



Legend of the Five Rings™

Winter Court



Kyuden Kakita, the Second year of the reign of Hantei XXXIX



Winter Court™

Once again, snow covers the fields of the Emerald Empire, and the fields of battle sleep beneath frost and ice. Even the feud between the Lion and the Crane is forced into peace, and the Six Clans of Rokugan gather together at Kyuden Kakita for a season of rest.

But beneath the thick snow of winter, cold knives await the unwary, and send them to an icy death. The most powerful courtiers gather at the Emperor's feet, hoping to gain his approval for their negotiations. Secrets are whispered beneath fluttering fans, and a single word could poison entire lives. And when Winter Court is over and the season dies, the wars that ravage the Empire will begin again. Each move is designed to catch the Emperor's ear, and machinations are sealed with bloody knives.

The Thirty-Ninth Hantei rests on his Emerald Throne, his face as pale as winter snow. His wife, the Empress Kachiko, tends to his illness and buries the court in intrigue and lies...

Learn the inner workings of the Empire, the secrets of the court and the history of the Emerald Empire. Discover the schools of the Miya and the private techniques of the Emerald Magistrates. Winter Court contains a comprehensive timeline of the Empire's history, a detailed account of the first ten Hantei Emperors, and information on running historical adventures. Further, it contains all you need to update your campaign according to the official RPG timeline, along with new advantages, skills, disadvantages and the ancient *nemuranai* of the Hantei.

Lay down your sword, samurai.

In this place, a single word can kill...

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Legend of the Five Rings

The Winter Court: Kyuden Kakita



*"One thousand years of peace, and with the strike of one sword,
everything changes. As each season that fades into the next, the Empire
ages, and the world must begin anew."*

– Doji Amieko, wife of the Crane Champion



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Tim Ellis, for talking to me about the first Ten Hantei, and helping me work out some of the details.

Patrick Kapera, Master of Otosan Uchi and tireless drone. We love you.

The thousands of L5R related websites and webmasters, who constantly update and encourage new players, and whose work goes unrewarded by all except their Java technicians.

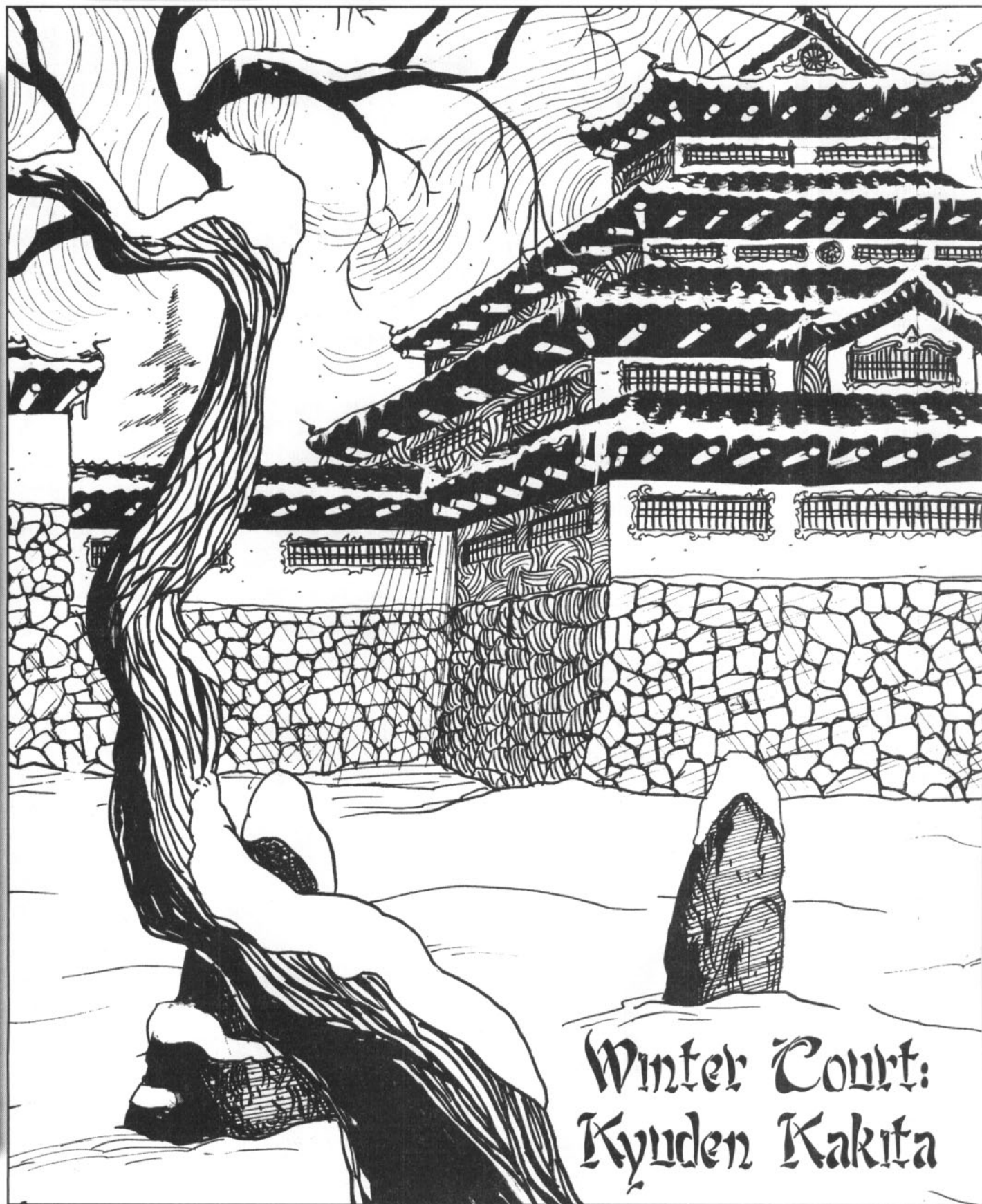
& J.M. Just because I can.

- Ree

Table of Contents

Introduction	6	Chapter Three: Night . . .	54
THE TASTE OF POISON (PART ONE)	7	THE TOUCH OF STEEL	56
Chapter One: Dawn	12	VISITING CUSTOMS IN ROKUGAN	58
A DARK VENOM	14	COURT INTRIGUE	61
CAMPAIGNS IN ANCIENT ROKUGAN	16	ENTERTAINMENT	63
NATURAL DISASTERS	19	GHOSTS	69
Fortunes' Wrath	19	THE SHADOWLANDS TAINT IN ROKUGANI	
Dealing with Disaster	19	SOCIETY	72
Elements of Disaster	19	A BRIEF WARNING	74
THE MIYA FAMILY	26	ASTROLOGICAL EVENTS	75
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE RONIN	31	THE IMPERIAL COURT	76
RONIN	31	THE HIDDEN SCORPION	79
Chapter Two: Afternoon	36	THE IKOMA HISTORIES	82
HIDDEN BLADES	38	A PASSAGE OF TIME	86
LIFE IN ROKUGAN	40	GREAT BATTLES OF THE PAST	90
A Samurai's Day	40	Chapter Four: Epilogue . . .	96
The Lower Classes	43	THE TASTE OF POISON (PART TWO)	98
APPRENTICESHIP AND GEMPUKKU	46	NEW SKILLS	99
ART AND CULTURE	48	NEW ADVANTAGES	101
		NEW DISADVANTAGES	102
		THE MIYA FAMILY SCHOOL	103
		NEW EQUIPMENT	104
		THE DAWN OF THE EMERALD MAGISTRATES .	
		105
		WHO'S WHO IN THE WINTER COURT	107
		NEMURANAI OF THE HANTEI	114
		OTOSAN UCHI	117
		CHARACTER TEMPLATES	124





Winter Court:
Kyuden Kakita



Honored guest, may your stay at our palace be filled with the wonder of winter days and warm nights by the fire.

My name is Doji Amieko, wife of Doji Hoturi, Champion of the esteemed Crane Clan. As the hostess for this gathering, and as Hantei the Thirty-Ninth's Official Court Advisor for his second Winter Court, it is my honor to send forth this invitation to you and your family. Again, the winter closes in, and the snow begins to fall, and the Empire seeks a rest from the troubles of the passing year.

As this is the second Winter Court of our young Emperor, we have gone to great lengths to begin what we hope will be a long tradition of peace and glory. The artisans of the Crane have spent many months preparing for the festivities of the winter, and the Crane welcome all honorable samurai who would pass the winter in peace.

It is much to our honor, therefore, that I officially announce that the Emperor Hantei the Thirty-Ninth has decided to allow our humble house to host his Imperial Court. The Emperor and his family will winter within the great walls of his gentle cousins: Kyuden Kakita. Located in the Osari plains, just southwest of the Capital City, the ancient home of the Crane welcomes you.

From the mountains of the Dragon to the dark plains of the Crab, the Empire begins to sleep, and we, the Kakita, lend a hand to create splendors and diversions to entertain the Empire. Please, join us at the Emperor's side, and celebrate another prosperous year for Rokugan. The Floating Court of the Heavens prepares itself for another season of festivities, excitements and tournaments of skill and honor.

The Favored Son anticipates your arrival, and I, his Mistress of Ceremonies, have prepared our simple palace for your stay.

Beneath my Lord's hand, I remain,

Doji Amieko



The Taste of Poison

Part One

Darkness fell across the land, spreading out from the palace like a swath of ash, charred by the passing of heroes. An Empire, once glorious, now frozen beneath a blanket of ice, waited only for the announcement that the young Emperor, sick and aged beyond his fragile years, had died. When it came, the Emerald Throne would crack once more, and the land would erupt into war.

Still in silence, that word would never come.

Deep in the heart of the palace at Otosan Uchi, there lies a room built for the whispers of courtiers, the sound of laughter and elegant music. Now, the room was silent, echoing with the

faint hiss and wheeze of labored breath. The Emperor was dying... but he would never be allowed to fall.

A swish of silk and a gentle slide of rice-paper shoji door heralded her approach. The servants crouched warily at either side of the chamber entrance, their faces respectfully pressed against the mahogany floors that shone in the torchlight. Behind them, a samurai in the red and black of the defeated Scorpion waited, his black mask hiding any features.

Her eyes danced behind her lace mask as she bowed. Her hips turned, pressing against the soft fabric that sheathed her perfect form. Black hair restrained by ivory pins fell elegantly below one ear as she knelt by his futon. The others did not enter; it was not their place to hear the whispers of the Emperor and his wife.

His wife.

She was the only person in the palace that he trusted; perhaps the only person in the Empire. She was the only other member of the Imperial family still alive, though she did not bear his name. And he still hoped - one day - that her blood and her body would bring rebirth to his line and his name. A rebirth for Rokugan.

"Good evening, my husband," she smiled, preparing his tea. White hands folded a linen cloth about the steaming water-pot, lifting it to drain into a sakezuki cup.

"Kachiko..." Hoarse, less than the sound of the water pouring into the porcelain bowl. His voice was softer than the cry of the smallest babe. It was of no use, and he lay back on the golden



cushions that surrounded him. Let her speak - it would soothe him. He had nothing new to say.

Around them, the Empire turned in its dance as it had for a thousand years. The Crane and the Unicorn, the Crab and the Lion, all the Great Houses knelt at the edge of the Emperor's throne and waited for his command.

A spasm of coughing racked his body with pain, tearing at his lungs.

They waited for him to speak, to tell them his will. Yet his throat was dry, hoarse, his voice torn apart by the coughing and the bitter, bloody pain. Less than a whisper now, the voice which commanded the Empire silent and weak. Diseased. Sickly. He could hear the whispers outside his chamber door. They spoke when the day was warm and the servants thought him to be sleeping, and they discussed preparations for his death.

Another racking shudder. His lungs burned with each tearing and cruel breath. She was beside him instantly, placing a cool towel upon his brow and lifting the steaming cup to his lips. Kachiko.

"Do not try to speak, my Emperor." Her polite formality hung in the air like a false kiss. "I know your throat is burned and dry. It will do you no good to strain it - you do not have the strength to speak."

She knew. She always knew his symptoms, from the smallest ache to the cries that awakened him in the night, calling in his mind but fading away as the dawn approached. The nightmares were the worst part of the illness - visions that haunted him as his body grew weak from the struggle. Still, Kachiko came every day, with every meal, and tested his food before he was allowed to eat. Her ability to ease his illness was remarkable - and her knowledge of his sickness made her useful.

More than that. She was invaluable.

Yet in her movements, betrayal lurked. Had he been wrong to marry her? To destroy her traitorous clan - no. In that, he had been justified. They had murdered his father, the Son of Heaven. It was a choice he would never regret. His face grew harder beneath the silken sheets of the Imperial covers, and his fists clenched into weak balls of flesh.

Then she was there, and the doubt returned once more.

"The darkness. Yes, I know," she smiled. "But now you don't have to worry anymore, Hantei. Your journey is almost over, and soon, the pain will end. Soon... but not yet. Not until you understand exactly what I have done to Rokugan, to the traitors that left my husband to die, and to those who call themselves 'samurai' - but have no concept of true honor." The words were somehow comforting, her tea flooding his throat with an easy, honeyed taste. Something stirred in his mind - some thought of





anger or regret or fear – and then was gone, floating away into the sweet green tea.

The Empire... in danger...father...

As the warm liquid entered his body, relief flooded through him. Kachiko. She was near, and she was beautiful, and all else fled from his mind as the coughs began to subside. *Kachiko is my wife, he dreamed, and the Empire is safe in our hands. One day, our son will rule from the Emerald Throne, and all will be right beneath the Celestial Heavens.*

“Rest, Hantei. I will care for you.” For a moment, her lace mask did not hide the hatred in her eyes. Still, she was comforting, restful, and the sound of her movements lulled him into peace.

A single tear rolled down his cheek as she spoke, but he knew not why it fell.

“Shh, Hantei-sama,” she whispered closely, her breath warmer than the steaming tea. “And I will tell you stories of your Empire, such as you have never heard before...”

The Winter Court

“We danced and sang until dawn, to celebrate the plenty of the New Year...”

– Doji Shizue

Welcome to the winter court of Kyuden Kakita! This is the second in our series of supplements detailing the events that shape Rokugan, as well as providing information about the Empire’s civilization, customs, and the Grand Imperial House of the Hantei. It is designed to give Game Masters a vision of what is occurring within the Empire within the official timeline of the L5R RPG, and what events are likely to occur within the next year. While we will be giving material on the storyline as it evolves throughout the RPG, we do not intend for this book to be the final word on what can and will occur in your Emerald Empire. Certainly, if your Game Master prefers that some events do not happen, or that the Clans interact differently than we describe, you should always defer to the opinions of your GM for the purposes of their campaign.

When the snow and temperature fall in Rokugan, all activity comes to a halt. The marketplaces close, the farmers huddle in their homes and the riverboats stay tied up until the spring comes to thaw the waters. When winter arrives, Rokugan is truly at peace.

Two years have passed since the Scorpion Clan Coup. For our purposes, all timeline-related material in this sourcebook can be considered to occur during the end of the second year of Hantei



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the Thirty-ninth's reign, in the Isawa Calendar year of 1125. However, this sourcebook is not only about the 'timeline of the Empire', but also provides valuable resource information about Rokugan's culture, history and items, which are of use to those Gamemasters who do not choose to follow our established timeline.

Winter Court contains timeline material, yes, but is not solely a timeline-related book. This sourcebook has information useful in any kind of campaign – historic, timeline, or completely outside the events of the 'established' Empire.

Winter in Rokugan is a peaceful time. Marketplaces are closed, and the noble families of the Empire retire to their elaborate courts. Winter Court is a time for samurai to brag about the past years, and give awards of Glory to those who have impressed their superiors. It is also an opportunity for artists to perform, duelists to prove their skills, and for alliances to be made and broken. During the winter, politics reign, political machinations flex beneath the elegant exterior of the Imperial Court, and lovers practice the subtle art of Rokugani romance.

In short, a winter court is a great setting for adventure. Sure, it's not wandering through the Shadowlands in search of Oni, but it can be a great source of intrigue and danger where samurai wage an entirely different kind of battle, using different skills and talents to win Glory and the favor of Rokugan's elite.

The *Winter Court* sourcebook is a continuing series, one per year, providing background material, information and ideas about how to run adventures in a court setting that are appropriate for all characters, campaigns, and levels of game play. As the Court of the Emperor changes from year to year, so the Winter Court series will chronicle these changes in the Empire, and the people responsible for Rokugan's web-like intrigue. The Court can prove to be as deadly a place as the Shadowlands – though the threats are far subtler.

Inside, you will find excerpts from the journal of Doji Amieko, hostess at Kakita palace and wife of the Crane Clan Champion, describing events and important people within the Imperial Court. We hope that these will help you create a fully detailed environment for roleplaying. The book is divided into sections detailing each aspect of the court, from the moment your characters arrive to when it's time to go home.

The first chapter, Morning, gives you history, background and a historical perspective of the Empire, giving information on how to run 'historic' campaigns within the Empire's rich and illustrious past. It further describes the Great Houses of the Imperial Court, discussing the lowest-ranking family of the Hantei: the Miya. There is also information about a samurai's family name: how it is won, and how it can be lost.

The second chapter, Afternoon, explains everything you'll need to know to survive Rokugan's most subtle battlefield. You'll discover new information about how Rokugan's apprentice system works, how sons of noble houses are exchanged among the Great Clans, details of a samurai's day, the various *gempukku*

rituals performed in the Empire. It also includes a vast list of items that are important to the Empire's culture in order to help you flavor the day-to-day workings of your campaign.

The title of the third chapter is Night; in it you will find information on the inner workings of the court, from the customs of visiting ambassadors and courtly intrigue to the practice of entertaining one's visitors during a courtly function. This chapter also deals with the darker side of the Empire; how courtly samurai deal with the Shadowlands Taint, and how ghosts, hauntings and other non-Shadowlands ghoulies are seen by the samurai of Rokugan. You'll hear the stories of the past two years – an overview of the events since the Scorpion Clan Coup – and a hint of things to come. As the world grows and evolves, the *Winter Court* series will track its changes, so that GMs can integrate as many of these sub-plots as they desire.

Lastly, in the Epilogue, you will find information on more Imperial Nemuranai, or magical artifacts of the Empire. There are new character options, including the Miya Herald, and a number of new skills and backgrounds for your characters. Also, you gain some unique insights into more of the people that surround the Hantei, and discover their games of intrigue and power.

While this book is not the final word on the Hantei and their family, we intend to present a detailed version of the Emperor and his court which can be integrated into any existing campaign. Remember that your Game Master may decide to create a different version of the Emperor's Court for their Emerald Empire, and you may be surprised by what you find there.

There are those who once saw the House of Hantei as no more than distant rulers, watching over a land truly governed by the feuds of seven ancient and powerful clans. Since the Scorpion Coup, however, the Hantei have been forced to defend their right to rule. The eyes of usurpers covet the Emerald Throne while a sickly Emperor attempts to keep order over a disintegrating Empire. Alliances could be the difference between an Empire ruled by the Hantei, and an Empire in chaos.

The Emperor's line has always held the Emerald Empire in a firm fist, keeping peace in the land and encouraging growth and prosperity. Shoji's coup changed that forever, and now even the power of the Emperor can be questioned – but secretly, beneath the cover of night, and of masks.

The past cannot be changed. What is there to fear?

The Scorpion are dead.

So get your best kimono on, bring something to perform and don't forget your invitation. We're on our way to Kyuden Kakita, and you're going to need every ounce of your skill, cunning and wits if you're going to win the attentions (and favors) of the courtiers.

In the Court of the Shining Prince, no one is ever alone for long.



Chapter One: The Dawn

Gentle guest,

Welcome to Kyuden Kakita! The dawn has broken over the forests of the Crane, and shouts can already be heard from the tournament fields. Samurai gather for practice, while artisans bring out their biwa and their poetry to capture an audience.

Resting on his raised wooden dais, the Emperor himself awaits the magnificence of another winter's day. Though his face is pale from illness, he smiles down at us from his lofty vantage, knowing that the Empire will strive to lift his spirits.

The greatest discussion in the court this year is the historic past of our Empire. You say you do not know the Empire's history? For shame! Your tutors should be scolded for their negligence. Have no fear, however, for we shall teach you. Open your eyes and listen to the words of the courtiers around you, and do not forget that you can learn as much from what they do not say, as from what they do.

Do you see the ronin that gather in the corner? They say that one of them, a man named Yotsu, tries to establish his own clan. A fool, he will lose the name so recently given by the Emperor's own father. You say you did not know that family names could be given, like gifts, from the Emperor's hand? Oh, there is much for you to learn...

The Miya have come to join us, bringing their histories and their wisdom. Listen to them carefully, my friend, for their words have merit. They are the Heralds of the Shining Prince, and they speak with his voice.

The sun rises above the horizon, and the courtiers spill from the palace, their bright kimono shining like winter flowers on the dark ground. Come with me, friend, and I will show you a world you have only dreamed of; a place where the Celestial Heavens reach down to touch our land.

Doji Amieko



A Dark Venom

"There is more than one way to strike at an unaware enemy..."

— Kuni Yori

The Seven Day Battle Plain was quiet today, and sunny. Reju sighed in relief. At least one thing was going right. It was amazing how one's perspective could change in a short time. A year ago, he couldn't have cared less whether the sun shone, so bright was his future. Reju had swept aside the other competitors at the Topaz Championship. Afterward, the Emperor had surprised the young Crane by offering him a position as a gunso in the Imperial Legions.

At the time, he had considered it an incredible honor. Only the finest and most skilled young warriors in the Empire were chosen for such a duty. And to enter as an officer! Like a dream. Now, he wasn't so certain. Ever since the Coup, the Legions had been marching tirelessly. Supposedly, they carried "the Emperor's diplomacy." In reality, they carried the Emperor's vengeance. The Legion had been specifically commanded to kill any and all Scorpions that did not surrender, or anyone else mobilizing against the Emerald Throne. They had burned three villages and one city. So much for diplomacy.

To the north, greasy smoke stained the sky. Ryoko Owari Toshi had been a beautiful city. Perhaps some day it would be again, but now it was a charnel house. It was here Reju had gotten his first taste of battle, and the taste was still bitter. Most of the Scorpion hadn't had anything to do with the coup. Some of them weren't even armed. There were women, children... but the Emperor's orders were very specific and these Scorpion did not surrender.

Seppun Nakao had seen the light in Reju's eyes, reflected from the torch in his hand. A frown had crossed the taisa's face at the hesitation mirrored there. Reju carried out the order dutifully, but Nakao summoned Reju for a private meeting nonetheless.

Nakao had set up his command in a large building near the river. It had been a warehouse once, but now was abandoned like much of the city. The building was dank, drafty, and uncomfortably close to the river's stench. Nakao could have chosen a more comfortable home. The governor's palace was unoccupied; Shosuro Hyobu and her family had fled weeks ago. Nakao refused to sleep in a palace while his men slept in tents. "One must lead by example," he would quote, directly from Akodo's *Leadership*.

Reju made his way to the warehouse with fear in his heart. Not fear of punishment, but fear of his own shame. His family was small and poor, minor vassals of the Doji. His impressive assignment had been the first hope for their advancement in generations. The hopes, dreams, and honor of everyone at home weighed upon Reju's actions.

The ashes were thick upon the streets, like black snow. Reju's foot struck something. It looked like a small, limp doll; Reju did not look down for confirmation. He put his mind away from the ashes, away from the pyres that burned at the edge of the city.

He stood quietly before Seppun Nakao, waiting to be acknowledged.

Nakao did not look up at first. The taisa was a large man, round about the face and broad of girth. His eyes were piercing, and he could move with great skill despite his size. His hair was carefully tied back in a traditional topknot, and every bit of his armor was immaculate despite the chaos of the previous day. Nakao sat at a slightly scorched table. A large piece of parchment lay before him, weighed down in the corners by rocks and a broken lantern. To Reju's surprise, Nakao was not studying a map or writing commands. A long brush in his hand, the taisa deftly crafted a detailed painting of a flight of sparrows soaring over a great waterfall.

Nakao carefully set the brush aside and looked up. "Konichiwa, Gunso," he said.

"Konichiwa, Taisa-sama," Reju said, bowing deeply.

Nakao inclined his head slightly and stood, folding his thick arms behind his back. "Do you know why I called you here, boy?"

"Because of my actions yesterday," Reju said. He met the captain's eyes squarely, though it took him great effort to face his shame. "It is because I hesitated upon your orders."

Nakao smiled, the expression seeming a bit unusual on the dour taisa's face. "No, I am afraid it is not," he said. "It is because you obeyed those orders."

Reju remained silent. If his captain chose to explain himself, he would do so. If not, Reju would bear his ignorance dutifully.

"That building was a school," Nakao said. "There might have been children inside. How do you feel about burning down a school, Reju?"

Reju opened his mouth, but closed it just as quickly. "I... I do not feel anything. It is not my duty to question the Emperor."

Nakao nodded slowly, his face tightening into its standard frown. He began to pace slowly, turning occasionally to regard the painting. Reju waited.

"It is difficult, is it not?" Nakao asked, not turning to look at the young soldier. "The life of a bushi. You are a novice, despite your elevated rank. I think perhaps this life is not everything you expected it to be?"

"I have never been in battle before, Taisa-sama."

"A most honorable reply," Nakao said with a chuckle. "You will make a fine soldier, Doji Reju. You remind me much of myself."

"Arigato, Taisa-sama," Reju said, bowing slightly.

"Don't thank me for that." Nakao chuckled bitterly. "Reju, I shall be leaving in the morning for Kyuden Kakita. While I am gone, the legion is to hold this position. Chui Seppun Hanzo shall be in command."

"Hai," Reju replied. Inwardly, he felt himself grow cold. An entire winter in this dead city? He could not imagine a greater torture. And why was the taisa telling him this? Surely a mere gunso wasn't worthy of being personally notified.

"Before I leave, I have a final command," Nakao said. "Take twenty men, the swiftest, the most discreet. Scout the southern borders of the province. Take as much time as you see fit to. I recommend no less than a week."

"A week?" That seemed an unusually long time to scout such a small territory.

Nakao nodded, and his eyes focused on Reju. "The Emperor's orders are specific. Choose those who seem most uncomfortable, give them a chance to take a breath. When you return, choose

twenty more and begin again. Our preliminary intelligence reports claim that there is no army within three hundred ri, and the Eighteenth Legion is already on patrol in that area, but we must be thorough. You have a sharp eye. I trust you will perform honorably."

Reju nodded quickly. "Hai, Taisa-sama." Relief flooded through him. He was glad for any excuse to leave this husk of a city.

"Before you go, Doji Reju," said Nakao, "I ask you to remember this. Honor and conscience do not always walk hand in hand. When your soul is clouded with doubt, think upon why we do this." For a moment, a shade of doubt crossed Nakao's face. Just as quickly, it was gone. "You are dismissed, gunso."

"Hai, Taisa-sama," Reju said. He bowed and walked quickly away.

Doji Reju had no love for sleeping on the hard earth, but it was better than remaining in the City of Lies, breathing the foul odors of death. He stood and stretched, feeling his bones pop. He kneeled to take up his armor, carefully lacing every plate in its proper place. Lifting his katana from its portable stand, he began his morning exercises. Reju moved the blade in wide arcs, quickly returning it to his sheath and drawing it once more in the ancient technique of the Kakita. One. Ten. Fifty. One hundred. A Crane could not afford to let his skill grow dull, no matter his circumstances.



The other bushi rose and grumbled among themselves. "Gunso!" chuckled Torisei, a young samurai-ko of the Mirumoto. "When you get done, do fifty for me. I could use the exercise."

"I could do a hundred, Dragon, and your wits would still be dull." Reju grinned. The soldiers chuckled.

"Might as well," mumbled Suzume Ryoshin. "Our time would be just as well spent"

"Have you a comment, Sparrow?" Reju asked plainly. He sheathed his blade and turned to face him.

Ryoshin shook his head. "I would speak no disrespect." His eyes quickly flicked away.

"I would my bushi speak their minds," Reju answered.

Ryoshin shifted, uncertain. "It is..." He hesitated. "This mission seems a waste of energy. The new officers seem so inexperienced - no offense, Gunso," he amended quickly.

"None taken," Reju said. "Is that all, Sparrow?"

"It's just-" Ryoshin looked to the north. "Doesn't it bother you that the Legions are moving farther from Otosan Uchi?"

"Are you suggesting the Emperor would intentionally weaken himself?" Reju asked, his voice harsh.

"Gunso!" called out Hidetaka, a Shinjo bushi with a white-maned helm. "On the hill!"

Reju quickly moved to higher ground. Gazing outward, he made out the scab of burnt wood and broken stone that marked the final resting place of the Usagi family.

"The Scorpion massacre the Hare, and Legion massacres the Scorpion," Reju mused to Hidetaka. "Who, I wonder, will come for us?"

"I hope this rider does not answer your question." The Unicorn pointed. "There."

Reju nodded. He could just make out a figure on horseback galloping toward them.

"I see no mon," Torisei said, appearing at Reju's side. He had learned to trust the Dragon's vision; her life in the mountains had given her a keen eye. "He is no Miya."

"Hidetaka, to your horse," Reju commanded. He ran for his own steed. "The rest of you, arm yourselves and follow."

Reju mounted first, but the Unicorn's mount was faster. Soon, they were racing full speed toward the mounted figure. The stranger drew swiftly closer. Reju could see that it was a bushi, garbed in the green armor of a Legionnaire. The samurai leaned low in the saddle, as if urging the horse to greater speed. At this distance, Reju could not tell any more. In moments, they closed on the rider and slowed to wait for him.

The rider galloped past, continuing at a tangential angle to Reju and Hidetaka. The Unicorn looked at Reju curiously.

"After him!" Reju commanded.

They galloped in pursuit. Soon, they could see the foam coating the horse's flanks, the wild look in its eye. They saw the arrow protruding from the rider's back. The Legionnaire was not leaning low, but lying limp, the reins tangled tight about his hands.

"He has been shot!" Reju shouted.

Hidetaka kicked his steed forward, leaving Reju's horse as if it were standing still. The Unicorn leaned low in the saddle and seized the reins from the unresisting rider. In an incredible display of agility the Shinjo took control of both animals, slowing them to a halt. By the time Reju had caught up, Hidetaka had already dismounted and was seeing to the Legionnaire.

"He's dead," said Hidetaka, an angry glint in his eye. "He's from the Eighteenth! A taisa! What would such an officer be doing out here alone?"

"Perhaps he was the last." Reju shook his head. He had seen too many corpses.

"Last?" Hidetaka asked.

"The Eighteenth Legion has been destroyed," Reju said. "There is no other explanation. Our Legion will be next." He pulled out the arrow: fletchings of steel grey and blood red. A Crab arrow.

"Crab?" Hidetaka snarled. "Why?"

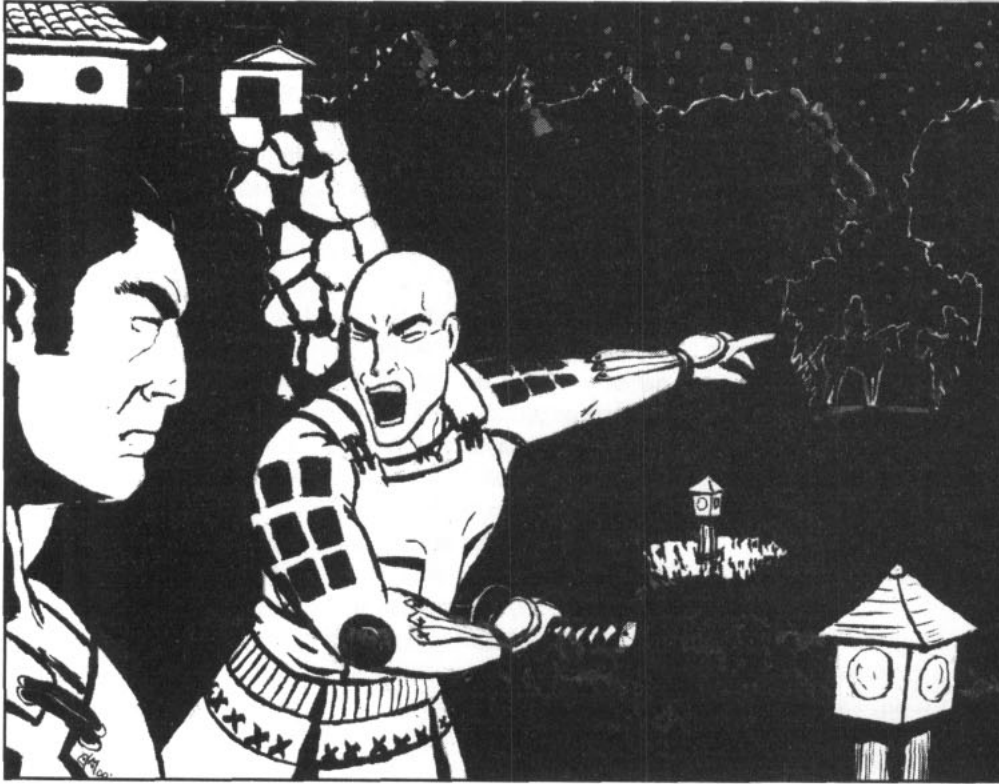
"Look!" Ryoshin shouted, pointing to the south as he rode up with the other bushi.

The first banners of Kisada's army appeared over the horizon.



Experienced *L5R* players in search of something new may wish to set their campaigns in the Emerald Empire's past - at the beginning of the Hantei Dynasty perhaps, or during the return of the Unicorn. While no game mechanics or overall cultural standards have changed, the political landscape is much, much different. The Hantei line is healthy and vibrant (or perhaps just starting), samurai face much different challenges, and the Unicorn (or Ki-Rin) are nowhere to be seen. The shift in the balance of power creates new challenges for honorable characters, and can provide a refreshing new take on the Emerald Empire.

Below are descriptions of three different time periods in Rokugan's history, along with suggestions for the type of campaign which they can incorporate. GMs who wish to run such a campaign should study them carefully. More information can be found in the *L5R RPG* and in the various *Way of* sourcebooks.



THE BEGINNING

A campaign could take place just before or just after the first battle with Fu Leng, when mankind was new and the kami walked the earth. The children of Sun and Moon are still among primitive humanity, their followers only beginning to form the seven great Clans. The traditions that "modern" Rokugani take for granted haven't been established yet; there's no class system, no division of labor, no concept of honor or bushido – only the descendants of the kami and the humans who follow them. Samurai heroes can't count on their position for respect; they'll have to earn it through courage, bravery and nobility.

In many ways, this is the most exciting time to be a samurai in Rokugan. The actions of the PCs will help define bushido for centuries to come, cementing the cultural standards and justifying their place in the celestial order. Peasants and other *heimin* bow to them not through an accident of birth, but because they really are braver, stronger, and more honorable than anyone else. Of course, all of that depends on the characters. If they can't defeat that marauding oni or make that alliance with the other clans, then perhaps they're not worthy of respect...

It's easiest to begin such campaigns after the first battle with Fu Leng. Before the Dark Lord's attack, Rokugan was truly nebulous. The seven Kami had few family members, so the great noble lines had not yet arisen. Shinsei had not yet appeared to expound his philosophy. Most activities concerned building the roads and cities that would eventually form the Emerald Empire. Such an environment has few opportunities for adventure and bears little resemblance to contemporary Rokugan.

After the battle, however, things began to change. Shinsei's words spread throughout the kingdom, while the Kami and their followers established the great clans and their purposes. The land was still wild, in need of brave samurai to tame it, and the culture still had numerous points of etiquette and protocol to determine. The characters can play a substantial role in these developments, giving them the power to shape Rokugan's civilization in countless ways. Particularly noteworthy heroes may even become revered ancestors, allowing their descendants to use their abilities.

GMs looking for a "baptism of fire" might wish to begin the campaign with the First War, as the novice PCs struggle to defend the Empire from the ravenous hordes of Fu Leng's

minions. Once the battle ends, they can continue to defend Hantei, using their newfound glory to bring stability to a fledgling Rokugan. While inexperienced characters might be overwhelmed by such an abrupt beginning, it can quickly establish the setting while giving the survivors a real sense of accomplishment – giving the players the feeling that they are truly living in the time of legends.

THE BATTLE OF WHITE STAG

Rokugan's only real contact with the *gaijin* came at the Battle of White Stag, when the barbarians attacked Otsan Uchi in their fleet of ships. The Empire was nearly four hundred years old at this point, and had already established much of its tradition and culture. They repelled the invasion with the help of the Crane fleet and the Asahina's wondrous magic, using fog and fierce bushi to counter the foreigners' strange gunpowder weapons. The battle helped solidify many of Rokugan's innate characteristics – pride in their people, distrust of foreigners, belief in the supremacy of the Hantei – and served as a pivotal turning point in the history of the Empire.

Player characters alive during this time could participate in the battle, and in the slow build-up of tensions that preceded it. The *gaijin* had merchants in Rokugan for years preceding the battle, interacting with the populace and trading strange merchandise from their tall-masted ships. PCs could work with them as court liaisons, fellow merchants, or even *yojimbo* assigned to protect them (and keep an eye on their activities). *Gaijin* interlopers would resemble Europeans of 16th century Earth: speaking a

strange language, using strange instruments like telescopes and sextants, and practicing customs abhorrent to the Rokugani, such as handling dead flesh. As the campaign continues, tensions slowly build between the Empire and the foreigners, affecting the PCs' relations with their strange guests. Finally, when the Emperor orders all trade with the *gaijin* to cease, the characters must deal with sudden and swift retribution. The unlucky ones may be captured and held as hostages while the rest may be called upon to use their knowledge of the barbarians to defend Oosan Uchi when the cannon shells rain down upon it. A White Stag campaign can define Rokugani honor, as the characters must ultimately turn on their *gaijin* companions in the name of bushido.

More information on the Battle of White Stag can be found in *The Way of the Dragon* (page 27), *The Way of the Crane* (page 45), *The Way of the Lion* (page 24), and *The Way of the Minor Clans* (page 90).

An Empire without the Unicorn

Of course, such a campaign need not limit itself to the *gaijin* invasion. Rokugani culture was much the same as in "modern" times, and characters during this period could have numerous adventures that have nothing to do with the barbarian invaders. The principal difference lies with the number of clans – the Ki-Rin clan was nowhere to be seen, having departed for the Burning Sands some time ago. As such, Rokugan's political make-up differed considerably from the days of the Scorpion Coup; alliances shifted more readily, dead-locks occurred more often, and society was more homogenous and unified without the Unicorn's new customs. The Crane and the Lion dominated politics, as they do now, but they no longer had to consider which side of an issue the Unicorn would champion. The Crab worried more about their northern borders, lacking another clan to guard their flank. And the Dragon and Phoenix lack the new insight that their wild cousins brought back from beyond the mountains. Such subtle differences can have a profound effect on an L5R campaign, allowing the players to see the various clans in a new and refreshing light.

THE RETURN OF THE UNICORN

Few events have had as much impact as the return of the Ki-Rin Clan from across the mountains. Their appearance shattered the balance of power between the Clans and sparked a brief war against the other clans; to this day they are not entirely accepted. A campaign set during their tumultuous arrival has plenty of drama and excitement to offer.

The main question in such a campaign would be whether to allow any Unicorn characters among the PCs. They would have to have a reason for traveling with the other characters, and the party could be pulled apart when tensions begin to flare. On the other hand, they have the potential to defuse crises between the newcomers and their cousins, showing by example how the two sides can live together in peace. Those who make friends with the

newcomers could help smooth the transition... or betray them in order to further their clans' ambitions.

Beyond intra-party relations lies the question of how such a tumultuous development will affect a society so steeped in tradition. Besides the skirmishes, the slow integration and the frequent social faux pas, the Unicorn must deal with strange new customs, devoid of rhyme or reason. Unicorn characters would have to adjust to a new land, a permanent home after centuries of endless wandering. They may not know how to live in one place, and resist efforts to "blend in" with their new nation. Similarly, other clans must adjust to the newcomers' strange habits, as well as the shift in political balance. They must learn to set their prejudices aside and embrace these savages as brothers, a feat few are capable of. Any new friendships they form will be tested to the limit. Their daimyos may use them to curry favor with the new clan, or else sabotage their efforts to rejoin Rokugan society. Even if there are no Unicorn among them, they must still take the barbarians into account. What would happen if the goblins the PCs were chasing wandered onto Unicorn lands? Would they be blamed for stirring up trouble? Would the Unicorn destroy the creatures and claim the glory for their own? The possibilities are endless.

