

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

DAVID ANNANDALE





# PART III

*The Hunt in the Green*

**Y**ASUKI TAKA LOOKED UP FROM THE JOURNAL. The three members of the committee appeared even less impressed than they had earlier. Taka's frustration mounted before they spoke. Were they listening to anything he read? Had they taken in a single word? This was more difficult than some of his more delicate negotiations.

"You are looking at us, Yasuki Taka, as if a point has been made," said Otomo Meiko. "Yet I am at a loss to see what it might be."

*If you cannot see the point, then yes, I wager you are often at a loss,* Taka thought.

"The threat here is even less substantial than the goblins," Miya Jiyuna scoffed, as ever waiting for her leader to set the tone of the reactions.

Seppun Fubatsu joined in. "How can the author call herself a samurai? How can any of her companions? Running from trees and their imaginations, pah. Disgraceful."

Meiko gestured with her hand as if Fubatsu's words hung visibly in the air. "If your goal was to horrify us with a display of abandoned duty, then you have achieved it."

He was wrong, Taka realized. *It isn't that they aren't listening. It's worse. They are listening, but not hearing. They decided what their verdict would be before this meeting even began. He would not despair. I have argued and won against traders with less on my side than this journal.*

Meiko went on. "Is this all, then? A litany of cowardice, incompetence, and fantasies? Before you remind us that the author is missing, you have provided more than enough reasons for why that should be, none of which does anything but reflect badly on her."

"She likely tripped and fell off a cliff," Fubatsu muttered.

Is there any point in continuing? Taka wondered. Any point in remaining in this small room, trapped in this hearing?

*Yes. Eihi deserves to have her chronicle heard and remembered. Onward, Taka!*

They wanted him to stop reading and release them from the obligation to listen to the record. He would not grant them that victory.

He would make them listen. He would cling to the hope that somehow, they would hear.

“She did not fall off a cliff,” Taka said. “And shadows in this region can kill. The warriors fled the False Lantern Grove, and that was an act of wisdom, not cowardice.”

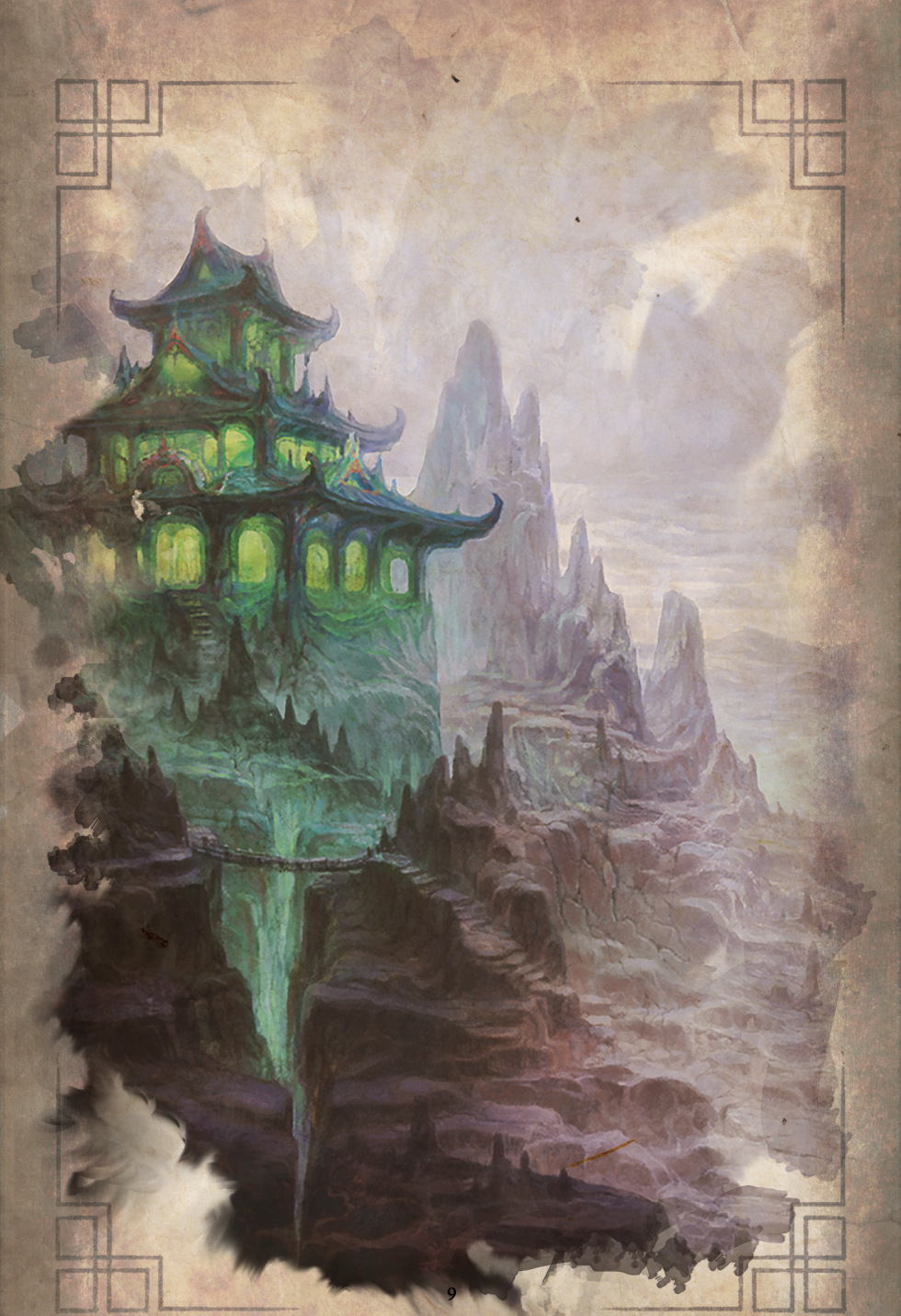
Meiko shrugged. “We do not doubt your word.”

