

THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

VOL. 2 / NO. 5

**1,000 Years
of Darkness**™

SNEAK PREVIEW

THE RETURN OF THE
MANTIS
UNRAVELED

**ACHIEVING
ENLIGHTENMENT**
STEP BY STEP

THE LAST
ORACLE
by Rich Wulf

ALSO:
BOOSTER DRAFT RULES
KOKU REDEMPTION





Illus. April Lee © 2002 AEG

SEASON OF THE Dragon™

In the mountains of the north, the Dragon Clan prepare for battle. Surrounded by enemies, they prepare to face one of their own – Agasha Tamori, Dark Oracle of Fire. It is the bloodthirsty Dark Oracle who has driven the Dragon from their homes, turned them against one another, thrown them into war with the Phoenix Clan.

Now the greatest heroes of the Dragon have decided to end the danger posed by Agasha Tamori. Will they succeed in cleansing this threat to the Empire, this stain upon their honor? Or will they perish in the attempt?

You will decide.



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THE
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THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY

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Editorial

It's been just over a year since L5R came home. (It's true, if you wondered at all, we're maternal us gamers, at heart...) At the moment of L5R's return, we had just finished a huge marketing push on our new CCG, Warlord. Our d20 products were doing extraordinarily well. Spycraft and Farscape were in the dicey throes of development. We felt confident.

To our great surprise, after nearly a year spent out of production, L5R returned with noble vengeance. Excitement and sales clamored beyond our best hopes. Thus, we've been able to publish 3 expansions since Gold and the fourth, Broken Blades, is at the printer.

Next we're publishing 1,000 Years of Darkness which takes a different tack from our standard storyline templates.

Our RPG line is receiving wide acclaim with our new dual 2nd Edition L5R and d20 mechanics format. Nearly everything is hitting yet we have much to accomplish.

Our next project is to revamp our organized play system by putting it into an online format. We'll be working exclusively with Organized Play™ and with their support, we'll have your tournament results immediately. Within minutes of organizers reporting results, we'll have access to them. In turn, we'll be able to cut down the time it takes to report storyline results to you from 4-5 months to 4-5 weeks.

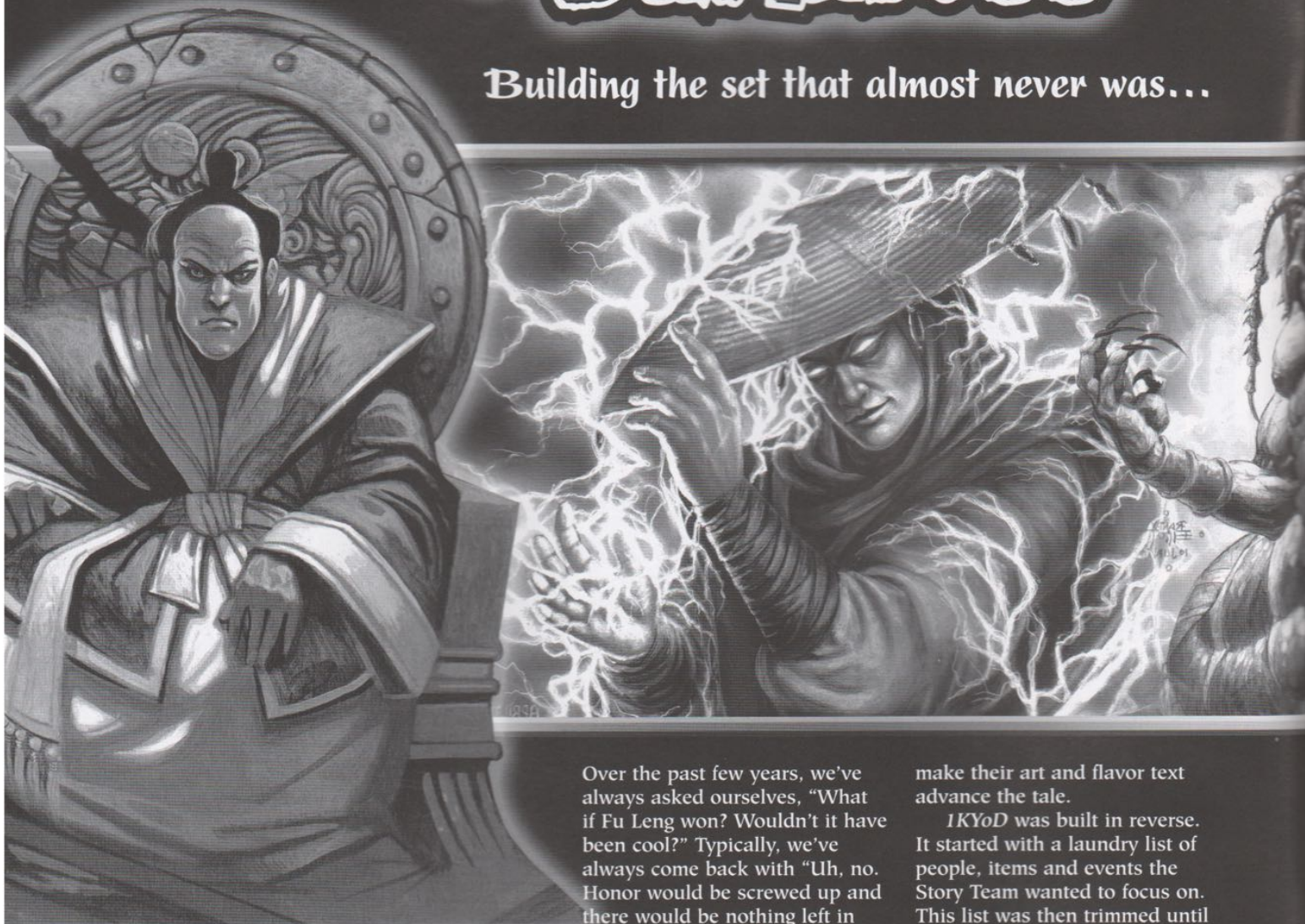
In a few weeks there will be an updated and revised tournament prize package available for all tournament organizers. Our goal is to improve your game and to upgrade your organized play experience — ultimately, of course, we wish to reaffirm that you've obviously chosen the best interactive storyline game ever.

— Raymond Lau
L5R Brand Manager



1,000 Years of Darkness™

Building the set that almost never was...



by Jeff Alexander

Illus: William O'Connor, April Lee, Randy Elliott, Steve Snyder, Hugh Jamieson © 2002 AEG

Over the past few years, we've always asked ourselves, "What if Fu Leng won? Wouldn't it have been cool?" Typically, we've always come back with "Uh, no. Honor would be screwed up and there would be nothing left in the world to play." It wasn't easy, but with a bit of thought and imagination, we gave it a try. As it turned out it, right on cue, it was more work than we expected.

The design of typical L5R expansions starts with mechanics. Ninety percent of the cards are developed first for game effect, then the Storyteam and Art Director work together to

make their art and flavor text advance the tale.

IKYoD was built in reverse. It started with a laundry list of people, items and events the Story Team wanted to focus on. This list was then trimmed until it fit into the set, then trimmed again to make room for cards that the Design Team wanted to add. Even the art department followed squarely behind the Story Team's lead on this set, rather than working in tandem.

This upside-down process was both a blessing and a curse on card design. On the one hand, it's exciting to think of mechanics for a brand new version of an old friend

like Togashi Mitsu or Daidoji Uji. On the other, the task of assigning an appropriate effect to a card titled "Obsidian and Jade" and featuring Fu Leng sitting in the Emerald Throneroom can be more than a little daunting.

We knew from the start that *1KYoD* would not be an entirely Gold-legal set. It couldn't be. Being an alternate history to an event that transpired a generation ago, it would entail rolling back the clock and would involve characters long-since deceased in the Four Winds story arc. But an entire expansion, even a promotional one, comprised of cards unusable in storyline play

legal when its effects are appropriate even if its story implications aren't, let us hit our goal.

The Open-only cards in *1KYoD* are aimed primarily at telling the story of what would have happened had the Second Day of Thunder gone horribly wrong for the Emerald Empire. Other than making sure we didn't completely upset it, the overall play balance of the Open environment was not taken into consideration. Bringing parity to a wildly unpredictable and steeply biased 3,500+ card environment was well beyond the scope of this expansion.

"But Jeff," you ask, "isn't mixing

follow-up of her *Time of the Void* version, to represent her reanimated form after being slain on the Day of Thunder. She was Experienced 2 in *TotV*, ergo, her next form should be Experienced 3 to allow an overlay in true storyline fashion. But Kamoko Experienced 3 had already been printed in *Hidden Emperor 4*. Under the Most Recent Printing rule, producing a new Kamoko Exp3 would obliterate that older version and render it forevermore unusable in Open games. This was not an option.

We briefly considered changing the card's title to sidestep the problem, instead calling her



would be a dud. This set had to be as Gold-legal as possible.

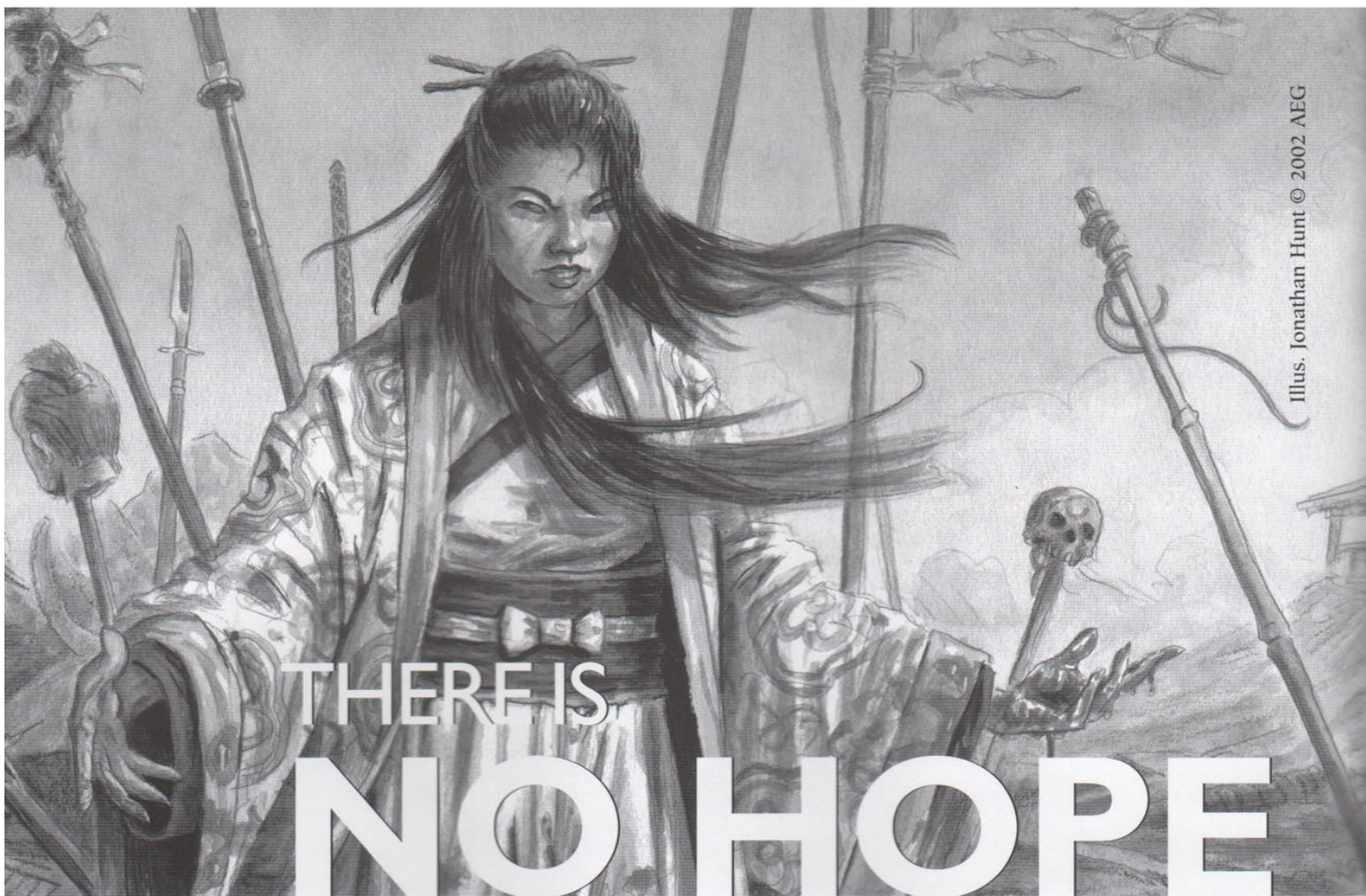
With that requirement in mind, we set a goal early in the design process of at least 50% Gold-legal cards, by title. Now, that exact percentage couldn't be applied evenly over all the card types. Actions, for instance, are relatively disconnected from the storyline, so making the majority of them legal was easy. On the other hand, with huge storyline stars like Togashi Mitsu and Hida Yakamo everywhere you turned, there was barely room to wedge a single Gold-legal Personality into each faction. Overall, these two factors balanced out, and that, along with a small amount of fudging and making a card Gold-

Open and Gold cards in one set hard because of their different power levels?" The point I just highlighted makes this a lot less of an issue. Yes, the cards that lack the Gold bug in *1KYoD* pack a bit more punch than their kanji-bearing counterparts, but only a little. Concentrating on the story let us place all the cards reasonably close to each other in potency but still appropriate to their respective environments.

