, such as the video and poster contests that have been so popular throughout the Race, are coming. Keep an eye out for your clan's shot at glory.

Most players have been curious about danger rumors, especially those that affect their Clan in the Race for the Throne.

Now is the time to lift the veil on that mystery. The new Emperor will look upon the Clans and determine the one that has most failed the Empire during the Race. However, would an Emperor from the Crane look upon failure in the same way as an Emperor from the Crab, or even the Spider? The Clan that faces the Emperor's wrath will be determined by the Clan that the new Emperor

comes from, based on the following.

CRAB – The Crab of course view weakness of arms as a sign of an unworthy Clan. For the Crab, if a question cannot be answered with violence, it is not worth asking. Therefore the Clan with

the lowest overall Military score will suffer the wrath of a Crab Emperor.

CRANE – The Crane of course see the ability to deal civility with your opponents as the bar for judging worthy samurai. Therefore should a Crane become the Emperor, the Clan with the lowest overall Politics

score will face his wrath.

DRAGON – Always looking to the future and the mysteries of the Elements, a Dragon Emperor would be wise in the ways of Spirit. Those who have the lowest overall Spirit score will face the wrath of a Dragon Emperor.





LION – The Lion are often held up as the gold standard of what it means to be a samurai. The Lion judge their opponents based on all areas of Bushido. A Lion Emperor will let out his wrath on the Clan with the lowest total points in the Race.

MANTIS – The Mantis are known for audacious displays of wealth, yet they also keenly understand that despite it being dishonorable, money does make the world go around. A Mantis Emperor will choose the Clan with the lowest overall Economy score to suffer his wrath.



PHOENIX – The Phoenix have always sought to gain knowledge, often at great cost to themselves and the Empire. However, mankind has never advanced without advancing knowledge. Should a Phoenix become the Emperor, he will lay his wrath on the Clan with the lowest overall Knowledge score.



SCORPION – The Scorpion have always survived by keeping threats to their Clan at bay. A Scorpion Emperor would be no different. Should the Scorpion win the Race for the Throne, the Scorpion Emperor will choose the Clan that came in second place for the Throne, his biggest threat, to suffer his wrath.



SPIDER – The Spider on the throne... we can only think with dread what this might mean. However, we do know that Daigotsu's machinations are beyond depraved, and he will open the gates for his brethren.

Should the Spider claim the Throne, the Crab Clan will suffer the wrath of the new Spider Emperor.

UNICORN – The Unicorn have always been an oddity to the rest of the Empire, their foreign ways clashing with Rokugani standards. Should the Unicorn win, the Clan with the lowest combined total in Military and Knowledge will suffer the new Emperor's wrath.



The Samurai Championships

AEG is proud to announce the dates and locations for the four Regional Samurai Championship Events. Now that we have selected our locations, dates, and teams we can begin the process of informing you about what will be happening at each event. Each of the 4 events and the Samurai Championships Global Storyline weekend will be special unto themselves and we will begin to leak storyline clues, special promotions, and event schedules over the next few months. For now your focus should be on your local Kotei and bringing victory to your clan. The stakes have never been higher.

The Samurai Championship is a worldwide tournament being held at four separate events—GenCon Indy, GenCon Australia, the European Championship, and the South American Championship—with the finals then being played in Southern California, home of the AEG offices.

“We have spent many months devising the plan for the Samurai Championships,” says Brand Manager Todd Rowland. “Our goal was to continue to make Samurai Edition an environment influenced by the entire community rather than a small number of players, yet still give those high-level players a chance at glory. We also had to balance the issue of geography and the fact that any event held would inherently exclude people in different parts of the world. We feel we have reached an effective solution.”

The Samurai Championship Tournament will begin at each one of the four major L5R events list above. These tournaments will place 32 players into the final rounds to be held in Southern California.

Each of these events will serve as the first step to the finals. Each event is a major part of the Samurai Championship Tournament and allows us to bring the Championship to players worldwide. Players on the pre-qualified events list must play at one of the four events listed above. Players on this list will not be required to play in the rounds preceding the main event at one of the four events listed above. All players will be required to play in one of the four events listed above to have the opportunity



BY TODD C. ROWLAND

to move on to the California Finals.

When players who are qualified for the Samurai Fund attend one of the four events listed above, they will receive a portion of the Samurai Fund at the first event they attend. Players who make the finals in California will then receive an additional stipend from AEG upon arrival in California. The stipend for attendance in California will come directly from AEG and not from the Samurai Fund. The final amount has not been determined, but will be prorated based on which event from which you will be traveling.

The Samurai Championship Tournament

Gencon Indy, Gencon Australia, the European Championship and the South American Championship are each host to the Samurai Championship Tournament. While each location will have special events, multiple tournaments and activities, the first rounds of the Samurai Championship Tournament will be represented in the main event at each location. 32 players will move on to the finals to be held in Southern California in November of 2008.

Mark Wootton, AEG Lead L5R Developer adds, “This is a huge deal for us. L5R is such a multi-dimensional game with players tied to the story, the interactive events, and ultimately the game play itself. It is hard to plan a single event that reaches all of these players. It has been our hope for many years to bring together the very

North America

Gen Con Indianapolis

August 14-17

Players Advancing: 12

Join AEG as they host many L5R events at Gen Con Indy! We always strive to make Gen Con an amazing experience for L5R players and this year will be no different.

Europe

Karlsruhe, Germany

October 3-5

Full Events List (coming soon)

Players Advancing: 14

The Germans will host the European Samurai Championships event for 2008. AEG guests will be on hand, as well as all the fun and excitement you can expect from the 2008 World Championships!

South America

São Paulo, Brazil

September 20-21

Players Advancing: 2

São Paulo plays host to the South American Samurai Championships event. AEG is excited to have a great tournament team putting on the event. Great prizes and events for all who come, as well as AEG guests in attendance!

Asia - Australia

Gen Con OZ

July 3-6

Players Advancing: 4

L5R makes its first major appearance at GenConOZ!

AEG will also have guests in attendance and the events and prizes will be top-notch!

Samurai Championship Finals & Global Storyline

Los Angeles and Dojo Days Stores Worldwide

Nov 7-9

best players for a showdown of diverse play styles from around the world. We feel that by hosting the Samurai Championship Tournament at these four events it will give all players the opportunity to be a part of something great. By hosting a boutique finals at AEG in California, we will, for the first time, bring the top players from around the world together to test each other and the game."

The decision to host the Samurai Championship Tournament in this way has created the opportunity to allow event teams best suited to run and host these events to be a part of the process of building the Samurai Championship Tournament with AEG. Over the years AEG has learned that the best events are those hosted in collaboration with local teams.

