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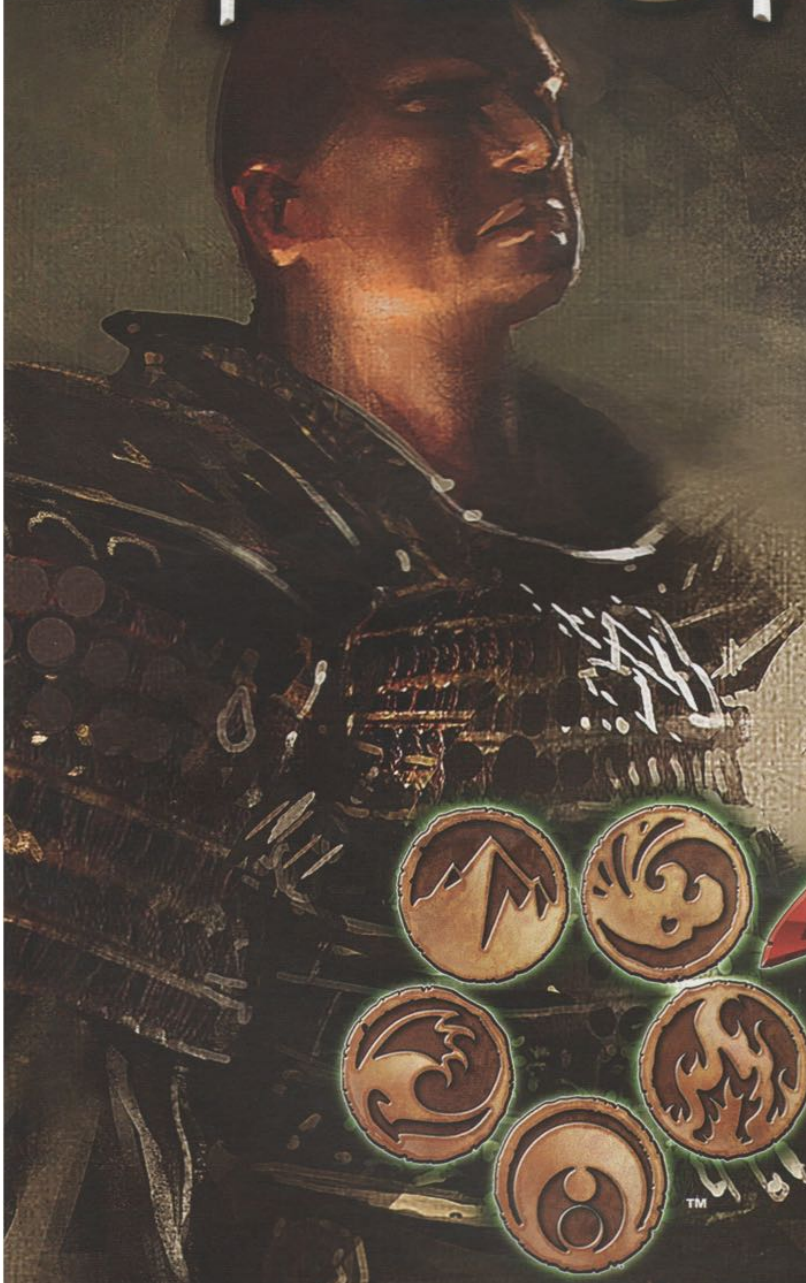


Samurai



Edition

Are you Deadly enough
for the Spider clan?



Legend of the
Five Rings™

Summer 2007



www.L5R.com



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THE
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HERALD

THE OFFICIAL LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS™ QUARTERLY • VOL. 2, NO. 22



Greetings Samurai,

Samurai Edition is near on the horizon. Needless to say, those of us at the office are incredibly excited. This edition of the game is comprised entirely of the things that made us fans of L5R in the beginning. From strong Clan identity to big interactive events, Samurai Edition is going to have it all.

Not only that, Samurai Edition is going to be (at long last) easier to learn and play than L5R has been in a long time. From simpler rules and cards to more intuitive deck building, it's going to be a much more user-friendly game. If you've had friends who have thought about playing, now is the time.

This issue looks at Samurai Edition from design and story to how the basic archetypes will play. You may also find a few spoilers here and there. In this issue we take a look ahead to the Samurai Edition Release Event and GenCon, and we'll also look back and say goodbye to the Ratlings as they make their exit from the world of Rokugan.

We'll see you in July at the Samurai Edition Global Storyline!

Samurai Edition	4	Tomorrow	16
Military	8	Characters of Samurai Edition (RPG)	18
Honor	10	Inbetween Breaths	21
Dishonor	12	Comics	22
Enlightenment	14	Koku Redemption	23

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Samurai

Edition



By Mark Wootton

There is a real sense of something special happening in L5R. In the many years that I have been involved in this game – as a player, as a Player Design Team member and as the Lead Developer for Lotus and Samurai Editions – it has never quite felt like this.

There is a buzz about how we are taking the game forward that is incredibly exciting. I want to share some of that excitement with you...

The first thing to say about Samurai Edition is that it is about the old and the new.

Like all base sets we are trying to bring back some old favorites, some cards that have that special sense of nostalgia for our older players. And I am not just talking about the power of the cards (although some of the ones we are bringing back are pretty strong). It is about respecting that sense of history and tradition of the game. It's about those cards that make you feel that

you are playing a game about epic Samurai characters in a rich setting. It is about sprinkling the set with flavor, so that those cards do not simply say "Cost: Target: Effect", but say "Cost: Target: He is completely humiliated, Effect".

In honoring the past we are not trying to be sentimental, we are trying to make sure that L5R design is taking all that is, and has been, best about the game and then blending it with new and inspiring ideas.

And in looking at some of the past successes we are really setting out Samurai as the arc for new players. For example, one of the

criteria for selecting cards was trying to make sure that they were easily understandable. That is not to say that we are removing the wonderful complexity of the game, nor that all the cards will be very basic. It is about taking a holistic view of the game and how it appears to a new player - some simpler cards and some more complex.

That means we have looked for cards that are simple and easy to understand. It means we have reviewed the rules, most have not changed - although some have been tweaked (and I will come to those later).

The key issue has been to make sure that the way that



those rules are constructed and written is clearer and simpler. Finally, we have worked hard to make the templating clearer and clearer, so that the cards are becoming more obvious in their intent – where they are complex they will be written in a way that makes them as simple to understand as possible.

Even the way that these rules will be presented through the rulebook has been reviewed from top to bottom.

So Samurai is an arc that new players will feel is a place for them to join the adventure, but it is a place where older players will find new and interesting challenges in a setting that is rich in tradition. We really believe this will be a time that will grow the player base.

Of course there will be new cards in the base set. In some cases these are

completely new. In others they are a new take on an old theme. Does this sound familiar?

“Political Limited: Target another player with higher Family Honor than yours: He loses 5 honor.”

As I said in my last article in The Herald, dishonor, as a victory condition is back! Oh, and by the way, that is not all of the card text, just a little teaser.

Action phase personality control will be part of a mechanism for ensuring the winning of battles, not a means to victory in its own right. We really believe that most decks should run a mixture of Action phase and Battle action cards, whether they are military, honor, enlightenment or dishonor. But how does that sit with bringing dishonor back?

In order to bring dishonor back and not create a lock deck we have changed the rule on Honor Requirements. It is simply not feasible to have personalities with honor requirements that represent a hard barrier, and to have driving people to negative honor as a win condition and not create situations where a player is potentially locked out of the game. Something had to give. From now on, not meeting an Honor Requirement will represent additional cost rather than an all or nothing barrier. When a player does not meet the honor requirement of a personality he will have to pay an additional two gold.

In other words, he or she can buy a personality cheap for full cost, minus two for the discount, plus two for not having the requisite family honor (or equivalent to the full cost). Alternatively he can buy a personality



at full cost plus two gold in order to gain the honor for that personality.

Interestingly, the new rule not only means that being below honor requirements as a result of another player's action is not a lockout situation, it also means that gaining honor becomes a useful exercise for all clans. If we now design personalities with above starting Family Honor requirements, it effectively becomes an additional costing mechanism with which Design can tinker. It also potentially gives an incentive to players that want to play any clan either pure or honorably, in a way that simply has not been available to them before. Gaining two or three points of honor will now have a purpose for most clans.

We have tweaked a number of other rules to make the experience more enjoyable – dueling has had a minor upgrade in mechanics, but a different approach to the whole thing. Dueling is now a strategy that supports your main goal rather than being an end in itself. You may play honor or military decks with dueling, rather than playing a “dueling deck” in the way that we have seen it in Lotus.

Mechanically, it now allows either player to focus from hand once per duel rather than making a decision beforehand about whether to add to the focus pool. And the challenging duelist will only get the first option to focus against a personality with higher chi who does not have the duelist trait. And because we hope that dueling will be more of a supplementary strategy we anticipate that the need to maintain only higher focus values for “the mirror match” will be less imperative.

We have also worked on the Naval trait to make it less of an all or nothing trait for Mantis players. Whilst this benefits them, it does mean that potentially other players can splash a little Naval into their decks and see some benefits. Basically in an attacking army with more Naval units than the defender, a Naval card in one of those units will be able to perform the first action.

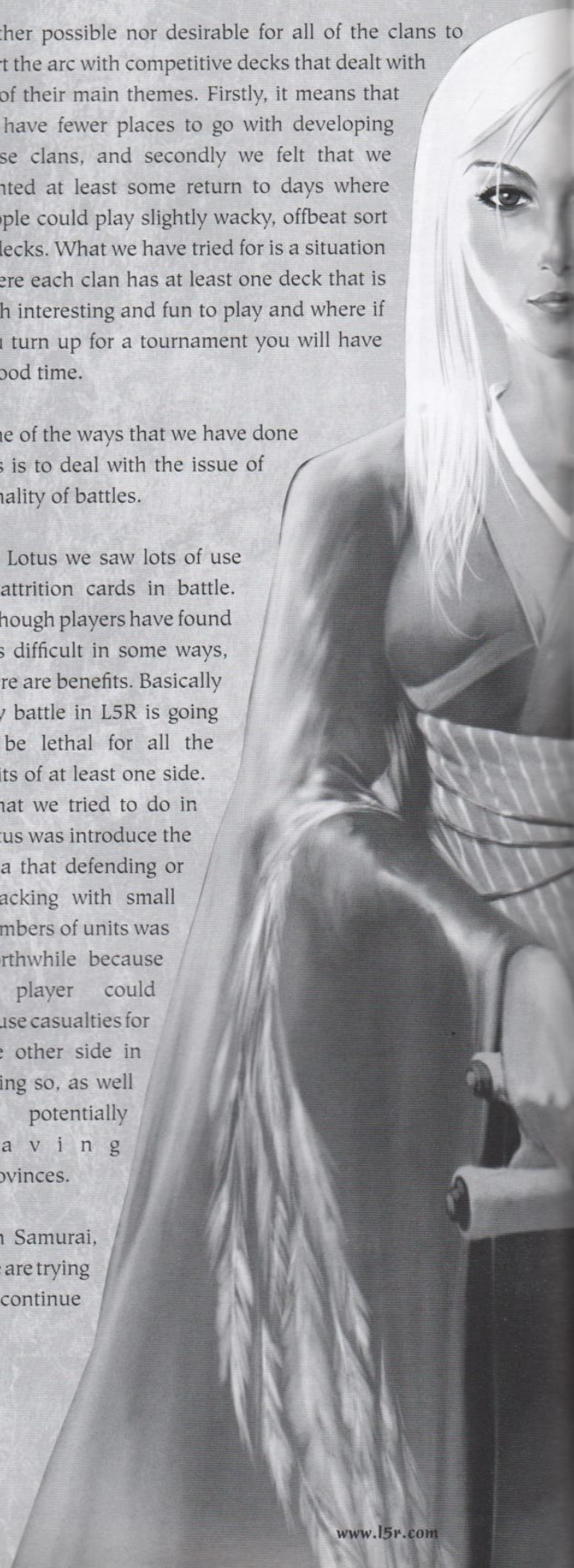
Throughout the arc we are hoping to enrich the various clan themes and develop cards that support those themes. We took the view that it was probably