Some GMs may even wish to use the Unicorn as villains, presenting them as a foil for "native" PC. The Unicorn represent a new, terrifying force in Rokugan and no one knows how legitimate their ties to the Ki-Rin are. The characters may be asked to help stem their advance, to keep them from "infecting" the Imperial court with their odious ways, or even to drive them from Rokugan entirely. They must work to defend their way of life from a band of invading outsiders. Though their efforts are doomed to failure (the Unicorn stay put, after all), they might gain some small victories for their clan – perhaps allowing their daimyo a stronger position after all the dust has settled. The action could alternate between diplomatic maneuvering within the Imperial Court, and skirmishes on the new Unicorn lands as the former Ki-Rin attempt to reclaim their territory. GMs should plan such a campaign very delicately; the Unicorn should appear adversarial without being evil and the players should be willing to face them without waiting for justification. The accomplishments will be minor – preventing an alliance, perhaps, or keeping certain fortress out of the newcomers' hands – but could grant the PCs a unique form of glory, unheard of in any other era.

Consult *The Way of the Unicorn* for more information on the wandering Ki-Rin and their return to Rokugan, as well as *The Way of the Crab* (page 34), *The Way of the Scorpion* (page 32), and *The Way of the Lion* (page 106).



*"Distant thunder rings of present danger."
- Naka Kuro*

Fortunes' Wrath

Nothing in Rokugan happens without a purpose. Chance, randomness and whim play no place in the people's view of the cosmos. In a world this harsh, this deadly, the mind needs to find order and meaning. When something has no obvious human cause, that leaves only one logical explanation: the gods. The Fortunes do not often interact directly with men; instead, they make their presence and feelings felt through the natural world. Omens come in eclipses, the behavior of birds, the falling of stars. Gratitude and benevolence come as rain in a drought, a cooling wind on a summer's day, a shining sun to light the way to victory in battle. Displeasure—well, displeasure is impossible to miss. It comes in the guise of disaster.

The Fortunes do not inflict disaster randomly or without cause, nor do they bother explaining the cause to mere mortals. They leave it to the shugenja to discern their meaning. Sometimes the cause has nothing to do with the poor people who suffer the disaster, but rather stems from some conflict or rivalry within the heavens. Other times the Fortunes react to some impious act on humanity's part: this act can be anything from a lord's abuse of his power to a peasant desecrating a sacred site. Here again, they do not explicitly state their anger's cause, but the shugenja are often the first to point a finger. If they don't, someone invariably will. The people demand a justification for the pain and suffering a disaster brings.

Like all existence, the disasters in Rokugan find their origins within the five basic elements that define the entire world. Each element corresponds to a different kind of disaster and also reflects a different kind of displeasure amongst the Fortunes. Thus in general people can infer some hint of the Fortunes' true feelings by the disaster they choose to inflict upon the world at

any given time. As a general rule of thumb, the more severe a disaster, the more displeasure the Fortunes are demonstrating. Many an opportunistic samurai, shugenja and even peasant has taken the opportunity opened by some natural calamity to accuse his rivals of angering the gods. Men have lost their thrones, their homes and even their lives to such accusations.

Dealing with Disaster

Causes aside, disasters mean very tangible, very urgent upheaval. They must be dealt with, usually immediately. They have the disturbing habit of turning the world upside down in a brief span of time. Earthquakes, typhoons and floods do not respect tradition, caste, or noble birth, and daimyo and eta alike feel the effects. In disaster's wake many of Rokugan's cultural restrictions fall apart. Samurai find their homes reduced to just as much rubble as a peasant's. Farmers find themselves searching for survivors among the dead shoulder to shoulder with shugenja and warriors.

How an individual lord comports himself in the face of such devastation reveals a great deal about both his personality and his priorities. Does he bend his back and help rebuild or does he maintain his air of aloofness in the face of proof that tragedy strikes at every level? Does he lift buckets to fight the fire, stacking logs to fight the flood and stones to rebuild fallen walls, or does he lord it over all from a charred throne under the open sky? Often times the most important thing a lord or samurai can do is provide leadership, demonstrating calm and directing the little efforts men can do in the face of a Fortune's wrath.

In the wake of such unmitigated catastrophe a samurai's life becomes even more challenging than the peasant's. While like them he has lost his home, maybe his family, he must concern himself with greater matters than simply rebuilding. Not only does he worry about where his next meal will come from and whether his children have shelter, he must also plan for the threat from beyond. Can his enemies strike while his lands are weak? He must rally what forces he has available in case soldiers come to his borders like vultures, eager to feast on the sickly domain. Likewise he must be careful from whom he accepts help. While help is sometimes a vital necessity, taking it often incurs a debt no samurai wants to pay. Is it better to suffer from want than take an enemy's charity? Every lord must answer this question for himself.

Elements of Disaster

Each of the five elements has its own special disasters for Rokugan. In addition to the physical effects, there are psychological consequences associated with each. Some, like typhoons, are somewhat predictable, happening in certain seasons and not in others. Others, like earthquakes, are utterly

unpredictable and all the more terrifying thereby. When disaster strikes the people turn first to their shugenja, especially those with knowledge of the appropriate element. Their knowledge seldom helps in the face of overwhelming force, but they provide what succor, guidance, and blame that they can.

EARTH

Disasters of the earth rank as the most dangerous of all. The earth itself sits quietly, a source of reserved strength and a solid base for all life. It is also the source of life and thus the progenitor of all men. When the earth stirs from its normally placid state it means the Fortunes have become truly angry, so angry that they turn the world on its head, shaking its foundations. Landslides in hilly and mountainous regions are considered Earth disasters, even though they usually accompany a hard rain. Although potentially deadly, they pale in comparison to the worst earth catastrophe: the earthquake. Traditional wisdom states that Earth disasters stem from some grave offense against the gods, usually hubris of some sort by someone who believes himself more important or more powerful or more holy than he truly is.

Landslides

The sudden shifting of earth on mountain slopes can level a village, or even a castle. In winter this can mean an avalanche of snow while in more temperate times and places it can take the form of rocks and mud. Like all earth disasters, they strike quickly and without warning and are over before any preventive action can be taken. Communities in the mountains and hills live with the fear of a landslide ever in the back of their minds. They usually make a special point to appease their local Fortunes and spirits, especially those associated with the earth.

In the aftermath of a landslide, all that is left to do is pick up the pieces and clear the debris. Entire communities disappear beneath the onrush of earth, and any survivors live on with their spirits broken. The local lord, should he survive the event, sometimes gives up and rebuilds a new town elsewhere, relocating the survivors. In less serious cases, cleaning up is merely a matter of putting in the hard labor necessary to clear the stones, dirt, and mud and then rebuild the homes. As with most disasters, people usually prefer to rebuild and repair temples first in order to prevent any further divine displeasure.

Earthquakes

All of Rokugan experiences earth tremors at one time or another. Most cities feel only a minor shaking of the earth for a few moments. The people take these mild quakes as warnings, a sign that the Fortunes have become disturbed. Whether or not it has anything to do with them remains to be seen. It is a time when samurai and other leaders take pause as well. They know that, should a larger quake come, the blame could well fall on them. Prudent lords take some time to make public displays of piety and thus forestall any future accusations that they might have angered the Fortunes.

When a large quake hits, splitting the ground, shaking buildings to splinters and tossing people and animals about like grains of rice, the whole community suffers. The very landscape changes as chasms abruptly open where houses once stood. The death toll can be mind boggling, especially if it occurs at night when people are asleep in their homes – homes that become collapsing deathtraps. There is no escaping an earthquake, nowhere to run that is safe. People tend to fly into a panic, losing all common sense, something that only adds to chaos.

Finally the tremors cease. The earth sits once again at rest. The feeling of helplessness begins to fade, quickly replaced by despair

and sorrow. The world that the people have known all their lives suddenly seems alien, a cracked and battered landscape from a nightmare. Here again, as with landslides, the samurai and his people can do little more than pick up the pieces, bury the dead and try to rebuild. It can take years to recover from an earthquake, especially if the lord does nothing to improve his people's spirits.

Thinking themselves punished by the gods for some grave sin of pride, they become excessively docile, their drive drained from them. Some lords become harsh with their peasants, whipping them back into shape through hard work. Others coddle them, providing feasts and religious ceremonies to ease their hearts and minds. Either can be effective unless the people decide the lord himself is to blame. On more than one occasion a samurai has found a knife in his throat while he sleeps, the victim of a pious assassin who blames him for the community's troubles.

One of the ironies of the Empire is that the greatest city in the land, Otosan Uchi, suffers from minor earthquakes as often as once a year. Although most of the heimin and nobles that live in the Imperial City justify this as the burden of drawing the

USING DISASTERS IN YOUR GAME

The Rokugani firmly believe that the Fortunes cause natural disasters. Depending on your campaign, they might be right. If your game has a serious religious flavor to it, if the gods really do intervene in the affairs of men, then you should consider all natural disaster, particularly big ones, to be true "acts of god" with very real reasons. If a noble is doing a bad job, if a temple gets burned, if a favorite of the Fortunes dies an unnatural death, they will make their displeasure known. Alternately, you can have the Fortunes take a lesser role in such things: disasters are nothing more than nature running its course. Even so, the perception remains amongst the people that the Fortunes are responsible. This presents all kinds of interesting opportunities, particularly if the PCs (or their lord) are accused of angering the gods.



constant attention of the Celestial Heavens, it occasionally causes courtiers to question whether the Sun and Moon are pleased with their favored son. Typically, earthquakes in Otosan Uchi are minor, though frequent, and the explanation favored by the heimin is that they are caused by the Sun visiting the Hantei Emperor in his palace, causing the earth to tremble from her footsteps.

In this way, minor earthquakes are often seen as a beneficial occurrence within the Imperial City, as the Sun visits her child and advises him on the course of the Empire's future. Perhaps, as well, it should be noted that the last such earthquake occurred over three years ago. It has been whispered that either Amaterasu does not have need to visit her favored son, or that she is displeased with his decisions, and thus remains distant.

WATER

Water plays a vital role in every living thing's life. For the Rokugani peasants it waters their crops, sustains them personally, and provides fish and a means of transport. It can also bring death and destruction. Water is an element of action, constantly on the move. Sometimes those movements bring benefits, like rain for the crops or a river to travel on. But the strength of water can cut through mountains. There are two principal disasters associated with water: the tsunami along the coast, and the flood which can strike anywhere near lakes or streams.

Water is an element of strength and clarity, so water-based disasters denote a failure in one of these areas. Perhaps the people have a failing in their strength or a leader doesn't stand up to his foes as he should. Another possibility is that the people have lost their sense of vision, strayed from their proper course in society. For example, a lord who orders his people to abandon their farms and take up some inappropriate task could easily expect floods with the next harvest. Likewise a people who refused to answer their lord's call to arms in the face of invasion might see their village wiped from the earth by a tsunami.

Tsunami

The perfect incarnation of rising anger, the tsunami begins its brief existence far out to sea as just one of many waves. Slowly it builds in strength and stature, drawing ever nearer the coast. It can swamp a ship in a moment, but its truest and most deadly form comes when it reaches its opposite number: the seemingly immutable earth. The horror of a tsunami comes first from its inevitability. Coastal residents who see the tide suddenly go dramatically out then watch the tsunami bearing down on them from afar, hundreds of feet high and totally unstoppable. Like a living wall, it crashes down upon their world.

A single wave can level a fishing village in an instant. Even stout stone buildings crumble under the water's weight. In a moment the disaster is over, although typically these waves come with terrible storms, making it difficult to react right away. When

the weather finally clears, if anyone has survived, it is time to rebuild or relocate. Possessions lie shattered on the beach or washed out to sea. In the face of such total, nearly instant devastation, the people nearly always seek someone to blame. Tsunamis are rare enough that the common man's logic dictates that they must happen for specific reasons.

Floods

Floods occur with much more frequency than the destructive waves known as Tsunamis. Moreover, they seldom happen instantly, but rather grow over time. Flash floods do occur in Rokugan, especially in areas that have recently undergone a period of drought and lie close to the mountains where melting snow can bring walls of water crashing down dry creek beds. These are the exception, however, rather than the rule. Most floods come from an entirely different source: rain, ceaseless rain pouring down for days or weeks at a time.

Unlike many disasters, it is easy to see a flood coming. The more it rains, the more the rivers and lakes swell. That also means that the people have time to organize some kind of resistance to the flood. Dikes, dams and canals dot Rokugan's landscape, trying their best to control water's flow. When the heavy rains do come, wise lords direct their peasants to make the necessary preparations by shoring up dams and building levees against the rising water. Many samurai, especially those whose holdings are threatened, come into the fields and direct the efforts personally.

The water cannot be put aside forever. It can eventually wear down anything that stands in its way, particularly things built by the hand of man. When a daimyo fights the flood, he is betting that time is on his side, that the rain will end before the waters break through and over his dams. Sometimes he wins; the rain stops and the waters subside. Then the hours of backbreaking labor spent erecting mud and wood levies are worth it. Sometimes, though, the Fortunes scoff at these feeble attempts. The dam breaks, the waters come rushing in and disaster strikes.

Floods can and do wash away entire towns on occasion. When ten feet of water pours into the village square, few houses remain dry and many come apart completely. Fortunately, humans can often avoid death in such situations except for those too close to a dam when it breaks. The biggest casualties come to the livestock and the crops. Even a gentle flood can wipe out fields that took months to plant and mature. This leads to hardship, not only for the peasants but for all of society. Without rice, Rokugan grinds to a halt. The only benefit to a flood is that sometimes it leaves the soil more fertile than before it came. Of course, other times it washes all the fertile topsoil away, depositing it in some other farmer's field downstream. As in all matters, it is the will of the divine that determines such things.

FIRE

As a people who live in homes made largely of wood and paper, the Rokugani have a profound respect for and fear of fire.

Like so many other sources of disaster, fire can be both friend and foe. It cooks food and heats homes, but it also kills men and destroys buildings. More dangerous yet, a simple flame can grow into a raging fire, the benign force becoming a rampaging beast in moments. Most destructive fires start as man-made flames that somehow get out of control. A mishandled campfire can set an entire forest aflame, and a displaced lantern can burn a city down. In these instances, the hand of the divine might or might not play a role. Not so for fire's cousin lightning. It comes with the storm but creates fire and is utterly unpredictable. A single strike can spark a flame that turns a peaceful glen into an inferno.

Fire as an element corresponds to active energy and thought. Thus fire-based disasters happen when man angers the gods through acts of muddled thought or slothfulness. Farmers slow in harvesting their crops can find them charred to ash by a Fortune's displeasure. Samurai who dither rather than act or who constantly change their ways might find their homes felled by lightning blasts or a careless servant's improper tending of the cook fire. A ruler whose thoughts show no focus, who fails to act, is no ruler at all, and the kami will punish him accordingly; so the common folk believe.

Forest Fires

Forests burn from time to time. It is the way of things. Indeed, it is part of the Fortunes' plan for renewing the forests and making room for new growth. Still, such fires can cause great discomfort, even death if there are villages or cities nearby. A forest fire can consume entire communities that lie too close to the tree line. Even if the homes are spared, crops and pastureland might not be so lucky. Fortunately, a vigilant community can see a forest fire coming from a long way off.

Usually the first to bring word of a fire – unless all can smell it on the wind – are those who spend their days in the forest. As animals flee the approaching inferno and columns of smoke rise, the foresters rush back to the villages and cities to give warning. Most communities in regions vulnerable to forest fire have established methods for dealing with them. The local samurai or lord organizes the people and leads them into action (or orders his trusted servants to do so).

It is impossible for mere men to quench a fire with water. Instead they must starve the fire by cutting down trees to create firebreaks, and using controlled fires to burn out underbrush so the greater inferno has nowhere to spread. This is hard, dangerous work. The entire community must man the saws and control the flame. In villages lucky enough to have a talented shugenja in residence, magic can sometimes make a difference, but few have the luxury to rely on supernatural aid. Ultimately it is determination, muscle and the Fortunes that determine the village's fate.

House Fires

Less predictable than forest fires and more dangerous, house fires present a constant threat to all settled Rokugani, particularly



in cities. Wood houses and paper walls make the perfect feeding ground for flames. Everyone in Rokugan practices basic fire safety, never leaving an open flame unattended in a home. Still, accidents happen, as does arson. When a house catches fire every man and woman must step up to fight it, for the conflagration can spread all too quickly.

Here again, as in fighting forest fires, water does little good unless the citizens can catch the fire while it's young. Instead they must quickly tear down the homes that lie in the fire's path. Rapid destruction of private homes for the sake of the greater good entails tough decisions and heartache. Although larger cities have designated fire brigades, for the most part fire fighting is an *ad hoc* affair, directed by the samurai on the scene. Sometimes personal feelings do enter the equation, with those in charge taking the opportunity to destroy a rival or enemy's house and spare a friend's. Of course the common folk are more likely to believe a lord has done something to anger the kami if he comports himself with less than total fairness during the firefighting.

AIR

The air belongs to the gods. Invisible, unstoppable, and vital to survival, air represents the most divine medium in existence. It can take the form of a cooling breeze or gather up water and rain it down on crops. The wind in moderation is a blessing; the wind

in its full fury is a disaster. Although storms combine elements – water in the form of rain, fire in the form of lightning, and air in the form of wind, as phenomena the Rokugani associate storms with the air. The rumbling of thunder and the ceaseless winds so obviously represent the kami that none can doubt the storm's true ruling element. Disasters of the air come in two common forms: storms and *taifuns*. The storm is a local event that can cause significant but brief damage. The *taifun*, or great wind, can devastate entire coastlines with its powerful winds and driving rain.

The element Air corresponds to forces not present and to intuition. As the realm of the Fortunes it is as unfathomable as it is invisible. We see its effects but not the thing itself. Of all the elements, disasters of the air are perceived as having least to do with mortal affairs. Storms are the byproducts of conflicts and competitions amongst the divine. While mortals might suffer the consequences, they seldom have anything to do with the cause. Thus blame seldom attaches to mortals when the air brings disaster unless there is some obvious reason to believe that a lord or shugenja has somehow directly interfered in the Fortunes' affairs.

Storms

A storm brings with it many things and can come in many different guises. All of them can cause death and devastation and



no mortal can stop any of them. Like so many natural disasters, humanity's only recourse lies in batten down the hatches and letting the tempest take its course. The most common storm brings only rain and wind, each of which presents its own problems. Rains cause floods, ruin delicate crops and damage buildings over time. Wind is a greater problem. It can blow down trees, tear off roofs, and send small objects flying with deadly force.

Cold-weather storms tend to be even more problematic. Although rare, a hailstorm can tear a village to pieces, with chunks of ice as large as a man's fist crashing down from the heavens. Hail in particular is seen as a sign that all is not well amongst the kami. Snow is much more common but can prove equally inconvenient. A blizzard can not only dump several feet of snow but bring chills that kill, especially the very young and very old. After a snowfall the community usually comes together to clear the village or city streets and repair damage to homes.

The worst storm of them all is the tornado, thankfully rare but certainly the most deadly incarnation of wind known in Rokugan. Folk wisdom sees the tornado as the very hand of a Fortune reaching down to earth and drawing some of our world up into the celestial realm. The devastation that accompanies this is ancillary to the Fortune's hidden purpose, but that doesn't make it any less deadly. The tornado descends with unbridled fury,

tearing apart homes, castles, fields and people. There is no stopping it, nothing to be done but pray.

Taifun

It comes from the water, growing in strength far beyond shore where no ship can go. It spans hundreds of miles, bringing with it the most terrible sustained winds man ever sees. It brings rain, it spawns tornadoes, it levels entire towns in a day. The Great Wind blows when the Fortunes will it, an expression of the gravest divine doings. In general such storms come in the summer and fall and bring with them nothing but sorrow. The high winds knock down even the most ancient trees, strip roofs from peasant and noble homes alike and flood river and seaside settlements. Aside perhaps for a great earthquake (which is much more rare) no disaster compares in scope or deadliness to the taifun.

And yet, at its center lies an island of calm. The eye of the storm is considered a very sacred, holy place. Here the shugenja say that a pious man can communicate directly with the heavens, even ascend to the celestial realm itself if he knows the way. Of course, the eye moves quickly and the storm soon returns, so one needs to move fast in order to take advantage of this moment of divine accessibility. Many have died seeking such communion,

but those who have succeeded claim that the moment changed their lives forever.

VOID

The natural disasters of void do not fall into the same category as the calamities associated with other elements. The void represents an absence within the world. In terms of disaster, this means catastrophes of deficiency, the removal of something vital to life and happiness. The two most common and harmful void-based disasters are drought and disease. Although different in their variations and effects, the Rokugani see them as being closely linked. Both bring slow agonizing death, neither has any easy solution, and both have a very definite origin amongst the kami.

The disasters of void come from the most grievous offense imaginable: impiety. When the fortunes beset mortals with drought and disease it is their way of retaliating for some impious undertaking, usually by a shugenja or daimyo. Whenever a particularly bad void catastrophe strikes, the rulers immediately start searching for someone on whom they can pin the blame. If they don't find a likely candidate, the people will inevitably blame them. Temple hold ceaseless vigils and prayer cycles hoping to uncover the cause and to placate the angry deities. The people themselves suffer and smolder, casting about for someone, anyone to take out their sorrow and anger upon.

Drought

Water brings life, a simple enough equation. Lack of water brings death to everyone, lord and eta alike. When the gods refuse water to mortals, they bring a long, slow and painful punishment upon man. The drought comes in the guise of pleasant days and sunny afternoons; but the sun perseveres and clouds are nowhere to be found. Days stretch into weeks and then months, and plants refuse to grow. Grasses brown and crumble, animals grow thinner and thinner and soon the people do as well. Eventually the rich soil turns to dry dust, whipped into blinding clouds by fierce, dry winds. The children and elderly suffer first, then the healthy adults. No rice grows, and no fish populate the rivers and lakes which have dried to trickles and muddy ponds. Then death comes, not to be washed away until the rains return.

As landed, wealthy individuals, nobles suffer less from droughts, but are by no means immune. There is no way to counteract a drought. Even the most powerful water magic does little in the face of a prolonged dry spell. The only possible relief comes if a lord is willing to spend money to help himself and his people. Droughts seldom affect all of Rokugan at once. Wealthy lords can import food and even water from other regions if necessary. Although costly, this ensures future good will of both the Fortunes and the people.

Disease

Nothing strikes more fear into a man's soul than disease. Plagues come without warning, a pox for the most egregious sins.

They strike high and low, killing in painful, debilitating and humiliating fashion. Rokugan knows its share of diseases, but one of the most deadly in recent decades is a flu-like illness that comes in the winter. It causes weakness, stomach upset and even death in some cases. Other, more deadly diseases are known as well, including forms of plague and leprosy that have intermittently ravaged communities.

Rokugan's residents, especially the upper classes, have a well-established fear of disease and personal pollution of any kind. They avoid anything and anyone associated with uncleanness. When a virulent disease strikes, samurai typically hide themselves away in their castles, refusing to have any contact with the sick. Many go so far as to banish the sick from their holdings entirely, or even kill them outright so as to prevent the disease's spread. Entire eta villages have been wiped out for fear that they might prove a breeding ground for illness.

Within the peasant ranks, attitudes towards the sick are only a little more charitable. Families tend to their own ill, but villages shun a family with more than one ill member. Neighbors suspect the family of impiety and don't want to become associated with the family for fear of angering a vengeful kami and falling ill themselves. When they see a lord become sick with disease (as opposed to the illnesses attendant with old age) many see this as a sign that the lord has lost his divine mandate. Although they seldom revolt, their support and sympathies start to turn towards other likely heirs to the throne.



The Miya Family

"The Art of War is the way of preserving peace."

— Miya Yoto

Asahina Tomo covered his face to hide the tears. The Matsu and Doji families had been stalemated for weeks. Their protracted skirmishes had cost both families dearly. Neither could afford the food or manpower shortages to continue their pointless war. Sadly, Lion pride and Crane dignity would not allow any other option. The war would continue.

Though both families had realized the need for diplomacy, their emissaries did little more than insult and shout at one another. Every day the tired soldiers grew more frustrated. When the fragile peace finally broke, it would break savagely. It would not be long before the Plain of the Emerald Champion ran red with blood once more. Tomo had hoped to retire by now, but the increasingly violent confrontations between Lion and Crane constantly required his skill with medicines and healing.

"The Plains have ever been the domain of the Emerald Champion," Kakita Ichiro snarled. "The Lion have no business here."

"The Emerald Champion is dead," Matsu Morishigi hissed in reply. His severe features twisted in disdain for the pampered courtier. "You no longer have a claim here, Crane. We Lion need these lands to support our armies, and we shall take them by right of superior force if necessary."

"We shall defend these lands to the death of the last Crane!" Ichiro retorted with a tight, smug smile.

"That seems acceptable," Morishigi replied. He turned and strode quickly toward the tent's exit. His attendants fell into line behind him. Inwardly, Tomo died. He knew that the battle would resume soon. Across the tent, he saw a young Lion, the one called Sanako, shake her head sadly.

Morishigi stopped at the door, his eyes frozen upon the girl who suddenly stood there. She was young and short of stature, but she carried herself with poise. The dust and sweat of a rough journey stained her kimono, but did nothing to diminish the intensity in her eyes. A short sashimono extended from the back

of her armor, flapping in the quick breeze as the tent flap snapped shut behind her. The mon it bore identified her as an Imperial herald, and at last Tomo felt a flash of hope.

"A Miya?" Kakita Ichiro asked archly. "What business do you have here, shisha?"

"I am Miya Yumi," the herald announced, the thunder of her voice belying her small frame. "I carry the Emperor's blessing. I come to bring peace to the Plain of the Emerald Champion."

"We asked for no intervention," Morishigi said bitterly. "Mind your own business, Miya."

"The preservation of peace is my business," Yumi retorted. "If you do not wish to listen to me, perhaps the Imperial Legion that travels two days behind me shall insure that you receive my gracious overtures with honor. Now, let us talk of peace."

"Good," Ichiro laughed lightly. "Someone to talk some sense into this Lion."

"More likely she will set you back in your place, Kakita," Morishigi snapped.

Yumi gave them both a speculative look. "Actually," she said, striding past the two of them. "I wish to speak to neither of you. You are dismissed."

"What?" Morishigi exclaimed.

"But we are the official representatives—" Ichiro began.

"By the power I represent, you are not official any longer," Yumi replied. She turned at the rear of the tent, her eyes scanning the assembled diplomats. She pointed at Tomo. "You," she said, "and you," she pointed at Kitsu Sanako, the young sodan-senzo. "Come, let us talk of peace between the Lion and the Crane."

Asahina Tomo smiled in relief as he stood and bowed to Miya Yumi. As he rose, he saw that relief reflected in Kitsu Sanako's eyes.

The Duty of the Miya

"The choice between love and honor is never easy."

— Doji Shizue

While the Seppun have sworn to protect the Emperor's life and honor, and the Otomo guard the Hantei's political interests, the Miya family have ever acted as the voice of the Emperor, carrying his will to even the farthest reaches of Rokugan. They are the heralds, messengers, and diplomats of the Empire, sowing unity and restoring peace in their wake.

The shisha, or heralds, of the Miya travel endlessly across the face of Rokugan. They are primarily bringers of news. More often than not, if a samurai meets a shisha it is only for an instant as the breathless messenger shouts the Emperor's latest declaration and gallops off at a breakneck pace. The mon of the Miya is representative of their duty. It resembles a complex seven-pointed star, but upon closer examination it is actually seven half-moons surrounding two concentric circles. The seven moons represent the Great Clans, and the outer circle represents the Hantei. The

inner circle represents the Miya family, the smallest part of the design which keeps the rest in balance.

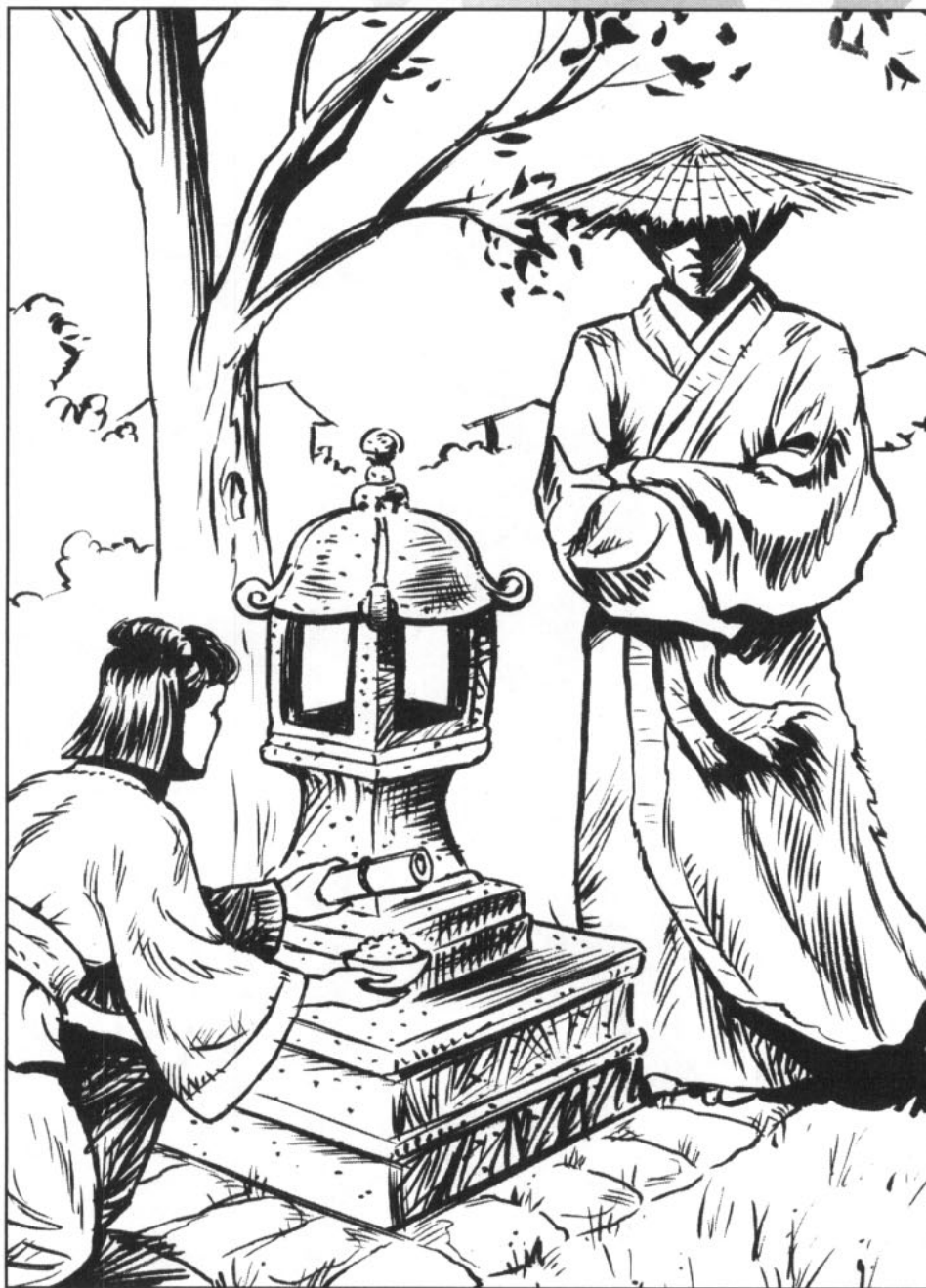
These Imperial heralds are distinctive for the banners that they bear, emblazoned with the mon of the Hantei and sometimes the Miya. They also wear a specially designed arrow-catching cloak called a *horo*. This cloak is woven from wicker, sculpted to billow out behind the herald. Though large and cumbersome, the *horo* is nearly weightless when on horseback, and serves to protect the herald's back from enemy fire. The cloak is immediately identifiable even from a long distance, allowing those who see the herald to prepare or move aside. Imperial heralds may travel through any province in Rokugan. Though border guards may stop a herald to inspect his travel papers, any other interference is an affront to the Emperor himself, an offense punishable by death.

The *shisha* are Rokugan's undisputed masters of the art of heraldry. A skilled *shisha* can identify nearly any mon or personal crest, reciting the name, rank, family, and clan of the samurai who wears it. Every spring, Imperial heralds travel to the homes of all the daimyos of the Great and Minor Clans. At this time, any samurai who wish to officially register a mon or crest may do so. All official mons are meticulously recorded in the heraldic scrolls at Kyuden Miya, and all *shisha* must study these scrolls constantly while they are in their home province.

Shisha also serve as diplomats. Whenever the Emperor determines that an inter-clan conflict has gone on for too long, or threatens the security of the Empire as a whole, a Miya goes to settle the dispute. An Imperial Legion is frequently mobilized as well, but the *shisha* rides on ahead in hopes of quelling the conflict bloodlessly. The *shisha* are quite skilled, and though they are sometimes seen as unwarranted meddlers, it is rare that they cannot bring a tense situation to an amicable conclusion. More often than not, the Imperial Legion's only duty when it finally arrives is to

enforce the treaty the *shisha* has crafted, and to see the Miya safely home.

Besides the important duties of herald and diplomat, the *shisha* also performs many miscellaneous duties. Any event which technically requires the Emperor's attention, but is not important enough to warrant an Otomo or Seppun, falls into this category. The *shisha* frequently oversee hostage exchanges, duels, births, *gempukku* ceremonies, *seppuku*, the ascension of a daimyo, and countless other important events. For all intents and purposes, the *shisha* speaks with the voice of the Emperor while



functioning in this capacity, and must be obeyed without question. In reality, however, the shisha seldom does any more than simply bear witness; most of these duties tend to be long and extremely tedious.

The most common of these miscellaneous duties is the delivery of Imperial gifts. When a samurai performs a great service worthy of the Emperor's gratitude and cannot appear in Otsan Uchi himself, a Miya herald goes forth to bestow the Emperor's reward. The gift may be a *nemuranai*, a fine katana, deeds of land, or other reward. Sometimes the Imperial gift is the herald himself: loyal or heroic servants of the emperor may receive the services of a shisha, usually for a period of service between one and five years. During this time, the shisha serves his new master with the same loyalty he would show the Emperor.

The skills of a shisha make them a welcome addition to any daimyo's service. Usually, they become important messengers or

advisors. Sometimes they are used as scouts, for their knowledge of heraldry is unparalleled. A Miya scout can quickly determine the identities and ranks of every officer in an opposing army simply from the sashimono they wear. At the end of their period of service, the shisha is immediately instructed to report to Otsan Uchi, where they inform the Imperial Guard of every detail of their period of service. This information passes on to the Otomo *seiyaku*. In this manner, the shisha are a useful tool for the Otomo to keep tabs upon all of the clans.

The last of a shisha's duties, and the one in which they take the most quiet pride, is distributing the Blessing of the Emperor. When Miya first rode forth to carry the Emperor's word, he accumulated a large group of fanatical followers. Some of these were samurai, but most were carpenters, farmers, stonemasons, and assorted craftsmen. As Miya carried the Emperor's news, these men repaired the damages done by Fu Leng's army, constructed bridges and castles where there were none before,



and increased the stability and prosperity of the Empire. When Hantei II learned what Miya had done, he ordered Miya's followers to continue in this capacity, bringing the Blessing of the Emperor wherever they went.

The Blessing continues to this day. Every year, all Miya set aside a portion of their wealth toward the Blessing (usually about fifteen per cent of their income, though many of the older and wealthier Miya give much more). The daimyo of the Miya meets with his advisors for three days to discuss the events of the past year. They discuss what areas of the Empire have been ravaged by war or the elements, which landmarks have fallen into ruin, or what fledgling cities can use development. With the money the family has donated, they hire the finest craftsmen in the Empire for a period of one full year. These craftsmen travel to the three areas most in need of assistance. The craftsmen are paid well, and never ask for additional reward after they arrive. They work swiftly and skillfully, endeavoring not to disturb anything while they stay, and leaving the Emperor's Blessing in their wake. The Miya never discuss the Emperor's Blessing. They do not do what they do for praise. They see it as their honor and duty to increase the worth of the Empire, and that is thanks enough.

The Role of the Miya

The Miya family has a unique place in Rokugan's rigidly structured society. While they are the chosen heralds and messengers of the Emperor, their origins are far more humble than the Otomo or the Seppun. The first Miya was a low-born samurai who happened to be in the right place at the right time. For this reason, the other Imperial families often tend to overlook the Miya, considering them little more than glorified servants.

The Otomo, in particular, get along poorly with the Miya. As the Otomo work to ever keep the Great Clans in conflict, the Miya sow peace and create strength. The Miya resent the Otomo family's underhanded games, and the Otomo consider the Miya foolish and intrusive. Though both families are necessary to Rokugan's unity, they rarely work alongside each other. The Seppun, on the other hand, consider the Miya a useful if curious family. The Imperial Legions and miharu work closely with the shisha and appreciate their drive to resolve war without bloody confrontation.

The Great Clans are often uncertain exactly where to place the Miya. They are a family close to the Emperor, but they do not seek political gain for their own benefit. They are a rich family, but do not maintain a large army. Militant clans consider them an enigma, occasionally of use as diplomats, impractical as a military target, and thus better left alone. Political-minded clans such as the Crane or Scorpion tend to look upon them with mild pity. In their estimation, the Miya have achieved ultimate success: the blessing of the Emperor, great wealth, high social standing, unlimited access to the entirety of the Empire. Sadly, they can use it for nothing but the benefit of others.

The Minor Clans hold the Miya in high esteem. The Miya are the voice of the Emperor, and always bring the news when the Emperor grants a samurai's petition for Minor Clan status. Afterward, this same shisha becomes the new clan's first and most important contact with the Emperor's court, and the means by which they can keep in touch with what the political climate of Rokugan. Shortly after the Miya family was established, Kitsune Fusaie, one of the greatest daimyos of the Fox, claimed "If the Emperor is the heart of Rokugan, then the Miya must be the blood." Many Minor Clan daimyos share his opinion.

The Miya's close bond with the Minor Clans is entirely a result of their duty as news-bringers. Time and time again, a Miya's diplomatic skills have saved Minor Clans from utter destruction at the hands of a belligerent Great Clan. Though the province of the Miya has never been invaded in Rokugan's long history, the family has many grateful allies in the Minor Clans that would rally to their aid.

The Fox have been long-time friends and allies of the Miya through the Emperor's close association with that clan. Since the Sparrow Clan emerged into the greater world of Rokugani politics, they have begun to discover that they have much in common with Miya philosophy as well. The Suzume have a profound respect not only for the Miya devotion to peace, but their unbridled dedication to diplomacy even in the face of chaos.

Surprisingly, Tsuruchi of the Wasp Clan is also very vocal about his admiration of the Miya. The Wasp daimyo frequently speaks in glowing terms of Miya Yoto's great diplomatic skill. Some whisper that the Emperor and Emerald Champion might never have given Tsuruchi their support without Yoto's influence. Though Yoto has never implied any such claim, and respectfully denies his involvement, the Wasp still adamantly support the Miya. Indeed, Wasp magistrates who encounter a shisha galloping down the road on some important mission often postpone their own duties to accompany the herald, offering their sharp eyes and swift arrows to keep the herald safe.

Lands of the Miya

Unlike other Imperial Families, the Miya do not make their home near Otosan Uchi. Kyuden Miya, the family's rather small ancestral home, stands on the site of the original Miya's home. It is nestled among the Spine of the World Mountains, just north of the Plain of Thunder, equidistant between Shiro Iuchi and Shiro no Soshi. The Miya are a small family, perhaps equal in size to the Sparrow. They do not maintain a large territory, and keep mainly to themselves. They have taken upon themselves the maintenance and care of the Plain of Thunder, upon which they hold the Test of the Emerald Champion whenever the Emperor's protector must be chosen.