“And I do not doubt the word of Eihi.”

“Let us hear more, then,” said Fubatsu with a smile. “What horrors did they encounter next?”

“Worse than shadows,” Taka replied, and he looked down at Eihi’s writing, ready to speak it out loud.





We rested for a few hours, taking care not to let the new day slip into night before we started our journey again. Time was as treacherous as distance in the Shadowlands. We have learned that. The length of days and nights did not obey the rules that exist on the other side of the Wall. When we broke the poor camp we had made and resumed our march along the barren hillside, it should have been midday. Yet I felt as if twilight were about to overtake us.

We should not have come here. On that, at least, we were all agreed. Even Jchidō showed no desire to forge on. The Shadowlands had defeated us. There was no shame in recognizing that fact. We had come here swathed in arrogance, and we had paid for that error.

We traveled for what seemed like leagues along the barren slope. It bent in and out of itself, and soon there were trees above and below us. At last, after many twists, the crest came into view, and Jchidō directed us to climb upward.

"Is this the way back to the Wall?" Nagiko asked, her words an accusation rather than a question.

"We know there is one," Jchidō replied, and his evasion made my heart sink.

"That is not what I asked," said Nagiko.

After a pause, Jchidō said, "We have traveled

downhill more often than not. We shall then seek the uphill path to leave the Shadowlands. We should be able to see the Wall from a higher point."

There was some truth to what he said, and some logic. But we had learned that logic could not be trusted here, and truth was elusive. And though there had been many descents, we had also changed direction many times.

Sosuta's face mirrored the doubts I felt. Reikai looked at Ichidō with a desperate, brittle hope. She needed to believe he could lead us to the Wall.

Like Nagiko, I did not believe he knew the way. But we had to look, and there had to be a way back. This direction was as good a choice as any other.

At the top of the rise, the land leveled off. Ahead, in the distance, it rose again, the geography uncertain in the endless murk, although I felt that cliffs awaited us in that direction. To the left and right was more of the same, though with dark, grasping woods waiting for us to wander into their clutches once again.