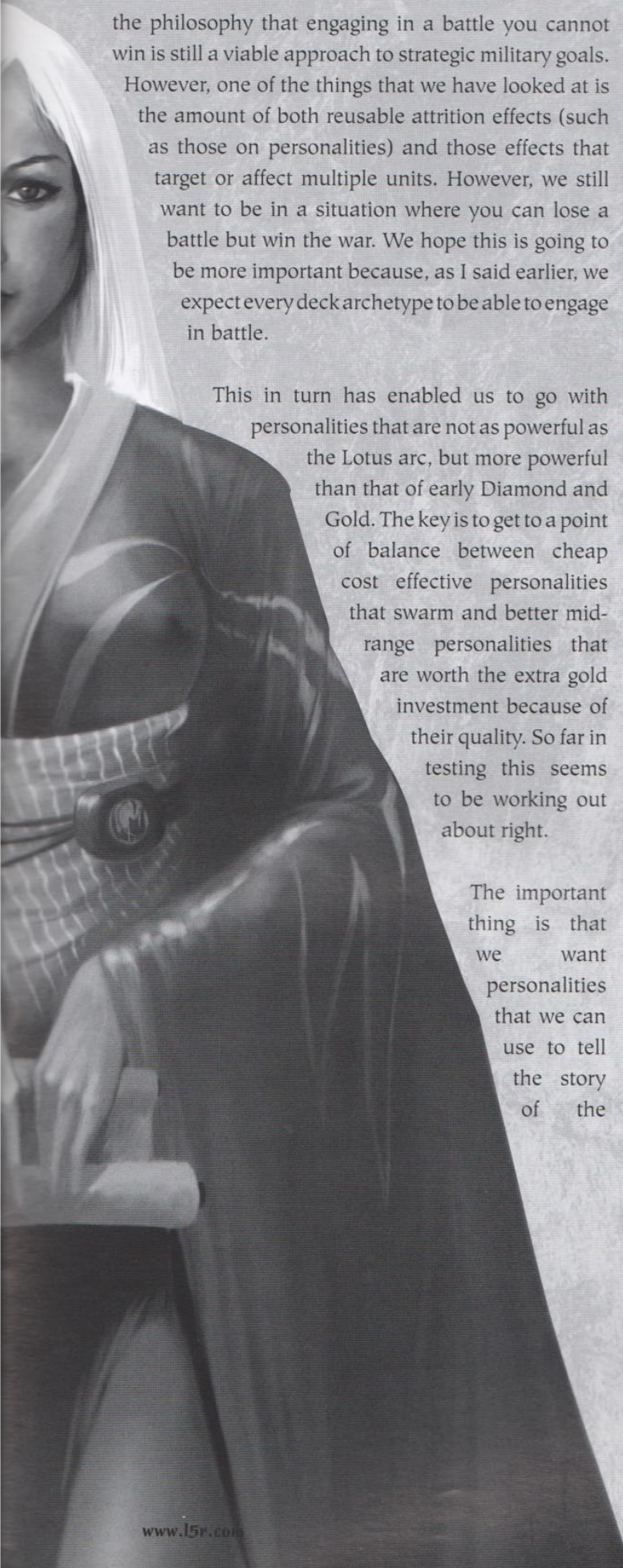
neither possible nor desirable for all of the clans to start the arc with competitive decks that dealt with all of their main themes. Firstly, it means that we have fewer places to go with developing those clans, and secondly we felt that we wanted at least some return to days where people could play slightly wacky, offbeat sort of decks. What we have tried for is a situation where each clan has at least one deck that is both interesting and fun to play and where if you turn up for a tournament you will have a good time.

One of the ways that we have done this is to deal with the issue of lethality of battles.

In Lotus we saw lots of use of attrition cards in battle. Although players have found this difficult in some ways, there are benefits. Basically any battle in L5R is going to be lethal for all the units of at least one side. What we tried to do in Lotus was introduce the idea that defending or attacking with small numbers of units was worthwhile because a player could cause casualties for the other side in doing so, as well as potentially saving provinces.

In Samurai, we are trying to continue





the philosophy that engaging in a battle you cannot win is still a viable approach to strategic military goals. However, one of the things that we have looked at is the amount of both reusable attrition effects (such as those on personalities) and those effects that target or affect multiple units. However, we still want to be in a situation where you can lose a battle but win the war. We hope this is going to be more important because, as I said earlier, we expect every deck archetype to be able to engage in battle.

This in turn has enabled us to go with personalities that are not as powerful as the Lotus arc, but more powerful than that of early Diamond and Gold. The key is to get to a point of balance between cheap cost effective personalities that swarm and better mid-range personalities that are worth the extra gold investment because of their quality. So far in testing this seems to be working out about right.

The important thing is that we want personalities that we can use to tell the story of the

Samurai arc, that can grow with the players and become talismans for their clans.

This has been quite a lengthy journey. The process of selecting and deselecting cards and trying to introduce ideas that then tweak the balance in the right direction with each review of the process is both time-consuming and challenging.

Of course, finally, it would not be the Samurai arc if we did not have the Yin and Yang of the true path and temptations thrown in the way of a budding Samurai.

To that end we have retained both the Bushido Virtues and the Dark Virtues. And yes, we have decided to tweak the power level of some of the latter in the Samurai arc, so that the power levels are what we want. Whilst we have tried to keep MRPs to a minimum, we do feel that a small number are overpowered for the environment we are trying to create - but it just does not feel like it would be the Samurai Arc without those cards. And as I have said earlier flavor is a very important part of Design now.

We also want to make sure that there is a greater sense of equality between the true path its dark mirror, which Daigotsu and his minions are pushing. Temptation should be real and powerful, but not mandatory.

And together with the Virtues expect to see the arrival of champions from both sides of the dark and light divide – Obsidian and Emerald.

This last point is something that I hope will illustrate another principle of the Samurai arc. We want a strong synergy between flavor, style and competitive environments and we will always be committed to taking action to make sure that that happens – and if we need to take action to balance those elements we will not be afraid of doing so.

I hope you enjoy Samurai Edition, I hope that you enjoy the arc and I really hope that you find plenty of new players in your areas that pick up on the “buzz” that we are all feeling in creating it.

ENOUGH

By Nancy Sauer

Hida Kaoru ran up the steps to the top of the Wall, struggling to keep up with the rest of her unit. She had done this thousands of times in drill, but now it was for real and her heart pounded like a hammer in a Katu smithy. The veteran warriors around her ran with no show of difficulty, a few of them loping up the steps two at a time. The unit reached the top and paused, waiting for further orders on where to deploy. Kaoru concentrated on sucking in as much air as possible without making gasping noises. The setting sun painted the massive stone-work a dull red, and she caught the mingled smells of sweat and lamp oil as the Wall prepared itself for the battle to come.

The unit ahead began to sprint down to the left, and the one Kaoru was with moved to the front of the landing. Her heart had not slowed down, and now a hollow coldness was settling into the pit of her stomach. She had been in the Shadowlands before, but those times she had been only a student, and her errors could harm only herself. Now she was a Hida samurai serving on the Wall, and her mistakes could kill thousands. She thought of all the time she had spent in the dojo's library, reading and rereading the histories and commentaries it contained; of the hours she had spent in weapons drills. She wondered if her preparations were enough. Was anything enough when battling the Horde? The coldness grew, sending tentacles of fear into her arms and legs.

"Kaoru!" barked her commander.

Kaoru straightened up and shifted her grip on her tetsubo. "Hai, gunso-sama!" she said, trying to sound confident.

"Don't be stupid," he said. "The oni don't care about your dojo rank and neither do we." As if to punctuate the point the evening breeze brought a loud, honking roar to them. "And don't bother to prove to us how brave you are: you are on the Wall and that's all the proof we need. Your sensei says you're good, but until you are good and battle-hardened you are one step above a pony. If you live to see sunrise you will be two steps above. Understand?"

Kaoru nodded. She had heard speeches like this before from her teachers, but the sounds of battle in the background here gave the words an unnatural clarity. "I will not fail you," she said, and realized that she meant it. The cold in her bones began to recede a little.

Whatever reply her commander was going to make was lost in a shrill whistle. "Signal!" he shouted, "Deploy right!"

Before they could move there

was a crash against the tower behind them and wooden planks and goblins rained down. Kaoru moved on instinct and swung her tetsubo up and around, connecting with a falling goblin with a wet thud. She continued the swing in a smooth arc, translating vertical motion to horizontal, and took out two more as they climbed to their feet. Then all sense of order disintegrated into a wild melee of weapons, claws and shouts. When it was over Kaoru looked around to discover that she was alive. Two of her comrades were sprawled among the goblin bodies, one with his throat ripped out, and another leaned against the wall, cradling a bloody arm.

"Deploy right!" the gunso shouted again, and Kaoru took off with the rest of her unit. The wounded and dead would be dealt with by the next group up, and in the meantime her unit had its orders. She ran easily, matching her pace with the others and keeping an eye out for more goblins. Far ahead she could see something large and green-gray trying to pull itself up over the top of the Wall, and she smiled grimly. She was here, and that was enough.



WAR!

By Leon Phillips

There are two types of players that favor military decks in L5R. Those that use it when it's the most viable option to win, and those that just love the clash of armies in the vein of epic Akira Kurosawa movies. Some players want to create the legendary hero, complete with his armor, sword, and troops at his back and send him in to cut a swath through the enemy ranks. Others like the feel of a horde of troops crashing into the enemy in waves. Still others enjoy the tactics in maneuvering units and neutralizing key opposition. A variety of play-styles and desires meet up in friendly games, local tournaments, and then gather to win glory at koteis and other regional or national events.

Battles with tension!

As the Lotus arc comes to a close, not all military styles are viable. Not untypical of any arc, when the power level of cards rise in an effort to enhance decks and appeal to players, certain styles move to the fore, naturally relegating others to the back. Lotus gave us a great semblance of back and forth battles with attrition on both sides. Unfortunately, certain cards dominated with their multi-unit effects. Naval armies would come in, Elemental Arrow multiple times, and wipe out multiple personalities before the defender had a chance to act. Other actions would send home multiple units at a time. Formations were tricky to balance and could drop a huge weight on one side of the scales of battle balance. Samurai Edition strives to keep the back and forth sway of battle, while reducing the number of multi-unit effects. The outcome isn't supposed to be determined in the first action or two. If two armies meet, they're going to fight!

"Get off my playground!"

Elimination methods of kill and send home will be available, but players will have to use a variety of tactics to beat opponents. The number of outright kill actions is being reduced, and either their costs are increasing or circumstances of use becoming more restricted. Certain clans are more resistant to kill effects

than others, so you'd best find ways to beat armies with differing methods. Force modifiers, bowing cards, and send home will all find themselves in one deck. The one-trick pony (or whichever clan you're playing), while consistent, isn't necessarily going to win. A good general will bring multiple tools and flexibility to the battlefield.

Followers will be useful!