The lands of the Miya are rugged but serenely beautiful. The inhabitants are skilled gardeners, farmers, and masons. They have become adept at sculpting the landscape in an aesthetically

pleasing manner. Many lush cherry trees and vibrant patches of wild flowers decorate the province. The Miya actually have very little arable farmland, and were it not for the wealth of their position it is unlikely that their land could properly support their population.

Kyuden Miya is small, especially for the palace of an Imperial Family. It is only two stories, and encompasses a dozen rooms and a small garden. The daimyo and his immediate family dwell in the palace, attended by their servants and whatever guests happen to be passing through. Other Miya samurai live spread throughout the province in small but opulently decorated homes. The majority of younger Miya, however, are shisha. As heralds, their duties demand constant travel and service. Over half of the Miya family spends most of the time away from the province, only visiting their home for two or three days a year. These days, as mentioned earlier, are spent in tireless study of recently registered crests and mons.

History of the Miya

The tiny farms and villages of the Miya province are lightly populated, but nearly every heimin and hinin serves with a fierce loyalty. The Miya remember their humble origins, and take great care to treat their vassals with respect. The Emperor's favor has protected the Miya for centuries, allowing them to maintain their small borders without fear of intrusion. Though they have few bushi, much wealth and a general disdain for combat, their province has never been attacked in the family's long history.

On the other hand, the Miya are no strangers to war. In every great conflict, the Miya have been there. When they cannot use diplomacy to halt bloodshed, they work as messengers and standard-bearers, attempting to fulfill their duties as swiftly and expertly as possible. The family motto is a curious one: "There are no Miya heroes." This is not of any attempt to undermine the family's courage or honor, but simply an assertion of their disdain for war. Miya do not seek glory in combat, they only seek its end. Of course, this cannot always be so. Oftentimes, the Miya find their proximity to the Emperor thrusts them into the heart of conflict, and they do their best to adapt.

During the First War, the Miya found their first test. The idea of a civil war in Rokugan was unheard of. The Emperor heard rumors of conflict, but greatly underestimated the scale of what was quickly escalating to the south. He sent a few shisha out to investigate the matter and report back. The heralds found themselves embroiled in the middle of a full-scale military conflict between the Crane and the Crab. Instead of attempting to return to the Emperor for further orders, the Miya took it upon themselves to solve the conflict. They met with officials from the Crane and Crab in an attempt to ameliorate matters.

Unfortunately, they only made things worse. Bringing such bitter enemies into close proximity only made tempers flare. A careless word from a Miya shisha caused a short, heated



argument between the Yasuki and Daidoji representatives. Shortly afterward, the Yasuki family broke off from the Crane Clan. Though there were extenuating circumstances behind the Yasuki break, the Miya nonetheless blamed themselves for the resulting animosity. The First War continued to rage onward, and the shisha returned to Otosan Uchi in shame. Rather than demanding the Miya's *seppuku*, the Emperor ordered the shisha to the front lines. Half of them joined the Crab army, and the rest fought on behalf of the Crane. There, they were to study the ways of war in order to bring peace. The Miya agreed.

Though many shisha died in that bloody war, those who survived learned of the horrors of combat and the psychological terrors such conflict brings. Contemporary daimyo Miya Sadamasa wrote down everything he had seen so as to prevent future conflicts. The book was called simply *No Heiwa* ("On Peace"). It is still considered the definitive work on diplomacy. Nearly every peacemaker or magistrate in Rokugan owns or has read a copy, and Sadamasa's simple, thoughtful words are often quoted to defuse potentially tense situations.

In the fifth century, the Miya met their next great test. When a fleet of gaijin ships sailed into Golden Sun Bay, the Emperor dispatched a band of shisha to greet them. Once the Miya boarded the ships, the gaijin held them hostage to insure Rokugani good behavior. Though details on the Battle of White Stag are sketchy, many of these Miya later died or were lost forever when the gaijin fleet was repulsed. For many Miya this is a bitter memory, a terrible failure and a lost opportunity. They wonder what could have been changed and what might have gone differently. Would the gaijin and Rokugani be at peace today if they had only tried harder? And somewhere in the world, perhaps the descendants of those taken at White Stag yet live, far across the sea and unaware of their true home. The Miya have taken a quiet vow to one day find these lost cousins and bring them home. Since White Stag, the Miya have redoubled their efforts in the quest for peace. Though there may be "no Miya heroes" there are countless tales of shisha who strove for peace against impossible odds.

Sadly, the current Miya daimyo, Miya Satoshi, has no tongue for diplomacy and no taste for peace. Having spent much of his young life in the courts of the Matsu, he considers his family's diplomatic ways to be weak and foolish. He believes the Miya should seize the power that is rightfully theirs and assume their rightful place at the Emperor's side. He is a warrior, and believes his people should be warriors as well. He laughs at Sadamasa's archaic writings, and claims he will "write a new book in the history of the Miya." In the meantime, the aged Miya Yoto weeps for his son. As the Empire descends slowly toward a full scale war, it seems that peacemakers are needed now more than ever.

What It Means To Be Ronin In Rokugan

Do not be wary of men who take risks with title and lands. Be wary of men who have nothing to lose.

– The Tao of Shinsei

Of all the citizens within Rokugan's Celestial Order, none are so thoroughly isolated as ronin. Even the lowly eta have one another to depend upon for support and camaraderie, but one who calls a ronin friend is rare indeed. There is no certainty where his next meal will come from, and no assurances of a warm place to sleep when the rain and cold nights come. Honor must be discarded for practicality and survival.

The Emerald Empire is a hostile environment for the ronin.

Historically, ronin are a dichotomy within Rokugan. Those few who appear in the vast histories of the clans are either heroes of the highest order, or villains of the most despicable lot. The fact that the vast majority has been neither fails to keep most Rokugani from assuming the worst about any given wave man. A ronin must work twice as hard in order to prove himself even half as honorable as any other man.

The harshest reality of ronin is this: for every Usagi, Tsuruchi, or Kaimetsu-uo that has existed in the history of Rokugan, there have been ten thousand nameless, faceless wave men who died alone and are remembered by no one.



Ronin

HOW ONE BECOMES RONIN

There are many ways to become ronin, but one that deserves special consideration at the moment is the loss of one's family name. The recent coup in Otosan Uchi has led to the abolishment of the entire Akodo family of the Lion, as well as the entire Scorpion Clan. Many samurai chose to avoid their fate by declaring themselves ronin. Consequently, travelers through Rokugan can expect to see a great many more ronin than have previously been evident.

The loss of one's family name is a devastating blow to any virtuous samurai, one which can destroy all but the most righteous ronin's honor and sense of self-worth. Many such individuals find themselves reduced to banditry within the span of a few short years. Consequently, this horrible disgrace is reserved for the most heinous of offenses.

Generally speaking, a samurai is stripped of his family name when he has committed some horrible disgrace or failure of duty. This is a much finer line than one might imagine. A samurai who fails in his duty and is truly repentant would most likely be permitted to commit *seppuku*. An unrepentant samurai, however, might be shamed with public execution. In order to lose family and clan, a samurai must have disgraced or failed his clan in some spectacular fashion, and genuinely repent his mistake. A harsh or vengeful daimyo, seeing the samurai's anguish over his transgression, may force him to live with the shame of his failure. It is without question the most excruciating fate that can befall an honorable samurai.

Some ronin do not suffer disgrace, but are simply born into the station. A child born of a samurai and a geisha, for instance, is technically samurai, but recognized by no family or clan. Many choose to ignore their samurai heritage and live uneventful lives as merchants or craftsmen. Others set out to claim their rightful heritage – a task difficult at best. Those rare few whom a clan accepts are so honored only after years, if not generations, of service to an unyielding daimyo.

WHAT DO RONIN EAT?

A ronin has no home where a meal is waiting. A wise wave man conserves his funds following a fruitful assignment, but many do not have sufficient self-control for such deferred gratification. Often a ronin finds himself at the mercy of the peasantry. Threatening simple farmers will certainly get results, but may anger their lord; a mistake which can quickly and brutally end a ronin's journey. Many ronin must either work at demeaning manual labor to earn food or, perhaps worse, hunt for their food. One of the many reasons proper Rokugani shun wave men is their suspicion that the ronin may have recently come into contact with dead animal flesh and thus become unclean.

Those ronin who do conserve their resources still manage only a meager diet. Simple unseasoned rice, noodles, and some vegetables make up their diet. Inexpensive tea is the most common beverage. And of course, there are countless ronin who partake of coarse, low-quality shochu, a hard liquor brewed from barley. The so-called "crab water" is the only escape they have from the brutality of everyday life.

WHERE DO RONIN SLEEP?

With no home to call their own and frequently little or no money to their names, ronin must depend upon the hospitality of strangers. Samurai will not offer their homes to such deplorable creatures unless they are exceptionally compassionate (or at least believe the ronin can be useful to them). Many of the peasantry view ronin as frighteningly unstable; some combine this fear with abuse or neglect as revenge against the samurai caste. All of this results in a simple fact of life: a ronin had best know how to take care of himself in the wild. Those who cannot find themselves victims of the forces of nature and can expect to meet their ancestors in very short order.

Ronin with a paid position within a village or samurai's retinue may sleep in inns or geisha houses. Even a respected wave man will rarely be given accommodations within the palace. Doing so insults the samurai who live within the simple barracks; most ronin are paid and released during the evenings to find their own sleeping arrangements.

HOW DO RONIN FIND WORK?

In order to survive, most ronin must offer their swords for hire. Every ronin hopes for a prestigious assignment as a yoriki or yojimbo, but such a position is rarely available to a wave-man. Many must settle for positions of protectors for a village or merchant. Others work as mercenaries for the clans. The Wasp Clan, for example, hires great numbers of ronin to protect their lands while they scour Rokugan for fugitives. The Unicorn Clan's history of adoption into the clan during their time in the Burning Sands makes them particularly open to hiring ronin, although they adopt individuals far less frequently than they once did.

Like so many other aspects of a ronin's life, finding suitable work is a matter of being in the right place at the right time. To those who seek ronin hirelings, one wave man is the same as



another, and the job frequently goes to the first ronin who happens along. Many ronin are too proud to solicit work, and rare is the wave man who directly requests work for pay.

Ronin have few resources to assist in locating work. Certain waystations for wave men have been built by other ronin, perhaps as many as half a dozen across the Empire. The best known of these, the House of the Green Coi, is located in the Eastern Hub Village just outside Otosan Uchi. Operated by a retired ronin, the House of the Green Coi serves as sort of a recruiting station for ronin. Many samurai who need additional dependable troops contact the owner with their requirements, who then passes the information to trustworthy ronin. For example, the Crab Clan frequently hires ronin to accompany Hiruma scouts or to serve as yojimbo to Yasuki merchants. After all, the Crab bushi have larger worries than protecting simple commerce.

WHO ARE THEIR FRIENDS?

Many players wonder why Rokugani are so biased against ronin. The answer is really very simple. A clan-affiliated samurai has both a family and a clan with a rich, proud history that lives and breathes within his heart, infusing his every action with pride and a sense of accomplishment. With his

ancestors guiding him, the samurai becomes part of something greater than himself: a living legacy filling him with the knowledge that his death will one day add to the proud tradition of his people.

A ronin has none of this. He is merely a man, and nothing more.

Other Rokugani look at the ronin and know that his heart and soul are empty of pride. They wonder how he can bear such a void, and they avoid him, for to associate with such a man disrespects one's own noble heritage.

Nonetheless, there are rare individuals among the samurai of the clans who see ronin as more than simple, disposable tools. These self-assured, bold individuals who treat ronin as equals often find themselves with life-long allies who will move heaven and earth to help what may be their only friend.

Contrary to what one might think, many ronin choose not to associate with one another. Although some ronin band together for a common purpose (such as the Village of the Nightingale in *Code of Bushido*), many more cannot bear the company of other wave men. For these men, another ronin is a mirror reflecting all

his own flaws and disgraces. Other ronin only remind them how far they have fallen.

Ronin may find camaraderie among the peasantry, but it is a difficult relationship that requires much effort to establish. Ronin hired to protect villages for long periods of time will earn the respect and admiration of the villagers, becoming a hero in their eyes. For the most part, however, the peasantry regards ronin with one of two attitudes: fear or disdain. Many peasants fear the ronin as an unstable element, answerable to no authority. Those heimin who resent their lot in life, however, see ronin as a means of achieving some small degree of vengeance against the samurai caste as a whole, taking any opportunity to cheat him. It is a small, petty victory, but it may be the only one a heimin may ever achieve over a samurai. Wise ronin take no action against such oppressors, for striking out against the populace will bring down swift retribution upon them.

THE RONIN IN COURT

As deadly as the wilds of Rokugan and the plains of war are for the ronin, perhaps nowhere is as dangerous as court life. A ronin is never so alone as he is when facing the political intrigue and subtle manipulations of courtiers.

An invitation to court is both a blessing and a curse for the wave man. While the opportunities to better his lot in life abound, so too do the threats to his very existence. For a ronin who wishes to better his lot in life, being invited to court can prove the means to achieve one's dream, or the destruction of all one holds dear.

ARRIVING IN COURT

Court is largely an invitation-only affair. Any ronin who appears uninvited at court will, if he is lucky, be summarily turned away. More rigid hosts could have him killed outright for his presumption. Unless there is official business to be conducted, most ronin avoid court life altogether.

Some daimyo reward ronin for valorous service by inviting them to court. Many daimyo hire ronin to perform unsavory tasks; occasionally, the ronin impresses his employer with his skill and ingenuity. He may then find himself promoted to yojimbo or minor yoriki, and as such may accompany his daimyo to court. This rarely lasts, however, as the novelty wears off and the ronin is dismissed or assigned other duties.

A RONIN'S BLADE

In addition to being a ronin's only claim to his samurai heritage, his swords are his only tools. They prove his status to peasants who hire him for protection and grant him slight lenience from magistrates. A ronin must rely on them to provide food when work is scarce.

Ronin sell their services for a price: food, armor, a place to sleep. It is not entirely uncommon for them to hunt with their blades when traps fail, and some ronin have even gone so far as to sell their elegant tsuba, replacing them with less ornate pieces of iron.

While a samurai's sword is his life, a ronin's life is only worth as much as his food and shelter. Without those, he is already a dead man.

Valorous service by a ronin may also result in a boon from the daimyo. This is an extremely valuable position for a ronin to be in. Many take such an opportunity to request a position of service, thereby eliminating their search for room and board. Some, however, specifically request an opportunity to attend court. These ambitious ronin believe that greater opportunities can be found in the political whirlwind of court life.

Yet another method for a ronin to find a place in court is as a representative of a village or settlement. Many villages lie outside the boundaries of the great clans, plagued by bandits and dependent on ronin for protection. If these settlements are large enough, they may be granted the right to send a representative to the nearest court. One notable example is Toshi sano Kanemochi Kaeru, the City of the Rich Frog. Nestled comfortably between the Lion and Unicorn clans, the citizens of this city normally send a representative to the court of both clans. Naturally, villages within the lands of the clans never do this. Any village which hires a ronin clearly believes that its lord cannot protect it, and the fate of such a village would be dire indeed.

There is one other option that can bring a ronin to court: amusement. Cruel courtiers may bring a ronin just to provide some excitement for the court. Certain courtiers derive enormous amusement from seeing just what a ronin will do when presented with an incredibly delicate situation. This entertainment has proved fatal to more than one ronin who unknowingly committed

a grievous social offense. Another side to this practice is the bringing of clan ronin to court in order to embarrass members of the ronin's former clan. A Scorpion who brings an ex-Crab bushi to court as his yojimbo incites frustration and hostility among the Crabs of that court, which the Scorpion could then use to his advantage.

THE TREATMENT OF RONIN IN COURT

Court life is not easy for ronin. They are surrounded by hostility with few if any allies to offer them respite. Even open-minded courtiers regard a ronin's presence as a curiosity or amusement, and will likely take every opportunity to make him feel out of place. Conservative courtiers find the ronin's presence an affront to the honor of the court itself. Even the slightest misstep or inappropriate comment will have them demanding his banishment or outright death.

Ronin from the clans typically have the hardest time in court. These are men and women who once held a position of great honor and responsibility, but lost it because they were not worthy. Needless to say, his former clan will be hostile toward, or at best disdainful of, the ronin. The enemies of the ronin's former clan may be somewhat more receptive, primarily as a means of embarrassing his former clan and drawing attention to their mistakes.



True ronin, though also treated with hostility, do not have the additional burden of previous failure hanging over their heads. Most courtiers mock their attempts to claim their samurai heritage, but will not actively seek their destruction without provocation. True ronin who have earned an invitation to court are usually intelligent enough not to draw untoward attention to themselves and stand a good chance of emerging unscathed.

Regardless of origin, ronin in court may expect to be given a wide berth by courtiers and diplomats. A ronin will quickly become accustomed to feeling all eyes upon him whenever he speaks or enters a room. Raised fans hide smirks and amused grins at his actions and words. There will be little outright hostility or rudeness, of course, as no one wishes to insult the host by treating another guest poorly. Still, the more conservative guests will act with thinly veiled disgust and quickly move on to the next conversation.

It is nonetheless possible for a ronin to find allies in court. Younger or older guests who are more open-minded may take an interest in him, if only to understand that which is different from them. These bizarre and unlikely friendships often end in tragedy as the well-intentioned samurai are pulled into the same plots that demean and disgrace the ronin. Those that endure, however, can last a lifetime. Those exceedingly few ronin who eventually find a place for their descendants among one of the great clans often begin their journey with a simple friendship at court.

WHAT THEY STAND TO LOSE

With so little to call their own, ronin cling tightly what they have. For this reason alone, many avoid court, where the merciless environment of manipulation and politics can cost them everything. Material possessions are not a weighty concern; the threat is to their honor and integrity.

The schemes and games of manipulative courtiers naturally gravitate to the obvious target of a wave man at court. The goal of these games is to humiliate and demean the ronin in front of his host. Honorable ronin trapped in these machinations become bewildered, disoriented and disgraced. Only the most alert and cunning ronin can avoid these dangerous schemes. Those who cannot often leave the court in shame.

Normal protocols in Rokugan demand that a samurai must gain permission from the appropriate daimyo to avenge an insult. Ronin have no lord. Therefore, any insult may be immediately and brutally avenged with only the permission of the host of the court. With half of the court attempting to goad the ronin into making an embarrassing statement and the other half waiting for a chance to cut him down for any insult, court is a deadly environment indeed for the ronin.

WHAT THEY STAND TO GAIN

With so many risks, many might wonder why a ronin would attend court at all. When one has so little, however, there is everything to gain.

Being invited to court in the first place is a significant achievement. It bespeaks an ability to say the right thing to the right person at the right time; an invaluable skill in court. Such an ability can serve the ronin well in this environment.

Better, if the ronin can impress someone in authority sufficiently they may offer him a position within their clan. Not a permanent position, of course; those can only be earned through generations of heroic service. But a position as a yojimbo, doshin or yoriki can be earned if the ronin is industrious enough and the courtier in question is relatively open-minded. The notion of a place to sleep and regular meals is quite appealing to most ronin.

Many true ronin aspire to acceptance within a great clan. Most have this dream cruelly driven from them by harsh reality in short order. Those who persist eventually recognize the immensity of the task they have set for themselves. Only generations of selfless service to their lord can result in the adoption of their descendants into the family of a great clan. The best a ronin can hope for is that his grandchildren may be adopted into the family toward the end of their lives, assuming he and his children live each day of their lives thinking only of their lord.

Understandably, many ronin perish or abandon this quest long before its fruition.

For the most honorable ronin, there is another potential benefit to attending court: the recognition of their deeds by those greater in station. As masterless samurai, the actions of a ronin receive no acknowledgement from others. In court, however, a ronin who acts with honor may be recognized for valorous deeds he has performed. This is as close to the ceremony wherein a daimyo proudly recognizes his samurai's achievements as most ronin will ever come.

THE AFTERMATH OF COURT

For the ronin, court is as grueling an arena as any battlefield. Those who survive unscathed will find themselves the envy of other ronin. Even those who suffer humiliation and abuse will walk away with something; a known guest of a daimyo's court commands more respect in his province. Peasants will treat him with more generosity and accommodation. Among samurai, the reaction varies. The clan and family of anyone whom the ronin insulted while at court will be intent on avenging the dishonor. Should that individual have enemies, however, they will be receptive to the ronin and eager to elevate him to a position of respect so as to cause further trouble. To those uninvolved in any insult, the wave man has gained familiarity. They may choose to employ him for certain discreet services or other unofficial duties.

Unfortunately, most ronin who attend court leave with no more than they possessed when they came. To them, court is a pleasant, if intimidating, reprieve from a harsh, unpleasant life. When court has concluded, they are dismissed and must return that life, wandering the face of the Emerald Empire.

This is the lot of the ronin.



Chapter Two: Afternoon

Good day, samurai of the Empire.

The afternoon is lazy, and the courtiers of the Empire walk through the twisting garden paths, enjoying the faint heat of the day. Soon it will become too cold to hold meetings outside, and the winter will truly be upon us.

There is to be a ceremony in the gardens today; a young Crab samurai will be given his gempukku, and we are all invited to attend. They say the youth will choose the name Tampako, in honor of his dead father, but no matter. Crab gempukku are honest and straightforward. We will know the truth of the lad's heart soon enough.

I know that the boy had been apprenticed to the Lion for battle-training, and I see that his skill with weapons is nearly unmatched among those his own age. The practice of fostering is still a popular one in the Empire - more so, now that alliances among the Great Houses are so scarce and so avidly sought.

The Empire is home to a thousand bright stars, each rivaling the heavens themselves. Every youth beginning their adult lives, and every proud artisan that sings of courage and honor - these are the things at the heart of the Empire. We tell the tales of samurai and heroes to remind ourselves that we, too can be great. So, let us walk among the gardens and see the future in this boy's eyes.

The Empire has many reasons to be proud.

Doji Amieko



Hidden Blades

The hostel was like a thousand others in Rokugan. It was poorly built. The roof leaked. The sake was old and bitter and so was the hostel master, full of resentment after a lifetime of catering to ungrateful samurai. The place didn't even have a name. It was just another stop on Fresh Soul's Road.

The old traveler's eyes were bright. Like so much else on his journey, the hostel brought back memories. He drew his horse to a halt. Its breath was labored in the harsh winter air, as was his own. Winter was no time to travel in Rokugan, not at his age, and not alone. It was a miracle he had made it so far. He paused for a moment to pray to the Fortunes. If they were in the mood to grant him miracles, he hoped they were still watching. He would need more miracles before his journey was done.

A small boy dressed in rags dashed out, bowed, and helped the old man dismount. He eyed the traveler curiously but discreetly. The fine clothing, peaked cap, and sword declared him a samurai, but he wore no mon. Ronin? The boy shrugged and turned to lead the horse away.

"Thank you, child," the man smiled, pressing a *bu* into the boy's hand. The youngster looked down at the silver in surprise, then smiled back, hurrying to the stable to rub down the horse and brag to his friends.

The traveler coughed as he mounted the steps to the hostel. He was far too old for this, but he had no alternative. He pushed the door open and entered. A drunken ronin staggered past, stopping to laugh loudly and clap the old man on the shoulder. He chuckled as he shut the door behind him and the ronin continued on his way.

"Not much has changed since the days we rode, has it, Yoto-sama?" asked a man waiting at a nearby table. He was another ronin, an odd character wearing the robes of a monk and jingasa of a soldier, both emblazoned crudely with the mon of a nightingale. He hunched low on his cushion, but peered up as Yoto approached. His face was as weathered as his robes. The years had chiseled his expression into a permanent frown, but his eyes smiled.

"I wouldn't say that, Koan," Yoto replied, settling onto an opposing cushion and signaling the hostel master. "Everyone but me seems to get younger every year."

Koan laughed out loud, clapping his hands heartily. Yoto smiled in his reserved fashion. Miya Yoto had always envied ronin like Koan. They didn't spend their time hiding from themselves like the samurai of the court. They lived.

The hostel master waited to be acknowledged. "A bottle of sake and a cup, please," Yoto said, returning the master's bow with a nod of his head. "And a bowl of rice." He glanced to the side, noting the empty table and cup of water before Koan. "Make that two bowls of rice," he amended, "and two cups." The hostel master bowed again shortly and waddled off.

"Thank you," Koan said. "Times have been difficult."

"Indeed," Yoto replied. Yoto took a few moments to survey the room. Two more tables were occupied. The drunken ronin sat at one, nodding as if he were about to fall asleep in his cup. A whip-thin merchant and his yojimbo sat at another, arguing quietly with a small man in a tattered red kimono.

"Are you sure this place is safe?" Yoto asked.

"As safe as anywhere," Koan replied. "The drunk is a former Akodo. He's honorable enough, if a little unstable. The merchant I know only by reputation, but he's a Mantis. Here on business, nothing more. None of them would betray you. You're the daimyo of the greatest peacekeeping family in the Empire, and if they knew that they would appreciate what you've done for them."

"I'm not the daimyo," Yoto said, a grimace twisting his normally cheerful face. "That is now the role of my son, Satoshi."

The hostel master arrived then with their sake and rice. They both waited quietly while he poured them each a cup, then returned to his business.

Koan nodded slowly as he sipped. "We've met, briefly," he said. "I came to visit you. He banished me from Miya lands. I assumed something was amiss, but I did not expect you had retired."

"I did not wish to retire, so obvious was the violence in Satoshi's heart," Yoto answered. "I had hoped to lead him by example, but quite the opposite happened. In the last year, his philosophies grew popular with the younger shisha, allies who would rather see a vital young warrior in charge than a feeble old man. When he demanded that I step down, the others supported him. I never saw it coming. I had been a stranger to the court for too long. Now, I have few friends left."

"You have many friends, Miya Yoto," Koan said fiercely. "Just look for them. Me, for one. Others. You've helped countless people, and they are grateful. If you only said the word, you could have an army at your back."

Yoto drank deeply from his cup, his eyes pained. "I am no warrior. I could never strike against Satoshi. No matter what may happen, he is my son and I love him more than life. Every morning I pray that he has come to his senses. Every night I curse myself for a fool. I should never have let the Lion raise him. Still, I have hope for him, even now."

"Then why are you here?" Koan asked, eating a mouthful of rice. "Why have you fled your own castle to seek an alliance with an old bandit like me?"

"In case I am wrong," Yoto said after a pause. "I lived my life stopping wars. I know when one is brewing. Shoji's failed coup was only the beginning. The Emperor's Legions run rampant, hunting phantoms. The Crab mobilize in the south, turning away from the Wall for the first time in centuries. The Crane and Lion are more belligerent than ever. Yokatsu marries off Unicorn daughters right and left, trying to secure alliances wherever he can. The Phoenix hide in their castles and wait for the worst. The Fortunes only know what the Dragon are doing, or why. Nothing makes sense anymore. The new Hantei means well, but I fear he has clutched a viper to his heart."

"Or a scorpion."

"Exactly." Yoto glanced about the room once more. The door opened to admit a group of strangers, hooded against the cold. "If the Miya will no longer seek peace, then someone must. Someone must stop Kachiko's plans, whatever they are. If it cannot be Satoshi, then by the Thunders it will be me."

Koan laughed out loud and threw back the rest of his cup.

"What are you laughing at?" Yoto asked, annoyed.

"You, my friend," Koan pointed over his cup. "For a moment there, you reminded me of a young herald I once journeyed with. All full of fire and venom, ready to wipe war from the face of Rokugan even if he had to fight the generals himself to do it."

Yoto smiled. "Except now I know that I cannot do it alone. If I had realized that earlier, perhaps I would still be daimyo. But never mind that. I have heard rumors of a call to arms among the ronin, of an army gathering somewhere in the Empire for unknown purpose."

Koan nodded sharply as he ate another mouthful. "Indeed. They gather south of Togashi Mountain. Their leader is none other than Toturi the Black."

"Toturi," Yoto said, his white eyebrows rising. "I would have thought him retired to a monastery."

"Many would say the same of you, old friend."

"Point taken," Yoto admitted. "How many follow him?"

"Hundreds. It is said he will have thousands before he is done. I've been thinking about joining him myself. I don't know what he plans, but it would be nice to be part of something again."

"Genius!" Yoto exclaimed under his breath, eyes wide with wonder. "Of course it would be Toturi!"

Koan blinked. "I don't quite follow you."

"Don't you see, Koan?" Yoto asked, gesturing wildly with one hand. "He may be the only man who can unite Rokugan! He's the



Empire's finest general, he has no political entanglements, and he just might be clever enough to avoid Kachiko's snares! He is working toward redemption! To save the Empire where he once failed!"

"Or he wishes to rule it," Koan said. "That is how the Great Clans see him."

"Only for now. If I join Toturi, the daimyos will see otherwise. I am still the most respected diplomat in Rokugan. Together, Toturi and I may be able to stop this war before it begins."

"Why, father!" called out a mocking voice. "What are the chances I would find you here?"

Koan and Yoto both turned. One of the strangers threw back his hood, revealing a handsome young man with shoulder-length hair. He opened his cloak to reveal a tan kimono bearing two family mons. On the right, he wore the mon of the Miya; on the

left, closer to his heart, the mon of the Matsu. "I am sorry, father," he said. "Did I interrupt your conversation?"

"Satoshi," Yoto hissed.

A sneer spread across Koan's face. His hand strayed toward the pouch of scrolls at his belt. Satoshi grinned. The five men behind Satoshi took a step forward, hands on katana. The Mantis merchant and his yojimbo, sensing trouble, quickly excused themselves. The Akodo was unconscious on the floor.

"No," Yoto whispered. "Do not deliver him the excuse he wishes for."

Satoshi frowned in disappointment. "I ordered my servants to keep a close eye on you, father. You know you are not well. How lucky I found you on my way to Kyuden Kakita."

"An odd route you chose," Yoto said.

"But a serendipitous one," Satoshi replied. "Yasoharu, Kansuke, doesn't my father look dreadful? I think we arrived just in the nick of time!"

"Yes, Satoshi-sama," one laughed.

"Well, we wouldn't want your health to deteriorate, father. That would be a tragedy," Satoshi said. "Take him to his room. In the morning, return him to Kyuden Miya. The rest of you will continue onward with me to the Winter Court."

Yoto stood, his hands shaking with anger and fear. "You cannot do this, Satoshi."

Satoshi stood before his father, stooping to look directly into his eyes.

"Stop me, old man," he said.

The two samurai took Yoto by either arm, escorting him to one of the hostel's many rooms.

"And you, thief," Satoshi said, turning toward Koan. "I believe I know a few Phoenix who would like to have words with you..."

The shugenja was gone. Satoshi cursed, glancing about the room. The door was open a crack, but there were no other signs that the Koan had ever been. Satoshi's men looked at him sheepishly; they had not noticed the escape either.

"Satoshi-san," said the remaining patron, the man in the tattered red kimono.


"No surprise, seeing you here," Satoshi said, nodding at the dark man. "My thanks for your assistance in finding my father."

"You owe me no thanks," the man replied, rising with a swift motion. "You owe me a favor. In time, I will see that it is repaid." He moved toward the door, his pace even but rapid. "We are watching you, Miya."

"I am a man of my word, Bayushi," Satoshi said with a smirk and a bow.

"There is only one Bayushi left," the ronin snarled. "I am just Hisa, now."

"Of course, my friend," Satoshi replied. "Of course, Hisa."



Life in Rokugan

Although epic adventures and massive battles might seem the norm throughout Rokugan, the truth is that the Emerald Empire is usually a quiet place. Many samurai loyally serve their lord for their entire lives without ever seeing military action. Even during the relatively rare times of war, most peasants go about their lives with little difference except for an increased demand for their crops.

With this in mind, players may wonder what their characters are supposed to do between adventures. The people of Rokugan are very ritualistic, having formalized methods of eating, praying, greeting one another, even putting on their armor. Most Rokugani have daily routines that they adhere to very strongly. Players should devise such a daily routine for their characters and integrate it into their background. Routines can lead to an interesting number of adventure hooks. For example, when your bushi comes off duty and stops by the local shrine on his way home, he could find a dead body, a mysterious stranger, a case of vandalism, or any combination of the three.

A character's routine can also add an element of reality to the game. For example, the GM can describe a character they interact with "off-camera" on a regular basis during the campaign, then introduce them as important characters later in the game. This adds an exciting bit of personalization to the game and avoids the pitfall of introducing personalities only in the session in which they play a role. If a Crab bushi must help a comrade with whom he has served on the wall every day for months (and whom you mention at the beginning of every session), then he is going to be much more invested in the ensuing drama.

This section examines a day in the life of various samurai – bushi, shugenja, and courtiers – as well as non-samurai such as merchants and eta. Use these as examples for your players to develop their own routines and ideas about the individuals with whom they interact.

A Samurai's Day

"One who is samurai must, before all things, keep in mind that he must die."

— Kakita's The Sword

A day in the life of a samurai is filled with tradition and discipline. Whether bushi, shugenja, or courtier, a samurai must serve for the benefit of the family and clan. A bushi must remain constantly alert for hours on end, whereas a courtier must deal with the intrigues and schemes of his peers. A bushi must overcome his enemies with the blade of his father while the courtier uses sweetened words laced with hidden meanings. Regardless of their training, their mission is the same: protect the clan with your weapons, whatever those weapons may be.

This service to one's clan demands a spiritual devotion as well as a physical devotion. It is extremely important for a samurai to remain pure so that he might serve to the best of his ability. To achieve this, many samurai bathe multiple times a day. This purity serves to assure the samurai's position with the Celestial Order. To be unclean is the lot of the heimin and eta, not the samurai.

MATSU UJIRO, THE BUSHI

Ujiro is a soldier in the vast army of the Lion Clan. He guards the wall of Shiro Matsu, the southernmost Lion holding that borders Beiden Pass and the lands of the Scorpion. The large number of troops posted at Shiro Matsu means that Ujiro has a shorter duty than many bushi elsewhere within the Empire. Matsu Tsuko rotates the guard shift often, keeping both the guards and the soldiers refreshed and ready for battle at a moment's notice.



Hour of the Sun (6:00–8:00 AM)	Ujiro awakens and bathes. He offers a prayer to his ancestors, and breakfasts meagerly on unseasoned rice and tea.
Hour of the Moon (8:00–10:00 AM)	After carefully cleaning his katana, Ujiro practices his kata for much of the morning, as he does each day without fail.
Hour of Hantei: (10:00–12:00 noon)	Returning from the dojo, Ujiro prepares his weapon and armor for duty upon the wall. He takes a light lunch of rice and noodles, then bathes again in preparation for meeting his daimyo. With his body cleansed, Ujiro dons his armor and daisho for the meeting.
Hour of Akodo (12:00–2:00 PM)	During the hour of Akodo, the officers of the guard gather with their daimyo to make their reports. As a gunso, it is Ujiro's duty to report any activity seen from the wall during his shifts.
Hours of Doji and Shiba (2:00–6:00 PM)	Ujiro serves alongside his men upon the wall, keeping careful watch for any signs of activity from the Scorpions to the south.
Hour of Bayushi (6:00–8:00 PM)	Relieved from his post, Ujiro passes by the shrine of his ancestors on his way to his barracks and offers a prayer for continued diligence. He proceeds home for another meal of rice, noodles, and tea. Afterwards, he reads from Akodo's <i>Leadership</i> .
Hour of Shinjo (8:00–10:00 PM)	Although not on duty, Ujiro returns to the wall for an additional shift. He chooses to do so to keep his mind and perceptions keen, and to lead by example those men who serve underneath him.
Hour of Hida (10:00–12:00 midnight)	Returning home, Ujiro cleans his weapons and armor and places them in a position of readiness. He bathes again, speaks another prayer to both the Fortunes and his ancestors, and retires for the evening.

KAKITA IMOKO, THE COURTIER

Imoko inherited her father's position as an ambassador to the Imperial Court. She was practically raised in court with her father following the death of her mother. Even as a child, her presence of mind and keen powers of observation caught the attention of other courtiers. When her father retired to a monastery, she was the natural choice to replace him. She has been extremely successful and is frequently invited to the homes of other prominent diplomats.

Hour of the Sun (6:00-8:00 AM)	Imoko rises and bathes. Her two handmaidens spend well over an hour dressing her and applying decorative face paints.
Hour of the Moon (8:00-10:00 AM)	Imoko takes a breakfast of rice, seaweed and tea with other courtiers while discussing the topics of the day.
Hour of Hantei: (10:00-12:00 noon)	The hour of Hantei is spent each day in the Imperial Court. As the Emperor entertains various guests and hears the occasional testimony from an Imperial Magistrate, Imoko moves among the crowd making pleasantries and exchanging invitations to various gatherings.
Hour of Akodo (12:00-2:00 PM)	Taking a light seafood luncheon, Imoko spends the afternoon in her home entertaining Kitsuki Heichei, a diplomat from the Dragon lands with whom Imoko hopes to form an alliance against the aggressive Lion.
Hour of Doji (2:00-4:00 PM)	After seeing the Dragon ambassador on his way, Imoko bathes and changes her attire to something more suitable for the evening.
Hour of Shiba (4:00-6:00 PM)	Given a few quiet moments, Imoko composes several letters to allies she has made in other clans, keeping herself in their minds. She also prepares a report to her daimyo in the Kakita family and composes a haiku for a rendezvous later in the evening.
Hour of Bayushi (6:00-8:00 PM)	Imoko and her fellow Crane diplomats dine in the home of Doji Satsume, the Crane Clan daimyo and Emerald Champion, as they do each month. Imoko spends the time maneuvering for position among the Crane courtiers.

Hour of Shinjo (8:00-10:00 PM)	Before retiring for the evening, Imoko spends precious moments in the garden with Shiba Aikei, a yojimbo to a Phoenix diplomat. The two exchange haiku and small gifts.
Hour of Hida (10:00-12:00 midnight)	Returning home, Imoko selects her attire for the next day. She bathes retires for the evening.

ISAWA SADAKO, THE SHUGENJA

Although the shugenja of the Phoenix Clan are renowned for their powerful magic, many of them choose a life of research and meditation over the power and fury of the elements themselves. Isawa Sadako lives a simple life at Kyuden Isawa researching new or lost spells for her family's library. She spends what free time she possesses among the less fortunate in the Phoenix Clan, spreading her prayers and blessings to those who most need them.

Hour of the Sun (6:00-8:00 AM)	Sadako rises with the sun and spends an hour meditating with the kami around her. Afterwards she bathes and takes her breakfast.
Hour of the Moon (8:00-10:00 AM)	On her way to the palace's library, Sadako stops at a shrine to the Fortunes and leaves a small offering. She then continues to the library, where she spends the early morning researching a new spell of Air to benefit her family's school.
Hour of Hantei: (10:00-12:00 noon)	In the late morning, Sadako and several of her fellow shugenja retire to the shrine within their school's grounds and practice their spellcraft, speaking with the elements and the kami in order to gain a more enlightened understanding of the spirit world.
Hour of Akodo (12:00-2:00 PM)	An extended lunch in the garden with her childhood friend Tomiko fills Sadako with a peaceful harmony that helps aid her meditations afterward.
Hour of Doji (2:00-4:00 PM)	Sadako returns to the palace library and continues her research. With luck, she will have developed a new spell of Air for the Isawa school in another six months.

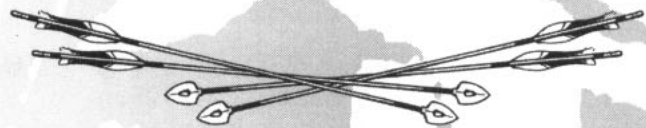
Hour of Shiba (4:00–6:00 PM)	Sadako spends time outside the palace, visiting with the peasants of the surrounding area. She blesses crops, offers prayers for the sick and watches the children play in the village center.
Hour of Bayushi (6:00–8:00 PM)	After dinner, Sadako takes note of her research progress thus far, and transcribes passages from the scrolls she is using for her research report to the great Library of the Isawa.
Hour of Shinjo (8:00–10:00 PM)	At the end of each day, Sadako spends at least two hours in deep meditation, reflecting upon the day and the wonder of the kami around her.
Hour of Hida (10:00–12:00 midnight)	Returning to her quarters, Sadako bathes and then sleeps upon her futon.