Development wasn't entirely without its minor glitches. Introducing alternate versions of Experienced Personalities brought up an unexpected problem: identity overlap. Take Otaku Kamoko, for example. We wanted to print a

something like "Kamoko, Battle Maiden" and giving her the "Experienced 3 Otaku Kamoko" trait, but it didn't feel right to change her, or a half-dozen other people's names. We then compared alternate ways of writing "Experienced 3" and ultimately settled on the notation seen on the cards.

Even with the new Experience mechanics, the storyline implications, and balancing of 2 play environments, there was one thing good that came out of designing this set; we had a lot of fun. And when it releases, we expect you'll enjoy playing with the cards from *1,000 Years of Darkness* as much as we did designing it.



THERE IS NO HOPE

What if Rokugan's greatest heroes had failed on the Day of Thunder? This is what might have been...

"It is said that even the Elemental Dragons feared the power of our mighty Emperor. Rather than fear his wrath, they barred the Celestial Heavens, turning their backs upon those they claimed to protect."

— Miya Satoshi, Imperial Herald, 1129 by the Isawa Calendar, the Seventh Year of the Glorious Reign of Hantei XXXIX

by Rich Wulf

Through the hole in the sky, the Elemental Dragons gazed at the earth below. They were not pleased.

"There is no hope," said Air, his voice the whisper of a breeze.

"Jigoku has won," said Fire, scowling in anger as steam rose from his mighty jaws.

"This is not right, sister," said Thunder mournfully. "This should not be."

"Many things should not be," answered Earth, her great head resting upon heaped stone coils. "And yet, there they are. Rokugan is doomed."

"Brothers, sisters, let us not jump to conclusions," said Air, his sinuous body slithering between the others. "Let

us consult with Void, who watched Rokugan so closely for the last year."

The Dragon of the Void turned from where he had been staring through the hole in the sky. The others had not noticed his presence, so wraithlike his appearance had become. It was no secret that Void had been closer to the humans than most, and had suffered greatly. At his side sat Jade, the tiny creature that was not quite a dragon yet. Void dipped his head in acknowledgment to his siblings and began his report.

"It has been one year since the Thunders fell," said Void. "The Dark Lord, Fu Leng, has declared himself Emperor of Rokugan. The traitors Kachiko, rules by his side."

"Emperor?" said Fire. "Foolishness. Destruction is Fu Leng's only desire."

"No longer," said Void. "He has tasted the power of the Emperor and found it to his liking. He has demanded that all those who once served Hantei now serve him, or be destroyed. The Lion were first. With the Seven Thunders defeated, Fu Leng emerged from the Forbidden City and gave the armies a single chance to swear fealty. Ikoma Tsanuri, who once led those who

served the Hantei, would not bow before the ghastly thing that came from the Palace. Ikoma Ujiaki knew no such doubts; he struck down Tsanuri and swore fealty to Fu Leng, who ordered him to attack the army of the Thunders."

"Surely not all the noble Lion would serve the Dark Lord," said Earth, though her voice held little hope.

"Not all, no," Void did. "But some. Enough. Fu Leng's defeated Horde rose again at their Ujiaki's command. The Day of Thunder became a day of slaughter. Ikoma Ujiaki became the Rikugunshokan of the Legion of Jigoku."

Void paused for a long moment, allowing his brethren to absorb the terrible news. "The Crane were next," he said. "The ravages of the Clan War had crippled their armies, but the children of Doji would not surrender. A week after the Day of Thunder, the Legion of Jigoku arrived at Shinden Asahina. Fu Leng's new Emerald Champion stood beside Ujiaki — Doji Hoturi. He wore no armor, proudly displaying the hole Fu Leng had torn in his chest. Kuwanan, lord of the Crane, rode forth to challenge what must surely be another imposter claiming his brother's name. Hoturi the Heartless rode back an hour later with Doji Kuwanan's head impaled on the tip of his yari. Within the hour, Shinden Asahina burned. On that day, the samurai of the Crane Clan died."

"None survived?" whispered Air, not willing to believe it.

"Only one..." said Void.

The Dragons bowed their heads in silence. If a tear fell from Jade's eye, none mentioned it.

"The Phoenix were next," Void continued. "The Legion cut down the Shiba armies like blades of grass, but while they sacrificed their lives the Grand Master gathered what shugenja he could and staged a mass exodus to the north. The Grand Master was challenged by Isawa Tsuke, the fallen Master of Fire, thought slain on the Day of Thunder but now resurrected by the Emperor's terrible maho.

At Tsuke's side stood Kuni Yori, Yogo Junzo, Kitsuru Okura, and the mysterious Daigotsu. Naka Kuro could not stand against Fu Leng's new Dark Council of Masters. His soul was torn from his body and imprisoned in a shaft of obsidian by Kuni Yori, a perversion of the techniques the Kuni once used to trap the spirits of oni. Those Phoenix who bowed before the Dark Council were spared. Those who were not, which were many, were destroyed."

"What of the Dragon Clan?" snapped Fire. "You made no mention of them."

"Theirs is the strangest tale," said Void. "Since Hitomi returned to her people, Togashi Mountain has been wreathed in shadows and silence.

Any who dare visit Hitomi do not return. The Dragon are only ghosts now. Even oni do not go there."

"And what happened to the others?" asked Air.

"The Scorpion, Crab, the Naga, Toturi's Army, and Unicorn gathered on the Plains of Thunder," Void said, gazing through the hole in the sky again. "Toturi and Hida Yakamo led them. You all sensed what came next."

"The Ashura," moaned the voice of the Celestial Dragon, and seven pairs of eyes turned upward to face the enormous eye of the creature that held the Heavens aloft. The eye, once golden, was now a dark brown shot through with silver veins.

"Yes," said Void. "The Emperor's most terrible creation — like fingers of death, ghostly samurai that hover in the air as if the earth is revolted by their touch. Where they passed, samurai crumbled into dust. Their moth-like wings bore the mark of death, as sharp as a Kaiu Blade. Their arrows rained down plague and corruption. Agasha Tamori and Iuchi Karasu combined their magic to strike down the strongest Ashura, but were destroyed in turn when the creature's unholy power erupted forth. Toturi knew that this time there would be no escape. That was when..." Void grew silent, unwilling to tell more of the tale.

"That was when your Oracle interfered," said Earth, an accusatory tone in her deep bass voice.

"Yes," said Void. "Isawa Kaede rescued the heroes who remained."

"So Rokugan has been corrupted now, like the Shadowlands?" asked Earth.

"No," said Void. "Now Fu Leng prefers his subjects uncorrupted so that they can feel the terror of his rule."



Illus. Ben Peck © 2002 AEG



The Taint is now a gift to be given at his discretion."

"And have any escaped his rule?" asked Air.

"Three Naga cities still stand, and the Islands of Spice and Silk have a sort of peace," said Void. "Fu Leng has only a handful of ships, none of which are prepared for an attack on the isles. It is there that the heroes gather. Hida Yakamo, Togashi Mitsu, Yoritomo, Horiuchi Shosan, even Toturi. Unfortunately, the islands were never intended to house so many. They rely upon guerrilla raids and piracy to steal the food they need."

"A bitter end for samurai," snarled Fire.

"This is not the end," Void whispered, though it seemed as if not even he believed the words.

"You were always naïve," Fire said with a sneer. "It is no wonder your Oracle threw the elements from balance by acting directly."

"Fool!" the Celestial Dragon suddenly roared, shaking the Heavens. "It no longer matters! There is no more balance! A thousand years of darkness will consume Rokugan! We must close the hole in the sky and turn our backs upon the mortals."

"You would have us abandon them?" said Void.

"We have no choice," said Thunder, "we cannot risk Fu Leng conquering the Heavens as well."

Void hung his head, his star-like eyes shimmering.

"I cannot abandon Kaede. I will go to the mortal realm and stay with her."

"You are too weak, Void," Thunder said. "Stay here, and let me protect her. Let Isawa Kaede be the Oracle of Thunder."

"You will be alone, Thunder," said Earth gravely. "We can offer you no aid once the Heavens are sealed."

"I will need none," Thunder replied boldly. "When you return you will find me waiting, or you will find me dead."

"So be it," said the Celestial Dragon. "When our sister Water returns, Thunder shall leave and the hole will be closed. The Celestial Heavens will be barred to Rokugan for a thousand years." The Celestial Dragon's great eye closed. This discussion was over. The Elemental Dragons went their separate ways, returning to their respective enigmatic lives.

"Where has Water gone?" little Jade asked curiously, eyes fixed on Void's.

"To return what we have taken," Void whispered.

"The geisha?" Jade asked.

Void nodded. "She does not belong here now."

"That is sad," Jade said. "Thunder said that her child might be the Empire's greatest hero."

"Do not give up hope, Jade," Void said, looking down on Rokugan for the last time. "I think that the Empire needs heroes now more than ever."

BOOSTER DRAFT RULES

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This new L5R variant can be offered to players who want to play L5R in an alternative format to the standard Sealed Deck style.

Players begin with a predetermined set of unopened boosters, a minimum of 5 boosters. Each player gets the same number of boosters from each expansion set. For instance if John gets a 2 boosters from Gold, 1 from *A Perfect Cut* and 2 from *Broken Blades*, every other players gets exactly the same ones.

Once players acquire their boosters, they are arranged randomly at a table called a Council. Generally, you don't want more than 10 players per Council. If you have more than 10, you may want to split the players into 2 Councils.

Once arranged and seated in their pods players may open their first booster. This is determined by the tournament organizer. Players look through that booster and select one card from that pack. Once that card is selected, it becomes part of their card library and is no longer considered part of that booster pack. The rest of the booster is turned face down and passed to the person on his left. Once everyone selects a card, they pick up the booster that was just passed to them and select another card for their card library, again passing the remains of the booster to the person on their left. This continues until the last card is selected and there are no more cards.

New official tournament format for *Legend of the Five Rings*

Once the first booster is depleted, the tournament organizer signals which booster players open next. Like the first booster, players select their cards but this time, pass the second booster to the player on the right instead of the left. Players continue until that booster is depleted and go on to the third booster.

The direction players pass their boosters is determined by which booster they select from. The odd numbered boosters, 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th are passed to the left or clockwise. The even numbered boosters 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th are passed to the right or counterclockwise.

After the boosters are depleted, players may select the stronghold they wish to play from a list pre-approved by the tournament organizer. Upon selection of the stronghold, players get 9 cards automatically added to their card library. They get 3 *Small Farms*, 3 *Jade Works*, and 3 *Clan Holdings*. Depending on the clan they selected, their Clan Holdings are listed below:

Crab: Iron Mine
Crane: Marketplace
Dragon: Gold Mine
Lion: Copper Mine
Mantis: Kobune Port
Phoenix: Silver Mine

After players collect their Holdings, they examine their card library and create 30/30 legal L5R decks for play. The 3 per card maximum and uniqueness rule are waived. All standard rules for Sealed Deck play apply, except the rule waiving clan play restrictions.

Once players create their decks, they begin the tournament.



by Ray Lau

Ratling: Large Farm
Scorpion: Geisha House
Shadowlands: Corrupt Silver Mine
Unicorn: Stables



It's time to get organized! Here is everything you'll need to know to run a sanctioned L5R event.

by Ryan Dancy

Starting August 1st, *OrganizedPlay Corporation* will be responsible for sanctioning events and processing event results for Legend of the Five Rings. As a Tournament Organizer, there are some steps you need to take before running your event to ensure that your event will be sanctioned by AEG, that player results will count towards their player ratings and official totals, and that the data you collect will be properly reported.

First, you will need an AEG Tournament Organizer ID. To establish this ID, please go to www.organizedplay.com/aegcentral, log in, and click the "Become an AEG Tournament Organizer" button. To become an AEG Tournament Organizer, you will need to provide a unique email address where you can be contacted to receive important

information about your account and AEG events, FAQs, changes to the Floor Rules and Event Guidelines, etc.

Second, you will need to request that your event be sanctioned before it is run. To request event sanctioning, please go to www.organizedplay.com/aegcentral, log in, and click the "Request Event Sanctioning" button. You will need to know the date of your event, and the location where the event is to be held. You will also need your AEG Tournament Organizer ID which you were assigned in the first step.

Third, you need to receive confirmation that your event has been sanctioned, which will be

emailed to you automatically when the OrganizedPlay staff sanctions your event. You can view the status of your events by going to www.organizedplay.com/aegcentral, logging in, and clicking the "View My Events" button.

