

Ikoma Shizuka appeared to be waiting very patiently, but in truth his mind was racing and he felt as if his heart might leap from his chest. It was not every day that a man was blessed with the chance to meet his hero. The dust trail to the north indicated that he would be doing that very thing in a matter of moments, and all the efforts and composure he had made over the past few days now seemed utterly pointless. He stood quietly, waiting, and in a matter of a few minutes, a pair of riders were pulling their horses up to stop near him. "Greetings, kinsmen," he called out, as casually as he could muster. "Welcome to the Righteous Path." He paused for a moment. "Or in your case, Miwa-san, I should say welcome back."

The young messenger bowed as she dismounted. "Thank you, Shizuka-san," she said. "May I present the venerable Ikoma Ayumu?"

Shizuka looked at the man. He had imagined him older, larger, but he seemed a simple man, his face lined with age. "Welcome, Ayumu-sama," he said, bowing deeply. "It is an incredible honor."

"Thank you, cousin," Ayumu replied. "The honor is mine."

"May I entrust Ayumu-sama to your care, Shizuka? I have a report to make to lady Miko as soon as possible."

"Of course," Shizuka said. "It would be a great pleasure." He watched as the messenger left. "I trust your trip to the Colonies was not overly difficult," he said. "I must apologize for our

inability to receive you at the embassy in the Second City. There are... difficulties."

"I witnessed them firsthand," Ayumu said. "The situation is completely unpleasant, but these are the times in which we find ourselves. It is beyond my ability to influence, and so I must instead attend to the matter that brought me to the Colonies in the first place."

Shizuka looked at the much older man carefully. He did not appear his age, although his face was lined with years and worry. There was something curious about the way he held one of his arms, but then of course the scout knew that the arm was in fact missing, and that only an elaborate false limb allowed him to wear his old but celebrated armor. "It is not my place of course, my lord, but I would be honored to serve you in any possible way in the execution of this task, whatever it may be. It is my duty as a Lion, and as an Ikoma."

The older man smiled. "Thank you, Shizuka. I am not the young man I once was. I graciously accept."

The scout's heart soared, and he bowed. "How may I be of service?"

Ayumu sighed. His hands played across a small pendant that he wore. "Do you know what this is?" He asked. "Jade. A gift from the Kuni. On the day they gave it to me, I swore that I would take my own life on the day it first burned my skin."

Shizuka frowned. "I have heard some... rumors... concerning your acts of valor and the consequences thereof."

"They are likely true," Ayumu admitted. "My soul bears the feather's touch of Jigoku. My discipline, and a healthy regiment of Jade Petal Tea, has kept it dormant for a great many years, but I know it is there. One day, I will be pushed too far, or wounded too greatly, and it will grow. That will be the end of me, for I will not live as a stain upon the Lion's honor."

"Of course," Shizuka said. What valor! What courage!

"I am the guardian of terrible things," Ayumu continued. "Things I took from a fallen warrior and swore to protect from the darkness forever. I have done so for many years now. Seven times, the darkness has tried to take them from me, and seven times I have turned them away. But I grow older now, and I must acknowledge my limitations. A time will come when I can no longer defend them. Perhaps that time has come already, I am not certain. But when that day comes, another must be ready to stand in my place. It is my duty to ensure that happens, so that the darkness can never reclaim its accursed prize." He looked to the young scout. "That is the reason I have come to the Colonies, young Shizuka. I must find a replacement to stand guard over evil, so that honor will forever be victorious."

Shizuka felt in awe of this man, but something troubled him. "Are the items you safeguard adequately protected in the Empire while you are here, my lord?"

Ayumu looked to the packhorse that rode behind his mount. "No," he said. "They are not."

— New Rules and Notes on Specific Cards —

Stalwart is a new keyword with rules implications. While a Personality has Stalwart, negate his first bowing each turn from effects of other players' cards. If a non-Stalwart Personality gains Stalwart, the "first bowing" is counted from after the point when he gained the keyword.

Family names: The following rule of thumb applies to all Emperor-legal cards: If the first word in a Personality's two-word title is not an English word such as "The" or "Master", and the Personality has a Clan alignment or a keyword ending in "Clan," that word is the Personality's family name. For formats using older cards, a complete list of legal family names will be posted to the Family

Name entry under http://rules.l5r.com/EE_Glossary_F.

Notes on Specific Cards

Blood Wave, Spiritual Coalescence: The destroyed Personality's Force is counted after he's destroyed, so will not include item bonuses.

Earth's Protection: You do not get the option to apply a bonus to your province strength if you are defending.

In The Right: "Up to half your Courtier's Chi rounded down" refers to the number of attacking cards you may target.

Muramoto Kojinrue: His second trait does not overcome the rule that abilities on bowed cards may not be used.

Path To Inner Peace: This is not a most recent printing of the old card, "The Path to Inner Peace" (Forbidden Knowledge). Today's Tao recognizes more than just one path there.

Sycophants: The second use is not granted to abilities that, for example, say they may be used once per phase, battle, or game.

The Tachikaze: You may inspect your own face-down cards under this card at any time, by the rules.

Truce: This can pay for a Personality who has your Clan alignment and another Clan alignment.