SHIBA RYUSHU, THE ARTISAN

Ryushu is a student of the arts. Since his days as a child, he found solace in the beauty of words and paintings. His *gempukku* was memorable due to his spontaneous haiku regarding the honor and wisdom of the sensei at his school. Though trained as a bushi, Ryushu has been given freedom to pursue matters of art “for the cultural betterment of his clan.” The recent news from Otosan Uchi has disturbed Ryushu’s concentration. He fears that he may soon be required to set aside the way of the artist and take up the warrior’s mantle.

Hour of the Sun (6:00–8:00 AM)	Ryushu rises early to watch the sun rise, hoping that its beauty will inspire him. Feeling comforted, he returns to his quarters to bathe and take his breakfast.
Hour of the Moon (8:00–10:00 AM)	Following breakfast, Ryushu retires to his studio and contemplates an epic poem he is working on as well as his most recent painting, which he is to present to his daimyo today.
Hour of Hantei: (10:00–12:00 noon)	Ryushu is called to the court of his provincial daimyo, Shiba Toma. There he presents one of his most recent works, a painting of Toma-sama’s lovely daughter communing with the spirits of the air amidst the beauty of a natural wooded glade.
Hour of Akodo (12:00–2:00 PM)	Following lunch in court, Ryushu meditates in a shrine to Benten, the Fortune of Romantic Love, in hopes that he might receive inspiration and win the heart of Toma’s daughter.

Hour of Doji (2:00–4:00 PM)	Inspired by the tranquility and serenity of the shrine, Ryushu returns to his studio and begins a new painting, which depicts Benten bestowing his blessing upon Shiba Ashiko. He imagines the smile upon her face when he presents the painting to her.
Hour of Shiba (4:00–6:00 PM)	Receiving an invitation to dinner, Ryushu bathes and selects his finest attire for the occasion. He meditates to calm himself.
Hour of Bayushi (6:00–8:00 PM)	Ryushu is honored to dine with Toma-sama and his daughter Ashiko; Toma is exceedingly pleased with Ryushu’s painting.
Hour of Shinjo (8:00–10:00 PM)	Deeply moved by his dinner with Ashiko (and very excited because he saw her smile at him behind her fan), Ryushu rushes back to his studio and completes the painting of her in the meadow. Jubilant, he makes plans to present it to her the following evening.
Hour of Hida (10:00–12:00 midnight)	His head and heart full of plans for his future, Ryushu bathes and retires for the evening, dreaming of Toma-sama’s beautiful daughter.



The Lower Classes

Life for those below the samurai is not as ideal as that of the nobility. Harsh reality often outweighs matters of the spirit. Consequently, heimin and eta have considerably less time to visit shrines or bathe more than once per day. These are the men and women whose hard labor allows Rokugan’s society to function. Although no self-respecting samurai would dishonor his ancestors by fraternizing with those beneath him, these are the people he has sworn to protect; fleshing them out as real individuals rather than hollow stereotypes can only improve the quality of your adventures.

NODOKA, THE MONK

Once a bushi in service of the Unicorn Clan, Nodoka retired to a monastery at an early age after his lord succumbed to a strange fever. He fondly recalls his days of study with the Shinjo family, but he feels that the spiritual awakening he has experienced since retiring is well worth the sacrifices he has had to make. Nodoka is troubled by the stories of military movement throughout the Empire. He and his brother monks fear that the hardships of war will distance the people of Rokugan from the teachings of Shinsei.

Hour of the Hare (6:00-8:00 AM)	Nodoka awakens with the sun each morning and bathes with his brothers in an ice-cold spring. In this way the monks purify their bodies to better achieve spiritual enlightenment. Afterwards the brothers return to the monastery for a meal of rice and water.
Hour of the Dragon (8:00-10:00 AM)	Following breakfast, the monks perform their chores about the monastery. Nodoka is privileged to wash the floor of the temple each morning. Afterwards he ensures that the lanterns have sufficient fuel and that nothing unusual within the temple will disturb morning meditation.
Hour of the Serpent (10:00-12:00 noon)	When the chores of the monastery are completed, the brother monks gather in the temple and meditate. Nodoka particularly enjoys the meditation process, and hopes to gain wisdom that will help his people overcome the hardships they face following the Emperor's death.
Hour of the Horse (12:00-2:00 PM)	Although food is available for mid-day meal, Nodoka often chooses to fast through lunch, instead moving outside the monastery's walls to continue his meditations surrounded by tranquil nature.
Hour of the Goat (2:00-4:00 PM)	Fitness of mind requires fitness of body. Nodoka and many of his brothers gather in the courtyard for various exercises. Some monks train with a bo, but Nodoka prefers martial arts exercises that involve breath control.
Hour of the Monkey (4:00-6:00 PM)	Nodoka and the brothers return to the temple for their second daily session of meditation. The scent of burning incense and the subtle chants of his brother monks help Nodoka transcend himself and seek enlightenment.

Hour of the Rooster
(6:00-8:00 PM)

Following a very sparse meal, Nodoka excuses himself to the small library within the temple. Here, he pours over the Tao of Shinsei for hours at a time.

Hour of the Dog
(8:00-10:00 PM)

With the setting of the sun, the day at the monastery is largely complete. Nodoka spends time writing his thoughts and reflecting, both on the day and on the problems facing the Empire. Afterwards, he retires to his simple straw mat to sleep.

Monks

Monks are somewhat nebulous in the Celestial Order; they fall somewhere between heimin and samurai. When encountered, a truly virtuous samurai knows to treat a monk with respect and courtesy. Monks can frequently be found wandering the countryside, maintaining the small shrines located in villages throughout Rokugan. While samurai will not fraternize with heimin, interacting with monks is perfectly acceptable. A monk can prove an ideal mouthpiece for a Gamemaster, or be used to add flavor to individual villages. And, of course, there is no reason that all monks have to be cryptic, enlightened men of faith. Some have more nefarious motives. This can be an excellent change of pace for your campaign. After all, who in your party would suspect the man behind all their troubles is the local monk?

SHOUKEI, THE MERCHANT

The vassal of a Yasuki merchant, Shoukei conducts trade with the other merchants from all parts of Rokugan. He deals in mostly mundane materials: finery for Crab diplomats, raw materials for weapon construction, and fabric for clothing. Despite his solid reputation as an honest merchant, Shoukei is as crooked as they come. He frequently makes a personal profit on deals intended to benefit the clan. His greatest fear alternates between being discovered by his lord and being poor for the rest of his life.

Hour of the Hare
(6:00-8:00 AM)

Shoukei rises early, eating a hasty meal and bathing (if time permits). With a quick prayer to Daikoku, the Fortune of Wealth, to bless him, Shoukei pores over his inventory, comparing his assets to the merchants he will likely meet today.

Hour of the Dragon
(8:00-10:00 AM)

The first meeting of the day is with a vassal of the Daidoji, with whom Shoukei attempts to negotiate a favorable exchange for foodstuffs to help feed the Crab bushi on the wall.

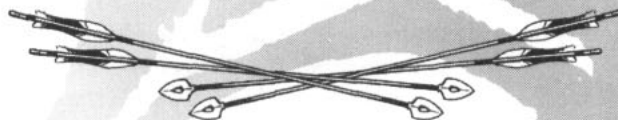
Hour of the Serpent (10:00-12:00 noon)	After a few hours of heated negotiations, Shoukei arranges an equitable agreement: two hundred koku of rice in exchange for enough raw ore for the Kakita bladesmiths to forge many new blades.
Hour of the Horse (12:00-2:00 PM)	Having set aside a small amount of each resource for his own purposes, Shoukei takes a luxurious luncheon at a local geisha house where a woman he favors works.
Hour of the Goat (2:00-4:00 PM)	Returning home from his rendezvous, Shoukei again assesses his inventory in preparation for his second meeting of the day, with a merchant from the Lion lands.
Hour of the Monkey (4:00-6:00 PM)	Shoukei engages in a lengthy and heated disagreement with the Lion merchant over exchange rates. After a considerable amount of time, he accedes to the Lion's demands in order to acquire badly needed resources.
Hour of the Rooster (6:00-8:00 PM)	Disgruntled over his latest business transaction, Shoukei returns to the geisha house for dinner and consolation. Finding his favorite companion otherwise occupied, Shoukei instead turns to heavy drinking.
Hour of the Dog (8:00-10:00 PM)	Staggering home, Shoukei plots methods to avenge what he perceives as an insult from the Lion merchant. He writes several letters of inquiry to some associates within Lion territory.
Hour of the Boar (10:00-12:00 midnight)	Shoukei falls asleep fully dressed.

TOUKAI, THE ETA

Toukai's family operates the crematorium in the so-called "Leather Quarter" of Ryoko Owari Toshi in the lands of the Scorpion. Although well off by eta standards, he still lives a life of abject poverty. He lives with his family in a single room hutch with a dirt floor.

Hour of the Hare (6:00-8:00 AM)	Toukai and his family rise at dawn. Eating a simple breakfast of rice and water, they quickly remove the mats from the floor and prepare the house for the day. Toukai leaves before the rest of his family and goes to the crematorium, where he lights the fires for the day.
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Hour of the Dragon (8:00-10:00 AM)	With the rest of his family arriving, Toukai assists in the day's plans: to pick up various corpses throughout Ryoko Owari. Two eta bodies that were brought in late the previous evening are cremated and their ashes prepared for their families.
Hour of the Serpent (10:00-12:00 noon)	Toukai and his two brothers travel through the Noble Quarter, picking up the body of Asako Kinto, who died four days previously, and taking it to the site of its ritual cremation via a palanquin. Toukai remains until after the burning is complete and the guests have placed the ashes within the urn. When they have left, he cleans the area for the post-funeral blessing.
Hour of the Horse (12:00-2:00 PM)	Eating a short lunch on the go, Toukai travels through the Merchant Quarter, buying several modest urns for families who cannot afford a proper funeral.
Hour of the Goat (2:00-4:00 PM)	With few bodies to process today, Toukai spends the early afternoon cleaning out one of the cremation chambers.
Hour of the Monkey (4:00-6:00 PM)	As the youngest son, Toukai leaves the crematorium early and returns to help his mother and younger sister gather and prepare food for the family's evening meal.
Hour of the Rooster (6:00-8:00 PM)	Toukai eats a meager dinner with his family, afterwards spending some time in the village's community garden with Amai, a young woman he hopes to marry soon. They speak of the future while planting seeds they hope will bear bean sprouts.
Hour of the Dog (8:00-10:00 PM)	In the late evening, when the fires have burned out in the crematorium, Toukai returns to remove the ashes and stock the wood so that things may begin again in the morning.
Hour of the Boar (10:00-12:00 midnight)	Exhausted after a long day's work, Toukai mutters a quick prayer for the continued health of his family and collapses into sleep on the tatami mat.



Apprenticeship and Gempukku

*"There is no loyalty but to the Emperor.
There is no honor but to die in his name."*

— Matsu Tsuko, Champion of the Lion

Yugure smiled and took a deep breath. It was larger than he had thought it would be, stretching out to either horizon like a great mountain of... well... stone. Yugure had no tongue for poetic words, but the sight of the Carpenter Wall stirred something deep in his Crab blood. It had been almost six weeks since his gempukku. He hadn't waited a day before leaving home to begin his training here. He missed his sisters somewhat, and the food on the road was scant this time of year, but at last he had arrived. At last he would be a Crab! A berserker! If he was lucky, he would be a hero, like his father. He steadied his katana on his hip, still unaccustomed to its weight, and strode proudly toward the large barracks near the base of the Kaiu Wall. Two massive samurai in dark red armor stood there chatting idly with each other.

"Yes?" one of them said bluntly, turning his steel eyes toward Yugure.

"I am Hiruma Yugure of Heiwa na Kaze Heigen," the proud boy proclaimed. He bowed low.

"I am Kage," the man said with a nod. "This is Tampako. What do you want." The samurai's manner was swift and terse. It took Yugure a moment to realize he had been asked a question.

"My father was a berserker and I have come to train in his footsteps," Yugure said. "Where is the school for the training of berserkers?"

"School?" Tampako chuckled, covering his mouth with one hand. Kage raised an eyebrow at the boy and opened his mouth to speak, but was quickly cut off by a surprised cry from the Wall.

"Oni!" screamed a bushi. A moment later a serrated purple tentacle wrapped around the man's torso and dragged him over the wall. The samurai shouted in defiance as he vanished over the side, burying his yari repeatedly in the tentacle as blood and ichor mingled to stream down his legs. Tampako shouted out the call to arms; dozens of bushi emerged from the tents, strapping on

their armor and readying their weapons. The oni pulled itself atop the Wall and roared. The thing was as large as a stable, a mass of jagged violet tentacles surrounding a strangely innocent feline face. The kitten mouth spread wider than it should have and coughed forth a cloud of white vapor, melting the armor and flesh from one screaming samurai.

Yugure's jaw dropped wide open. Kage drew his katana and rested one hand on the boy's shoulder, regarding him with the eyes of a dead man. "Ready your blade, Yugure," Kage said. He pointed at the oni with his sword. "There is your school."

As part of the training in most Rokugani professions, a period of apprenticeship is standard practice. Shortly before the young person reaches their teenage years, their parents bring them to visit the *kabunakama* (merchant guild) of the appropriate craft, seeking out a *shokunin*, or artisan. The first formal visit between master and apprentice is referred to as the *memie*. If the teacher finds the potential student worthy, he pays a *tetsuke* ("advance money") to the parents, and drafts a *shomon*, or formal agreement. The child then becomes a *totei*, an assistant to the *shokunin*.

For ten years the *totei* remains indentured to the *shokunin*, living in the master's home. The *totei* receives no pay for assisting the *shokunin* and is also expected to function as a servant, performing chores around the house in his spare time. Many *shokunin* take advantage of this arrangement, working children like slaves and teaching them little of their craft. Those *totei* who attempt to escape this formalized slavery face *kagyō-gamo*, a law forbidding runaway apprentices from practicing their chosen professions.

Apprentices who serve out their indenture dutifully can expect to train for a period of up to ten years. After this time, the *totei* receives a set of tools from the *shokunin* and is free to strike out on his own and attempt to go into business. If he is skilled and fortunate, the new craftsman might even become a member of the *kabunakama* himself.

Compared to craftsmen, the training of a samurai is quite different. There is no period of indenture. Fortunate youths may train with their parents, carrying their weapons, readying their armor, and caring for their steeds. A lesson or two in swordsmanship (using wooden boken, not katana), archery, horsemanship, and perhaps a few words of advice on how to properly wear armor are customary, but the true art of a samurai is denied until *gempukku*. After a youth becomes a samurai, the nature of his training depends whether the clan is at war.

If a young samurai undergoes *gempukku* during wartime there is no formal training. The youths are simply shipped to the front lines to wear down the enemy. These new soldiers are always sent to attack first. Not only does this weed out the weak, it gives new recruits a taste of battle and gives the veterans an opportunity to rest, gauging the mettle of the enemy. These recruits either learn the ropes and become warriors, or they die.

Rookie warriors lucky enough to survive the first few weeks are assigned to an advanced unit further back in the ranks. This unit will still be composed of inexperienced bushi, but the sergeants will have at least a year or more of experience. These veterans teach the soldiers the intricacy of combat, and try to keep as many of them alive as possible. They also train the new recruits in the rudimentary techniques of their clan. It is

important to note that shugenja or courtiers are never thrown into their profession unprepared. The very



concept is either too dangerous (for shugenja) or ridiculous (for courtiers).

Outside of wartime, samurai train at a dojo. The sensei of these great schools are very selective, and only the finest or most influential samurai can expect to be accepted. Though every dojo teaches a variety of techniques, there is always one area where each school excels. For example, the Kakita dojo specializes in the art of iaijutsu, while the Hida dojo specializes in no-holds-barred combat and survival.

Admission to those outside of the clan is uncommon, but circumstances can contribute to such an occurrence. For example, a daimyo who kidnaps a child of another clan as a gesture of defiance or revenge may send the child to his family dojo as a further, bitter insult. This is a bizarre occurrence, however, and almost always a matter of scandal. The sensei of the dojos do not appreciate having ancient traditions disrupted.

A much more common reason for cross-clan training is the training of hostages. Hostages are not a result of kidnapping. Kidnapping is theft of another person; illegal, pure and simple. A hostage is taken with agreement or notification of the hostage's family. This is done for many reasons, most often to insure good behavior in an enemy. During violent periods in Rokugani history, the Hantei Emperors have invoked *Hitojichi* (Hostage) Laws, requiring each daimyo of each family to spend at least a month of every year in Otsan Uchi. After the daimyo returns home, his family remains in the city for another month as hostages of the Emperor. In this manner, the Emperor could greatly reduce the chances of an organized attack by holding the loved ones of important figures. With the current state of the Empire, it would be no great surprise were these laws to be invoked once more.

Hostages are just as frequently used for peace as for war. To cement an alliance, clans often exchange hostages. These hostages are typically the second sons of the allying daimyos, symbolizing the dedication to peace, while practical enough to protect the primary heirs. These hostages live with their captors for a specified amount of time, usually a year. Occasionally, if one family wishes to assert superiority over the other, their hostage is required to swear permanent fealty.

Whether in war or peace, hostages are usually treated as honored guests – a true samurai would not endanger his clan's interests by attempting escape. Most of these hostages are hostages in name only. Many of them become quite welcome among their captors. Often, these hostages train at their captors' dojo, resulting in the occasional samurai adept in the techniques of a rival clan.

It should be noted that those who are given the opportunity to attend a formal dojo take it as a matter of great pride. A samurai defends the honor of his school as vehemently as he would that of his family or clan. Thus, even a bushi who has trained at the school of a bitter rival (as in the case of Matsu Seijuro or Doji Kuwanan) would never seriously consider sharing the secrets of his

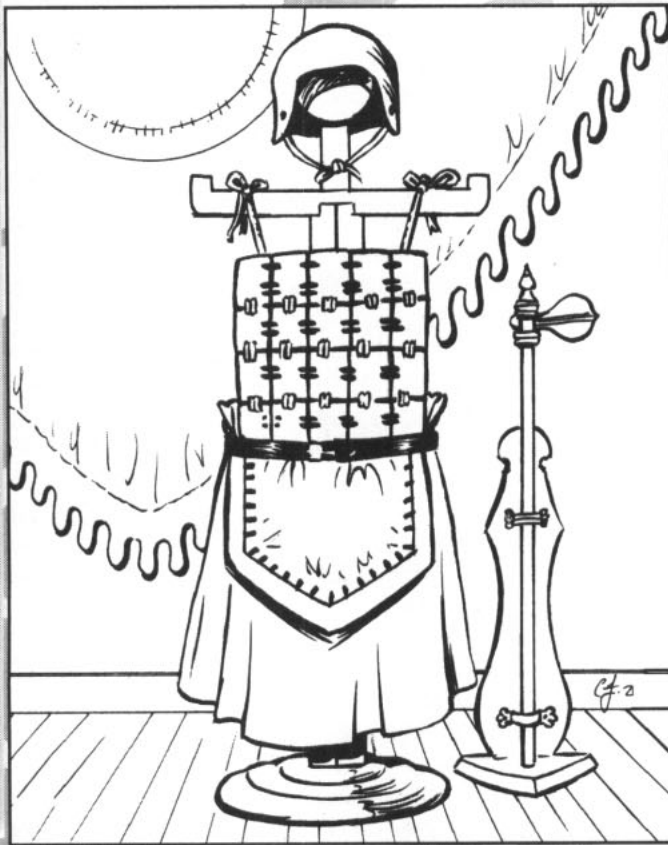
school with outsiders. Such an action is an offense to the bushi's dojo and sensei. The only exception to this is in war-time, where a samurai must learn the ways of war as quickly as possible. In this situation, it is permissible for two students to share techniques, but only if they are both students of the same dojo.

Obviously, as a dojo becomes more established and builds its reputation, a greater number of samurai come to study there. Over a period of many centuries, continued practice and experimentation gradually improves the quality of a dojo's curriculum and broadens the range of skills that it can offer. In turn, the clan which funds such a dojo will note any improvements and invest in more training and supplies. For this reason, older dojos, such as those of ancient families, tend to be more successful than younger dojos, such as those of Minor Clans and young families. The legendary dojos of the Mirumoto, Akodo, Shiba, and Hida are classic examples, as they have all taught students for nearly a millennium and receive enormous amounts of support. These schools offer a great variety of powerful techniques and maintain a staff of famous sensei, offering training that lesser schools cannot hope to match.

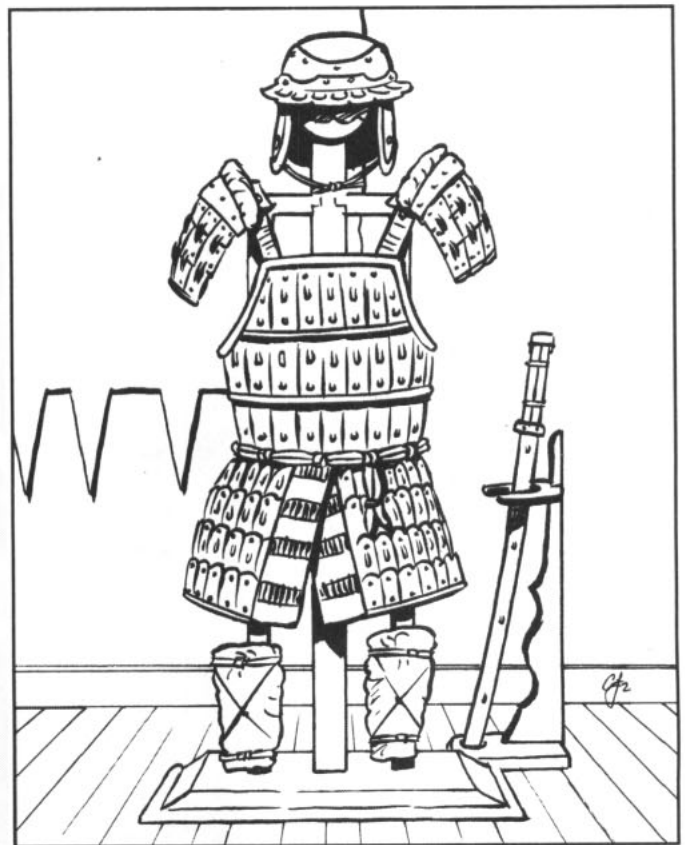


ARMOR

Just as a sword should be an extension of the samurai's will and intent, his armor should be a second skin. Artisans put as much skill into creating a fine set of armor as any smith puts into beating and refining a katana to perfection. In the hands of a master armorer it becomes not only a second skin, but a better skin: flexible, tough, resilient and beautiful. Engraved, embossed, and painted with intricate designs and family symbology, the



Stage One Armor



Stage Two Armor

complete suit allows the samurai to present his best, most breathtaking face to the world. Every samurai with the means keeps a personal craftsman in his retinue, whose sole job is to care for the multi-layered armor.

Samurai armor is very flexible, designed not to impede movement. A typical suit consists of hard leather and small iron plates woven together in overlapping horizontal tiers. Tightly woven silk cords tie the pieces together. Each piece of leather receives added strength and beauty through the application of a coat of lacquer: the sap of the lacquer tree, a toxic substance that workers collect via a painstaking process of tree tapping. They then refine the brown, gummy sap until it thickens and purifies and dye it, usually black or red. The artisan carefully primes each piece of armor, polishing it and cleaning it, before he applies the lacquer. Each piece receives between twenty and ninety coats, applied one at a time with each coat drying before he applies the next. The lacquer can be inlaid with decorations, ranging from gold and silver dust sprinkled into the wet lacquer to ornate inlays and designs.

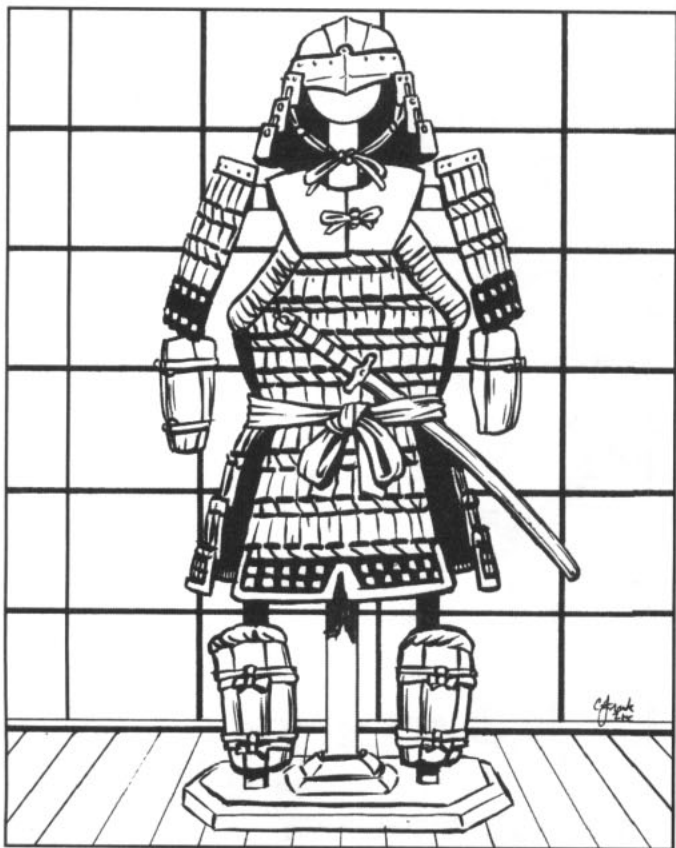
Once the lacquered pieces are finished, the artisan assembles the entire suit, tailored to fit the samurai who will wear it. The upper portion consists of a large, solid armor chest plate that protects the front and which has additional tiers of plates in the front and back. Additional tiers protect the lower torso and sides.

A protective skirt made from large vertical sections of lacquered iron tiers hangs from the armor's upper section. Additional tiers and plates protect the samurai's arms. The literal crowning piece of the armor is the helmet, again made from lacquered iron plates. The helm often incorporates decoration both grand and fearsome, including facemasks designed to give the wearer an imposing or terrifying visage in battle.

Most samurai take great pride in their armor, and wealthy nobles have multiple sets for different occasions. As with everything else, quality and cost reflect directly upon the wearer's social status within the complex noble hierarchy. Although it is seldom appropriate to wear armor at court functions, occasionally the need arises during winter court for a samurai to don his full regalia. In such instances the kind of armor and its decorations can send subtle or not too subtle messages to the rest of the court. A samurai who dresses in battle-scarred, utilitarian armor sees war or conflict on the horizon, while one who wears more decorative protective wear sends a message of peace and prosperity.

SWORD MAKING

No artisan in Rokugan lives with more honor than the sword maker. For society as a whole and the samurai in particular, the sword occupies such a central, fundamental place that the forging



Stage Three Armor



Stage Four Armor

process has become a legendary, religious undertaking. No single act of creation is more difficult, incorporating strength, finesse, an eye for detail and most importantly a strong spirit. Everyone firmly acknowledges that a quality sword cannot come from the hand of man alone, that the spirit and celestial worlds must play an integral part in a blade's creation.

Before beginning the forging process, a sword maker fasts for several days. He then comes to the anvil dressed in white, the color of priests. He honors his gods each day and each night of the forging process. Creating a fine blade takes much, much more than hammering a piece of steel into the shape of a sword. The sword maker must carefully weigh two vital considerations. For a blade to have a sharp edge it must be made from hard steel. The only problem is, hard steel becomes brittle, easily breakable in battle. Soft steel proves much more resilient, but does not hold an edge. The sword makers overcome this dilemma by mixing the two kinds of steel, hammering, folding and refolding soft and hard steel together. The result is a blade with a hard steel outer edge but a soft steel core, making it difficult to break but capable of keeping a razor edge for prolonged periods.

A sword's importance transcends its blade or durability however. It is a measure of the owner's strength, a pure, physical

embodiment of their will. Samurai love their swords with a religious devotion. The ritual forging process imbues the blade with a discernable spirit, a holy aura that the owner feels obliged to live up to. When he fails in battle a samurai's first prayers are to the kami to forgive him for offending his blade's spirit. When human and sword spirit are as one, victory becomes inevitable.

One of the most famous tales about sword making describes a contest between three master forgers, each of whom was vying for the honor of creating a new blade for the Emerald Champion. All three created blades of surpassing beauty and strength. The first stepped forward to test his blade. He placed a block of stone at head height and slashed at it, splitting it neatly in two. The blade had not a nick or a scratch. The second stepped forward and carefully laid his blade on the ground and then dropped a piece of silk over the upturned blade. The mere weight of its falling cut the cloth in two.

The third master forger stepped beneath a blossoming sapling. He stood beneath it and with one hand shook the tree, while the other held the blade outstretched beneath the showering pink petals. Not a single petal touched the sword's upturned blade, although the man himself was soon covered in bright blossoms. Without pausing the Emerald Champion chose the third blade.



While the others showed strength and sharpness, the third showed spirit. Even the falling blossoms knew to avoid its deadly edge. The champion's enemies would not have such a luxury.

SAKE

Nothing makes a cold winter court night more bearable than nice, warm sake. Although the term actually refers to any alcoholic beverage, there is really only one type of sake that finds a following amongst the samurai and courtesans of Rokugan. Tradition maintains that sake was a gift from the gods, that it is in fact the standard beverage in the celestial realm. Sake begins its life as rice; brew masters steam it so that its starches turn into sugar. They then add mold to stimulate fermentation. Around two months later they refine the fermented liquid into the clear beverage drunk throughout the land. The result is a sweet beverage that is best served warm.

The actual flavor and quality of the sake depends chiefly upon the materials that go into it. The higher quality the rice, the better the final product. The same holds true for the water in which the rice is steamed and fermented. Certain sacred springs produce much higher quality sake than average rivers and streams. Although most villages brew their own local sake, a few sake manufacturers have reputations that exceed their local markets. Fine, well-crafted sake is a delicacy for the rich, with the great houses and of course the Emperor buying it by the barrel. It is considered a tremendous honor to have one's sake drunk by the emperor, and brew houses across the land compete for the distinction.

Serving sake warm releases its flavors and aroma. Special porcelain containers are used to heat the sake by placing them in a pot of boiling water for several minutes. At feasts and celebrations servants keep a number of such pots boiling away discreetly; out of sight but near enough so that the sake can be served immediately. Although not comparable to the ornate rituals around drinking tea, the Rokugani still have certain amount of etiquette concerning imbibing sake. They drink from tiny porcelain or lacquered cups and tradition demands that each drinker pour for the other. The traditional toast, "Kampai," accompanies the actual drinking.

Go

It has been said that the Fortunes created no better test of a man's intellect than the game of Go. Elegant, simple and infinitely challenging, Go stands as the most popular and respected game in all Rokugan. More than a pastime, for many this strategy game is a passion. Samurai learn the game even as they learn to wield their swords and for many mastery of it proves more of a challenge than any school of bushido.

Go originated with the Fortunes and they still play it in the heavens. Some say that the thunder is merely the placing of stones upon the celestial board and that taifuns come as a result of particularly brilliant game play between two divine opponents. They in turn taught Go to the shugenja who spread its beauty and

wisdom to the bushi. A test of pure strategy with military overtones, the game caught on like wildfire. In the centuries since it has become an vitally important intellectual and cultural pursuit within Rokugan. Countless texts and essays upon Go strategies and tactics exist, with more written each year.

Three hundred years ago the Emperor formally acknowledged the game's importance by releasing a list of the foremost Go players in the realm. Every three years players from across Rokugan come together to compete, not for money or prizes, but merely for the honor and status that attend victory. The clans and families compete furiously in such contests, although none, not even the Scorpions, would dare cheat or try and degrade the process. Go's beauty lies in the fact that it is pure and pristine, a direct challenge to the players' minds without any outside interference.

Playing Go

Go is played on a grid made up of 19 by 19 intersecting lines and uses black and white stones for game play. One player picks black, the other takes white. Game play proceeds by placing one stone at a time upon an intersection on the board (not within the squares). Once a stone is placed it cannot be moved, although the opponent can capture it. The object of the game is to use your stones to claim territory on the board and capture your opponent's stones by surrounding them with your own. When both players pass, the game ends and whoever has the most territory and captive stones wins the game.

Go offers tremendous opportunities for intuition, experimentation and strategizing, especially in its opening phases. The Go masters have cataloged thousands of opening strategies and ranked them according to effectiveness. Once a game begins it can last for hours, sometimes even days. The psychological component of the game is almost as important as the game play itself. Two opponents can chat amiably as they play or brood over the board in silence. It is of course always bad manners to criticize or comment upon another player's moves.

At winter court, games of Go take on many additional subtexts. Two friends can use a game to plot strategy against enemies. More significantly, two rivals can take out their aggressions against each other over a board. The court watches such games closely and a victory never goes by without some comment or observation from the assembled nobles. The inability to play Go is viewed as being almost on par with being unable to wield a sword or write good calligraphy: a sign of ill-breeding and low class.

A samurai's personal Go set is an expression of both his status and his love for the game. Anyone who can afford one gladly pays the price for ivory, pearl and rare wood sets. Perhaps the most famous set belonged to the Go master Miya Tasumi, who lived two hundred years ago. From childhood he showed great promise, but he let his natural talent go to his head and did not take the game as seriously as he could have. He won game after game against masters from throughout Rokugan. Then, in a game



watched by the Emperor himself, he lost to relatively minor challengers. Shamed and beaten, Hideo withdrew into the wilderness to perfect his game. As a sacrifice to the gods and his own iron determination, he hunted down the finest and most dangerous beasts of the forest, killed them in honorable combat, then stripped the flesh from their bones and carved a set of white Go stones. He never lost a match again. While few samurai take their obsession with the game to this level, the class probably spends more time than they should thinking about it.

PAPER

To the Rokugani from the noble tier of society, paper – or *washi* – is a simple fact of life. They give it little more thought than they would silk, wood, metal or any other raw material that takes hours of hard labor to produce but that exists in sufficient quantities for a nobleman to have it whenever he wishes. Pasted to wooden frames, it forms the mainstays of interior walls and doorways within homes. The Rokugani wrap their clothing and gifts in it and use colored strips of washi for religious ceremonies and decorations. Beyond all these utilitarian purposes, washi also serves as the medium for writing, a skill and art that nobles spend a great deal of time perfecting. Thus one finds paper everywhere amongst the samurai, from their written orders on the battlefield to the walls of their home and the toys they make for their children.

Like many important things, paper has simple roots. It begins life as the bark of the mulberry tree before artisans strip it away and soak it in cold water. The laborious process of creating paper begins with removing the bark by steaming the branches and then, having soaked them, scraping away the tough outer layer with a sharp knife. The workers then heat the inner layer of soft white fibers in an alkaline solution before rinsing it again with cold water. They then pick the impurities within the fibers out by hand before beating the fibrous mass with mallets or sticks until it becomes pulp. The artisan then mixes water and vegetable mucilage with the pulp until it attains the correct consistency. The paper maker now dips a bamboo screen into the pulp and then gently shakes it to drain away excess liquid. This process leaves a flat, relatively uniform textured layer of pulp which is then laid out to dry. The result of all that: a sheet of washi.

The final product is very tough, at least compared to other kinds of paper. Its rough texture takes dyes and inks well, making it perfect for writing or coloring and use as decoration. Throughout Rokugan, each clan and district has its own experts, men and women who specialize in the fine art of paper making. High quality paper is nearly as esteemed as high quality silk or other fine objects. Every self-respecting samurai wants only the best paper for his calligraphy. Sending a diplomatic or official message on poor quality paper is an insult to the recipient. It shows that the sender does not esteem him worth fine quality

washi. On the other hand, if a poor samurai cannot afford quality paper, others recognize this immediately and it reflects upon the sender rather than insulting the recipient.

Within the highest ranks of society, such as at the Winter Courts, a fierce but rarely acknowledged rivalry exists when it comes to paper. In a politically charged environment where every movement has triple meanings, even paper can start wars. The quality of one's paper, be it used for writing, walls, or lamps, is another sign of one's place in the world. Many clans have paper made with subtle or even invisible dyes mixed in with the raw pulp, producing a barely visible watermark upon the paper with the clan's mon. Some guard their paper so closely that they enchant important documents so that they self-combust should anyone else try to write over them (since paper is expensive, reuse is quite common).

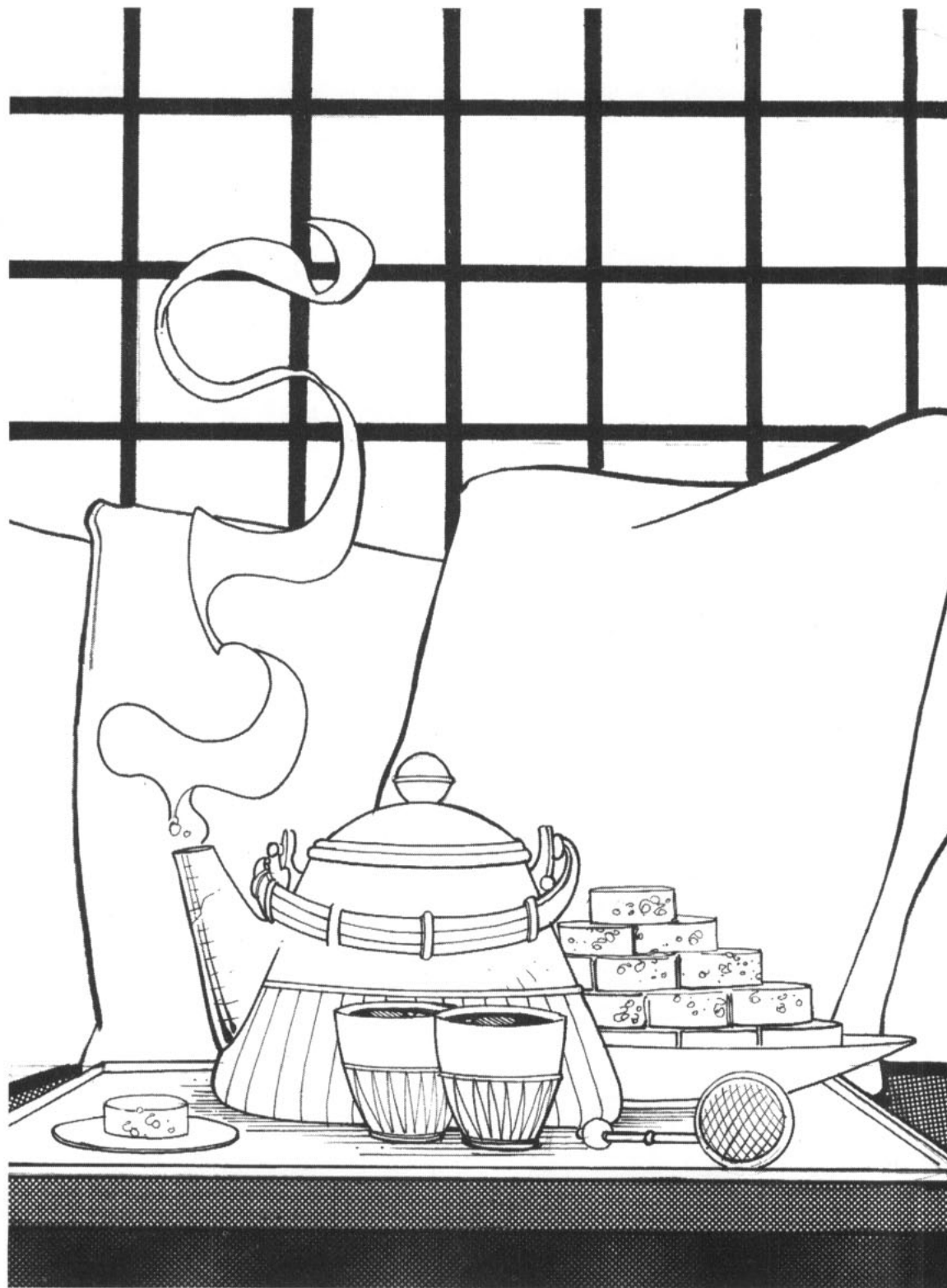
FANS

One might think that on a cold winter's night a fan has little use. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The fan has many, many uses, and cooling oneself is just the least imaginative of them. Fans come in to basic types: flat fans that are always open, called *uchiwa*, and fans that fold, known as *sunsu*. Although both have their origins and primary functions as cooling devices or a means to fan the flames of a cook fire, they have developed other purposes as well. Samurai who lead troops into battle use a special type of flat fan that they use to both signify their rank and issue commands to troops. Some generals employ an iron fan, known as a *tessen*, when at war. There are even tales of samurai using their *tessen* and even their paper fans as weapons.

