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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the fans of Legend of the Five Rings, who have been with us for years or days, who travel to major events or never leave their town. You all make Rokugan what is today, and we thank you.

The Jade Championship

By Shawn Carman

The Emerald Championship grounds, two months ago...

The largest of the many Imperial tents was normally abuzz with activity, and had been for more than a week as the Emerald Championship had begun to take shape. Now that the final match had concluded and the Championship was ostensibly at an end, the clamor within had calmed somewhat, but there were still more than a dozen young Otomo and Miya scurrying here and there, handling the hundreds of bureaucratic tasks that had arisen from the match. The stoic Seppun guardsmen at the door looked on impassively, bowing sharply as the tent's flap opened suddenly.

Otomo Hoketuhime, Lady of the Otomo, entered the tent, her face completely devoid of any expression whatsoever. On her heels was Miya Shoin, the Imperial Herald, whose face bore a hint of concern, although over what was not certain. Hoketuhime stood motionless for a moment, then spoke. "Leave us, please."

Everyone in the tent froze, perhaps recognizing the enormity of their lady's displeasure despite her tone and appearance. Then, with great haste, they all slipped out the front of the tent, leaving the two Imperial daimyo together in silence. Shoin said nothing, simply waiting.

"How did this happen, Shoin?" Hoketuhime asked quietly.

"The rules that govern the tournament are quite clear," Shoin offered. "Nothing that happened was in violation of our traditions."

"Kakita Noritoshi should have been the victor. Any fool can see that," she replied. Her tone had become icy. "And now how do we proceed? With a creature like Jimen serving as the Emerald Champion? Preposterous!"

Shoin winced at her tone. "We have little choice, my lady. We discussed this possibility some time ago, when the plans for the Championship were in their earliest stages..."

"We discussed nothing of the sort," she cut him off. "The pos-

sibility of some Lion or Unicorn, perhaps, but this? A possibility of this sort was never even entertained. It was simply too... too ridiculous to contemplate!"

The Herald nodded. "It certainly seems that way, and yet it has come to pass. There is little we can do to mitigate the effects, I fear."

"Do you know Shosuro Jimen?" Hoketuhime asked. "He is a predator. An animal. Everything said in his presence is stored and used as a weapon. Some say he is Paneki's personal assassin as well."

Shoin said nothing. He could not remember ever hearing Hoketuhime speaking with such vitriol.

"Very well, then." As quickly as her anger had appeared, it seemed to dissipate like fog in the sunlight. "We will simply need to create another Champion to ensure Jimen's influence in the courts is not altogether unopposed. A Crane would be ideal, of course. Their outlook mirrors our own quite nicely."

Shoin frowned. She could not mean another Emerald Champion, for to even entertain such a thought was anathema to one of Imperial blood. "You mean a Jade Champion, my lady?"

"Begin preparations immediately," she ordered. "We will convene in two months' time."

He grimaced. That was scarcely enough time to organize even a moderately sized tournament, much less something with the size and requirements of the Jade Championship. But of course he had no choice in the matter. It simply would be done, regardless of whatever hardships were involved. "I will see to it at once, my lady," he said, bowing.

The Estate of the Emerald Champion, Month of the Dog, year 1169

The tournament would not yet begin for another two days, Shoin mused, and already the representatives from the Great Clans had begun to arrive. The first attendees had come shortly after dawn, and were relatively few in number. As the day had progressed, however, they had begun to arrive more frequently and in larger

groups, sometimes dozens at a time, sometimes even entire caravans of hundreds. He had known this would be the result, of course; ever since the unpleasantness at the Emerald Championship, he had looked toward the Jade Championship with a sense of impending doom. He hoped that he would be proven incorrect, but he now wished nothing so much but that he had been more adamant in trying to convince lady Hoketuhime this was not a good idea.

As if on cue, the lady of the Otomo emerged onto the balcony, her wispy white hair billowing slightly in the cold wind. At her side, as was the norm in the past few days, was the familiar form of the new Emerald Champion, Shosuro Jimen. Jimen appeared much as he had prior to his victory, clad in beautiful Scorpion robes, his face concealed by an intricate mempo. The difference, however, was that he had replaced his previous, rather disturbing mask for the mask that was part of the Emerald Armor. He had inherited it as part of his new station, and had begun making use of it almost immediately. Despite its familiarity, Shoin found it as disturbing as Jimen's previous mask, perhaps even more so. "Good morning, my lady," Shoin said. "My lord." He bowed deeply to both.

"Good morning, old friend," Hoketuhime said, favoring him with one of her rare genuine smiles. "How does the day find you?"

"Well, thank you, my lady," he answered. He favored the Emerald Champion with a wan smile. "I fear your hospitality will be tested more than we expected, Jimen-sama. The number of spectators we anticipated was exceeded some hours ago, and they continue to arrive in force."

"Excellent," Jimen said. "What better opportunity to offer the Great Clans my humble hospitality and prove to them that their interests are mine? I must again offer my sincerest thanks to you both for allowing me to serve as the host of such an auspicious event. I feel as if I have been favored by the Heavens themselves."

For the briefest of moments, Shoin believed that he saw a flicker of irritation cross Hoketuhime's features. But of course that was not possible, for in all the years he had served alongside her,