

THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

VOL. 2 / NO. 7

BLACK WIND FROM
THE SOUL
A NEW WIND ARISES

THE WEEK OF THE
RATLING
HONOR AMONG VERMIN

**BLADE OF
SERPENTS**

by Rich Wulf

DECK BUILDING:
**BASICS AND
MISCONCEPTIONS**

ALSO:
MAKE A WISH CARDS
KOKU REDEMPTION

Wac
MII



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WEEK OF THE

Ratling™

The Nezumi live between the cracks, hiding in forests, caves, ruins, and dark corners. Some call them vermin, but they bear a strange sense of honor not unlike that of samurai. The Nezumi were here before the dawn of the Empire. When the samurai are gone, they will remain.

To serve the tribe, to protect the pack, to die with a strong Name, to forever chase Tomorrow. This is what it means to be a Ratling.

What will be their fate? You decide.



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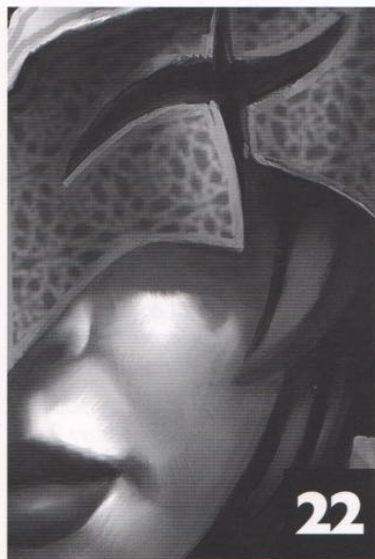
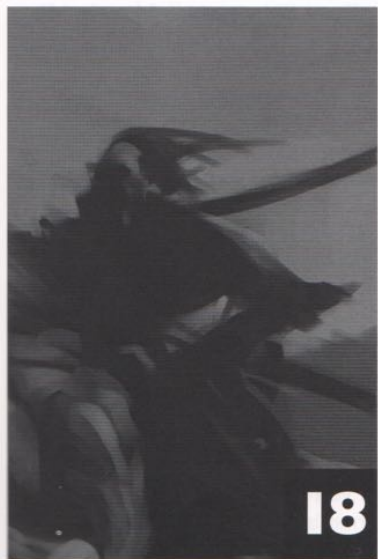
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THE
IMPERIAL

HERALD

THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY

VOL. 2 / NO. 7



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Editorial

We've got a lot in this issue of the Herald for you. Covering the end of the Season of the Great Clans promotion, we've got an article on the Week of the Ratling. This was perhaps one of the most enjoyable articles I've had the pleasure of putting together. Going back through some of the history of why the Ratlings are as popular as they are today took me back through 4 different writers, 2 designers, and 3 brand managers.

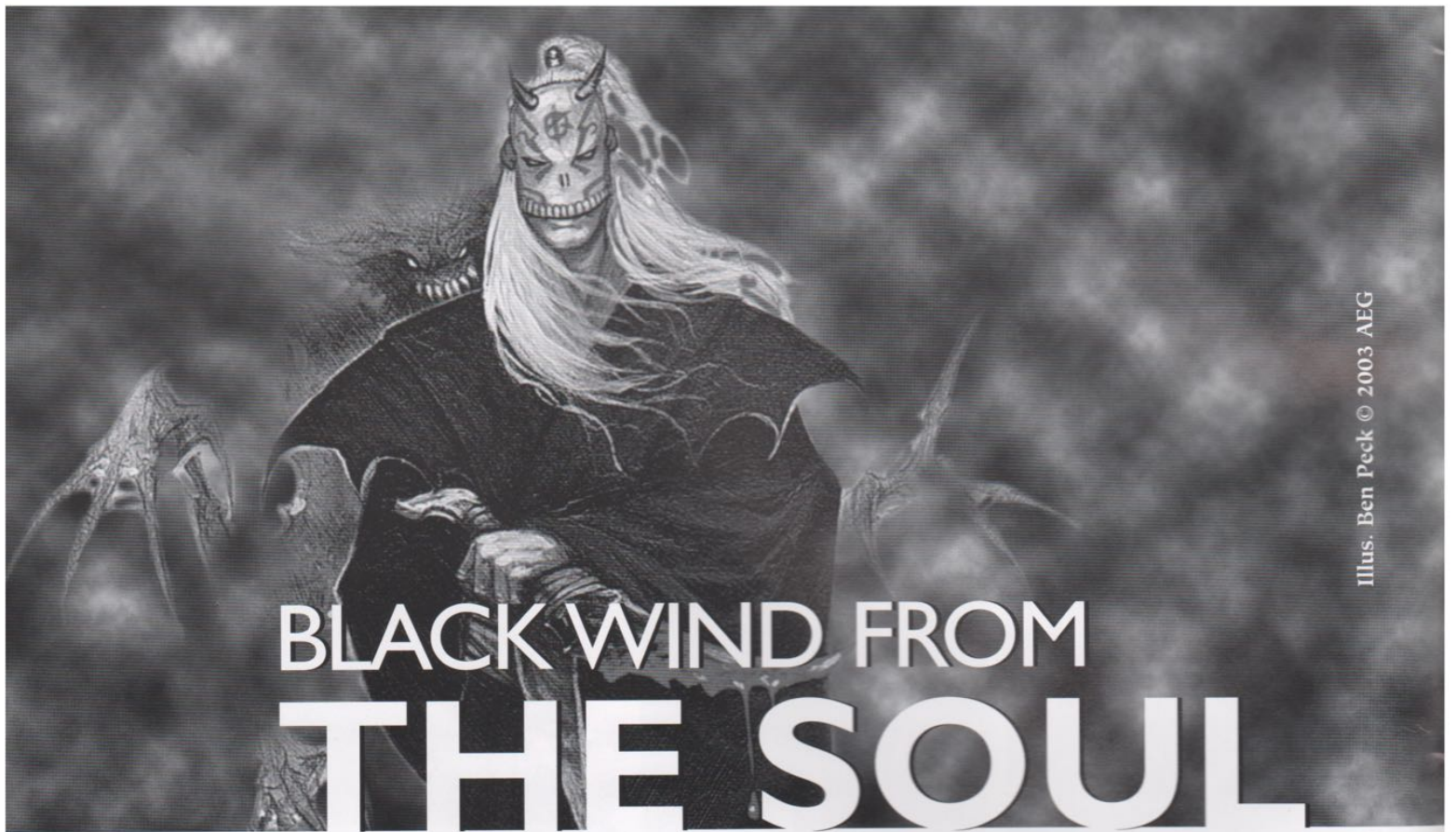
As small beacon of comic relief, I don't think the Ratlings are ever going to be dethroned as the clan that never was. So we cover the Rats this quarter. If it were up to me, for flavor, I'd stick a round of cheese in with the free promo cards you received this time.

After much planning, budgeting, and design work, we finally made new clan T-shirts and have them available. I hope you like them as the designs are a little different from what you're used to. If you have any suggestions on how to make them better, feel free to send them to me.

Speaking of suggestions, putting together the Herald is one of the jobs I have at AEG that I like the least. That doesn't mean I don't put my love into it, because I do. But some-times, I run dry of ideas. What do you guys want in your Herald? I think strategy articles, some fiction, some previews, but I'm afraid it gets a little old. I'm asking for suggestions and advice. Send me your suggestions and advice on how make the Herald a little better. After all, this magazine isn't for me, it's for you.

Raymond Lau
Brand Manager
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BLACK WIND FROM THE SOUL

by Jeff Alexander

It's been done casually, by loyal Shadowlands players eager to show support.

It's been done officially, for storyline reasons only, at select big events like GenCon. But it couldn't really be done until now.

What am I talking about?

Why, declaring Daigotsu as your Wind, of course.

Adding a fifth Wind to the game for the half-brother of the dark god is undoubtedly the trickiest thing to do for *Heaven & Earth*, even more than designing the Strongholds. In fact, at this time, the playtest process yet to begin on *H&E*, so instead of explaining how Daigotsu ended up, I'm going to give you the run-down on how he started...

The biggest single issue I had to address was how Daigotsu players would pay for its ability. All the other Winds require discarding the Favor, which implies several things: that player had more Family Honor than his opponent (who might or might not be in an honor race with him), that player bowed a Personality, and that player has Personalities in play with a Personal Honor

above 0. In order to make the Daigotsu Wind parallel the others mechanically — and have a greater chance of being fairly balanced against them — it would have to share these qualities:

- *Require sacrificing the use of a Personality for a turn,*
- *Potentially put restrictions on certain qualities that Personality has to have, and...*
- *Impose potential contention with your opponents over who can use their Wind and who can't.*

With those considerations recognized, it was time to set them aside and brainstorm.

Idea #1: Daigotsu's action can only be used while someone else has the Favor. I rejected this immediately. The four existing Winds don't uniformly encourage players to hold onto the Favor, so a Daigotsu like this would be strong against some opponents and useless against others. Not only that, but any player could render your Wind unusable simply by never lobbying herself. No

current Wind has the drawback of letting your opponent turn it off at will by turning his own off. Daigotsu shouldn't have it either.

Idea #2: The cost is simply bowing a Personality with a Personal Honor of 0. This still isn't perfect. It lacks the parallels I'm looking for above. More to the point, it's guaranteed to be available to you every turn you have a spare Personality. None of the existing Winds have this luxury.

Idea #3: You have to discard the Favor to use Daigotsu's ability, but you can bow to take the Favor if you have less Family Honor than anyone else. This has a similar problem to #1, only in reverse: it utterly defeats any opponent's Wind that requires holding onto the Favor between turns.

Idea #4: Add a "Dark Lord's Favor" to the game in addition to the Imperial Favor, and add a non-Political lobbying for it based on lowest Family Honor. This has shades of #2's problem of being

available to you every turn, regardless of your opponent... unless your opponent and you are both Shadowlands players, in which case you can never use your Wind.

Something became evident at this point. The nature of the Shadowlands' -19 Family Honor was stymieing any attempts at having Daigotsu players compete with their opponents for the Favor.

There is never any variation, never any racing. (Well, not "never," strictly speaking, but while I'm not blinding myself to the fact that the Shadowlands was not going to be the only faction building decks with Daigotsu, I absolutely could not ignore the fact that Daigotsu was going to be, for all practical purposes, the only Wind that Shadowlands players would use.)

A sudden idea struck in the ironic form of Fu Leng's unwitting half-father, *Hantei the 38th from Scorpion Clan Coup*. He could only be put into play by discarding the Imperial Favor or bowing more than 15 Force worth of cards. What if Daigotsu's followers could play the Favor game... using Force?

Do Shadowlands decks gain Force as fast as other decks gain Honor? It's close. They certainly gain it fast in middle and late game, but they start at zero. With the right early Followers, though, they can jump into the four-to-six range as early as the second turn, before their opponent has a reasonable chance of lobbying for the first time. Counting only Personality Force eliminates that potential imbalance. For that matter, let's only count printed Force. Now they can't get a six-to-ten point jump from *Yakamo's Claw* or the *Porcelain Mask* either... and *The Spawning Grounds* doesn't get a political advantage over the other Strongholds.

So now we've got half a card: For purposes of any player lobbying, your Family Honor is considered the total printed Force of all your Personalities.

We'll also need something to get around the Shadowlands' inability to take Political actions and their near-universal 0 Personal Honor.

Lobbying is not a Political action for you. You may lobby with any Personality regardless of Personal Honor.

All we're missing now is something to use the Favor for. For guidance, I turn to an old card, *Dark Lord's Favor*. This card had four abilities that roughly opposed the four standard Favor actions:

Open: Dishonor a target Personality.

Limited: Target player must discard a card from his hand.

Battle: Reduce the Force of an opposing card to zero.

Political Reaction: Cancel one honor gain.

I couldn't give Daigotsu all four of these, but perhaps I could give him a variation on one of them. Options 1 and 4 produce effects a little too commonplace in the Gold environment. Option 2 is denial — and unlike *Dark Lord's Favor*, it's repeatable denial that doesn't cost you a card yourself. The Battle action, however, shows promise. It's interactive, it doesn't depend too much on your opponent's deck (even pure Honor decks chump-block with medium-Force units to save Provinces), and it has combo potential.

So here's the complete rough draft of the card going into playtest:

Shadowlands

For purposes of any player lobbying, your Family Honor is considered the total printed Force of all your Personalities. Lobbying is not a Political action for you. You may lobby with any Personality regardless of Personal Honor.

Battle: Discard the Imperial Favor to reduce the Force of one opposing card to 0.

What's it going to look like after playtesting is completed? Heck, if I knew that... It'll surely change, and I'm as curious as the rest of them to see how!

2003, The Year at a Glance

2003 is the Year of the Sheep. It's said those born in the Year of the Sheep are charming, elegant and artistic, and enjoy material comforts. They're also mild worriers and have a tendency to complain about things, or so they say.

For us, 2003 is the Year of the Diamond. We say those that are released in the Year of the Diamond are robust, stimulating, and colorful. They're mildly addictive, entertaining, and worth every penny, or so we say.

From corrupt rats to ascending heirs, we have a great year in store for you. While Rokugan stares revolution in the face, we march towards rejuvenating the L5R tournament environment with the release of Diamond. But who's interested in generalizations — you want detail don't you?

This is what we've got going for the year 2003.

