

well simulates their interaction. Moreover, its command and leadership rules are among the most innovative and distinctive.

There is a mainstream in the series, consisting of the ancient games. Yet the series also thrives when it departs from the mainstream. And **Samurai** is about as far as one could imagine, both in distance and time.

More important, feudal Japan is more than foreign to the ancient Western way of war. The armies in the classical-era games, and **Lion of the North** for that matter, are typically unified ones, constituted either under the authority of the state or an

ambitious leader with the power to act as a state unto himself. In either case, the army tends to be the strong arm of a single political force.

By definition, feudal systems tend to be more decentralized, typified not by a single authority of any stripe, but by a web of relationships and obligations. In the feudal world there is a hierarchy of authority, but also an overriding emphasis on reciprocity. The liege can demand the service and support of a vassal, but also owes that vassal support, and recognition of his own authority.

In the feudal world, life can be complicated.

The armies of **Samurai** are feudal ones. Armies are divided into contingents, under their own *busho*, and need to be individually activated before they can go on the attack. This greatly impedes the ability of commanders to exploit the principle of mass, as one turn at *Nagashino* notwithstanding, very little mass of their army can be called up to act simultaneously. A player can get one contingent, maybe two can coordinate, but not more.

Consequently, **Samurai** stands alone in the challenges and decisions it demands of its players. It is unique among a set of games already distinctive and justly renowned.

The Power of One: Individual Combat in Samurai

BY MIKE MONTESA

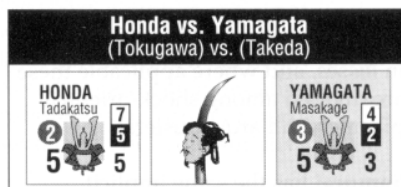


ne of the few wargames out there that makes any attempt to accurately portray medieval warfare

in Japan, much less anywhere in East Asia, is **Samurai**. For those who have played other games in the *GBoH* series, the differences in play are readily apparent; there are no large formations like Roman legions or Spanish *tercios*; there are few variations in the armament or employment of the troops. Most of all, the commanders, the *busho*, actively seek each other out on the battlefield in order to duel for their own personal glory.

These factors create a game that plays like no other in the *GBoH* series. The players must attempt to coordinate the actions of several clans and the battles often hinge on the results of an Individual Combat phase between two *samurai* or *busho*. In the battle of *Mikata-ga-hara* below, we'll look at how these factors affect the results of the game.

Turn 1: The Takeda right vanguard, led by Naito, advances through the trees north of the village at hex 2102. Tokugawa's left wing units form a line anchored on the village. The *samurai* Endo is summoned by Ishikawa (Tokugawa) but no one is within his challenge range. Naito charges Mazudaira (Tokugawa) and routs one of his ashigaru (AS). Shocked by the power of this charge, Mazudaira and his men head for the hills! Rout Points: Takeda 0, Tokugawa 24



Turn 2: The Takeda right is fully engaged near the village. Hard pressed, the Tokugawa units call upon another *samurai* for help; Akashi. Akashi charges in, taking Oyamada's (Takeda) head. In the Individual Combat phase Honda (Tokugawa) easily decapitates Yamagata and the Takeda attack stalls for the moment. Ogasawara (Tokugawa) charges in. The Takeda advance their left 'king units. In response, Sakai (Tokugawa) moves out and calls on *samurai* Ohashi to duel with Obata (Takeda). Obata makes short work of Ohashi. Tokugawa shifts his gurd to the left in case his units near the village fall apart. Rout Points: Takeda -5, Tokugawa 14

Turn 3: Oyamada's replacement (R) regroups his line. The fighting in the village is fierce and Naito takes Ogasawara's head. Leaderless, the clan looks doomed, This is too close for Tokugawa and he activates his own house troops, sending his cavalry charging the left flank of Naito's line. One of Naito's AS routs. Ishikawa regroups, going for momentum but gets the Die Roll of Doom! Naito re-activates and attacks, routing the Ogasawara cavalry and the clan flees! Oyamada(R) calls on *samurai* Dan to challenge Akashi, but Dan retreats and loses face! Way out on the Takeda left, near the banks of the Magomagawa, Obata is attacked by Sakai. Sakai first sends *samurai* Yamamoto charging in (who is killed) then gets Momentum and drives off Obata's contingent in shock combat. Obata loses face in the IC with Sakai. Rout Points: Takeda 2, Tokugawa 49 (2 clans fled)

Turn 4: Takeda's center vanguard gets into position and is immediately charged by Tokugawa's own troops. Several units are disrupted. Near the village, Naito still holds his ground. Oyamada's clan dresses their line while a forward AS takes some *teppo* fire from the village, disrupting it. Takeda begins moving units to shore up the center. Oyamada's clan flees. Rout Points: Takeda 36 (1 clan fled), Tokugawa 55 (2 clans fled)

Turn 5: With most of his unit beat up Naito withdraws. In the center Baba (Takeda) engages Honda. In an epic duel, Baba manages to fight several rounds before Honda dispatches him. On Tokugawa's right fate is kind as Obata's men charge Sakai and get shot up by *teppo* reaction fire. Losses are heavy for everyone. Naito tries to hold his men back but the clan breaks and flees! When Takeda sees Naito's banners heading back towards him he gestures his war fan towards the enemy. The huge Takeda reserve now begins moving forwards. Rout Points: Takeda 68 (2 clans fled), Tokugawa 42 (2 clans fled)

