

THE JOURNAL OF
YOGO TANAKA

田 余
中 吳



3 Hare

A new journal to begin the new year.

*Spring's light dawns
Slicing the winter clouds
What truth will be found?*

I confess I used to think the Kitsuki were wasting their time with their famous journals, writing down entire conversations word-for-word and recording every thought that passed through their heads. Like writing a pillow-book, really, not a magistrate's journal at all! Still, as the years go by I find my memory has begun to fade. A common complaint for those beyond the age of retirement, or so I am told. Perhaps I should give in, follow tradition, and shave my head, but I have to confess I would miss the challenge and stimulation of fulfilling my duties. When I am at work, digging out the truth, uncovering our enemies, I feel as young as the day I passed my gempukku.

As for the matter of Isawa K_____ and his peculiar associations, it appears the entire matter has been hushed up quite nicely. K_____ has retired to a life of contemplation and the monks will see to it that he drinks his tea. His unfortunate "allies," of course, have been dealt with, leaving nothing behind to disrupt the Empire's harmony.

At the moment, no specific duties require my attention, either officially or in my true capacity. I admit I find such boredom easier to endure than in my younger days.

I have heard some rumors of bandit trouble in the Mantis territories to the south. Such incidents sometimes hide darker realities, and if nothing else it will give me something to while away the days.

18 Hare

Today I met Taisa J____, whose squadron of Imperial Legionnaires has been sent to deal with the bandit trouble in this province. J____ is everything one would expect from a taisa in the Imperial Legions... which is to say, strict, honorable, brave, and utterly unimaginative. I fear he will have a difficult time solving these problems if he does not have assistance.

Help will probably not be forthcoming from Lord G____. The bandits appear to be cleverly focusing their attacks on the caravans of other clans' merchants passing through his lands, while leaving the Mantis caravans untouched. Further, my associate within the court has picked up clues suggesting that Lord G____ may be facing blackmail as well. This is most disturbing. What could bandits know that would give them influence over a lord? And how are they able to contact him?

It seems I was wise to come here. Even an old fox still knows a few tricks!

*Subtle truths hide
Behind a wall of smiles
All men have a price*

6 Dragon

I confess disappointment. After all my efforts, the bandit chief escaped Taisa J____'s raid. Really, even for such a strict young man he seems to almost court failure like a lover! Surely I was not that foolish even in my earliest youth.

Of course, the whole tiresome situation is compounded by Lord G____'s sudden remorseful seppuku, which was not at all what I was hoping for when I arranged for him to learn that I knew about his personal indiscretions. So much for learning how the bandits delivered their blackmail! It is enough to make one lose one's face.

The whole matter leaves me deeply uneasy. And who was the prospective customer for the valuable goods the bandits stole? The crystal items are especially troubling in this regard. Theft of such precious goods is never to be taken lightly, of course, but the bandits went out of their way to target the caravan carrying those goods, and through my own contacts I happen to know those particular items were in fact relics of crysteel, brought back from the Burning Sands by our cousins three generations ago. Who could the bandits possibly have planned to sell such artifacts to?

I've had to go out tonight and purchase a new writing brush after I crushed the last one in an excess of frustration.

*Fools and oxen
Trample all before them
Sleep hides like a thief*

8 Dragon

Things look slightly better than they did two nights ago. And what a disappointing poem! Really, even at my age I should be able to do better than that.

Taisa J_____ does not seem to care whether the bandit chief's sudden flight was a coincidence or whether he received some warning of his raid. Regardless, he believes the situation is fully resolved. However, at my urging he arranged for me to question the captured bandits prior to their execution. The fools claimed their chief was the one who met with their sponsor, and claimed he left shortly before our raid on a journey to Mura Sabishii Toshi. It seems that is where he first met his mysterious benefactor, before he recruited these cretins to serve as his muscle and steel.

I intend to travel there next. If nothing else, perhaps the Crane authorities may be more helpful than the late and unlamented Lord G_____. Unfortunately, Taisa J_____ believes the investigation is complete with the break-up of the gang, so I will need to arrange a new guard. Perhaps a ronin, if any suitable men can be found. I have never hired one before, but preference must bow before duty.