L5R CCG

Heaven & Earth

Releasing April 2003

Chaos in the heavens and war on earth, where do you go when you die? Just when the Shadowlands Horde seems defeated, the samurai of Rokugan learn a terrible truth — the Dark Kami, Fu Leng, has been released into the Celestial Heavens and now wages a war against his brethren, leading an army of oni into the heart of the Celestial Order.

- 150+ new cards for the L5R Gold and Diamond environment
- A New 5th Wind, Daigotsu for the honor impaired
- Features the clans: Lion, Phoenix, and Shadowlands

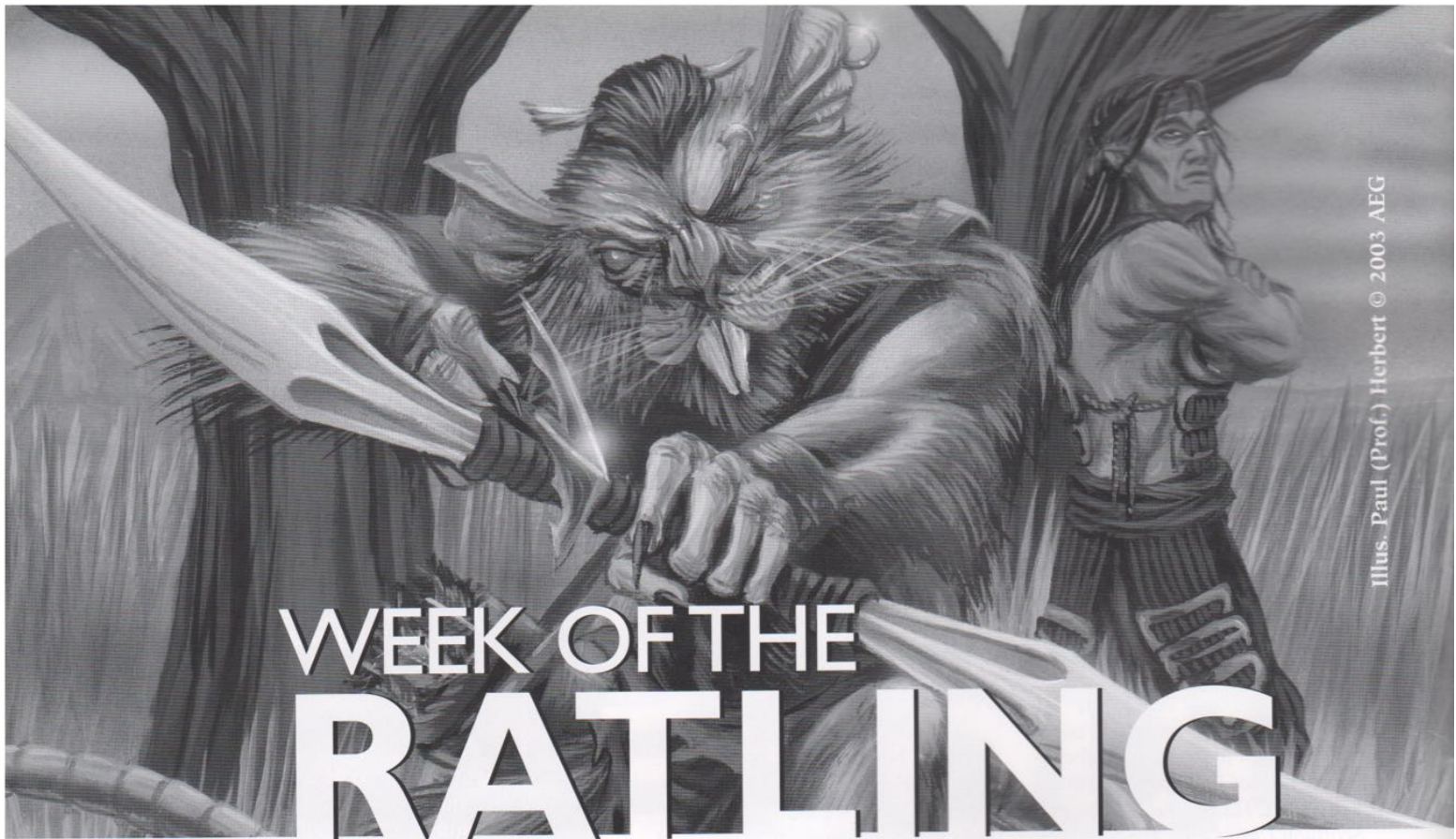
Winds of Change

Releasing August 2003

The Gold Storyline Finale. The Oracle of the Void returns from her self-imposed exile to find the Four Winds poised to destroy one another. The Shogun and the Anvil demand one another's blood. The Sword strives for peace, but few will listen. The Wolf stands apart, consumed by his quest to destroy the Dark Lord. And in the City of the Lost, Daigotsu only laughs.

- 150+ new cards for the L5R Gold and Diamond environment
- New Formation mechanic for more customizable battles
- 3 new decks: Crab, Mantis, Ratling
- Offers better interactive storyline support for players than ever before
- Includes a new storyline tournament with a new prize card

cont. on p.9



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WEEK OF THE RATLING

Offering a stoic yet colorfully fantastic world, L5R stretches the imagination into the super-natural. A cross between fantasy and humor, Ratlings originally appeared as follower cards in the first L5R CCG release, *Imperial Edition*.

Their popularity was immediate. Although they were completely “outside the box” in a world of samurai, the call for more Ratlings resulted in new personalities appearing immediately in the very next expansion (*Ratling Thief* and *Ratling Scavenger*).

Even with their popularity, we never anticipated Ratlings would become as well-liked as they are today. Originally designed strictly as a diversion from the honor-bound pace of the samurai world, Ratlings became a source of comic relief in a proud and stoic world. At least that’s what happened when Ree Soesbee took over the storyline.

In fact, John Wick, the original storyline writer for L5R, didn’t really give very much of the spotlight to the Rats and had no real intention to. But, when John felt it was time to move on, Ree took the reins and gave more attention to our beloved rodent race.

Much the way roaches would be the only creature to survive a nuclear firestorm, Ratlings would survive living in the land of the Taint.

Ree’s vision of the Ratlings contained them to a role of comic relief. Her introduction to their broken, repeating English immediately injected more personality into the Ratlings than any previous story.

For those of you that didn’t know, Ree shared an office with Rob Vaux, a fantastic writer with a “sharp” sense of humor. Rob wrote the first compiled sources of the Ratlings, which can be found in the *Book of the Shadowlands* for the L5R RPG. He devoted an entire chapter to the Nezumi.

Ree and Rob worked closely at AEG, bouncing ideas off each other daily, feeding off each other’s

creativity. But when it came to Ratlings, they had contrasting visions. Rob always envisioned the Ratlings filling the role of the cockroaches of the Shadowlands, feeding off the bottom, scavenging for scraps of food wherever they could. Much the way roaches would be the only creature to survive a nuclear firestorm, Ratlings would survive living in the land of the Taint.

Fortunately, Ree was the lead writer and her decisions bring us the Ratling we have today, lovable, unreliable, furry creatures with the hearts of samurai, and innocent souls of children.

by Ray Lau

Ratling Fun Facts

Ratling Cards

Personalities: 22 Open, 15 Gold
Followers: 10 Open / 4 Gold
Ancestors: 1 Open / 1 Gold
Regions: 1 Open / 0 Gold

Support Cards

(i.e. *Sharp-Sharp Stick*, *War Paints*, etc.)

Holdings: 2 Open / 1 Gold
Actions: 3 Open / 2 Gold
Kihos: 1 Open / 1 Gold
Sensei: 1 Open / 0 Gold

Week of the Ratling

In honor of this verminous clan, AEG brings you the Week of the Ratling and in true L5R fashion, we're ending the Season of the Great Clans tournament program with a twist. Starting from March 29th through April 7th, Week of the Ratling will run in your favorite L5R hobby stores. Unlike the standard two month cycle, the Rats only get a week. Don't miss out on this exclusively shorter time period, cause like the Nezumi themselves, it offers a smaller, better, condensed version of the tournament kits.

Much like the other tournament kits, Week of the Ratling includes half a dozen clan card boxes for the Ratling proud players. The twist here is it's only about **half** the size of the 800-card count boxes other clan kits offer. After all, mice don't need much room, do they?

Now for the big prizes of this event. This kit comes with 16 promotional *A'ichtr'foo* personality cards (4 of which are foiled). That way even with 16 participants, everyone gets a card and the top four are rewarded with a foiled version of *A'ichtr'foo*.

Previous Great Clan kits included a foil version of that clan's *Celestial Sword*, but our furry critters don't carry katana or wakazashi, instead they wield branches or chipped stones. We're also including a copy of a foiled *Sharp-Sharp Stick*, which was originally published in *1,000 Years of Darkness*.

The storyline tournament also reveals more about the Ratlings and their culture.

A largely unheard of tribe of Nezumi living in the bowels of the earth, away from the taint, from other Ratlings, and humans just surfaced. Even their own Ratling brethren know little about them, other than their name, the Stained Paws. Although they bring with them, new obstacles.

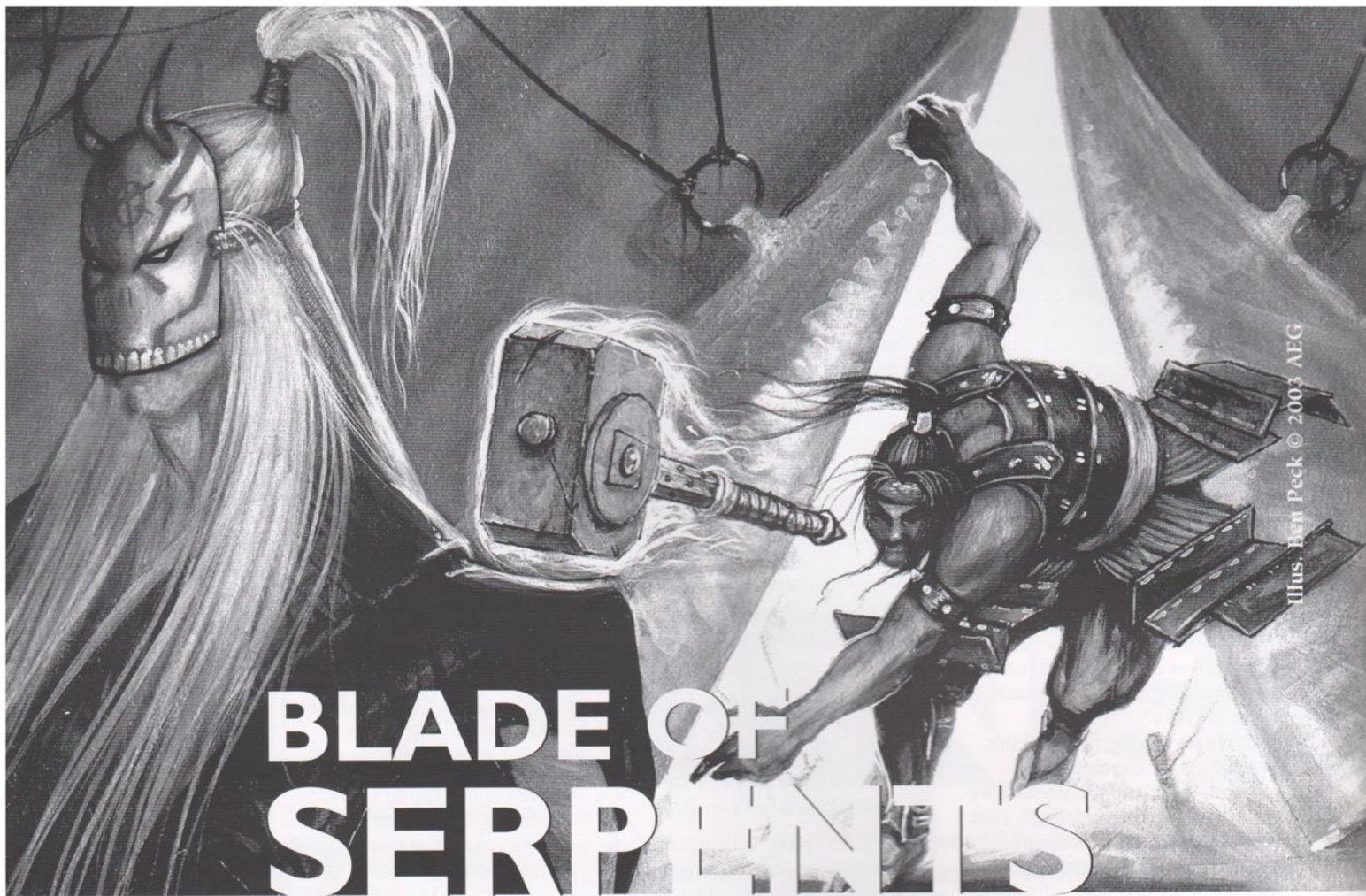
Above ground, the Stained Paws have taken into league with Daigotsu and his minions. In fierce battles, they have all but destroyed two other Nezumi tribes, but strangely and more than anything else, they want human blood.

Never in history have Ratlings befriended the Taint, for they've understood the nature of its evil. Nir'um'tuk, a crafty Nezumi guide, along with a wizened Rememberer, look to save the Stained Paws from the perils of following the Dark Lord. Only you have the opportunity to change this course of history, or, if you want, encourage it. You tell the tale.