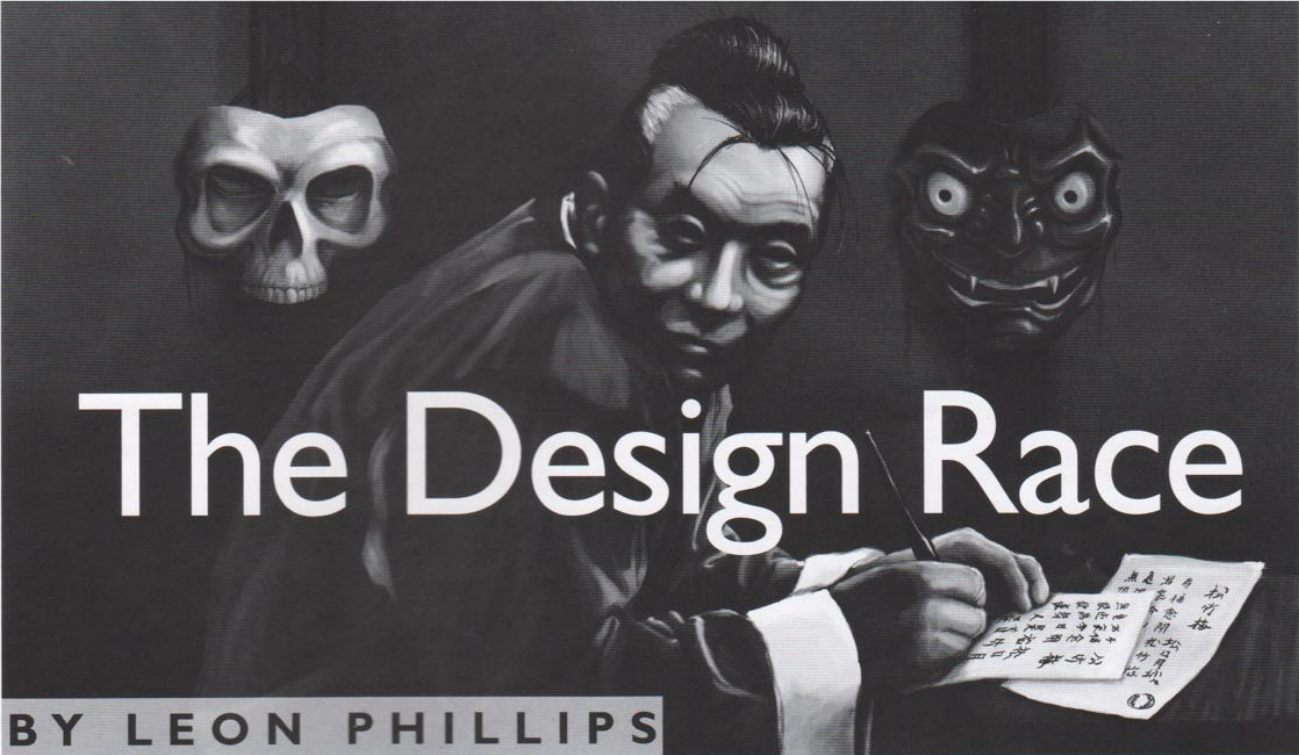
The Samurai Championship Global Storyline Event

On the same weekend as the Samurai Championship Finals in November, L5R's Dojo Days stores around the world will host our biggest global storyline event ever. All players will be invited to take part, and they will also contribute points to their Clan for the final leg of the

Race for the Throne. These global events will allow every member of every Clan to have a stake in who ultimately wins the Imperial Throne of Rokugan. All attendees will receive special product discounts, cards, and other awards. Dojo Days stores of Level 3 or higher will receive a special Samurai Championship Event Kit to help prepare for this event.

The entire Samurai Championship Series will be very special this year, and AEG looks forward to delivering amazing events to mark this great arc.





The Design Race

BY LEON PHILLIPS

Seventy-five. That's the number of cards that were credited to players that I counted on a skim through of the last four sets (including Words and Deeds). That means that in at least 75 instances, players have directly affected design.

And I can tell you that the design team loves it.

Every time we create a card a player designs, the card itself takes on new flavor. Now it's not just Random Crab Dude, it's Dan Jacobson's Wandering Crab. It's not just a follower, it's David Reed's Wolf Legion. L5R has always been about interactivity and player participation. How the story evolves is directly impacted by the actions of the fans. Events transpire from tournament results from all around the world. And when this happens, the design team creates an attachment between players and the game.

Occasionally we scour through old stories for more background, or read tournament reports by players and organizers for the thoughts of those involved. Then we discuss, lobby, argue, and lament over intent or effects of a particular card. In all cases, the story team nudges us when we go off track (and thumps us when we're completely off our game). Playtesters get to help us see the usefulness of a card, but a few chime in with their Clan thoughts.

Every card goes through several cycles of design and testing, but the credited cards always get special attention. Preserving the flavor of an awarded card is crucial. After all, somebody won the right to have their name along the

edge of the card. It should be noted that not every credited card is a power rare. Far from it, in fact. Since balance of the game is our priority, we assign rarity based on need, not wants.

The "Big Picture" cards add a level of difficulty to design. There were actually two events that went through playtesting for Stronger Than Steel as Chagatai pushed for the throne. The outcome of the kotei season saw The Throne Stands Empty seeing print and the other event not seeing the light of day.

Accepted Clan temptations are especially difficult to balance. They must be strong enough that players see them as worthwhile, yet not so strong that they're seen as "The winning clan gets stronger" cards. Even so, we think the Crab and Dragon players will be pleased by their items. After all, it's not every day that one gets several items that each rival your clan sword and armor!

There are a variety of ways players earn points for their clan in the Race for the Throne. And this creates a smorgasbord of information for designers to draw inspiration. The upcoming kotei season promises to add a plethora of new cards.

Here's a disclaimer though: players should note that the choices at a kotei do not necessarily result in cards. Of course, that doesn't stop the designers from trying! After all, I'm itching to help design a new martial arts style, or perhaps an experienced Legion of 2000. Maybe one of them will have your name on the side?

Guiding the Race: Choices and Consequences

BY FRED WAN

As always, the players of L5R have a hand in guiding and shaping the future of Rokugan. This has been the case since the inception of the game, but the Race for the Throne created a new framework for player participation and raised the bar in terms of the sheer gravity of player-made decisions. The Race gives the players more ways to interact with the Story Team and the story as a whole.

Clans and Destinations:

Players knew right from the beginning that the Race for the Throne was going to share Samurai Edition's focus on the clans, and that the ultimate goal for every faction was the Throne. This allowed players, when making storyline choices, to have a clear idea of what all their efforts were building towards, and to make story choices based on how they wanted their particular clans to develop.

New Ways to Influence the Story:

The Race has players involved in multiple ways, many of which do not involve how well a person places in a tournament. With new forms of competition and involvement, there are new story results available for the Story Team to integrate into the storyline.

The Winter Court event was the ideal example of this. The players in Winter Court were role-playing, negotiating, interacting, and forwarding their clans—in a different way than simply playing the CCG. Winter Court provided the Story Team with a lot of material and possibilities, many of which have been canonized.

A Less Overt Shadowlands:

The Shadowlands and Spider, as always, are ready and waiting to weaken, destroy, and corrupt the Empire. However, because the Race is centered upon the activities of the clans in seeking the Throne, the Spider is not the overt threat that the Shadowlands has been in the past. This has let allowed the Story Team to explore something that not even Clan War really explored deeply—why the Empire has a multitude of clans that feud with each other rather than one perpetual central authority. The Race has changed the backdrop, and by changing the backdrop, it has opened up new avenues to explore.

Temptations:

Player choices are meaningful when there are good arguments both for and against a given course of action. The Temptations are very much a part of that philosophy. All of the Temptations are crafted to be good things for their clans—if a clan takes one, it receives a guaranteed story benefit. The benefit might not be concrete in the sense that the Story Team might not reveal to players all of the nuances and implications of the Temptation in advance, but taking a Temptation will always be to the net benefit of its clan.