25 Dragon

Well, I have found my ronin – a woman, as it turns out, not a man. She calls herself “Needle,” with the kanji for a delicate lady’s sewing needle, but there is nothing delicate about her. Quite the harsh and unpleasant woman – I started to write “young woman,” but in truth I do not know her age, and with her rough hands and tanned skin she could as easily be forty as twenty. Still, she does seem to know her way around a sword, and the local representative of the Consortium assures me she can be trusted to carry out her contracts.

I expected Needle to also have contacts among the lower castes of Mura Sabishii Toshi, which I will need to question if I am to track down that tiresome bandit chief. Somewhat to my surprise, she did not – perhaps even ronin have standards. In fact she seemed rather offended at the suggestion that she might know such people. How in the name of the kami does such a crude and ugly creature acquire such high standards?

I shall have to meet with the Consortium again and see what they might know.

*Coiled steel spring
Wrapped in hoari of rust
Who knows its strength?*

15 *Serpent*

I meet tomorrow with lord Doji I____, who has charge of this city, to submit my request for assistance from the city guard in arresting the bandit. At least, I am fairly certain the man called “Akira” who is working at the Trading Council’s warehouse is the same bandit I have sought for the last month. Naturally the whole situation is quite delicate, since the Crane will likely be thoroughly insulted by the suggestion that they employ bandits. Lord I____ has put me off for many days, finding excuses not to grant me an audience. One wishes the Consortium was willing to expend a few resources to have “Akira” kidnapped and questioned in private, but they have been oddly uncooperative, referring to “political considerations.” If I were a paranoid man, I might suspect someone was deliberately working to obstruct my investigation.

Actually, I am a paranoid man, but even so I cannot credit the idea that someone could manipulate both the Crane and my own clan. Needle claims I am far too trusting toward my own folk. “Loyalty means nothing without other virtues to strengthen it,” were her words. I was quite put out by such nerve – she seems to think our shared effort to locate the bandit entitles her to ignore the difference in our station. I should give her a good scolding the next time she steps out of line. Surely there are other ronin I could hire in her place.

21 *Serpent*

Enough. It is clear that Lord I_____ and his friends in this city's tiresome little mercantile excuse for a "court" have no intention of assisting me. Not only do my requests for an audience continue to be delayed, but I am told that I have become something of a laughingstock within the ranks of Lord I_____’s sycophants.

I know this because I have managed at last to cultivate one friendship among the local Crane, a minor nobleman – or perhaps a merchant patron, the Crane are very vague about such things – named Doji Ch____. He meets with me regularly at a teahouse by the docks and we share tales and gossip. He’s provided me with considerable insight into the workings of Lord I_____’s court – like all gossipers he always gives away more than he intends to, and he’s clearly getting an illicit thrill out of sharing stories with an old Scorpion. It seems he’s only a peripheral member of I_____’s court due to his connections with the Colonies, which he claims to have visited several times. I’m not sure how truthful his stories about those gaijin lands really are, though I admit they can be fascinating in a shallow sort of way.

Since Lord I_____ is determined not to assist the “silly old Scorpion” in his city, it appears I shall have to take action directly and offer apologies later. Every day that passes increases the likelihood that “Akira” will slip away and take with him any hope of resolving the mysteries behind his activities. I have told Needle that we will go tonight to question the criminal. She seemed quite uneasy at the topic – in fact I can hear her grumbling and muttering in the next room even as I write these words. Really, unless she changes her tune I will definitely replace her.

*Cobwebs burn away
In the light of truth
Who would fear?*

27 *Serpent*

I have tried to begin writing this several times.

Needle is dead, and so is my investigation.

It began easily enough. We left the inn after midnight, when the streets were empty and most lights extinguished, and made our way as quietly as we could to the poor tenement district where “Akira” resides. I was rather surprised to discover that I was quieter than Needle – I cannot imagine how she lasted so long as a wave-woman! Still, neither of us made much noise, and when we reached the proper tenement I gestured for her to go first. As we had planned, she slammed the door open and then leapt inside to seize the bandit before he could awake and flee. I was to follow, close the door, and take the cover off the lantern I carried.

The first steps seemed to go properly, but as I stepped in after Needle, I heard her stumble and thrash about, and then curse very loudly. She did not sound angry, but rather shocked and, I think, perhaps afraid. Which I had never heard before, even in our private conversations.

Old fool. Calling them “conversations” even in this personal journal. Hiding from yourself as much as anyone else.