Ten Things You (Probably) Didn't Know About Ratlings

- 1) With the exception of the Rememberers, Nezumi have horrible memories. For this reason, Rememberers hold an honored place within the tribe, as scholars, advisors, and historians.
- 2) Nezumi can leave chemical messages for one another via pheromones. These chemicals can warn of danger, show the way to food, or mark the edges of a tribe's territory.
- 3) The Nezumi have no word for "coward." They see fear as a symbol of strength. A warrior wise enough to feel fear but who fights on regardless is a great hero.
- 4) Nezumi teeth grow extraordinarily fast. Nezumi frequently file off bits of their own teeth to create tools or weapons.
- 5) Though Nezumi are immune to the Shadowlands Taint, they can be corrupted by the Lying Darkness and become faceless Goju.
- 6) In Nezumi names and language, an apostrophe (') represents a click and a dash (—) represents a squeak. Thus, the Nezumi name "Por'ee-rep" is pronounced "Por click ee squeak rep."
- 7) The Ratling language primer in *Way of the Ratling* contains numerous inside jokes, including references to the authors, their friends, and their family.
- 8) "Nezumi" is a technical name given to the Ratlings by Kuni scholars. The Nezumi appreciate being given such an interesting name, so they use it often. On the other hand, "Ratling" is somewhat derogatory term people use to describe them, and that most Nezumi find offensive. The Nezumi call themselves the "Chi'ch-tch," which loosely translates to "The Brave Warriors Who Remember."
- 9) The Nezumi word for "tomorrow" is synonymous with "death." The Nezumi speak of Tomorrow as if it were an intelligent force, and believe Tomorrow hates the world and will eventually consume everything.
- 10) Ratlings have a strange concept of the past or present. Anything in the past is "Yesterday." Anything in the future is "Tomorrow." When telling tales of the past, they speak of events as if they are currently occurring, and talk of long dead heroes as if they were close friends.



BLADE OF SERPENTS

A lone figure entered the chamber, like the dead men, he wore the color of the Phoenix... he was not.

Otosan Uchi, three months ago...

by Shawn Carman

The sun was shining brightly as Seppun Oroku walked through the gardens of the Seppun estates in the Imperial City, but the chill of winter lingered on in the brisk morning air. Oroku clutched her kimono tightly about her body and picked up the pace of her walk. The silent yojimbo walking behind her kept his steady, even pace, the precious bundle he carried tucked tightly under his arm. Oroku sighed happily when she reached the garden's end and entered the warm, incense-scented air inside the estate chambers. "Hyobe," she said, turning to her yojimbo. "It wasn't that cold. You complain too much." She looked at him for a few seconds with a mischievous glint in her eye, but as usual, Hyobe said nothing. Sighing in mock exasperation, she turned and continued on her way down the hallway toward one of the audience chambers. "Remember," she added to her taciturn companion just before entering, "let me do the talking."

The chamber was one of the tastefully decorated rooms where the Seppun had their guests await an audience with a member of the family. Under normal circumstances, the delegations occupying the rooms

were individuals who had requested the privilege of the Seppun's time, but in this particular case the Seppun had actually requested that Phoenix send a representative to speak with them. It was highly unusual for an Imperial family to request someone to visit them in their home, and that perhaps was partly why the Phoenix had responded so quickly. Whatever the reason, the Phoenix had evidently thought it an important event, for they had sent a prestigious envoy; a man with three yojimbo must be quite important indeed.

"Seppun Oroku-sama," said one of the yojimbo suddenly, catching her off guard. She was not accustomed to having a guardian speak. "I am Shiba Bajiru, emissary of the Brotherhood of Heaven's Wing. My associate is Isawa Moriyasu of Kyuden Isawa. We are most honored to have been chosen to respond to your invitation, and our lord has instructed us to offer whatever service we can possibly provide."

"Thank you, Bajiru-san," Oroku said warmly. "But it is the Seppun who wish to perform a service for your august clan."

Moriyasu looked puzzled. "I'm sorry, Oroku-sama, but I do not understand. We understood that you had requested the Phoenix's aid in some delicate matter. Is that not the case?"

"It is a delicate matter, this much is true," Oroku explained, "but not one that requires the Phoenix to serve the Seppun. In fact, it is almost the opposite of that." Gesturing toward a table where a servant was pouring tea, Oroku continued as the group sat. "There are many precious items in the Seppun's care. As the Emperor's guardians, it has fallen to us to protect many objects sacred to the Hantei line over the centuries. Now that the Hantei line has essentially come to its end, we have begun to reconsider some of the items within our care, and whether or not they could serve a greater purpose elsewhere."

"Many of those items under your care are best kept removed from the Empire," Bajiru said. "Too many would use them for their own purposes. Not all clans are as strong or as wise as the Seppun."

"And yet," Moriyasu added somewhat hastily, "the Seppun possess the wisdom to determine the best place for these treasures. The Phoenix will of course respect your decision."

"Of course," Oroku said, smiling demurely. "The Seppun lords have been most impressed with how well Shiba Aikune has controlled the awesome power of the Last Wish. The Wish is purportedly the most powerful artifact in Rokugan, yet Aikune has shown restraint and strength of will in its use." Oroku watched the Phoenix carefully; none of them showed any surprise or disbelief at her words despite reports that Aikune had unleashed the Wish against his own Lion advisors only weeks before. "If the Phoenix can wield such an artifact, then they are the only ones worthy to bear our gift." Gesturing to her yojimbo, Oroku reverently unwrapped the package set before the group. The silk wraps fell away to reveal a katana, one that bore the chrysanthemum mon of the Hantei family.

"A magnificent blade," said Bajiru admiringly.

"This blade has not been used in centuries. Its last use was a betrayal of the Seppun's oath to the Hantei, yet it was necessary to preserve the Hantei line. It has been a great source of confusion for our family over the centuries, but at last a decision has been made. This blade saved the Empire once, and perhaps its power can do so again. We ask that the Phoenix, wisest of the Great Clans, wield it. May its presence show all that the Phoenix bear our favor. May its power grant you the chance to bring peace to the Empire once more. Its name is Mukizo, 'Flawless.'"

Bajiru nodded, his stern expression unchanged, but Moriyasu smiled broadly and bowed his head deferentially. The little shugenja was practically drooling at the notion of claiming the sword for his clan. He would decline twice, of course, but that was protocol and nothing else. Not for the first time, Oroku wondered if this was the wisest course of action for her family. She would do what she was ordered regardless, but she did not have to like it.

Moriyasu opened his mouth to decline the offer, but never got the chance. From somewhere beyond the estate's walls, there was a thunderous report that sounded as if the Fortunes had lashed out against the city. Bajiru and Hyobe were on their feet at once, as were Moriyasu's two yojimbo. Seconds later there was a second report, and the very floor rocked as if by an enormous earthquake. The eastern wall exploded in a hailstorm of wood and stone, and through the smoke Oroku could see hazy, inhuman forms lunging into the chamber.

"The Shadowlands," Bajiru shouted, leaping headfirst into the creatures pouring through the destroyed wall. His speed was nothing short of amazing. Oroku could hardly see his blade while his movements were little more than a blur. The misshapen beasts that were rapidly filling the chamber fell by the dozen as Hyobe joined the Phoenix warrior in the fight. Moriyasu's yojimbo joined as well, but they were clearly outstripped by the two more seasoned warriors. Oroku saw one fall beneath a wave of the creatures, shortly followed by the second. Moriyasu shouted an incantation to the Fortunes, summoning a billowing column of flame that destroyed the beasts that had killed his bodyguards.

Over the fighting, Oroku heard another voice chanting, but this was nothing like the prayer Moriyasu had uttered. The words were unfamiliar, almost painful to the ear, and echoed with a sinister tone that made them ring out above the din of the battle. A huge stream of foul green energy appeared in the chamber, but rather than striking like the column of flame, it wound its way sinuously through the room like smoke. For a moment, Oroku even imagined that there was a pair of empty black eyes and a great, gaping maw that made the energy look like a terrible serpent. That image lasted only a moment before it lashed out and struck Moriyasu.

The Phoenix shugenja only had time for a muffled scream before the energy destroyed him utterly. Flesh and tattered remnants of his clothing scattered across the room with explosive force. A splatter of blood hit Oroku in the face, and despite the incredible circumstances, she felt a fleeting wave of nausea.

A second blast of corrupted energy, black this time, laid Bajiru low. His magnificent orange armor blackened and cracked where the energy tore through him. Hyobe fell as well, but was not killed. He was swarmed by tiny green creatures, who pinned him to the ground with their sheer numbers.

A lone figure entered the chamber. Like the dead man, he wore the colors of the Phoenix, but his expression left little doubt in Oroku's mind that he was not. His maniacal, depraved smile terrified her, but she would not show it. Summoning her courage, she managed "You are not welcome here. Please leave."

The man standing amid the rubble laughed. "I did not realize the Seppun were a humorous people. You must be an exception." He glanced around the room at the various dead bodies, looking for something. Finally, his eyes settled upon the blade Oroku had been presenting to the Phoenix. Hefting the katana, his smile took on a hard, cold edge. "Ah, this is what I was looking for. You and your allies were merely an added bonus."

Diamond Edition Releasing October 2003

A new basic set marks the beginning of the Diamond Storyline. Whether by the people or by right of power, an Emperor has been chosen. The Empire must face more trials before its fragile peace based on fear and justice takes root.

- *Features 10 Clans, with 2 strongholds each*
- *Marks the beginning of the Diamond Environment*
- *500+ Cards to kick off the new tournament environment*

Reign of Blood Releasing December 2003

- *150+ Card expansion, exclusively for the new Diamond environment*

L5R Encyclopedia Releasing March 2003

The comprehensive L5R CCG compendium, 176 Full Color Page.

Containing every card in print with the Gold Edition bug, the L5R Encyclopedia is a must have for every *Legend of the Five Rings*™ fan. Includes all Gold legal cards released between May 2000 and Dec. 2003 — adding up to over 1500 cards, all in full color.

Includes pre-Gold expansions, *Gold Edition*™, *A Perfect Cut*™, *An Oni's Fury*™, *Dark Allies*™, *Broken Blades*™, *1,000 Years of Darkness*™, *The Fall of Otsan Uchi*™.

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"That is not for you," she whispered.

"Oh, but it is," he insisted. "The favor of the Seppun. That is what you said this blade represented, isn't it? The blessings of your family? Yes, that was it." He admired the blade for a moment before pointing it at Oroku. "You will offer me the Seppun's favor. In the name of Lord Daigotsu. After all, are we not stronger than your chosen protectors?" He nodded toward the dead Phoenix.

Somewhere deep within her soul, Oroku felt the stirrings of anger. "I will not."

"You will give the blade willingly," replied the stranger. "Or I will take you and your yojimbo instead. You will not enjoy your time with us, I think." At his words, a flickering of electricity raced down the blade and arced across the room to strike Oroku.

The pain was, as promised, unimaginable. Her muscles spasmed out of control, twisting her body in a violent convulsion that threatened to snap her bones like dry tinder. When the pain passed, she saw a flickering of movement from the corner of her eye.

Hyobe had thrown off his attackers and raced across the room in an instant. "No!" he shouted, lashing out at the maho-tsukai. His strike was barely deflected by the blade the stranger carried, but still tore through his side. It was the first time Oroku had ever heard Hyobe speak.

The maho-tsukai lifted his blade, its surface crackling with energy once more, but he was never given the chance to speak. A third explosion ripped through the building, collapsing the chamber in a pile of rubble. Several large stones struck Oroku, and she was too weak to avoid them. She felt the stone crush her bones, and a blossoming warmth within her told her that she was bleeding inside.

For a time, she fell unconscious. A distant sound awakened her after an unknown length of time. She felt cold and could not move. A faint voice said something that sounded like "she's going," and a blurry form entered her vision.

"Seppun-sama," a man's voice said. It was gentle and comforting. "I am Isawa Churezu. We cannot treat your wounds, but we will see to it that you are not further defiled by the creatures that attacked you. They have all been killed."

She opened and closed her mouth, but was unable to speak.

"Shh," he said. "Your yojimbo did not survive, I am afraid. Your Phoenix friend did, however. We are removing him to safety. He will live."

"No," she managed. "No, the blade, he..."

"Shh," he said again. "Do not try to talk. The Phoenix will be honored to receive your gift, and we will commemorate it to your memory, Seppun-sama."

"No," she whispered one last time as darkness took her.

The northern Isawa provinces, one month ago

Mishime slowly slid his shoji screen open. There was no light in the corridor; all was dead at this time of night. Light was unnecessary, he mused, for darkness had always been his ally. It had cloaked his indiscretions for years, and now it allowed him to move unseen through the Empire. Darkness had allowed him to infiltrate Otsan Uchi several months ago and now it had allowed him to win Isawa Churezu's confidence, working his way into the man's home, if only for a short time.

And now, it would allow him to seize the prize he needed to achieve his life's ambition. It had been so easy to gain Churezu's confidence. Appearing unbidden on his doorstep, wishing to thank the man that had saved his life. The fool was eager to embrace his kinsmen, and reveled in Mishime's endless gratitude and constant recounting of his heroism. Posing as Isawa Moriyasu had not been difficult with so willing a target.

