

Legend of the Five Rings™



Bells of the Dead

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Background	6
Time Line	7
Act One: To Hunt a Hare	8
Where to Next?	11
Finding Ozaki	14
Who's Who in Act One	15
Act Two: Gang War	18
The Fields of the Morning Sun	18
Friendly Traveler Village	20
The First Wave	22
The Second Wave	24
Finding Kitsune Hamato	25
Who's Who in Act Two	26
Act Three: Bells of the Dead	28
Taka	28
For Whom the Bell Toll	30
The Fortress	30
Final Battle	34
Nakiro's Revenge	35
Resolution	36
Who's Who in Act Three	37
Dramatis Personae	40

Bells of the Dead



"It takes one man to keep a secret, two to break it. Conspiracies don't work."

— Yasuki Taka, wily trader

What is Bells of the Dead?

Bells of the Dead is the second of the "I," or "Intrigue" series of adventures. The adventure presented in this book presents the tale of complex conspiracy, dark betrayals, and desperate heroes. It is the tale of a revolution within the most clandestine organization in Rokugan, and a battle to prevent a greater evil from being born.

Though intended for a experienced magistrate characters, Bells of the Dead could be adapted for any party. The three part adventure also offers side quests in "Challenge - Focus - Strike" format. Through these side quests, Bells of the Dead could be expanded into a larger campaign. The only limitation is the desire of the players and the GM to hunt the conspiracy to its roots.

This adventure picks up in the wake of adventures presented in other Legend of the Five Rings products, such as The Hare Clan (from the first Game Master's screen) and City of Lies. It also draws from Way of the Minor Clans and The Merchant's Guide to Rokugan. It is a sequel to Haunting of Usagi Castle, from the 2nd Edition Game Master's Guide. None of these products are necessary to use this adventure. Everything you need is reprinted within.

The Theme of Bells of the Dead

If there is one overbearing theme it is uncertainty. The player characters are never sure who their friends are, or what they've stumbled into. The characters find themselves hunting noble samurai and assisted by sinister Kolat. The characters take a trip into the heart of a haunted realm of unrestful spirits, following the footsteps of a forgotten legend. If they succeed, a clan will be restored to honor and a powerful evil will be banished. If they fail...

Let's not think about that.

Don't worry. It'll be fun.

Now let's go. The Kolat aren't the sort of people you keep waiting.

—Rich Wulf



— Tomoe

I do not know if this shall find you in good health.

I do not know if this shall find you at all.

I do not know why I write this, for even as I put the words to paper the chance grows slimmer that either of us shall survive. I can smell the hounds nipping at my heels. Every time their jaws snap shut the escape is narrower than the last. Worse than the magistrates, who do what they believe to be right, are the ones I cannot name. The ones responsible for the death of our father and the obliteration of our clan.

No, they have a name.

They are everywhere. They are everyone. Every time I accept a hand in friendship, I fear the other hand holds a knife. Every time I meet a stranger on an empty road, I wonder whether the meeting was by chance. I have encountered the Kolat on three occasions since my escape on that terrible night, and I shall tell you of them now.

The first was in the village near Mori Kage, where Yukio's code sent me. Shadowy men burned the magistrate's home to the ground and left me to take the blame.

The second was in a back alley in the fallen city of Ryoko Owari. The man's name was Koda; he told me so just before he drew his wicked farmer's blade. Only Kennô saved my life on that day. I severed Koda's head and left him to rot among the garbage. No one would notice another corpse in the City of Stories.

My third encounter was the strangest of all.

In the village of Nanashi Mura, the magistrates set their snares. I peered out the window of the shoddy inn where I rested to find a squad of magistrates marching into the village. That blasted Miya was at the head. I do not know how he finds me, but he never fails. I should have known better. A hare who sits still too long is prey. I grasped Kennô in both hands and prepared to meet my doom.

Then I saw the most curious thing.

A shabby little man in the garb of a trader led the samurai away, claiming loudly that he knew where they could catch the "Usagi fugitive." I thought him mad at first, but as he led the hunters off into the dark tangle of forest, he glanced over his shoulder directly at my position. With a wink and a smile, he led the magistrates away, mouthing a single word as he departed.