It is, however, the paper fan that finds the most use at Winter Court and in Rokugan society. As with every aspects of a samurai's possessions, his or her fan is an important symbol of his importance and place in the world. Artists use the paper surface of the fan as a canvas for their craft, creating beautiful works of utilitarian art for their patrons. The fan's decorations can consist of anything from clan symbols to landscapes to elegantly written poems in the finest calligraphy. One tale tells of a lord who had hundreds of folding fans, each with a different poem written upon it. When a supplicant came before him he would hear the man out in silence, then draw forth a fan from his kimono, unfold it, and fan himself. The poem revealed gave the answer to the supplicant's request. The lord, who despised dealing with such matters, never spoke a word.

The fan has other uses as well. Many at court, particularly women, use fans to hide their mouths while they speak. Those looking on from across a room or garden cannot know whether she is speaking or not. The nobles at court have developed an entire body language of fan gestures. From the simple way a samurai waves his fan, unfolds it, points it or lets it rest in his hand he conveys messages to others. Some of these are widely known, such as the habit of opening and then closing a fan when one becomes bored of a certain speaker or the quick crack of a fan snapping open in anger at a perceived insult. Others are particular to clans or families, allowing them to communicate secrets in the open without others grasping their meaning. The Scorpion clan and Shosuro family in particular have a detailed and precise "fan language."





Chapter Three: Night

Konichiwa, honored guests, and may your evening burn brightly.

Darkness has fallen, and with it, the souls of mortals become afraid. Who is to say why we are afraid of the dark or why our souls fear until the light returns?

Yet somehow, the spirits that walk the night plague us as surely as they darken the eyes of the dead. Even in Winter Court, we are not immune from the hauntings of the past. Our ancestors watch over us, and yet the gaki step lightly through our dreams, led by the whispered tales of children around the court fire.

It has been two years since Shoji's assault on the Empire, yet those spirits plague us still - and likely, will never cease. Though the artisans of the court dance the night away, and the singers light the evening with their music, in the back of the court the shadows still linger.

We can only pray to the Fortunes that they do not come for us.

Doji Amieko



The Touch of Steel

The night air in the garden was completely silent. No sound broke the stillness.

Ide Masouri wondered idly how things had changed so quickly. Only a month ago he had been an honored guest and respected emissary of the Unicorn Clan. Now he was all but a prisoner within the halls of Kyuden Ikoma. He had not seen the other diplomats, one from the Dragon and another of the Crane, in over a week. He wondered if they, too, were confined as he was.

Masouri glanced over at his escort. Before the horrible incident in Otosan Uchi, the guard's name had been Akodo Hajioki. He and Masouri had shared many games of Go in the garden in the early evening. Now he bore the mon of the Matsu family upon his sleeve. Masouri had not heard him speak in over a week. The young man had taken to wearing at all times a mempo with the visage of a snarling lion. Masouri suspected that he often wept behind the mask.

The diplomat turned his attention to the Lion guards standing upon the wall in the distance. There was no movement from them at all. An unknowing onlooker could easily take them for statues to guard against evil spirits. Were evil spirits truly a threat, when men could so fill their hearts with hostility?

"Matsu-san," he spoke suddenly, "do you know if I will be permitted the audience with Ikoma Ujikai that I requested?" The silent guard bowed his head deeply in a show of respect, but shook his head softly from side to side. Masouri would not speak with Ujikai tomorrow. "Of course, Ujikai-sama is no doubt busy with his other guests. I'm certain another ambassador must be occupying his time tomorrow." Another glance back to the young Lion, and another subtle shake of the head.

So, Ujikai was meeting with no one. Masouri thought back to that morning, when he had watched what appeared to be hundreds of Lion bushi on maneuvers outside the palace. It is as if they desire war, he thought. He shook his head sadly. Despite all the wisdom his venerated grandfather had imparted to him, Masouri had never fully believed the Lion's reputation for bloodlust. His teaching at Shiro Ide had left him incapable of

imagining such wanton desire for destruction. But with the Hantei dead and his newly crowned heir stricken so ill...

"...perhaps no one can stop the tides of war." Matsu Hajioki winced behind Masouri, and the Unicorn could sense his pain at the recent turn of events. Masouri had admired the Akodo for their analytical minds and apparent desire for peaceful outcomes to conflict when possible. With the family gone, however, the rage and pride of the Matsu could turn against any nearby target: the remnants of the Scorpion scattered throughout the lands to the south, the rich fields of the Crane to the east, perhaps even his own people to the west. He must prevent war with the Lion at all costs, for the sake of his kinsmen.

"Matsu-san, I would like to walk upon the wall and gaze toward my home in the west, if you please. And then I must return to my quarters and pen a message to your lord requesting an audience at his earliest convenience."

Matsu Hajioki bowed and stepped aside for Masouri to lead the way. Leaving the false tranquility of the garden behind, the Ide emissary returned to the stark reality of Kyuden Ikoma.

Upon the wall overlooking the hills to the west, Masouri drew a deep breath of fresh night air. He imagined that he could smell the sweet chrysanthemums in the plains to the south of his home. Yes, this was what he needed to rededicate himself. With a light breeze rustling his kimono, he closed his eyes and imagined himself atop the magnificent peaks in the Unicorn lands. He would journey there again soon. He would redouble his efforts to see Ikoma Ujikai. He would be granted an audience, regardless of what he must do to make it so. He would make Ujikai understand that continued diplomatic relations with the Unicorn Clan were essential to the Lion's well being. Together, he and the Ikoma daimyo could found a lasting relationship that could prevent any future hostilities between their clans. Perhaps they could even set an example for the other clans to follow their lead.

Excited by the prospect of leading Rokugan through the darkness that loomed over them like the night sky, Masouri opened his eyes...and his smile died on his lips.

The Lion guards around him had tensed and were carefully watching the horizon. There, at the very edge of his line of sight, several mounted figures stood on a rise, apparently observing the palace. Their mounts were tall, lithe horses. Even at this distance, their silhouette was unmistakable.

"Otaku scouts," Masouri whispered. Horror gripped his heart as he realized that the Unicorns were scouting the western Lion lands. Tears welled in his eyes to know that his family and clan would risk war for the sake of ambassadors such as himself, but they couldn't know the depth of the Lion's rage. He could not permit them to suffer for his sake.

"Ide-sama. You must return to your quarters now," one of the surly Lion guards barked at Masouri. It was neither a request nor a suggestion.

The night air no longer felt refreshing. Masouri could only feel a heavy, oppressive presence, like distant thunder on the horizon.

* * *

Returning to his quarters, he immediately went to his writing desk and began a message to Ikoma Ujikai. In it he spoke at great length about the honored traditions of both their clans. He wrote of the Lion's long and distinguished service in the name of the Emperor and the wishes of the late Hantei XXXVIII for peace throughout his lands. He beseeched Ujikai to recall the history of non-aggression between the Lion and the Unicorn and honor that tradition by granting him an audience.

When the letter was finished, Masouri wrapped the scroll tightly and sealed it with the mon of the Ide family. He handed it to his silent guardian with instructions to pass it on to Ujikai. Once more the young bushi bowed his head respectfully and stepped outside the shoji screen. Masouri watched the silhouette of Hajioki as he passed the scroll to a scribe for delivery. The scribe glanced at the scroll, perhaps regarding the mon it bore, then tucked it absently into his obi and disappeared down the corridor.

Masouri regarded the retreating figure with cold dread. He was certain that Ujikai would never see the scroll. Perhaps the Ikoma daimyo had seen none of the diplomatic requests Masouri had sent. He felt fear rising within him.

What could cause the Lions to so disregard the ambassador of their neighbor? What could incite them to such an act of aggression?

Shiro Shinjo bathed in the light of the full moon, and Shinjo Tabe gazed west from his vantage point high inside the castle at the illuminated lands beyond. The countryside was as still and quiet as the Burning Sands at night.

If only the passions of men could be so still, thought Tabe.

The sickness that had struck the land took loved ones from so many that no one had remained untouched. The plague had left the samurai of Rokugan frustrated and angry, with no enemy at which to strike in vengeance for their suffering. Although the sickness had passed, the news of the Emperor's failing health and lack of an heir could awaken dark ambition within the heart of even the noblest samurai.

Turning from the window, Tabe walked slowly through the corridors of his familial estate. His own clan had desperately attempted to stay the tides of war, but he secretly feared that their actions had only worsened matters. When the Shinjo had received word that the Otomo were determined to maintain the court in Otsan Uchi at all costs, the Shinjo daimyo had resolved to do no less. In his name, the Unicorn had detained the ambassadors from the other great clans, keeping them within the Unicorn lands and preventing them from returning home. He had hoped that keeping the diplomats in Shiro Shinjo would encourage good relations with the other clans.

Unfortunately the leaders of the Unicorn, busy preparing for the possibility of war, had little time to meet with the captive diplomats. The ambassadors from throughout Rokugan had become little more than prisoners within Shiro Shinjo. Although

Tabe met with them as frequently as possible, it was clear that they did not consider his presence worthy of their diplomatic efforts. They were permitted to send messages to their families and clans, but with bandits plaguing the area, Tabe feared that none of their missives would ever reach its destination.

To make matters worse, the Great Clans had clearly misinterpreted the intentions of the Unicorn. Throughout Rokugan, the Ide emissaries that spoke for his clan were held captive, not permitted to return. The clans believed that the Unicorn were taking hostages and they retaliated in kind.

Finally, Tabe had learned just this evening that the Unicorn leaders had sent Otaku scouting parties to watch for signs of invasion. He was certain that this action would be grossly misinterpreted by the other clans as a sign of aggression. The Lion in particular would take great insult. That thought pained Tabe greatly. His own uncle had been the Ide ambassador to Kyuden Ikoma. Was he still living, held captive within the Lion lands, or had the Unicorn's actions doomed him to an ignoble death far from his beloved home?

Tabe's heart ached with uncertainty at the very thought.

His quarters within the Imperial Palace had no view of the outside, so Iuchi Takaai could not gaze upon the moonlit sky. It mattered little to him, for his heart was full of other things. He read carefully over the scrolls that told of his clan's actions. His advice to the Shinjo had been taken, almost to the very word.

Takaai smiled inwardly. In a matter of weeks, the enemies of the Unicorn would be snarling at the gates, awaiting the opportunity to strike them down for their foolishness.

And he, Iuchi Takaai, would be there to avert war at the last moment. He, who had so long been ignored by his family, and who had been reviled by those outside his clan, would at long last receive the respect he was due. Those who had belittled him would suffer for their mistakes. He was so fortunate that such a simple plan would succeed so marvelously. To think that the inspiration had come from so unlikely a source...

With that thought in mind, Takaai snuffed the candle and made ready for sleep. He was to take his morning meal with the ailing Emperor's new wife in a few short hours, and he wished to be rested when he spoke to her. Of all people, she alone could understand the genius of his machinations. After all, was it not she who had inspired the thought within him?

Still smiling, Takaai fell asleep with an image of dark beauty drifting into his mind.



Visiting Customs in Rokugan

With allies in every house in the Empire, a wise man can find aid wherever he needs it."

- Kakita Yoshi

Status in Rokugan is inextricably tied to gifts. Although it is not necessary for a samurai to offer a gift to every lord he meets, it is considered extremely poor manners if he does not. Any time a samurai receives a formal invitation to an event (such as Winter Court, for example) or visits a location to conduct business (such as diplomatic negotiations), it is proper etiquette for him to offer a gift to his host.

A gift must be carefully selected, and appropriate for the recipient. Well known daimyos can expect gifts that appeal to their personal interests, whereas more obscure individuals will likely receive a gift that reflects the stereotypical interests of his clan. For example, a gift for Shiba Akiuji, a daimyo known for his passion for finely crafted armor, might be an exquisitely detailed mempo bearing both the mon of the Phoenix. A lesser-known Phoenix lord might instead receive a rare spell scroll or collection of sayings from the Tao.

While gift-giving is a great opportunity to gain favor with a host, it is also an opportunity to cause enormous insult, as the wrong gift can greatly offend the host. A collection of romantic haiku is of no use to a Crab daimyo and clearly indicates to him that his guest has no knowledge of the Crab's sacred duties guarding the Wall. Such social faux pas have incited wars.

Traditionally, a guest presents his gift to the host upon his arrival. It is not unheard-of to send the gift ahead of the guest, but the majority of courtiers and ambassadors prefer to present the gift in person, which permits the host to offer the customary two refusals before accepting.

Some daimyo who host a court offer a small gift to each of their guests. This is not necessary, and only the wealthiest lords do such a thing. Oftentimes this gift is a trinket of some sort that plays a role in a contest to be held during the court.

RITUALS OF GREETING

The host of a court usually greets each of his guests as they arrive at his home. The host dates his invitations so that all guests arrive on the same day, and then remains near the palace's entrance for the entire day. Of course, remembering so many individuals can be difficult in the larger courts. A simple greeting ritual has arisen that eliminates the need to remember a large guest list.

When arriving in another's home, a samurai should declare himself before his host before taking any other action. Bowing low, the guest first acknowledges the host's name and ancestry (and thus his greater station) before introducing himself. An example of the formal greeting is as follows:

"Noble Mirumoto Chisora-sama, steadfast warrior of the Dragon Clan and descendant of Mirumoto Kaijuko, I, Kuni Mukami, servant of the Crab Clan and proud descendant of Kuni Osuko, offer you this humble gift in gratitude of your most generous invitation into your honorable household."

There are numerous variations on this greeting used by samurai familiar with one another. If the host speaks first when greeting guests, he is demonstrating that he already knows the guest and welcomes him to his home. This is a great honor, usually given only to those who have known the host for many years or who have performed a great service for the host sometime in the past.

CLOSED DIPLOMACY AND THE ART OF SUBTLETY

Victory is achieved by appearing to be applying orthodox when you have something very different in mind...

- Isawa Tsuke, Master of Fire

Although court is marked primarily by large gatherings of all guests, most important negotiations occur in secrecy. Significant and binding agreements are made during meetings within private chambers, walks in secluded gardens, or meals taken alone with important ambassadors. Very few guests at a Winter Court are ever privy to any true diplomatic sessions. Any samurai who inadvertently stumbles across one of these closed sessions will earn the public enmity of the participants. Seasoned courtiers who find themselves approached for serious negotiations in public view should be very skeptical regarding the intentions of the other party. Often this is a means of ensnaring the naïve or inexperienced in some less-than-honorable political scheme.

Those few samurai who speak on behalf of their clan at court must be aware of the appropriate manner in which to do so. Even in most dire of circumstances, forthrightness is by no means a virtue. Desires and intentions should be hinted at or veiled with delicate language. Direct and open language is a sign of weakness and invites manipulation and betrayal. Rather than ask, "Will you join our attack on the Lion Clan?" the proposal would be more appropriately phrased, "Our clan must defend our honor by avenging the grievous insult done us by the Lion Clan. We know

that you, too, have been treated dishonorably by the Lion. If our victory is quick and without great cost to our people, we would insist that they return to your clan the land they took from your ancestors." A coarser phrasing of the question suggests that the speaker is too direct and uncouth to make an efficient ally.

THE CHAMBERS OF COURT

Rokugani courts vary considerably from place to place. The mood is defined not only by the clan who holds the court in question, but also by the facility itself. The Crane's opulent wealth and extravagance sets a completely different environment from the rugged austerity of a court in the Crab lands. Likewise, the Spartan, stoic style of the Lion could not be more different from the strange architecture and *gaijin* trappings of a Unicorn Court.

Cunning courtiers assess their surroundings immediately upon arriving at a new location. A courtier in the Lion court knows to carefully adhere to tradition, while a diplomat attending the Unicorn court will recognize the opportunity to express new ideas in such an open environment. These sorts of cues allow courtiers to know exactly what their boundaries are, and give them an idea of what will happen to those who exceed them.

Traditionally, more wealthy and luxurious courts (such as those of the Otomo, the Crane, the Scorpion, and the Unicorn) are considered more liberal by the majority of courtiers. These courts more readily accept (and even expect) overt scheming and political machinations. The Lion, Crab and Mantis clans generally hold more conservative and thus less popular courts (although the wealth of the Mantis Clan does lend itself to an attractive court). The trappings of these courts are much more mundane and reflect the more traditional tenets of bushido. Plots and schemes are looked upon with disdain, and the games that characterize the winters here are based more on the warrior arts. Poetry contests and the like are rare indeed.

Although most courts resemble one of these two stereotypes in most respects, a few fall somewhere in between. The Phoenix Clan are particularly renowned for their neutral tendencies; they do not focus on the luxurious surroundings of the more wealthy clans, but neither are they obsessed with the military arts as are the more conservative clans.

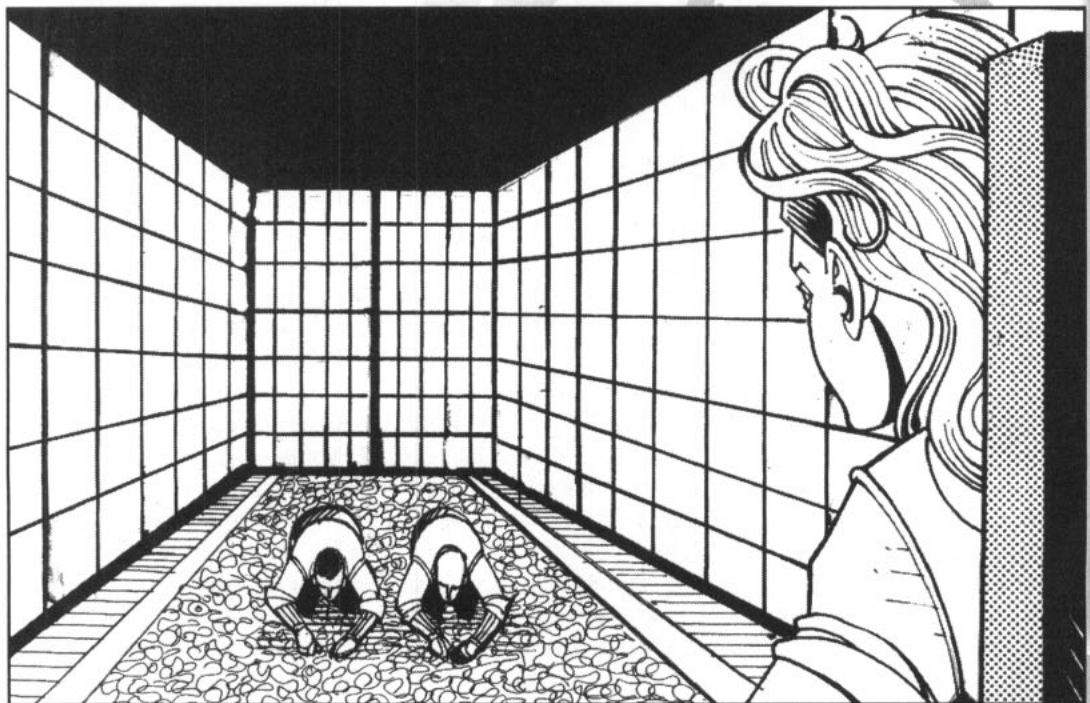
The competition for the hand of the princess Otomo Yoroshiku, held only three years past, is already infamous for its ingenuity and uniqueness. The past year's court was held in the palaces of the Otomo, where the Emperor could be surrounded by his closest family and most loyal guardsmen. This year, the Emperor has chosen to travel to Kyuden Kakita, but he brings a retinue twice as large as that with which his father, Hantei the Thirty-Eighth, once traveled. Many of the minor clans hold similar Winter Courts during this season, though none save the Fox and the Mantis has ever been host to the Winter Court of the Hantei.

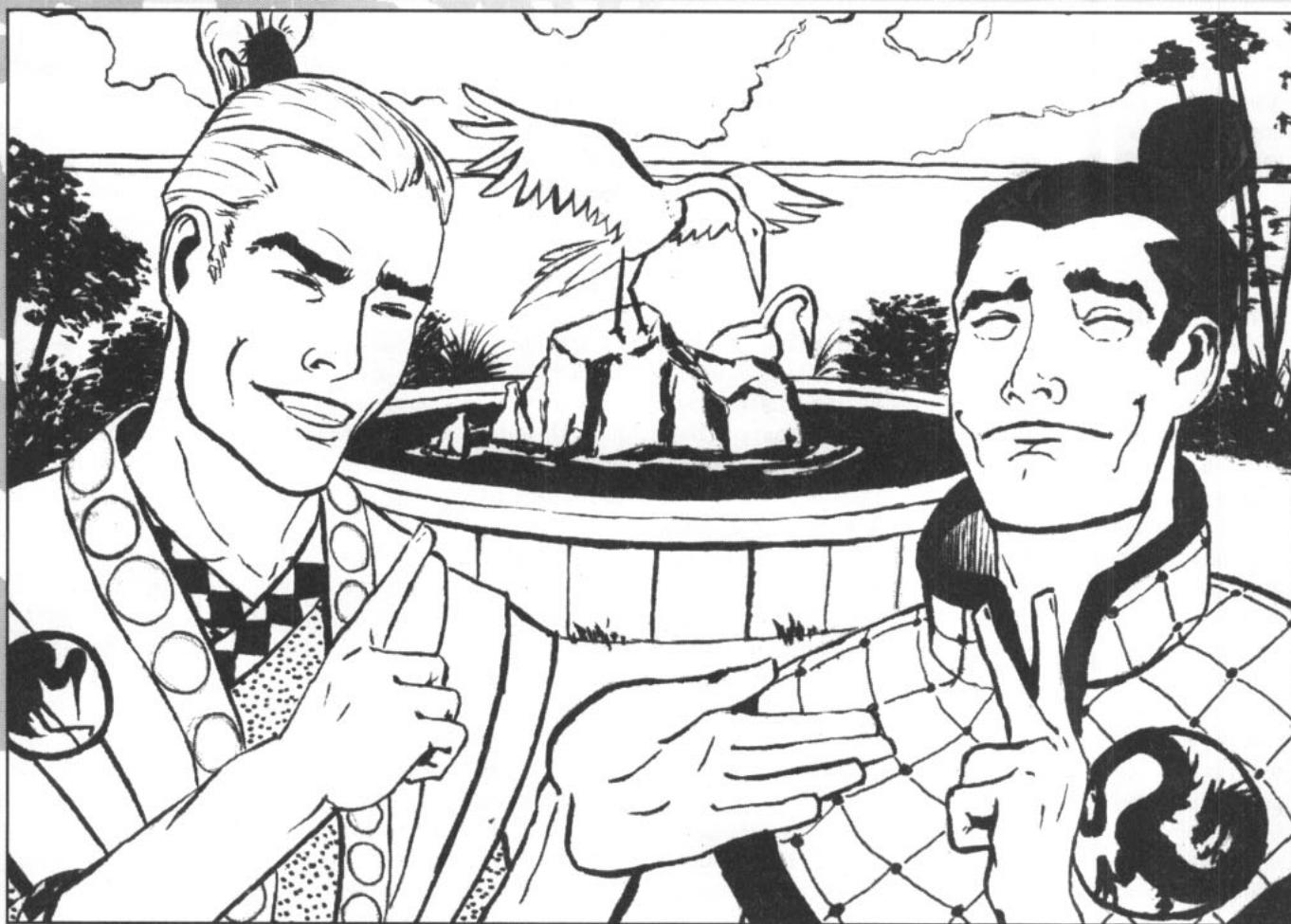
Regardless of location, all courts share certain similarities. While the host palace is open to all guests (with a few exceptions), there is invariably a central chamber in which large events are held. The decoration of these chambers varies considerably from clan to clan, but the basic architecture usually follows the same rough parameters.

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A balcony looks down into a large two-floor chamber. The host sits on a dais located at the far end of the chamber, with his chief advisors on either side. Tapestries and calligraphic paintings adorn the walls of the lower level, usually depicting a great victory or proud moment in the history of the clan. An ornate stairwell leads to the balcony from the first floor, crafted from mahogany or other sturdy material. Smaller rooms for private conversations or meals lead off from the main chamber. Privacy screens permit a certain degree of anonymity to the rooms' occupants.

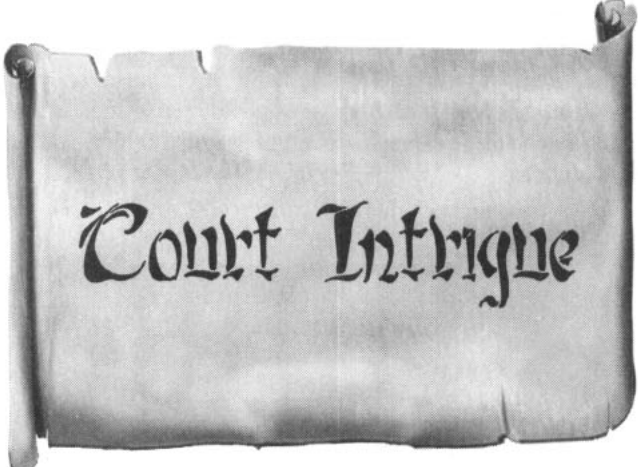
Gardens are another constant in any court, wherein guests can meditate, hold private conversations, play games of go, or simply take a moonlit stroll with a romantic interest. Every clan has its

gardens, although the Crane and Phoenix are particularly renowned for theirs.

Winding paths lead through this garden of delicate trees, beautiful flowers and incredibly well maintained hedges. The bouquet of chrysanthemums, iris, and countless other blossoms pleasantly assaults your senses. Soft murmurs can be heard from others walking through the gardens, but the lush vegetation and clever spacing of paths prevents you from seeing them or hearing their words. Plots of intricately shaped sand and rock dot the landscape, and there is an occasional go board nestled into an alcove among the trees.

Of course, there would be no court without meals. While most are available wherever guests choose to take them, there are occasionally large banquets within the dining hall of the palace. In the more lavish courts, these banquets could feed a village of farmers for days on end.

The dining hall stretches out, lengthy tables of polished wood laden with delicious foods. The scents of seasoned rice and seafood delicacies permeate the room, awakening the appetite. Servants quietly place dishes and pour tea and sake. Manicured bonsai trees adorn the long tables, establishing a sense of serenity throughout the hall.



Court Intrigue

Sometimes the downfall of houses hinges on the fumble of a wrist.

– The Tao of Shinsei

The Emperor's Winter Court this year is unlike any in history. The only heir of the assassinated Hantei XXXVIII has fallen ill. Although the courtiers make a noble effort to proceed as if everything is normal, an undercurrent of fear runs through this Winter Court. Ambassadors delicately search for the beginnings of aggression between the clans. Other intrigues are secondary to the threat of war upon the horizon.

Hostilities between the Unicorn and the Crab have been a matter of some speculation. At the last Winter Court it seemed as though the two clans would go to war over the Crab's annexation of the Falcon Clan's lands. The sudden death of Toritaka Tsimari during a hunt at Kyuden Seppun last winter quickly dissolved the budding Unicorn-Falcon alliance. The Falcon Clan has sent numerous emissaries to Otosan Uchi to protest the Crab's action, but since the Hantei's assassination during the Coup, they have quickly and quietly withdrawn their objections. Still, it does not seem that the Unicorn have forgotten the blight upon their name.

Whispers of Toturi the Black permeate the atmosphere at Winter Court. Since his disgrace he has been spotted all across the Empire, frequently in the company of other wave men. Some suspect him of planning a coup, perhaps hoping to succeed where the Scorpions failed. Others would see him hunted down and executed. Among these last are many of Matsu Tsuko's supporters in the Lion Clan.

There is much concern among the clans at rumors of a sickness sweeping the lands. Few have been spared the effects of the strange malady, not even the Son of Heaven himself. The Phoenix and Agasha have thus far been unable to determine the cause of the plague, but some believe it is mystical in origin, much like the so-called Darkfever that plagued the Phoenix lands the previous year.

Sample Ambassadors

Regardless of where a court is held, there are inevitably representatives from every major clan present. For a careless samurai, these courtiers can be more deadly than the most skilled bushi or voracious oni.

The following are representative of individuals found at every court across the face of Rokugan.

CRANE CLAN COURTIER

Earth: 2

Fire: 3

Water: 2

Perception 3

Air: 3

Void: 2

School: Doji Courtier Rank 2

Skills: Courtier 3, Etiquette 4, Heraldry 2, Law 2, Manipulation 3, Oratory 1, Political Maneuvering 1, Sincerity 3

Honor: 3.5

Glory: 2.4

Advantages: Allies, Social Position

Disadvantages: Enemies

UNICORN CLAN AMBASSADOR

Earth: 2

Fire: 2

Water: 3

Air: 3

Void: 3

School: Ide Emissary Rank 2

Skills: Commerce 1, Courtier 2, Etiquette 3, History 2, Horsemanship 3, Kenjutsu 1, Law 2, Sincerity 2

Honor: 2.8

Glory: 2.1

Advantages: Balance

Disadvantages: Gaijin Name

LION CLAN DIPLOMAT

Earth: 2

Fire: 3

Water: 3

Air: 2

Void: 2

School: Ikoma Omoidasu Rank 2

Skills: Bard 3, Calligraphy 1, Courtier 2, Etiquette 2, Heraldry 2, History 3, Law 2, Lore: Bushido 3

Honor: 3.8

Glory: 2.5

Advantages: Social Position

Disadvantages: Driven (champion Lion Clan in court)

Guests at Winter Court

KUNI TAKIGE

Earth 4
Fire 3
Water 2
Air 3
Void 4

A startling contrast from the stereotypical Kuni shugenja, Takige is a handsome, athletic young man who turns the heads of women wherever he travels. He is quite skilled at the arts of court (Courtier 3, Etiquette 4) and generally well-liked among his peers.

This carefully crafted image is a complete ruse. Takige is one of Kuni Yori's trusted advisors, and has undertaken the most unspeakable missions for his daimyo (Shadowlands Lore 5). His sole purpose at Winter Court is to assess potential allies among the clans in what Hida Kisada calls "the inevitable war to come."

If Takige believes that none of the clans will support the Crab's bid for the throne, then perhaps they will find allies elsewhere...

AGASHA NUNORI

Earth 2
Fire 3
Water 2
Air 2
Void 3

A young shugenja in service to the Dragon Clan, Nunori is out of his element at Winter Court and he knows it. He is a scholar, not a courtier (Shugenja Lore 4, Courtier 1). Although court has only just begun, he has already developed a reputation as an insensitive boor.

Nunori actually requested this post, calling in numerous favors owed his late father in order to earn it. He has heard the rumors concerning the lands of the Falcon Clan, and he recognizes the tales from ancient texts he has studied (Naga Lore 2). He secretly wishes to return to the lands of the Dragon with sufficient evidence to inform Tōgashi Yokuni that his surmise is correct: the Naga have returned to Rokugan.

SHIBA OTAKI

Earth 3
Fire 4
Water 2
Air 2
Void 2

A valiant samurai with a history of service to his clan, Otaki left the elite order of chikai after suffering serious injury while successfully defending Isawa Eju from a bandit attack. Despite the lingering arm wound, he remains a competent warrior (Kenjutsu 3, Iaijutsu 2).

Since his retirement from active duty, Otaki has served as an ambassador to Rokugan's more martial clans. He has spent time

among both the Lion and the Crab and has earned their respect. His presence at Winter Court is an attempt to ensure future peaceful relations with those clans. Shiba Ujimitsu and the Council of Elemental Masters are greatly concerned about possible war with their neighbors and have placed their faith in Otaki's abilities.





Entertainment

"There is honor in the learning of civilized things."

—Doji Hoturi, Crane Clan Champion

Hida Kuroda smiled, throwing salt over each shoulder in the ritual of purification. Finally, here was a contest he could sink his teeth into! Maybe being banished to Kyuden Kakita for the winter wasn't such a waste of time. He stepped into the circle, stomping his feet heavily onto the packed earth. Across the ring, another large man wearing the loincloth of a sumai completed the same process. Kuroda smiled grimly and bowed to his opponent.

In the background, Kuroda noticed Ichiro. The pampered Crane courtier had made a game out of humiliating Kuroda since the Crab had arrived. The first night, Ichiro tricked Kuroda into entering a poetry contest. The day after that, a young maiden enticed Kuroda to meet her in the gardens. He ended up spending the rest of the day with the old women, sculpting snow dragons. He later discovered that the maiden was one of Ichiro's servants. Now, the courtier simply stood back and smiled in a most unnerving manner. Kuroda pushed the thought out of his mind. This was sumai. Surely, even Kakita Ichiro couldn't find a way to rob Kuroda of this victory.

And what a victory! Kuroda slammed one shoulder forward, forcing his opponent out of the ring in seconds. The courtiers applauded appreciatively. Even Kuroda's opponent seemed impressed. The big Crab turned to Ichiro and sneered.

"There," Kuroda snapped. "That is how we win a contest at Kyuden Hida."

"I stand corrected," Ichiro answered with a small smile. Fluttering a silken fan over his face, smiling at some joke that Kuroda obviously did not understand.

"What?" Kuroda asked, narrowing his eyes. "What is going on?"

A tall man in the golden-bronze ceremonial armor of the Imperial Guard stepped to the edge of the sumai ring. He bowed deeply to Kuroda and waited with infinite patience.

"Eh?" Kuroda asked. "What do you want, Seppun?"

"You are the victor," the miharu replied. "It is time for your reward. The Hantei awaits."

"The Hantei?" Kuroda laughed triumphantly. "This must be some prize!"

The Seppun looked momentarily confused. "Do you not know? The winner of the sumai competition has the honor of performing the bugaku for the Emperor."

Kuroda's jaw dropped in horror. "Bugaku?" Kuroda asked. "A dance? I don't dance!"

Kakita Ichiro chuckled. "I suppose you shall learn. That is how we win a contest at Kyuden Kakita."

During Rokugan's long winter months, entertainment is a premium commodity. With nothing to look forward to but long-term indoor confinement, a variety of contests and entertainments have been devised. Many Rokugani pastimes are simple games such as go, shogi, and Winds and Fortunes, but other more involved entertainments of the samurai have become part of the subtle political games that shape the Emerald Empire. Nowhere is this more evident than at Winter Court.

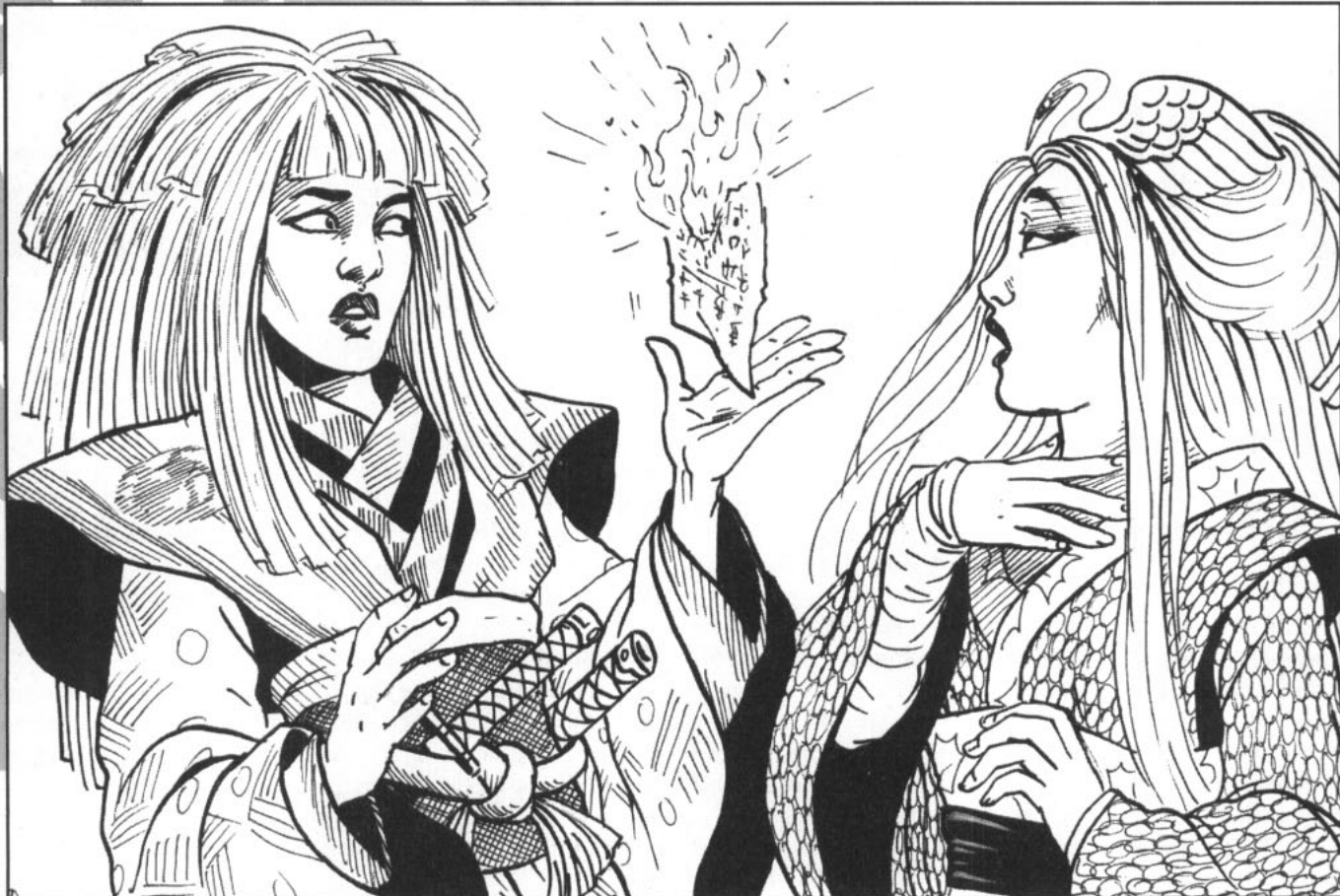
ARTISANS

It is often said that the culture of Rokugan lives and breathes at the Winter Court, where the greatest artisans in the Empire gather to entertain Rokugan's samurai. For this reason, the Kakita family always receives many invitations. The Kakita are well aware of their reputation, and never disappoint. At least two master artisans from every branch of the Kakita Academy attend every winter.

It is an established tradition that each Kakita artisan must unveil one new masterpiece during the first week of Winter Court. Tangible pieces like ikebana, paintings, and origami remain on display for the duration of the Court. All works on display at the end of Winter Court go to Otsan Uchi to be added to the Emperor's personal collection.

Each of the Kakita masters holds open forums of artistic discussion, and talented amateurs have the opportunity to attend to confer with the masters. Many aspiring artists dream of receiving an invitation to Winter Court merely for a chance to attend these discussions. Scribes note down every word spoken at these forums, returning them to the archives of the Kakita Academy after the conclusion of the court, for use as reference in future studies.

The Kakita masters accept all challenges to the quality of their work, so long as a significant work is presented. If challenge is made, a panel of judges swiftly gathers to choose the superior work. If the general consensus indicates that the new work is of higher quality than that of the master (which is extremely rare – the Kakita are quite good at what they do), then the master's work is removed from display and replaced with the challenger's. In addition, the challenger is invited to attend the Kakita Academy to continue his studies. Those who dare this challenge and fail are considered arrogant or foolish, and quickly become the laughing-stock of their profession.