The thick wooden door that protected the area where Churezu conducted his research was a meager barrier at best. Mishime placed his palm against the portion of the door where the lock was centered and pushed. The wood resisted at first, but it began to creak under the force, and finally cracked and splintered. It was louder than Mishime had expected, but the powder he had placed in Churezu's meal would prevent his awakening. The shugenja's doddering old yojimbo could have conceivably heard the sound, but he doubted it. The man was clearly a fossil, and was only still in service because he had nowhere else to go.

The chamber was even darker than the corridor, as it had no exterior windows. It mattered little, however, as Mishime had memorized the position of the item he desired. He glided silently through the chamber until he reached the rack upon which a lone katana rested. He exalted in his victory for the briefest of moments, running one finger along the edge of the blade until a lone drop of blood ran down its mirrored exterior. "Mine," he whispered hoarsely.

Light suddenly filled the room, causing Mishime to hiss in surprise and spin to face the door. There stood the aged yojimbo, still clad in his plain, frayed kimono. One hand rested on the hilt of his blade, and the other carried a hooded lantern that he had just opened. For one so old, he had entered the chamber without a sound. "Impressive, old man. I don't remember the last time someone surprised me."

"The real surprise will come when I kill you," the old man said in a ragged voice. "I thought your line ended when I killed your father years ago."

"Killed my..." Mishime's voice trailed off. He peered across the dimly lit chamber at the old man, and understanding dawned on his features. "Reikado? By the Fortunes, are you still alive? Unbelievable!"

"Believe it or not, as you like," the old man said, drawing his blade. "In a moment, it won't matter. You look just like your father, and now you'll share his fate."

"I don't think so, old man. My father was a powerful and cunning man, but I'm far wiser than he ever was. For example," he reached into his obi and withdrew a small, black, egg-shaped object, "I always come prepared. Please, enjoy the essence of Pekkle no Oni." Mishime hurled the object to the ground between himself and the old man.

The Shadowlands, present day

The Temple of the Ninth Kami was a severe building, even for the City of the Lost. Mishime never entered its obsidian doors without feeling awed by Fu Leng's power. His years among the Phoenix had been utterly wasted, that much was clear to him now. His father's path, the path of maho, was the true path to power. His father had joined the Phoenix Clan with his



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Where the object struck the floor, there was a brief flash and then a thick, black cloud filled the chamber. The old man cursed and hurled himself out into the corridor to avoid the cloud of Taint. Laughing, Mishime grabbed the blade from the stand and chanted a short prayer to the Dark Kami. A bolt of sickly green energy erupted from his outstretched hand and instantly rotted away the chamber wall. "You've missed your chance, Reikado! You will die knowing you have failed! Sayonara!"

With those parting words, Mishime leapt through the hole he had created and carried his prize into the night, laughing all the way.

meager elemental magic when they opened their doors to any ronin with potential following the Clan War. By that time Tenkazu had already faked his death, throwing his nemesis Reikado off of his trail after nearly two decades. As a result, Mishime had been born an Asako.

Deep in his soul, Mishime knew he had never truly belonged. When he had the chance to betray not only his family but several Kuni witch-hunters investigating the City of the Lost, he had taken it without hesitation. Serving the Phoenix had been a drudgery, but serving Daigotsu was exhilarating.

Even as the thought crossed his mind, Mishime approached the Dark Lord of the Shadowlands. Daigotsu was sitting on the throne that had replaced the Steel Throne, apparently lost in thought even as he stared into his open right hand. "My lord Daigotsu," he said, bowing low. "I have returned from my quest, and I wished to thank you again for allowing me to undertake it."

"And what of me, little Snake?" came a voice from across the room. Steeped in shadows, Shahai ran one bone-white finger along the surface of the altar that dominated the temple's western wall. "No greeting for me? You should be cautious, lest I take offense."

"Forgive me, Dark Daughter," Mishime said with the proper respectful tone. "I did not realize you were there."

"Mmm," mused Shahai. "I am not accustomed to being overlooked."

"Not now, dearest," said Daigotsu lightly. "I believe my hatamoto has something he wishes to tell me. Is that not correct, Chuda Mishime?"

"It is, master," said Mishime reverently. "I have at last recovered that which escaped me during your siege of Otosan Uchi. I present it to you as a gift." He held the katana he had recovered from the Phoenix provinces before him reverently.

"A katana. How intriguing. I already have several. What need have I for this one?"

"I have retrieved this blade because it is the same blade that ended the mortal life of Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum. Your ancestor, my lord."

Daigotsu leaned forward in his throne, an amused smirk on his handsome features. "The blade the Seppun have guarded all these centuries? I thought it was lost in the siege."

"It was, master, but only temporarily. The Phoenix had taken it to study. I have retrieved it for you."

The masked man stood and took the blade from Mishime, holding it like a delicate work of art. "The blood of the Hantei stained this blade," he murmured. "This sword struck down the rightful Emperor, wielded by a hero who knew his duty to his family. Marvelous." He favored Mishime with a smile. "You have done well, hatamoto. Very well indeed. What reward would you have for this service you have done me?"

"I ask only to serve you, master," Mishime said. "I ask only to gather others to bear my true ancestors' name. I ask to let them spill their blood on your sword and swear their eternal loyalty to the Chuda and to you."

The Dark Lord's smile was both terrible and genuine. "That which you ask, I would gladly have given in time. Rise, Chuda Mishime, and begin your line anew." After a moment's thought, he added "And what will your legacy be called?"

"The Snake Clan, my lord," Mishime replied. "And I will finish the task my ancestors could not. I will drown the Empire in blood. For you, master."

Daigotsu nodded silently, pleased with his hatamoto's words.



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DECK BUILDING THE BASICS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

by Dan Tibbles

Deckbuilding is fundamentally centered on consistency. A deck that crushes opponents but only does it two out of three games is not as strong as a deck that wins consistently.

The Dynasty deck is a deck based on consistency. Dynasty decks are more important than Fate decks, as you will be seeing more of your Dynasty deck in a game than your Fate deck. In addition, you base your ability to purchase cards, either Fate or Dynasty, on your Dynasty deck.

Dynasty consistency comes from a combination of gold development and buyable personalities. Events in Gold are not game-changing enough to run more than the best two-to-four. There are several good formulas for putting together a deck, mainly involving gold holding and personality count. If you are just beginning, try 17 gold holdings, 3 events, 3 regions/non-gold producing holdings, and 12 personalities that can be purchased with your

The Dynasty Deck is a Deck Based On Consistency.

stronghold and one holding, 3 that can be purchased with your stronghold and two holdings, and 2 that cost more than that. This is a good base, but oftentimes this needs to be tinkered with.

A deck's Gold Scheme is commonly considered the most important part of the deck. Usually it is more important how you use the gold than what it specifically is. Build your deck and then build the gold scheme. There is enough selection for holdings in the gold environment that make this possible. Be careful with *Gifts and Favors*. It is heralded as an end to first turn no gold draws, however if you flip no gold on turn one and then discard everything in your provinces, there is a 20% chance your *Gifts and Favors* will be one of the cards that you refill in your provinces. If you plan to run *Gifts and Favors*, try two of them for increased consistency.

Gifts and Favors can best be included in a deck with a 3-4 gold producing stronghold and it allows you to play with 15-17 holdings as opposed to 17-19 holdings, as was required for consistency before *Gifts and Favors* was released.

The game can be divided into three simple categories, early, mid, and late. The personalities in your deck, especially in the gold environment, should be useful in all three stages of the game. Decks that focus on winning in one particular category are inherently less consistent than decks that are well rounded. Personalities that are cheap and can be purchased with only a player's stronghold are usually not worth the trouble unless they are being purchased for their personal honor in an honor deck. Speed attack decks were good in Open because of the event base at the time and the cheap Fate cards that allowed a

player to kill or bow larger personalities. With those cards out of the environment, look to making consistent decks that will function well at any stage of the game.

An important point to keep in mind on personalities is that the most important elements of each personality are force, chi, and personal honor. Most abilities on personalities are situational and not worth paying extra gold for. Before including a personality in your deck with an ability, make sure there are no other personalities you could include that have better numbers for the same gold cost. There are, of course, some abilities that are good on personalities and are consistently useful, however many people play with personalities that have abilities that are not consistently useful. Track those personalities in games you play and record how many times you used that personality's ability in a game and if it was useful. If you are only using a personality's ability in one out of five or more games, try to find an alternate personality with better numbers.

For Fate consistency, the important thing to remember is that you will be seeing a smaller portion of your Fate deck compared to your Dynasty deck. Each of your Fate cards should be good on its own, without any other specific Fate card needed to work with it. A perfect example of this is dueling. The way to win a duel is to have five chi more than your opponent, not to have tricky duel-oriented cards. Instead, replace those cards with items to increase your force and/or chi, as these items will work by themselves, without the dueling cards, as opposed to the dueling cards that are specialized. This same theory can be applied to any other combination of cards that require two or

more Fate cards to work properly. Just as each personality should be useful at any stage of the game, each Fate card should be useful by itself.

Fate cards that have drastic effects and work with the deck theme are different. *Stand Against the Waves* is a great example. *Stand* is a card that only works in combination with other Fate cards. Those Fate cards, however, should be the basis for the deck. Any deck that has *Stand* in it should have followers in 40-60% of its Fate deck. It will consistently draw and play them, so whenever you draw *Stand* it will be consistently good.



Sneak Attack, on the other hand, is used too often. A deck should have at least 12 actions to play that will drastically change the battle if they are played with a *Sneak Attack*, such as *Night Battle*, *Deadly Ground*, and *Overwhelmed*. If you don't have this many cards

to use with it, then you will find yourself drawing *Sneak Attack* when it is useless. This lack of consistency is the main reason you will see good decks lose tournaments. If you would like to win more games, take a careful look at your deck's consistency. Play games with a pen and paper at your side and note whenever you



draw something that is useless. This will give you an idea of the cards that are not helping you. Those cards can then be replaced with more versatile cards.

Be careful about putting in cards that only work against specific decks. If your deck is good, then it should only need a little push to allow it to beat the decks that you are having trouble with. For instance, instead of adding in *Twisted Forest* to help beat Shadowlands decks, add in *The Golden Obi of the Sun Goddess*, or *Hiruma Slayers*, both will work well against non-Shadowlands decks, but also have a little extra push to help you defeat Shadowlands. Usually changing your deck strategy slightly will allow you to beat certain decks consistently while still remaining intact against the rest of the playing field. One other note about fighting specific decks, use your Fate deck for it, not your Dynasty deck. The Dynasty deck is too important to have less than sub-optimal cards.

When you build a deck, have one goal and a single way to achieve it, then build your deck around that. Use cards that will be consistently useful. Weed out cards that are not. In the end, it is a fairly simple process that simply takes time to understand.

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KOKU PRESENTATION

A Champion's Strike

0

Battle: Target one of your Unique Samurai in this battle to destroy any number of opposing Followers with a total Force less than or equal to your Samurai's. With a single perfect strike, Hideo and Ishuro had to fight it out for a time.

3

0 **Bayushi Kankatsu** **3**

-10 1

Scorpion Clan Imperial Chancellor • Courier
Experienced • Unique
Political Reaction: Bow Kankatsu to negate an Honor gain.
"The Chancellor's duty is to mediate between the Four Winds. But what happens when the Chancellor uses greater gain to keeping them divided?" -Sakura Forester

Ch'ppu'kich **2**

3

Great Shining Hoard • Unique
Iron Ch'ppu'kich to produce 2 Gold.
Battle: Bow Ch'ppu'kich to search the personal Force of a Ruling Follower and an opposing non-Ruling Follower. *"How did you find all of that iron?" He asked. The Ironsist only smiled."*

4 **Dark Eyes on the Wall** **0**

0 6

Ninja • Shadowlands • Unique • Low 4 Honor
Will only attach to a Shadowlands or Ninja Personality. Gains Cavalry while attached to a Ninja. Gains Goblins while attached to a Goblin and may attach to Personalities that will only attach Goblins. Followers: Gains +1F while attached to an Onari. *"You never will see me restrained..."*

2

Forgery

0

Ninja Battle: If the current Province has no Regions, move a Region from one of your other Provinces to this one. You must be the Defender to play this card. *"Enough! The Lion awakes! This map is useless!" Behind him, the messenger smiled.*

3

Hand of the Shogun

1

Target an opponent, who then targets two of your Personalities. Each one gains the Cavalry trait if he or she does not have it, or +2 F if he or she does. These effects last until the start of your next turn. *"If Kankatsu wants to keep the battle lands so badly, then he can guard them as we do!" -Hida Shiro*

4 **Hiruma Tatsuzo** **4**

2 9 2

Crab Clan Samurai • Yu 4
Reaction: When Tatsuzo is targeted by an action while he is in an army, have a Follower attached to him to cancel the action. This can be done once per battle. *"I will use the Sea from his house. Then let us see how 'real' his soldiers are!" -Isago*

Hunting Cabin

5

Unique • Costs 5 Iron Gold for a Master Clan player. **Reaction:** Bow when a ranged attack from a Personality targets a Nonhuman card. That ranged attack will destroy that card regardless of its strength. **Battle:** Bow and destroy Hunting Cabin to give +1F to each of your Personalities and Followers with ranged attack abilities in the current battle.