I pulled the cover off the lantern. All I could see was dark red, red splashed and spattered everywhere, smeared across the floor, covering the walls. Needle was standing in the middle of it, holding what was left of Akira.

I heard something. I heard something clear its throat, and then chuckle. And a voice said, “Welcome.”

That was all. Needle turned and cursed and started to draw her sword, and I turned and saw – something. Large and fast and with eyes that glittered unnaturally in the lamplight. It moved swifter than a striking snake. I fell backward and the lamp went out, and I heard Needle scream.

And scream and scream and scream.

The Fortunes alone know how I got out. I suppose the demon must have needed a few moments to finish killing Needle. The next thing I recall, I was in the street, running for my life. I, one of the Black Watch, running from a creature of darkness! I ran until my old lungs gave out and I collapsed gasping and vomiting in the street.

Shameful.

I went back the next morning. The tenement had burned down, the whole building. Shame makes me admit it may have been my dropped lantern... but no, I think that demon – whatever it was – burned the building so that no evidence would remain.

I finally spoke with Doji Ch_____ today, and he says there are all manner of bizarre and damaging rumors about me in the court. He suggested I should leave the city before things grow worse.

Perhaps I will. Perhaps it is time to finally shave my head.

20 Goat

I am not mad. At least I do not think so. And so I resume this journal.

*A path through darkness
Blind by day and night alike
My hands bleed*

Today I began an inquiry into Doji Ch____. There are a number of reasons, and my thinking on the matter is still somewhat confused. Writing may help me to organize myself.

A month after I returned home, I received a letter from Shosuro Akai, our clan's new representative in Lord I____'s court. He claimed Lord I____ was insulted that I had left without continuing to seek an audience. I wrote back about the gossip I had gained from Doji Ch____, and Akai seemed puzzled – Doji Ch____, he wrote, was merely a visitor, a man of minor importance from the Colonies, who had spent a few weeks in the court. He had left before Akai ever arrived there to take up his post... which meant he was already gone when I spoke with him in the city!

After some consideration I made arrangements to return to Mura Sabishii Toshi and speak in greater detail with Akai and our other representatives there. The Consortium delegate – the same man I dealt with before – was highly uncooperative, to put it mildly. He all but openly suggested I was too old to be doing anything but read poetry in a monastery. What sort of Scorpion takes such an attitude? However, Akai was more helpful. From him I confirmed that Doji Ch____ was indeed gone from the court and the city by the time I visited before.

How did this man – this supposed Crane – remain in the city and deceive me so thoroughly? And is it not remarkable that my witness and my bodyguard were murdered when the only one in the city who knew my true intentions was Doji Ch____?

I had forgotten! The Consortium representative, Bayushi Sakamura, also knew about my investigation. Perhaps I am looking in the wrong place? I shall investigate him as well.

15 *Monkey*

My investigation of Doji Chonitsu – I see no reason to conceal his name any longer – has revealed a remarkable array of allies for a man of such obscurity. I have already encountered friends of his among his own clan, my clan, the Imperial families, and even the Lion. Crane merchants are known for building networks of alliances, of course, but Chonitsu seems to have assembled a remarkably extensive assortment, and to have done so largely without drawing any public attention. This is all the more strange given how much time he spends in the Colonies. It seems he is there now, or at least that is what he has allowed people to believe, since I can find no direct evidence of his presence in the Empire at this time.

He is heavily involved in the trade of exotic goods and gaijin curiosities to and from the Colonies, and my inquiries suggest he may have even stronger allies and influence in the courts there. I have sent letters to our representatives in the Second City, but given the long travel times between here and the Colonies, I may not hear back before spring. In the meantime, I have asked my superiors to arrange for me to attend winter court in the Crane lands, so my investigations may continue.

28 Rooster

My investigation of Bayushi Sakamura has hit a dead end. I believe he is bringing political pressure to bear against me – or perhaps Doji Chonitsu is doing so to protect him, although the best evidence still suggests that Chonitsu is in the Colonies. Regardless, I've been told – and in some cases, subtly threatened – to drop my inquiries into Sakamura's activities. At my age, physical threats don't carry much weight any more, and of course I have no immediate family – something I used to feel somewhat ashamed about. A wife and children would be vulnerable to threats, so perhaps the Fortunes chose wisely when all my marriage arrangements fell through in my youth.