Fourth, you need to ensure that each participant in your event has a valid AEG Player ID. Blank AEG Player ID card forms will be provided to you on request so that you can make them available to any players in your event who do not already have a card. These are new IDs and replace any previous ID that the player may have from the DCI or from the Imperial Assembly. These cards are provided free of charge, and there

Sample Reporting Line

(Winner) Player ID: _____, Faction: _____, Wind: _____, vs.
(Loser) Player ID: _____, Faction: _____, Wind: _____.

is no cost to the players to participate in the program. If you do not already have a supply of blank AEG Player ID cards, you can order a pack for a \$5 shipping and handling fee at www.organizedplay.com/aegcentral, by logging in and clicking the "Order AEG Player ID Cards" button.

PLEASE NOTE: Without a valid, current AEG Player ID for EACH PARTICIPANT, your results WILL NOT be processed. You CANNOT use old DCI or Imperial Assembly numbers to report results. ONLY the new AEG Player ID cards will be accepted.

Fifth, you need to record each match played by each player, tracking the winner and the loser of each match. In the spaces provided below, please write the AEG Player ID number of the winner and loser of each match played. A "match" is usually one game, but if you are playing multi-game rounds, record the winner of each multi-game session rather than the individual games.

Also record the faction (clan name) for each player for each

match. Per the L5R Floor Rules, players are not allowed to change factions in the middle of an event.

Then list the "Wind" used by each player for each match. Per the L5R Floor Rules, players are not allowed to change Winds in the middle of an event. If a player chooses to play without a Wind, please note "None" in the space provided for the Wind.

See the example on the previous page for a sample reporting line.

Sixth, within 30 days of the date your event was scheduled to run, you must report results by going to www.organizedplay.com/aegcentral, logging in, and clicking the "Report Tournament Results" button. When you do so, please have your half of any AEG Player ID cards you issued at your event ready so that we can add those players to our system.

If you have any questions about this process, want to request tournament guidelines or L5R Floor Rules, or want to provide feedback, please write to us at info@organizedplay.com.



Illus. Llyn Hunter © 2002 AEG

The Dragon Draw Engine

At heart I'm a Dragon player — they were my first clan. It is the deck I usually won with so while meandering about on the first day at Origins and checking out what everyone was playing, it was a particular Dragon deck that caught my eye. Brandon "Hawke" Flores' deck: innovative and potent, it advanced to the final 32 and made the top 8 out of 132 players.

The main focus of this deck is drawing cards. In drawing a ton of cards, it creates opportunities instead of waiting for them. Through the use of the stronghold, Imperial Favor, and *Mirumoto Tsuge*, this deck is capable of drawing 4 cards a turn! That's a 300% card drawing disparity compared to most other deck types!

Typically, when playing this deck, you win by honor. With duels and by paying for personalities at full cost, it doesn't take long to reach 40 honor. Against other honor runners, hold some of your duels to gain the honor advantage when *Deeds, Not Words* is used against you. Make sure to dishonor the other player's personalities when they refuse duels and then follow this up with a *Shame*.

Against military decks, you may give up 1 or 2 provinces in favor of drawing cards to setup a bit of Personality Killing (PK) in later turns through *Iajutsu Challenge* and *For the Empire*. Additionally, you're armed with *Imperial Edicts*, *Flattery*, and *In Search of the Future*, against none of which your opponent can play *Test of Courage* as any kind of prevention.

This deck's card drawing compliments the dueling, military advantage, and honor gaining so well, it hums. Try it. You'll be pleasantly surprised.

Tsuge Sez...

Stronghold:

Shiryo Mirumoto

Wind:

Toturi Sezar

Personalities:

1 Doji Reju Exp2
3 Mirumoto Tsuge
3 Mirumoto Ukira
1 Miya Yemi
1 Rezan
3 Tamori Chieko
3 Tamori Chosai
1 Togashi Satsu

Holdings:

3 Gambling House
3 Gold Mine
2 Hiruma Dojo
3 Jade Works
1 Ki-Rin's Shrine Exp
3 Sanctified Temple
3 Small Farm

Regions:

2 Campsite

Events:

Bitter Vengeance
Boastful Proclamation
Imperial Gift
Welcome Home

Actions:

2 Code of the Bushido
2 Dragon Tattoo
3 Flattery
3 For the Empire
2 Iajutsu Art
3 Iajutsu Challenge
2 Iajutsu Duel
3 Imperial Edicts
2 In Search of the Future
2 Shame
2 Snow Crane Tattoo

Kihos:

2 Purity of Spirit
2 Ryoshin's Last Words
3 The Wind's Truth

Followers:

1 Hunting Tiger
1 Mirumoto House Guard

Items:

2 Armor of Shadows
1 Celestial Sword
of the Dragon
1 Imperial Standard

Rings:

Ring of Air
Ring of Earth

THE RETURN OF THE MANTIS

by Brandon Flores

The Mantis are back and they're ready for some Gold Edition action.

Looking at their personality base, the direction is clear. The clan is not built for true honor running; instead, one of their clan foci relies heavily on a military aspect. The Naval trait, allowing a free action in offensive battles, leans their decks heavily towards military.

The personality base before *Broken Blades* was rather haphazard. Dash honor requirement personalities helped somewhat but also offered up weaknesses to compensate. Any personalities they had with honor requirements were rather solid but with their low starting honor, any early honor hit could have nullified their very existence in play. With that in mind, the new Mantis player needs to work towards a balance of personalities, or simply adjust his gold producing holdings to include secondary methods of keeping his head above water in regards to honor totals.

With the release of *Broken Blades* the Mantis are ready for action...

The Mantis currently has a few "—" HR personalities in Gold: *Ikemoto*, *Nobumoto*, *Shanegon*, *Junichi*, *Katoa* and *Gusai*.

Nobumoto is the *Soul of Mukami*, yet when given the Naval trait he's more akin to *Purusha*. The drawback on him is that he's tiny and takes up a slot in your deck that could have been used by a personality with force. *Shanegon's* ability is bland but as a Gold boxable he's rather standard fare. *Junichi*, the *Soul of Ranbe*, can reduce *Osano-Wo* card costs in addition to his normal shugenja abilities; his 2C is a problem, however, since shugenja's chi in Gold is rather important for simple things like *The Wind's Truth*. *Katoa* helps you pay for fate actions at the cost of bowing and an honor hit, yet it's rather negligible when it comes to saving your hide. He can bow to pay for *Call to Arms* or afford an *Investigation*, which can

be invaluable. The reigning theme behind these particular personalities is that they're all non-samurai, meaning they need the "—" HR to make up for their dishonor weaknesses.

The samurai of the "—" HR group have it a little better. *Ikemoto* has the bow/unbow "drawback" which is only an issue in the late game. Until then, he's a prime candidate for attacking and "buying" a rally next turn or simply *Ambushing* something and straightening before the attack phase. *Gusai* is simply large; his ability doesn't see much use in Gold, since bowing him to cancel a political action is only effective against *The Wind's Truth* or possibly the favor.

The honorable personalities for Mantis are much better. *Kalani*, *Hiro*, *Aramasu Exp3*, *Gombe*, *Heishiro*, *Okame*, *Kitao* (and *Exp*) and *Sen* all offer something to the

honorable decks. The less-than-stellar *Mogai*, *Yukue Exp*, *Sumio* and *Naizen* will likely not see play due to either high honor requirements or lame duck abilities. *Osano-Wo* may not be a Mantis, yet he joins for two less gold and he brings with him a great ability as well as a trait.

From a military standpoint, the best personalities would obviously be the cost effective ones. Decks can comfortably run with three each of *Ikemoto*, *Katoa*, *Kalani*, *Okame*, and *Kitao*, with *Kitao Exp* and *Aramasu Exp3* serving as the heavier tanks. It offers some boxable personalities and a few midgame personalities as well.

The gold structure for a fragile Mantis lineup should include some honor-gaining mechanism. With a 4G stronghold, the Mantis can look towards *Sanctified Temples* or *Kabuki Theater Troupes*. The *Temples* can offer more honor with excess gold later yet the *Troupes* require no gold to work and keep you stable early if you need them. For stability's sake, the *Troupes* are a smarter choice.

Traditional gold would then follow in the forms of *The Hiruma Dojo*, *Jade Works*, *Kobune Port*, *Small Farm* and *Large Farm*.

For regions, Mantis doesn't need the standard *Campsites*, *Sorrow's Paths* or *Farmlands*. For their focused purpose, you're best off with a couple *War-Stained Fields*. The ability to manipulate your followers into completely Naval units gives you a stronger advantage when entering battles, freeing up your *Sneak Attacks* for battles with mixed armies.

As for events, it may be best to stick with the *Imperial Gift* and *Welcome Home*. You'd have a free slot available at this point for something extraneous, like *Ki-Rin's Shrine Exp* or *Honor's Lesson Dojo*.

As for the Fate deck, the construction is rather simple. For naval followers, you should include *Ivory Isle Mercenaries*, *Mantis Bushi*, and *Mantis Raiders*. Other methods to victory involve going the *Ashigaru* path and drawing extra cards, and worming your way into *Sneak Attacks*, *Stand Against the Waves*, *Superior*

Tactics, and *Kaneka's Advance*.

Action is key to the Naval strategy. The early units are designed to take advantage of the first action, so if your opponent presents a strong defense, you can do something about it. A naval *Arrows from the Woods* or *Stand Against the Waves* can often wreck someone's entire battle strategy, with naval *Kaneka's Advance* supplementing as a "now you see me, now you don't" method of attack.

As for your wind choice, it'll either be *Tsudao* or *Naseru*. Low honor clans may fall behind, so you can afford to use *Tsudao* in defense. However, if you play the personality-kill decks with *Kolats* and *Ambushes*, *Naseru* is your best bet since he affords you access to *Naseru's Strength*.

As it stands, Mantis is a decent clan that still needs a piece or two to complete its naval punch. Until then, people can get a feel for it until a few more sets come out and their personality and actions bases become more fully stocked.

Rice for Rats Deck

Making a competitive Ratling deck using the *Warrens* stronghold can be difficult, but rewarding. Obviously, playing any Ratling-based deck has its weaknesses, since Nezumi easily fall prey to most types of personality removal. The key, then, is to use their biggest strength: momentum.

The first challenge is to build a solid gold scheme. The *Farms* and *Forests* formula works well, and really takes off when a *Forests of Shinomen* enters play. Since most of your Ratling personalities have a gold cost of 5 or 6, your *Forests* essentially become another set of *Jade Works*.

After you have several gold-producing holdings in play, it's time to recruit vermin! Your 12PS buys adequate time needed to summon a small horde. Try to concentrate your attacks to one province at a time, as you will often lose personalities and followers in the process. *Sneak Attack* and *Stand Against the Waves*, or *Sneak* and use ranged attacks whenever possible. If you lose a battle, just summon a new horde quickly, rinse, and repeat.

Rice for Rats

By Mark Jelfo

Stronghold:

Warrens of the Nezumi

Wind:

Toturi Tsudao

Dynasty:

Personalities:

3 Ik'krt
3 Kan'ok'ticheck
3 Nir'um'tuk
2 Ratling Conjurer
2 Ruantek
3 T'k
3 Yoee'trr
1 Zin'tch

Holdings:

1 Dragon Dancers
3 Forest
3 Jade Works
3 Large Farm
2 Rice Paddy
3 Small Farm

Regions:

2 Forests of Shinomen
1 Plains of Otosan Uchi

Events:

Imperial Census
Peasant Revolt

Actions:

2 A Test of Courage
3 Arrows from the Woods
3 Charge
1 Counterattack
2 Narrow Ground
3 Rallying Cry
3 Sneak Attack
2 Stand Against the Waves
3 Superior Tactics
3 Take the Initiative

Ancestors:

Wikki'thich-hie A'tck

Followers:

3 Ashigaru Archers
3 Ashigaru Spearmen
3 Ratling Pack
3 Ratling Scout

Rings:

Ring of the Void



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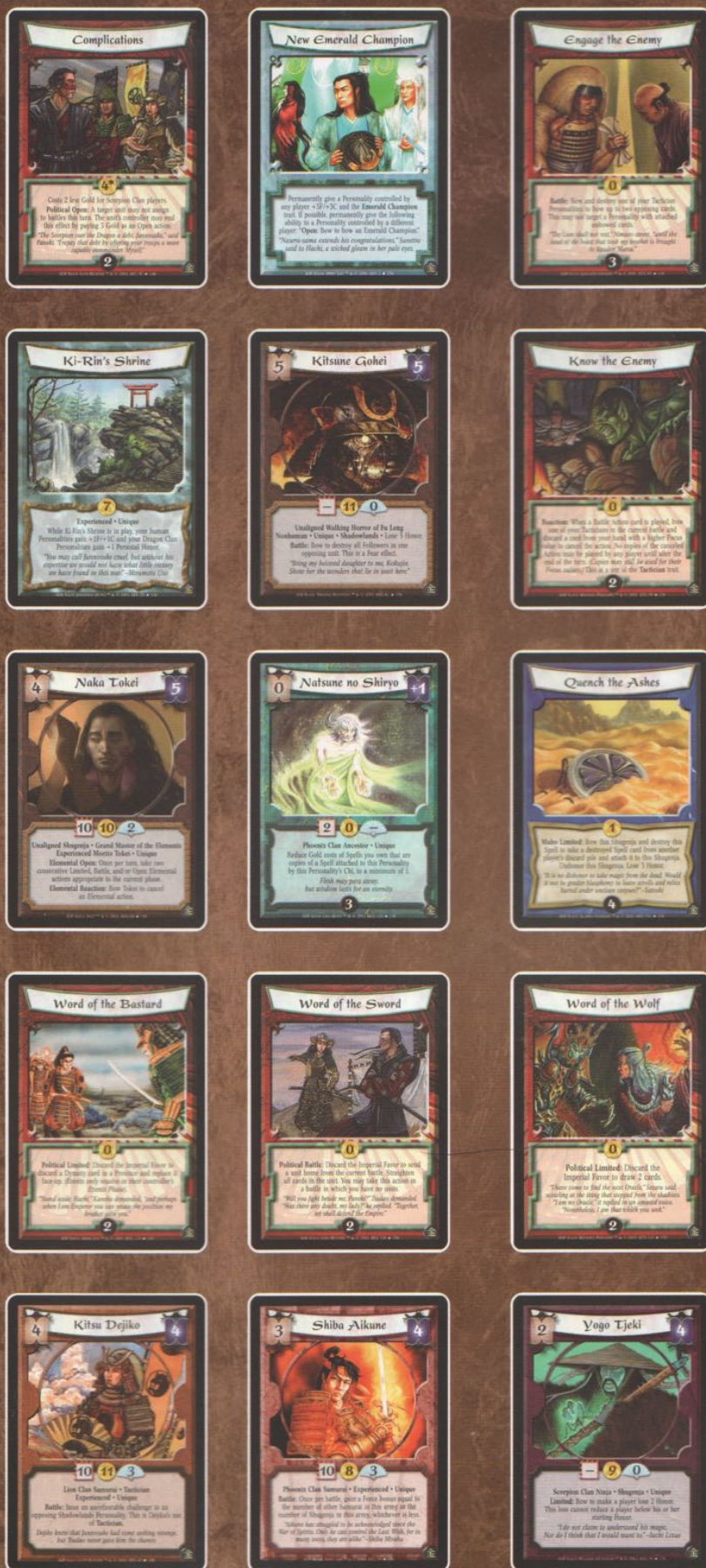
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- ☐ WORD OF THE BASTERD
- ☐ WORD OF THE SWORD
- ☐ WORD OF THE WOLF
- ☐ GAIJUTSU NO SHIYO
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THE LAST ORACLE

"In the ninth glorious year of the reign of Hantei XXXIX..."

— Miya Satoshi, Imperial Herald

The sky was black now. Even during the day, the smoke from ten thousand fires raging across the face of the Empire nearly blotted out the light of day. Isawa Kaede could not remember the last time she had truly felt the warmth of the Lady Amaterasu. Not so long ago she had gone to the lands of the Moshi family in search of any insight they could offer. Perhaps with their knowledge of the Lady Sun, Kaede could contact the Dragon that shared her soul. She had not felt the Dragon of the Void's presence in far too long, and she feared that something truly dreadful had happened.

The horror of what she had found in the Centipede lands was something that remained with her even now. With so much horror and death in the world, Kaede often marveled that she had yet to become numb to it. She wept over the burned and twisted carcass of each child she came across, and mourned the loss of all those who had been destroyed by Fu Leng's rule. Still, it was better this way. If she ever lost so much of her humanity that meaningless slaughter did not affect her, perhaps it was time to leave the mortal world behind.

The mortal world. Mortal was an appropriate word, for no living being was too aware of his or her mortality in this dark time. Sinister, inhuman creatures scoured the face of the Empire, enslaving or destroying all who opposed them. Only by acquiescing to the tyrannical rule of the despotic god Fu Leng could anyone hope to survive. And even then, survival consisted of slaving one's life away in the service of a corrupted Emperor while desperately trying to avoid attracting the attention of the murderous beasts that served him.

Isawa Kaede halted her reverie and took note of her surroundings. She was no longer in the vast, burning plains of the northern Empire, but instead she found herself in the blackened peaks of the Twilight Mountains. At one time, such a transition had been normal for her. The essence of the Void Dragon that permeated her being would occasionally take her places without warning. It was one of the small prices one paid to be an Oracle. But Kaede had not felt the Void Dragon's presence in so long that the sudden movement surprised her.

Taking stock of the peaks around her, Kaede quickly recognized her position. This particular section of the Twilight Mountains was once the home of the poor, doomed Boar Clan. More importantly, the last remaining vestige of that clan's existence, an ancient stone tower, was home to one of her kind, Hiruma Osuno, the Oracle of Earth.

With an all-too-human eagerness, Kaede moved herself through the Void, traveling instantly to the site of the Tower of Vines her brother called his home. Her eagerness was instantly snuffed at the sight that greeted her: the proud tower was a smoldering ruin, collapsed into a meaningless pile of stone and wood. Struggling with despair, she reached out with her senses to try to find some sign of life. She sighed with relief. There was something there; it was faint. Someone lived yet in the ruins.

Kaede ran across the hillside to the base of the collapsed tower, scanning the wreckage for any movement or sign of life. There was a soft clattering of stones to her right. She started to move in that direction, then stopped as a gigantic beast rose from the rubble.

The creature was at least fifteen feet tall, perhaps more. Its skin was covered with rough green scales and festering red boils. Long mandibles surrounded its mouth and rows of spiked tentacles lined its underbelly. From its appearance, it could very well have destroyed the tower on its own, but because of its massive bulk, the beast was apparently trapped in the rubble when the tower fell. It chattered excitedly and reached for Kaede with one gigantic claw. As it grew closer, she felt another emotion that had long been absent from her mind.

Rage.

With clenched teeth, Kaede stepped forward and made a short, slashing motion with her hand. A gaping wound ripped open in the body of the creature, its thick carapace parting as easily as water. Blue ichor fountained from its body. The monstrous beast shrieked in surprise and agony, reeling from the sheer shock of the strike. Kaede did not relent, reaching out and shredding the thing's essence again and again, tearing it to pieces. As she tore it apart, the chunks of meat and bone were rendered into nothing by the power of Void. In moments, she had reduced the beast to a memory. It was as if it had never existed.

"Kaede..." came a weak voice from the rubble.

She rushed to the source of the voice. There, lying in the shattered remnants of the tower was the broken and dying form of her counterpart, the Oracle of Earth. One look at his ruined body told her that he was dying. Not even an Oracle could survive the wounds he had endured. "Do not try to speak," she whispered. It occurred to her that she had never truly met this man before, though she felt an instant kinship with him.

"You must listen," he croaked. "There is very little time. When the beast came, I tried to summon the power of the Earth Dragon, and I failed." He coughed violently, and it was obvious that he was bleeding inside. "Have... have you noticed it as well?"

"Yes," she admitted. "The Dragons are distant now."

"No, not distant," he corrected weakly. "They have abandoned us, Kaede. The mortal realm is lost, and the Heavens have sealed their gates to avoid the same

fate." His one remaining hand clutched at Kaede. "Can you feel it?" he whispered. "Can you feel them leaving?"

She only nodded, a single tear rolling down her cheek. "We are lost."

"No," he said again, with surprising force. His eyes blazed with sudden fury. "The elements have abandoned us, but there is still a chance. As long as humanity still exists, there is a chance for victory. You must be that chance, Kaede."

"I do not understand," she protested.

"One Dragon remains," he said. "The Dragon of Thunder. The Dragon of courage, protector of heroes. So long as it remains with us, we have a chance. But it cannot act against Fu Leng on its own. It must have an agent. It must have an Oracle." The dying Oracle slumped back against the stones, his strength fading rapidly. "I had hoped to help you, but it is too late for that. You are the only one left, Kaede. You are the Oracle of Thunder," he whispered.

The Oracle said no more. It took Kaede several moments to realize that Hiruma Osuno had died.

Kaede wept then, stroking the dead man's cheek. The thought that his flesh was dead did not matter to her at the time, because the flesh was pure and uncorrupt. The touch of another human seemed so inconsequential when the threat of being torn asunder by an oni was a daily reality.

A cold sensation rippled through Kaede's being, so suddenly and harshly that she gasped with the severity of the feeling. She felt the Void recede from her as suddenly as the wind shifting from one direction to another. For the first time in decades, she could not sense the Void. In an instant, she was human again, robbed of all her strongest magic. She felt as defenseless as a newborn.

Before she could react to the sudden loss, a new feeling welled forth inside her, a blossoming fire within her soul that filled her with a sense of confidence the likes of which she had never known. She was suddenly aware of thousands of humans across Rokugan, each struggling against the forces of Fu Leng in their own way, to the best of their abilities. Each bore within them the embers that could be fanned into a raging inferno. And some already possessed such fire.

A voice resonated throughout her mind and soul, echoing in the deepest recesses of her being. "Even in the darkest storm, thunder lights the way. I am with you, Isawa Kaede," the Dragon of Thunder said. "Now and forever. You know what you must do."

Kaede knew. She was the guardian of heroes, the protector of humanity's last chance. She was the seed that must endure this dark time until the forces of darkness were banished and the enemies of darkness returned to their rightful place. She must counsel the heroes that remained and ensure that the light of humanity was not extinguished forever.

And she knew where she must begin.

* * *

At the second Day of Thunder, the Emerald Empire of Rokugan fell to the dark power of Fu Leng. The greatest heroes of the land marshaled their forces to kill the Dark Emperor. They had failed. Laughing, the dark god summoned forth demons known as Ashura from the deepest pits of Jigoku. They descended upon the forces of Rokugan like locusts, destroying everything they touched.

Kaede knew when she stepped forth to save the heroes of Rokugan that she had defied the rules that governed the Oracles of Light. Normally, such an act would have had terrible consequences, but with the Empire already consumed by chaos she hoped it would make little difference. Now, as she faced the leader of those heroes three years later, she knew she had made the right decision.

Akodo Toturi had changed very little, but the lines around his face were deeper and the look of his eyes spoke of a fatigue no man should endure. To her, however, his spirit shone as brilliantly as the sun. The flames within his soul burned so brightly that it seemed a miracle his flesh could contain them.

"It is good to see you once more, Kaede-san," Toturi said, a faint smile upon his lips. "I had thought perhaps you were lost to us."

"I was lost," she replied, "but not in the sense you mean. And now I have new purpose. You are the key to my quest."

Toturi shook his head. His dark eyes were like steel. "Now is not the time for riddles, Kaede. Are you here to aid us or not?"

"I have come to aid you, Toturi. But again, not in the way you think. You have spent the past two years leading your force's army through the mountains of Rokugan's western border, taking supplies where you can and striking out at whatever enemies are available. It is a meager existence, one unworthy of a man such as yourself."

"I have nothing," Toturi hissed. "If I attack with what I have, the only thing I achieve is a violent death for myself and my men. We shall end up serving Fu Leng as undead abominations, like Hoturi and Kamoko, or a slave to his influence like Kachiko. Such a fate is no

better than surrender, and surrender is unacceptable."

"I have brought you all you will need to fight," Kaede said.

Toturi frowned. "Weapons?"

Kaede smiled. "Of a sort, yes." She gestured to the entrance to Toturi's ramshackle tent. The flap whipped aside as if by a strong wind, and three figures strode in.

The first was by far the largest. As broad as two men, a single fist glowing faintly with the luminescence of supernatural jade, the powerful warrior lay down a tetsubo the length of a normal man's entire body. The second was small and rail thin. His armor was blackened by soot and grease. His face was covered by an iron mempo.

"Toturi," the first man rumbled. "Still alive, neh?"

"Hida Yakamo," Toturi had risen from his seat. A grin slowly spread across his weathered features. "I thought you were dead, my friend!"

"Bah!" roared Yakamo. "You didn't think Fu Leng could stop me, did you?"

"And you," Toturi turned to the second figure. "You seem familiar..."

"I look much different, I suppose."

"Daidoji Uji!" exclaimed Toturi. "I thought there were no more Crane."