4 **Kokujin** **4**

-13 0

Double Chi • Tattooed • Shadowlands
Experienced 2 Honor Kokujin • Unique
Low 4 Honor Kokujin may only straggle during your Straighten Phase. Bow Kokujin after any duel he is in ends. The Double Chi trait has no effect for Kokujin's opponent during duels.
Limited: Bow Kokujin to issue an unreasonable challenge to a bonded Personality.

0 **Konetsu** **4**

10 6 4

Crane Clan Courier • Samurai • Unique
Political Open: Once per turn, copy a Political action from any other Personality in play. *"Occasionally the fortune tells between Irons and Masters. The opposites of the divine are similar to a mirror's, and sometimes children are born such as yours!"*

1 **Menhari-gata** **4**

6

This Personality gains the Buddhist trait while Menhari-gata is attached.
Battle: Discard a card from your hand to lower the Force of all opposing Personalities by the discard's Force value. This is a use of the Buddhist trait. *"There the opposite trait can be a deadly weapon in the hands of a warrior!" -Atsuh's Leadership*

2

Moneylender

4

You may pay any amount of Gold when paying the Moneylender. For one Coin taken on it when it enters play for each Gold paid.
Bow Moneylender and remove any number of Coin tokens from it to produce an equal amount of Gold. Limited: Bow Moneylender and pay any amount of Gold to add one Coin token to it for each Gold paid.

Show of Good Faith

4

Political Limited: Bow one of your Couriers to take control of another player's Personality until the end of the turn. You may not declare an attack or move cards or tokens to or from that Personality while he or she is under your control. *"If we are truly to be allies, Chik, then you will tell me what you have of the High Kamidai and what others can see of it!" -Chen asked.*

4

3 **Storm Legion** **0**

1 6

Unique • Naval • Only a Master Clan Personality can attach the Storm Legion.
Battle: Once per battle, bow an opposing Unique Follower. *"The captain, Kamidai-chin 'Komet' named, 'The Storm Legion serves Kikou and to show loyalty is at!"*

4

The Seppun Temples

Unique
After you bring a Personality into play from this Province, you may attach a Follower to that Personality from your hand, paying all costs. Reduce the Follower's Gold cost by 4, to a minimum of 1. *"These Temples has ancient secret! Enemies and Spirits before a lot more capital. These old temple were her should find her there!" -Dai Inoue*

The Shadow's Claw

0

Reaction: Play before your Personality focuses in a duel. Look at your top five Fate cards, focus with one, take one into your hand, and shuffle the rest into the deck. *"Carry your secret to the grave, Shikany!"*

2

+0 **Tsutomu no Shiryō** **4**

1 0

Dragon Clan Ancestor • Unique
Reaction: Bow Tsutomu no Shiryō after this Personality enters a duel to change the duel to one of Personal Honor. *"Mother, give me guidance," Shikany said, bowing her head. "Show me the way to defeat my father!"*

3

2 **Unquiet Spirits** **0**

0 3

Spirit • Nonhuman
After each time an Event resolves while Unquiet Spirits are in play, if you have any cards in your hand, you must choose and discard one to permanently give Unquiet Spirits +1F. If you are unable to discard, bow this Personality.

2

Using the Wish

Unique
Give one of your Personalities Force and Chi between equal to the Personality's personal Force and Chi until the beginning of your next turn. Destroy the Personality at the beginning of your next turn. *"Wishful Art!" Tsunagi bowed. "You cannot know power without wisdom!" "Silence, old woman!" Akahara replied."*

Wazinu no Yokai **4**

0 0

Shadowlands Ancestor • Shadowlands • Unique
Destroy Wazinu no Yokai at any time that this Personality is not Shadowlands.
Battle: For *Great One* to be used and prepared to do so (Owner 14), but Agasha had other plans. A smileable hand appeared from the shadows, drawing her red and white essence into the darkness.

2



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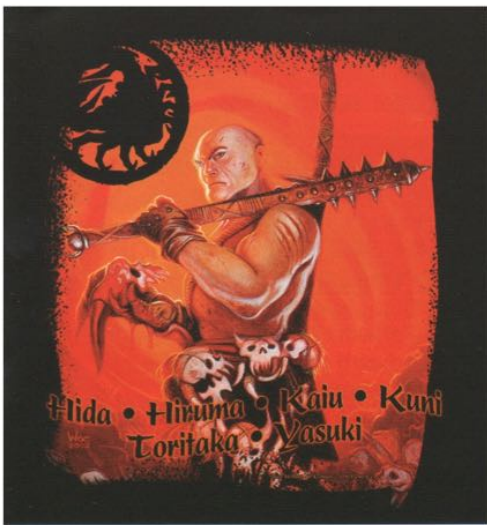
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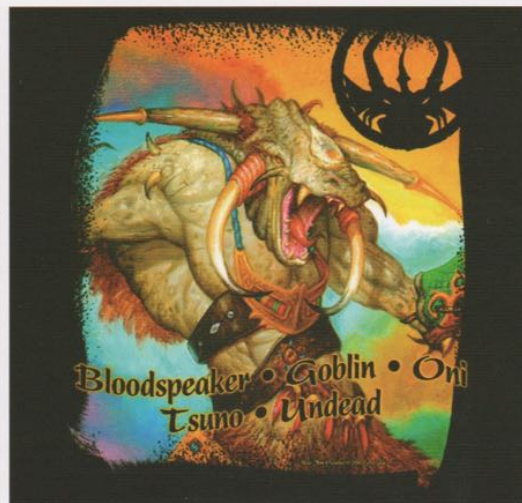
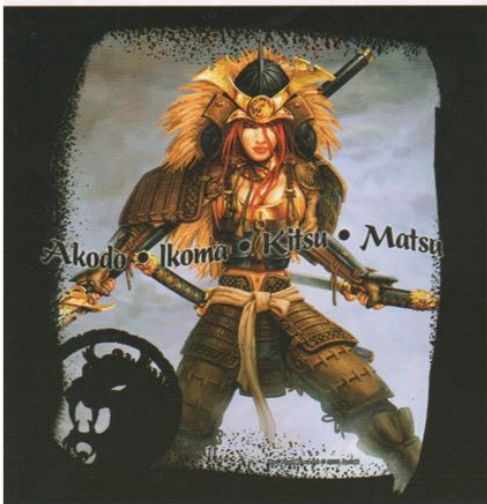
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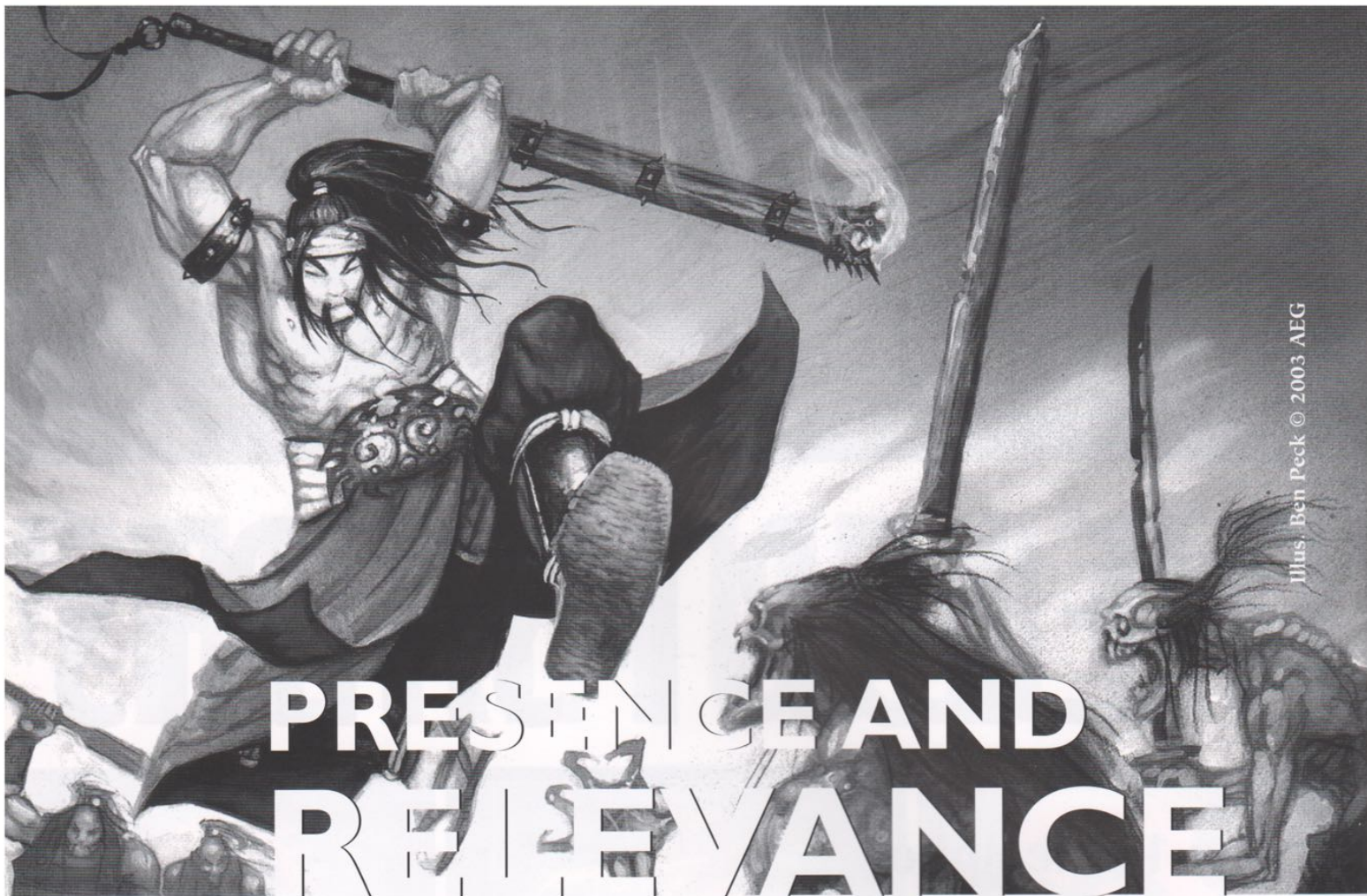
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PRESENCE AND RELEVANCE

by Jeff Alexander

Chances are you've heard of 'em and you don't like them... the Rule of Presence and the Rule of Relevance.

The concept underlying these two rules is simple enough: while a battle is underway, only actions that involve that specific battle are allowed, and only if they're taken by players involved directly. That's it in a nutshell. The lion's share of that section of the rulebook is nitty-gritty details defining what involved means in concrete game terms. That's where much of the confusion arises since lists of items in a rulebook (or worse, lists of lists) are intimidating.

Here's what the rulebook says, taking the Gold Edition text one rule at a time and updating it through the rulesheet in *The Fall of Otosan Uchi*:

*A player can take a Battle or Open action only if he or she is involved in the current battle. This is called the **Rule of Presence**. To satisfy this condition, the player must either:*

Chances Are You've Heard of 'em and You Don't Like Them...

- *currently have at least one unit in the battle, or...*
- *gain a unit in the battle as a result of the action (for example, use Superior Tactics to move a unit from another Province into the current, empty one).*

If you have a bowed unit in the current battle, that's still a unit. Though you can't play actions like *Jaijutsu Duel* or *To Do What We Must* in this instance (since you can't target your own people with your actions), that unit nonetheless counts for Presence and makes cards like *Entrapping Terrain* legal. Also, it needs to be your unit. An ally's unit will give your ally Presence, but it won't help you. Third, what matters is whether you have a unit there right now. If you assigned a lone samurai-ko at the start of the attack but she just got duelled to

death, you don't have Presence anymore.

A few notes on that second condition are in order. Moving another player's unit in does *not* satisfy Presence (though it does meet Relevance). If you have no units in a battle at all, it's illegal to move someone else's in. Although you will mostly meet this condition by moving a unit, it's just as legal to create one, with a card like *Cowardly Conscripts* or *Arrival of the Emerald Champion*.

Got that? Good. Let's move on to the second rule.

*A player can take only Battle and Open actions associated with the current battle. This is called the **Rule of Relevance**. In particular, the action needs to satisfy at least one of the following conditions:*

- It comes from a card or token at the battle.
- It moves or creates a card or token in the battle.
- It targets or directly affects a card or token in the battle, the Province under attack, or the battle itself.

All of those items are straightforward, except maybe that last one: affect...the battle itself. This covers things like Terrains (which often don't target or affect any cards when first played), actions that end the battle (*Flattery*, *Crushing Attack*), and actions that add extra rules or costs for the duration of the battle (*Deadly Ground*, even if it wasn't a Terrain; *Storms of War*).

This is the rule that makes it legal to cast *Blood of Midnight* or *Biting Steel* with a shugenja you



kept unassigned, as long as you're casting it on someone in the current battle. This is also the rule that lets that same shugenja cast it on anyone anywhere while his own battle is resolving if you take the risk of assigning him.

What are some actions that might count for Relevance but don't? Well, one ancient example is bowing your unassigned *Kakita Yoshi* or *Doji Tanitsu* to take the Imperial Favor while someone else is attacking you. The action isn't coming from a card in the battle, it isn't doing anything to a card in the battle, it isn't directly affecting the battle itself, and — perhaps most importantly — affecting a player who has units in the battle is not one of the ways an action can be Relevant. Another, slightly more complicated example is casting *Energy Transference* from a



shugenja outside the current battle to kill an opponent's Personality who is also outside the battle in order to lower the Force of the *Celestial Sword* he has present. This isn't legal because, although you know casting that spell will affect a card in the battle (the *Sword*), it's not a direct result of the action.