Turn 6: This turn both sides engaged clans withdraw and try to regroup. Baba's clan withdraws but flees at the end of the turn. Now to the front, Takeda's son Katsuyori leads the charge into Tokugawa's troops near the village, disrupting one AS and routing another. Ishikawa returns the favor, but blows Momentum and gets the DR of Doom. Yamagata (Takeda) reactivates and withdraws leaving one AS behind. The AS somehow survives and keeps Yamagata's clan from fleeing. Out on the Tokugawa right, *samurai* Hajikano is called by Sakai to challenge Obata. Obata responds to the challenge and dies honorably. Tokugawa tries to activate two of Oda's clans but they decide to head for the rear for tea and rice cakes. Tokugawa can win now

Samurai: The Power of One

if he can escape without losing any more clans; not an easy thing to do if Takeda keeps up the pressure. Rout Points: Takeda 90 (3 clans fled), Tokugawa 47 (2 clans fled)

Turn 7: Tokugawa is looking to disengage but Katsuyori won't let him. Katsuyori charges in, pinning Tokugawa's men as they wheel. Honda, wounded already, falls to Katsuyori's sword. Tokugawa's right is headed full speed to the rear and Sakuma's clan (Tokugawa) moves to screen their lord when he pulls back. Takeda's 'big fist' moves inexorably forward. Rout Points: Takeda 101 (3 clans fled), Tokugawa 61 (2 clans fled)

Turn 8: Tokugawa signals a general withdrawal. All clans disengage and move towards the retreat edge. The next turn will be Takeda's last chance to stop them. Rout Points: Takeda 101 (3 clans fled), Tokugawa 63 (2 clans fled)

Turn 9: Takeda's troops under Katsuyori hurl themselves forward. Ishikawa is killed in the IC with Katsuyori, and finally, his clan flees. Takeda takes the field with a very hard won victory. Final Rout Points: Takeda 96 (3 clans fled), Tokugawa: 81 (3 clans fled)

Busho casualties: (Takeda) Baba, Obata, Oyamada, Yamagata. (Tokugawa) Honda, Ishikawa, Ogasawara

Samurai casualties: (Takeda) Yamamoto. (Tokugawa) Ohashi

Everybody Wants to be a Hero

Probably one of the most interesting things about a game of Samurai are the effects of individual combat. In other games in the *GBoH* series, leaders are so important to the command and control aspect of the game that players rarely wish to risk putting them in the front line. Leader casualties are only incidental in the overall shock combat. While leaders are no less important to command in Samurai, the very nature of *samurai* warfare encourages and rewards leaders who engage in personal duels. There are even specialists, the *samurai* characters, that leaders can call on to fight for them.

In the game, the number of enemy heads taken directly affects an army's Rout Point level. At five RPs per head this can really add up. Even when you are losing, having a nice pile of *bundori* markers in your *bonjin* can keep you in the game. In this *Mikata-ga-hara* battle report, both sides saved from 20 - 25 RPs this way.

So get in there and fight! *Samurai* are best for IC and *busho* killing since they usually have better Combat Ratings and losing them doesn't effect your command ability. But watch out. Some *busho*, like Tokugawa's Honda, are expert fighters.

In a *Samurai* Challenge Phase your options are; *Samurai* Charge, issue a Challenge, commit *hara-kiri*.



A *Samurai* Charge, while dramatic, often results in the *samurai* being killed before reaching his target (the enemy *busho*). Your battle crazed *samurai* has to survive any *teppo* or *yumi* reaction fire, and then roll under his Stamina once in the target hex. Obviously, high Stamina *samurai* are best for this. Charging *busho* without any fire-capable units protecting him also increases your chance of making it into the enemy *bonjin* (headquarters) without any wounds and ready to fight.

Challenges are the best way to take *busho* heads with your *samurai*. However, *busho* have the option of calling on their own *samurai* to respond to your challenge. If they are inactive, they will have to roll against their Charisma to get someone to fight for them. If the roll is failed, the *busho* Loses Face. Thus *busho* with low ratings are better off responding to the challenge themselves if inactive since Losing Face basically makes them all but ineffective (until they redeem themselves in Individual Combat where they usually die anyway). *Busho* with high Combat Ratings can usually hold their own against *samurai*, so the choice here is up to you.

Should a particularly important leader (like a *Taisho* or *So-Taisho*) be challenged by an impertinent *samurai*, he should always call on another *samurai* to fight for him if possible.

Losing your *Taisho* (or letting him Lose Face) really hurts your ability to control your army (and allows your opponent to sneer at you for being a coward). Inactive *Taisho* will still have to roll against their Charisma, so low rated *Taisho* may be better off doing their own fighting (or perhaps not, but at least they'll die honorably).

On that note, my best advice when in Individual Combat is keep fighting! Losing Face does keep your *busho* in the game and his clan in control, but mid-range *busho* who Lose Face are rarely able to perform effectively once shamed. Their command ability suffers and if killed, their replacement is often as good or even better. Also, the only way to redeem a shamed *busho* is by another duel! If your *busho* Lost Face by running from a duel he is probably wounded already, so the only thing he will likely gain by going into another duel is his honor (before he loses his head). If he wins this fight however, you get to bask in the glory!

Hara-kiri is an act of desperation at any time. If you decide to use it in the game, all I can say is try to make it as effective as possible. That is, try to be near units that are Disrupted or have a lot of TQ hits when you gut yourself.

In Shock Combat, again *busho* to the fore! Unless your *busho* must fight another *busho* in the Individual Combat Phase, your *busho* helps your AS or *kibamusha* (KB) with his Charisma. As part of a KB *norikuzushi* charge, the presence of a *busho* is a big plus and can send an enemy unit packing.

Although it might be difficult for gamers used to protecting their leaders from harm at all costs to do, Samurai encourages you to get your leaders into the thick of the action. The emphasis on individual leaders and personal combat is an important part of the feel of the game. Even when the odds are long, you must not hesitate, just like the *samurai* of old believed. *Ganbatte kudasai* (good luck)!