However, when a clan takes a Temptation, it is forgoing points. The cost is always known; you are making it a little bit harder to do well in the next leg in exchange for a guaranteed benefit. Both choices are good; it is a matter of the personal choice of each player in each tempted clan which option is better.

Participating:

L5R is about getting players involved and passionate about Rokugan and its inhabitants. The Race gives players more ways to be involved. More involvement means more input for the Story Team to craft an Empire that is aware of and responsive to the players as a whole.



WORDS AND DEEDS

DUNCAN MACPHAIL

Honesty. To a samurai, this does not mean telling the truth. Rather, honesty means keeping one's word, to make speech and action one. A samurai has no need to make promises for with a simple statement he is committed. Now is a time when the Empire needs the dedication of all its samurai, as the race for the throne near completion.

Words and Deeds provides new tools to take action, to hold your power or upset others expectations.

On the Wall

The Crab's ancestral duty is to protect the wall. The new Crab stronghold is the wall. With the highest province strength of any stronghold in Samurai Edition, it will be tough to crack. Moreover, the Crab prepare for a lengthy siege, using the fortified walls against their enemies.

The Crab samurai can turn an opponent's own defenses against them, making a high province strength a liability to others. Kaiu Shoichi limits the ability of your opponent to defend even further, allowing you to hold back a portion your army without hindering your chances of victory. Hida Fubatsu has a unique heritage, but he knows his duty is to protect his Crab brethren. Hiruma Kaikawa, a man of high ideals, represents the mysterious Jade Hand.

On the other end of the spectrum are two Crab of less honorable character: the tragic Hida Bachiataru and Hida Manabu. They both grow more powerful over time. Bachiataru becomes a greater asset over the course of the game, while Manabu grows stronger in battle each time an enemy or comrade falls. Consider sacrificing Manabu to a Death Trance, an action that lets a berserker pay the cost for a Wedge-like effect on your entire army!

Watching over the damned is Hida Nichie, the champion of two consecutive Kumitae tournaments. Nichie-sama was not cursed by the taint as she feared, relieving some doubt in Crab players' minds. Finally, the new Jade Champion, Kuni Daigo, brings Jade purity in his fight against the Shadowlands. And with it, he brings the potential to rival the Elemental Masters. An awesome array of strength has rarely been seen in such a humble display.

The Dark Hearts of Men

The Spider have operated within the borders of the Empire, making alliances and manipulating the weak and foolish. The time has come for the blackest of clans to claim their place within the Empire or face its combined might. With Black Silk Castle, Spider players can strike out at their enemies through the weakness of their fallen comrades.

The new Spider Clan stronghold has a powerful battle action that does not restrict deck construction; it allows you to destroy a personality with lower gold cost than one of your opponent's dead personalities. Faatima is an obvious choice in Black Silk Castle, raising a new ghul each time you use your stronghold. Chuda Jinsei can make Faatima's ghuls even stronger and brings his own minions to the game. The Spider have a growing voice in the Empire's courts, and Daigotsu Masisha ensures the Spider's enemies are shamed. And Heaven's Fire demonstrates how the Spider manipulate others to their own ends.

Daigotsu Harushi shines as a beacon of Shourido, filling an important role for the Spider Clan's new paragon theme. He can make use of the new Black and White to destroy an enemy card in battle or recover a valuable resource with A Warrior's Patience. Another corrupt monk joins the Spider Clan, Tetsuo, who brings another powerful battle action to the Spider's arsenal. Michio is revealed as the Paragon of Dark Dominion, and he is ready to control the battlefield. To round things out, Daigotsu Gyoken relentlessly pursues his objectives.

The Western Steppes

The Unicorn are masters of cavalry, horsemanship, and the Western Steppes. None dare challenge their land or skill on horseback. When they outnumber the enemy, Unicorn samurai are fearsome indeed. To increase their numbers, the Western Steppes Stronghold creates additional, "expendable" resources. Each turn, you can create a free personality, however he goes away at the end of the turn, so you'll want to be sure you can make immediate use of him.

Shinjo Akimitsu, the Topaz Champion, uses his tactical acumen to test an army's strength. Joining him is Shinjo Genya, who is not afraid to take on big challenges. The wanderer Shinjo Naota is a scout, reminiscent of Shinjo Rojin. Utaku Fusae is a highly honorable addition to the battle maiden roster. With this lineup, you should have no trouble Diverting the Reserves before your opponent can make his end move, or if you simply need more resources.

Rescued from imprisonment, Iuchi Ietsuna is a loyal servant of the Lords of Death who inspires the Clan. Moto Yong-tai was last seen during the Khan's march on Toshi Ranbo; now she returns more powerful and a master of the travel magic employed during that campaign. Finally, Shinjo Shono strives valiantly to defend his Khan's lands from the advancing Lion armies; his ability gives you the final assignment even against another player using Cavalry, and straightens a personality to defend you.

New Themes

Words and Deeds develops new ideas from Honor's Veil. There are more personalities with the new keywords Kensai, Paragon and Commander; and specialized actions to support them.

For the kensai, having a weapon is the only way they practice their art; no problem for Mirumoto Otohiko, who enters play with one. Equip your kensai with a more powerful weapon, such as Blade of Awe, which pays the costs of many actions during battle.

The Dragon aren't the only masters of the sword, the Dojo of Bitter Lies has been training their own kensai — Bayushi Ryouya and Bayushi Yousui — both eager to make a Swift Sword Cut through the hearts of their enemies.

Commanders bring discipline to your army, allowing you the use Coordinated Movement, which works best in large armies with many followers. The Lion Clan receives two new paragons of Bushido with Akodo Itoku (a second boxable Tactician!) and Matsu Yosa; you may want to put them in an army alongside Akodo Sadahige, if you aren't busy experimenting with the new deathseekers.



Mantis enjoy new magistrates Tsuruchi Chuuya, who lets all your archers shoot and run, and Yoritomo Fushou, who will swiftly punish the dishonorable. The Phoenix receives support for their yojimbo; they can protect their charges with Final Sacrifice. Crane's political and economic strength continues to grow, but will it be overshadowed by the dark deeds of the Asahina daimyo?

New Actions

Words and Deeds features several powerful Unique actions, representing the great lengths the clans go in their final efforts to win the throne, one time expenditures of resources, and heroic efforts. One of these is Duel of Champions, which lets you issue a challenge, one Unique personality to another. This card exemplifies drama and heroism.

Other new cards alter the shape of the game, such as The Last One. You can invest all your resources into a single, untouchable personality, as long as you are willing to make him your last man standing.

This set also presents a new Heroic Shout action, this one a reaction. Crab has plenty of ways to bow the enemy in battle, and with Devasting Blow you can turn that effect into immediate card destruction. This will give you more opportunities for a Shout of Victory! Of course, Crab isn't the only faction that can make use of this card.

There are plenty of new cards in Words and Deeds that take the action to new levels. I wish I could talk about every card, but there isn't room. Besides, that's what the online previews are for.