So. That's all there is for Presence and Relevance. Simple, yes? But wait! There's one more major rule in the rulebook.

A player can take an action that refers to an opposing card or this battle, or that includes an implicating phrase such as another attacking card or the Province this card is defending, only if the card on which the action is printed is in the current battle. This includes Fear and ranged attacks. Players can take actions without such a phrase no matter where their cards are located, provided they meet all restrictions.

This rule is clarified in greater depth with the following extra paragraph in *The Fall of Otosan Uchi*:

An action which refers to this battle always refers to the battle currently being resolved. In addition, if the card it appears on is of a type which can be in battles (such as a Personality), the card must be in the current battle for the action to be legal.

This rule has nothing to do with either Presence or Relevance. It is its own separate rule, and it applies to all actions in addition to those two rules. On top of that, it applies to all types of actions, even Reactions. While it sounds

confusing at first, if you think about it, it's not so much a rule in and of itself. It's more of a reminder that a card's text can require the card's presence in the current battle even if nothing in the rulebook does, and an alert that this requirement is implied in a number of ways.

This rule is the reason *Bayushi Paneki* (Exp.) and *Hitomi Kagetora* (Exp.) cannot move them into battle, but *Bayushi Kwanchai* and *Matsu Hataki* (Exp.) can.

Other Common Misconceptions

Myth: A card with an Open action never needs to be in the battle.

Fact: Open actions taken during battle are bound by the Rules of Presence and Relevance the same way Battle actions are.

Myth: A card with a Battle action always needs to be in the battle.

Fact: This is true only of Regions and Fortifications. For everything else, if you're using the action in a manner meeting all the rules, the card can be home or in a different battle.

Myth: Actions on Regions and Fortifications can be used when you have no units.

Fact: These card types don't get special breaks. Unless the action is a Reaction or the card says you don't need units, you can't use it if you don't defend there (or if you do but all your units get eliminated). *Watchtower* can be used on its own. *Pitch and Fire* can't.

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Releases June 2003

Secrets of the Crane
Releases August 2003

Secrets of the Unicorn
Releases October 2003

Secrets of the Dragon
Releases December 2003

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Secrets of the Scorpion

By the time this article reaches your hands, the first three installments of the new role-playing game sourcebook series for Legend of the Five Rings, the Secrets of the Clans series, will be available on the shelves of your local game store. In the tradition of the Way of the Clans series, these books provide an in-depth look into the history, customs, families, lands, and secrets of Rokugan's Great Clans.

The Secrets series updates the Great Clans to Gold Era examining their present activities and holdings in light of the wars that have ravaged the Empire over the past several decades. You can expect to find new faces, new mechanics, new stories, and new adventure ideas contained within these books, as well as a guide to the provinces of each major family in each clan along with the introduction of the vassal families that serve the clan's greater families.

The following preview is an excerpt from Secrets of the Scorpion, the next release in the Secrets of the Clans series. Look for it! "Coming in April 2003."

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DOJO OF BITTER LIES

Classes: Fighter, Samurai, Bitter Lies Swordsman (prestige)

Schools: Bayushi Bushi, Bitter Lies Swordsman (New Path)

HISTORY

The Dojo of Bitter Lies is relatively new, though its origins stretch back three decades to a samurai named Bayushi Tengen. The Scorpion histories remember Tengen as a great hero of the Clan War, one who frequently succeeded despite overwhelming odds. What the histories do not record is the fact that Tengen was often sent on these missions to rid the clan of his presence. Tengen was a loud, boorish, arrogant samurai who made a nuisance of himself. A descendant of the original Bayushi Tengen who wrote the seminal Scorpion text *Lies*, he memorized his ancestor's teachings quoted them loudly even in the most inappropriate circumstances.

Tengen devised his own technique, the Dark Sword of Bitter Lies, and gladly offered to teach it to any who wished to learn. Sadly, more often than not Tengen's students ended up seriously injured when attempting to replicate his style. Again and again the clan attempted to rid itself of Tengen, but again and again he survived. While there was no question that Tengen lacked his namesake's skill and intellect, he possessed devilish luck. When all others fell around him, Tengen always survived. Others began to call Tengen the "Failed Martyr" for his complete inability to die when he was supposed to, though never in his presence.

During the Scorpion's exile to the Burning Sands, Tengen was inevitably among the first to escape the Senpet copper mines. A cave-in killed the rest of his work crew and shattered his chains, allowing Tengen to flee and wage a secret war against his clan's captors. The Senpet repeatedly tried to recapture him, and failed. The Scorpion whispered tales of Tengen, the Failed Martyr, and the Senpet came to fear his daring attacks.

On one occasion, Tengen had planned a daring solo raid against a Senpet military outpost. Tengen's plan unraveled nearly instantly, but when the archers turned to fire, a watchtower suddenly toppled, killing the entire unit. The Senpet commander threw down his sword in frustration and confronted Tengen.

"Kill me if you must, Failed Martyr!" he roared. "I will be undone by tactics. I will be undone by magic. I will be undone by strength or even by sheer persistence, but if I must be defeated by dumb luck, let the gods kill me now."

And a lightning bolt struck the Senpet commander from a clear sky.

Though Tengen freed his imprisoned Scorpion brethren and escaped, he was greatly dispirited. He had always thought his victories a product of natural talent, but now there was no question that he was incredibly lucky. Looking back on his life, he realized that all of his victories were nothing more than dumb luck. Dazed and disillusioned, Tengen decided to test his luck's limits by returning to Rokugan alone. The journey should have been impossible. The normally

difficult trip across the blazing desert was broken by a freak thunderstorm that provided all the water Tengen required. The Unicorn soldiers guarding the pass never noted his presence, as they were all taking shelter from the rain. Realizing that all of his successes had been merely a chain of ridiculous coincidences, Tengen retreated to the depths of the Shinomen Forest to live as a hermit.

For three decades Tengen lived in solitude. Eventually he moved into the sleeping city of Iyotisha. There, at least, the slumbering Naga provided some company. When a young bushi named Kwanchai sought out Tengen and demanded to learn the way of the Dark Sword, Tengen refused. He had come to see the power of his technique as a curse, and would not willingly share that curse with another. Kwanchai would have none of it. After months of relentless pestering, Tengen became quite irritated. He finally taught the young bushi the Dark Sword technique just to be rid of him. He believed that, like his other students, Kwanchai would not be able to master the techniques.

To Tengen's quiet horror, he was wrong.

Tengen's curse of luck has been passed on to his student.

TRADITION

Since his return from Tengen's hut, Kwanchai has attempted to spread the Dark Sword's teachings. Drawing upon his uncle Kaukatsu's influence, Kwanchai obtained enough resources to construct a small dojo for the students of Bitter Lies near Kyuden Bayushi, subtly hidden in the Seikitsu Mountains.

Though Bayushi Tengen had limited success teaching the Dark Sword to others, Kwanchai and his disciples have had no problems. The key, it seems, is a calm, balanced, and logical mind — if you have one, you can never learn the technique. All students of Bitter Lies must consequently be extremely zealous; some would call them "mad." The students of Bitter Lies keep an eye out for others like themselves. Any who allow their overzealous loyalty to the Scorpion Clan to consume their sanity are welcome in Kwanchai's dojo.

Initially, Bayushi Yojiro was uncomfortable with the idea of a dojo full of madmen embracing the teachings of a madman not a day's travel from Kyuden Bayushi. Eventually, however, Bayushi Kaukatsu persuaded him that Tengen's students could be quite useful to the clan if used wisely. In his own day, the Failed Martyr was a valued agent. Whenever a situation could not possibly get worse, Bayushi Kachiko sent Tengen. The results were seldom what she had intended, but generally were more harmful to the clan's enemies. An entire dojo of samurai as lucky as Tengen at the beck and call of the Bayushi family would be unstoppable.

Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on one's perspective), Kwanchai's students do not share Tengen's insane luck. While all Bitter Lies swordsmen do seem to be extremely lucky, Kaukatsu's plan to create an army of Tangens was not as successful as he would have hoped. The Failed Martyrs nevertheless make excellent pawns.

TRAINING

The students of Bitter Lies are expected to be intimately aware with the original Bayushi Tengen's teachings. Tengen's *Lies* is not merely required reading; all students must memorize the entire volume and be prepared to quote it. Laggards are punished with physical labor and grueling calisthenics.

Another common method of training is spring patrol. As winter warfare is uncommon in Rokugan, clans frequently dispatch large groups of soldiers on spring patrol as soon as the ground thaws. Spring patrol can often be boring and uneventful, but it can also be the deadliest mission imaginable if the clan's neighbors are on the move. For such a deadly and unpredictable mission, Bitter Lies swordsmen are the natural choice. Spring patrols around Kyuden Bayushi are always accompanied by a handful of Bitter Lies Swordsmen. The officers in the area think of them as "lucky."

SENSEI

There have only been three true sensei in the dojo's short history. The first, of course, was Tangen, who taught Kwanchai. The second was Kwanchai, who taught the first handful of students. Sadly, Kwanchai's lust for adventure and drive to prove himself made him a poor choice as permanent sensei. He eventually handed his duties to one of his first students, Sharaku.

The sensei of Bitter Lies fulfills three separate duties. First, he must keep an eye out for rumors of other prospective students. Not all samurai have the right mix of dumb luck and insanity to master the Dark Sword, so he must choose his students carefully. Second, he must care for the students. As all Dark Sword students are somewhat unstable, it is a constant chore for the sensei to make certain that they don't unleash their insane zeal upon each other. Third, he must train the students. Though this seems obvious, the first two duties can be extremely time consuming, so the sensei must be conscientious in setting aside time for training.

BAYUSHI SHARAKU, SENSEI OF THE DOJO OF BITTER LIES

[Fighter 3/Bitter Lies Swordsman 5; Bayushi Bushi 2/Bitter Lies Swordsman 1]

Like most Bitter Lies Swordsmen, Sharaku is loud, arrogant, and obnoxious. He spits when he talks. He punctuates every sentence with a laugh like a braying donkey. He cannot hold a conversation for more than two minutes without quoting Tangen's *Lies*. Those who speak with him for any length of time cannot help but conclude that he is not entirely sane. Sharaku is aware of his reputation, and he approves.

Sharaku's insanity is a carefully produced act. As a member of the Kolat Dream Sect, he finds the idea that a mortal man can become entirely invincible by embracing madness fascinating. Though Sharaku can understand Kwanchai's teachings and can practice the Dark Sword technique well enough in the dojo's confines, he finds that when he needs it in combat, the technique does nothing. Apparently, he is not insane enough. Or perhaps the technique does not function since his true loyalty is to the Kolat and not the Scorpion.

In either case, Sharaku gladly agreed to take Kwanchai's place as sensei. This way, he can remain in the dojo, teaching the students even as he learns from them, and never need fear the Bitter Lies technique failing him in a moment of crisis.

The Kolat, in the meantime, have mixed feelings about Sharaku's work. While none can argue that the Bitter Lies swordsmen seem to possess supernatural good luck, the fact that their luck is proportionate to their madness is disturbing and their unswerving loyalty to the Scorpion is discouraging. The Kolat place great value on order, discipline, control, and defiance of the samurai order. What the Failed Martyr's students have created is... unsettling.

DOJO OF BITTER LIES BENEFITS

Being a student of Bitter Lies is a mixed blessing. While a Bitter Lies Swordsman can count on a great deal of loyalty from his fellow students, the Empire considers them lunatics. Of course, the fact that Bitter Lies Swordsmen are lunatics makes this somewhat easier to bear.

SOCIAL BENEFIT

Being a student of Bitter Lies inspires fear in one's opponent — if not fear for your talent with the blade, then fear for the madness that led you to walk the Failed Martyr's path.

Benefit: The swordsman suffers a -4 penalty on all Diplomacy checks with others who are aware of his school's nature, but gains a +4 bonus on all Intimidate checks with those who have heard of his dojo.

Benefit: The swordsman has a +10 TN penalty to all Courtier and Diplomacy checks with others who are aware of his school's nature, but gains two Free Raises on all Intimidation rolls against those who have heard of his dojo.

TRAINING BENEFIT

The most obvious benefit of the Dojo of Bitter Lies is access to their unique technique, the Dark Sword of Bitter Lies.

Benefit: Assuming the swordsman meets all other requirements, he may enter the Bitter Lies swordsman prestige class.

Benefit: Assuming the swordsman meets all other requirements, he may take the Bitter Lies Swordsman New Path.

BITTER LIES SWORDSMAN (PRESTIGE CLASS)

The school of Bitter Lies was founded shortly before the Clan War by the infamous Scorpion Clan Martyr, Bayushi Tangen. To be a Bitter Lies student is a dubious honor at best. While it cannot be denied that Bayushi Tangen and his most notorious student, Kwanchai, have performed extraordinary feats, the sensei of most dojo attribute these circumstances more to dumb luck and stubborn stupidity than to skill. Regardless, the Dark Sword school has gathered a small following (no more than six or seven students at any time) and any who truly wish to embrace the path need only to prove themselves to the Bitter Lies Swordsmen.