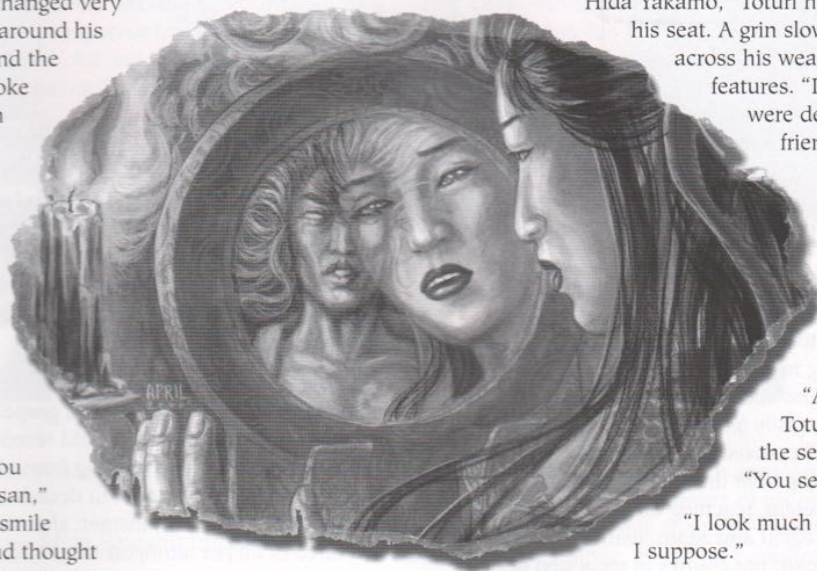
"You were right," Uji whispered. "My clan is dead. I live only to kill Doji Hoturi."

"I cannot believe this," Toturi said, slumping back into his seat. "I thought all of you dead."

"There are many flames still burning within Rokugan," Kaede answered. "We must gather the flames together if we are to survive this winter. The Crane and Phoenix are dead, the Crab nearly so. The Naga are being exterminated. The Dragon are gone. The Unicorn have fled, and the Lion and Scorpion serve Fu Leng willingly."

There was silence in the tent for a moment. Then Yakamo laughed.

"I do like a challenge!" he exclaimed. "When do we begin?"



ACHIEVING ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment is a unique feature of L5R. Building a successful Enlightenment deck is a rewarding experience which goes unrivaled. However, with the demise of *Finding the Harmony* as a viable way to Enlighten, the path to Enlightenment once again becomes long and difficult.

So, you may ask, "How would one such as me achieve this mighty goal?"

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

1. Prepare yourself. Before you even start building your deck, think carefully about the things that will be required for the play of all five Rings. For the *Ring of Air*, you're going to need a few Shugenja (preferably some with Innate Abilities) or Monks available. You'll need some nifty tricks to get the Rings of Water, Earth, and Fire into play, and you'll need to take into account how difficult it will be for you to drop your hand for Void. Sure, these may all sound like pretty simple considerations, but people will forget to take these things into account when building their deck. Think about the Clan you want to Enlighten with, and whether or not that Clan has access to all the things that you need. Making a weak decision at this point can make the next four tips pretty pointless, so take your time. Choose wisely.



Illus. Mark Evans © 2002 AEG

2. **Be Self-sufficient.** Three of your Rings require interaction with your opponent. Ensure that those levels of interaction are available to you. The *Armor of Osano-Wo* is your best friend, because it ensures that you don't have to wait around hoping your opponent will get twitchy and attack you. *Ambush* is great for Water, because it always gives you an opposing army to beat up on. Also, think carefully about putting a *Wandering Monk* or two into your deck. Tossing a *Wandering Monk* over to your opponent will guarantee you a bowed personality that you can both duel for Fire and *Ambush* for Water. Bring everything you need for Enlightenment with you to the table. You won't be disappointed that your opponent doesn't have something you need.

a card for an effect? Better. Be ruthless with your card choices, and you will be rewarded with success.

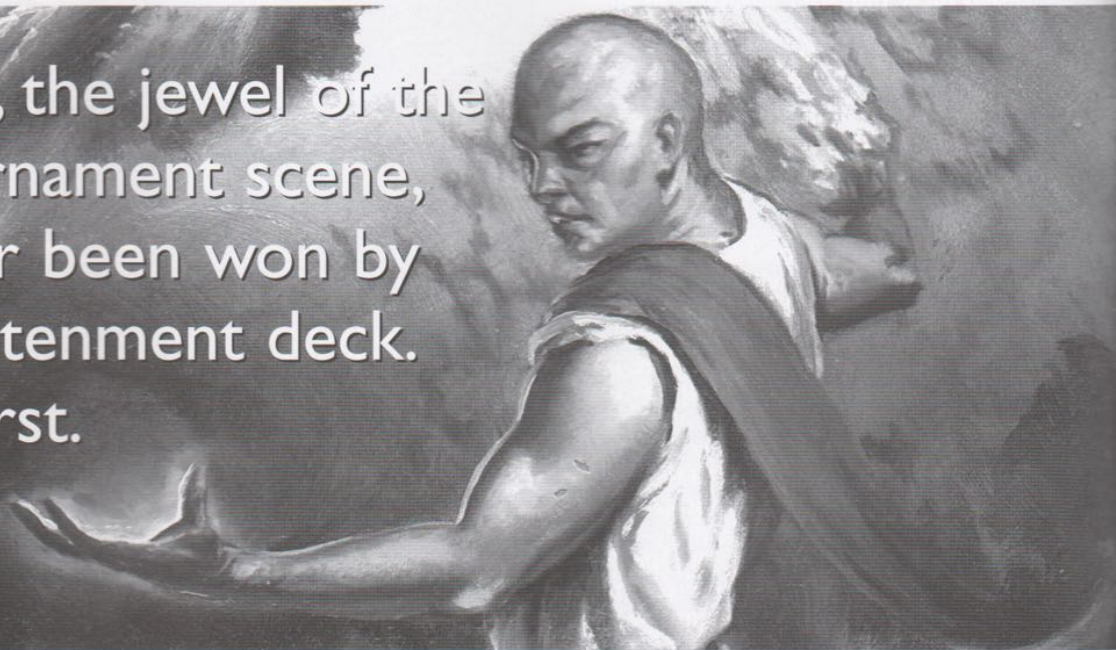
4. **Pack Resources.** All five Rings are Fate cards. Most of the ways you have to play your Rings are likely to be Fate cards. So, the more ways you have to draw Fate cards, the more Fate cards your draw, and the more options that you have. Unlike a lot of other decks, you really can't afford to tie yourself to the one normal draw per turn that comes in the rulebook. Don't be afraid to grab a few unconventional ways to draw some cards, like *Interesting Sticks*. Also, anytime you can trade a Dynasty card for a Fate card (*Glimpse of the Unicorn*, *Imperial Ambassadorship*, *Wandering Monk*), take it.

make this deck work, and that is, of course, practice. If the secrets to Enlightenment were given away on every street corner, everyone would be doing it.

Finding the Harmony had a lot of effects on the tournament environment, but one of them was the complete destruction of respect for the Enlightenment victory. With the MRP and fall of *Finding*, that respect is slowly starting to return. Today, it really means something to Enlighten. An Enlightenment victory at a major tournament will once again get you a standing ovation. However, the Designers are more aware of what Enlightenment should mean. It is, and always will be, the most difficult of all the victory conditions.

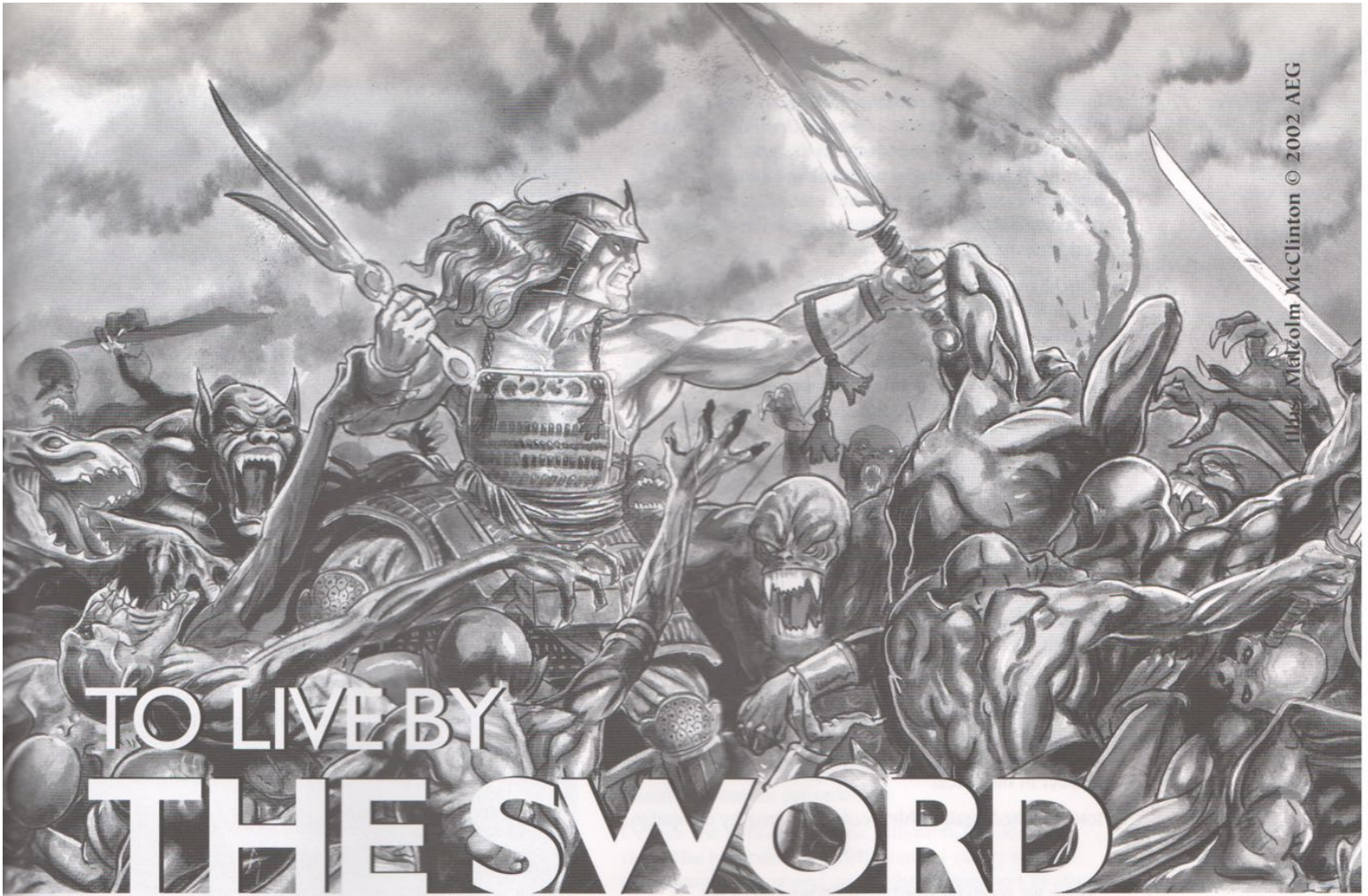
The road to Enlightenment is long, but at the end lies a reward without peer in this game.

GenCon, the jewel of the L5R tournament scene, has never been won by an Enlightenment deck. Be the first.



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

5. **Walk the Long Road.** Your first build of an Enlightenment deck will never be as good as the fifth build, and the fifth build will never be as successful as the tenth build. When you start off on the path to Enlightenment, be prepared to do some rigorous testing. Be prepared to rethink your basic assumptions. Be prepared to get frustrated and throw your deck against the wall. Unfortunately, though, there's only one way to learn how to



TO LIVE BY THE SWORD

It was difficult not to love Toturi Tsudao. Not love of the sort one found in Kakita romantic poems, of course. That would be completely inappropriate. She was exquisitely beautiful, yes, but a true samurai kept such feelings under control. Duty and loyalty were all that mattered, and it was in that regard that Tsudao gained the respect, admiration, and even love of those under her command.

Doji Jotaro watched the woman known as the Sword move among her troops, checking the readiness of her men and making preparations to break camp. Many in the Empire believed her nickname came as a result of her long years of service to the Imperial Legions. That was part of it, but not all. Her devotion, her honorable nature, and her brilliant leadership had earned her the nickname when she was yet a teen, fresh from her gempukku. It was the comparison of her innate nature to that of the samurai ideal that made the term so appropriate.

"Pining again, Crane?" The tone of the voice was pleasant enough, but there was a demeaning edge to the words. Frowning, Jotaro turned to face what was becoming an all too familiar adversary.

"I would think you would have found something else to occupy your time, Paneki-san," Jotaro said pleasantly. "While I certainly enjoy our conversation, I find it hard to believe there is not something more pressing for you to do. After all, you have been here longer."

Bayushi Paneki, a member of Toturi Tsudao's command staff with a reputation as a hero of the Empire. Since Jotaro had arrived in the First Legion, the Scorpion had treated him with nothing but disdain and disrespect. For the past week, the man had needled him whenever possible, always skirting the edge of insult but never actually crossing over. For whatever reason, the abrasive samurai had decided that it was in the best interests of his clan to keep a close eye on Jotaro. Not that Jotaro had anything to hide, of course, but it was still annoying. Paneki had intimated that Tsudao had asked him to perform this duty, but Jotaro strongly doubted that. Tsudao had granted Jotaro this position for his valor in the Crane's conflict against Akodo Kaneka. Jotaro had gladly accepted the post; it was the Sword's way of stating clearly to her half brother that she did not appreciate his ill-advised attempts to create peace in the Empire by making war with the Crane Clan.