WEB OF THE SPIDER

BY JUSTIN WALSH

DECKLIST

Spider Dark Virtue Military

Stronghold

The Spider's Lair

Events (1)

1 The Spider's Shadow

Holdings (17)

1 Daigotsu Kanpeki

1 The Khan

1 Private Trader

1 Seat of Power

3 Rich Coffers

3 Shinomen Marsh

3 Secluded Village

2 Fortified Camp

2 Akodo's Grave

Personalities (22)

1 Daigotsu

1 Daigotsu Rekai

1 Yoritomo Hotako

1 Bayushi Tsimaru

3 Daigotsu Hirata

3 Daigotsu Ryudo

3 Daigotsu Sachio

3 Daigotsu Kaikou

3 Takayasu

3 Hiromasa

Actions (32)

3 Control

2 Determination

3 Insight

3 Knowledge

2 Will

3 Rout

3 Solid Defence

3 Stay Your Blade

3 Turn of Fortune

2 Crippling Cut

2 Desperate Wager

3 Rapid Deployment

Followers (6)

3 Gunso Shiraki

3 Wandering Budoka

Items (1)

1 Daimyo's Blade

Rings (1)

1 Ring of Water

The deck focuses on "send-home" actions as its key battle tactic, and packs a considerable amount of attachment destruction and denial, by stripping key personalities and opening them up to actions that can kill them. Daigotsu Hirata is a monster, and, if not dealt with, can take over the battlefield on his own. Likewise Daigotsu, who, with Seat of Power, Turn of Fortune, and Daigotsu Kanpeki, hits the board early and stays there, creating huge force swings and allowing you to attack much more aggressively. Daigotsu Ryudo locks down certain attachment abilities, and renders action cards like Peasant Vengeance and Few Against Many useless. He also allows you to target unaffected attachments as a priority, maximizing action advantage in battle.

The Fate deck contains considerable "card-draw," enabling you to reach important cards quickly and reliably. Dark Virtues feature heavily, enhancing several features of the deck, as well as being powerful action cards in their own right. The Followers attain high force quickly, and the Fortified Camps allow you to keep these monsters around

turn after turn. Turn of Fortune is a key card in the deck in all match-ups, allowing you to save key units, or pull dirty tricks like redirecting duels to Daigotsu.

Against Military, you have a high number of battle actions, a stronghold that makes attacking decks weep, and one of the best force-to-gold ratios in the game (especially if Kanpeki turns up). You should be able to establish action and card superiority in battle, and wear your opponent down. You will lose provinces, but this only helps certain parts of the deck and, with Spider's Lair, you are a huge threat until your last province is finally destroyed, as you should be out-producing your opponent. Don't be afraid to go on the defensive with send-home actions to buy another turn or two of production.

Spider has a tough time against speed Honor, so you will need to dig as fast as you can for a Desperate Wager. Sadly, if you do not see a Wager, you can expect to lose most of these games. However, the best way to defeat Honor decks is to attack multiple provinces, forcing your opponent to play more cards from his hand, and then swoop on two, three, or even all four provinces in the last turn. You must strip his defensive abilities at every turn.

Against Dishonor — possibly the toughest match-up for Spider — you have Solid Defense to keep you in the game, and Desperate Wager to finish your opponent off. Dishonor is a game that has to be played very much by ear: sometimes it is necessary to be aggressive, while, at other times, a more considered approach is necessary. Regardless, draw through your deck as fast as possible to get to your match-up-winning cards.



FROM FICTIONS TO NOVELLAS

BY FRED WAN & SHAWN CARMAN

Since Gold Edition, the storyline of Rokugan has advanced not only through flavor text, but through weekly fictions published on AEG's forums and website. Recently, this trend has progressed to the next step, and printed novellas have become available to players. On the surface, each of the novellas looks like just a set of fictions, but the fact that both the Emerald & Jade DTP novella and the novella given out as a participation prize for the 2008 Kotei deal with key events that have taken place in the storyline, events of such magnitude that dealing with their ramifications throughout the Empire required more than just a weekly fiction or flavor text to address properly.

Creating the novellas required a slightly different treatment because of the fact that players would read the events in the novellas all at once, unlike the weekly fictions, which are staggered and allow for the passage of time in Rokugan as real time passes from week to week. Likewise, the novellas had to be written well in advance of the players getting to read them, which meant that whatever was included had to build upon fiction and flavor text that was planned but not yet written. The novellas also needed to introduce certain events, so that they could be developed for use later in the Race for the Throne.

This typically meant a lot of behind the scenes tweaks and changes to make sure the overall tone of these events were consistent between authors, which can be more difficult when so much fiction is produced in such a short period of time. Some of it can be fairly subtle, and often what is not stated can have also be significant. For example, the Phoenix Clan has the

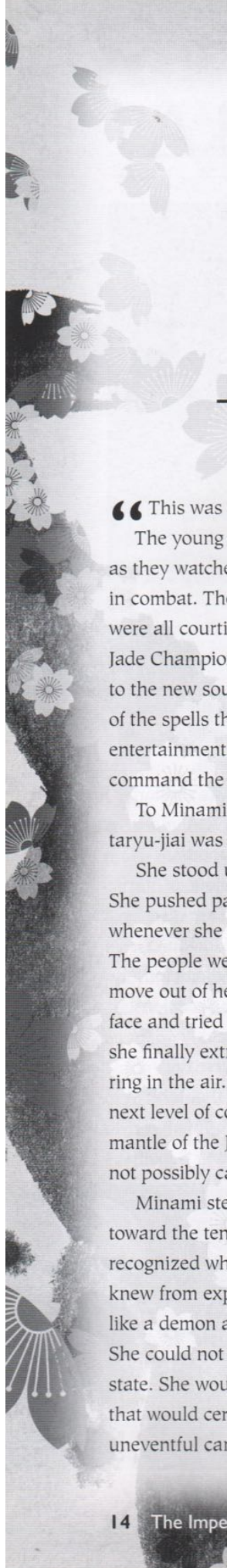


deepest and most profound connection to the elements and kami of all the Clans. One way that theme was reinforced was by simply not having any Phoenix contender lose a match on-screen. Asahina Nizomi came close, but ultimately even he could not prevail against Agasha Tomioko without risking his soul.

The Scorpion fiction in the Kotei novella was similarly subtle. The fiction explored and developed several plot points that have been building over several months. For example, the Scorpion are still very conscious of the effects of Bishamon's curse. The Scorpion are also very concerned with the development of the Dragon Clan, and are wary about the possible implications for their alliance. Both Bishamon's curse and the Scorpion-Dragon relationship have been explored in weekly fictions in the last few months, partially because the stage needed to be set in order for the events that took place in the novella to seem like a natural outgrowth of the story to date. That can be easier said than done when the story is sometimes written out of order!

Ultimately, these novellas are the next step in the development of the Samurai Edition storyline. They have allowed the players to witness the ramifications of major events in the Empire, events that have affected each of the clans and that will go on to have serious effects on the Race for the Throne as a whole. With any luck, these novellas are just the first step in a new level of storyline development that will continue over the course of this arc and into the next.





A TALE OF THE Jade Championship

BY BRIAN YOON

“This was a mistake,” Moshi Minami said to herself.

The young Mantis courtier stood among the crowd as they watched Tamori Wotan and Kuni Ochiyo locked in combat. The sight fascinated those around her; they were all courtiers and sycophants, looking for the next Jade Champion so that they could make connections to the new source of political power. To them, the sight of the spells that rent the ground was just magnificent entertainment. It was awe inspiring to see mere men command the power of the kami.