In the past, they've only been as good as the personality they're attached to. Bow the personality and the unit is essentially fodder. The concept of a follower being ineffective without a leader was sound, but not particularly playable. No longer. Followers add force even when the personality is bowed. Personalities that perform actions that bow themselves as a cost can attach followers and know the troops aren't going to just stand around and watch.

Spells will have bite!

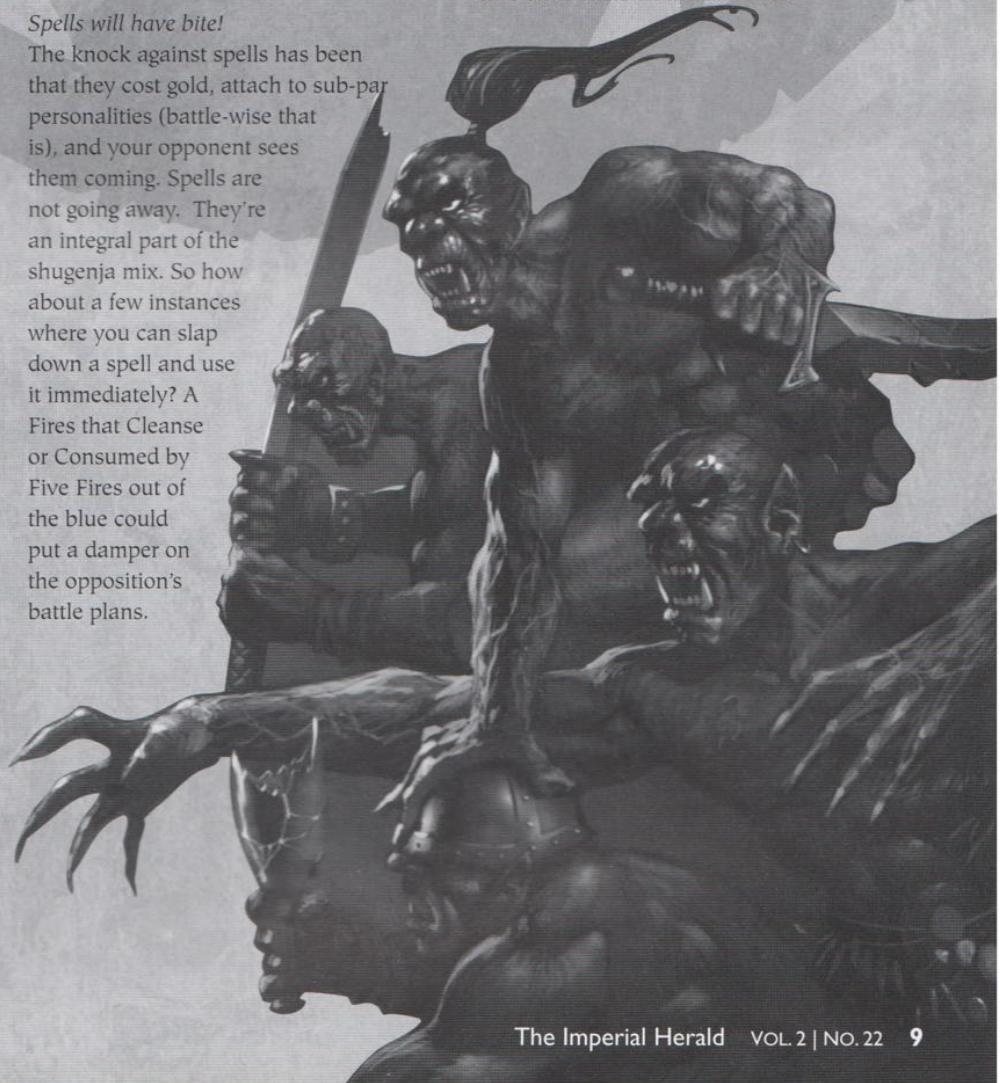
The knock against spells has been that they cost gold, attach to sub-par personalities (battle-wise that is), and your opponent sees them coming. Spells are not going away. They're an integral part of the shugenja mix. So how about a few instances where you can slap down a spell and use it immediately? A Fires that Cleanse or Consumed by Five Fires out of the blue could put a damper on the opposition's battle plans.

Cowards!

Another occasional frustration of the military deck has been that pesky control deck or defensive honor runner. You know the sort. The ones that prefer that you stay on your side of the table and not come and bother them. In Samurai, the action phase will influence the game, but not rule it. Those political decks are actually going to have to step in the way now. Military decks might not win every game, but that defender is going to have to step in front of your juggernaut and take a few licks before ruling those courts.

Resolution

Combat will sway to and fro, as players try to nudge the fortunes of war to their side. All players will have to play battle actions and be ready to send in heroes to fight for their clan. All players will face each other on the battlefield.



THE WAY OF HONOR

By Nancy Sauer

The morning was young but the early sun had risen high enough for its heat to be felt. Matsu Takeko wiped her face with a handkerchief, thankful that she only wore light armor today. "You are probably thankful, too," she said to her horse. The animal declined comment, but he did speed up slightly. Takeko frowned until she realized that the road was dipping down towards a stream. She let the horse set his own pace until they reached the stream, and then she slid out of the saddle and let him drink. Kneeling down beside him she also drank, then refilled her water bottle.

Takeko rechecked the horse's saddle and tack. She didn't need to check the scroll-case she carried: it was safe in her obi, opposite her daisho. To be chosen to bear a message from her lord to the commander of the Kyakuchu garrison was a great honor for someone so young, and it weighed on her more heavily than her armor. "Hurry up," she told the horse. He ignored her, but a few moments later he stopped drinking and started to browse among the wildflowers that fringed the stream-bed. Takeko got back into the saddle and pulled him away. "You'll have plenty to eat at the post station," she said, urging him into a trot.

A mile from the stream the road divided. As she turned her mount's head to the west, Takeko reflexively scanned the east, and her eyes narrowed. A handful of heimin were surrounding a small cart, apparently defending it from a gang of bandits. At the moment the bandits were hanging back, but Takeko didn't think the spears the heimin were using would deter them for long. She frowned. It was a samurai's duty to protect the weak, and banditry was against Imperial law. On the other hand, if she was killed she would fail in her duty to deliver the message. A moment more of thought and she smiled and kicked her horse into a run. If she killed the bandits instead of them killing her, there was no problem.

As she bore down on the combatants Takeko drew her katana and gave a fierce yell. "MATSU!" At the sound of it the heimin spearmen looked up in hope and the some of the bandits turned to meet her charge with fear on their faces. She cut down two of them as she ran past the group, then rolled out of the saddle. She was a good horseman, but she preferred the solidity of earth. She landed easily and dashed in to attack. One

bandit flinched out of her way and found himself in the zone of the spearmen. The heimin made short work of him.

Takeko killed two more before being confronted with one who had skill with a sword. After a flurry of blades they broke apart. They circled each other for a moment, testing, and Takeko leaped back in with a swift slash. Her opponent eluded her attack and counterattacked, drawing a red line of blood down her upper arm. She grinned with a combination of pain and triumph--his sword was now too far from his center to stop her. She twisted her blade and brought it back around, cutting off his head. That broke the courage of the remaining bandits, and they began to run down the road.

Takeko took two steps, wanting to pursue, and stopped suddenly when her head started to spin. The wound in her arm, she concluded, was more serious than she had first thought. She looked around and the heimin all prostrated themselves. "You," she said, "catch my horse. I must get to Kyakuchu." Then she fell over.

Matsu Maruoka studied the young woman kneeling before her. "You rode all the way from there to here with that wound?" she asked.

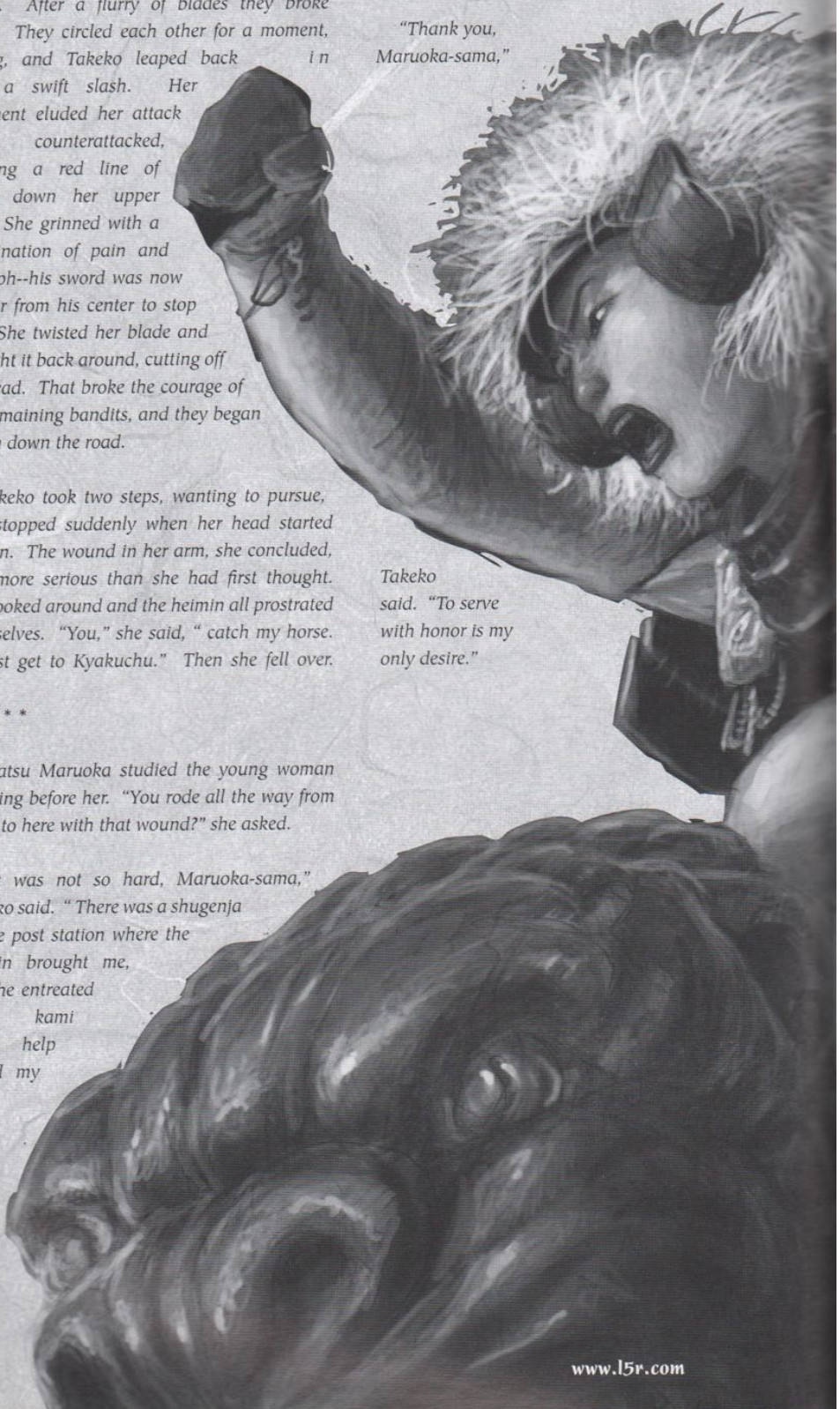
"It was not so hard, Maruoka-sama," Takeko said. "There was a shugenja at the post station where the heimin brought me, and he entreated the kami to help speed my

healing. It is little more than a dull ache now."

"You have shown great courage and devotion to duty," Maruoka said. "You have brought great glory to our clan, and I am sure that this will not be the last such time."

"Thank you, Maruoka-sama,"

Takeko said. "To serve with honor is my only desire."