This is not to say that friendly challenges do not occur from time to time. Frequently, two rival artisans of great skill come to the Winter Court solely for the purpose of publicly comparing their skill. The artists rarely have any say in whether or not they wish to be involved; that is the decision of their patrons. After a time and place are decided for the competition, the two artists come to a neutral ground before an audience. Two troupes of actors receive the same play to briefly rehearse and perform; two ikebana masters receive the same selection of flowers and allowed to begin. Poets receive a single topic upon which they must each compose a poem.

Both competitors work in full sight of one another, fully aware of their opponent's creation the entire time. The ritual and formality involved in this challenge is often compared to that of an iaijutsu duel. Like an iaijutsu duel, the stakes are quite high and the loser might risk everything on a single challenge. Noble patrons wager great amounts of money on such competitions. If an artisan fails, he can count upon his patronage quickly drying up.

In game terms, an artistic competition functions like an iaijutsu duel. In the case of a group effort, such as competing troupes of actors, each group should choose one individual as their "lead" (see *Working Together*, *L5R RPG*, page 103). The lead is the only participant who can spend Void at any time during the

competition. The initial Target Number of the duel is 15. The competitor who has a lower rank in the appropriate artisan skill must Focus or Strike first.

If a competitor chooses to Focus, the TN is raised by 5 and then the other competitor must now Focus or Strike. A competitor may Focus a number of times equal to their Void, but may Focus an additional time by spending a Void Point.

If a competitor wishes to Strike, then the most skilled artisan on each side must immediately make a skill roll against the current TN. The base artistic value of the piece is the current TN plus the competitor's Artisan skill. A failed skill roll has an artistic value of zero; something went dreadfully wrong. After a Strike is called, both competitors may spend any number of Void Points to add 5 to the artistic value of their piece for every Void Point spent. The competitor who did not Strike may add 10 points to the artistic value of his final work. A character who has attended a school specially dedicated to their art (Kakita Artisan) may add their School Rank x 2 to the final value. An artisan who was clever enough to work something into his piece to flatter his judges can also increase his piece's worth at the GM's discretion. This requires research beforehand and no small amount of guile, but can raise the final value by up to 5 points.

In theory, the artisan whose piece has a higher artistic value wins the contest. In reality, this is only sometimes the case. Art is

subjective, and so is politics. Judges are frequently biased, and those skilled at making friends among the court succeed more frequently than those with talent. To express this in game terms, an artisan who is disliked by a majority of the judges may have the final artistic value of his piece reduced by 5, 10, or even as much as 15. This is not to say that an artisan without political connections doesn't still have a chance to win, but he'll have to work much harder than his opponent to impress a biased jury.

KEMARI

For those with a taste for more physical contests, the Winter Court offers an odd game called kemari. The rules of the game were introduced several decades ago by the Shinjo, and it has since become very popular. Kemari is similar to soccer, in that it uses a large leather ball which players may not touch with their hands. Players stand in a circle and kick the ball about, attempting to keep the ball from touching the ground. Perhaps the strangest part of kemari is that it is played in full courtly dress, kimonos and peaked black caps. Many players find that maintaining one's dignity during a game is as much of a challenge as keeping the ball in the air, a subtle metaphor for the complex life of a samurai.

A game of kemari can be played using the following mechanics. An game should includes ten players, so that the GM can easily roll randomly to see where the ball will end up. When playing Kemari, roll Reflexes + Kemari or Reflexes + Athletics with one Raise. The first player to kick the ball must roll a TN of 5 to kick the ball in the air. The ball then flies to a random player. Note that a player can kick a ball to himself – it flies straight up and comes right back down. A kicker can attempt to direct the ball to a specific individual by making two Raises.

The TN to keep the ball in the air increases by one exploding die each time the ball is successfully kicked, until someone finally fails and it hits the ground. A player with the Quick advantage may roll two dice to determine the increase to their TN, and keep the number they prefer. Each player who kicks the ball, whether successful or not, must also make a Reflexes + Etiquette roll vs TN 15 to keep their courtly dress in order, or a 25 if they were not paying attention to the game. If they fail, the character either trips on his kimono, drops his hat, loses a shoe, or otherwise embarrasses himself. A mistake like this is far more humiliating than letting the ball hit the ground, and will make the character a target of subtle jeers and veiled insults for days.

As a side note for dirty kemari players, a Raise can increase the TN for the next player to keep the ball in the air by one die, or increase the TN to keep their courtly dress in order by 5.

There is no particular function to kemari; it simply passes time and keeps the players fit. However, like any game, it can be wagered on. Players make bets on how long they can keep the ball in the air, and keep records of their longest games. Shinjo Yasamura is the undisputed champion, and has kept the ball in the air a record eighty-nine times with a team of supportive players. Yasamura jokingly claims that he attends the Winter

Court for “the poetry, the women, and the kemari, but not in that order.”

SUMAI

The most intense physical competition at Winter Court is certainly *sumai*. Wrestlers go through intense rituals of purification and meditation before a sumai bout, and spectators come to watch the ceremony as much as the sport. An actual bout of sumai is over in seconds, as two massive wrestlers slam into one another with the intent of knocking the opponent off his feet or pushing him out of the ring. Matches are separated into four ascending categories according to the skill and reputation of the wrestlers: *juryo*, *maegashira*, *sanyaku*, and *yokuzuna*. Only yokuzuna bouts are allowed at the Winter Court, and the current Hantei is said to be particularly fond of the sport.

Sumai tournaments take place between two teams of wrestlers who perform seventeen bouts before the Emperor and his entourage. The winning team receives a beautifully crafted bow (no bonuses to hit or damage, but incredibly beautiful and valuable), and then stands before the emperor and his court to perform *bugaku*, a complex ritual of ceremonial songs and dances; the champion dances while twirling the bow that he has won.

BOWMEN'S WAGER

The Bowmen's Wager is another staple of the Winter Court: the most prestigious archery contest in Rokugan, though many argue that the annual tournament at Kyuden Ashinagabachi is a greater show of talent. Bushi who prefer combat to court seize upon the opportunity to demonstrate their worth for the Emperor. Each Great Clan receives five invitations to the Wager to distribute, and each of the Imperial Families receives one. Each entrant must donate a prize, and if the judges feel the prize is insufficiently worthy, the invitation is denied. The giving of prizes is a bloodthirsty political competition; in the end only sixteen archers may compete.

The Bowmen's Wager is a four-day event. For the first three days, each archer is given exactly twenty arrows of similar color and marking. Every arrow may be fired once, and every target struck is worth a single point. Every day, points are tallied, and half of the competitors proceed to the next round.

On the first day, archers must demonstrate their skill by shooting at straw targets. These shots are relatively easy, requiring a skill roll at TN 20 using Archery or Kyujutsu.

The second day, they fire while mounted on horseback at full gallop. These targets have a TN of 25, and require use of Horse Archery. Characters without Horse Archery must make an Agility + Horsemanship roll vs TN of 20 every time they try to fire, then roll Archery or Kyujutsu against a TN of 35.

On the third day, the archers are led to an open field. When all competitors are prepared, wild dogs, rabbits, or birds are released and the competitors must stand in place and shoot as many as they can before the animals flee out of range. Each archer must

roll Perception + Hunting vs a TN of 10 to spot a target, and an Archery or Kyujutsu roll against the TN of the creature. Roll Wounds as normal. If the target dies, it counts as a point. If it is merely wounded, it continues to flee. Every round, the TN to spot targets increases by 5 as they escape or are whittled down by other competitors. (On the rare occasions when Winter Court is held in Crab lands, the targets used on the third day of the Wager are goblins.)

On the final day, the two most successful archers compete against one another. The archer with the greatest score challenges his opponent to strike a particular target. Inappropriate challenges, such as "Shoot the sun," will be vetoed by the judges. Firing two arrows into an apple before it strikes the ground is reasonable. The opponent must meet the challenge, or decline. The challenger must then meet his own challenge, or decline. After this, it is the other archer's turn to name a challenge and his opponent's turn to meet it or decline. When two challenges have been failed or declined in a row, the Wager is over. The GM must determine the TN for these challenges as he sees fit, but nothing less than 25 is appropriate.

The archer with the most points wins, and collects the prizes submitted by the other fifteen contestants plus a gift from the Emperor. The bounty is always great; a Shinjo steed, fine dai-kyu, and quiver of fine arrows are the least a victor can expect. The loser is not so lucky. The winner presents the second-place archer with the "Cup of Defeat" before the entire court, and the loser must drink deeply from it. The cup is an ancient wooden bowl carved by Asahina craftsmen. It contains only water, but ill fortune is rumored to follow those who drink from it.

An interesting anecdote surrounds the Cup of Defeat. Four years ago, Tsuruchi of the Wasp Clan won the Bowmen's Wager, forcing Matsu Agetoki to drink from the Cup. Each year since then, Tsuruchi has received an invitation to the Wager from the Crane. Every year, he declines. "I already have my prize," is the Wasp's polite reply.

WINDING WATER BANQUETS

Winding Water Banquets are another entertaining pastime of the court. Ostensibly, these elaborate picnics are social gatherings held alongside a pond or stream, amid the beauty of nature. In reality, they are thinly veiled intellectual duels which test the wit and intellect of everyone involved.

As the guests dine beside the water, servants fill small wooden cups with sake and place them in the stream. These cups float downstream, and eventually come to shore. If a cup floats near a guest, he must take it, stand, drink, and recite a poem. Few poems recited at these banquets are original works; they're not expected to be. However, the wittiest courtiers can improvise a poem from a topic suggested by another guest. After the guest completes his poem, he returns the cup and it floats to someone else, who must repeat the process.

To depict a Winding Water Banquet in a game, the GM first determines who ends up with a cup. If this guest wishes to quote

a poem, he must roll Intelligence + Lore: Literature vs a TN of 10. If he wishes to compose an improvised poem from another guest's topic, he must roll Awareness + Poetry vs TN of 25. An original poem based on a topic of the guest's own choice is merely Awareness + Poetry vs TN of 15, but that's not nearly as impressive. Raises can be used to produce a better poem. If the player actually writes a poem he should earn a free Raise or two for his effort.

After the first poem, things get tricky. Anyone can spout out a poem and sit back down, but that won't impress the court. To make an impact, a character must Raise to a TN higher than any other poem recited during the banquet. The "winner" of the poetry contest may receive a point of Honor or Glory, or simply draw notice from the other courtiers for his achievement, paving the way for future contacts.

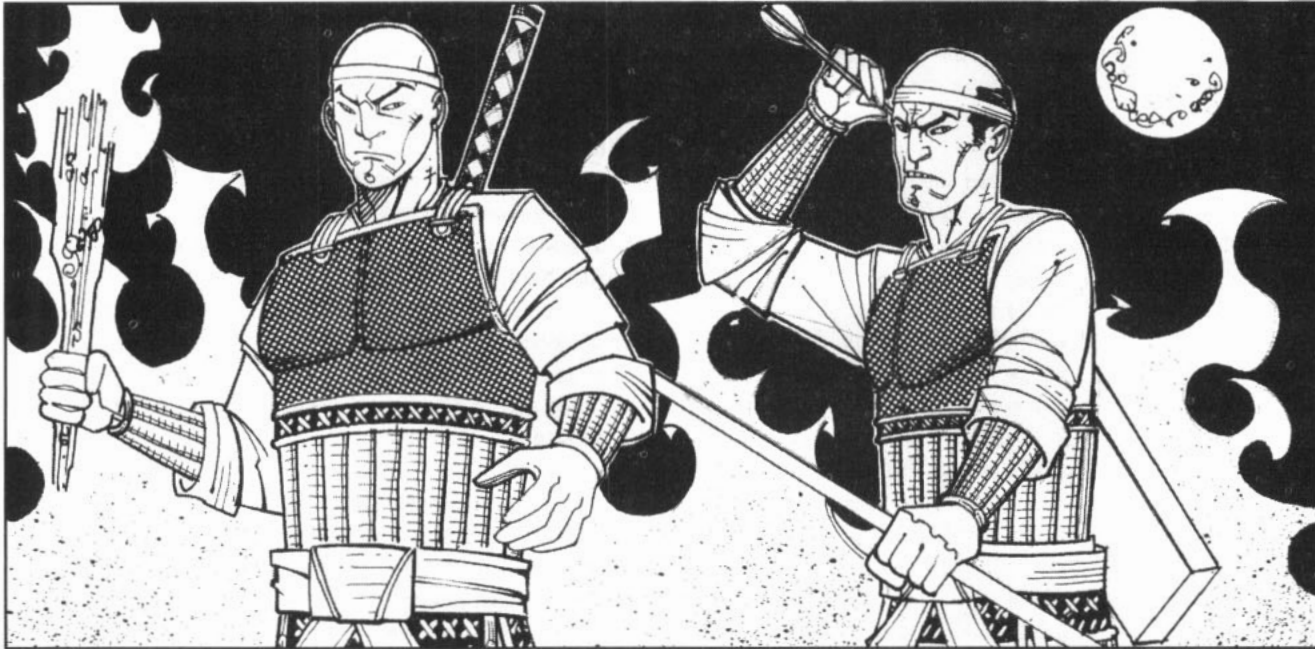
THE DEVIL CHASE

The most spectacular and, literally, magical contest at Winter Court is the Devil Chase. On the night before the last day of the court, when winter has ended and spring begins, all attending shugenja are invited to spend a night in communal meditation. At this time, the shugenja ready their most powerful spells in an effort to drive evil spirits away from the house, insuring safe travel for the Emperor. Each shugenja displays his magical effect; the shugenja whose display is most impressive becomes the Devil Chaser.

The next morning, the Devil Chaser dons a golden mask, a bright red skirt, a bow, and a shield. With twenty assistants, he runs through the halls of the castle, twanging the bowstring and smashing the bow against the shield to scare away oni that may have infested the home. Though some find the ceremony amusing, the Council of Masters adamantly insist that a Devil Chase take place every year at the end of Winter Court. The mask, skirt, bow, and shield are all ancient Phoenix relics, believed to be possessions of Asako. The Phoenix take the Devil Chase quite seriously, believing that the chosen Devil Chaser is granted mighty powers.

If player characters wish to participate in the Devil Chase, here's what they have to do. The night before the chase, each shugenja must cast spells upon the house to clear the way for the Emperor's procession. Common enchantments include Evil Ward, Elemental Ward, Benevolent Protection of Shinsei, and other protective spells. These are only cast ceremonially - while they count as spells cast for that day, they do not function as they normally do. The magic is simply absorbed into the well-being of the home. If a character does not have an appropriate spell, he may simply cast Commune to entice the household spirits to be watchful and protective. The shugenja who casts the greatest number of rare spells, or makes the greatest amount of Raises, becomes the Devil Chaser.

The relics of the Devil Chaser do indeed have magical power, but only when all four are worn by a shugenja on the last day of winter. First, the Devil Chase really does drive away evil spirits.



All oni, kansen, and non-human creatures with the Taint flee the castle hosting the Devil Chase. The most direct road between the castle and Otsan Uchi is cleared as well, and will remain clear of evil for three months. Second, the relics bestow a number of abilities upon the Devil Chaser. Anyone attempting to cast *maho* on the Devil Chaser must Raise a number of times equal to the Devil Chaser's highest Ring. All Fear effects generated by Shadowlands creatures that target the Devil Chaser are reduced by the Devil Chaser's School Rank. The Devil Chaser rolls and keeps a number of extra dice equal to his Honor when resisting the Shadowlands Taint. At the end of one year, these benefits fade unless the shugenja is chosen as Devil Chaser again. The relics also have a third power, one that the Council knows of but chooses to keep to themselves. Any human with the Shadowlands Taint who touches any of the relics collapses to the ground, screaming in intense pain, unable to break contact with them voluntarily. The relics inflict one die of damage on a Tainted individual every round until someone else removes all four of them. In addition, such contact – even for a single round – causes the relics to lose their other powers for one year.

LETTERS

The longest running competition of Winter Court is the game of letters. It is a subtle game, one that many visitors fail to understand or even recognize. Still, it should not be underestimated. The fame and fortune of many a courtier has been built and broken by a single letter, and a correspondence at the Winter Court can build an alliance that lasts generations or begin a feud that lasts centuries. Letters are the weapon of choice among critics and blackmailers. They are the most subtle yet most direct gift of a lover. If politics are the heart of Winter Court, then letters are certainly its blood.

The writing of a letter is a complex matter. At court, one does not write a letter as one would write a message for a friend, or as a general would compose orders for his soldiers. A variety of skills and considerations must be addressed. The composition is a concise, calculated act, a careful dance calculated to amuse, confound, tantalize, seduce, and provoke the recipient. Every part of a letter is important. Every part of a letter is symbolic.

First, the choice of paper is of utmost importance. Color establishes mood or emotion, as does the texture and thickness of the paper. A matter of grave concern calls for a paper of greater weight and grain. For a dreamy and romantic mood, one might choose a thin tissue. The size of the paper in relation to the writing is also a consideration. A large piece of paper used to carry a small message may be taken as a gesture of generosity ("I used all of this extra paper, just for you"). In contrast, a small piece of paper cramped with writing may be seen as an insult ("You're not worthy of my paper").

Second, the content matters a great deal. The traditional practice is to compose a thirty-one syllable poem with an image drawn from nature, subtly implying the author's intent rather than stating it outright. This is often seen as yet another move in the courtier's eternal game, but it serves a practical purpose as well. Letters written at court are hardly private. They are almost never sealed, and nearly anyone can stop a servant in the halls to read what they bear. In fact, it's expected. Letters display the author's wit and guile to everyone; they do not communicate secrets. Recipients who play the game correctly can understand the letter even though the message is not directly stated.

Third, the author's brushwork should convey the proper message. The style can convey a message entirely different from the content. An elegantly written message could symbolize love, or could simply communicate that the writer is wealthy and well-

read with plenty of time to practice calligraphy. Messy handwriting is usually considered an insult, so writers often compose several drafts using different brushes and inks before choosing one to be sent out. Even if the intent is to be insulting, the execution should be proper.

Finally, the courtier must consider the packaging of the letter. Rokugan has several established traditional styles of letter folding, and some clans have developed their own secret styles to display their cunning and confound forgeries. (Before the Coup, the Scorpion were notorious for this. It was considered a great display of skill if one could unfold a Scorpion letter without tearing it.) The letter is then attached to a flower, branch, stick of incense, or other object with a particular odor. Again, the choice of perfume plays a part, often encapsulating the theme of the letter. A proper servant must also deliver the letter. An important servant implies that the recipient is also important. A minor servant implies that the recipient is of little note. Letters of this sort are never delivered personally; it would defeat the entire purpose of the game.

All courtiers are familiar with the game of letters; they learn the game the way a bushi learns to wield a sword. The game of letters is ancient, dating back to the early days of the Emperor's Court. Hantei Genji, the Shining Prince, is considered to have been one of the most skilled players, and many of the letter-writing traditions currently practiced by courtiers are believed to have been established by him many centuries ago. An expression of love, for example, might be written on soft, rose-colored paper, contain a poem comparing the recipient's beauty to an animal or flower of choice, and be accompanied by a sprig of oak to show that the author's love is strong. A suggestion of cowardice toward a Crab might be written on thick white paper (white, to symbolize death), feature a poem describing a thick-witted crustacean drowning in its own shell, and be scented with bitter almonds. The possible combinations are limitless. A skilled courtier is so adept at observing the interplay of letters she can often guess the intent of a message without even opening it.

Needless to say, correspondences are taken extremely seriously at Winter Court. Each letter demands a reply. Otherwise, the recipient might as well admit the author's superior wit. The game often continues for the duration of the court, and a single courtier might have a dozen correspondences continuing at once.

In game terms, a "duel of letters" begins one of two ways. Either the character decides to send a letter, or receives one. A multitude of skills can be useful in a duel of letters, particularly Courtier, Rhetoric, and Calligraphy.

First, the character must decide on paper, content, brushwork, and packaging. A roll of Awareness + Courtier is made, at whatever TN the player thinks is appropriate. The GM should make this roll secretly. The player won't know whether or not the roll was successful, but one of her servants or advisors might be able to clue her in if her plan is particularly poor. ("Sama? Perhaps you shouldn't send the letter to the Matsu daimyo on the powder blue paper embossed with cranes in flight.") Other skills

can potentially help this process. For example, Herbalism can help select a particularly rare herb with which to scent the letter. The GM should allow free Raises for each skill that could potentially assist the character, but no more than one for each of the four stages.

Attempting to use courtier techniques through the content of a letter is possible, at the GM's discretion. This requires a number or Raises equal to the Rank of the technique. (Example: Doji Courtier Rank 3. When the recipient receives the letter, he would make a contested Honor roll as stated in that technique. A failure would cause the target's initial Courtier roll when replying to the letter to automatically fail. The Bayushi Courtier Rank 1 technique will also work in writing a letter, though a letter is not a contested roll. The courtier must Raise once to use the technique in the content of the letter, as usual.)

Second, the character must actually create the letter. This requires an Awareness + Rhetoric roll to compose the poem, a Reflexes + Calligraphy roll for brushwork, and twenty-five minutes for each process. The TN for each of these equals that of the original Courtier roll. If the player makes a bad roll, the character realizes her work is shoddy and may try again, but each failed roll still takes a half an hour of time. A letter can be created more quickly, but each ten minutes saved requires two Raises. A proper letter of this sort cannot be planned or written in less than five minutes.

Finally, the character must package and deliver the letter. This requires a final Awareness + Courtier roll to make sure that everything comes together appropriately, and ten minutes of time (if all necessary elements are at hand). The TN equals the original Courtier roll. By making two Raises, the player can induce the GM to reveal whether the initial Courtier roll was successful. This is the character's last chance to realize that she made a mistake somewhere and begin the entire process again.

When a letter is delivered, the recipient must make a Willpower + Courtier roll against the TN of the letter. The Bayushi Rank 1 technique will grant free Raises to this roll for every 2 points of Disadvantages of the author, even though this is technically not an opposed roll. If the recipient succeeds, every 5 points she succeeded by will grant her a free Raise to her initial roll when planning a reply. If the recipient fails, every 5 points she failed by results in a penalty of one die on her initial roll when planning a reply.

Each letter gives the recipient the option to "raise the stakes." If a courtier receives a letter with a TN of 25, and replies with a TN of 15, then she's admitting that she's not as clever. If she writes a reply with a TN of 30, then she's proving she's even more clever and the stakes are raised. Of course, there are times when one does not wish to raise the stakes. If a clan daimyo writes you a letter, you're hardly doing yourself a favor by raising the stakes and proving him a fool. The proper thing to do would be to write a letter of sufficient quality, but not one better than your superior; that would be arrogant. However, be careful not to write one sorely lacking in quality; that would be an insult. This is also

important to keep in mind while trying to cultivate a courtly romance. To prove yourself witty will do wonders in the eyes of your love, but to prove your love a fool or insult their intelligence might bring down the whole house of cards.

Is there a point to all of this? Maybe. Courtiers make or break their career off of the strength of their letters. The game can bestow great wealth, glory, and honor upon a sharp wit.

And then, sometimes, it's just a silly game.

FIREWORKS

Though gunpowder, or "gaijin pepper," has been outlawed in Rokugan since the Battle of White Stag, that has not stopped the more curious and industrious among the Emerald Empire from studying the art of explosives. The Agasha family are particularly interested in the subject, and while they have not yet mastered the art of transforming chemicals into weapons, they have made quite a reputation for themselves with a bizarre art they call *hanabi*.

Hantei XXXVIII was wary of the Agasha experiments after hearing rumors of explosive *hanabi* sticks, fueled by illegal gaijin pepper. He demanded a selection of *hanabi* to be brought to Otosan Uchi for study, comparing it to samples of gaijin pepper left from White Stag. After the Phoenix intensely studied several dozen pieces of *hanabi*, the baffled scholars determined that they did not contain any gaijin pepper at all. In fact, the Phoenix scholars weren't exactly sure what the *hanabi* contained. Agasha Tenno, the Grand Master of *hanabi*, immediately revealed that all of the ingredients were found on Togashi Mountain, not outside of Rokugan at all. It contained nothing but natural starches, sugars, oils, gums, and metals. When the Hantei asked what the purpose of the *hanabi* was, Tenno offered to put on a personal display for the Emperor.

What followed was a riotous performance of sights and sounds, with multicolored fiery explosions. The Emperor was pleased by the Dragon's art, and invited him to return to Otosan Uchi several times to display these strange "fireworks." Since then, *hanabi* have been welcome sights at every Imperial gathering and major festival. The current Hantei is even more enamored of *hanabi*, as some of his earliest memories involve watching the Dragon fireworks over Golden Sun Bay while perched on his father's lap. Every Winter Court for the last seven years has culminated with a grand show of Dragon fireworks, and this year will be no exception.

Most of the Empire is not entirely certain what to think of *hanabi* just yet. The Crab are extremely curious about it, and frequently invite Agasha chemists to their lands to discuss possible applications. The Unicorn, on the other hand, are adamantly opposed to the use of *hanabi* in their provinces. They believe the explosives to be a potentially dangerous and uncontrollable element. The Dragon claim that *hanabi* is not dangerous at all, in the right hands, and that it is not sorcery that powers it, but *kagaku* – "science."



"You do not have to believe me, Unicorn. You only have to get out of my way."

– Toritaka Mariko, Reiryoshi

The Crane laughed. He laughed long and loud. "If there are ghosts and demons in the world, Kitsu," he said to me, "then why do we not find their bones and corpses as we do those of men?"

"But we do," I told him. "They are everywhere."

For an instant there was doubt in his mocking eyes. "Show me," he said. "Show me the proof of these 'hungry spirits.'"

And then I pried up the nearest flagstone with my staff. Beneath the stone, a mass of creatures squirmed to escape the light. There were beetles, spiders, worms, centipedes, maggots, and all the dark things of the earth.

"There," I said to the Crane. "There are the remains of the gaki."

– From the journal of Kitsu Iemasa

The real world is said to be merely one level of existence, and most shugenja will not hesitate to remind others of this fact. The other worlds are open to the men of magic. With the right eyes, one can see these worlds, layered upon the one we live in on into infinity. These other worlds are the domains of the spirits. Known spirit realms include *Chikushudo*, the realm of the animal spirits, *Toshigoku*, the realm of perpetual fighting and slaughter (see "Legacy of the Forge" for more information on this realm), *Yomi*, the realm of elevated and blessed ancestors, *Gakido*, the land of hungry spirits and demons, and *Jigoku*, the world of the honorable dead. Often, these realms are all generalized under the umbrella term of "jigoku," although this is mainly for the sake of simplicity; all the spirit realms connect with one another as they connect to Rokugan. The worlds interact often, and many mortals might be surprised to discover how frequently the spirits venture into the Emerald Empire. These spirits refer to the world of humans as *Ningen-do*. While many spirits find the conflicts of mortals beneath their concern, many take great delight in secretly visiting Rokugan. The majority of them are merely curious and

indeed quite harmless. They are an everyday fact of life that the general populace is simply not aware of.

But not all spirits are timid, and not all come to Rokugan for the sake of curiosity. A few species from each realm cannot help but interfere. The demons of Gakido are motivated by their evil natures; they exist for destruction and continuously seek to subjugate the mortals of Ningen-do. Nature spirits such as kappa and mujina endlessly plague mortals by pestering them with annoying pranks and practical jokes. Shiryo constantly cross over into the mortal world at the behest of sodan-senzo or in order to offer a guiding hand to their descendants. The denizens of Toshigoku may return occasionally to the battlefields where they originally died, and in these fearful instances, an observer had best beware. An entire spectral army of samurai ghosts may appear and march across the land to meet an enemy that no longer exists, wielding spectral weapons that can cut just as sharply as any mortal blade. The denizens of Gakido who cross into Rokugan to feed are the most well-known of these ghosts. They are called *gaki*, or "hungry spirits," by those of the Falcon Clan who know them best.

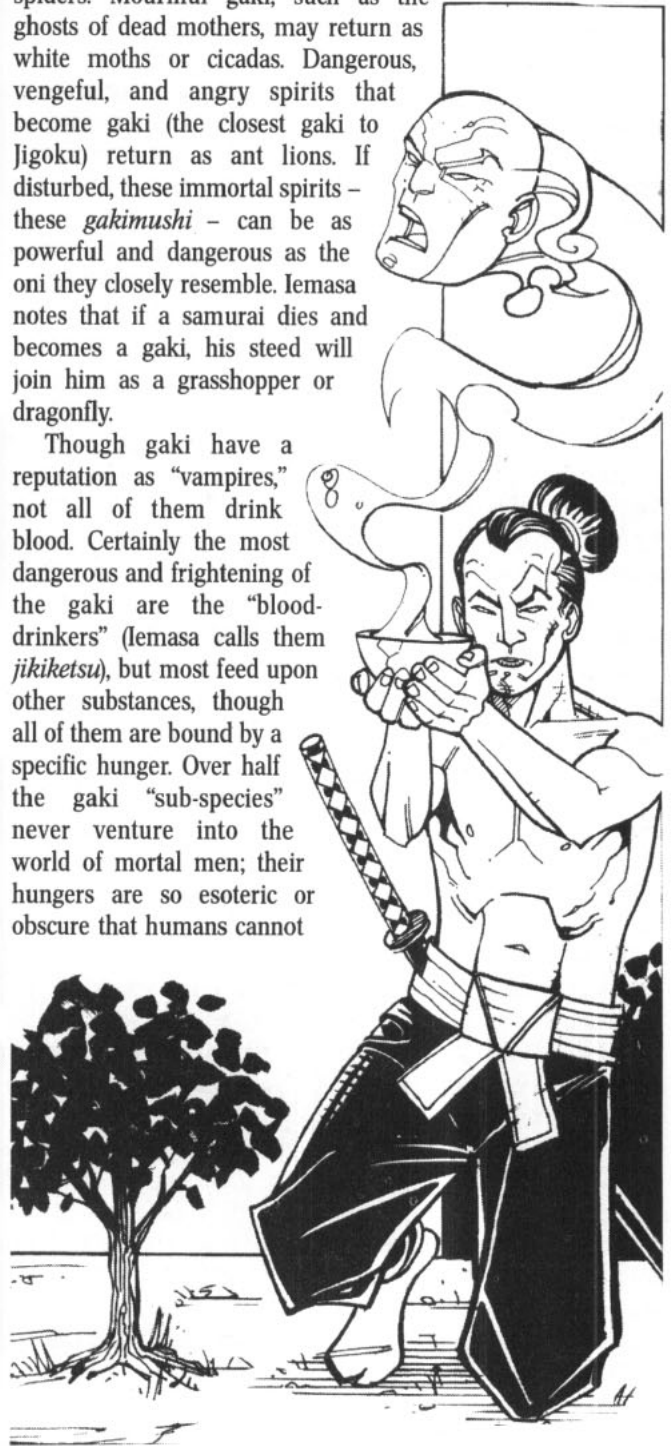
The *gaki* are perhaps the most misunderstood of all of the spirits. These are the denizens of Gakido, a realm of nothingness and loss. The *gaki* who venture forth from Gakido roam Ningen-do in a near mindless state, seeking to satisfy their endless hunger. While the hauntings and other strange supernatural occurrences in Rokugan are frequently blamed upon oni or other Shadowlands creatures, the *gaki* are often the real culprits. They have given rise to the countless legends and superstitions that involve the warding and avoidance of spirits. In Rokugan, a haunting is nothing to take lightly and a *gaki* can be a fearsome opponent for the unwary.

Though the Phoenix may argue otherwise, the sodan-senzo of the Kitsu and the Spirithunters of the Falcon are the foremost experts on ghosts and hauntings. Both have written extensive volumes regarding the *gaki*, and though many are simply metaphysical musings or admonitions against unrighteous behavior, some contain concrete evidence on the hungry spirits. The famed "phantom hunter" Toritaka Iemasa catalogued thirty-six varieties of *gaki* during his travels. His life's work, named simply *Gakiken* (or "spirit-sword"), is considered the quintessential text on all matters of haunting, possession, and ghostly phenomenon. Shugenja wishing to gain a better understanding of the hungry spirits should find a copy and read it thoroughly.

According to Iemasa, not all spirits who die become shiryo. If a man's crimes outweigh the good deeds he performed in life, the Celestial Balance may demand penance before he joins his ancestors. The violent and bloodthirsty are bound in Toshigoku. Those guilty of lesser offenses become *gaki* until such time as they redeem themselves through punishment. A truly reprehensible soul may be cast into Jigoku itself. Once in Jigoku, the spirit has little hope for escape, but may eventually emerge from Jigoku into Gakido once more. These types of *gaki* are the most powerful and ancient of all the hungry ghosts.

Perhaps the strangest observation of Iemasa is the relationship of *gaki* with common insects. Iemasa observes that Gakido is closest to Chikushudo, the realm of animal spirits. The *gaki* have no true forms in their own realm, so they must borrow their forms from the closest animal spirits, the insect spirits. Because of this, all *gaki* have the ability to transform into some variety of insect. Vengeful or spiteful *gaki* may become biting flies or spiders. Mournful *gaki*, such as the ghosts of dead mothers, may return as white moths or cicadas. Dangerous, vengeful, and angry spirits that become *gaki* (the closest *gaki* to Jigoku) return as ant lions. If disturbed, these immortal spirits – these *gakimushi* – can be as powerful and dangerous as the oni they closely resemble. Iemasa notes that if a samurai dies and becomes a *gaki*, his steed will join him as a grasshopper or dragonfly.

Though *gaki* have a reputation as "vampires," not all of them drink blood. Certainly the most dangerous and frightening of the *gaki* are the "blood-drinkers" (Iemasa calls them *jikiketsu*), but most feed upon other substances, though all of them are bound by a specific hunger. Over half the *gaki* "sub-species" never venture into the world of mortal men; their hungers are so esoteric or obscure that humans cannot



understand them. Those that do venture into the mortal world are separated into three classes: the *muzaigaki* (seekers), *usaigaki* (scavengers) and the *shozaigaki* (feeders).

The *muzaigaki* are a tragic, pathetic lot, cursed to always hunger and never feed. They wander the world in constant agony without the slightest understanding of how to sate themselves. They seldom appear, for their hunger has made them bitter and ashamed. They rarely communicate, even with *shugenja*. These ghosts sometimes become frustrated or violent, but never directly harm humans. Angry *muzaigaki* have caused objects to spontaneously break or hurl themselves through the air. Sometimes they attach to a particular area and remain there for a long time, but can be persuaded to move on through certain blessings or magical wards. The only cure for a *muzaigaki*'s condition is time; when they have suffered long enough, they will join the *shiryō*.

The *usaigaki* rank above the *muzaigaki*. These spirits are allowed to feed upon the waste and refuse of mortals. The Fortunes sometimes pity them, and allow them to feed upon the offerings left at their shrines. Iemasa notes that even a casual observer might see the *gaki* feeding upon the offerings in the form of a beetle or ant. They never harm humans, and in fact can sometimes be quite helpful. If a mortal *shugenja* provides a *usaigaki* with a bit of cast-off food to eat, it will usually be happy to supply him with information. *Usaigaki* have well defined territories, and remain near steady food sources for many years. They often travel in large packs, and may become visible in order to drive off other spirits such as *mujina* or *kappa*. When these *gaki* consume enough food, their punishment is lifted, and they go onto *Yomi* to become *shiryō*.

The *shozaigaki* are the most dangerous of the hungry spirits, cursed to feed only upon impure or living substances. Their hunger might seek out blood, sweat, bile, tree pulp, or other such substances, though a single type of *gaki* will only ever feed upon a single substance during its existence. These *gaki* are the most troublesome for *sodan-senzo*, Falcon Clan hunters and other *shugenja*, for though the mortal may attempt to assist the *gaki* on its journey to *Yomi*, there is no way to convince it that mortals are anything but a source of food.

Some *shozaigaki* invisibly enter a human body to feed, causing fevers and chills by their presence, then leave when the fever breaks to feed elsewhere. These *gaki* linger closest to *Jigoku*, and some of them greatly resemble *oni* in form and abilities (including the aforementioned *jigokumushi*). If confronted outside of their victim, they can be incredibly hostile. All *shozaigaki* claim a certain area as their territory, and then remain there until they either fulfill their punishment or are sent forcibly back to *Gakido*. Until that time, a *shozaigaki* is never satisfied and always on the lookout for its next meal. Dealing with a *shozaigaki* is a tricky business. Sometimes, the only option is to simply leave the *gaki*'s territory. In some cases a *shozaigaki* can be appeased, if some way can be found to sate its hunger.

Though all *gaki* that enter into the world of men can take the form of insects or become invisible at will, their concealment is not entirely reliable. *Kitsu sodan-senzo* can always detect *gaki*. *Shugenja* who attempt to see *gaki* (casting an *Sense Air* spell for this specific purpose) may also sense their presence. In addition, dogs, horses, cats, and *nezumi* can always see *gaki* and will avoid them. At times, the mentally infirm may see communicate with




gaki; even the blind are occasionally blessed with a special "spirit-sight" that allows them to see these ghosts.

Though gaki are not true ancestral spirits, sodan-senzo often take it upon themselves to help these creatures. Their natural abilities allow them to see gaki, and their ability to summon and control spirits makes them ideal communicators. Many Falcon and Kitsu choose to model themselves after Iemasa and become "spirit-fighters" themselves. These spirit-hunters (or *Reiryoshi*) travel alone, working to help people deal with the ghosts that trouble them. In a way, the Kitsu pity the gaki who harm humans. They truly have no choice; were it not for the sins of their life, they would be shiryo. If allowed to fulfill their punishment, they will be shiryo. This obliges many Falcon Clan members to help the unfortunate spirits. Of course, this does not mean that a *Reiryoshi* will be unwilling to send a *shozaigaki* back to Gakido at the end of a crystal katana. Compassion is one thing, but foolishness is quite another.

Though all gaki could eventually be redeemed, attempting to do so can be a monumental task. Some gaki are so weighted down with sin and corruption that only hundreds of years of punishment will allow them to cross into Yomi. In these cases, helping the spirits is not a practical option, but protecting oneself from them is. Magical wards such as Benevolent Protection of Shinsei, or Yogo wards specifically created to defend against spirits, will keep gaki from entering a home. Spells which specifically affect Shadowlands creatures such as Jade Strike, Tomb of Jade, and Evil Ward are effective against *shozaigaki* only. Though they have no true Shadowlands Taint, their proximity to *Jigoku* still allows these magics to have full effect upon them.

Weapons of jade and crystal can harm any kind of gaki, and their touch causes them extreme pain. Some *shugenja* fearfully claim that this is proof that the gaki are evil. The Falcon argue against this point, as other varieties of spirits (such as animal spirits or shiryo) can be driven away or summoned by the use of jade and crystal. The Kitsu believe that the divine nature of these minerals affects all supernatural creatures, regardless of origin. They were created by Amaterasu and the Fortunes, exist in all the worlds at once, and thus can be used as effective weapons. Of course, this is all provided that the wielder can see his target. An invisible gaki cannot be harmed, even if the wielder's attack is successful. Harming a gaki requires conscious effort, not blind rage.

If a gaki is "slain" by jade, crystal, or spells, it is not truly destroyed. Rather, it immediately travels back to Gakido, to remain there until it has sufficiently recovered to return to *Ningen-do*. The amount of time is not exact, but the recurrence of well-documented spirits suggests that it requires several years at the very least. *Muzaigaki* and *usaigaki* banished in such a manner will avoid the area where they last appeared, but a *shozaigaki* can always be relied upon to return to its old haunt, angrier and hungrier than ever. Such spirits are responsible for the haunted reputations of many areas of Rokugan, such as the Shinomen Forest and Morikage Castle.



The Shadowlands Taint in Rokugan Society

In Rokugan, there is perhaps no fate more terrible than contracting the Shadowlands Taint. The corrupting power of He Who Must Not Be Named inevitably twists the body, mind, and soul of the infected and even death is not a certain cure. In a constant effort to keep the Emerald Empire free of corruption, many clans have official organizations which keep a constant vigil for those who have contracted the Taint.

The two most notable of these groups are the *tsukai-sagasu* of the Crab Clan and the dreaded inquisitors of the Asako – a special variety of Emerald Magistrate *shugenja* trained to root out the Dark One's touch. These two groups often work in unison; the *tsukai-sagasu* hunt down and capture those who bear the Taint and then the inquisitors determine what course of action to take. The Imperial laws regarding the Taint are extremely strict, and considered immutable. The official degrees of Taint and punishments are as follows.

