



LIVE-ACTION ROLEPLAYING

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BLOOD AND HONOR

PART ONE

Shiba Kanshiro believed that there was a Fortune of Destiny, and that she conspired only to make his life difficult.

Kanshiro stepped out of Lord Juro's chambers, struggling to keep the rage and frustration from his face. Kanshiro thought he saw a guard smirking at him as he closed the door, but when he looked at the man his eyes were politely averted. What was it with this place? Why did everyone here seem to go out of their way to make things difficult? Kanshiro adjusted the two swords tucked beneath his obi and moved on with all the dignity he could muster. He quietly fumed as he made his way back to the gardens, planning his next move.

The Shogun was not a man known for indulging in worldly luxuries, but he was a canny politician who recognized that there were many who did. Seppun Juro, most realized, was more important for being known as the Shogun's karo than for his position as governor of Honored Treaty City. The governor's palace served as a place to entertain those who wished to have the Shogun's ear, keeping them comfortably entertained and away from strategic operations in nearby Shiro Henka. These gardens, like this palace, were not designed for the Shogun but for his guests. Subtly curving rock paths wound between delicate trees, bushes sculpted in wondrous natural patterns, and a brilliant riot of beautiful flowers. Kanshiro liked this place, and had spent quite a great deal of time here since his arrival. Even so, the beauty of the gardens only slightly mitigated his anger.

"Kanshiro-san," called out a delicate voice from his left. "Things did not go well, I take it?"

He looked toward the source of the voice. A woman in the red silken robes knelt just beside the entrance of the courtyard. She peered up at him over the top of her book, dark eyes encircled by a red velvet mask in the manner which distinguished the Scorpion Clan. Kanshiro's training cried out at him not to trust a Scorpion, but during his time in the governor's palace he had become quite fond of Soshi Kaoru. His heart said she was not like other Scorpion, even as his brain told him this was quite possibly exactly what she wanted him to think. In any case, he had no secrets, so he saw no harm in befriending her even if her motives were impure.

"The Shogun's karo is being difficult," Kanshiro sighed. "I have told him of the situation in my home village, how the bandit attacks are increasing in frequency and organization, but he seemed almost amused. It sounded as if he believed the attacks were our fault, as if my family had failed to protect our home... he refused to dispatch troops to aid us."

Kaoru frowned sympathetically. She rose, folding her book and tucking it into her obi. "Juro has become corrupted by his position," she whispered to him. "With the Shogun occupied keeping peace in the south, his word here is absolute. If rumor has it right, he is easily distracted by worldly pleasures. I have heard that many, like you, have found greater success in keeping his focus on important matters by bestowing certain gifts upon him."

Kanshiro's eyes widened. He glanced about to see if Kaoru had spoken while any of the other guests were in hearing range. Of course she had not. "Bribes?" Kanshiro

hissed, outraged. “Such is not conduct worthy of a samurai, especially a samurai who serves the Shogun directly!”

Kaoru studied Kanshiro for a moment, as if gauging the sincerity of his words. She smiled gently. “You are a good man, Kanshiro,” she said with just a hint of sadness. “An honorable man. Some days I fear there are too few like you left in Rokugan.” She moved past him down the garden path, walking slowly enough that he could follow if he so chose.

“Is something wrong, Kaoru-chan?” he asked her, walking beside her.

“A family matter,” she replied. “You have your own problems, Kanshiro-san. I would not wish to impose upon you.”

“My own mission here seems futile,” Kanshiro replied. “If there is any way that I can help you, it is my duty as a samurai to do so.”

Kaoru looked at him over one shoulder. “Not all samurai would be so generous to a Scorpion.”

“Since I arrived here, you are the only one who has shown me kindness and courtesy,” Kanshiro replied. “I will not repay that with distrust.”

Kaoru’s face flushed slightly with surprise. She nodded to Kanshiro, thanking him for his kindness. “It is my cousin, Yoshino,” she replied. “Lady Uidori dispatched the two of us here to present a gift from our family, a crystal flower carved by the legendary Ashalan sandsmith. We have been here for two weeks now. Yoshino claims that it is his responsibility to remain here until the Shogun returns to claim his gift, but this is not true.”



"Oh?" Kanshiro replied. He had met Kaoru's cousin a time or two since his arrival. He had seemed a curt, arrogant, and impatient young warrior.

Kaoru glanced around carefully, then looked up at Kanshiro. "Yoshino is having an affair with Seppun Isa, Lord Juro's daughter. It is for her sake that he makes excuses to remain."

"But the karo's daughter is betrothed to Mirumoto Aichi," Kanshiro replied, "an officer in the Shogun's guard, due to arrive at the castle this very day." Kanshiro had not expected a problem of this scale – he almost regretted his selfless offer to help.

"Now you understand my difficulty," Kaoru replied. "Aichi's clan, the Dragon, and my clan are allies. If this shameful affair should see the light of day not only would the Scorpion's reputation with the Shogun be greatly harmed, but our alliance with the Dragon Clan would be as well."

"I am not certain how I can help," Kanshiro replied, "but I promised, Kaoru-chan."

