

Legend  
of the  
Five Rings™



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The  
Record  
of  
Eihi

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DAVID  
ANNANDALE



**SHADOWVEIL**  
— Legend of the Five Rings —

# The Record of Eihri

**T**O THE SOUTH OF ROKUGAN LIE THE Shadowlands, a blighted realm born of a fallen god's hatred and torment. For a thousand years, its denizens have assailed the Emerald Empire.

At the heart of the Shadowlands lies the Festering Pit, a rift between the Mortal Realm and the Realm of Torment. From this fissure, corruption seeps into the land, twisting the very earth, air, water, and spirits. When it first opened, all nearby living things were destroyed or twisted into foul, unnatural forms. In the centuries since, demons and monstrosities have spewed forth from the pit to wreak misery and destruction.

Mortals who dare step foot in this forsaken domain must guard against the spiritual sickness known as the Shadowlands Taint, which can poison even the noblest hero's body, mind, and soul. Those who fall here are doomed to rise again, their corpses puppeted by evil spirits and vengeful ghosts.

Many have ventured beyond the vast Kaiu Wall that protects Rokugan from the Shadowlands, but few have returned. Those who do are never the same...

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# SHADOWVEIL

Legend of the Five Rings

## The Record of Eihi

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# PART II

The Lies of the Land

**Y**ASUKI TAKA PAUSED IN HIS READING OF THE journal to drink from the tea that a servant had brought for him. The committee members, an unmoved audience of three behind the low table, took the opportunity to show him how little headway he had made.

“Goblins,” said Otomo Meiko, her tone dry and unimpressed.

Miya Jiyuna picked up on the cue and ran with it. “Hardly a force to threaten the Emerald Throne,” she sniffed. “Does the Crab Clan think we are so easily frightened?”

Seppun Fubatsu said nothing. He just smiled, his expression condescending and stopping short of being an insult.

“The Crab Clan does not think anyone in the Imperial Palace is easily frightened,” Taka said with a sly smile. He spoke calmly, taking no baits. “It is my hope, though, that the other details Eihi records have not escaped the notice of the committee.”

“They have not,” Meiko said. Her two subordinates nodded.

“I would also remind you,” said Taka, “that we have recovered this record, but not its author.”

After a pause, Meiko said, "We will bear that in mind."

That felt like progress, however slight, Taka decided.

"You may continue," said Meiko.

Taka gave a short bow, set down his tea, and continued to read his next chosen passage.





We have learned new things about this land. It may be dead, but it is also a liar. Distances are an illusion, never to be trusted.

We came to this realization early. We struck camp with the coming of dawn, eager to be away from the crowding, twisted stone formations that stretched in every direction, presenting their thicket as endless to our limited perspective. None of us had slept well during the night, and all the watches had been disturbed by the constant sense of hostile movement at the edge of visibility.

All the same, we headed off with a sense of optimism. Our walk was steady and quick, and it was daylight again, or at least as close to daylight as seems to be possible in the Shadowlands. And before we had ended our march last night, we had caught glimpses of what seemed to be a forest not too far from where we were. We welcomed the prospect of bidding farewell to these twisted spires of stone.

But the farewell did not come as we had expected. We walked for hours, and the spines and fangs and claws of rock refused to release us. They gathered closer, turning the weak dawn into a glowering twilight.

"I don't understand," said Rekal. "We saw the end of this region yesterday evening. How can we not even catch a glimpse of it any longer?"

"Sight or its absence does not change the fact of existence," Ichidō told her. He spoke as a mentor, and Reikai relaxed for a moment.

Her tension returned a moment later, though, when Nagiko asked, "Are we sure we are going the way we intended last night? We have no landmarks to guide us."



Jchidō shot her a glare. Doubts from a senior samurai were not welcome. But I wondered the same thing. The question had to be asked.