THE HONORABLE PATH

By Faber van Kraanen

There have always been Clans that were better at trying to achieve the Honor victory than others, be it through a higher starting Family Honor on their stronghold, higher average Personal Honor on their personalities, or access to honor generating actions. Of course all of these factors are closely tied to the story aspect of the game, where we'd lift our eyebrows if say, the Scorpion were to achieve an honor victory or the Crab were to enlighten...

L5R being the interactive storyline CCG, Design is closely tied to these

factors. What

I'm trying to say is:

Do not worry!

Come Samurai Edition, your Crane, Dragon, Lion, Phoenix and Unicorn decks can still make honor decks work in many ways as they always have. There will just be a new card pool to work with, with new artwork and better wordings, ready to challenge the players to create that winning deck.

The Crane are the classic honor clan, and with their high starting family honor, their above average personal honor on personalities and wide access to all sorts of dynasty and fate side honor effects, they will continue to be the honor clan of choice in Samurai Edition. Their decks usually make for the best example of the classic honor deck, where the Crane player puts down a clock for the game within which the opponent will need to beat him or her. This is supported by playing all sorts of defensive actions against military and, depending on the local playing field, some actions against the other deck types of Dishonor and Enlightenment.

Crane will have people such as Kakita Noriko (KD) and support cards like Governor's Court (KD) as staples. Cards such as Blocked Supply Lines (SE) and Peaceful Discourse (KD) can be used to defend your provinces from attackers.

Finding the right mix for the right environment is the challenge set for each prospecting honor player.

One of the biggest strategy choices for an honor player is how they will handle the so-called 'mirror-match' where the opponent is aiming for the same goal as you are. You can design your deck to try and simply be faster, but skill will be a huge factor in this strategy. Or you can include 'meta' cards that specifically hurt the opponent if he tries to do what you do. In SE this could be a card like Unfortunate Incident (SE) or Utter Defeat (SE), Assigning Blame (TTT) or perhaps even Kanshi (TTT).

Crane, with their below average Force, is likely not the clan that can easily switch to military, but including a few big personalities for the (counter-) attack is still an option for them too. Samurai Edition will have Crane see some personalities that are capable of launching counter attacks, namely Doji Kurohito basic., a little changed to better fit the SE field.

But overall, switching to military is the strength of honor clans such as Lion, Unicorn and Dragon, who may not be as fast with the 'clock' but can start putting pressure on the opponent's provinces more easily.

For the Lion and Unicorn, attacking is an integral part of setting up the clock, approaching the honor principal with less speed but putting the pressure on the opponent in a more direct approach, with the help of their Deathseekers and Battle Maidens.

The Dragon has several routes to take too, with their Monks or Samurai personality bases tying into several sets of support cards, some of which you will already see in Khan's Defiance or The Truest Test.

The Phoenix, with their many shugenja, will be able to utilize their magic, presented in the form of Spells and Kihos, to both generate honor gains and defend themselves from attacks. Cards like Houhou (KD) will ensure a Phoenix player a stable source of defenders to stave off the aggressor.

It has been our aim to make certain every victory condition delivers as much fun as possible to both the player and the opponent, and honor has certainly not been an exception. All in all, I am positive that those of us that enjoy building an honor deck will not be disappointed in the exciting challenges the card pool of Samurai Edition has in store for us!

OF DUTY AND HONOR

By Brian Yoon

The first and foremost worry of anyone stationed in the City of Lies, Bayushi Kurumi mused, was corruption and deceit.

She reclined on her cushion in the attendance chamber of the mansion. She wore her most flattering kimono, one that shifted with her every move in the style of the legend Kachiko. The sun had begun to set; the combined light from the window and candlelight set the room in a soft, intimate glow. The doors were shut, and the sound of nighttime insects filled the room. She was alone with him.

He was a handsome man. His face was sharp and angular and reflected the pride that drove his actions. His black hair was long and braided and looked to be taken care of every day. His eyes were warm and golden, showing his emotions with surprising clarity. His shoulders were broad and firm and his physique showed that he would be dangerous in a fight. His kimono, marked with the Dragon mon, was immaculate. He sat across the room from her, his eyes fixed on hers.

"Thank you for joining me tonight," Kurumi said softly. "I was hoping to have a chance to speak to you. Alone." Her voice sounded as musical as a strum of biwa. He leaned forward to hear her better, and her smile seemed more inviting from the distance.

"Anything I can spare for you, Kurumi-chan," he replied.

Kurumi opened a fan in front of her face and moved it delicately. "Forgive me for my forwardness for even asking this of you. You are an esteemed man, Kitsuki Okuni-sama, and I would hate to cast any mark of doubt upon it."

"Call me Okuni-san, dear girl," he said. "As for a taint of

dishonor,
do not
worry yourself
on it. You are
a promising
young
woman
and

you have proven yourself marvelously this first month at court. No one doubts your company."

Her eyes were openly grateful for his kindness. She closed the fan and tapped it gently against the palm of her hand. Her kimono slid fluidly with her.

"I thank you for your certainty, Okuni-san, but I do not know if everyone shares your optimism. I am an unwed woman in private with an older, impressive man. Immediate suspicions would fly towards our actions, Okuni-san. Could you blame them?"

Okuni frowned in mock contemplation. "An interesting thought, my dear. Perhaps my enemies would be quick to find ill intent where none was present. Though I meet you alone tonight, Kurumi-chan, would anyone truly believe any mischief could go on under your uncle's roof? His reach is notable. Few people would willingly incur his wrath."

Kurumi bowed to the floor. "I should have bowed to your wisdom from the beginning, Okuni-san. You are right. No one would believe anything untoward would happen here. Yet if we were to meet some other place, in some other time, where no one would know of our plans..."

Okuni's smile grew, and Kurumi knew she had judged him correctly.

"An interesting offer, Kurumi-chan. You know that I would be most delighted to further discuss your future."

Kurumi's eyes grew wide. "What do you mean, Okuni-san?"

He leaned even closer, and Kurumi moved forward to mere inches from him. "I have some pull with the Imperial Magistrates stationed in Ryoko Owari. I've been working with the Dragon embassy for many years now, and I've gotten to know the man very well. He is an agreeable man."

"What a wonderful idea, my lord. If your friend could somehow help my way... And you trust this man completely, Okuni-san?"

He nodded. "Harada is a man who can pull some strings for personal friends of mine, if she would have my recommendation."

Her smile grew secretive, and she raised her fan to cover it once more.

Though they had spoken for only a few hours, by the time Okuni set out to leave Kurumi had complete knowledge of his indiscretions. Perhaps more damning was his admission of corruption among the Imperial Magistrates.

He could only hope for a chance to seppuku, when she handed her superiors the truth.

The truth was, Kurumi thought as she left the house, the danger of Ryoko Owari did not come from corruption. The true threat came from those who were utterly convinced they held honor above all.

SHAMEFUL DOG!

By Eugene Earnshaw

Dishonor victories have a long and checkered history in L5R, sometimes powerful, sometimes weak, and often reviled. But from the perspective of the setting, dishonor is very important. If honor is a force more powerful than steel, then dishonor should cut deeper than a blade.

In the past, dishonor has been intimately associated with lockdown. Because many clans have honor requirements, long before they get anywhere near -20 honor, they stop being able to play the game. L5R isn't much fun when you can't bring out any personalities. And if there's one thing we don't want in Samurai Edition, it's lockdown. We want players to be able to play their decks, not be prevented from even bringing their cards into play. So we had a bit of a dilemma. We were determined not to allow dishonor lockdown, but we did want to support the option of pursuing dishonor victories. To reconcile those opposed goals, we had to rework the whole past conception of how dishonor could work. Instead of a control deck, dishonor had to become a clock: gradually, relentlessly, it drags its opponent kicking and screaming toward -20. By changing the rules around honor requirements, we have eliminated any possibility of the dreaded HR lockdown.

So how does the dishonor victory work, Samurai Edition style? Well, the basic concept is damned if you do, damned if you don't. Some effects offer you a choice between having personalities dishonored or losing honor, some effects hit dishonored personalities with penalties and honor losses, and some effects just generate unconditional losses. The end result is that the opponent WILL be losing honor, but he has some difficult choices to make regarding who gets dishonored and when. And, while the dishonor player is smacking the opponent around, the opponent will be bringing out his own people and doing his own thing – whether that's trying to break provinces, gain honor faster than you make him lose it, or enlighten.

As of Samurai's release, dishonor will mainly be a

Scorpion thing. The trick to building a Scorpion dishonor deck in Samurai is finding the right card mix to advance your win condition, protect your provinces, and disrupt your opponent. It is difficult in Samurai Edition to build a dishonor 'blitz' deck, so any sensible dishonor player will have to build with the mid-endgame in mind.

In causing honor losses, re-useable cards are key. Shosuro Dazai is not in Samurai, but Shoshuro Uiyeda (SE) forms the core of Scorpion's reusable dishonor engine, together with the Scorpion Political Stronghold and Bayushi Kaukatsu exp. 2. This can be supplemented by big one-time hits such as 'New Breach Action' or by conditional repetitive effects such as Unspoken Threats (SE).

In battle, Scorpion dishonor benefits from the synergy with several powerful battle actions. Insolence Punished (KD) is virtually a 'get out of jail free' card in the mid-game, and Hunting the Prophet and Unexpected Betrayal (also from Khan's Defiance) have such powerful effects they can often win a battle almost on their own. These have the advantage that they can be used equally well on offense as on defense which can become relevant in honor vs. dishonor

matches. Since the opposed honor gains and losses tend to approximately balance out, victory is often decided by who gains the upper hand militarily – or by who is better able to disrupt his opponent's reusable honor effects.

There are many options that players have available to consider when fine tuning and personalizing their dishonor decks. Magistrates offer substantial synergy with a dishonor strategy, but using magistrate effects places restrictions on the personality base. Scorpion also can include shugenja if they desire, so as to be able to include powerful hand manipulation effects such as Walking the Way (SE) and Banish All Shadows (SE). While Scorpion will not be able to rely on clearing the board with control actions, they can certainly introduce some such effects into their decks.

Designing a fun, flavorful, interactive dishonor deck has been one of the toughest design challenges we faced for Samurai Edition. We've had to think 'outside the box' quite a bit. I hope players enjoy the results in Samurai Edition!

THE REFRESHING WIND

By Brian Yoon

I sawa Kyoko stepped out of the hut and stretched to take the kinks out of her muscles. It was a wonderful morning. The sun shined brightly and warmed her body. The gentle breeze caressed her, reminding her that the winter had finally passed. As soon as she came outside, she became aware of the kami that lived in everything, and they became aware of her. They flew to her cautiously. She smiled gently, her expression illuminating her beauty. The sound of their whispers surrounding her relieved her tensions about the work ahead of her. It was her first assignment after her gempukku, and though she was confident about her abilities she was still nervous.

She curiously looked around the village. Though the sun had come out only an hour earlier, the buildings were empty. All those who were able to help out at the planting had already left to start the day's work. A few children too young to help in the fields idly stood along the roads. Her gaze stopped on a beautiful young woman with a basket of silks on her back, her figure clearly showing the advanced stages of pregnancy. Though she was in no shape to do heavy work, she was still contributing to her village. The peasant had stopped in the middle of the road, and her eyes were fixed on Kyoko. Kyoko walked toward the peasant. When the woman realized Kyoko was headed for her, she jumped like a rabbit but stayed frozen in her tracks.

"What's your name?" Kyoko said pleasantly.

"My- they call me Yuki, my lady," the peasant stammered.

