

*Trusted Counselor,*

*The transformation of the open plains as leaves fall and the northern winds blow has always brought me joy. Even as the land grows harsh, we come together at the fireside and recall our bonds of fellowship, remembering that we are the children of the wind. As the Lion continue to claim grievances against us, Utaku Kamoko leads the riders of the Higashi Kaze Company south along the Three Sides River to keep our aggressive neighbors safely out of our lands. They know they cannot vanquish us while we ride free, and so they attempt to lure us into village squares and walled courtyards. Were it not for our allies the Crane, I suspect the Akodo would gladly send their full might across the river, thinking we could not drive off their full legions. Fortunately, our friendship holds strong, the Crane refuse to yield, and the Lion are restrained.*

*To safeguard the village that Ikoma Anakazu so brazenly called his own, I have appointed Moto Juro as the steward of Hisu Mori Toride. He is a cunning tactician who will give no quarter in a fight, yet I know that he will be far happier when his duty no longer demands of him such violence. His passion for justice and understanding will without doubt guide the village toward a prosperous future.*

*Yet I am pained by the news that the courteous Ide Tadaji sends from his station at Otosan Uchi. Even after many months of loyal service, our beloved daughter Iuchi Shahai remains locked away in the Forbidden City beyond the reach of our diplomats and mediators. While she has been granted the honor of educating the greatest of the Emperor's guards, no bird should be kept caged away from the reach of her own family. I entrust to you a letter from her father, that you ride swiftly for the Imperial Capital and find the means by which you can deliver it to her—and to her alone. Her father wants her to know that she has not been abandoned at the capital.*

*While you traverse the blessed streets that line Seppun Hill, you will also likely encounter the newest passion of the court. His Majesty's Ancestral Sword will soon be given to the clan he trusts most to keep it safe. While I expect that to be the Scorpion, given the confidence that the Hantei shares with the Lord and Lady Bayushi, it would be to our benefit if it was bestowed upon the Crane. Should the subject arise while you are there, do not restrain your praise for the sons and daughters of Doji-no-Kami.*

*When the followers of Lady Shinjo set out into the unknown, they knew not the obstacles they would face, yet their companionship and their courage saw them through. I know you will be the same, for you too are of the Unicorn.*

*Shinjo Altansarnai,*

*Seeker of the Setting Sun, Khan of Khans, Mistress of the Five Winds,*

*Daimyō of the Shinjo, and Champion of the Unicorn Clan*