FIRST DEGREE – PASSIVE INFECTION

Mild Taint, no mental symptoms, little danger of contagion: No punishment, but monthly scheduled interview by a *tsukai-sagasu* to see if infection has become worse. The subject may not marry without informing the prospective spouse and family of the condition. Any violation of these protocols is immediately considered a "dangerous mental symptom." (See Third Degree Taint.)

SECOND DEGREE – ACTIVE INFECTION

Moderate Taint, possible mental systems, some danger of contagion: Subject is offered choice of *seppuku*, or relocation to a secluded location inhabited solely by Tainted individuals under supervision of three *tsukai-sagasu*. The Damned of the Crab are a good example of this degree. This level of punishment is rare.

THIRD DEGREE – DEADLY INFECTION

Extreme Taint, dangerous mental symptoms, physical symptoms that leave potentially dangerous residues, large danger of contagion: Immediate execution. Subject is seen as unstable

and potentially dangerous, so *seppuku* is not a viable option. Decapitation and incineration must follow. Note that the inquisitors consider intentional concealment of any degree of Shadowlands Taint from other individuals a “dangerous mental symptom.”

FOURTH DEGREE – EMBRACE OF THE DARK

This includes possession by oni or other demonic entities, use of one’s Taint for supernatural strength or speed, the practice of maho, or just the worship of He Who Shall Not Be Named (even

if the subject is not actually Tainted). The punishment is death, decapitation, and incineration if the subject is a willing accomplice. If a possessed individual is an innocent, then a reasonable effort must be made to free that individual.

Harboring the Taint

Those who knowingly conceal the Taint of another, for whatever reason, are guilty of harboring the Shadowlands Taint. The inquisitor may determine fitting punishment. Depending upon the severity of the crime this can range from a fine to execution.

Many object to these laws, which seem to bestow unlimited power upon unscrupulous or bloodthirsty inquisitors. In an effort to keep the unthinkable from happening, the Phoenix Elemental Masters and the Emperor himself are placed beyond the jurisdiction of inquisitors. Once a year, all inquisitors must report their annual findings and performance to the Council of Masters. If they have acted rashly or unjustly at any time their charter is permanently revoked.

Occasionally, the intervention of duly authorized investigators is not an option. Matters become complex when a political figure contracts the Taint, since a courtier’s natural reaction is to conceal it. Courtiers spend their entire lives accumulating favors and contacts that cannot be easily handed off to a successor; for an important courtier to be carted off to a monastery could place the entire clan in jeopardy! Naturally, such an occurrence would also cause a great scandal, if the secret were to get out.

If a courtier were found to be Tainted, even the most dedicated and sycophantic of allies would quickly turn away from him. In typical Rokugani fashion, most samurai and servants would completely ignore the individual, hoping that the problem will resolve itself on its own. Samurai avoid associating with or even touching a Tainted person the same way they would avoid touching a corpse. The Tainted person is a corpse in the eyes of most samurai, albeit a corpse whose body and mind haven’t figured it out yet. Even challenges will be rare, as the fear of becoming infected by Tainted blood is very real. The two exceptions to this rule are Crabs and Seppun Miharū. Crab bushi will eagerly challenge and slay a Tainted person, and Imperial Guardsmen must legally kill any tainted person in Emperor’s presence unless the Emperor personally commands them to stay their hands.

All of assumes that the individual’s Taint is publicly known. Trained *tsukai-sagasu* and inquisitors are rare in most courts. They tend to cast a grim pall over the courtiers’ bright world, and are usually too busy for courtly games anyway. So long as a Tainted courtier does not have any obvious symptoms, or is adept at hiding them, he could remain undetected for years.

The most popular method for concealing the Taint is Tea of Jade Petals. This rare tea suppresses symptoms and prevents the infection from worsening. The tea is expensive – currently selling



for five koku per dose (and a weak dose, at that). However, for many the results are far more attractive than the alternative.

Tea of Jade Petals is very rare, as the jade lotus only grows in a single monastery in the heart of Crab Lands. Thus, the Tainted individual requires utmost discretion in obtaining and transporting the tea. Inquisitors know that the tea only has one use, and tsukai-sagasu keep a close eye on all who purchase it. If the inquisitors track down a purchaser and his symptoms are very mild (first degree Taint), he may be let off with a warning. However, if anyone at any time asks that person whether they are Tainted, they must answer truthfully or pray to the Fortunes that the inquisitors do not hear about it.

Home-grown jade lotus blossoms are not an option. At best, the flowers wither and die. At worst, the brew is foul tasting and mildly poisonous. The Kuni and Asako have instructed the monks of the Jade Lotus to keep their secrets close, and never share their techniques of growing and harvesting the flowers. For those who cannot obtain Tea of Jade Petals, discretion is the only option. Concealing the Taint can be a difficult and dangerous road, however, embarked upon only by the truly desperate.

As the Taint twists the body, hiding its effects becomes ever more difficult. Rotten or scabrous skin, missing or extra body parts, or even labored breathing can quickly bring a political career to a grisly end. Less extreme symptoms can conceivably be concealed. Powerful perfumes can cover the smell of rotting flesh. Thick robes or gloves can hide deformities. Even mutations of the face can sometimes be concealed with makeup. Though this is an odd solution, pure white or clan-color makeup is not unheard of in the court, and in fact is sometimes a fashionable affectation. Masks are an option, but can pique quite a bit of curiosity; in the post-coup political environment, any courtier wearing a mask may appear to be a Scorpion collaborator. Shugenja have the option of illusion spells to temporarily cloak their handicaps, but these can often be unreliable; kami do not appreciate being used to conceal the Dark One's power.

As opposed to the merely physical, mental symptoms are much more difficult to conceal. The eyes and ears of ones' enemies are always open to any irregularities in behavior, and a skillful courtier can pick up even the most intricate nuances of a rival's actions. Paranoia, hallucinations, inappropriate outbursts, or other oddities may not be recognized as a sign of the Taint, but they will display weakness, leading to a short and unimpressive career for a courtier. This can be deadly if an enemy courtier actually discovers the Taint.

At this particular Winter Court, attendants who possess the Taint may be in for quite a surprise. Every night spent at Kyuden Kakita becomes a parade of terrible nightmares. Every morning, they find that their infection has slightly increased (one box of Taint). Every night spent in such close proximity to the Emperor accelerates this process. Those who do not have any Taint at all are not affected at all.



Last year, the "Whispers of the Empire" and "In the Imperial Court" sections of the *Winter Court* supplement mistakenly contained some material which spoiled the ending of one of our modules. It was not intentional, but when writing about the current events of a rapidly-changing Empire, certain information sometimes slips through. Still, it was a mistake, and the author would like to apologize for any problems it caused to running L5R campaigns.

Although we've edited this year's sections more carefully to avoid such spoilers, we thought it was still a good idea to include a warning:

The material presented in the following sections contains facts about the current state of the Emerald Empire, including the reactions of the clans to the Scorpion Clan Coup, their attempts to further their own secret agendas, and their hidden plots and goals.

If you feel this information might adversely affect your ability as a player to watch these events unfold, or if you have difficulty separating out-of-character and in-character information, you might not want to read the next several pages.

It's all right.

If you aren't sure whether the information would 'spoil' the events for your character, just hand this material to your Game Master before you read it, and ask their opinion.

You can always trust your Game Master. Right?

And keep in mind that the changes we describe in this section are those that evolve from the official *Legend of the Five Rings* storyline, which may or may not be appropriate to your campaign. Ask your Game Master before making any assumptions – as we've always said, the game belongs to them. It is their decision to exclude any or all of the information contained in the following pages, or to change things entirely from our proposed continuity.

Good luck.

Astrological Events

Two years have passed since the Scorpion Clan Coup: two years of relative peace, broken only by the rising feud between the Lion and the Crane. Those two years have not been entirely uneventful, however, and Phoenix and Asahina scholars point to significant omens and unusual astrological events to prove that some great event lies just on the horizon.

The astrological events described below are depicted in the order in which they occurred over the past two years; clever GMs may wish to use any or all of them as settings for scenarios to depict the swift passage of time after the Coup.

RISE OF THE BLOOD MOON

A strange reddish haze hung over Rokugan's moon for seven days during the summer of the past year. Thick and as red as blood, it darkened the moon and all the stars around it with an impenetrable veil of blood. Beginning shortly after this occurrence, there have been a documented rise in *maho*-users throughout the Empire. Those few Bloodspeakers unfortunate enough to be captured alive claim that the blood moon was a sign of Iuchiban's return, and that deep in the Shadowlands, a great force is rising.

Three entire villages were slaughtered – men, women, children and animals – in the southern Phoenix lands, near the old Snake Clan stronghold. This event happened on a single night during the Blood Moon, leaving the ground covered with their corpses. The Phoenix were unable to completely hide this event from the eyes of the Empire, and are spending a considerable amount of resources to discover how the event came to pass and who is responsible.

In the court, there have been murmurs of resurrecting the long-forgotten position of Jade Champion, a shugenja whose duty it is to destroy all those who dare to use *maho* within the Empire. The Phoenix, less than pleased with this idea, have redoubled their efforts and called in favors from other clans to regain control before the idea of restoring the post of Jade Champion reaches the Emperor's ears.

AMATERASU'S PITCHER

The Pitcher, a constellation known for its falling stars, expelled three stars in a brilliant display of starlight, reflected from the crystal altar of the Shrine of Osano-Wo. The strange falling stars are said to herald a new era of peace in the Empire, backed by the strength of the Fortune of Storms. Others say it marks the rise of the Mantis Clan, sons of Osano-Wo; or that the Crab clan (also descended from the great Fortune) will shortly win a telling victory against the forces of the Shadowlands.

SHADOW BLACKENS THE SKY OF OTOSAN UCHI

During the heat of the day, the noon radiance of the city turned as dark as twilight. No sign of this shadow's cause could be seen, although several Seppun shugenja have claimed that one of the Dragons, possibly bearing an Oracle, came to the city for an audience with the Emperor, and that the shadow belonged to the Dragon as it passed over the palace.

THE GHOST OF THE TWILIGHT MOUNTAINS

The Ghost has claimed the lives of three Crab Scouts, hurling the Hiruma to their deaths from the highest clifftops near the ancestral Boar Clan lands. The Crab have refused help, scorning all tales of the Twilight Mountains as 'useless superstition.'



In the Imperial Court

Other events occurring at this year's Winter Court include the formation and execution of numerous small plans, carefully planned webs of deception and lies which form the backbone of Rokugan's political intrigue. Many of these plans are not public, and their participants have no desire to make them so. Anyone who 'discovers' that they exist may have significant political leverage – or a new enemy.

THE CRAB

Some believed that the death of Hantei XXXVIII would quell Hida Kisada's burning ambition – that a new young Emperor could assuage his fears that the imperial line had grown weak. Nothing could be further from the truth. Kisada watched the new Hantei leave two of his most dangerous enemies – Akodo Toturi and Bayushi Kachiko – alive, rather than kill them and strengthen his reign. Worse, he married Kachiko, giving her ample opportunity to avenge her fallen Clan. He saw the way he looked at her in the throne room, saw the lust and naivete in his schoolboy's eyes, and knew the power she had over him. The Lady Scorpion has compromised the throne and could destroy the Empire if she wished. Kisada cannot allow that to happen.

He began preparations almost as soon as the new Hantei took the throne. He dispatched his advisor, Kuni Yori, to search for allies among the Shadowlands – bargaining with their unholy enemies. Not only did Yori secure a peace agreement, but he brought back powerful oni and other creatures willing to serve under the Crab banner. With the forces of Fu Leng placated, Kisada could then turn his mighty war machine north and seize the Emerald Throne for himself. His son Yakamo began slowly withdrawing troops from the Kaiu wall, no longer fearing the creatures on the other side. Now, the wall stands abandoned, and the Crab armies wait orders to march north – to the Emperor's allies in the Crane, to the empty lands of the Scorpion, to the vital Beiden Pass in the heart of the Seikitsu mountains. With luck, they can sweep the squabbling clans aside and claim the throne for their Champion. Kisada could then turn on his Shadowlands allies with the combined might of six clans behind him. The weak

Hantei line would be eliminated, Fu Leng would be destroyed, and the Hida family could begin a new line of Emperors under the Great Bear.

Not every Crab is happy with this turn of events. The young Hida Sukune watches his father with unease, and many other bushi whisper that an alliance with the Shadowlands is madness. But Sukune is too loyal to disagree openly and the rest have enough faith in Kisada to leave their questions unanswered... at least for the time being.

CRANE

The Emperor has done the unthinkable: he has taken a Bayushi as his bride.

Of course, such mistakes can be rectified.

One death, and the Emperor will need a new wife.

The Daidoji and the Kakita presently have more troubling matters on their hands: namely, the Crab armies who seem prepared to invade the Kakita lands, near the family's ancestral home to the south of Beiden Pass. Although the ancient stronghold is nowhere near as resplendent as the northern Shiro sano Kakita, it holds a great deal of significance to the Crane and to their family. To see it assaulted, even destroyed, would be unthinkable.

The Daidoji continue their war against the Lion, readying troops to the south in case Kisada takes advantage of their distraction. They prepare their armies and their tricks, scouting the land for any minor changes caused by the turn of the seasons. The Asahina, secure in their libraries, decry any such maneuvers and refuse to participate – even in the Crane's defense. No command from the Doji Champion, Hoturi, has raised a single Asahina hand in battle, and the Lord of the Crane fears that to press the issue would mean seeing blood across the Asahina lands – not that of the Crab, but of protesting *seppuku*.

But the battle with Matsu Tsuko's Lion Clan does not go well for the Crane. In the court, Kakita Yoshi and his negotiators desperately use their hoarded favors to bring allies from the Phoenix and Unicorn, hoping the threat of a war that will encompass the Empire will be enough to keep the Crab at bay.

DRAGON

Of all the clans of the Empire, it is perhaps the Dragon who understand most about the dangers facing the Hantei line and the Emerald Throne. All Dragon ambassadors were recalled immediately after the Scorpion Coup for the space of one year, supposedly 'to pray at Shinsei's shrine for the peace of the murdered Hantei's soul'.

When they returned to the other clans, the Dragon were much sobered. Mirumoto, Agasha and Kitsuki alike all seemed to turn their attention toward building alliances among the ronin of the land, creating a safe boundary south of the Dragonfly lands, and keeping the peace throughout the Empire. They have taken a great interest in the affairs of the Lion-Crane war, insisting that



the two clans negotiate for peace wherever possible. Their efforts have prevented full-scale war for nearly two years, but even their expert intervention has worn thin under Tsuko's rising anger and frustration. The Crane lobby for time, grateful for the assistance of the Dragon, but their own hidden attacks on the Lion only continue to exacerbate the situation. Already three Lion generals have died from duels over 'insults' at court, and the Matsu family grows less tolerant of courtly politics by the hour.

Meanwhile, in the mountains of the Togashi, a storm brews. Tattooed men of all description roam the Empire, searching for Toturi the Black, ronin general. The Champion of the Dragon, Togashi Yokuni, has demanded that Toturi be brought to the mountain of the Dragon.

He has no intention of explaining his purpose, and the tattooed men who serve him are equally inscrutable. When they find Toturi, no doubt they will find a way to make him comply.

LION

With Toturi gone, the Lion fell under the influence of their new champion, Matsu Tsuko. Brash and proud, Tsuko has stressed a dual philosophy of absolute strength in the Clan and absolute

loyalty to the Emperor. She has stepped up the war with the Crane, hoping to recapture the lost Toshi Ranbo, and pledged her best troops to the defense of Otsan Uchi. Her success on the battlefield has impressed the Hantei, who has given her leave to act as she sees fit. Most moderating voices within the clan were killed, or left with Toturi, so few speak out against Tsuko's policies. The Lion have become rigid and unbending – dedicated to an absolute honor that allows neither weakness or mistake. Tsuko expects her clan to embody all that is noble and right in the Empire, but a sword can break if oversharpened and even the strongest oak must bend before the hurricane. Quiet voices in the Imperial Court suggest that the Lady of Lions is pushing her clan too far.

There are still a few voices of calm within the clan. The last Akodo, Kage, speaks of reconciliation and does his best to guide the new Champion along a less extremist path. Tsuko refuses to listen to him, but others respect his wisdom and listen to his words. Among them is Toturi's old protégé, Ikoma Tsanuri; with her master gone, she has turned to Kage for advice, and the old man has used her as a bridge to the implacable Matsu family.



Whether their words will be enough to divert Tsuko from her present course, only time will tell.

PHOENIX

With the possible exception of the Dragon, the Phoenix are the only clan that realizes the true danger threatening Rokugan. The Elemental Masters speak of ancient prophecies and a dark lord ascendant. Yet they do not know how to stop the rising tide and cannot convince the other clans to heed their warnings.

In the years since the coup, the Phoenix have continued as they always have, seeking peace among the great clans and working to resolve differences within the Empire. But their efforts took on a greater urgency as the Lion-Crane war continued unabated and a strange wasting disease swept through the land. There was an air of desperation in their diplomacy, as if the clans' continued squabbling threatened more than just the peace. When not mediating disputes, they retreated into their lands, becoming even more isolationist than before. The Isawa shugenja cloistered themselves for weeks at a time, refusing to disclose the nature of their meetings. The Master of Earth continued to make dangerous excursions into the Shadowlands, searching for any knowledge that might help his clan against the nebulous danger they faced. The Master of Void, Isawa Ujina, disappeared completely and no one would confirm what had become of him. When pressed about these goings-on, they responded only with stony silence, and with admonitions to set petty disagreements aside "before it's too late."

With the Isawa retreating into isolation and desperate diplomacy, it has fallen to the Shiba family to keep up appearances. Led by Shiba Ujimitsu, with the help of "Little

Turtle" Shiba Tsukune, the Phoenix bushi have stepped up their involvement in outside affairs. Units of Shiba bushi can now be found in all areas of the Empire, helping settle disputes and lending their strength to righteous causes. A few Asako and Isawa shugenja have joined them, using their powers for the common good rather than remaining in seclusion. What they hope to accomplish is uncertain, but their presence has brought some small amount of comfort to the troubled Empire.

UNICORN

Rokugan's perennial outsiders were not overly affected by the Scorpion coup, and have remained essentially unchanged in the years since. Their swift reaction to the coup and instrumental role in thwarting it earned them a newfound respect, which they used to consolidate their holdings and raise their standing among the other clans. They are the only clan not currently embroiled in a crisis of some sort, and the only one with the strength and flexibility to handle anything that the future might hold. In a darkening Empire, they are one of the few remaining points of light.

As a result, they have found themselves in a curious position: defenders of the Emperor's justice. With the Lion and the Crane embroiled in war and Otosan Uchi infected by the plague, the Unicorn are the only ones capable of upholding the law. They have embraced this role reluctantly to be sure; few acknowledge it and fewer still wish to serve such a purpose. But fate seems adamant about their purpose. Refugees have begun appearing in the Unicorn lands (the only ones untouched by war so far), and with no enemies in the other clans, the Otaku Battle Maidens

have turned upon thieves and bandits to practice their martial skills. They have found themselves revered by the heimin and other lower classes, who see the Unicorn as their only saviors. A few clan members have pressed for closer ties with the other clans – cementing an alliance with the Lion, or perhaps the Crab – which would reap substantial benefits without threatening their newfound strength. But until Ide Tadaji can produce something, they must content themselves with the quiet purpose destiny has provided them.

MANTIS AND THE MINOR CLANS

The Mantis Clan has a secret. A deadly secret, one they can't afford to reveal. Scouts for the Mantis have been into the Shadowlands, cast ashore on one of their scouting trips along the coast south of the Empire. While trudging their way north toward the wall, a group of Mantis witnessed Kuni Yori, the daimyo of the Kuni, making an alliance with the Oni of the deepest south.

The Mantis now know about the Crab's alliance with the Shadowlands, but what to do? The Mantis can't accuse the Crab (the Crab have higher glory, and they could easily crush the Mantis), so Yoritomo has begun to build up his own armies in preparation for the Crab – no matter what the Crab do.

The Mantis are building walls, constructing boats, and angling for alliances with the more powerful Minor Clans. Still, all is being kept very quiet, in case the Crab or the other Great Houses notice the increase in Mantis military strength and raise questions.

NAGA


Deep in the forests of the Shinomen, the slow rise of the Naga continues. Slowly awakening from their fugue, the Naga arm themselves against the enemy they know to exist: the Foul, both shadow and undead. They can scent its passage in the land – from the thick vapors of the south to the hidden secrets in northern lands, they sense the rise of a great power, uncontrolled by the Bright Eye and the Pale.

The constrictor priests have fully awakened, and they bear a single message from Atman's great Eye: destroy this evil, before the land is made to suffer.

The only difficulty which the Naga have in fulfilling the Atman's akashic commands rests among the gibbering apes that live across the wide plateaus outside the Shinomen forest. Their attempts to speak with the *huu-mans* have been met with violence and aggressiveness, and even the peaceful Greensnakes grow weary of careful politics. The Cobra ready their greatest spells, turning their cities into havens and desperately seeking methods to encourage eggs to grow.

Soon, the time will come when the Asp armies fully awaken, and the Naga roll across the fields beneath the group mind of the Akasha, twisting the humans beneath their tails.

If the *huu-mans* will not listen to the Akasha's warnings of their own accord, then their minds will be opened by force and by war.



The Hidden Scorpion

If you are following the official timeline, by now the Scorpion Clan Coup has struck Rokugan, the Great Houses of the Empire have allied against the treacherous Bayushi, and all eyes are turned to watch an ailing boy-Emperor on the Emerald Throne. The Bayushi lands are burned, the Yogo flee their homes, and the Shosuro fade into shadow, muttering of secrets and revenge.

So where are the Scorpion now?

Known as the Clan of Secrets, the Scorpion have always wielded a dark and sinister power. It was Shosuro who returned alone from the Shadowlands after the first battle against Fu Leng, and the Scorpion Clan which safeguarded the Black Scrolls that imprisoned the Dark Lord. It was the Scorpion Clan who founded the legendary ninja. And while the Lion and Crane have always been the right and left hands of the Emperor, a Scorpion has always been behind him, silent and waiting in the shadows.

Their ability to discover anyone's darkest secret seems almost supernatural, and many times the daimyos of the other clans have wished to see the Scorpion fall.

Perhaps they have all finally received their wish.

AFTER THE COUP

Their clan broken, the survivors scattered to the winds, the Scorpion Clan hid from the forces of the Empire and waited for a chance at vengeance. Their mistress, Lady Kachiko, remained at the Imperial Palace, a heartbeat away from the hated Hantei. Through secret communiqués and hidden messages, she contacted her clanmates and began preparing for revenge. The Scorpion stockpiled weapons in different locations and reestablished a secret stronghold in the ruins of Bayushi Palace. When the plague began to spread across the land, Kachiko moved to isolate the Imperial family, poisoning the young Hantei and passing his illness off as a disease. Slowly, the Scorpion have emerged from their exile, stirring the simmering tensions between the clans in hopes of sparking a full-blown war.

Today, most Scorpion still have to keep a low profile – hiding their names and pretending to be ronin or members of other clans. They are dedicated to avenging their broken clan and will

do whatever their mistress commands in order to fulfill her treacherous schemes. Loyalty no longer exists for the Scorpion, for there is no one left to be loyal to. All that matters is bringing the Empire which destroyed them to its knees.

After the Scorpion Clan Coup, most Scorpions were forced into hiding, silently serving their lady Kachiko. The Scorpion no longer seek to rule the Empire, but to slay the Emperor – to gain vengeance on those who destroyed their clan. The Crane are the instrument of the Emperor's vengeance – not to exterminate the Scorpion, but rather to make them ronin, their names lost, their heritage forgotten.

RPG campaigns continuing after the Scorpion Coup should present increased tension between the clans. As Hantei the 39th steps up to command his Empire, the political scene grows tense.

An inexperienced Emperor sits on the Emerald Throne. The land itself is restless. A plague has begun to creep through Rokugan, killing scores of peasants, samurai, and nobles alike. The most tragic deaths are at Otosan Uchi, where nearly all members of the Imperial Family die from the disease. The Emperor himself lies in his bed, fighting off the sickness that even

his own healers are unable to prevent. The only one who seems unaffected by the plague is his wife, Bayushi Kachiko.

Realizing that the Hantei family may be doomed, and that a new Emperor would be needed, the Six Clans begin to struggle among themselves to prove their dominance.

One day, one of them will seize the throne.

SCORPION PERSONALITIES

Scorpion characters who survive the Coup are changed greatly, hiding from the Six Clans and the Emperor's wrath. They are ronin, clinging to their family name and fighting to survive in a land they once thought to rule.

Bayushi Togai

Once the strongest general of the Scorpion Clan (excepting only their great Champion), Togai has fallen far from grace. He has known the honor and acclaim of a true war-leader, and it was his plan which captured the city of Otosan Uchi during the Coup. But now he is condemned as a traitor, reviled and hunted, hiding behind masks and shadow. One day, he vows, the Scorpion will



take vengeance on those who destroyed them. When that day comes, the Empire will know the fury of Togai.

Bayushi Tomaru

Tomaru, son of a Bayushi geisha, was adopted into the Scorpion at a young age, and trained in the arts of battle and Scorpion cunning. After the Coup struck down much of his family, he gathered what remained of the Scorpion House Guard and fled to the secret labyrinths beneath Shiryo Bayushi - waiting for a time when he could at last destroy those who thought to end the Bayushi name.

Bayushi Yakuan

"Guard the Southern Wall, Yakuan." Those were the last words Lord Shoji told him, just before the armies of the Six Clans struck Otosan Uchi. Though Yakuan fought bravely, the wall fell, destroyed by Toturi's minions. Yakuan fled into the shadows, and has done nothing since save condemn himself for cowardice, scarring his skin with tremendous cuts just to 'see if the blood still runs Scorpion red'. Many say that Yakuan has gone mad. Others whisper that his madness is a disguise, and that he is preparing to lead the Scorpion onto the field of battle - and if possible, meet death as an honorable samurai should.

Soshi Bantaro

Bantaro's spells raised undead to champion the Scorpion cause at Otosan Uchi, though the Bayushi did not know of this until much later. Bantaro has mastered *maho*, calling forth creatures as foul as night. When Shoji fell, Bantaro's mind cracked, and he has since spent every waking hour seeking the path to restore his master to life. All other duties have been forgotten - his position as daimyo of the Soshi, his duty to the Lady who bears Shoji's name...

Bayushi Hisa

A young son of the Bayushi house, Hisa scarcely has the glory necessary to enter his family's palace. Before the Coup, he was no one, a soldier among a thousand others, ready to die for his house and for the Empire.

But no more. No more do thoughts of social strata or glory hover in the young samurai's mind; now he has learned the true cost of duty, and the true price of honor. Now he serves only to serve, and if he must destroy his honor to keep his family alive, it is a small price to pay for vengeance.

Bayushi Kachiko

The Empress, seated at the left hand of the mighty Hantei, is motionless and cold. Her cruelty hides behind veils of lies and deceit, and the hatred she holds for her husband is known only to those few who guard her life. Kachiko stood before the boy-prince, knowing he destroyed her house, and with the subtle guile of a woman convinced him to take her for his own. It is the only

mistake he made, and the only opening the Scorpion Lady needed.

Thereafter, she foiled an assassination attempt on the Emperor's life, proving her loyalty to him; but only she knows that the plot was set into motion by her own hand. Conveniently, the symptoms of the poison which presently seeps through the Emperor's veins are indistinguishable from those of the plague which is ravaging the land.

Kachiko swears the Last Hantei will die in pain and anguish, and that he will only know the truth only when he is on the steps to Jigoku.

Only then will he understand who has destroyed him.

Bayushi Tasu

Defend the Lady. Remember your oath.

The words of Tasu's father linger in his mind as he ponders his future. Once, he was son to an honored house, second only to the Champion himself, ready to accept the burden of governing his mighty share of Bayushi lands.

Now, his lands are burned, his family scattered and slaughtered, and his mind cries for justice. He stands in the shadows at Kachiko's side, waiting for the day he can give his life to save hers. It is all he has left, all the honor his withered life will allow. He has heard the scratching in the darkness, the insane cackling of Soshi Bantaro's magic.

Soon, he will have his chance...

Bayushi Goshu

Goshu was once the Scorpion's strongest voice in the Imperial Court, and even after the apocalyptic purge he still retains favors, reins of power over many of the most prominent courtiers in the Empire. His web of intrigue and blackmail is vast, and no member of the Imperial Court is safe from his machinations. He draws the strings in ever tighter, remembering each face, each command and each death.

When his web is finished, the Scorpion will strike once more; this time, their poisoned stab will not be deflected.



The Ikoma Histories

Deep within the libraries of the Ikoma, several scrolls rest in crystalline cases, safe from the ravages of weather and time. Many times, Ikoma historians have come to the cases and gently removed these historic documents, citing their text for the purposes of the Imperial Hantei. The task of keeping these scrolls safe has now fallen into my humble hands. It is with a poor historian's pen that I transcribe some of the material contained within these ancient scrolls and carry their knowledge to the Winter Court of his Imperial Majesty. Know that any inconsistencies and inaccuracies in these texts is due to the failing eyesight and simple pen of this poor servant of the Shining Prince on his Emerald Throne.

Wherefore I set my hand,

Ikoma Kaoku, Historian

This third year of the reign of Hantei XXXIX, IC 1125.

The Lineage of the Imperial Hantei

*"We honor those who have lived before.
We will remember their great deeds,
And learn from their follies."*

- The Gempukku Poem of Shinjo Sharasu

First, there was nothing.

Then, from the sky, the kami fell, born of the Sun and the Moon to guide us through our lives. With their wisdom, they taught us the code of the samurai and lifted our souls toward the enlightenment of the Celestial Heavens. The Hantei was first among the kami, his siblings, and founded the Empire that shines as brightly as the stars in the sky. This is the record of his line, that we may remember the great deeds of the children of Hantei in the name of the Emerald Empire.

The First Hantei

The first Hantei was the youngest son of Amaterasu and Onnotangu, born within the Celestial Heavens but fallen to earth after his fight to free his brothers and sisters from Lord Moon's hatred.

The First Hantei fought with his siblings to rule the Empire they would build. The original Kami dueled for the right to lead the Empire, with Hantei at last defeating Akodo in a final battle for the fate of the people of the land. Although it is said that Hantei never truly loved the Empire as he had the Celestial Heavens, he married Mioko, a daughter of his sister Doji's clan, in order to do honor to Doji's line and in remembrance of his sister's heavenly beauty.

Although some texts state that the First Hantei died of his wounds shortly after the final defeat of his corrupted brother, it is more popularly believed that he ascended into the heavens after finishing the war against the Dark One. One version of this tale is told in the Shosuro Furuyari's famous play, *The Death of Hantei*.

Hantei Genji, Hantei II

Hantei Genji, eldest son of the First Hantei and Mioko, is commonly referred to as the Shining Prince, for his contributions to the foundation of the Empire's culture and beauty. After him, all first-born members of the Hantei lineage have carried the formal title of "Shining Prince," out of remembrance of Genji's legendary deeds.

Genji was a great patron of the arts and a fine poet. Undoubtedly, he is responsible for many of the cultural traditions practiced by the people of Rokugan, including the tradition of primogeniture (inheritance by the first-born child). Like his father, Genji is believed to have ascended into the Celestial Heavens when he tired of rulership.

Genji's life is documented in *The Tale of Genji*, written by the youngest son of Seppun. The work depicts Genji as a skilled politician, poet, and enlightened statesman. He is directly responsible for much of Rokugan's culture, from the food eaten by the people of the empire to the protocols needed to interact among the noble samurai of the realm. He also began the religion of Shinseism and the Shintao faith, although it did not gather national popularity until much later in the Empire's history.

Genji married the most beautiful woman in the realm, a Crane named Doji Oborozukiyo, called by poets 'the Lady of the Misty Moon'.

Hantei Ningi, Hantei III

Ningi, the second child and first son of Hantei Genji, was said to have been the first truly mortal Emperor. His lineage is recorded among the very first scrolls of the Ikoma libraries, and is much debated by the Asako and the Doji. Ningi created the traditions of the Imperial Court and the magistrate system, and established the first code of laws in the Empire. Although the position had been established decades before his reign, Ningi set

out the responsibilities of the Emerald Champion and commissioned his armies, deputies, and legal duties.

Further, Ningi is credited with uniting the Seven Clans of the Empire beneath his rule, establishing the system of legal land ownership (all land belongs to the Emperor) and defining both the Imperial Court and the Emerald Champion position. In a highly debated decision, Emperor Hantei Ningi summoned a samurai named Togashi Kaze to show him a style of unarmed combat that Kaze was teaching to the peasant classes. As the peasants had been forbidden from carrying weapons, Kaze's practice of fighting instruction for the peasants was poorly received by the Imperial Court. Kaze was killed by the Emerald Champion when he refused to demonstrate his technique before the Emperor.

Hantei Bosai, Hantei IV

Hantei Bosai assumed the throne after his father's death. Ningi lived a long and fruitful life, and was buried when he reached ninety-three years of age (say the Asako scrolls). Bosai's major contribution to the Empire was his establishment of monasteries for the purpose of retirement, and the beginning of the *inkyō* tradition wherein members of the samurai class retire when they reach their fortieth year.

Beyond that, his reign is depicted as peaceful and explorative, researching and mapping the Empire for the first time in its history. The maps currently used by Rokugani scholars were created during Bosai's reign, and have endured unchanged since that time.

Hantei Fujiwa, Hantei V

At the beginning of his reign, Fujiwa was a dynamic Emperor. His policies renovated the Empire, creating treaties and defining clear borders between the Seven Clans as well as establishing the homelands of the two earliest Minor Clans: the Mantis and the Fox.

Fujiwa ruled during the 4th Century of the Empire, and had two Doji wives. His first wife died childless while Fujiwa was fighting in the Crab lands, and his second is recorded to have given the Hantei Emperor a son and two daughters.

Fujiwa's most renowned accomplishment is his leadership of the Crab during a time of war against the Shadowlands. Fujiwa is said to have led the Imperial Army to assist the Crab against the forces of Oni no Usu. After defeating the Oni and her minions, Hantei Fujiwa severely punished the Crane and Lion, who through political attacks had weakened the Crab and so put the Empire in danger.

Late in Fujiwa's reign, his eldest son was kidnapped by the Gozoku, a political alliance created by the champions of three of the clans. Doji Raigu, Shiba Gaijushiko and Bayushi Atsuki believed that the Emperor should be no more than a figurehead for the Empire, and that true power should rest in the hands of the clans. Their primary argument revolved around establishing independence for the provinces of the clans, creating a system of

city-states rather than a singular Empire. Fujiwa's son was held hostage, and the Emperor was forced to accede to their demands.

Fujiwa died of ill health shortly after his capitulation to the Gozoku rule, leaving his aged uncle, Otomo Tohojatsu, to reign as regent for Hantei Kusada until the boy could reach his *gempukku*. Tohojatsu, who had always coveted the Emerald Throne, was easily swayed by the already powerful Gozoku council. His concessions shaped the path of the next century, and destined young Kusada to be no more than a figurehead for their reign. The Gozoku held power for over a century, from early in Fujiwa's reign through Tohojatsu's regency and during the entirety of Kusada's tenure on the Emerald Throne.

Hantei Kusada, Hantei VI

Kusada ruled during the 5th Century, but his reign had little impact on the Empire beyond cultural significance. During Kusada's reign, many of the finest poets and artists of the Empire flourished, creating legendary works that are still beloved in today's empire. He also heavily sponsored religion, establishing more than twenty-four temples within the main districts of Otsan Uchi before the twelfth year of his reign. The majority of these were considered holy sites where Shinsei himself either walked, gave a speech or performed some miracle.

Kusada was an ineffective and powerless Emperor, his reign completely dominated by Gozoku rule. While he was on the Emerald Throne, the Gozoku used their power in the Empire to create a detailed system of roadways, encourage agriculture and the independence of the clans. Although Kusada had a son, the boy was as much under the power of the Gozoku as was his father. However, the Gozoku alliance made a single critical error: in an effort to control the succession of the Hantei, the Phoenix, Scorpion and Crane raised all of Kusada's sons, but let other clans raise the daughters as political alliances. Yugozoneime was raised by the Lion, who taught her to be an Empress in order to break the Gozoku and reestablish the true Imperial line of the Hantei Emperors.

Hantei Yugozoneime, Hantei VII

The first Empress to rule from the Emerald Throne, Yugozoneime had Lion support from the first day she took the throne. The Lion, with the assistance of the Dragon Champion, raised young Hantei Yugozoneime from childhood, teaching her the ways of the Empire as well as the skills of a Matsu bushi. Yugozoneime also trained at the Crane academy after her assumption of the throne, and became one of the greatest swordmasters of her time.

When Hantei Kusada died of old age, his eldest son was brought forth from the Phoenix lands to carry on his lineage (and the Gozoku alliance). At his coronation, however, his sister Yugozoneime challenged him to a duel for the throne.

She was victorious, and with the military support of the Lion and the Dragon, shattered the political control of the Gozoku. Many members of each of the three clans involved in the Gozoku

either immediately retired into monasteries or died in duels within the year, although no formal mention of charges or accusations are recorded in the Ikoma libraries.

Yuzohime married Doji Usan, a childhood companion and member of the Kakita Academy. Popular legend claims that he gave up the right to be Emerald Champion to earn her hand. She dismantled the power of the Gozuko, whose administrative functions were absorbed into the Imperial families.

Hantei Muhaki, Hantei VIII

Muhaki's greatest contribution to Rokugan was to ban the original text of Akodo's "Leadership." After visiting Lion lands and being instructed by their sensei, he declared several portions of the text heretical for its apparent support of deception in warfare. Some say his decision was based on the advice of his original sensei, a Crane named Kakita Kuga, but others who have read Akodo's text, say that the Emperor's decision was based on the merit – or lack thereof – of the original text.

Hantei Retsuhime, Hantei IX

Retsuhime was the second Hantei Empress. She went against her father's wishes and married a Matsu. However, perhaps as a result of Amaterasu's disfavor of the match, Retsuhime and her husband had no children. With no one to directly inherit, the son of Regozohime's cousin (who had married a Doji) inherited upon the Empress's death.

Retsuhime had no brothers, but three younger sisters. Her reign was peaceful and prosperous, save for minor wars along the northern edge of the Empire. These minor battles occurred between the Dragon, the Phoenix, and the unknown tribes to the far north named the 'Yabanjin'.

Shortly before Retsuhime's reign ended, the wars ceased, and the barbarian tribes were forced farther northward, out of range of the Empire and the people of the Clans.

The Tenth Hantei

The name of the Hantei is not recorded by the historians of the Empire, who customarily refer to him not only by his title, but by the appellation 'He, who sacrificed his name for the Empire.'

He began the custom of the Emperor ruling only under the title Hantei, with no personal name. Also, he was the first Emperor who had to be "re-discovered" amongst the imperial families, and the first member of the Hantei that did not have the direct firstborn-to-firstborn lineage to the First Hantei Emperor. Many assume that he dropped his personal name in order to allow his lineage to be forgotten, and only his blood to be remembered – to assume the title as a name, and therefore reaffirm his noble blood.

Hantei X established the first system of education in Rokugan, and his dislike of shugenja and magic was notorious. He assisted in the building of the Four Temples around Otsan Uchi, and gave a great deal of attention to the monasteries of Shinsei, seeing their wisdom as a viable alternative to the spells of shugenja.

His attempts to quietly rid the Empire of spellcraft, however, failed utterly.

The Imperial Families

Each of the Imperial Families is well-known within the Empire. Here is a current list of those individuals who are currently active within the Emperor's court, as well as those who were of great importance in the recent past and whose presence still affects the movement of the courtiers.

