

The Aos Sita

Given Zahn's staunch traditionalism, the decision was made to have the Aos Sita - an ancient Takarn war dance - performed during his inauguration ceremony as leader of the rebel forces.

The Aos Sita began with the crowd falling into a respectful silence and parting to allow ten of Zahn's finest soldiers to take the floor. They lined in up four rows marking out the shape of an arrow which pointed northeast. It is traditional for the arrow to point directly towards the enemy. To the northeast lay the government strongholds.

Interestingly, this meant that the soldiers had to turn their back on Zahn. Fitting symbolism, for the cause is greater than any man. Even if that man is Idan Zahn.

The ten stood stoically for a few moments until an eleventh soldier emerged from the crowd. She was dressed differently to the other soldiers. She was draped in the skin of a no-ape and wore its face as a mask. She was the Shoman. The torchbearer of old.

She began pacing through the ranks the ten had formed. One by one, she looked each soldier up and down and, one by one, each soldier became restless, agitated. One by one, they began to hiss and spit and seethe. They began to contort their faces and stick out their tongues. One by one, they began showing the enemy that they were ferocity made man, waiting to be unleashed. And unleashed they were.

The Shoman moved to the head of the formation and began the Aos Sita proper by unleashing a volley of nakalite-driven fireballs, crying out in ancient Oan...

"By the blood of our ancestors"

"We fight! We die! We live," the ten cried back as they beat their chests, slapped their thighs and threw their arms to the heavens in accordance with traditional practices.

"We are powerful!" the Shoman cried, letting out another volley of fireballs.

"Powerful!" the ten shouted in response, stamping their left feet in perfect unison.

"We are invincible" the Shoman cried, letting out more fireballs, setting the old metro tunnel intersection alight.

"Invincible!" responded the group, now stamping their right feet in what had become a trance-inducing rhythm.

"We will not surrender..." she cried.

“Never surrender! We fight! We die! We live!” the group responded.

On “we live”, the ten knelt and all fell silent again. The trance-like beating of body parts gave way to an eerie calm. The Shoman paced in front of the group for a while before letting out a deafening roar and setting the floor ablaze.

“Assume the first stance” she bellowed, standing in the flames, kicking bits of flaming debris in the direction of the enemy.

The group responded with “we live” and began drill one of the two fundamental forms of the Takaran Martial art, Zin-sho. The trance-like beating started up again and began to crescendo as the ten displayed their martial prowess.

“Assume the second stance” she demanded a moment later, bending the fire to her will.

“We die” cried the group as they assumed the second form.

“The gods are with us” cried the Shoman as she fell to her knees surrounded by what was now a veritable wildfire encircling herself and the ten.

“WE. ARE. THEM.” cried the group. On “them”, the ten broke formation and unleashed all the pent up emotion that the Aoi Sita had conjured within them.

They broke formation and leapt through the flames. The crowd too became overcome with emotion and poured in on top of the ten, starting a riot. The Shoman turned and looked to where Idan Zahn and I were seated and gave him a knowing smile. Zahn turned to me and said confidently.

“General Li does not stand a chance.”