To Minami, the sight of the shugenja in midst of the taryu-jiai was a cruel reminder of everything she had lost.

She stood up from her seat and grabbed her parasol. She pushed past the others, politely excusing herself whenever she impeded the view of another bystander. The people were entranced by the duel and would not move out of her way. She kept the annoyance off of her face and tried to move away from the crowd. By the time she finally extricated herself, polite applause began to ring in the air. One or the other would now advance to the next level of competition and was one step closer to the mantle of the Jade Champion. At the moment, she could not possibly care less about such a trivial detail.

Minami stepped away from the crowd and walked toward the tent reserved for Mantis competitors. She recognized where this line of thought was taking her. She knew from experience that this mood would possess her like a demon and color every word and gesture from her. She could not risk meeting a high ranking samurai in this state. She would no doubt make a foolish remark, and that would certainly be the end of her short and rather uneventful career as a courtier for her clan.

The sound of a chuckle reached her ears and Minami turned her head toward the noise. A Crab stood next to a tent, his eyes fixed on her. His companion, a Lion bushi by the look of it, looked stiff and uncomfortable as he watched her approach.

“Your pretty face is creased with unhappiness, Mantis-san,” the Crab said, a gentle smile on his face. “Did the duel not meet your fancy?”

Minami smiled back at the man and racked her brain for a clue of the man’s identity. He was a Kuni; that much was obvious from the traditional face paint and the large Kuni mon on his breast. His personal mon decorated his clothes in a more discreet manner. Minami simply could not figure out who this person was. The Lion was an Akodo in the Lion armies, but she knew too little of Lion heraldry to determine any more than that.

“It’s not a matter of enjoying the duel, Kuni-san,” Minami replied. She gestured to the crowd that had begun to disperse. “I simply could not stand being in a crowd of people who thought the display little more than a spectacle.”

The Kuni raised an eyebrow and turned to the Lion. “A courtier that speaks what is on her mind, instead of a bunch of flowery nonsense? What a treat!” The Crab stepped forward with a slight hobble, and Minami noticed for the first time that he relied on a cane to walk.

“It is refreshing,” the Lion said gruffly. “Perhaps if courtiers were to do it more frequently, I would be able to stand to spend more time with them.”

“I am new to the courts,” Minami admitted. “Perhaps I am too foolish to last for long without relying on, as you say, flowery nonsense.”



"I don't believe it for a moment," the Crab responded. "I am a wonderful judge of character, and I say that you could succeed at whatever you'd put your mind to. It's a gift. More of a burden, really, as it is difficult being correct all the time."

Minami hid a grin. This Crab was an oddity. Most Crabs she had met were uncouth and unpleasant to speak to. This one had a sense of humor that she could appreciate. Even his flirtatious words seemed fueled by a desire to lift her spirits rather than any other nefarious thoughts.

"A burden," Minami repeated. She bowed slightly to the Crab. "I thank you for continuing on with such responsibility on your shoulders. Lesser men would be crushed under its weight."

"I am afraid that Umibe-san's ego will be able to bear it," the Lion said. He smiled slightly, as if the expression were unfamiliar to him, and he looked years younger for doing so.

The Crab threw his head back and laughed heartily. "I am Kuni Umibe, shugenja of the Crab Clan."

"Akodo Koun, gunso of the Lion Clan," his companion said.

Minami smiled. "I am Moshi Minami. It is a pleasure to meet you both."

"Exchanging pleasantries already? I thought you were one of the honest ones," Koun said. Minami turned

to him, the smile freezing on her face. She knew that tensions between her clan and that of the Lion were rough, but it did not warrant an attack on her. Before she could say something scathing in response, a cloud passed over Koun's face and he raised his hand to stop her words.

"My words were too harsh, Minami-san," Koun said. "I have a habit of speaking before I can examine the import of my words. I have no quarrel with you, though there are harsh relations between our clans. I hope that you do not judge me unfavorably from my outburst. I do not intend to insult you."

Minami held back her response and studied the gruff bushi. He did look contrite. From the other side of Koun, Umibe studied him with an impassive face. Perhaps the Crab was surprised by the man as well.

Minami shook her head. "Perhaps it is a good thing that you do not spend much time in court, Koun-san. As for me — well, it is a beautiful day outside. Let us leave the influence of the court far behind us."

Umibe and Koun nodded. "I hope you are not on a task for your daimyo, for I would hate to be deprived of your presence," Umibe said.

"Nothing of the sort," Minami responded. "I was headed toward the Mantis tents for a rest."

Umibe studied her with an intent look on his face. "Perhaps you would join me on a stroll to the center of

the testing grounds? I am not used to walking at such a slow pace."

"I hope no malady afflicts you," Minami said politely.

Umibe shook his head. "No, I am simply weakened from exertion. I have recently undertaken a project that has consumed much of my time and powers. You attempt to distract me from my goal, and I would appreciate an answer to my suggestions. After all, I would appreciate listening to a courtier's viewpoint on all the madness that surrounds us, without any of the deception."

"I am afraid I can only offer Umibe the viewpoint of a warrior," Koun added. "He hears it every day from the others on the Wall. I offer him no challenge, no interesting viewpoint. I must say he was ready to find an excuse to stop our conversation when you walked by."

"With such an invitation, how could I possibly say no?" Minami responded. She opened her parasol and gestured to the Crab. He started his walk with the help of his cane, and the pair slowly made their way up the road.

"You thought the others were too disrespectful while they watched the match?" Umibe asked softly.

Minami lowered her voice in turn so that others walking by would not overhear — or worse, take offense.

"I think the whole thing is a travesty," Minami said.

"These people do not realize what it means to cast a prayer to the kami, to borrow their aid with spells. Yes, the shugenja in the duel were making fantastic changes to the ground, the air, nature itself. Still, the kami must be respected and the works of a shugenja should never be reduced to yet another way to kill the opponent."

"You say that shugenja should respect the kami," Koun responded. "Showing respect for the kami is not at odds with utilizing them to fulfill goals. A shugenja may be a priest of the kami, yet he is also a samurai. It is part of his duty to follow the orders of his lord, and use the resources available to

him to defeat the enemy. To kill, if necessary."

"I am unsurprised to hear you say such a thing," Minami said. "I do not mean to condescend, Koun-san, yet you do not know the relationship between a shugenja and the kami around him."

"I believe it is a rather popular viewpoint in the empire these days," Umibe added.

"Every morning when I wake up," Koun said, "I pray to my ancestors that I do not fail in their eyes. I can sense their presence every day, and in battle I can feel the joy of the ancestors as I charge. Perhaps it is not a physical matter, but I can certainly understand the sacred bonds one can have with the spiritual realm."

"I do not mean to imply you are not spiritual," Minami quickly replied. "I simply mean that the kami cannot be used like a tool. To call upon their aid is to ask the elements to bend for our benefit. That is a mighty power that must not be misused."