"Arigato, Kanshiro-san," Kaoru said gratefully. "I only ask you be careful not to speak of this matter. Even if a mere servant should overhear, and report to the Mirumoto..."

A sudden commotion behind them drew his attention. A dozen samurai in fiery armor of the Shogun now spread across the garden, taking up positions at every exit. Some herded guests into the open area, looking at the guards and at one another in confusion, irritated. A lanky woman in a billowing green kimono stepped into the center of the garden. The winding image of a snake tattoo coiled itself over her shaven head, and she scanned those present with a calculating eye.

"Guests of Honored Treaty City," she called out. "I am Kitsuki Temko, agent of the Shogun. In the name of the Emperor, none of you are to leave this castle, and should any of you desire to leave the confines of these gardens, you shall do so only in the company of my chosen guardsmen. And so it shall remain until the murder of Lord Juro is solved."

WHAT IS ROKUGAN LIVE-ACTION?

As the name suggests, this is a game set in a fantasy world known as Rokugan, an Empire of heroic samurai, mystical shugenja, and fearsome creatures from the Shadowlands. Though the setting draws heavily from the culture and history of Japan and other Asian nations, it is a unique fantasy world.

Legend of the Five Rings™ first appeared in 1995 as a collectible card game. This game introduced a revolutionary idea: a game whose story was influenced by the actions of its players through the results of major tournaments. *Legend of the Five Rings* later expanded into a role-playing game in 1997, the game upon which many of the rules and mechanics of this game are based, though previous knowledge of the game is not

necessary to use this book.

Those familiar with the role-playing game may note that the rules here are greatly streamlined. As a live-action game, it is designed to move much more quickly and with less Game Master participation than a tabletop roleplaying game. This is not to say that the rules for Live-Action Role Play (or LARP as it is more commonly referred to) are inferior to its tabletop counterpart – they are merely designed to take the best advantage of the medium at hand. We have taken away the dice, replacing them with a deck of normal playing cards.

Welcome to Rokugan, where honor is a force more powerful than steel.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

LARP can most closely be compared to a mix between tabletop role-playing and an improvised play, where each player portrays his character. The use of props and costumes is encouraged. As opposed to dealing strictly with Non-Player Characters (NPCs) or working cooperatively in a party, players often have a variety of objectives and there are generally few Game Master-controlled characters. Rokugan Live-Action still has Game Masters (GMs), though their role more closely resembles that of a referee or judge rather than representing all the other assorted characters in the game. LARP has been called is a more intensive role-playing experience, with players leaving character rarely, if at all during a game session.

GMs accustomed to keeping their players on a short leash may have problems running their first LARP session. This is not to say that you cannot achieve storyline agendas or have one-on-one sessions with players. In this environment players should become more responsible for familiarizing themselves with the rules so as to not to cause too heavy a strain on the GM. The main duty of the players is to enter into the persona of the characters they have created and see the world through that character's eyes. As in all role-playing games, there is no defined way to “win” or “lose” a LARP other than the objectives players set for themselves — you get out of it what you put into it.

Imagination plays an important part in LARP. As appropriate settings can be difficult to find, just about any environment can be turned into a suitable space for play. A park that is isolated, someone's home, a college campus, or a church can all provide places for the game provided you manage to secure permission. Make certain LARP area is clearly defined before play begins so players do not wander out of the intended boundaries.

Setting a mood is also important, and can help players feel more in character. One of the easiest ways to make any environment feel more like Rokugan is to remove items of modern design (if possible). An area with sparse furnishing is far less jarring to the mood of the game. Playing back-

ground music such as the sound of taiko drumming significantly enhances the tone of the game. However, keep in mind that loud music, dark rooms, and smoke, while they may set an intriguing mood, can be disruptive and confusing for players.

Costumes, while optional in many LARPs, can also help set a mood and get everyone into character. Costume is probably one of the biggest concerns when playing in a LARP and this book explores costuming in detail. Dressing in a traditional Japanese fashion can be costly and the array of accessories needed makes the prospect daunting to the newcomer. The costuming chapter in this book will walk readers through how to make a basic costume, something workable and attractive for a LARP, without



breaking their budget.

THE MOST IMPORTANT RULES

This book includes a number of rules for creating and playing characters. One should feel free to tinker with and adapt these rules to fit his or her style. However, there are a number of rules that are critical, and should not be altered. These rules are designed to make certain the LARP experience is safe and fun for all parties:

- No alcohol or drugs should be present. These substances not only impair judgment and affect role-playing, but can also make players uncomfortable.
- No weapons should be present. Even the presence of realistic toy weapons cause problems. Players often get carried away with the emotions of their characters, so better that the temptation not be available.
- No touching other players in any way. While a good rule to maintain player etiquette in general, this also fits in well with the flavor of Rokugan, where physical contact is considered rude.
- Respect other players, and remember the boundaries between “in character” behavior and etiquette to your fellow players. Instituting a hand signal to indicate that one is communicating “out of character” is a good way to prevent unfortunate misunderstandings.