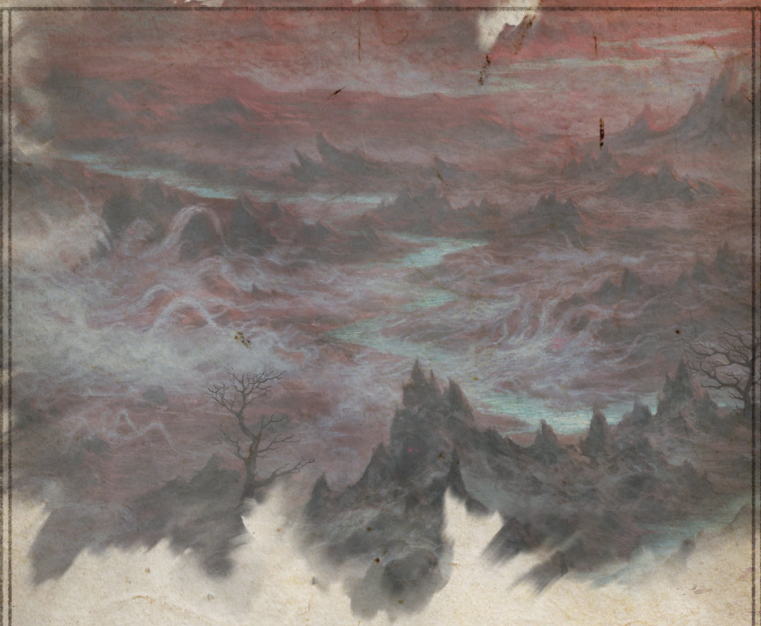
"The slope marks the way," Jchidō said. "We have been descending since we entered this region, and the descent will take us out of it."

He strode off with confidence. We followed, though Sosuta and I exchanged a glance. The land did slope down here, but we had walked along level portions, too. Perhaps Jchidō had been able to detect a consistent direction to the descents that we had not.

The formations pressed in harder on us as we moved forward. Their twisted shapes leaned in toward each other, almost connecting, casting more shadows until we could barely see more than a few yards ahead. Perhaps that was why we did not realize the change. I can think of no other explanation.

Sosuta noticed first. "Are we among trees?" he asked in alarmed wonder.

We stopped and took in our surroundings. Dark tree trunks had replaced the thorns of stone. Thick foliage hid the sky from us. I had been stepping carefully over uneven, rocky beds, but now, I realized, I negotiated roots that spread over the path like serpents. A carpet of dead leaves crackled beneath our feet.



How did we not see?

As we looked around, the way forward became even less clear than it had been before. Faint paths twisted away between the trees in every direction. The land rose and fell wherever we looked.

"I can't see where we came from," I said, burying panic. All trace of the stone formations had vanished. There was nothing but forest about us.

How did it happen?

"We must take care not to get lost," said Nagiko. The edge in her tone implied she thought we already were. But even she did not come right out and state it.

"We will mark our way," Ichidō said. He slashed at the nearest trunk with his knife. He carved out a wedge-shaped wound in the bark, pointing in the direction we had been going. "This is the sign of our path and of our passage," he concluded.

We set off again. Deeper into the woods? It felt that way. The shadows become more abyssal the further we journeyed, more fluid. Like the night before, they danced, but always caught out of the corner of my eyes. I looked sharply to the left and right, alert for attack, my attention always pulled by the lying darkness.

When would the landscape shift again? How had that been possible?

I saw the jerking head movements of the others, and knew I was not alone. I did not know whether to feel comforted by that fact or not.

"What do you see?" I asked Gosuta.

"The shadows in the trees," he said, looking up. "I keep thinking I see things leaping from branch to branch, keeping pace with us."

I had not seen anything that high up. When I raised my gaze, the brush, as if jealous for my attention, writhed with threat and teeth. It stilled when it pulled my eyes back down to focus on it. "You see nothing down below?" I asked Gosuta.

"No, nothing."

The others overheard us. We discussed and realized we all saw different movements. They sometimes appeared to overlap, but never consistently, and could never be seen directly.

"More deception," said Jchidō. "The land seeks to wear us down with empty threats. Show it no weakness." He slashed at another tree as if to underscore his defiance.

I could not help myself. "But how will we know when the threat is real?" I asked.



"When it does not melt away," Jchidō answered with a snap of displeasure.

He was right, of course, but the constant, twitchy alertness wore me down. The day, barely worthy of the name, passed away into night, and as the darkness came down on us, the flows of the shadows became more insistent and mocking.

"We cannot make camp here," said Nagiko, touching Jchidō's arm.

Jchidō sighed and agreed, "No, we can't."