"Who is to judge what uses are proper, and which are a violation of the ties between shugenja and kami?" Umibe asked. "We are a warrior caste, and in these uncertain times war has come upon us. With the help of the kami, a shugenja can fulfill a combat objective more easily than a unit of bushi. If a prayer to the kami can accomplish something that would otherwise be bought

with blood, how can a
come to his

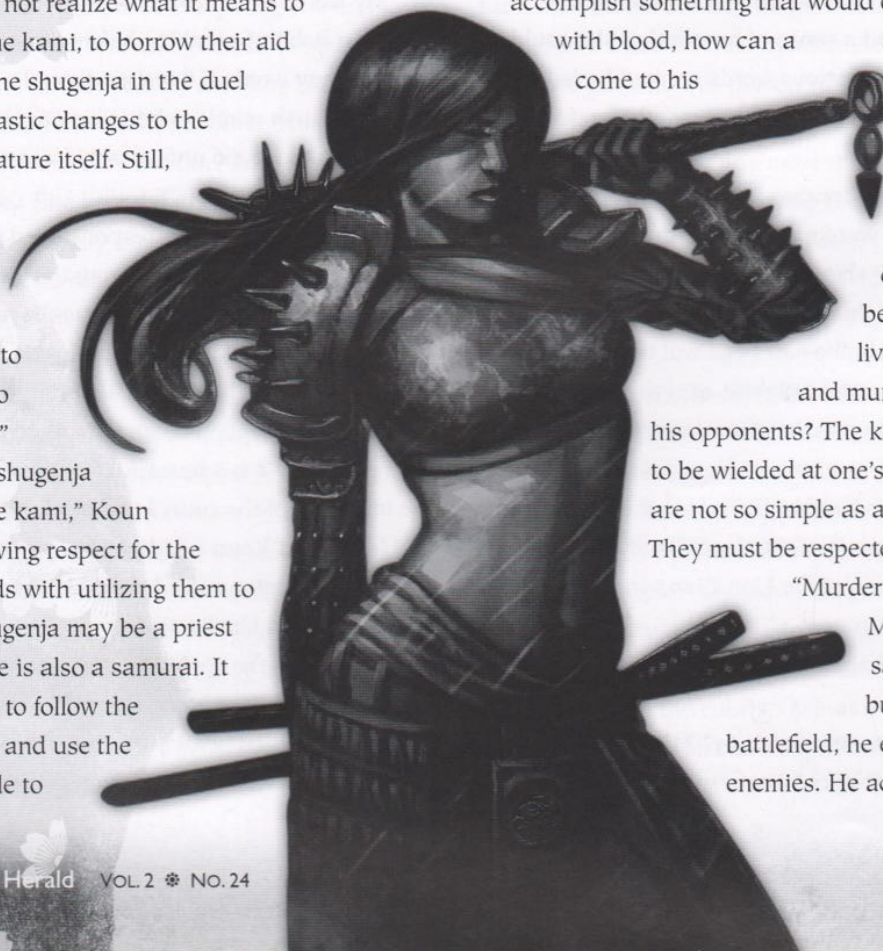
shugenja refuse to
clan's aid?"

Minami
looked at her
companions.

"Where does
one draw the line
between saving the
lives of his comrades
and murdering the lives of

his opponents? The kami are not weapons to be wielded at one's opponents. They are not so simple as a yari or a tetsubo. They must be respected and revered."

"Murder is a strong word,
Minami-san," Koun
said. "When a
bushi steps onto the
battlefield, he expects to face his
enemies. He accepts that he may



die for his clan. In this case, it is not murder."

"Ideology is one thing," Umibe said, "and experience is another."

"This is quite unfair," Minami said with a slight smile. "You are working in concert against me."

Koun bowed. "I must admit that my experience with shugenja is limited. I have never fought by a shugenja's side nor lived the priest's life. I can only address this issue from life as I know it. Umibe-san, what do you believe?"

"I believe that the matter is clear in some cases," Umibe said. "On the Wall I face the horrors of the Shadowlands as they attempt to gain entry to the empire. There I must call upon the aid of the kami to bring down creatures that are invulnerable to weapons. Can I stand aside, knowing that my intervention means life or death to Crab samurai?"

"Of course not," Minami said. "It is an unfair comparison, Umibe-san. The Shadowlands is an abomination to all living creatures. We must do all we can do to repel their influence, and the kami themselves jump at the chance to destroy the filth."

"I simply choose the most extreme example. If a shugenja faces a maho-tsukai, ready to spill blood for Jigoku, should he hesitate in destroying the enemy?"

Minami glanced at her companion. "Yet again, an example of the Shadowlands Taint. They are exceptions to the rule."

"What if dozens of bushi rushed a shugenja, weapons at the ready?" Koun asked.

"You cannot be arguing that the shugenja must face personal peril to call upon the kami, Umibe-san," Minami said. "If the shugenja were not on the battlefield, he would not face the situation."

"Yet it is a position that many shugenja face. If your lord were to ask you to do everything you can to further the influence of your clan, you would not refuse," Umibe said.

"I would not," Minami agreed, "but there are limitations to that demand."

"How can one refuse to do everything if your lord demands it of you?" Koun asked.

"I believe that each shugenja is given responsibility for his actions when he earns the right to speak to the kami. One must not pervert that responsibility for anyone, even

one's lord." A small smile graced her face. "I doubt you would look favorably at the use of maho for one's lord."

Umibe grinned. "Another example of the Shadowlands Taint. They are exceptions, as you said."

"I simply use the most extreme example to make a point, Umibe-san," Minami said with a small laugh.

Umibe was silent for a few moments as they passed a group of loud, boisterous samurai. "Your point is received," he said. "I do not sense the gift of the kami in you, Minami-san, yet you have a keen insight into the minds of the shugenja. How do you come by this knowledge, if you do not mind my asking?"

Minami spoke past the sudden lump in her throat. "I was once able to speak to the kami," she said. She struggled to keep the despair from her voice. "I lost the ability to do so after a certain experience on the field as a magistrate."

Umibe and Koun did not look at her, instead choosing to look straight ahead at the road. Minami was glad that they did not shame her by witnessing her burst of emotion. "I cannot imagine what that must feel like," Umibe finally said, the humor gone from his voice. "I apologize for bringing such pain to you."

Koun simply remained silent, instead choosing to stare at a food vendor as they crossed the road.

"Do not worry," Minami said, her emotions finally in check. "It was a long time ago, and I know that it is all for the best. I believe we have reached your destination."

Umibe and Koun looked around at his surroundings. The center of the testing grounds was a gathering place for vendors selling everything from small doodles to food. The crowd seemed to be drawn to the central testing area, where two shugenja prepared to match strength of will to see who would succeed.

"I must depart, Umibe-san, Minami-san," Koun said. He glanced over toward the Lion tents then bowed to the pair. "I have to attend to my duties. Thank you for your company. You have taught me much."

"An unusual man," Umibe murmured as Koun walked away. "I seem to be just in time for Daigo's match. Thank you, Minami-san. You have given me much to think about."

Minami bowed back. "You as well, Umibe-san. I hope you find your answer to the questions."

And I hope that one day, you can find peace, Umibe

THE JADE CHAMPIONSHIP IN THE RPG

BY SHAWN CARMAN

The results of the Emerald Championship were unexpected to everyone but the Emerald Champion himself. The man to become the direct servant of the Emperor was not a paragon of honor, respected all across the land, but a man who was rumored to be an assassin and a murderer. The Imperial families decided then and there to fill a position of equal weight and importance. The new Jade Champion, they hoped, would divert the attentions of Shosuro Jimen and dampen his machinations.

