

Esteemed Samurai of the Glorious Phoenix Clan,

It is my hope that the shape of this letter, that of a singing cricket, provided you with some amusement. It was folded by the skilled hands of my new advisor, the honorable Asako Maezawa, to grant a moment free from worldly concerns. I am told such things ensure the health of the spirit. Naturally, if any folds were not crisp, or portions of the letter arrived torn, then be advised that this letter was prematurely opened.

I have much to say. As you likely have guessed, the security of the clan relies on your discretion in the following matters.

You may have heard rumors of the Master of Void's disappearance and taken steps to quell them. I write to inform you that those rumors are true. Isawa Ujina is gone. The council plans to announce this to the clan after further investigation, but I am telling you now so that you can control any unseemly reactions. Ujina-sama was beloved by all who knew him, but he would want us to continue on. This is what my beating heart insists.

As agreed when she came of age, the honorable Akodo Kaede has declined to inherit her father's seat. I have yet to speak with her regarding her father's wishes, but for now, it is the will of the Elemental Council that the Void seat remain vacant. This may leave us vulnerable, so let us be even more vigilant.

While we cannot know why Ujina-sama has vanished, we have some theories. Some believe this is Unicorn retaliation for the festival incident. The one known as Iuchi Shahai, who dwells in the same city as did Ujina-sama, has made her feelings toward us very clear. This relates to the purpose of this letter.

I know you are stretched thin, honored servant of the Phoenix. As it was when we petitioned the throne regarding the Unicorn's meishōdō traditions, our requests for Imperial-sanctioned access to Toshi Ranbo fell on deaf ears. The current stewards of the city care little for our concerns; to them, the imbalance of the land is a fight on the other side of the river. It may seem wrong to abandon our efforts toward these ends. But this is a greater matter, and chasing two hares means you won't catch either.



I need you to find the Master of Earth. With the Void seat vacant, and Isawa Atsuko needed to protect the initiates of Starry Heaven Sanctuary, there are only three masters on the council, and they need their fourth. Enclosed with this letter are traveling papers permitting passage to the last place Tadaka claimed to go: a rural village in Kuni lands. I wish I could tell you more, but he has not written in some time, and I cannot be sure my own letters have reached him. He will probably resist, insisting upon the importance of his work. When he does, please show him the enclosed seal of the council. That should convince even him. And if it is possible, please write back when you have found him. I would be grateful.

Fallen blossoms will not return to the branch. Time is fleeting. Leave as soon as you can. And kindly destroy this letter.

Shiba Tsukune,

*The Soul of Shiba, Protector of the Council, Keeper of the Tao,
Daimyō of the Shiba, and Champion of the Phoenix Clan*