"I do indeed have many responsibilities," Paneki added with a smile, "Fortunately, I am efficient enough that I am left with a fair amount of free time."

"That is fortunate," Jotaro muttered under his breath.

"Tell me, Crane," the young bushi continued, "do you watch Tsudao because you admire her beauty, or because you are jealous of it?"

by Shawn Carman

Jotaro sighed. "I never thought about it," he said. "Tell me, Paneki. Are you so deliberately insulting to me because my clan offended you in the past, or are you merely another fool who belittles the Crane because it amuses you to tear down your betters?" Jotaro locked gazes with Paneki, his ice blue eyes fixing on Paneki's dark brown ones.

Paneki stared evenly back at Jotaro, the corner of his mouth slowly curving into a smile. His right hand trailed toward the sword tucked behind his obi. Jotaro matched the move so quickly that it seemed as if it had been on the hilt of his blade all along. His facial expression had never changed. Paneki's hand stopped in mid-movement.

"Be certain," Jotaro whispered.

"Be certain yourself," Paneki said with a chuckle. "If you had been studying me as carefully as I have been studying you, you would know by now that I am left handed."

Jotaro sneered in irritation, moving his hand away from the hilt.

Paneki nodded, smiled, and scratched his chin. "That is quite a temper you have there, Crane," he said, turning his back and walking a way. For a moment, before he turned, there seemed to be a note of respect in his voice.

Jotaro sighed again. This would be a lengthy campaign.

* * *

"Have we received word from Otsan Uchi yet, Dejiko?"

"No, Tsudao-sama," the Lion samurai-ko replied. "We have not."

Tsudao frowned. She had sent word to the capital nearly two weeks ago. With the speed of the Unicorn under her command, it was ample time for the message to have been received and a response to have been sent. If she could not get the information she needed, her entire command would suffer for it. "Unfortunately, we do not have the time to continue waiting. We must pursue the Tsuno now or we risk losing them." She glanced around the camp. "Where is Jotaro?"

"Here, my lady." The Crane sidled up to the pair of samurai-ko easily, his immaculate features at once charming and subservient. "What is your order?"

Tsudao grimaced. It was not an easy command to give. "I need scouts to check the perimeter of the forest." She gestured to the south, where the vast Shinomen Mori loomed. "Tell them to be on their guard, however. We have no idea how many of the Tsuno there are, or even where they are."

"At once, my lady," Jotaro responded crisply. "Shall I employ standard scout units?"

A pained look came upon Tsudao's face. "No," she replied, her discomfort evident. "Five man squads will undoubtedly alert the Tsuno to our presence, if they remain."

Jotaro was silent for a moment. "Individual scouting pattern, Tsudao-sama?"

"Yes. Send the best we have. If they are alone, they may avoid the Tsuno's detection."

"And if they are seen, we only lose one man," Paneki said from the corner of the tent. Jotaro's eyes flicked to the Scorpion with a start. He had not noticed him standing there.

"I will note the specific scouts and the areas that they have been sent to detail, my lady," Jotaro said. "If they do not return we will at least have an idea of the Tsuno's location."

"A keen observation," Paneki nodded. "Your tactical mind is as sharp as your temper, Crane."

Jotaro glared quietly at the Scorpion. Tsudao looked from Paneki to Jotaro, one eyebrow raised. "Is there a problem here, honored sirs?"

"No, Lady Sword," Jotaro said stiffly. "No problem. Thank you for the compliment, Paneki-sama."

Paneki tilted his head slightly. "I can help you find the troops you will need, Jotaro."

Tsudao nodded. Jotaro bowed again and left to gather the scouts the Legion would need. She noticed that Dejiko looked after the Crane curiously. "Is something amiss, Dejiko?"

"No, Tsudao-sama."

"I know you too well, Dejiko. You do not trust Paneki. Or is it Jotaro? You think he is too inexperienced?"

"No, it is not that, not at all," the Lion samurai-ko seemed flummoxed by the question. "It is just... Jotaro represents everything that I was raised to believe made the Crane weak. Paneki represents everything I have been taught to hate and distrust in the Scorpion. And yet, I have found myself coming to respect both of them."

"We are all soldiers," said Tsudao. "If we cannot respect one another, then we will die at the hands of our enemies." She allowed the comment to hang in the air for a moment, weighing upon each of them. "Come now," she finally added. "Camp breaks in less than an hour, and we have not yet spoken to the fourth and fifth squadron commanders."

* * *

The forest was nearly silent. Toturi Miyako had spent much of her childhood creeping quietly through the woodlands near her home, and she had never known one to be so quiet and so still. She had never been to the great Shinomen Mori, of course, and she had heard that Naga had frightened off most of the wildlife, but surely this was not normal. The Naga temples were another day's travel inside the perimeter. Could the serpent-men's influence extend so far? Miyako doubted it. No, something else had surely frightened away the wildlife.



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A flash of color among the bushes up ahead caused the Monkey samurai-ko to halt in her tracks, her hand clutching the hilt of her katana. She remained motionless for several minutes, waiting to see if something was up ahead. When nothing happened, she very slowly began to inch her way forward. Although the distance between her and her destination could be measured in mere feet, it took her more than a few minutes to reach it, so quiet and so cautious was her advance.

Lying crushed and twisted on the forest floor was the body of a Unicorn samurai. His face was contorted in a grimace of pure agony, and Miyako had no doubt that his grievous wounds had been inflicted before his death, not after. His shattered hand still clutched to the cold steel of his gaijin blade, and although the weapon itself was broken, there was the stain of crimson upon it. It was not human blood.

Miyako frowned. This was one of the signs she had been told to look for. Clearly, the Tsuno were in the forest, or at least they had been. This man had been dead for several days. Assuming the foul beasts continued moving, they could have reached the southern border of the forest and be on their way to the Crab provinces by now. Perhaps they would return to the Wall and their master? Or perhaps they came from somewhere else entirely. There was much about the Tsuno that was as yet unknown.

Despite the Unicorn's corpse, Miyako's mission was clear. She had been assigned to travel nearly two full days into the forest and gather the information Tsudao needed. By the time the entire Legion was ready to enter the forest, she would be back, hopefully with an idea of the Tsuno's movements within the gigantic woodlands. She whispered a brief prayer for the Unicorn's soul to reach Yomi without difficulty and quickly began moving once more.

A few hours later, Miyako had begun to wonder if her questions regarding the Tsuno had not been correct. She had not seen anything out of the ordinary since leaving the Unicorn's corpse. With the sheer numbers the Tsuno had used to attack the Lion lands, it seemed almost unthinkable that they could disappear so completely.

She was still wondering if they might have left for the Crab lands when the beast leapt from the shadows.

* * *

Tsudao sat at her table in her command tent, regarding the map of the Shinomen Mori with a concerned expression. The depths of the forest had never been fully explored, despite her father's close relationship with the Naga that dwelled within it. Leading her forces into the forest was a dangerous gambit, but not one that she felt she could ignore. The Tsuno had disappeared into the forest; Tokei had revealed that much. Now the First Legion must follow.

She sighed and covered her face with her hands. The past months had been the most taxing of her life. She had barely enough time to grieve over the loss of her parents before the Empire seemed to explode. Between

the constant bickering with her brothers, the attacks on Otsan Uchi, the Kaiu Wall, and the Lion lands, not to mention the war between the Phoenix and the Dragon, the destruction of the Dragonfly, and that unpleasant business with Junnosuke, Tsudao sometimes felt as though she were living in some surreal dream. Sometimes she thought she should assume the throne as Paneki encouraged her to do. But no, if the throne were rightfully hers then her mother would have said as much before she disappeared. All she could do now was try to hold the Empire together while everyone else tore it apart.

Tsudao shook her head and focused on the map. That was no way to think. Regardless of what else was going on, it was her duty as the commander of the First Legion to protect and defend the people of Rokugan. The Tsuno had appeared from nowhere and struck a terrible blow against the Lion. If they were allowed to escape unhindered, who knows where they might attack next? No, it could not be permitted. She would not allow it.

Still, sometimes she only wanted to rest. She might be Toturi's daughter, true enough, but she was only human, and felt the weight of her responsibilities very keenly. Fortunately, she had extremely talented and competent lieutenants serving under her. Dejiko and Miyako. Paneki and Jotaro. Tokei. A wide variety of personalities, all very different, yet all served the Legion to the best of their ability. Without them to rely upon, Tsudao's job would prove impossible.

"You are far too hard on yourself, daughter of Toturi," came an unexpected voice from the shadows inside the tent.

Tsudao was in motion instantly. She leapt from her sitting position, her kimono rustling softly with the sudden, graceful movement. She came to a kneeling position next to the stand where her sword rested. With a single, fluid movement, she drew the blade and spun in the direction of the mysterious voice. There was no fear or surprise in her eyes.

A low chuckle came from the shadows. "Now, now, that's not polite! You did send for me, after all." The figure stepped into the light.

Toturi Tsudao gasped.

* * *

Miyako refused to give up, but she had begun to wonder if this could be her final stand. She had dodged the first Tsuno for nearly half an hour before finally losing it in the woods. Or at least she thought she had lost it. She was moving as fast as she could back toward the perimeter of the forest. Over the past few miles, however, she had begun to suspect the creature had gotten ahead of her somehow. It was nothing she could confirm, but there was a cold dread in the pit of her stomach. Her father had taught her to trust that feeling.

A terrible roar split the air, confirming her suspicions. The gigantic form of the Tsuno blotted out the fading evening light as it leapt from the bushes to swing its gigantic spear in her direction. The Monkey samurai-ko rolled away from the strike and lashed out with her yari. The tip of her weapon glanced harmlessly off of the beast's armor. Its strike, however, shattered a young tree completely. It compensated quickly, backhanding her with one thick forearm even as its weapon cleaved the wood.

Miyako rolled backward, her helmet lost. Her head rang from the creature's attack. She could afford no mistakes in this battle. The Tsuno was larger, stronger, possibly faster. One strike from that spear would mean instant death.

"Filthy animal!" the monster roared in harshly accented Rokugani. Its breath reeked of rotten meat and foul earth. It fixed her with strange red-gold eyes. "I will make a drum from your flesh!"

"Die!" cried Miyako. She hurled her spear at the Tsuno's face and used the moment's distraction to draw her twin swords. She assumed a dueling pose and waited, balancing atop a fallen log.

The Tsuno laughed at her stance though it watched her warily. It was a booming, terrible noise that echoed throughout the forest for miles. He lunged at her, his blade crashing down in an overhead swing that would have split stone with its force.

Miyako shifted her weight, allowing the log to roll and throw her to one side. The Tsuno's blade missed her by mere inches. She spun as she fell, letting her strike flow through the entire movement and gather as much speed and force as possible.

Just as the Tsuno began to recover from its overextended attack, Miyako's blade sliced neatly through its leg at the knee. She threw her wakizashi, burying the blade in its lower abdomen. The creature howled in pain and toppled backward. Miyako hit the ground and sprung forward again, burying her katana in its throat before it could gather its wits.

The young Monkey slumped to her knees beside the corpse, exhausted beyond anything she had ever experienced. She had defeated the Tsuno because it was overconfident. Still, it was larger, faster, and far stronger than any human she had ever encountered, and it displayed an impressive intelligence. How could they hope to defeat such an opponent?

Another roar sounded from deep inside the forest far to the south. The doubt cast from her mind, Miyako suddenly found that she had energy left after all. She rose and continued her desperate flight from the Shinomen.

* * *

Kitsu Dejiko ran through the camp. After a full day's march to get the Legion near the Shinomen's border, he had looked forward to a restful night. The summons to Tsudao's tent changed that. Whatever the reason, Dejiko feared the worst. Tsudao had only summoned her officers in the dead of night once before, years ago. That had been to tell them they were halting maneuvers immediately to engage a force of Yabanjin barbarians invading the northern Phoenix provinces.

Dejiko reached Tsudao's tent to find a heavy guard posted. Jotaro and Paneki were already here. Dejiko stepped in quickly, the guards bowing low before her, and was immediately taken aback by what she saw. Tsudao and her chief lieutenants were standing around the edge of the tent. She saw Toturi Miyako standing near Tsudao. One side of the woman's face was badly bruised, but she was very much alive. In the middle, a man sat on a mat sipping tea. A pleasant smile graced his weathered features, and he inclined his head respectfully as Dejiko entered.

"Ah, a Kitsu. How surprising to see you here," said Naka Tokei, the Grand Master of the Elements.

Dejiko immediately knelt before Tokei, struggling to find the words for such a surprise. Finally, she simply said "Greetings, Tokei-sama. It is an honor to have you with us."

"Rise, daughter of Kitsu," Tokei said cheerfully. "It is far too late in the evening for such niceties."