"Don't be scared, Yuki. What is it?" Kyoko asked gently.

"I.. It is said that you can hear the voices of the gods themselves," the peasant said. Her voice trembled. "Is it true, my lady?"

Kyoko's smile grew. "Yes," she said wistfully. "The kami are all around us, wherever we go. As we revere them and trust in them, they trust us back in return." Her eyes grew distant as she listened to the kami that still circled her. "And they speak with voices too

beautiful for this world."

Yuki's eyes were large with wonder. "I wish I could hear them," she said wistfully. Suddenly, her eyes filled with terror as she realized what she had just implied. She bowed deeply to the samurai. "I am sorry, my lady! I meant no offense!" she gasped, then hurried past her to the town hall.

Kyoko turned to watch the girl's exit then nodded. She resumed her walk toward the fields, her ears filled with the sweet song of the air. Her kimono rustled around her as the air kami lifted her and glided her across the land. As she approached, she could see a single figure standing in front of the fields. Before she could even see any of his features, the words floating across the elements told her that the village foreman was awaiting her presence. She had met the man briefly when she arrived the night before, and knew he was a simple and humble man that

truly looked out for the people under his care. For that, Kyoko respected him beyond his station.

"Good morning, Kyoko-sama," the man said when she neared, bowing to the floor. "I trust you rested well."

"Your house was more than adequate, thank you," she said, nodding.

"Do you need any assistance in your task today, my lady?" he asked.

She looked out at the fields that lay out in front of her. The villagers were all out on the fields, working

to ready the fields for the year. Her sight was filled with more than humans at hard work. The elements themselves were alive with joy at the event. It was more than just a preparation of the fields. In their own way, the villagers were celebrating the kami themselves.

"No," Kyoko replied. "I will bless the fields for the year. It will be no trouble."

"Yes, Kyoko-sama," he said. "I suppose such a simple matter would be easier to manage than calling thunder upon our enemies or calling fire from your fingertips."

She turned to him, a gentle smile on her face. "You are wrong," she said. "Each spell is a prayer, and each prayer is an appeal to the elements. Whether they answer or not depends on their will."

She turned to perform her work, and the kami raised her into the air.



ENLIGHTENMENT

By Bryan Reese

Enlightenment has typically been a boring deck to play against. You play your game, he plays his, and you probably never interact once. In Samurai Edition I have yet to build a successful, typical, enlightenment deck. They simply don't work. What we have been able to do with Samurai Edition though, is to build successful Monk honor and military decks that can play all five rings in any game. If they stop you from getting a certain ring out, that is fine, you are still busting their provinces. We will show you what we are doing to get these rings into play, and at the same time preview all five of the new rings here for you, though they have not all changed.

Ring of Air

After you successfully resolve your third or later Spell or Kiho action in one turn from cards with different titles: You may put this card in play from your hand.
Battle/Open: Bow this card or discard it from your hand: Straighten a target Personality.

The easiest way found to play this so far is with Strike the Summit, Strike the Center, and Strike the Base, all from Khan's Defiance. Great cards for attacking or defending, this three-card combo will be supplemented nicely with your new Ring of Air to straighten the Monk who just bowed for Strike the Base.

Ring of Earth

After your army destroys a Province or army in battle resolution at a Province, if you are not an ally: You may put this card in play from your hand.
Battle/Open: Bow this card or discard it from your hand: Raise a target Province's Strength by 4, or lower it by 3 if this card is in play.

Now, Ring of Earth is a tricky one. It naturally lends itself to the military version of the deck, and is rather easy to play in that version. If you are playing the honor version, it is still possible to get it into play; you will just need to win a battle. And Monks definitely have the capabilities of winning battles.

Ring of Fire

Focus Effect: You may give this card -2 Focus Value. If you do, and you win the duel, put this card into play.
Battle: Bow this card or discard it from your hand, and destroy one of your target Personalities: Destroy a target Personality opposing him with lower Chi.

This one is one of our favorite Rings in Samurai Edition. Elegant, simple, effective. It harkens back to the days where enlightenment decks needed duels to win. Whether you are military or honor, duels kill people and that is always a good thing to win a game.

Ring of the Void

After you successfully resolve your fourth or later non-Kiho action from Action cards in one phase: You may put this card into play from your hand.
Open: Bow this card or discard it from your hand: If any player has more cards in his hand than you do, or if you bowed this card, draw a card.

As with much of Samurai Edition, card draw has been reduced on the Ring of the Void. Getting it into play is a guaranteed card every turn, and that is not easy to dismiss. Still as powerful as always, Ring

of the Void is playable in all forms of enlightenment decks.

Ring of Fire

After you successfully resolve your fourth or later Battle action during one battle from cards with different titles: You may put this card into play from your hand.
Battle: Bow this card or discard it from your hand: Target one of your units and either your home or a battlefield with one or more enemy units. Move your unit to the location. If it moved, straighten it.

Ring of Water is one of the trickier ones, but can generally be played in larger battles. Personalities such as Tamori Wotan are great for getting Water into play.

Playing each of these rings is really fun, and by extension so is enlightenment in Samurai Edition. You get to play your game, your opponent plays his. It is fun, interactive, and is unlike anything L5R has ever seen. Your opponent can often stop you from getting rings out, and this is ok because you still are busting provinces with your armies. Conversely, we have had battles where one player lost an entire army, but played a ring or two in the meantime and considered it a success. Enlightenment is a whole new ball game, one we are excited to be playing in.



TOMORROW

By Rusty Priske

Kan'ok'ticheck had never seen so many Nezumi in one place. In fact, nobody had ever seen so many Nezumi in one place, at least in modern times. His call had been heeded, and Nezumi from all over then land had flooded into the Shinomen Forest. Thousands of them crowded in and radiated around a single spot.

The Chief of Chiefs could not see them all due to the trees, but he was getting constant updates and he could feel them all around him. Any human would likely be terrified to see so many in one place.

Mak'irtch approached him. "It is time, oh Great Chief."

Kan'ok'ticheck nodded. "Have they all come?"

"Not all, but most. The Chipped Tooth have chosen to stay away. K'mee has also chosen to stay with the humans. All told, no more than fifty nezumi have failed to answer your call."

The Chief nodded again. "If we are not enough, then fifty more would not change the outcome.

A deep resonating voice called out. "I wish to come."

The two nezumi turned to see the leonine visage of Nintai, the last Kitsu. Mak'irtch shook his head. "I am afraid that this is not possible. The ritual we are using is for Nezumi alone."

Kan'ok'ticheck reached out and grasped Nintai's shoulder. "I appreciate your offer, but it cannot be. You can still be of great service to us, my friend."

"Anything you need, I will do. I owe the Nezumi more than I can ever measure."

"When we go to face Tomorrow, we will be vulnerable here. You could be our guardian and watch over us while we travel the dream paths. You could keep us safe so that those who are able to return can do so. Will you do this?"

Nintai nodded. "It would be my honor."

They grasped forearms, and the Nezumi walked towards a circle left amongst their kind, leaving the Kitsu behind to watch. The other Nezumi bowed their heads in respect as their leader passed and he reached out to some, patting them on their backs or grasping their paws. When he reached the center, they hushed. The silence covered all the thousands until the only sounds were the wind through the leaves.

Mak'irtch drew forth the Hourglass that the Broken Shinbone brought back from the tomb in the Shadowlands. He handed it to his Chief who raised it high over his head. He spoke and Mak'irtch's magic ensured that all nezumi heard his voice. "You have all been told what we need to do. The time is now. We are going to save our past and our future. Everything that the Nezumi are has built to this moment. When it happens, you will be faced with horrifying creatures, and you will be tempted to run like any intelligent creature. There will be nowhere to run, so that is not an option. We are there to fight. So stand and fight, and remember who we are." Kan'ok'ticheck paused and scanned his followers. "Now."

Nintai watched as each Nezumi fell into a deep slumber.

Aided by the magic of the Hourglass and the Nezumi shaman, the change was nearly instantaneous. One moment they were amongst the trees of the Shinomen, the next they were on the fields of dreams, leaving their sleeping bodies behind them. Kan'ok'ticheck had dreaded what he would see and how much damage had been done since he was gone, but it seemed that no time had passed. Te'tik'kir and the others still stood on the plains outside of the great city and the dragons, or what appeared to be dragons, still approached from a distance, destroying everything as they went. Te'tik'kir's face lit up as the army of nezumi appeared.

"You remembered! Thank the great den!" As the transcendent spoke, Kan'ok'ticheck's eyes never left the enemies. He silently despaired as the numbers that they faced expanded even further. Two more dragons followed the first three until five horrible creatures stood, displaying traits of the five elements. Two great humans, glowing with unearthly light, flanked them. The one on the left was brighter than anything on earth and swung a great tetsubo, dotted with stones of yellow. Through the glare, Kan'ok'ticheck could see that he wore heavy armor and a great helm. The one on the right glowed paler, and wielded two swords with deadly efficiency. She did not wear the great armor of the other, and her shaved head could be discerned through the glow.

As frightening as these two humans were, they were nothing next to the dragons. Each was larger than any hundred nezumi. Their teeth and jaws could slay ten warriors with a single attack. Their claws could rend just as easily. Plus, they spewed fire, or tornados, or water geysers. The threat seemed insurmountable. As before, wherever they stepped, the land vanished in a haze. They were literally unmaking the land with their presence.

The Chief of Chiefs did not hesitate. "We must protect the Transcendents! Form on your tribal chiefs! We attack!"

The Nezumi fought bravely, but they could barely reach the great creatures. The Fire Dragon sprayed the land with flame, killing indiscriminately. The Earth Dragon, clad in heavy stone scales, flung its tail around, crushing each swing. The nezumi on Water Dragon attackers, drowning thick, briny water. The Air Dragon attacked with the power of a storm, buffeting the nezumi in gales of force that left them unable to stand, let alone attack. The humans waded through the Nezumi swinging tetsubo and swords, leaving none alive in their paths.

The Nezumi tried to keep the creatures from the city and the Transcendents, but they could not sway their course. The dragons crashed into the side of the city, sending buildings crashing into ash. Where they did not destroy physically, they let dissolve in their wake. All of Dream was dissolving behind them and the Nezumi could not stop them.

"You must not fail, Great Chief."