One thing cannot be denied — though their training is unconventional, the students of Tangen are inexplicably effective. Their refusal to back down or surrender in the face of insurmountable odds has won them begrudging respect from the more established Scorpion schools, and their habit of surviving lethal situations that would fell more conservative samurai cannot be denied (or explained). Their battle cry, "Prepare to face the Dark Sword of Bitter Lies!" inspires dread in allies and enemies alike.

Hit Die: d10.

TABLE 1-1: THE BITTER LIES SWORDSMAN

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+2	+0	Foolish Bravery (+1/3 levels)
2nd	+2	+3	+3	+0	Luck of the Dark Sword
3rd	+3	+3	+3	+1	Glory of Bitter Lies
4th	+4	+4	+4	+1	Foolish Bravery (+2/3 levels)
5th	+5	+4	+4	+1	Embrace the Dark Sword

REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a Bitter Lies Swordsman, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +3.

Feats: Great Fortitude, Way of the Scorpion.

Special: A Bitter Lies Swordsman must agree to teach the character. Generally, only those who have been assigned missions guaranteed to end in certain death but have nevertheless triumphed through dumb luck and sheer bullheadedness are deemed worthy to learn Tangen-sama's techniques. The student must renounce all former dojo (losing all former dojo benefits), embracing only the Dark Sword's teachings. Those who exhibit unusual "cowardice" (such as fleeing from superior numbers or refusing a challenge for any reason) are cast out and targeted as enemies.

CLASS SKILLS

The Bitter Lies Swordsman's class skills (and key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Iaijutsu Focus (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), and Profession (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

CLASS FEATURES

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Bitter Lies swordsmen are proficient in all simple and martial weapons as well as in light and medium armor.

Foolish Bravery: So long as they neither retreat nor falter, a Bitter Lies swordsman cannot be defeated. Whenever the Bitter Lies swordsman attacks a more powerful enemy, he gains a +1 morale bonus on all attack and damage rolls for every three levels or Hit Dice his opponent has greater than his own (minimum one; no bonus is applied if the opponent is of equal or lesser level). This applies only if the Bitter Lies Swordsman immediately attacks what he perceives to be the most powerful foe present (in case of a tie, he may choose). Should the swordsman retreat or fail to attack (or at least pursue his opponent) for even a single round, use of this ability is lost for that combat.

If the most powerful opponent present is defeated, then this bonus applies to the surviving most powerful opponent, and so on, until all applicable opponents have been defeated. At 4th level this bonus increases to +2 for every three levels of difference.

Luck of the Dark Sword: Once per day per level in this class the Bitter Lies Swordsman can reroll any attack roll, skill check, or saving throw that he makes during combat or any other life-or-death situation. If the new result fails and would directly result in the swordsman's immediate death (such as failing a Climb check while dangling over a vat of boiling pitch), he may roll a third time, but must keep the final result.

Glory of Bitter Lies: At 3rd level the Bitter Lies swordsman becomes immune to all fear effects, and gains a +2 morale bonus on all saves against mind-affecting effects.

Embrace the Dark Sword: At 5th level, the swordsman has mastered the Dark Sword technique. Each time he defeats an opponent with equal or greater Hit Dice, the swordsman gains a +2 bonus on all attack and damage rolls for the rest of the combat. This bonus stacks with all other bonuses, including multiple applications of this ability.

BITTER LIES SWORDSMAN (NEW PATH)

Technique Rank: 2

Path of Entry: Bayushi Bushi 1

Path of Egress: Bayushi Bushi 2

Technique: The Dark Sword of Bitter Lies — Devised by the infamous Bayushi Tangen, this technique allows the swordsman to succeed where all others would fail. Whenever facing an opponent of greater Insight Rank, he rolls and keeps additional dice on all attack rolls equal to the difference, but never more dice than his ranks in the Luck Advantage. In addition, the swordsman rolls and keeps dice equal to his ranks in the Luck Advantage in all life-or-death situations outside of combat (such as attempting to climb over a vat of boiling pitch).

Should the swordsman ever retreat in the face of superior numbers or skill, or ever fail to attack his most powerful opponent as soon as he can, this technique cannot be used for one day.

This new official version of the Dark Sword technique updates and supersedes the one presented in Bayushi Tangen's description in *Way of the Scorpion*.



A FALLEN KAMI

How will you kill immortals?

The Celestial Heavens had not changed in eleven hundred years. The endless gleaming surface of the Dragon Road still dominated the landscape. The sky swirled with stars, not the distant motes of light the mortals viewed but beautiful flames bright, close at hand. Everything was as it as it should be.

Except for the gates.

The gates of Tengoku, forged of a metal purer than gold, a metal had no name since no words, mortal or immortal, could describe its beauty. The gates now stood at an awkward angle, unbalanced. The shining metal had turned to blackened sludge, oozing sloppily over the surface of the road.

The Dark Kami sighed and knelt beside the ruined gates. He touched the black mess with the tip of his spear, then studied the spear tip. He sighed.

"Are you displeased, Lord Fu Leng?" hissed Akuma, the hideous green oni that walked in the Dark Kami's shadow. "If the destruction your Ashura have wrought is not adequate, I shall see to it that they redouble their efforts." The demon snapped its head eagerly, cracking its three burning tongues.

"I do not take pleasure in Tengoku's destruction, Akuma," he said to the demon. "This is my home. I do not relish any part in its destruction."

Akuma's three eyes narrowed. He was a being raw with chaos; he thrived on annihilation. He did not understand. "Do you think we could have used these gates as a weapon against the Fortunes?" he snarled, grasping at the first thought to enter his sinister mind. "Perhaps we could find a way to repair them..." The demon squatted by the gates, lapping the corrupted sludge with one tongue.

Fu Leng shook his head sadly. Akuma could never understand, and to attempt to explain would only confuse the creature further. Fu Leng left Akuma to his dinner, stepped over the melted gates, and strode into Tengoku. He could hear the sound of combat, the shrieks of the oni and the screams of the dying. He struggled to hear the music, the song of the Celestial Heavens, but he could not find it amidst the chaos. For eleven centuries he had dreamed of hearing that song once more, and was denied it still.

Did his brothers and sisters hate him so?

by Rich Wulf

Fu Leng's hands twisted on the haft of his spear. He would slaughter them all before he let them send him back to Jigoku. He would show them gods could die.

A defiant cry sounded from Fu Leng's right. He turned slightly, eyes calm behind a pale porcelain mask. A bloody figure in samurai armor charged toward him, flames trailing from his sword. The Dark Kami moved swiftly, driving the blade of his spear deep into the warrior's chest. The dying warrior swung his sword desperately. Fu Leng made no move to parry or dodge. The blade struck his shoulder shattering. The warrior's eyes widened then narrowed in anger. He coughed, blood dripping from his mouth.

"You will not win, fallen one," he croaked. "You will not bring your Taint into Tengoku."

Fu Leng studied the man's face. "You are one of the fushicho," he said. "The firebird warriors of heaven. You live without fear, for you know so long as you die in Tengoku's defense you shall be reborn."

"And I will fight you with every life Heaven gives me," the warrior snarled defiantly.

"A shame, then, that this will be the last," Fu Leng said. He flicked his spear, sending the dying fushicho flying over his shoulder. The man soared through the fallen gates, tumbled over the Dragon Road, then vanished into the mists.

The Dark Kami took satisfaction in the fushicho's dying shriek, perhaps the first time he had known true fear in a life he thought eternal. Fu Leng continued on across the battlefield. He could see the ranks of his Ashura soaring across the sky, locked in battle with the fushicho and their counterparts, the ryu. Here and there he could see the bright figure of a Fortune or the shambling form of an Oni Lord. His eyes settled on Hoshi, son of Togashi, his nephew. The half-mortal had taken the form of an enormous dragon, searing the demon armies with torturous flame. Fu Leng thought for a moment Togashi would be proud of his son. He wondered if the boy would put up a greater fight than his father had.

"Lord Fu Leng," came a voice from behind him.

The Dark Kami turned to face five ashura, the beautiful demon-samurai he had created to invade the heavens. Their faces were pale. They hovered in the air on motionless wings. They bowed to their master.

"What news, my Chosen?" Fu Leng asked.

"A gift, my lord," the ashura said with a smile. It stepped to one side. The Maw pushed a bloody woman in samurai armor to the ground at Fu Leng's feet. She rose up on one arm, looked defiantly into the Dark Kami's eyes. He recognized her immediately.

"Shinjo," he said, looking at the demons. "How did you capture my sister alive?"

"She surrendered to us," the Maw said. "She said she wished to speak with you."

Fu Leng looked down at Shinjo, then back at the demons. "Why is she wounded?" he asked simply.

"The price of defiance," another said. "She stands with the armies of heaven."

Fu Leng looked up calmly, extending one hand toward the Ashura who spoke. The demon-samurai looked uncomfortable for a moment, then began to shake. A drop of dark blood trickled from its nose, sizzling into flame as it touched the air. The ashura whimpered in pain. Fu Leng closed his hand into a fist. The ashura screamed, briefly, then was no more. Its empty black armor clattered to the ground.

A second ashura opened his mouth to speak. Fu Leng opened his hand and sliced it sharply through the air. The creature looked down in surprise as its body was cut in half from shoulder to hip. Like the other, it vanished, leaving its armor in a pile.

"How dare you?" Fu Leng demanded, glaring from one to the next. "Do not speak, do not apologize, do not even bother to tremble, for there is no apology that can undo what you have done. This is no minor Fortune, no dragon-spawn, no worthless minion of Tengoku. This is a Kami! One of my own blood! She is my sister! You are not worthy to look upon let alone shed her blood. You think that you have pleased me. You cannot be more wrong. Go now, return to the battle. In the morning, if I do not hear that the three of you have died in combat, I will find you, and you will learn what I have done to your two fellows." The ashura all stared at Fu Leng mute with terror.

"Go!" he roared.

The three ashura fled as swiftly as they could fly, hurrying to their deaths to escape their master's wrath. He extended one hand toward Shinjo to help her to her feet. She denied his aid, rising on her own. He frowned as he removed his mask.

"I see that you have changed much, brother," Shinjo said hoarsely. "You look like Hantei."

"A long story," Fu Leng said. "I am pleased to see you are well. I would have come to aid you, but the mortals trapped me well."

"So that you could kill me yourself?" Shinjo asked frankly.

Fu Leng frowned, looked away. "Is that what you think my intent was so many years ago?" he said vehemently. "I never wanted to kill you or any one... Except Togashi, and perhaps Hantei... I just wanted you to feel the pain that I felt. To know the fate you had resigned me to. You think me a monster, a foul corruption of the god I once was. Perhaps this is true... but you made me this way, Shinjo. You and the others left me in the Pit while Jigoku stripped my immortal soul bare. Do you know what that is like?"

"I think I do," Shinjo said. "The Lying Darkness trapped me once. For centuries I was held in the Black Earth, with dark jinn whispering in my ear. My brothers and sisters did not come for me. Even yet, I did not become as you are. Here I stand, uncorrupted."

Clan Rivals

June 2003, these bi-monthly tournament/league kits replace the Seasons of the Great Clans packages. Clan Rivals further raises the bar by involving every single player skill and ranking aside.

In Clan Rivals events, players choose to support one of two clans and will immediately begin to accruing storyline points for that clan. There's a twist. By supporting that clan, players receive a clan booster pack filled with 5 foiled promo cards that players have to put in their decks. Players not only affect storyline, but now storyline affects them!

- Includes 16 promotional booster packs (8 for each featured clan)
- Includes a large poster for vibrant store signage and marketing
- Comes with 4 Clan Rival card binders for additional prize support

Features the following match ups:

Crane vs Lion
(June 03 through July 03)

Dragon vs Phoenix
(August 03 through September 03)

Scorpion vs. Unicorn
(November 03 through December 03)

Crab vs Mantis
(January 04 through February 04)

Ratling vs. Shadowlands
(March 04 through April 04)

"And you think that this is a coincidence?" Fu Leng chuckled. "The Lying Darkness was my ally, for a time. In the depths of my bondage, it asked me if it could feed upon your name. I told it that if it did so, Isawa's prison would not contain me. My destiny be damned, I would tear the universe apart if a lesser being defiled one of the Kami. When I fell, you forgot me. When you fell, I protected you. Think upon that, little sister."

"If you protected me before, then protect me now," she said softly. "Leave Tengoku."

"Why?" Fu Leng asked. "I did not begin this war. I simply asked your watchdog Okura to stand aside. Okura, I might remind you, once served me until human influence made her betray me. I did not begin this war for Tengoku. You did."

"Because your presence here is destroying the Heavens!" Shinjo retorted. "You are a Kami, true, but Jigoku is within you. Your very presence inspires corruption. Look at what your ashura did to the gates. Such will be the fate of all of Tengoku if you remain. You wish to escape Jigoku but it is too late. You are Jigoku now. I know that you do not trust the others, thus I hoped that you would trust me. You know me, Fu Leng. I would not lie to you."

Fu Leng scowled, shaking his head slowly. "You think I do not see the truth, sister, but I do. I know that there is no place for me here. I can never be free of the Taint. Filled with hatred for you and the others, I embraced its power completely. Even yet, one glimpse of my home may yet be enough to satisfy a thousand lonely years in the Realm of Evil. I might have left after stepping through the gates..."