"Tokei-sama," Tsudao began now that all her lieutenants were present, "I did not expect you to come in person. When I sent my messengers, I merely hoped for your advice regarding these Tsuno. You have traveled the Spirit Realms at length, and I thought perhaps you might know something that would aid me in finding them."

Tokei's smile faded, and a sad look appeared in its place. He set his tea aside and rose to walk about the room, his hands clasped in his sleeves. "I do indeed know much of these beasts, Tsudao-san," he said gravely. "And that is why I have come. If you hope to catch them, you must know some of their secrets."

"Only some?" inquired Dejiko.

"Yes," responded Tokei. "Not even I am privy to the dark past of the Tsuno, but there are things I have learned. The Tsuno do not move from place to place in the blink of an eye, as some of you have surmised. They simply move through the Spirit Realms in places where they touch the mortal realm most closely." He pulled a second mat closer to the one upon which he had been sitting and returned to his seat. He gestured to the other mat and looked at Tsudao expectantly.

Wordlessly, Tsudao sat and mirrored Tokei's meditative pose. "Allow your mind to wander freely," Tokei said in a low, soothing voice. "Let it drift, as if you were about to sleep."

The two sat motionless for several long minutes. Dejiko had begun to wonder if anything would happen at all when suddenly Tsudao gasped. "Are those..."

"Yes," Tokei answered. "What you feel are the spirits of the sleeping Naga."

The Sword's brow furrowed in concentration. "What are..." her voice quavered in anger. "The Tsuno have taken the Naga cities." Her head moved slightly back and forth as she spoke, as if she were looking for something. "What are they doing?"

"Using rituals the Empire has never seen. What can you see?"

"A portal... there's some sort of portal. And inside it, there are visions. I cannot make them out. But there's something strange about them, something familiar..." Tsudao was caught up in her visions now, making no sense.

"Look closer," Tokei urged.

"The portal, they're entering it," Tsudao whispered. "I can see everything that surrounds them. There is a mist, and moving shapes. It seems so familiar to me... almost like a..." her eyes opened and she sat up suddenly. "A dream!"

Tokei only nodded. "Yes, very good. Your spirit is strong, like the goddess you emulate."

Tsudao climbed shakily to her feet. "They move in dreams."

Tokei nodded. "They have a ritual that allows them to enter Yume-do through the places where concentrations of nightmares are strong. They are torturing the sleeping Naga, and using their pain to transport themselves across Rokugan."

Tsudao placed her hands on her blade, drawing strength from its solidity in the confusing discussion. Tsudao did not like fighting magic; that was her brother Sezar's domain. "Tokei-sama, how can we defeat creatures that can move through dreams?"

"And if they can move through Yume-do," added Dejiko, "what other realms are open to them?"

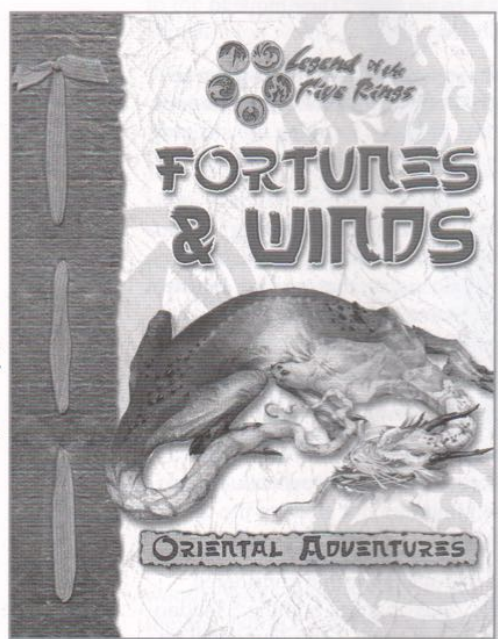
"Toshigoku, the Realm of Slaughter — a realm with many strong connections to the Lion provinces. Jigoku. Perhaps others. These things are not given to me to foresee," Tokei said simply.

The tent was silent as the officers within considered what they had learned. "This changes nothing," Tsudao said, the strength back in her voice. "The Tsuno will be hunted down, and we will end the threat they pose. We possess knowledge now, and in time we will find a way to use that as a weapon. Return to your tents, all of you. We march at dawn."

Tokei smiled once more. "You are your father's daughter," he said softly. "There is no mistaking it."

FORTUNES & WINDS

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The next book in the Legend of Rings RPG line, *Fortunes and Winds* opens up new worlds for players already familiar with Legend of the Five Rings — ten worlds to be precise.

The Spirit Realms, vaguely hinted at in previous supplements, are illustrated here in detail. The Realm of the Hungry Dead, the Realm of Tricksters, even foul Jigoku, home of the demonic oni; all are presented in this volume along with their bizarre inhabitants.

Moreover, we'll go into detail of what happens to players when they enter those realms and why each realm has degrees of jealousy that binds players to that realm. In fact, did you know that the Shadowlands trait is actually a measure of Jigoku's hold upon a creature and its degree of jealousy it has over the fact that the creature isn't within its realm, but in another.

We'll also talk about the Celestial Dragons, the Oracles, and the many deities that affect all things natural and unnatural in your world.

So how do you get to these realms? What will you find there? Most importantly once you are there, how do you get home again? *Fortunes and Winds* answers all these questions and more.

- *Compatible with the Gold Edition timeline, but contains information usable in any L5R campaign.*
- *Contains rules for entering and adventuring in Rokugan's ten Spirit Realms, adding new possibilities for longtime players.*
- *Contains information on Rokugani myth and legend, including the divine Fortunes... and how to become one.*
- *Compatible with the traditional Alderac game system and the popular d20 System.™*
- *Strong continuity with the L5R CCG.*

Check out the next few pages and discover why this book is a must-have in any Rokugan™ or Oriental Adventures™ campaign.

THROUGH BLOOD AND THUNDER PART ONE

THE YEAR 1128, MONTH OF THE DOG

"I have nothing further to teach you," the old man had said. There had been no disdain, no judgment, no emotion whatsoever. It had been a simple statement of fact. The Grand Master no longer had any use for a student, at least not if that student was Morito Toki. With those six words, Master Kuro vanished as quickly as he had come.

...

"Do not let this consume you, Toki," Morito said, frowning at his brother across the low table.

"You cannot understand, brother," Toki replied with a sigh. "You do not know what it is like to call upon the kami. The Grand Master showed me how to summon wind, rain, and flame, to hear the eternal voice of the earth. I thought that I was making great progress, as if I were on the edge of a great breakthrough... instead I am abandoned, as if I am not even worth the great Kuro's time."

Morito shrugged. "Perhaps you are not," he replied, lifting a chunk of fish with his chopsticks and popping it into his mouth. Toki looked at his brother curiously.

"That seems a rather insulting thing to say," Toki said, peering at the unshaven monk with a hurt expression. Toki had been the only member of Toki's command staff to remain in the village with Toki after the Black Lion had departed.

Morito chewed thoughtfully for a moment before explaining. "Toki and I have wandered the Empire for years now. Because we are ronin, everyone has told us we're worthless, from the lowest peasant to the great daimyo of the Unicorn."

"Except for Kuro," Toki corrected.

"And Toki," Toki added.

"And that's exactly my point," Morito said, pointing at Toki with his chopsticks — an impolite gesture, but Morito had never been much for etiquette. "Look at Toki. There is no question that he is an important man. Everyone knows he is important, and look where important men like Kuro, Fuchinome, Reviled. Half the Empire wants to go un-

"Such as?" Morito sipped from his sake.

Toki stalled, his mouth open but no words coming out. "I'm sure I would have found a purpose in time," he said finally.

"Of course," Morito said with a laugh. "That's always been your trouble, little brother. Always eager to throw yourself into the breach, never smart enough to stop and think about what's on the other side."

"Like when I left the Unicorn to follow you as a ronin?" Toki said. "Exactly. I never asked you to follow me," Morito shook his head slightly. "Well, I'm done eating," he said, rising from his seat. "Good knowing you, Toki. Are you ready to go, Toki?"

"I'm not leaving," Toki chuckled. "You can't be serious. Yogo Junzo knows that Nanashi Mura is allied with the Black Lion. Rumor has it his oni are marching here even now. Toki has his hands full in the south; we need to leave before the snow sets in. The Horde will wipe this place off the map of the Empire."

"Toki asked me to stay here," Toki said.

"Only because he wanted you out of the way," Morito said.

"Nonetheless," Toki said. "This is my duty."

Morito looked around. "To die for a village of ronin? Nobody here really cares about Toki's cause, or they'd be with his army right now."

"I care," Toki said, frowning.

"And if there were a hundred of you in Nanashi Mura, Toki, things would be different," Morito said. "But they're not. If you're looking for something to fight for, Toki, I don't think you'll find it here."

"I have to begin somewhere," Toki said, meeting his brother's gaze.

"I will stay and fight, Toki."

The young ronin nodded quickly.

Morito sighed. For a moment, it looked as if he were about to argue.

He scratched at his unshaven cheek and gave another sharp chuckle. "All right, then," Morito said. "I'll tell you what, brother. If you survive, and you find what you're looking for, you come let me know. How?" Though his words were light, Morito's voice was thick. The gruff ronin knew that he would never see his brother again.

"I will," Toki said. "Will you do me a favor as well?"

"Name it," Morito asked.

"When you win back your honor and become a true samurai again — for I know that you will — name your castle after me," Toki said.

"Ha," Morito replied. "Of course. I will name it the Castle of the Ox, for you are surely as stubborn as one."

"Fair enough," Toki said.

With a final grin, Morito bowed to his younger brother and exited the sake house.

"You made the right decision, Toki," Toki said. "We may die, but we will die with honor." As Toki listened to Morito's horse galloping away, he wondered if Toki was right.

THREE MONTHS LATER...

"Foolish samurai!" the oni roared. "You should have run when you had the chance!"

This, Toki reflected as he unleashed a blast of jade in the oni's face, had definitely been a poor decision.

The village was surrounded. The Shadowlands Horde had broken through Nanashi's feeble defenses on every side. The armies of the walking dead marched beside squat bokemono and terrible oni that defied all description. Only a handful of defenders remained to stand against the onslaught, and they were quickly losing ground to the Horde. Toki and a few others had ridden out in search of reinforcements, but there had been no sign that they had even escaped.

Again and again Toki shouted to the kami, summoning forth the power of jade in the manner that Naka Kuro had taught him. Beams of green energy lanced into the Horde's ranks, striking down three

INTRODUCTION

creatures at a time. It was not enough. The Horde seemed endless, and they were intent upon making an example of this tiny village that had allied itself with the Black Lion.

"What do we do, Toki-sama?" shouted a desperate voice at his side. It was Tsubo, the young peasant who now led the Eyes of Nanashi. The young man's face was pale with fear. Toki wondered how much of that fear was reflected in his own eyes.

"Keep fighting!" Toki shouted. He had hoped to say something more inspiring, but it was all he could manage under the circumstances.

It seemed to have the desired effect. The samurai redoubled their efforts, holding the line against the enemy. Then Toki heard it; it was not his encouragement that had inspired the troops — it was the loud, clear note of a Unicorn hunting horn. Reinforcements? There may be hope yet.

"I think not, little samurai," shouted a voice from the ranks of the Shadowlands Horde. A massive creature stepped forward from the army, as tall as the waist as the largest ogre. The beast held a great nodachi in each hand. Its skin was covered in sharp, glistening scales and two great horns curled from the crest of its head. Around its neck it wore a necklace of shattered bones, taken from Crab samurai. The Shadowlands forces withdrew at his approach. Even the mindless undead seemed to sense this creature's power. "Lord Junzo demanded that an example be made of Nanashi. You will all die today."

Even from here, Toki could sense the creature's power. The combined forces of Nanashi stood no chance. Unless the entire Unicorn army rode to their rescue, even the reinforcements would likely perish when they arrived.

It was then that Naka Kuro's final lesson took shape in Toki's mind. The young shugenja realized what he must do.

"No!" he shouted, stepping forward from the ranks of the village's defenders. The power of the five kami swirled in brilliant aura around his body, as if angered by the corruption of the oni.

The oni laughed at Toki. "Ah," it said. "Run, little shugenja. Turn around and scamper into the forest while you can. Perhaps you can live to tell others what we have done to your village. I will give you this chance, for your bravery."

Toki merely smiled, and said three words.

"Not this day."

Raw energy flared from the former student of the Grand Master, and the world itself seemed to bend to Toki's will. A great sphere of white energy widened from the shugenja's position, consuming all else in its path. The armies of the Horde screamed in pain and terror as they scuttled away. Trees were torn from the earth by their roots. The skies above, clear only an instant before, now churned with clouds as black as night. Lightning crackled from Toki's fingers, and fire burned in his eyes. The great oni did not try to turn or run as the others did; it knew there could be no escape from what was to come. It seemed to bow in respect for a single instant before the wave struck and its body crumbled into dust.