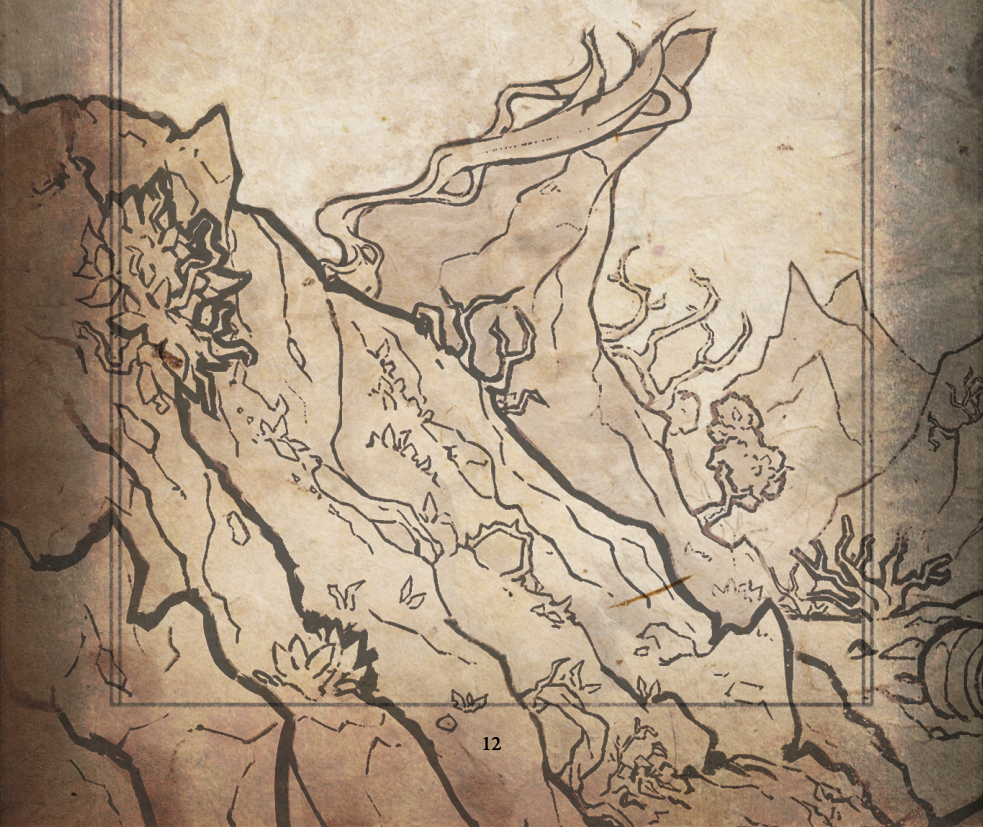
We went forward, and the ground became damp and boggy, and soon we arrived at a great field of reeds. They stood before us like a wall, ten feet tall, blocking out our view of the distant rise of the land. A wind blew over the field as if conjured by the reeds, created by

their waving movements. Their stalks and leaves rubbed against each other, the susurrus hovering at the edge of forming words.

None of us were eager to venture within, the reeds no doubt surrounding us like the forest.

"We are resolute," Ichidō said. "We go forward until we can no longer, or we reach the Wall."

"Forward," said Nagiko. "How will we know that is where we are going once we are in the midst of this?"



"By taking care where we place each step," said Jchidō, as if the solution really were that simple. He marched into the reeds, and we followed.

We had our blades drawn to chop down the reeds, but there was no need. We entered in a slight gap between the stalks, as if they had parted for us. It was not a path, exactly, that few followed, more like a lack of resistance that drew us forward.

At least, we thought it went forward. I paid attention to where I walked, placing each foot directly in front of the other. We all did. But the whispering of the reeds grew more insistent, more insidiously catching at the ear, forcing me to listen, drawing my attention.

Elki.

The reeds called my name. I was sure of it. A breathy, hissing sigh of Eyyyyyy-heeeeeeee at the back of my neck. I whirled around and stopped dead.

"Oh no," I said loudly, bringing the others to a halt.

Bent reeds and trampled soil marked our passage. And our route curved.

"We have not been walking straight," I said.

"Perhaps we..." Jchidō began but trailed off.

Perhaps we... what? Had only just deviated from a straight path?

No. Jchidō would not lie to us, or to himself. My heart sickened as the reality of our situation sank in.

We were lost. Truly lost.

I had already known that in my soul. We had been lost, without realizing it, since before we had reached the forest. But I felt a new visceral sense of being lost, lost. The reeds surrounded us. We could see no more than a few feet into their shadows, and the small patch of sky above us. I found it hard to breathe. The reeds sucked the air away with their presence and their whispers. We would never see an open clearing again.