Many people remember the reign of Kuni Utagu nicknamed the Wall. His constant vigilance protected the empire while it was weak and staggering from the massive civil war that rent the Empire. The new Jade Champion Kuni Daigo made neither grand promises nor assurances to fill the void left in the world by such a great legend. He simply knows his duty. He will fulfill them, or he will die at the task.

New Path: The Jade Magistrate [Shugenja]

Technique Rank: 4

Path of Entry: Any shugenja School Rank 3

Path of Egress: Re-enter the same School at Rank 4

Requirements: Glory 3.0+, Status 3.0+, or Honor 3.0+, must be invited by the Jade Champion

Technique: Path of Jade

Those who serve the Jade Champion share his mission of keeping the Empire pure from corruption in all its forms. You add your Insight Rank to the total of all your rolls involving Perception or Awareness. Any spell you cast that targets someone or something you know to possess any amount of Shadowlands Taint receives a number of Free Raises equal to your cumulative rank in shugenja Schools.

The Jade Seal

The Jade Seal is a small, almost insignificant object that belongs to the Jade Champion. When the seal was created, it was a simple badge of office that was used by the

champion to stamp onto official documents. Only the mark of the Jade Seal can promote someone to a Jade Magistrate or a Jade Legionnaire. The seal was often given to an assistant of the Jade Champion that would handle all the small but important duties that the Jade Champion simply did not have time to do on his own.

Since the Jade Seal has always been associated with powerful shugenja, it was only a matter of time before it absorbed enough magic to awaken. In the hands of Asahina Sekawa, Master of the Five Rings, the Jade Seal became a nemuranai of no small power.

The Jade Seal can only be handled by the Jade Champion or someone with the permission of the Jade Champion. The mark of the Jade Seal is immune to forgery; any attempts by the greatest of forgers looks fake to all viewers. Documents with the stamp of the Jade Seal never fade, though it may still be destroyed by normal methods. Finally, the bearer of the Jade Seal gains three Free Raises to detect forgeries.

Trappings of the Jade Champion

For more information on the rights, responsibilities, and trappings of the office of Jade Champion, see the chapter on Politics in Emerald Empire, and on the Mantle of the Jade Champion and other items in the upcoming supplement, Prayers & Treasures.

Kuni Daigo is a man devoted to one goal and one goal only: the destruction of the Shadowlands.

Even as a boy, Daigo knew exactly what the future lay in store for him. He grew up in the Kuni Wastes, a harsh reminder of the sacrifices the Crab Clan has made to protect the empire from the horrors of the Shadowlands. He read the histories of the Clan and noted the thousands of heroes who gave their lives to defend the Wall. On his gempukku, he saw firsthand the dangers of the lands beyond the Crab lands. Daigo took the lesson to heart and trained to learn all the weaknesses of the Shadowlands.

Kuni Daigo, the Jade Champion of Rokugan

Air 3 Earth 5 Fire 4 Water 3 Void 4

Reflexes 4 Intelligence 5 Strength 3

Honor: 2.8 Status: 9.0 Glory: 5.3

School/Rank: Kuni Shugenja 5

Advantages: Heartless, Social Position (Jade Champion), Strength of the Earth (4)

Disadvantages: Antisocial (2)

Kata: None

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Battle 2, Defense 3, Etiquette 1, Heavy Weapons 4, Instruction 3, Jujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 3, Meditation 5, Spellcraft (Maho, Spell Research) 5, Shadowlands Lore 7, Tea Ceremony 2, Theology 4

Spells: Banish, Commune, Counterspell, Importune, Sense, Summon, Earth's Stagnation, Force of Will, Jade Strike*, Fires from the Forge, Tetsubo of Earth*, Armor of Earth, Grasp of Earth, Tremor, Slash of the Lion*, Strength of the Crow*, Tomb of Jade*, Divide into Ash, Prison of Earth, Spikes of Earth, Fury of Osano-Wo, Aura of Flame, Speed of Flame*, Fist of Osano-Wo*, Light of Yakamo, Castle of Water, Path to Inner Peace, Wave-Borne Speed, Bane of the Scorpion, Regrow the Wound, Sacred Ground

Note: Spells marked with an * are Innate Abilities for Kuni Daigo.

Daigo was not disheartened to learn those weaknesses were few and far in between.

Daigo was never a frivolous man, but any outgoing behavior was erased in 1158. On the very first day that he was assigned there, the forces of Daigotsu assaulted and took the Kaiu Wall with a surprise attack from all sides. He fought bravely but could not stop the deaths of his companions. Daigo considers the Wall's capture a personal failure, as he believes that he should have been able to do more. He keeps these thoughts to himself but lets the memory of the day push him toward greater feats.

When he heard that Hida Kuroda had returned to the Crab Clan as Kyofu, Daigo volunteered for the opportunity to follow him into the Shadowlands. He was not important to the Clan, he reasoned to his daimyo, yet his skills would prove invaluable in the dangerous land. Tansho gave him permission to lead the Damned into combat, and Daigo

followed Kyofu to the Wall of Bone. He survived, but the horrific day would only convince him more that there was nothing more important than ensuring that such nightmares be exterminated as soon as possible.

Kuni Daigo knows the true duty of the Jade Champion. He believes his predecessor, Kuni Utagu, had the right idea. The Shadowlands is the only enemy, and the fight should be taken to the doorstep of the enemy. As soon as he ascended to the position of the Jade Champion, he began to gather all the jade he could from the sources now available to him. He began to prepare for his duty.

Daigo would ignore politics completely, if he could. In doing so, however, he hinders his own efforts. In order to focus his attentions on truly important matters, he gathers assistants to act on his behalf, giving him freedom to fight the Shadowlands. If he can do that, none of the political repercussions matter. The Shadowlands must be crushed.



Yogo Rieko was never an outstanding student and her parents did not realize her gifts until late into her childhood. Her ability to speak to the kami was at first stilted and unimpressive. However, Rieko did not complain that it took her twice the effort to perform the simplest spells. She accepted the fact that she was not gifted and worked harder.

She gained the attentions of the Kuroiban during the chaotic years after the death of Toturi the First. It was a confusing time, where strange tainted beasts appeared in the middle of the empire. Without waiting for orders or clarification, Rieko acted to destroy everything Tainted in the Scorpion lands. The Kuroiban were impressed with her dedication and quick responses and recruited her for their organization. With the help of the finest shugenja in the Scorpion Clan, Rieko trained harder and honed her powers to a level she had never dreamed.

Rieko is forward and sincere in her dealings with everyone. The honesty tends to surprise everyone she meets, as they do not expect a Scorpion to be forthright about her dealings. However, when she is performing the duties of the Kuroiban, she seems like a different person. In her eyes, the targets of the Kuroiban are less than nothing. They are not humans; they forfeited that right when they decided to betray the empire. In this, Rieko is brutally effective as a Kuroiban agent.