Still, political influence can be difficult to resist, and my own allies are sadly few and far between. The Black Watch has little direct influence, only enough to make sure I can still pursue my duties. Sakamura shall have to wait for now.

It may be for the best. I believe Doji Chonitsu – or whoever (whatever?) it is that goes by the name “Doji Chonitsu” – must be my true target. The patterns all point to him as the force behind the bandits, the events in Mura Sabishii Toshi, and my own personal difficulties.

10 Dragon

I found this journal in my quarters a few weeks ago, but now I finally have something to write in it again.

*Idleness mocks effort
The old watch as youth derides
Where is truth now?*

After nearly a year, I have finally encountered Doji Chonitsu again, and in the court of Kyuden Doji no less! The winter in Kyuden Doji was pleasantly free of any demands for my special duties, and indeed as the months went by there were times when I could allow myself to forget that I was anything more than a half-retired clan magistrate. I even managed to participate in the Game of Letters, and I feel no small pride that two of my poems drew favorable comment in the courts. My skills have not wholly faded!

Still, I did unearth enough about Chonitsu to keep my fears simmering. He has far too much political influence for someone of such obscure stature. And he seems oddly changeable – different people remember his character differently, according to their own natures. I recall him as a charming gossip who sympathized with my situation. Others recall him as an acerbic wit, a clever political courtier, an intimidating rival. Some think he is a merchant patron, some think him an artist or a diplomat, some even think he is a spy or a high-ranking samurai pretending to lower station. It is as though he changes himself into whatever best suits the needs of the moment.

Or as though he is not human.

Now Chonitsu has supposedly recently returned from the Colonies. He insists he does not know me. His allies, of course, insist he must be truthful, and I do not have the station or support to dispute him solely on my own word.

If Chonitsu is truly what I suspect, he must be exposed, whatever the cost.

19 †Horse

A most disturbing incident.

While returning home to attend my sister's funeral, I spoke with my superior in the Black Watch of my suspicions toward Doji Chonitsu. He dismissed my concerns and suggested I was wasting my time – and by extension, the clan's resources, a subtle accusation of disloyalty but one which was clearly intended. I protested that such imputations were unfounded, and pointed to my past accomplishments on behalf of clan and Empire. He as much as claimed I was too old to think clearly, and said I should consider a “well-earned rest” in the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Of course, he did not actually order me to retire. He is my superior in the order but he is not my lord. And I will not fail in my duty simply because a Shadowlands infiltrator has tricked some of my clan. If there is one failing to which we of the Scorpion are prone, it is to let ourselves be deceived simply because we are too confident that we cannot be deceived.

Or am I deceiving myself? Have I sought a false explanation for events? Perhaps Doji Chonitsu really is just a merchant patron with a knack for developing political allies. Perhaps I am simply trying to find a false purpose, to pretend that I have important duties that preclude retirement. Perhaps there is no mystery here, no lurking threat of maho or Shadowlands infiltrators. Perhaps I am simply an old fool.

Perhaps. But if I am a fool, the only harm I will do is to myself. And if I am not, the Empire will be protected from a danger which no one recognizes. After all, I am a Scorpion. Don't we have a tradition of sacrificing our own lives and reputations to protect Rokugan?

*Fame is illusion
Ephemeral as the wind
Only duty is real*

14 Goat

It seems Doji Chonitsu has resurfaced in Kosaten Province, making himself a fixture in the court of Lord Daidoji S_____. I intend to leave for there in the morning.

Despite all my efforts I cannot figure out just what Chonitsu is plotting. Clearly it has something to do with the Colonies, since he spends far more time there than he does here in the Empire. And clearly he has need of rare and precious substances, since I have now identified at least three incidents connected with the theft of same, not to mention his extensive alliances with merchants who deal in such goods.

I believe this time I shall hold myself aside and observe. I have been too direct in the past and he has exploited this. If I remain and watch, I may be able to detect his plans without exposing myself.

The question still remains – who or what is the person, or thing, calling itself Doji Chonitsu? If his influence had not alienated my superiors, I might be able to arrange some sort of test – slipping powdered jade into his tea, or similar tricks. As it is, I am left groping in the dark, not knowing what I face or how to defeat it.

Perhaps, if the Black Watch can no longer be trusted, I should seek allies outside of the clan.