"Run."

He was not there by chance, I can tell you.

Still, I took his advice. Even with his help, I barely escaped Katsu's clutches. The Miya is clever and relentless, and I cannot help but respect him despite my position.

Ever since that day, I wonder. Why did the merchant help me? Am I part of some larger plan? (Do the Kolat wish to torment me or kill me themselves? Is there something larger that I do not understand? (Do I have allies that have not even revealed themselves? It seems almost too much to hope for.

Is this all some sort of damned game?

I pray that I will find the answer.

I pray that I will find you, my sister.

I pray for us all, for I fear that this cannot end well.

— Ozaki





Background

"Only fools and dead men search for secrets. The wise accept what they know."

—Akodo Kage, revered sensei

No one defies the Kolat.
No one escapes the Kolat.
No one defeats the Kolat.
Everyone who challenges the Kolat dies.

The Kolat have worked a long time to plant this reputation in those who know. The Kolat exist solely because of their absolute secrecy. If they were exposed, they would be destroyed. Every time they kill an enemy or wipe out a potential competitor, they risk exposure. It's much simpler if their enemies believe from the start that they cannot win.

Are the Kolat as invincible as they claim? What happens when someone finds a way to escape the Ten Masters?

You're about to find out.

There are two groups of Kolat in this adventure. The true Kolat are not the villains in this adventure. They're not heroes, but they're not the problem. The other group, a splinter faction led by Daidoji Dajan, has rebelled against the true Kolat. Dajan wants what the Kolat want – to rule the Empire. He's just a bit less patient about it. He's pretty sure he knows just how to finish the job. Only a few things stand in the way.

- 1.) The true Kolat
- 2.) Usagi Ozaki
- 3.) The player characters

• In Act One, To Hunt a Hare, the party embarks on a search for the fugitive Hare, Ozaki. Their quest may lead to the heart of the once-proud land of the Scorpions, or through the gloomy forests of the Toritaka.

• In Act Two, Gang War, the player characters catch up with Ozaki in time to become trapped in a village torn apart by Kolat manipulations.

• In Act Three, the player characters confront the rebel Kolat Daidoji Dajan. In order to stop Dajan's diabolical plan they'll need luck, skill, and a bit of help...

A Quick Word About the Kolat

"Conspiracy is stronger than any magic."

—Isawa Korekado, shugenja

What are the Kolat? As presented in The Merchant's Guide to Rokugan, the Kolat are an ancient organization dedicated to casting down the samurai caste. They have a very long-term view, concentrating upon slow accumulation of influence and secrecy. They utilize extortion, smuggling, and assassination, but also hold a great deal of power in legitimate business. A Kolat businessman doesn't have to worry about preserving secrets if he operates within the law. Legitimate businesses make excellent cover for the odd spike of income that results from extortion or robbery. The Kolat obey the law whenever possible, and when that doesn't work, they change the law. If it takes a long time, so be it. The Kolat are very subtle, and very patient. They don't like making waves, which is one of the reasons why Daidoji Dajan angers them.

At a glance, the Kolat don't seem much different from your typical criminal organization, but there are two important things that separate a Kolat from typical gangsters, spies, or Scorpions.

1.) Heresy – The Kolat want to cast down the kami and abolish the samurai. In a world where the kami are your ancestors and guide your every action, the very idea is insane! The Kolat maintain that their motives are pure. They remember the world before the kami. Mortal man does not need divine puppeteers controlling his actions. The Kolat know exactly how dangerous these ideas are, so they keep their religious opinions to themselves. They believe that their goals will, in the end, redeem their actions. The ends will justify the means, for those ends are just and cannot be denied.

2.) The Oni's Eye – The Ten Masters possess one of the most powerful nemuranai in Rokugan. It is a great crystal that can spy on any location and produce tears which the Masters use to monitor agents in the field. The Oni's Eye gives the Kolat unmatched communication, organization, and espionage capabilities. They would not exist without it. The Masters believe it is infallible, that no one can hide from its gaze.

They are wrong.