Yogo Rieko, Agent of the Kuroiban

Air 5 Earth 3 Fire 4 Water 3 Void 4

Reflexes 6 Willpower 4 Intelligence 5

Honor: 1.2 Status: 5.6 Glory: 4.9

School/Rank: Yogo Shugenja 4/Kuroiban

Advantages: Forbidden Knowledge, Read Lips

Disadvantages: None

Kata: None

Skills: Acting (Disguise) 3, Anatomy (Torture) 2, Calligraphy (Scorpion Clan Cipher) 2, Courtier 2, Deceit 5, Etiquette 4, Forgery 2, Investigation (Interrogation, Search) 7, Kenjutsu 2, Knives 2, Lore: Maho 6, Medicine (Wound Treatment) 3, Meditation 3, Shadowlands Lore 4, Spellcraft (Maho) 5, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 3

Spells: Banish, Commune, Counterspell, Importune, Sense, Summon, By the Light of Lady Moon, Cloak of Night*, Tempest of Air, Way of Deception*, Call Upon the Wind, Mists of Illusion, The Eye Shall Not See, Mask of Wind, Summon Fog, Know the Mind, Lady Moon's Legion, Slayer's Knives, Whirlwind, Earth's Stagnation, Jade Strike*, Armor of Earth, Walk Without Passing, Immortal Steel, Tomb of Jade*, Path to Inner Peace

Note: Spells marked with an * are Innate Abilities. If anyone asked Yogo Rieko what she had done to reach her position, both as an influential Jade Magistrate and a high ranking member of the secret Scorpion organization the Kuroiban, Rieko would respond with a simple word: "diligence."

She attended the Jade Championship with cool confidence. She prepared for months for the competition and was as ready as she could be. No one knew her identity before the beginning of the Championship. With the help of a few tricks she learned while performing missions for the Kuroiban, she disguised her true abilities and pretended to be a shugenja of little worth. The deception helped her best her opponents until she faced Kuni Daigo. She accessed his abilities and thought that he would be no match against her skills with air and earth. Her defeat only made her see that she was just as likely to fall into the same trap she had posed to her opponents. She believed her foe to be "just a Crab," and was unprepared for his power.

Rieko is prepared to fall back into obscurity and return to her duties with the Kuroiban. However, her future is out of her control. The Emerald Champion Shosuro Jimen promised her at the tournament that she would be chosen as one of Daigo's magistrates. Though such an outcome seemed unlikely, she was unsurprised to receive the call to become a Jade Magistrate.

Rieko would much prefer to be with her comrades in the Kuroiban, but she will do what must be done to guarantee Scorpion power in the empire. She watches Daigo and waits for him to falter. Daigo undoubtedly knows that his newest assistant reports to the nefarious Emerald Champion. Rieko must perform in a delicate dance where any misstep will mean her downfall.



Perhaps her life would have been different had she not followed a simple whim.

Minami was a daring child, unbound by expectations or rules. Her parents adored her and allowed her every indulgence. She always pushed the boundaries of what society and the world told her she could do. She was only three when her parents discovered her in her room, spirits of fire dancing around her as she giggled and laughed. Everyone was surprised except for Minami. To her, it was only natural that the kami would bless her. They had been talking to her all her life.

Minami entered the Moshi Shugenja School at the height of the Spirit Wars. Minami impressed her teachers by grasping the techniques to hone her attunement to the kami. She performed her gempukku ritual at the top of her class. When she became a samurai, the whole world was ripe for her taking.

Her sensei wanted Minami to become a teacher for the school, to help the younger children understand their abilities. Minami had something else in mind. She was young and reckless; the idea of spending the rest of her life in a remote school did not appeal to her. She respectfully declined the suggestions and offered her abilities to the Tsuruchi magistrates. A shugenja, she reasoned to the magistrates, would help hunt down fugitives of Imperial Law. A shugenja paired with a Tsuruchi Bounty Hunter would be able to perform feats that would be impossible without the help of the kami. Tsuruchi Nobumoto was

Moshi Minami, Jade Magistrate

Air 3 Earth 2 Fire 4 Water 3 Void 3

Awareness 4 Willpower 3 Intelligence 5

Honor: 2.2 Status: 2.9 Glory: 3.4

School/Rank: Moshi Shugenja School 2*/Yoritomo Courtier School 1

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Clear Thinker, Precise Memory

Disadvantages: Momoku, Small

Kata: None

Skills: Artisan: Ikebana 2, Calligraphy 4, Courtier (Gossip, Political Maneuvering) 6, Divination 1, Etiquette (Conversation, Sincerity) 5, Investigation (Notice) 4, Lore: Orochi 5, Meditation 3, Spellcraft 4, Storytelling (Poetry) 3, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology (Fortunes) 6

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Counterspell, Burst, Extinguish, The Fires that Cleanse, Hurried Steps, Inferno's Tooth, Fist of Osano-Wo, Heart of Nature, Path to Inner Peace

Note: Moshi Minami can no longer hear the kami, nor will they answer her. Minami cannot use any spells, her Moshi Shugenja School Techniques, or any kiho unless this affliction is treated. However, if this affliction is treated, she loses the Momoku Disadvantage as well.

skeptical, yet he gave Minami the opportunity to succeed. He paired Minami with another samurai fresh out of his gempukku and set them to work.

Tsuruchi Ki and Minami worked together to find many criminals across the Empire. It took several years for Minami to get accustomed to her duties but those years were the best of her life. Ki grumbled and moaned about the rotten conditions, sleeping in the wilderness, thanklessly protecting the Empire, yet Minami could not release the sense of adventure from her mind.

Doji Oto was just another criminal wanted for forgery of travel documents for bandit gangs, yet he managed to lead Minami and Ki on a chase across the Crab lands. They finally cornered him in a cave in the middle of the Twilight Mountains. The duo charged in after their quarry without hesitation and entered a different world.

The tale of her adventures in Sakkaku, the Realm of Mischief, is well known in the Mantis lands. The Mantis know of Minami's pact with the orochi Tsurayuki and how

Minami cast great magic to bind the soul of a human and an orochi to escape back into Ningen-do. No one had ever heard of anyone casting such a complex spell, let alone use it to escape their cruel fate. The repercussions of her experiments into magic are only spoken of in whispered rumors. When Minami returned to the human realm, she could no longer talk to the kami. It was as if a great blindfold had covered her senses, leaving her deaf and blind to the rest of the world.

Yoritomo Kaigen and other shugenja refined Minami's spell and made it safe for further experimentation by the Mantis shugenja. Moshi Amika herself tried to figure out a way to cure Minami's affliction but made no progress into her problem. Given the state of affairs between The Mantis and the Phoenix, it was no easy feat to receive the care of Asako Bairei, but the Mantis used every favor they could to make that a reality. Even the Master of Water could not figure out how to restore the lost abilities.

Instead of wallowing in despair, Minami decided to find another way to serve her clan. If she could not be a priestess of the kami, she would serve the clan in the courts. She attended the Yoritomo Courtier School and threw herself at the lessons as fervently as she had years before with the Moshi. She learned quickly at the side of other great Mantis courtiers like Yoritomo Yoyonagi and Yoritomo Sachina.

She attended the Jade Championship despite her painful memories and watched others flaunt their abilities. She maintained a low profile, yet even that small appearance caught the attention of Kuni Daigo. The new Jade Champion decided that her unique background made her a perfect match to serve as the Jade Champion's representative in court. Minami accepted with eagerness; her new duties would offer her the greatest challenges of her life in the most dangerous battlefield of all.

At night, a voice whispers into her thoughts. If she had not followed Tsuruchi Ki into that cave, it says, she would not be in such a position of power. She would not have any of the opportunities at her fingertips now, but she would still be able to converse with the kami. At night, she admits to herself that she would do anything to regain everything she has lost.

Regret is a sin, yet Minami wonders every night if the sacrifices she has made for the Mantis are worth the pain she feels every day.



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