Enough. I found the calm core at the center of my being, the one strengthened by years of disciplined meditation. My breathing eased, although the sense of enclosure did not diminish.

I heard Gosuta take a breath and knew he had been struggling as I did. Before me, Reka's eyes flicked back and forth. She was closer to the edge of terror than the rest of us. I thought it simply cruel that Jchidō had taken along someone so inexperienced.

Jchidō turned around to face the front of our line, saying nothing, seeking an answer that would never come. Nagiko strode past him, jolting us all into action once again.

"There will be no guidance for us," she said, slashing



at reeds in front of her. Three fell at her feet like vanquished foes. "We must keep moving, and so we will. We can do nothing except strive until we find a way out. If we must cut down every reed in this field, then we shall."

Her determination renewed us all, and we moved on, hacking at the reeds on either side, carving our mark into the enemy land, as we had in the forest. The susurrus responded with anger. The reeds waved in fury, beating at our ears with white noise.

Suddenly, the sounds stopped. The wind dropped. The reeds barely swayed, only a faint ripple dancing across their tops. Anticipation fell across the field. The land held its breath, and so did we.

Ahead of us, Nagiko and Ichidō stopped where they were. "Be on your guard," said Ichidō.

We attacked the reeds around us, clearing a small space, and formed a circle, our blades facing out, ready for the attack.

The scream came at us suddenly, an instant typhoon of agonized rage and hunger. It rushed through the reeds like a typhoon, and we had barely turned in the direction of the shriek when a spectral figure burst upon us. It retained the shape of a human, although all trace of the person it had once been had gone. Spectral, decaying





armor surrounded a withered, skeletal body. A train of vaporous robes trailed behind it. Long black hair writhed in an ethereal wind. In a shriveled, rotting face were black holes instead of eyes, and a mouth filled with pointed teeth was contorted by its howl. Nails long as daggers extended from its hooked fingers.

It flew at Sosuta even as a second shrieking ghost arrived at our left flank. I slashed at the horror's translucent body, and my katana passed through air. But as my blade hit the ground, the ghost acquired a moment of solidity and its nails cut through Sosuta's armor, narrowly missing his throat. He stumbled back and swung his sword through an empty image.

The second ghost fell on the others as the first renewed its attack on Sosuta. I pulled him out of the way. The ghost's nails ripped his cheek open, and his blood splashed across the whispering reeds.

The ghost renewed its attack, pressing us too hard. We could not hit it, but it could bleed us, and it had set its hunger on Sosuta. This kind of horror was unknown to me, too twisted and cruel for any ghosts I'd encountered at home.

"Run!" I ordered him. We blundered in the reeds, sprinting as best we could to get a bit of distance, a

bit of breathing room, a moment to think and prepare a counterattack that we could use against the specter.

The ghost pursued, and it must have been toying with us. It could have caught up in a moment, gliding through vegetation that could not touch it. Its scream followed us, a torment and tormented. I could feel the ghost feeding on our souls from afar.

"When it attacks me," Sosuta said as we ran.

"What?"

"When it attacks me," he panted. "Solid."

I understood. In the moment the ghost made contact with him, we could make contact with it.

Maybe.

We had to try.

We turned then and had time for one shared look of defiance and comradeship, before the ghost was upon us. Its howl buffeted us, a windstorm we leaned into as we let it approach. The ghost reached for Sosuta with both hands, and with our swords raised, we waited as our instinct begged us to fight, letting the enemy strike first.

The ghost plunged its nails into Sosuta's throat as I slashed my katana down. My sword felt as if it were cutting through thick honey. The ghost screamed, in pain this time, and I severed its arms at the elbows as Sosuta's blade rammed through its chest.

The ghost melted away, its wail an echo spiraling into silence.

Sosuta fell, his throat torn open, his life jetting out into the dark.

I shouted in rage at the cruelties of chance. I could do nothing for him except hold him until he choked his last. Until he stilled.

Until he left me alone in the darkness and my grief.



# SHADOWVEIL

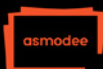
Legend of the Five Rings

## ART CREDITS

Layout, internal design and cover design by Nick Tyler.

## INTERNAL ART

*Part III* by Daria Khlebnikova, Emil Falk & Stefan Ribera,  
Max Bedulenko, and Massimiliano Haematinon Nigro.



VENTURE INTO THE  
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