Kan'ok'ticheck spun around at this new voice. This was no Nezumi,

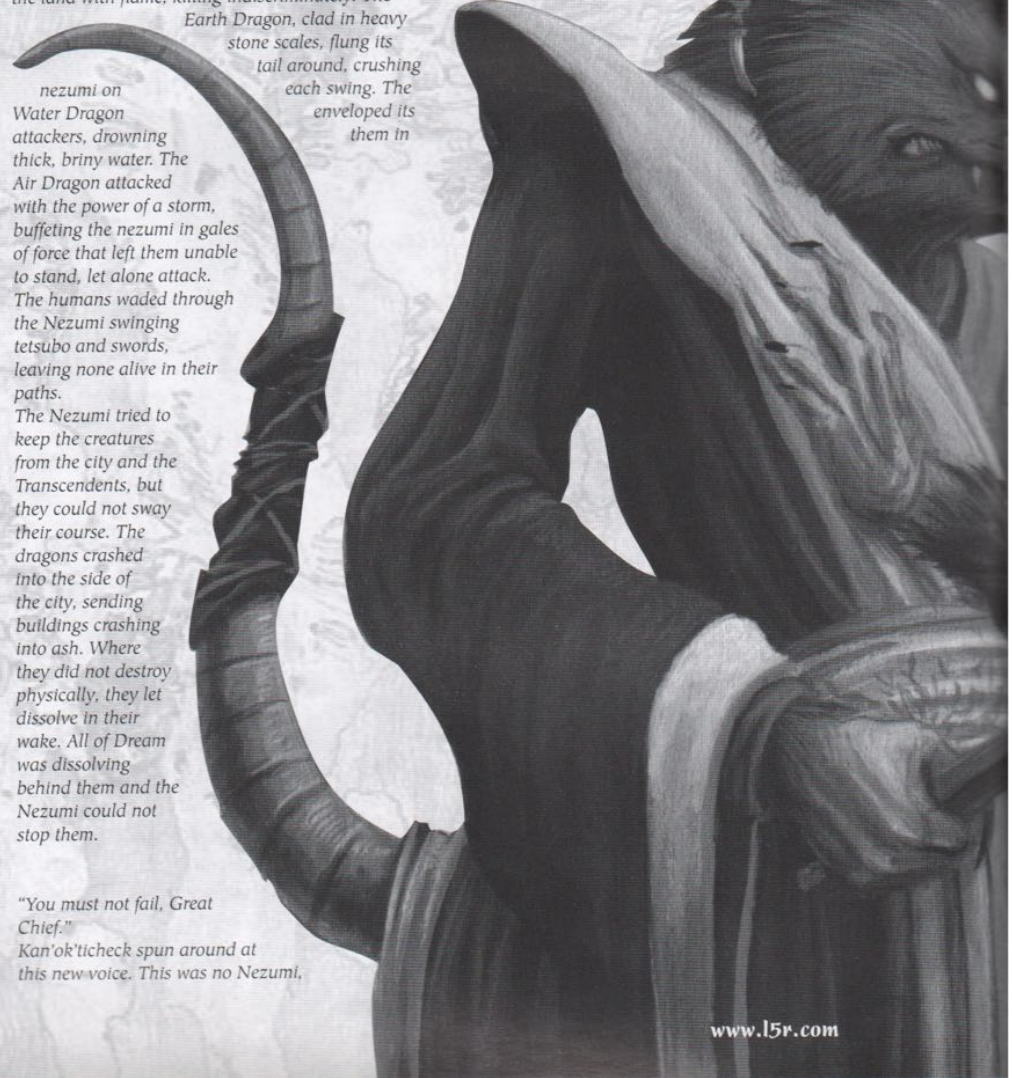
though he spoke their language perfectly. "Ningen?" Shiba Ningen was there, but his form was hazy. His clothes changed color from moment to moment and sometimes Kan'ok'ticheck could see through him like he was made only of mist or water.

"I sensed what was happening and I have come to impress upon you the importance of this battle. What you are fighting is not what it seems. Those are not actually the great Elemental Dragons, Lord Sun, and Lady Moon. They are manifestations of Yume-do itself. The land of dreams is going mad and destroying itself in the process."

Kan'ok'ticheck furrowed his brow. "I do not understand."

Ningen nodded. "I am not surprised. The celestial heavens are in turmoil and waves of entropy are enveloping all of the realms. Yume-do, as it is made of dreams, is the least stable of the realms so it was the first affected. These images signify the collapse of the land, and they must be defeated or there will be nothing left. Then the turmoil will continue until all the realms are overcome and destroyed. No others can face this. You alone can be victorious."

The white rat looked thoughtful. "So these are not really dragons, but they kill like them all the same. Many



Nezumi have died and we have yet to defeat a single one of them. You say that everything depends on us? I fear for our success, but we will do our best." "As will we."

Kan'ok'tichek turned to see Te'tik'kir and another Nezumi he did not recognize. "No, Te'tik'kir! You must not! We came here to protect the Transcendents, not lead them into battle!"

The shaman nodded. "Yes, and we are grateful. However, what Ningen has told you changes much. We cannot stand by while all is destroyed and killed. We will fight, even if it means our end. Tomorrow is here and we will not flee from it. The land itself rebels against us but we will fight until our last breath." The other rat stepped forward. "My name is Tchickchuk. I lead the Nezumi here. My army is at your command."

Kan'ok'tichek grasped the other nezumi's paw. "It will be my privilege to fight at your side, Tchickchuk." The Transcendent grinned, flashing sharp teeth. "Then let's fight! It has been too long!"

The wave of Transcendents joining the living Nezumi gave new momentum against the dream creatures. Tchickchuk was a masterful general, and between him and Kan'ok'tichek they kept the Nezumi fighting in an organized fashion that many samurai would have admired.

The first casualty inflicted came when a group of shaman and conjurers, led by Achirin, faced the Dragon of Air. The monstrous creature constantly shifted and flowed, its features not always distinct. Achirin led the others to call on the forces of the Dragon itself, and then created a dynamic whirlwind. At first, the Dragon scoffed at the idea that it could be defeated by its own element. It glared at the shaman and advanced upon them. As it continued to approach, however, the Nezumi could see increasing uncertainty in its eyes. Its swirling form started fraying around the edges as it struggled to maintain its cohesion. There was no retreat, as the land behind them no longer existed.

With a shrill scream that shook the breadth of Yume-do, the Dragon was torn asunder and absorbed into the wind, leaving no trace behind. A great cheer went up from the Nezumi as the shaman fell, exhausted.

Kan'ok'tichek and Tchickchuk looked at each other and they could see the truth in their eyes. They could win.

Yoe'e'trr perched himself in a tree on a hilltop and lined up his target. At the base of the tree crouched Gran-otik looking up at the scout while also watching the approaching human. Yoe'e'trr called down, "Who first?"

Gran-otik smiled and said nothing. He notched and fired three arrows in quick succession, trying to pierce the heavy armor of Lord Sun.

The first strike was swatted aside by the man's great tetsubo. The second struck him in his armored chest, but did not pierce. The third vanished in the right eye slit on his helm.

The glow on the giant faltered a bit as he grasped at his helmet, trying to find the source of his pain.

Yoe'e'trr called down to Gran-otik. "Nice shot. Now I'll hit the other eye. Watch." Yoe'e'trr was as good as his word and Lord Sun fell to his knees. Before he landed, his body exploded in an incredibly bright light, temporarily blinding all on the field and leaving nothing behind but smoke and memory.

The Dragon of Earth swung

its great stone tail and swept five Nezumi from his path. Ep'kee leapt from the path of the swinging tail and sank his small axe into the hard carapace. It gained only small purchase but it was enough for him to grab hold of one of the heavy scales. The dragon swung the tail, trying to dislodge the annoyance. Distracted, it did not notice the second nezumi moving in on its flank. Z'orr'tek vaulted himself up the creature's foreleg and thrust his spear between two great scales, and into its throat. In its pain, the Dragon threw Ep'kee clear into the side of the damaged city, killing him instantly. Z'orr'tek fared no better as the dragon crunched down with his great teeth as he started to dissipate. The body of the Nezumi hero fell alone, with the dragon gone completely.

A force of Tattered Ear warriors attacked the Dragon of Fire. It sent huge goutts of flame, incinerating the nezumi quickly. They never retreated, even as the smell of burnt fur and flesh filled their nostrils. Soon the sheer number of the Nezumi overwhelmed the Dragon. For every ten he killed, he had to watch ten more. Finally, as another group fell, Akatch threw a spear, piercing through the ear and into the brain of the creature.

Ch'krit trod the ground in front of Lady Moon and yelled. "Face me! Horrible creature! Face me!" The human cocked her head at the sound and assessed the rattling in front of her. As if accepting the challenge, the moon-woman shrank quickly, until it stood in front of Ch'krit, looking at him eye to eye. Her twin swords flashed and a dark and cold voice leapt into his mind. "You cannot beat me by yourself, creature. I will not be undone."

Ch'krit nodded. "That is likely true." A second Nezumi crashed into the side of Lady Moon, knocking her off balance. Both Ch'krit's and Chee'trr's swords left her with dark smoke billowing from her body where there should have been blood. Soon the smoke wrapped her entire body before dissipating, leaving nothing behind. "But I don't stand alone."

Chu-rochu and H-tach'ch stood side-by-side facing the Dragon of Water. "It is very large."

"Yes it is."

"There is no way we can defeat such a thing."

"None whatsoever."

"You will take the right?"

"You have the left."

The result was never in doubt as the dragon followed his fellows into nothingness.

The Void Dragon was the only one that remained. The surviving Nezumi gathered around its Chiefs and faced the creature of swirling darkness, and they knew fear. Despite the defeat of the other beings, this dragon did not show any pause. It looked down on them with contempt and snarled. A voice that made no sound echoed in all of their heads. "Do you think you can defeat me? You have defeated my brothers, but they are bound by what they are. I have no such boundaries. I am all and nothing. I am your doom."

Kan'ok'tichek signaled to the other chiefs, and the Nezumi moved forward as one. The shaman worked their great magic to support the warriors, and each warrior used his sword or spear or axe to support the warriors around them. Many Nezumi fell to the claws and teeth of the dragon, but each left its mark. Each wound bled darkness, and the dragon slowed under the attack.

Slowed, but did not stop.

Mak'irtch pulled a single Nezumi scout aside from the battle. "What is your name?"

"Chi'kel."

"There is something we must try, Chi'kel. Take this." Mak'irtch removed the Hourglass from her robe. "It is our last chance."

Following Mak'irtch's instructions, Chi'kel moved through the ranks, getting closer and closer to the jaws of the Void Dragon. Finally he reached the point where many Nezumi had felled to the beast's great teeth. Emikek was the last to give his life as his blood spilled under the force of the Dragon's bite. As it opened its mouth to find the next victim, Chi'kel flung the Hourglass with all his strength and accuracy. The object vanished behind the teeth and into the thing's gaping gullet.

The dragon shuddered. Its black skin wavered and faded, turning to grey. Its eyes glassed over and its shoulders stooped. Its teeth and claws cracked, as if under great pressure. It appeared wrapped in age as it fell forward onto its chin. It struggled to regain its footing as Kan'ok'tichek stepped forward and drove his sword into its head.

As the last dragon fell it exploded in a wave of darkness. The entire realm of dreams ceased to exist for a moment. When it reappeared, all of the nezumi fell to the ground, clutching their stomachs until the wave of nausea passed. When they were able to look around they saw that the city was returned to its full glory, complete with gleaming spires of silver and gold. The land was restored, all of its destroyed sections intact, as if the Dragons had never come. The fallen Nezumi and Transcendents were gone, leaving no sign of their passing. Unlike the city, they did not return.

Tchickchuk stood and offered his paw to Kan'ok'tichek to do the same. "It is done. Many tribes worth of nezumi have died, but the realm is safe. We have won."

Kan'ok'tichek looked puzzled. "Something happened. When the last dragon fell, something was done to us." "You are correct." Shiba Ningen once again stood in front of the two Chiefs. I was fortunate I was unable to maintain my connection to this realm, or it would have happened to me as well. I was able to take one Nezumi with me...but only one."

"What is it? What happened?"

Ningen's eyes were downcast as he said. "In its death throes, the dream of void removed Yume-do from existence for just a moment. In defeat it could not complete the destruction, but in that moment, the link you nezumi had to the waking world was severed. You will be unable to awake and return to your lives."

The Chief of Chiefs mouth hung agape for a moment. "So we won, but we still lost."

Tchickchuk clasped his new friend on the shoulder. "I am sorry. You deserve better."

Ningen smiled sadly. "The nezumi have done what no one else could, and they have saved the world. I think you have all earned your rest. This is your home now." Tchickchuk also smiled. "Come, Kan'ok'tichek. Let us introduce your friends to mine. Let us show the Nezumi the city of legend."

