

*Most Honorable Samurai of the Lion Clan,*

*I write to you on behalf of our Champion, Akodo-ue, whose service to the Emperor continues to require his undivided attention. He attends to his duties as Emerald Champion with the appropriate neutrality, having appointed the Honest Scorpion, Bayushi Yojiro, as Chief Magistrate of Toshi Ranbo and elevating the wise and strong Kitsu Chiemi as the next commander of the Imperial Legions. Few will now doubt the righteous strength of the Emperor's Right Hand, though the Lion Clan's armies will miss Chiemi's tactical brilliance as we stand upon the brink of war.*

*Despite our Champion's diplomacy, the warmongering of the Unicorn Clan has continued to escalate. Even as they celebrate their conquest of Hisu Mori Mura, their hordes continue to grow. We must keep our armies mustered to oppose them. When the Unicorn ride to battle, and I have no doubt that they will, we shall strike back with a fierce roar and strike fear into the hearts of oathbreakers such as they. Fear not that we should be spread thin by our ongoing conflicts against Doji Hotaru on the Osari Plains: the honorable Matsu Tsuko has gathered her forces and will soon avenge the death of the great Akodo Arasou, striking a blow to the Crane that shall force them to retreat from the field of battle.*

*Do not hold grievance with Champion Toturi for attending to the needs of the Empire while our clan struggles to uphold the Emperor's peace. He is faced with countless cunning enemies in the Imperial Court, and even his inviolate honor is not enough to draw the Emperor's ear away from the Scorpions who surround His Excellency. As Toturi must fight his battles, so too must we: look now to the command of your generals and your daimyō. We must maintain our pride and unity in these difficult times, for even Heaven could not say when Toturi's duties as Emerald Champion will command less of him.*

*I have been informed by Seppun Michiko-sama that the Emperor shall soon draw upon tradition and put the Ancestral Sword of the Hantei under the care of one of the clans until the Crown Prince is ready to ascend the throne. Despite our ancestral duty to serve the Emperor as his military Right Hand, I am certain that the whispers of those Scorpion, Crane, and Phoenix who frequent the court have given him reason to consider their clans better suited than our own in this endeavor. If the Son of Heaven sees fit to bestow that honor upon one of those clans, we must ensure that the sword's stewardship goes to our allies among the Phoenix, and not to the scheming Scorpion or Crane. Where you can identify the clefts of their armor, whether in the court or on the field, I call upon you as loyal servants of the Lion to strike out and disable the operations of these two rival clans. By the strength of our honor and the courage of our samurai, the Lion Clan shall guide the Empire towards a righteous future!*

*Your humble advisor,*

*Ikoma Ujiaki*

*Honorable Ambassador to the Imperial Court*