The Eyes of Nanashi turned to retreat as well. The daring passed to look back at the onslaught Toki had unleashed. The wise just ran. The earth trembled and seemed to scream as the shugenja released his power. Toki fell to his knees in the center of the storm, struggling vainly to control the magic. He knew that there was only one way.

Toki glanced up just as the reinforcements arrived at the edge of the clearing, and for a single instant he could see his brother at Toki's side, leading the charge to save Nanashi Mura. Morito shouted something, but Toki could not hear.

Toki could control the power he had summoned no longer. He surrendered himself to the power of the spell. One instant he knelt amid the great crater of destruction he had unleashed. The next instant, he was merely gone, and all was at peace once more.

...

THE SPIRIT REALMS

BY TORITAKA SHIRANE, PHANTOM HUNTER

Look around you. The world that you perceive is but one of many possible states of existence. Countless other realms lie superimposed over the realm of mortal men. Some of these realms are much like our own; others are by their very nature inconceivable. Some of these realms are inhabited, and the creatures that dwell in them live out their entire existences as unaware of us as we are of them. The creatures that dwell in these realms are referred to as "spirits," and thus the worlds they live in are called "the Spirit Realms." The term "spirit" does not necessarily imply that a creature has returned from the dead, or that it is in any way less real than a human. It merely describes creatures not native to Ningen-do, our own realm.

The concept of realms beyond our own may seem strange and unfamiliar. However, the presence of the Spirit Realms can be found throughout the history of the Empire. The existence of the Shadowlands, the War of Spirits, the Legacy of the Forge, and the many tales of ghosts, shapeshifters, and trickster spirits are direct evidence of these Realms. My family has studied the Spirit Realms since our founding, and has often consulted with the Kitsus, whose particular expertise is the realms of the dead. Even with our combined knowledge, there is much about the Spirit Realms that is unknown, but I will share what knowledge I have.

One does not enter Tengoku as if entering the next room or journeying to a faraway province. A traveler does not seek out the Heavens. They surround us at all times; we merely fail to perceive that realm and are thus unable to affect it. Likewise, denizens of these other realms are often unable to perceive our existence, and thus cannot interact with us.

There are many different ways to enter the Spirit Realms, with the most common being an alteration in the way one perceives reality. The most extreme example of this is death. When a mortal's soul dies, it immediately transfers to one of these realms, where it awaits reincarnation. Depending upon a person's actions in life, he may find himself reincarnated as a lesser beast, tormented by the oni of Jigoku, or sent to live in blessed harmony with his enlightened ancestor. Some spirits, such as hegeyokai, never reincarnate but seem effectively immortal. Other creatures, such as the Naga, have their own form of reincarnation entirely. Indeed, I suspect that the Naga Akasha is similar in many ways to our Spirit Realms; perhaps it exists in the realm of Yume-do or Meido. My encounters with members of the Naga race lend credence to this theory.

Of course, it is not necessary for one to die to enter a new realm of existence. As was proven during the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, spirits can also enter other realms by the intervention of powerful magic. Some realms are said to be "closer" than others. Again, this is not due to any physical proximity (all Spirit Realms overlap one another) but because they are similar in one way or another. Travel between two strongly

INTRODUCTION

5

TRADE HUB



There's one little deckbuilding wrinkle about Trade Hub: it's a Port.

Players often have a love/hate relationship with attachment cards: the Fate cards that must attach to a Personality to be any good. Items, Followers, and Spells can help decks pull off wacky feats and rack up large force. They might even guarantee a win on turn seven – except that opponents using mostly actions win on turn six.

There are several problems in making a good deck using lots of attachment cards instead of actions. One major drawback is that you have to shell out cold hard cash to pay for your attachments, whereas actions generally have a zero written in the gold coin. If you like those attachment cards, watch out for *Trade Hub*: it helps fix that problem.

Trade Hub is a holding that costs 3 gold, so it's affordable under most strongholds. It produces 2 gold by default, or (this is the good bit) you can bow it and discard one of your items, followers, or spells to produce gold for another attachment card equal to the card's focus value plus 2. If you have a lot of attachment cards in your deck, you can toss the ones you don't need now for the ones you do. You can discard one copy of *Veteran Samurai* in hand to attach another, and your 4 focus *Poison Dartgun* can pay for a 6 gold *Blade of Truths*.

Furthermore, the card types don't have to match. You can discard a spell with 3 focus value

(*Walking the Way*, for example) to pay for the 5 gold *Medium Infantry* you really need on the table. That versatility makes *Trade Hubs* more attractive than specialty holdings. A *Bushi Dojo* or the *Library* costs the same as a *Trade Hub* and makes more gold, but only for one particular type of card. In addition to its versatility, *Trade Hubs* will kick out 2 gold for anything. Given the increasing number of 2 gold cost holdings these days, that's a significant feature. The one qualifier is that Ancestors can't be discarded to the *Trade Hub*. There's just not a big market for ghosts.

What kinds of decks could make use of this card? Strongholds whose powers revolve around attachment cards leap to mind. *Kyuden Hida* decks load up on followers for card drawing power, but are often slow to play them because of the gold costs. Now some followers can be discarded to get the ball rolling faster. *Kyuden Agasha* can do the same for spells.

The new Unicorn stronghold deserves special mention here, for a couple of reasons. Unicorn have received a lot of support for exotic items lately, with cards like *Vordu's Discovery*, *Unicorn Marketeer*, and *Spyglass*. This trend continues with *Shinjo Shiro*. Not only can it salvage an item on its way to the grave, it raises the focus value of your items by 1. This is significant, since there isn't another way in the Gold tournament environment to fiddle with the focus values of things. With the *Trade Hubs*,

Unicorn players can turn an item with a printed focus value of 4 into 7 gold.

Although Tactician and duelling decks generally use actions more than any other card type, cards in these deck types are selected for high focus values already. Attachment cards in such a deck could routinely generate 5 or 6 gold for each another.

There's one little deckbuilding wrinkle about *Trade Hub*: it's a Port. That makes it appealing to Mantis and Crane players, who have traditionally controlled the seashores of Rokugan. For instance, *Daidoji Merchants* is a new holding that has a reduced cost for Mantis and Crane (4 gold instead of 5), and Ports raise its gold production. *Yoritomo Heishiro* can get Force or Chi boosts by bowing a Port, making *Trade Hubs* useful for Mantis after gold production is no longer a problem.

Trade Hub isn't the only new Port in *Broken Blades*, either. There's a region named *Port Town*, too, so all the combos above are all the more relevant. Crack out those *Pearl Divers*!

Trade Hubs' Port trait makes for nifty combos, but it's the "discard for gold" trait that gives it a feel reminiscent of the old favorite, *Merchant Caravans*. While *Trade Hubs* may not be a staple card for every deck like *Merchant Caravans* were, it should be a worthwhile addition to a wide gamut of decks.

by Zen Faulkes

Master Tactician

In "The Fall of Otsan-Uchi" tournament at Origins 2002, 122 players from across the country participated to either keep Daigotsu from taking and holding the Forbidden Palace. Out of the brutal 13 hour slugfest, one clan returned victorious and slew Goju on the palace steps. We owe this victory to the Lion, represented by Dan Tibbles, last years Lion Standard Bearer.

This is his deck. It's a fast paced, low "trick" deck. His strategy revolves around getting a Tactician out on turn 2 and chomping through his opponent's provinces on turn 3 with a follower and a 4 Focus-Tactician-Force-Bonus. While this province crunching is going on in one hand, his other hand is bringing gold into play. This gold later pays for a well selected *Geisha Assassin* to kill of a key personality before his opponent can mount any sort of defense.

You'll note that there aren't many "tricks" in his deck. Dan relies on straight Force to keep his opponents from standing in his way and when he does need a trick or two, he plays *Superior Strategist* to get it into play.

This deck list may not have some of the staple cards that most Lion players consider essential, but don't be fooled, it beat two opponents in only 5 turns. Be afraid, very afraid.



"Master Tactician"

by Dan Tibbles

Stronghold:

The Ancient Halls of the Lion

Wind:

Toturi Tsudao

Personalities:

1 Akodo Ginawa, Exp. 4
3 Akodo Ijiasu
3 Akodo Tadenori
1 Ikoma Fujimaro
1 Matsu Domotai, Exp.
3 Matsu Hataki
1 Matsu Hitomi
3 Matsu Hyun
1 Matsu Kenji
1 Matsu Nimuro
1 Zin'tch

Holdings:

3 Copper Mine
3 Dragon Dancers
3 Gambling House
3 Jade Works
3 Large Farm
3 Small Farm

Events:

Famine
Imperial Gift
Welcome Home

Actions:

3 Counterattack
3 Focus
3 Geisha Assassin
1 Iaijitsu Duel
1 Luring Tactics
3 Rallying Cry
1 Return for Training
1 Stand Against the Waves
3 Superior Strategist
3 Superior Tactics

Ancestors:

1 Shiryō no Taisa

Items:

1 Celestial Sword of the Lion
1 Golden Obi of the Sun Goddess
1 The Imperial Standard
1 Yoritomo's Kama

Followers:

3 Doomsayers
1 Hunting Tiger
3 Lion's Pride
1 Matsu House Guard
1 Spirit Legion
3 Veteran Samurai

Rings:

Ring of the Void

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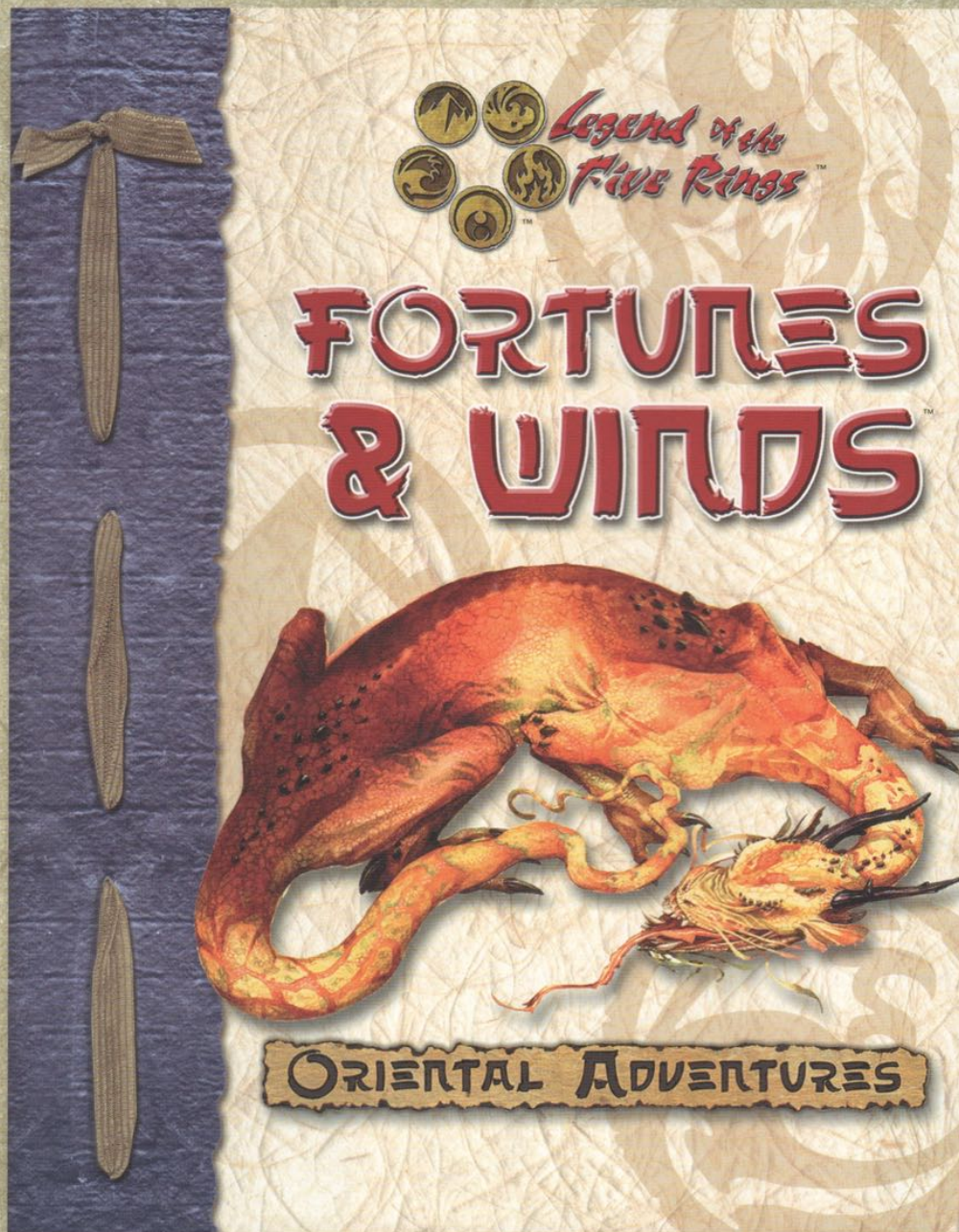
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Your guide to the Rokugani Realms



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