

The Five Rings Symbol, consisting of five interlocking rings, each containing a Japanese character: 風 (Wind), 火 (Fire), 土 (Earth), 水 (Water), and 空 (Air).

Legend of the Five Rings

The Way of Shinsei



"We tell the tales of heroes to remind ourselves that we also can be great."
– The Tao of Shinsei



Credits

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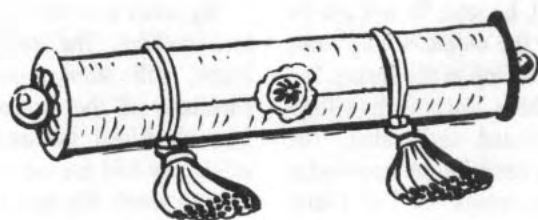
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EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

If a general is wise, he knows that a single man can halt an entire army.

Sometimes the downfall of houses hinges on a fumble of the wrist.

The higher you stand above modesty, the easier it becomes to lose your footing.

Liberation

"No! You cannot go! Tell me which of them did this, and I'll..." I trailed off. I was fifteen, and I did not know how much cruelty could be created in the name of revenge. I could not think of any fate sufficient enough to rain down upon my father's enemies.

"Stop," he said, and I could hear the pain in his voice. It cracked like the waves on the rocks below Kyuden Doji. "You will find yourself at the end of a poisoned blade, and that will be the death of our whole line, not just me."

I bit my lip in frustration. Death. My father was going to die. Perhaps not by the swift stroke of seppuku, but forgotten in the oubliette called the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

I watched him as he folded his last kimono, white, enclosed in the sky-blue kashimo, and carried it out to the courtyard. He was dressed in plain gray, a symbol of his humility. He looked like a ronin. Of course retiring to join the Brotherhood of Shinsei was the honorable thing to do, the reward of a life devoted to duty. But to be sent away in your prime to a cold, barren cell, to shave your head and waste your best years with shriveled old men and meditate upon a world you did not even participate in – it was a death.

My father gave the last of his personal belongings to the thin monk who waited there. As he watched the monk carry them away to be given to the Brotherhood, he said, "It will not be so bad. I remember how the monks would come to worship at the Shrine of Doji in the spring. You can look for me among them, teaching the village children." My father hesitated, and added, "The Emperor no longer has a need for my knowledge of the political maneuverings of the Clans.

Perhaps the heimin children can put the information to better use."

His words were bitter. My anger choked in my throat. I saw my father's tears as the world he had created slipped away. My mouth was dry as I said, "Just give me a little time, Father," I promised. "I'll make sure they take you back."

My father pulled his wakizashi from his obi and laid the sheathed blade in my hands. "I once thought that, if I had but enough days to live, I could make a difference in this world. Each day, each moment, was precious, because there was so much to live for." He seemed resigned, lost. "Now, all of that time has slipped out of my hands. I look into the future, and see only the Brotherhood and endless days of... nothing at all. I do not know what I will find in that future. But I think, for me, time has ended." He released the blade. "For you, it is only beginning. I will pray for you."

I watched my father walk out of the courtyard, the first steps of his pilgrimage to the monastery and into solitude, and swore that I would free him, somehow. With time.



The room was cold, a barren stone cell empty of adornment. A simple pallet, stuffed with straw, served as a futon. An oil lamp guttered and filled the air with its scent. A set of brushes and paper were the only remnants of the man I had known all my life. I resolved to leave as quickly as possible.

"I have the promises of assistance we need. The Emperor will approve. The Scorpion have been shamed for their part in the incident at Plum Blossom village, and the Imperial Court needs your guidance, Father. It is time to come out of retirement, put aside your poetry, and reclaim your place at court."

My father just watched me with quiet eyes and said nothing. The saffron robes enfolded his frame, still strong, still healthy. Those eyes contained all the sharpness I had remembered from childhood, but as they had when I was a child, they told me my answer. My father did not need to speak. His eyes said "No."

"I cannot."



"But you were forced to retire, Father! Everyone knows that. Your honor in the court was beyond reproach, your counsel heeded by all. The Scorpion saw the first gray in your hair, and turned the Emperor against you, claiming you were too old for your duties. They forced you into this monastery, this exile. Out of jealousy! Do you not remember?"

He answered, but his face still held the half-smile he wore when he watched me as a child. "I remember."

I was angry. I had worked for six years to return my father to his rightful place at the Emperor's side, where once his eloquence prevailed, and he refused to return. He spurned the fruit of my efforts.

The court needed him.

"You wept when the Emperor told you to go. There were rumors you had died of a broken heart, that it was your angry spirit that brought down the Scorpion... did all of that mean nothing to you?"

I needed him.

My father closed his eyes. "It meant everything to me. I lived to serve the Empire. And the Empire was kind to me in return. I had all I wished, and

thought there was nothing more that I could desire."

"Then why...?"

"Here I found the one thing I could never have. Something too precious to sacrifice, even for the sake of the Imperial Court."

My father held out his hand, begging me to understand. I was still too angry to reach to him. All my planning, all I had done for his sake, was being lost.

"What did you find?" I asked bitterly.

"Freedom from time."



The monk saw me before I saw him. I remember he was neither young nor old, a man of my own age. Around him were clustered the children of the town's samurai too young for schooling, to listen to his stories and parables of Shinsei. I had just walked through the middle of





their gathering in my desire to reach the Lady's shrine, so distracted was I by my duties of the day.

"Doji-sama!" the monk hailed. His voice was respectful enough, but there was laughter in his eyes. I was too preoccupied to be concerned. "Sumimasen, Doji-sama. Please forgive us for gathering in such a traveled place, where we could impede your path."

I waved the apology away, not eager to talk to one of the Brotherhood, even after ten years. "It is nothing. I am far too busy to be concerned with such trivial matters." I tried to walk away.

The corners of the monk's mouth tilted upward slightly. "Of course, Doji-sama," he called out again. Then he said, "If I may ask, for the further knowledge of these children regarding the duties of their elders, what sort of tasks are you concerned with this day?" He bowed deeply to me again and said, "Forgive me if the question is impertinent."

I was annoyed with the monk's question, but the day was bright and fair, and the children were watching me with eager eyes. I had enough time to answer for their sake, at least. "I am going to fulfill my obligations at the Shrine of Lady Doji, and then I must meet with the merchants that ship our rice to the Kaiu Wall in order to feed and keep strong the Crab that protect Rokugan from the evils of the Shadowlands. Then I will set up a series of events to permit the Akodo daimyo and the Dragonfly daimyo to interact in a peaceful and controlled setting, so they will be able to come to an understanding and prevent war between the Lion and the Dragon. This will keep the Empire strong. I also will be arranging the Imperial Court's activities in celebration of the Bon Festival. This way, the Emperor can perform the rites that insure that ancestors are properly venerated throughout the land. If I have time, I then will try to compose some poetry in honor of our Lady for the Festival."

I think some pride tainted my words, but I was proud. I had worked hard to reach a position where I could serve the Empire well and see that it was kept on the correct path.

The monk bowed deeply again to me, and the children followed. I stood straighter, pleased at the acknowledgement. The monk then said, "*Domo arigato*. It sounds to me as though you are concerned with many great things, Doji-sama. You have very little time, and on each moment, great things hang. It is perfectly understandable that you would not be able to divert, even for a