We carried lanterns to light our way. They kept us from tripping over roots, but they also made the darkness seem closer, if that was possible, and more alive with strange rippling, like a stream. There would be no sleep for anyone if we stopped. "We will rest at dawn," Jchidō continued, "or when we leave these accursed woods."

I hoped against hope that we would reach an open area first. We were exhausted, and I regarded the prospect of marching through the night with dread. Staying where we were, though, would be even worse.

On we went, on and on, the shadows tormenting us with every step. I began to see what Gosuta had described in the boughs, but never at the same moment or in the same place that he did. Things slipped and danced between the

branches. They hung down, waving like silk veils in the wind, though no breeze stirred the trees.

Nothing ever attacked us directly, yet the assault of the dark was relentless. Fatigue impaired my judgement. I sensed a lunge at my face, and I struck out. My blade clashed uselessly against a tree trunk. I stood motionless for a moment, stunned by the violent jar against my arm. I stared, mouth open, at the tree, bracing myself for its retaliation.

"Eihi?" Gosuta touched my shoulder.

I jumped.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

I came back to myself. "Yes," I said. I mentally chastised myself. The tree remained motionless. It was only a tree. It was only a tree. "Yes," I repeated, more firmly, insisting on that truth.

Gosuta and I walked closely together for the rest of the night, our shoulders brushing, that reassuring contact helping to keep us grounded and sane.

I could not tell how close to dawn we were. The night had become endless. Its shadows devoured time. The woods would never release us from their grasp.

But then they did, in a fashion. The ground dropped abruptly before us. Any steeper and it would have been a cliff. No trees grew on the bank, and though clouds



covered the moon, its light still bathed the land with a weak, cold silver. The darkness of night had begun to lift. Dawn was not far off. We could see to the bottom of the hill, where more trees spread out, seemingly all the way to the horizon.

In the center of the woods below, though, there was something different. We saw a grove where the trees did not appear to coil with each other into tangling gnarled claws of branches. They stood tall and green, instead. Lanterns hung from them, lighting the way into the grove. As we looked down, another party of samurai disappeared down the path between the lanterns.

"We aren't alone," Reikai breathed.

Such an expression of relief would have shamed us when we first set out on this expedition. Now, none of us could deny that we felt the same.

"I didn't get a good look at them," said Sosuta. "What clan were they from?"

None of us had been able to tell.

"Most likely Crab Clan," said Ichidō. His certainty sounded hollow.

"That grove looks... untainted," I said, barely able to believe in the miracle after having been trapped in that unholy forest.

"A refuge?" said Reikai. "In the Shadowlands?"

"Is that possible?" questioned Nagiko, her skepticism tempered for once by the need to hope.

"We'll soon see," said Ichidō. "At worst, we will make camp on this slope."

We worked our way down to the base of the hill and the entrance of the grove. The lanterns were paper, their delicacy the most extraordinary thing I had seen yet in the Shadowlands because they had so little right to exist. Their soft light beckoned us forward. The air within the grove was cool and moist, a balm after the dry cruelty we had been breathing since arriving on this side of the Wall.

An oasis of sanctity. That was what we had before us. I could have wept.

We took a few steps into the grove.

Dawn broke then, and the first light of true day brushed against the lanterns.

Except, they were not lanterns.

Severed heads dangled by their hair from the branches. Some had been reduced to skulls. Others still bore flesh, rotting or leathered. Faces sagged with expressions relaying the end of all hope. The air turned foul, an exhalation from the depths of Jigoku.

And something stirred. We had barely stepped more than a few feet into the grove, but we all felt the thrum vibrating our souls, the warning that we had touched the



outer edge of a web belonging to a huge evil. And the predator sensed our presence.

We fled. We knew we could not fight what entity had stirred in the same way we knew we could not chop down a mountain. We left the grove behind and scrambled away back along the slope. We ran without thought or plan, and we only stopped when exhaustion brought us down.

We are resting for now, though we have not dared start a fire. We are huddled together on this barren slope.

"We should not have come here."

Rekat's words. She is right. We all want to leave the Shadowlands.

But we do not know how. We do not know where we are. We cannot tell where the Wall might lie.

We should not have come here. We should not have come here. We should not have come here.



# SHADOWVEIL

Legend of the Five Rings

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