Nintai walked among the Nezumi where they lay. He had felt something happen. They had shuddered, as if as one. The Kitsu went from one to another, checking them for any signs of life. He found none. He did not rest, even when it was clear that there was no hope. He checked each one, not sleeping for nearly three full days, until he confirmed that not a single Nezumi who went into Dream still breathed. He finally sat among them, with his face buried in his great paws, and wept.

By Shawn Carman

With each new base set, new characters are introduced into the Legend of the Five Rings mythos. Samurai Edition will be no different, but what will be different is the approach we are taking with these new young samurai. These individuals have a great destiny to fulfill, each and every one, and we are going to be there to watch it unfold from the very beginning. Fresh from their gempukku, these young men and women will be some of the characters through which we will witness the events of the upcoming arc. And to kick things off, we thought we'd give you a glimpse of some of these individuals, fully detailed through the L5R RPG, Third Edition.

Hiruma Aki

Air: 2 Earth: 3 Fire: 2 Water: 2 Void: 3
Stamina: 4

Glory: 1.0 Status: 1.0 Honor: 1.5

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 1

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Bishamon's Blessing, Death Trance

Disadvantages: Driven (kill the oni that slew his parents), Unlucky (3 pts)

Kata: Striking as Earth

Skills: Battle (Specific Enemy: Shadowlands) 2, Defense 2, Heavy Weapons 3, Jujitsu 1, Kenjutsu 3, Kyujutsu 1, Lore: Shadowlands 3

Hiruma Aki was just a child when his parents died in service atop the Great Carpenter Wall. He remembers the day his uncle came and informed him of their death, and that he would be living with his cousins until he could earn a place in the dojo. On that day, Aki's spirit died. Every day since then, he has prepared for his body to follow suit.

Aki craves battle. He longs for the chance to kill goblins, ogres, trolls, and oni. He despises the lull between combats, because then there is nothing to distract him from the emptiness he feels. He has known nothing but battle, or preparation for battle, his entire life. He has no friends, no close family to speak of, and no one he can confide in save for his sensei. It is perhaps for that reason that his sensei has begun to find other duties for the young berserker to fulfill, hoping that he will find something in life that he can enjoy before he finally meets his end in the same manner as his parents.

Kakita Hideo

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 2 Water: 2 Void: 3
Reflexes: 4 Agility: 3

Glory: 1.0 Status: 1.0 Honor: 3.5

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 1

Advantages: Sacred Weapon (Kakita Blade)

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Arrogant), Lechery (1 pt)

Kata: Kakita's First Stance

Skills: Courtier 2, Defense 2, Etiquette 1, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 2, Kyujutsu 1, Meditation 1, Storytelling (Bragging) 1

Kakita Hideo was a popular child because of his natural athletic ability. This lasted for many years until the other children began to grow jealous of his ability, and the fact that he never seemed to lose. Hideo was not particularly concerned. His parents had made arrangements for him to study at the finest Crane dojo in Tsuma, so convinced were they of their son's natural ability. They were not disappointed, and neither was the boy's sensei.

Hideo is the perfect Crane warrior. He is confident, athletic, and his natural charm and arrogance drives his foes to fury, forcing them to make mistakes which Hideo can then exploit to his own benefit. He has only been in a handful of duels, and never one to the death, but despite his youth, Hideo is already developing a reputation as a man to be feared within the duelist's circle.

Kitsuki Taiko

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 2

Awareness: 3 Perception: 3

Glory: 1.0 Status: 1.0 Honor: 3.5

School/Rank: Kitsuki Courtier 1

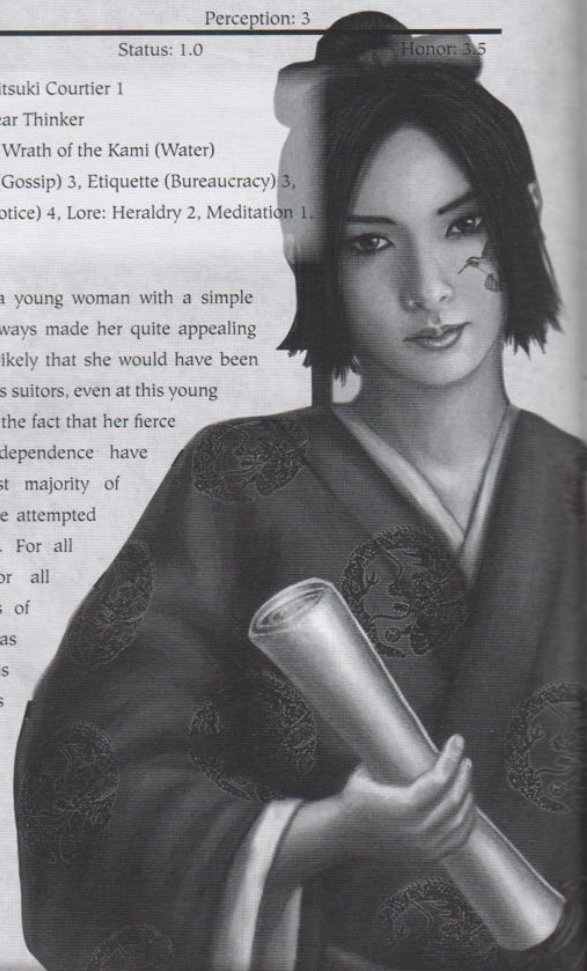
Advantages: Clear Thinker

Disadvantages: Wrath of the Kami (Water)

Skills: Courtier (Gossip) 3, Etiquette (Bureaucracy) 3, Investigation (Notice) 4, Lore: Heraldry 2, Meditation 1, Theology 1

Kitsuki Taiko is a young woman with a simple elegance that has always made her quite appealing to young men. It is likely that she would have been the object of countless suitors, even at this young age, if it were not for the fact that her fierce intelligence and independence have intimidated the vast majority of young men that have attempted to get close to her. For all her intelligence, for all her vaunted powers of perception, Taiko has never noticed this tendency; matters of romance and marriage have never been important to her, and she has never paid them any attention.

Taiko is a brilliant judge of



character, and can often deduce complex interrelations between others simply by observing them for short periods. Her sensei among the Kitsuki expect great things of her, and she expects great things of herself. To Taiko, the world is a riddle that is awaiting discovery. Every challenge set before her in court or otherwise, is a riddle to be solved, and she commits herself fully to them. Once committed, she does not stop until it is solved. In another life, perhaps she was a great huntress. In this one, she is a merciless advocate of her family and clan.

Taiko favors tattoos, but not in the traditional Dragon style. She commemorates each major victory or discovery with a small tattoo somewhere on her body, most of which cannot be seen by others. In this way, she has chosen to create a history of her life that will be with her always.

Akodo Shunori

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 2

Glory: 1.0 Status: 1.0 Honor: 3.5

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 1

Advantages: Balance, Hotei's Blessing

Disadvantages: Idealistic

Kata: Striking as Fire, Striking as Water

Skills: Battle (Mass Combat) 3, Defense 2, Kenjutsu 2, Kyujutsu 1, Lore: History 2, Storytelling 1, War Fans 1

Akodo Shunori was always a strange child. When he was young, he never showed particular interest in the games of other children. Kemari, chasing one another through the forest, and even pretending to fight with katana simply did not hold his attention. Go and shogi were his passion, even as a child, and he spent many long afternoons sitting quietly with his grandfather in the garden, watching every tactic, every strategy that the players made. Afterwards his grandfather would take him aside and explain what had happened, and years before his formal training as a samurai began, Shunori could be found playing men fifty years his senior. He did not often win, but he never played badly.

Shunori is a quiet young man whose keen eyes miss nothing. He could have been a courtier or an ambassador, but his love of battle and tactics is far too great for such a life. He thrives within the great Lion military, and works hard to prepare for the leadership position he hopes one day to achieve.

Yoritomo Eriko

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 2 Water: 3 Void: 2

Reflexes: 3 Agility: 3

Glory: 1.0 Status: 1.0 Honor: 1.5

School/Rank: Yoritomo Bushi 1

Advantages: Ambidextrous, Daredevil

Disadvantages: Contrary, Overconfident

Kata: None

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 1, Commerce 2, Craft: Sailing 3, Defense 2, Kenjutsu 2, Peasant Weapons (Kama) 5, Stealth 2

Yoritomo Eriko's parents were from a particularly poor branch of the Yoritomo family, and her mother died of an illness when she was only four. With no other options save to give up his only daughter, Eriko's father instead chose to take her with him when he served at sea for months on end. Many feared the tiny girl would perish, but in fact she flourished.

Eriko has almost literally spent her entire life at sea. She does

not recall the years before she took to the ships with her father, and the longest period of time she has lived on dry land has been no more than six months at most. In her mind, her recent gempukku ceremony was a formality, nothing more; she has been a Mantis samurai for more than a decade.

Eriko resents the Great Clans from the mainland. They have no understanding of what it means to struggle as the Mantis have. They take so much for granted, and they desperately need someone to show them the truth. Eriko is more than willing to be that samurai.

Isawa Takesi

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 3

Willpower: 3 Intelligence: 4

Glory: 1.0 Status: 1.0 Honor: 2.5

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Fire) 1

Advantages: Ally (Kakita Hideo: 1/1), Blessings of the Elements (Fire)

Disadvantages: Bitter Betrothal

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Counterspell; Aura of Flame, Burst, Extinguish, Fires form the Forge, Reversal of Fortunes, Tempest of Air

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, Iaijutsu 1, Lore: History 1, Meditation 2, Spellcraft (Fire) 3, Tea Ceremony 1, Theology 2

The kami have smiled upon Isawa Takesi since the day he was born. His parents, both shugenja, could see the way he stared at the spirits those around him could not. They saw how he smiled at them, and how they swarmed around him protectively in return. However, they had learned history's lessons well, and knew that those who are particularly strong in the elements are often led to hubris and disaster, and Takesi was raised with these lessons in mind.

Takesi is not an arrogant young man, but it is difficult for him to identify with others that cannot see the majesty of spirits that surrounds them at all times. He struggles daily to remain grounded and centered, but at times it can be difficult not to get caught up in it all.

Bayushi Ietsuna

Air: 3 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 2

Glory: 1.0

Status: 1.0

Honor: 1.5

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 1

Advantages: Dangerous Beauty

Disadvantages: Cruel

Kata: The Tail's Reach

Skills: Courtier (Political Maneuvering) 2, Defense 2, Etiquette 3, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Kyujutsu 2, Stealth 2

Bayushi Ietsuna is a dangerous man. His every action, movement, and word serve as a warning to those around him. He is inscrutable, charming, and seethes with an understated menace that puts everyone in his presence ill at ease. To Ietsuna, it is a game. It is the subtlest form of manipulation, and only those who can overcome the aura of danger he exudes are truly worth of his respect.

The irony is that Ietsuna is not so dangerous as he appears. He is a talented warrior, but not a prodigy. He is a cunning social opponent, but not brilliant. And he is talented in arts that others would find disgraceful, but he rarely puts them to use. Rather, Ietsuna's duty is to present a diversion for his clan's enemies. He uses his gift, the gift of presence, to put others on the defensive, allowing his more subtle clanmates to operate with a reduced chance of detection. As he gains experience, however, there is no doubt that Ietsuna will become a force in his own right, and one day the fear others seem to have of him will be well-deserved.