"And yet you remain," Shinjo said.

"Of course," he said. "Mother is dead, father is dead, and two pathetic mortals dare replace them, two of the same mortals who dared stand against me on the

Day of Thunder. You call me corrupt, Shinjo-chan, but I say it is Heaven that is corrupt. Too many mortals walk as gods now. Tengoku is clogged with arrogant mortals. I will leave soon enough, but as a final gift, I will cleanse the Celestial Heavens. All beings that once walked as a mortal shall be expelled, cast into the gloomy realms of the dead. Those traitorous dragons shall feel my wrath as well. None are free from guilt."

"And how do you intend to do this?" Shinjo asked. "How will you kill immortals?"

"With this," Fu Leng said, hefting his spear. "I took it from Emma-O, the Fortune of Death. No creature withstands its blade. Those slain by it are cast into an eternity of grey nothingness in the melancholy realm of Meido. Even should they escape, I plan to repair the gates and close them when I am finished here. Tengoku will be restored to a pure, empty state, freed from the hands of mortal thieves."

"I was mortal once," Shinjo said. "Does your vengeance include me?"

Fu Leng looked at Shinjo for a long moment. A slow smile spread across his face, a happy smile, much like the way he had smiled before they had both fallen from Heaven. Shinjo returned the smile. For a moment, perhaps she thought that she had reached him, convinced him to end his war.

With that, Fu Leng buried his spear in his sister's chest.

"Do not think of this moment," Fu Leng said. "Think of happier times, little sister, for memories are all that you have now. Good-bye."

Shinjo fell dead on the Dragon Road, her face still frozen in a sad smile. Fu Leng looked down at her regretfully for a long moment, then returned to the battle.



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THE TAO OF LAU

Illus. Pamela Eklund © 2003 AEG

That brings up the question, what makes a good L5R player?

Apenny for your thoughts? I've learned over the years watching, playing, and developing L5R that there really are no good secrets. I'd like to think, at least in my own world, that I'm a pretty good L5R player.

That brings up the necessary question, what makes up a good L5R player? In my case, I'm an average to above average deck builder.

I can put together a competitive deck in short order and go 50-50 in most tournaments. I've got a semi-decent memory of the current card set, which is certainly helpful when trying to predict what may come up in any given game. My in-game strategies are usually pretty solid, usually saving my *Superior Tactics* or *Deadly Grounds* for a game breaking moment.

What I've described above doesn't make me a good player. What makes me good is my ability to get inside your head and in some cases, stir it up a bit. I don't mean ESP, telepathy or any of other psychic mumbo-jumbo. I'm talking about misdirection and illusory options.

For example, you want your opponent to think that you have more than you really have. *Ninja Spy* and *Emperor's Underhand* are really good tools for this of strategy. Dave, whom I play L5R with in the office from time to

time, is really good at it. So, there I am, sitting contently with my 2 provinces and 30-something honor. It's his turn and I've got almost as much Force as he does on the table with about 15 different ways to send his units home from battle (on the table and in my hand). He looks at me carefully and then bows his *Ninja Spy* to look at my hand. Next carefully dismissing each card, he sets up his units in a line and announces an attack on one of my provinces.

Now, I'm thinking that I'm screwed. He must have some way around all my battle actions (i.e. *Night battle*, *Deadly Ground*, etc...). Naturally, I send no one to defend and he takes the province and the rest of the game goes downhill from there. I find out of course, that as usual, Dave had nothing. Absolutely nothing useful in his hand! If I had sent anyone at all to defend I would have won the battle and likely the game.

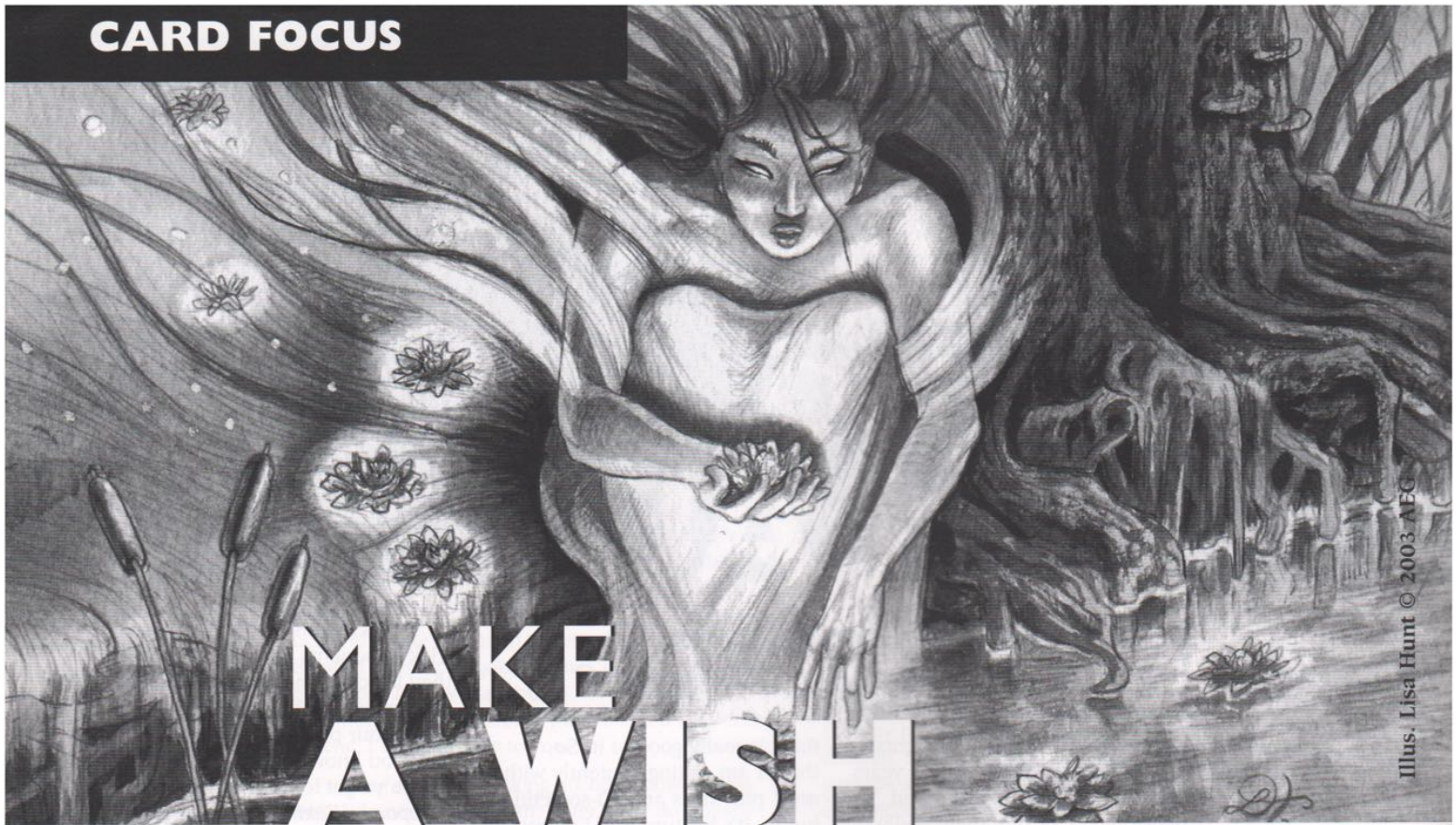
Another wonderful card is *Honor's Lesson Dojo*. This card forces your opponent to prepare for every inevitability before finally passing to end the battle action segment. The very presence of this card typically forces players to play more cards or actions than actually needed to win a battle leaving him less capable in later encounters.

Duels are also a good way to trick opponents into doing what they logically shouldn't. Try challenging someone to a duel when your personality has lower Chi. You know he's thinking, damn it, you've got to have a *Poisoned Weapon* or *Kakita Technique* in your hand. See how often, they refuse and take an honor loss.

Lastly, although I don't recommend this in tournaments or with people you don't know, try asking, Are you sure you want to do that? in a critical moment. Give your opponent a moment of uncertainty and you may unravel and tangle his entire plot. Or at least you can grin on the inside while he shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

L5R is a game of skill and you won't get far if you don't have any. But like all games half of it is in the mind and if you can control your opponents in there, you'll find yourself with the upper hand more often than not.





Illus. Lisa Hunt © 2003 AEG

MAKE A WISH

by Ray Lau

In the world of L5R, we launch your imagination. You become our fearless samurai, mystical shugenja, and stealthy ninja. From slaying beasts to rescuing maidens in distress, the fantastic world of Rokugan provides the inspiration to play out your deepest dreams.

Two years ago, AEG lost John Zinser Sr. to cancer. In his honor, AEG setup the John Zinser Sr., *Dreams-Come-True Foundation*. The goal of this foundation is to raise money to help the dreams of children with terminal illness come true. In conjunction with the Make a Wish Foundation these children will have the power to make one dream become a reality.

As pictured to the right, L5R and Warlord offer special cards for players who want to help such a dream come true. You can go to the Dreams Come True page of the AEG Website and make a donation by purchasing these specially designed cards. Any of you donating five dollars or more

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These cards are 100% tournament legal. After you use one of these cards, you still need to have 40/40 tournament legal decks. So if you have 3 of these cards in your deck, we suggest making your total Fate Deck size 43 at the start of the tournament.

Please mark your calendar! Cards available online on March 1st, 2003 at www.alderac.com.

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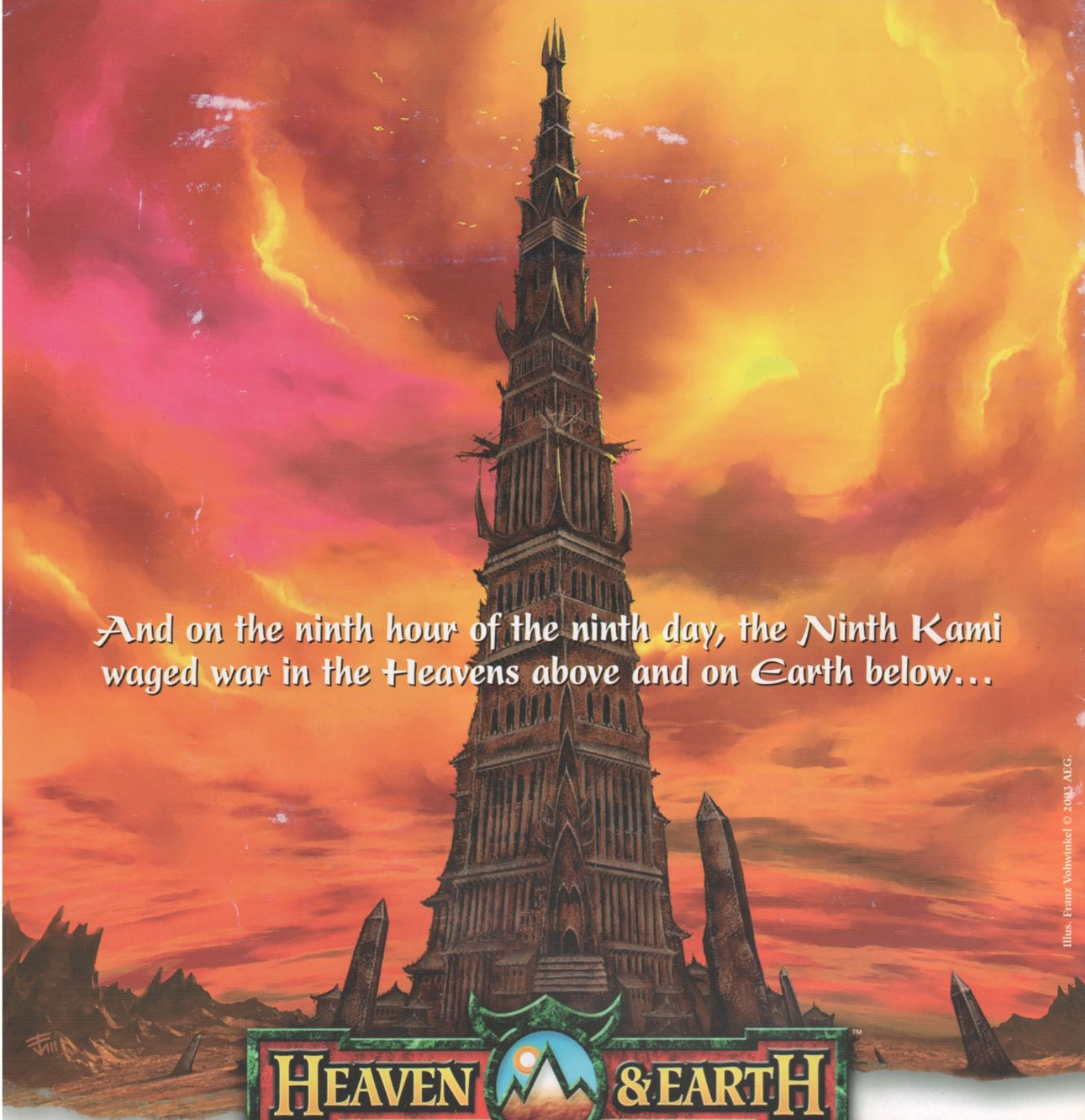
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