Utaku Kohana

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 3
Reflexes: 3

Glory: 1.0

Status: 1.0

Honor: 3.5

School/Rank: Utaku Battle Maiden 1

Advantages: Daikoku's Blessing, Quick Healer

Disadvantages: Small

Kata: None

Skills: Battle (Skirmish) 2, Defense 2, Horsemanship 3, Kenjutsu 3, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Heraldry 1, Polearms 2

The Utaku family has a well-deserved reputation for grim and humorless samurai. Utaku Kohana is a paragon of the beliefs and practices the battle maidens maintain, but she does not share those personal qualities. She is a bright and gregarious young woman who makes friends quickly and easily. There are those among her family who believe she is a flighty young woman, but even they cannot deny her gifts in the skills practiced by their school.

Kohana's current assignment is as a yojimbo to a seasoned Ide diplomat serving in the capital city. She has enjoyed visiting the capital and experiencing the different traditions of other clans, but she longs to return to the open plains. She hopes that one day soon, her charge will travel to the courts of other clans, and give her the opportunity both to travel the Empire as well as to meet new and exciting people as part of her duties.



In Between Breaths

By Justin Walsh

I owe Legend of the Five Rings an awful lot. Through a game (a game!), I have found a simply unparalleled community in gaming, learned some deep and important things about myself and met many people who engender nothing but respect and admiration, some of whom have become lifetime friends.

Legend of the Five Rings also paved my road towards gaming as a profession. The start of that path sadly began with an almost immediate split from the game. Over time, L5R became less relevant to my life, until the ache of its absence faded. The effort to get back into the game was always overcome by the inertia of everyday obligation, but I was able to keep in touch with some people and keep the inner child mollified with occasional, furtive forays onto various web pages.

When I started hearing things about Samurai Edition, I was, naturally, curious. Bit by bit, the things I heard began to make it apparent that what was happening with Samurai Edition deserved more than just casual attention.

First, the story. I do not know Shawn and his team very well, but the broad strokes of the story that were emerging for Samurai struck a deep chord. And not just with me, it was clear. There was nothing unusual in people talking about the upcoming arc: people talk all the time. But it was the way that people were talking that was different. Having been through pretty much every arc of L5R, I heard something that I hadn't for a long time – anticipation. More than that: reverence. That is a strong word to use, but, as with many other players, I felt it too. Five Rings was returning to where it began – to what made it great. How could anyone not feel a tingle in their spine?

Next, the rules. I was fortunate enough to work with Roger on the first PDT. When I speak about people in L5R whom I respect, Roger is in the vanguard. Focused, determined, and possessing the insight and incredible rigour that marks a true academic, hearing that Roger was reworking the rules was one of those moments that borders on revelation. Quickly followed by: "Yeah, of course. Obvious, isn't it?" Roger had been a guiding light of systematic rationality when it had come to templating (among many other things) while I was with the PDT. To hear that he had been given full reign to re-write and formalise L5R's rules once and for all was a bit like hearing about 2-in-1 conditioner and shampoo for the first time. Take two bottles into the shower? Surely science had reached its pinnacle. Well, maybe not. Happily, there is no doubt that L5R's rules have.

Finally, the cards. I have to preface this section by admitting that Mark Wootton and myself have, Jay and Silent Bob-like, been described as "hetero life mates" (there is no question that I am Silent Bob, by the way – despite my chiselled good looks and lean physique). And, loathe as

I am to admit it, my leaving the PDT was one of the best things to happen to L5R: because Mark replaced me. While this might lead to some degree of bias towards Mark's work on Samurai, I am going to reverse the possibility in one of those delicious twists intended exclusively to embarrass a close friend.

Mark is a bizarre mix of curmudgeon and schoolboy – half Scrooge, half Han Solo. This peculiar mixture makes him just about the perfect game designer: the imagination and vision to see what can be with the miserly refusal to give credence to what shouldn't. On top of this, Mark takes his work very seriously indeed, and does not get excited by much. It comes with being old, apparently. Anyway, one evening, I decided to abuse my designer NDA and quiz Mark up on Samurai Edition. Initially cautious and modest about the project, bit by bit, Mark's real feelings began to show themselves.

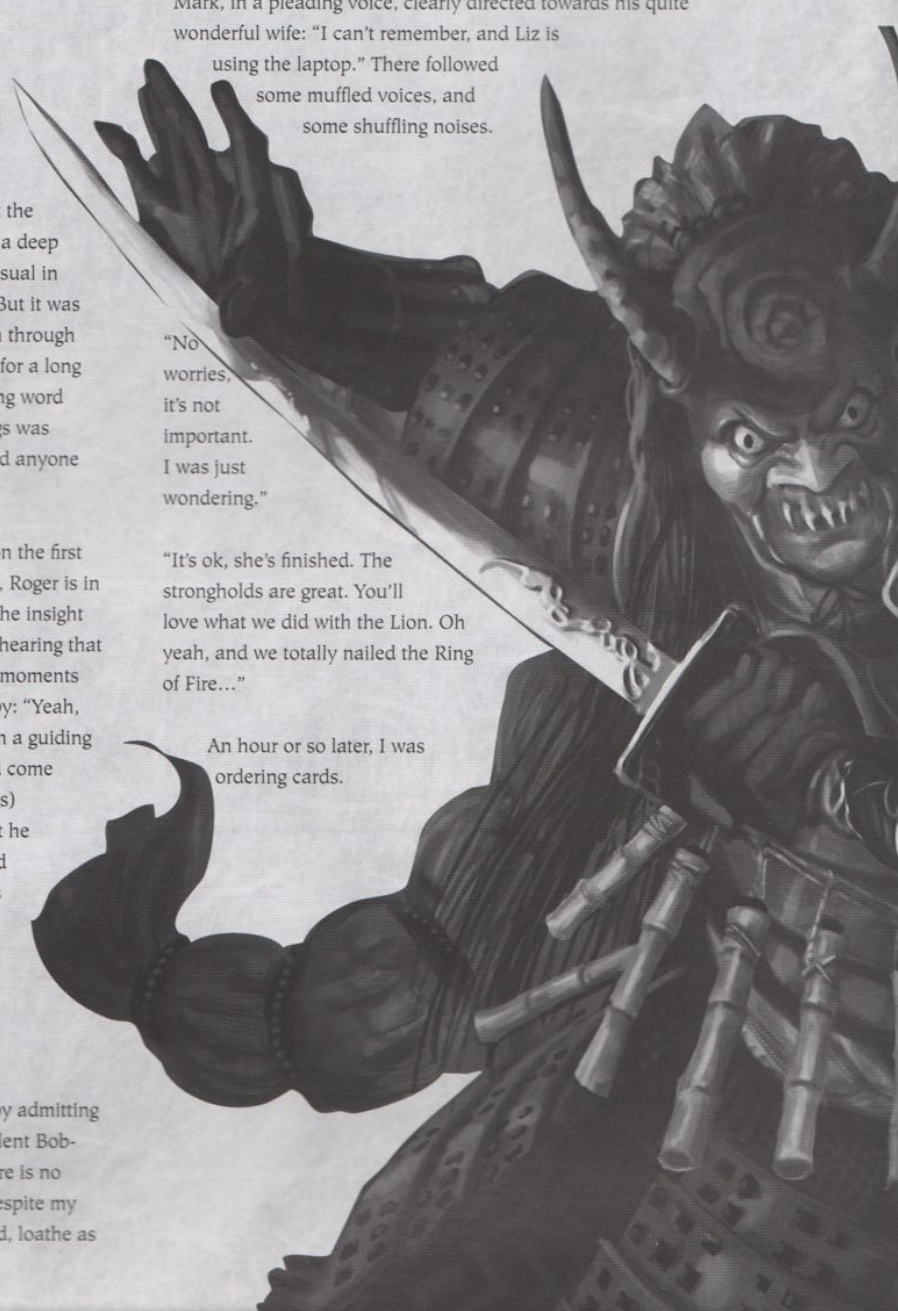
"So, what do the Phoenix and Spider strongholds do then?" I asked.

Mark, in a pleading voice, clearly directed towards his quite wonderful wife: "I can't remember, and Liz is using the laptop." There followed some muffled voices, and some shuffling noises.

"No worries, it's not important. I was just wondering."

"It's ok, she's finished. The strongholds are great. You'll love what we did with the Lion. Oh yeah, and we totally nailed the Ring of Fire..."

An hour or so later, I was ordering cards.



IT WAS A FEW YEARS AGO, JUST ANOTHER BATTLE OPPOSING TWO CLANS, MEN BECOMING HEROES, FIGHTING OTHER HEROES...



IT WAS THE VERY FIRST TIME I TOOK PART IN A BATTLE

WELL, AT LEAST TRIED TO!



LET ME GO!

YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO FIGHT, YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE.

SOMEDAY I'LL BE ONE OF THE GREATEST HEROES OF...

WELL YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO WAIT PAST YOUR GEMPUKKU BEFORE JOINING BATTLE.



IMAGINE IF WE ENCOUNTER AN...

ENEM...



SHE WAS ABOUT TO LET ME FIGHT AND YOU BLEW IT!

OH YEAH, COME AND SAY IT HERE!



YOU'RE LUCKY I'M TIED!

YES, I REMEMBER THAT BATTLE...

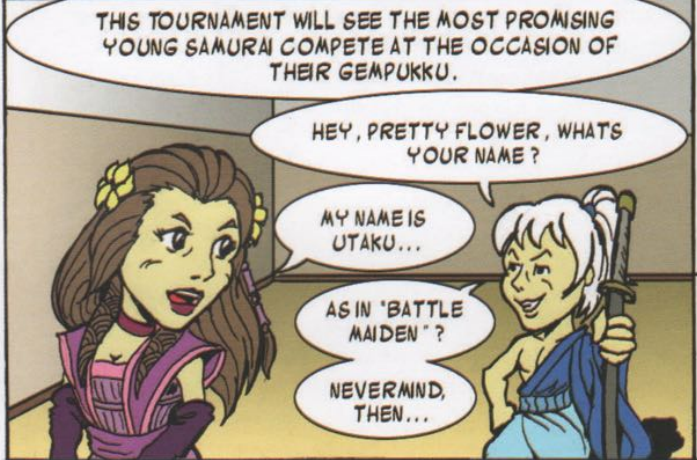
EVEN TODAY...

WELCOME TO THE TOPAZ CHAMPIONSHIP!



YOU TWO KNOW EACH OTHER, DON'T YOU?

THIS TOURNAMENT WILL SEE THE MOST PROMISING YOUNG SAMURAI COMPETE AT THE OCCASION OF THEIR GEMPUKKU.



HEY, PRETTY FLOWER, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

MY NAME IS UTAKU...

AS IN 'BATTLE MAIDEN'?

NEVERMIND, THEN...

AND THE WINNER WILL HAVE THE HONOR TO WEAR THE TOPAZ ARM...



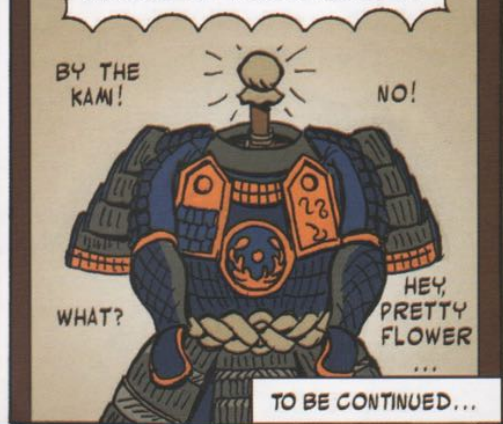
HEY, PRETTY FLOWER ...

DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT!

AREN'T YOU... A PIRATE?

WE PREFER "SOLIDARITY TAXATION FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THE SEAWAYS" RATHER THAN "PIRACY"

WHERE'S THE HELMET?



BY THE KAMI!

NO!

WHAT?

HEY, PRETTY FLOWER ...

TO BE CONTINUED...

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