THE SEPPUN

The Seppun are considered the 'first family' of the Empire, and rank behind only the Hantei themselves in prestige. They are the defenders of the Emperor and his city of Otsan Uchi, comprising the bulk of the higher levels of the Imperial Guard as well as the body of the Imperial court. While the Emerald Champion and the Kakita duelists defend the body of the Emperor, the Imperial Guard bring law to Otsan Uchi and defend it from all who would dare threaten the peace of the Emperor's City. Though they failed in their duty during the Scorpion Clan Coup, they insist that their failure will teach them to be more vigilant. Many Seppun died of seppuku after the city was retaken, to pay for their sins against the Hantei and his family.

Seppun Baka

Chief Historian to Hantei XXXVIII, Baka still controls the movement of the court and is frequently engrossed in prayer with the young Hantei XXXIX for his continued good health. Lately, he has become second to the Emperor's wife, Kachiko – a position he does not seem to be taking well.

Baka is extremely well-versed in the Tao and other religious texts, and unfortunately is quietly loathed by the majority of the Imperial court.

Seppun Daiori

Daiori is still the daimyo of the Seppun, though his life has been threatened four times over the last three years. Once a miharu guard, he was wounded protecting an Otomo messenger from a Crab attack and now serves as a military advisor for the Imperial Guardsmen within Otsan Uchi. Although he rules the Seppun lands, he rarely leaves the Imperial Palace, keeping his young son Hotaitaka constantly by his side.

His paranoia has become the subject of much whispering about the court, and many courtiers claim that he worked with the Scorpion when they came to take the city. If that is the case, then his paranoia may be justified.

Seppun Guri

Guri is the father of Doji Masekeri, a popular figure in the Imperial Court who is very well-received by Bayushi Kachiko. Masekeri has become a handmaiden to the Empress at times, a

position which has conferred on her father a great deal of prestige.

THE OTOMO

The manipulative and poisonous Otomo assist with the tedium and bureaucracy of the Hantei's court, keeping the Empire running despite the sickness that has befallen the Emperor. They are a powerful family and a constant presence in the Imperial Court, and it is their duty to ensure the dominance of the Hantei. However, with the current political situation and no sign of the Emperor regaining his health, the Otomo are nearly overwhelmed.

Otomo Banu

Cousin to Hantei, the effeminate and weak-willed Banu seems concerned only with his appearance and comfort. He is a leech, drawing sustenance from the Emperor's illness and implying to anyone who will listen that he may be the next Hantei Emperor.

He has often tried to make his influence felt in the court, but rarely has he been taken seriously – until now. With no obvious successor, Banu's claim is as legitimate as any other, perhaps more so considering his political ties with the Phoenix and the Unicorn.

Otomo Sorai

Sorai still rules as family daimyo of the Otomo, and has gained a great deal of support in the last two years. Beneath the surface of the court, he deals with the fallen Scorpion, assuaging them as best he can and working toward their reinstatement. The Scorpion trust him only when they have to, but they realize he may be their only chance at returning to their lands and their title – and without his assistance, they would have no chance at all.

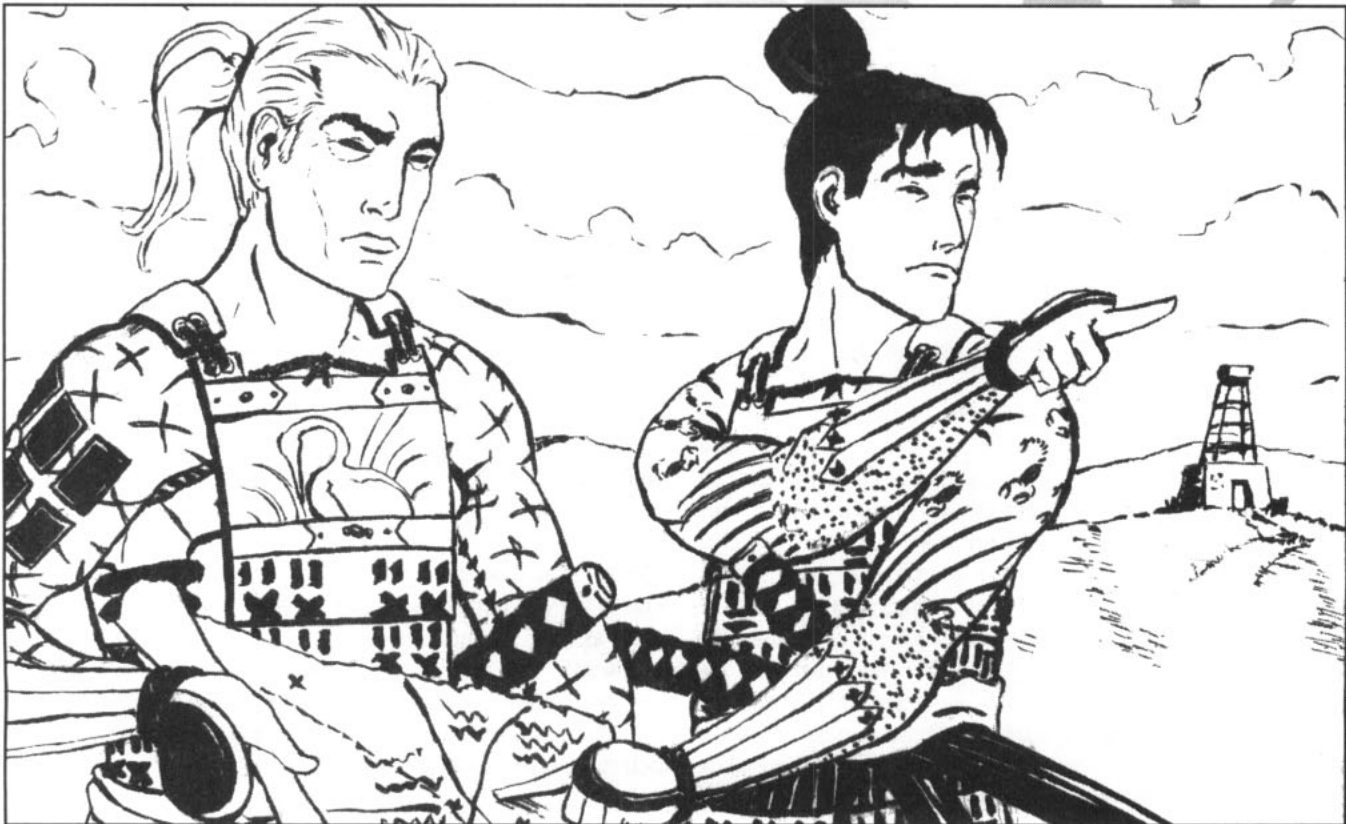
Although Sorai never speaks to Kachiko directly, he knows that she is the strength behind her fallen clan.

MIYA FAMILY

The small family of Imperial Heralds does not have the regal lineage of the Seppun and Otomo, but their sense of duty and honor is unquestioned. They are the descendants of a follower of Otomo, but they have carved their own name into the stone of the Empire, at the side of the Imperial Hantei.

Miya Satoshi

Satoshi is the Matsu-trained son of Miya Yoto. With his father nearing retirement, he has taken over the role of Imperial Herald for Hantei XXXVIII, as well as the position of family daimyo. For more information, see page 110.



A Passage of Time

The following timeline was compiled by two very promising students at the Ikoma school, named Ikoma Hikaze and Kuni Mon. It is a modern assessment of the historical events depicted, arranged according to the best information presently available. Although it no doubt contains some minor inaccuracies, this timeline is currently the basis of study for numerous historians across the Empire. It is likely to remain so for the rest of this generation.

It should be noted that, in return for their hard work, Ikoma Hikaze was granted a permanent position within the Ikoma library, and Kuni Mon was apprenticed directly to his daimyo, Kuni Yori – both received great honor for their work.

– Notes, Ikoma Kaoku, IC 1125

ROKUGANI HISTORY

First Century (1–100 IC)

Fall of the kami: Established pre-calendar

It should be noted that this is an event to which no date can effectively be given. The fall of the kami marks the beginning of time, and the separation of the Celestial Heavens from the world of Hantei and his siblings. It is obviously before the Day of Thunder, but whether it is the same year as the formation of Isawa's City (the lost Gisei Toshi) is debated by scholars.

The contradiction occurs when comparing ancient Phoenix scrolls. Many of the scrolls held by the Asako say that Isawa took his people north to build his own city just after the Kami fell. This account leads the reader to believe that the primitive tribes only existed for a short time before the arrival of the Kami, and that time began at the moment when the Kami first began their fall. However, documents controlled by the Seppun mention that the tribe of Isawa forms, then major events happen, and then the Kami arrive, indicating a much larger time lapse between the formation of the primitive tribes and the arrival of the Kami.

Basing our theories on the scrolls of the Seppun (closer to the Emperor's hand, and therefore obviously more accurate), we place the formation of the primitive tribes of Rokugan before the Kami's

fall, and state confidently that time began on the moment when the Sun Mother and Lord Moon first conceived their children.

Formation of lost Gisei Toshi: year 1.

Birth of Naka Kaeteru, the first Grand Master of the Elements: year 13.

The Day of Thunder: year 42.

Various Dragon texts mention that the death of Mirumoto occurred in the 42nd year of the Empire. However, Scorpion scrolls mention that Bayushi died in the year 76, allegedly 30 years after the Thunders entered the Shadowlands. In either case, the Day of Thunder can be accurately placed between the years 42 and 46 of Isawa's Calendar.

Birth of Hida Osano-Wo: year 50.

This date, too, is assumed but must have occurred shortly after the loss of Hida's first son, Atarasi. Crab stories indicate repeatedly that Hida meets the Thunder Dragon three years after the Thunders defeat Fu Leng, and one year later she returns with his child: Osano-Wo. This would place Osano-Wo's birth four years after the First Day of Thunder.

The formation of the Fox Clan: year 80.

Fox scrolls, magnificently detailed with regard to lineages but sadly containing little detail of outside events in the Empire, state that the 'Fox' stayed on Ki-Rin lands for a generation until they were removed by the Lion. Shortly afterward, they began their lives in Mori Kitsune, and were granted a family name of their own. This suggests that the Fox Clan formed one or two generations after the First Day of Thunder. The Fox also claim to be the oldest minor clan, a statement disputed by the Mantis.

The formation of the Mantis Clan: year 80–85.

For convenience, and for lack of better information, we must assume that the Mantis Clan was formed during the same short period as the Fox, giving them equal claim to prestige within the Empire. Certainly, the Mantis existed as a formal clan long before their ancestor, Gusai, was given the right to bear a family name. Although we hoped that Mantis scrolls would bear a greater amount of knowledge on this topic, we were politely but repeatedly refused when we went to their islands to seek access to the Mantis lineage documents.

We do know, from studying the texts of the Crab, that the Mantis Clan were formed by Kaimetsu-uo, son of Osano-Wo. If Osano-Wo was born four years after the Day of Thunder, then we may assume Kaimetsu-uo wasn't born for at least 20 years afterward. The various events surrounding the two children suggest that Kaimetsu-uo had been given his *gempukku* (typically, for the Crab, this occurs between twelve and fifteen years of age) before he organized the Mantis Clan.



Death of the first Asako, wife to the first Yogo: year 57.

Birth of Moto Soro: year 60.

Moto Soro was the first daimyo of the Moto, and Unicorn scrolls place his birth before the Unicorn's travels outside the Empire, mentioning that the Unicorn found him with his tribe, as an aged man of many years.

The Phoenix Clan find Uikku, the Serene Prophet: year 72.

Phoenix documents claim that Uikku was discovered approximately 30 years after the war with Fu Leng. Assuming, then, that our date for the Day of Thunder is correct, this must be the year of Uikku's birth.

Death of the first Agasha: year 82.

Death of the first Ikoma: year 82.

Death of Uikku, the Serene Prophet: year 90.

If the Phoenix scrolls have been correctly deciphered from the scraps that remained after the Library's burning in IC 300, Uikku died at age 18, about 48 years after the war with the Shadowlands.

Birth of Shinjo Martera: year 100?

Although Unicorn scholars demand recognition of the accuracy of this date, it is unlikely, because Martera is Shinjo's child. The Ki-Rin Clan had just left the Empire in the year 100. The Unicorn histories (all oral myth and story) say that the Ki-Rin Clan spent 100 years with the Ujik-Hai. Those 100 years do not seem to take into account the time it took for the Ki-Rin to arrive

in the lands of the the Ujik-Hai, nor the time between their departure from the Ujik-Hai and Shinjo's disappearance (the point at which the tales state she gave birth to her children). This date should be at least 200, probably closer to 300, but in deference to the honorable Shinjo Yokatsu-sama, we list it here, as he requested.

Kuni Nanaku notices Taint on corpses: year 100.

Second Century (101–200 IC)

Death of Kuni Nanaku, Crab scholar: year 105.

Creation of the Badger clan: 110

Birth of Soshi Saibankan: year 130.

Birth of Bayushi Tange: year 147.

Death of Hida Akemi: year 168?

Death of Bayushi Tange: year 170.

Death of Soshi Saibankan: year 175.

The first mention of the mythical Naga: year 200.

According to Crab and Falcon records, a Crab named Kaiu Sudaro lost his son in the Shinomen forest. The boy was apparently saved by creatures with great snake tails and human bodies – to all accounts, this is the first notation in the Empire of the mythical Naga.

Death of the first Iuchi: year 200 (potentially much later – 300–500?)

Once more, the Unicorn Clan's oral tradition causes unusual discrepancies with Imperial dates. It has been suggested by ancient Ide scholars that time moves differently within the Empire as it did for the traveling Unicorn, or perhaps the awakening of time caused by the conception of the kami took longer to begin in lands far distant from their fall. For whatever reason, the Unicorn legends suggest that Iuchi died shortly after the time when Shinjo disappeared to give birth (as it were) to her children. This date is more likely after 300, but no later than 500. However, if we accept the date of Shinjo Martera's birth, then we must also move Iuchi's death forward to this date.

Third Century (201–300)

Death of Hida: year 210.

This date is included only for perspective, as the Crab historians openly admit that Hida's death is considered an apocryphal date that reflects the stamina of his clan.

Death of Asako Ingen: year 243.

Battle of Cherry Blossom Snow Lake: year 245.

Birth of Isawa Akuma: year 250.

Death of Isawa Akuma: year 283.

This date is important to note, as it correlates directly with the first emergence of the Oni no Akuma from the Shadowlands, also in the year 283.

The Moto Family forms: year 300?

According to Unicorn legend, this would place Moto Soro, family founder, at over 150 years of age. His birth is most likely far later than the Unicorn legends describe. It should be noted that a more accurate-seeming piece of information can be found on an old Ide travel-scroll (unfortunately, carved on a piece of tanned leather, and most disgusting to behold). This text states that the first Moto established the family "700 years ago." We prefer to accept this second date, as it seems to make more sense. However, to further muddy the waters, the Imperial Heralds have informed us that the original Shinjo told the Emperor, on their return, that the Moto in the Unicorn split completely from the Ujik-Hai, and may or may not be related to the original Moto family that still roams the Burning Sands. It is most likely that the returning Shinjo lied to the Emperor in order to cover for the lost members of the Moto family still roaming the Shadowlands. If so, the members of the Shinjo house descended from these individuals should be found and permitted to commit *seppuku* immediately to atone for their ancestor's dishonor.

Battle of Three Stone River / Treaty at Mamoru Kuotei Toshi: year 335.

Fourth Century (301–400)

Birth of Hiruma Kazuma: year 302.

This is the beginning of the famed Ratling-Crab alliance (the existence of which the Crab continue to deny). Kazuma was known to have a rapport with the ratlings, and after his death, the ratlings often assisted the Hiruma in their exploration of the Shadowlands.

Failed siege of Hiruma Castle: year 314.

Victory With no Strike: year 353.

This famous battle occurs in three places in recorded text, and amazingly, all place its year of origin at precisely the same time. This is the first concrete and absolute piece of historical information, and should be used as a basis for other events, in relation to their distance from the time of this battle.

Asahina family founded: year 353.

Wedding records of Isawa Asahina and his bride allow us to place this event far better than any scrolls recording the devastation of the Crane lands. A pity that the Crane find wedding documents of more importance than true historical events. Still, the information allows us to place the Asahina origin, and mark it in accordance with the Seppun texts.

The Yasuki split and the Crane-Crab War: year 387.

Sparrow Clan formed: year 398.

Five Nights of Shame: circa year 400.

The death of the Snake Clan. It should be noted that the Crab have a detailed account of a battle with a creature known as the Shuten Doji dated 654, significantly after the Snake Clan was eradicated.

Shinjo last seen fighting Living Darkness: year 400?

This is the best practical date of the event that the Unicorn term the 'Blood War', wherein the Ki-Rin fights a creature of Living Darkness. According to their legends, this event happened approximately "500 years ago." Shinjo may have died in 400, but it still seems somewhat unlikely.

Fifth Century (401–500 IC)

Birth of Akodo Godaigo: year 410.

Hida Tadaka & Matsu Itagi in Shadowlands: year 412.

This is the famous event wherein a Lion Champion ventured into the Shadowlands, only to be rescued by the Crab. It is assumed by many to be a parable, but the Crab and the Lion both insist that the events of the tale actually happened. If that is the case, then this is the most probable date.

Birth of Bayushi Tesaguri: year 415.

Death of Iuchi Atesoro: year 418.

Birth of Shiba Maryasu: year 419.

Birth of Agasha Kasuga: year 420.

Note that this date differs from the Fox lineages, but brings Kasuga more into correct placement with the actual origins of the Tortoise Clan, founded by Imperial Decree in 442.

Birth of Matsu Hitomi: year 423.

Births of Mirumoto Ryudumu and Tokeru: year 433.

Death of Bayushi Akoru: year 440.

Gaijin Ambassadors Arrive at Imperial Court: year 440.

This date, recorded on Seppun scrolls, marks the first arrival of the honorless *gaijin*. Other corresponding accounts in various libraries of the Empire vary only by a few years to either side, and so, we choose the date revealed in the scrolls closest to the Emperor's hand.

Death of Matsu Hitomi: year 441.

Akodo Godaigo disappears: year 441.

Battle of White Stag/Raging Seas: year 442?

Dragon texts, the clearest on this issue, state unequivocally that the *gaijin* were allowed two years to prove their honor and their respect for the Empire. At the end of that time, the *gaijin* were expelled, and retaliated with violence. Since this year, the *gaijin* have been strictly barred from Rokugan.

Bayushi Tesaguri sells Black Scrolls to Phoenix: year 445.

Although certain scrolls list Tesaguri's birth and death as 415-545, my companion and I are certain that this is no more than a clever Scorpion deception. The listed date of 545 is in fact either 445 or 455, unless he lived 90-100 years within the Traitor's Grove while tied to a tree.

If the Scorpion dates are in fact correct, I pity those who betray the Empire's most poisonous clan.

Mantis family 'Gusai' recognized: year 450?

Birth of Kakita Wayozu: year 450.

Death of Mirumoto Tokeru: year 456.

Birth of Kaiu Gineza: year 459.

Birth of Isawa Takao: year 465.

Castle of Faithful Bride completed for Matsu Hitomi: year 468

The castle's legendary history says it was completed 27 years after Hitomi's death, to commemorate the first Hitomi's 27 years of life. However, the Lion insist that Matsu Hitomi only lived to be 17 or 18.

Birth of Asahina Yajinden: year 475.

Death of Shiba Murayasu: year 479.

Death of Mirumoto Takeda: year 480.

Death of Isawa Takao: year 489.

Mantis family 'Gusai' removed: year 510.

The Gusai family name was revoked after only three generations when Gusai Rioshida attempted a coup, holding the Emperor's son 'hostage' in the Mantis isles. The Prince was returned and the Gusai family destroyed, but the Mantis were allowed to retain their clan, for they betrayed their lord to save the Prince.

The Blood War: year 510.

Death of Shinjo Martera: year 500?

Martera's death is placed at this point because the Unicorn scrolls (created after they entered the Empire) say that some of Shinjo's children died during the Blood War. This matches their oral history.

Sixth Century (501-600)

Battle of Stolen Graves: year 510.

Crab scrolls mention two items: first, that Kaiu Gineza allegedly dies in 498, and second, that he died building Iuchiban's Tomb. Thus, 510 must be the date wherein the Tomb was completed. By this token, the earlier date is clearly a historian's mistake.

Death of Asahina Yajinden: year 515.

Death of Akodo Samune: year 522.

Death of Kakita Wayozu: year 535.

Birth of Doji Hotei: year 539.

Battle of Kenson Gakka: between 533 and 554.

Texts here are unclear; the battle for the castle destroyed most of its historical documents, and later texts have been too concerned with the honor of the battle to mention the date. A pity.

Seventh Century (601-700 IC)

Birth of Isawa Ijime: year 601.

Death of Isawa Ijime: year 618.

Ijime died at 16, although her death is poorly recorded in the Phoenix scrolls. This account is almost certainly accurate.

Account of Shuten Doji by Kuni Kaneo: year 654.

Yasuki Fumoki disappears: year 671.

Birth of Doji Taehime: year 680.

Birth of Hida Banuken: year 684.

Birth of Daidoji Masashigi: year 690.

Birth of Kuni Osaku: year 695.

Eighth Century (701-800)

Battle of the Landbridge: year 715.

Loss of Hiruma Castle: year 716.

Battle of the Cresting Wave: year 716.

Battle of Thundering Shrine: year 718.

Birth of Kitsu Taiko: year 717.

Death of Hida Banuken: year 739.

Death of Doji Taehime: year 745.

Battle of Bloody Retreat: year 750.

Battle of Sleeping River: year 750.

Death of the last Hiruma student, Sokokai: year 755.

And thus, the end of the Hiruma school.

Kitsu Taiko becomes the Master of Fire: year 761.

The first and only instance of a non-Phoenix becoming one of the Elemental Masters, this seemed relevant for inclusion because of its unusual nature and unique importance to the Empire.

Birth of Shosuro Furuyari: year 774.

Death of Kitsu Taiko: year 781.

Birth of Mirumoto Kaijuko: year 789.

Birth of Agasha Kitsuki: year 798.

Ninth Century (801-900)

Birth of Shiba Toriiko: year 802.

Death of Mirumoto Watanubo: year 805.

Mirumoto Kaijuko becomes the first female Mirumoto daimyo: year 805.

This is also an unusual event, and marks the increasing egalitarianism of the modern Empire.

Kitsuki family formed: year 820.

The Return of the Unicorn: year 815.

Battle at White Shore Plain: year 815.

Hiruma Katsuhito fails to retake Hiruma Castle: year 819.

Battle of Chrysanthemum Petals: year 827.

Battle of Broken Daisho: year 827.

Death of Agasha Kitsuki: year 829.

Shosuro Kenjo executed by Unicorn: year 845.

Death of Shosuro Furuyari: year 856.

Death of Mirumoto Kaijuko: year 877.

Birth of Shiba Sakazu: year 881.

Tenth Century (901-1000)

Birth of Shosuro Itode: year 914.

Shinjo Fujimaka / Ikoma Goheshu find Naga ruins in Shinomen: year 925?

Some scholars say this event denotes the 'awakening' of the serpent-men, who have apparently been seen by Scorpion and Crab venturing into the forest of the Shinomen in modern times. If this is accurate, then the Naga have been 'watching' us unobserved for nearly 200 years - a disturbing thought.

Birth of Kakita Rensai: year 935.

Death of Shosuro Itode: year 940.

Night of Falling Stars: year 960.

Kakita Rensai vanishes: year 962.

Death of Daidoji Yurei: year 998.

Eleventh Century (1001-1100)

Battle at Kyuden Kitsune: year 1090.

Birth of Matsu (Kitsuki) Kaagi: year 1097.

Battle at Fate Gorge: year 1100.

Twelfth Century (1101-1200)

Hantei XXXVIII takes throne: year 1103.

Matsu Kaagi becomes Kitsuki Kaagi after his family is murdered: year 1106.

Birth of Hantei Sotorii: year 1107.

Wasp Clan founded: 1109

Scorpion Clan Coup: Spring 1123.

Hantei XXXIX takes the throne: year 1123.

Current date: year 1125, the Second Year of the reign of the Emperor Hantei the Thirty-Ninth.



"Learn from the past... or it will become your future."

- Shinjo Yokatsu

THE FIRST DAY OF THUNDER

The Kami fell and founded an Empire. These events make up the foundation of all Rokugani belief. So, too, live the stories of the first war against the Shadowlands. It is remembered as the Day of Thunder, the day when Shinsei took seven mortal heroes into the Shadowlands - never to return.

According to myth, it was only a short time afterwards that Hantei established his court and created the provinces that his siblings would rule, founding modern civilization. From the far



south, the place where the Dark One fell, an evil force rose against the fledgling Empire. One by one, fighting separately, the armies of the Great Clans fell. Before the rise of the Oni and the beasts of the south, the Emperor's men had no hope of victory – Fu Leng had caught them unprepared, building an army while the Seven Kami created an Empire.

Then, according to the legend, a mysterious monk calling himself Shinsei, or the “New Way”, came into the Empire from the far west. He knelt before Emperor Hantei and told him that destiny could not be changed by the Kami, but only by mortal men. After spending an evening discussing the future of the Empire with Hantei, he was given permission to gather a mortal from each clan: Hida Atarasi, Doji Konishiko, Lady Matsu, Lady Otaku, Lord Isawa, Lord Mirumoto and Lady Shosuro. These heroes, collectively known as the Seven Thunders, went into the Shadowlands to fight the evil Kami there.

Only the Lady Shosuro returned.

THE LION-PHOENIX CONFLICT

In the early Empire, provincial borders were unstable and changing, shifting as each clan grew in strength or lost power. The Lion grew rapidly, their armies swelling with soldiers as they retired from the fight against the Dark One's horde. Needing more land to feed their troops and unwilling to rely on trade, the

Lion decided to supplement their dwindling supplies by seizing a large portion of the land to their north – land previously controlled by the Phoenix Clan.

The Lion did not wish a two-front war, however, so they arranged to sign a mutual non-aggression pact with the Crane. As soon as this was done, the Lion forces moved against the Phoenix, long-time allies of the Crane. Although the Phoenix had not forgotten the combat magic taught to them by Lord Isawa, they were unable to keep the land that the Lion wished to gain. Driven back, they turned to their allies in the Crane. Although the Crane could not directly intervene, they obtained the Emperor's favor, and forced the Lion to retreat from Phoenix lands.

THE BATTLE OF THREE STONE RIVER

Following the hostilities between the Lion and the Phoenix, both clans continued in mistrust with aggressive diplomacy. Eventually, another battle broke out, as the Lion found a weakness in the Phoenix lines. A thousand Lion samurai attacked the southwestern Phoenix lands, which were defended against by a group of only 45 shugenja. According to the reports of this battle, the Phoenix used terrain to their advantage, but their true strength lay in the might of their spells.



Only a hundred Lion survived. After a treaty was arranged, the Emperor demanded that the Lion begin training shugenja for use in war, to protect against the possibility of invasion.

VICTORY WITH NO-STRIKE

Outraged by the meddling of Crane in a Lion-Phoenix conflict, a powerful shugenja named Isawa Asahina went on a rampage across the northern Crane lands. He was confronted by Doji Kiriko, a samurai-ko known for her great honor and her kind heart. She blocked his path, refusing to fight him but preventing him from killing innocents by intercepting his battle magic with her own body.

At last, inspired and humbled by Kiriko's sacrifice, Asahina stopped his assaults. Later, to repay the damage he had done to the Crane, he married Kiriko and formed the Asahina family, loyal to the Crane.

THE FIRST WAR

The first true inter-clan war (previously, attacks between the clans had been disconnected battles, skirmishes, and minor conflicts) occurred early in the history of the Empire. The Lion and Phoenix had settled their differences, and now a new difficulty had begun between the Crane and the Crab. The war started over the Crane's claim to the Kenkai Hanto peninsula and the rich fishing waters of its bay.

The war between the Crab and the Crane lasted nearly four years, with a constant line of battle drawn between Kyuden Hida and the Yasuki Yashiki, then under Crane control. In the end, the stalemate was destroyed when the Yasuki 'betrayed' (some say 'chose to leave') the Crane and were taken in by the Crab. Thus, the Crane monopoly on trade was broken.

The Crab, with their more powerful army, seized the peninsula and drove the Crane back to the walls of Kyuden Daidoji. In the end, the Doji used their control over the imperial court once again, and drove the Crab back to Yasuki territory.

The war ended rather abruptly, as political pressure was placed on both sides. The war had created a shortage of rice and fish throughout Rokugan, and the other clans insisted that the Crane and Crab ease their bickering and return to their Imperial duties. The land and the fishing rights were divided equally between the two clans.

THE BATTLE OF THE RAGING SEAS

When the *gaijin* arrived on Rokugani soil they were accepted with reluctant grace by the Emperor and his court. By all accounts, the *gaijin* were rough, uncultured, and dirty. Their one saving grace was their trade: spices and gold from foreign lands. These pale men brought Rokugan's first contact with civilization from across the great sea, but records of the *gaijin* culture have since been largely destroyed. Little information remains other

than descriptions of their fighting styles, their strange magic, and their roaring iron tubes.

Simply put, when the Emperor demanded that all gaijin leave Rokugan, the pale men from across the ocean refused. A large fleet attacked Otsan Uchi itself, but was driven away by the united Crane and Mantis forces. Since then, all contact and knowledge of the gaijin – including the people from beyond the Burning Sands and from the distant southlands known as the Ivory Kingdoms – have been strictly controlled by the Emperor and his officials.

THE BATTLE OF WHITE STAG

Possibly one of the most famous battles in the history of the Empire, the Battle at White Stag was the final conflict between the gaijin and the Six Clans. Although their fleet had been driven away from the Rokugani shoreline, a mass of gaijin troops had seized control of the strategic high ground of White Stag.

An assault by Lion infantry led to the death of nearly 2,000 Matsu at the hands of the roaring magic of the invaders. One of these explosions killed the Emperor and his bodyguard, forcing the legions of the Empire to retreat toward Otsan Uchi. While the battles continued, the first Matsu champion of the Lion Clan was named, to serve for the duration of the war, and until the Ikoma could determine which Akodo had the truest claim to the position. That champion, Matsu Zaruko (also known as the White Lioness) rallied the Emperor's troops and gathered the forces of the Seven Clans into a final assault. The gaijin were driven back to the ocean by the fury of their attack.

Once the gaijin arrived on the shores of the Golden Sun Bay, they discovered that their boats had been destroyed by the Tortoise, and the fleet driven away by Mantis and Crane. Zaruko declared that no mercy would be shown to these invaders, and the gaijin were killed to a man on the shore of the bay.

IUCHIBAN

The Empire's past contains many dark secrets, but none more bloody than the wars with the blood sorcerer, Iuchiban. The *maho* sorcerer Iuchiban stole the bodies of the heroes who had been given honorable burial in Otsan Uchi's fields, and raised them from the dead to fight at his side. Using this mighty army, Iuchiban assaulted the emperor's city and very nearly took over the Empire.

His plot was uncovered after an investigation by Soshi Takasaho and Akodo Minobe, who were suspicious of four powerful Bloodswords created by Asahina Yajinden at the sorcerer's command. During the final battles, Minobe led the Imperial Guard against Iuchiban and his undead minions, defeating them with the help of the Six Clans.

THE BATTLE OF THE STOLEN GRAVES

The followers of Iuchiban attacked Otsan Uchi with their army of zombies and the forces of the Lion and Crane met them in battle. The Crane broke through the lines and reached

Iuchiban's lieutenant Asahina Yajinden, taking him captive. Locked away by the peaceful Asahina, Yajinden emerged with his mind wiped and lived out his life as a gardener in the capital.

THE BATTLE AT THE TIDAL LANDBRIDGE

Several hundred years ago, the Shadowlands assaults against the Crab began to grow stronger, driving the Hida away from their claimed territory. While this happened, a sizable force attacked the southeastern end of what is now the Kaiu Wall. At that time, the position was held by a single watchtower, lightly defended by the Crab. The attack was led by the clever Oni no Kinjiro, a foul creature known more for cunning than for strength.

Overwhelmed, the local commander, a samurai named Hida Bokaru, tried to signal for reinforcements, but foul magic darkened the sky to the north and prevented the Crab from seeing the flare. As the watchtower guardians prepared for what seemed to be a final assault, a hunting horn sounded across the bay, and a group of Daidoji guardsmen rode to the Crab's defense. Their leader, Daidoji Masashigi, loaned the Hida his strength and drew the Oni to the south, into the waves of the tidal landbridge. There, Masashigi and his Daidoji men fought Oni no Kinjiro until the tide rose and swept them all away.

THE FALL OF HIRUMA CASTLE

Less than a year after the attack at the landbridge and the death of Oni no Kenjiro, a massive invasion of the Crab lands began. It appeared that the original assaults by Oni no Kenjiro had been no more than a test, and now the true strength of the Shadowlands was released against the Crab lands.

A massive wave of oni, undead and other creatures flooded from the deep south, led by an oni known only as the Maw. Although the Maw has no name known to history, it is suspected that he had stolen a name from beyond the Empire – perhaps from the Ivory Kingdoms. The forces of the Maw overran the Kuni and Hiruma lands easily. In the assault, they burned and destroyed the library and ancestral homelands of the Kuni and also seized Kyuden Hiruma, turning it into a fortress for their own uses.

THE BATTLE OF THE CRESTING WAVE

After the forces of the Maw began to roll across the Kuni and Hiruma lands, the Crab began to fight with desperation. The body of their armies gathered at the edge of the Hida lands, but no respite from the unrelenting horde could be found.

The Kaiu Wall, at that point no more than plans upon an architect's drawing table, was the Crab's only hope. In order to give her clan time to raise the wall, a shugenja named Kuni Osaku created an enormous tidal wave that kept the enemy at bay for 73 days. Once the other clans realized what was happening, they gathered to assist the Crab in their defense. Supplies of jade and food came from the Crane and Phoenix lands, and military reinforcements from the Lion and Dragon brought tons of rock and metal with them, to assist in the



building and fight against the minions of the Maw. The battle was successful; the Crab successfully held the newly-built wall against the Shadowlands, and the Maw was defeated.

Osaku collapsed and died from her immense magic, but her sacrifice will never be forgotten by the Crab.

THE BATTLE OF SLEEPING RIVER

Two hundred years after the imprisonment of the sorcerer Iuchiban, his spirit escaped once more. Again, he drew forth a horde of undead, but this time, he also created a widespread cult known as the Bloodspeakers to carry on if his attempt to destroy the Hantei line failed.

During his imprisonment, Iuchiban had learned how to shift his intelligence from body to body. He used this power to try to take over an *ise zumi*, who successfully resisted Iuchiban's power. The tattooed man returned to the home of the Dragon, and with the knowledge he had gained, another army was raised to destroy Iuchiban once more.

But Iuchiban had grown stronger since he was first defeated, and it took the combined might of all Six Clans to defeat his

legions of Bloodspeakers. Unprepared to face the massive force of the undead and the dark *maho* of the Bloodspeakers, the Rokugani forces nearly failed to protect the Empire. At the end, the Crane rallied, fighting alongside the powerful soldiers of the Lion, and the Empire gained the upper hand. The Empire was saved, Iuchiban was trapped again, and three massive tombs were created to hold the sorcerer's spirit. Since that day, he has not returned.

THE BATTLE OF THE BLOOD RETREAT

During a fairly peaceful time in the Empire, the Shadowlands struck again, sending a large force of undead through the northern passes of the Twilight Mountains. The army was concealed by the thick winter snows – weather that did not hamper the undead. When they realized that the Shadowlands had invaded, the Scorpion evacuated Ryoko Owari and moved their forces to stand within Beiden Pass, to defend the Emperor's lands. After five days of battle against the horde, the rest of the Empire joined the Scorpion in battle, and defeated the undead legions.

RETURN OF THE KI-RIN

For seven hundred years, the Ki-Rin clan was gone from Rokugan, their descendants in the Fox Clan speaking for them in all matters. It was the Crab who first detected a large group of unknown warriors heading into the Empire – amazingly, traveling at incredible speeds through the Shadowlands.

The Crab prepared for the worst, convinced that these horse-warriors were nothing more than another trick of the Dark One. However, the Crab were not prepared to face the blinding speed of Unicorn cavalry, and the Shinjo troops raced through the Twilight Mountains and past the Kaiu wall.

SEVEN DAY BATTLE PLAIN

After their forces entered the heart of the Empire, the Unicorn camped on the fields to the north of the Shinomen Forest. However, the clans of the Empire were not eager to make peace with these barbarians, and the Unicorn met the combined forces of the Lion and Scorpion. Using the terrain and the speed of their steeds to their advantage, the Shinjo escaped through Beiden Pass, and met with a Phoenix delegation that had been sent by the Elemental Masters to discover the truth about these foreign invaders. After only a short negotiation, a messenger was sent to the Emperor's court, requesting that the Hantei turn his personal attention to these matters.

When the Emperor sent a Miya messenger to the strange samurai, the response was swift: they were the Unicorn clan, descendants of Shinjo, and they had come home. Like the Crab, the Lion and Scorpion clans did not believe the claim, and continued to attack the interlopers. Eventually, with the help of the Crane, the Emperor was convinced of the heritage of the strange horsemen, and welcomed them into the Empire.

THE CRANE-LION WAR

The Lion and the Crane have fought each other since the early days of the Empire. The conflict between the Kakita and the Matsu is legendary within the Empire, and flared into numerous battles during the history of Rokugan.

It never was worse, however, than when the Lion began a full-spread war against the Crane only a few years past. The centuries of rivalry, arguments over land and border skirmishes flared up into a full-scale war. The battles at Kenson Gakka, Toshi Ranbo and along the Matsu border with the Kakita have caused many deaths, and nearly thrown the entire Empire into war. Modern historians suggest that an outside force precipitated this escalation into war; the Scorpion may have worsened the conflict in order to hide preparations for their recent coup attempt.

THE BATTLE ON THE PLAINS OF GAJU SHINDAI

This battle, a massive conflict between the Lion and the Crane, saw the loss of nearly five hundred men on either sides. It is recorded as one of the bloodiest battles in recent history, and

strongly suggests that the Lion and the Crane will be unable to solve their differences through diplomacy alone.

The battle rapidly escalated from minor border disputes, turning into a full war on the fields of Gaiju Shindai. Several events which occurred between the Lion and the Crane nearly resulted in both clans losing their invitations to that year's Winter court, and cast a pall over the Emperor's winter visit to Kyuden Seppun.

THE BATTLE OF THE FORGOTTEN TIDE

The second major battle between the Lion and the Crane, this event has fueled the fires of the Matsu and Doji forces, resulting in the termination of negotiations between the two clans.

On the field of battle, Matsu Agare's *seppuku* was disrupted by an archer's arrow from the direction of the Crane lines. Taking the offending arrow as a deliberate insult, the Lion attacked the Crane, proclaiming that no mercy would be shown. The two armies clashed on the fields outside Toshi Ranbo. Peace talks, arranged for the first days of the siege, were quickly abolished, and the two armies descended rapidly into full-scale warfare. However, Crane magic seems to have affected the Matsu, and the Lion retreated from the battle entirely after only a short period of conflict. Many of the samurai involved are reported to have awakened from the battle with little memory of these events.

THE SCORPION COUP

Seeking to take the Emperor's throne for his own, Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Shoji and his clan assaulted Otsan Uchi under the cover of night, murdering the Emperor, threatening his son, and seizing the holy city of the Sun.

History writes that Shoji did not expect the other clans to be able to respond to his assaults in time to stop him completely, but the Unicorn arrived days before the Scorpion had expected. Because of the swiftness of the Shinjo, Shoji was unable to properly prepare Otsan Uchi for a siege, and the city broke down into skirmishes and isolated battles.

Shoji's last hope was the Crab. Hida Kisada, an outspoken critic of the Hantei line, marched toward Otsan Uchi with unknown allegiances. However, when he arrived, the Great Bear refused Shoji's offer of alliance and stood on the battlefield beside the other five clans. Shoji was slain in honorable battle by the Lion Champion, Akodo Toturi. While the city was besieged, the young Hantei prince was smuggled out of the city by the Phoenix. He was given his *gempukku*, and proclaimed Emperor.

The city was retaken by a force of all six clans, and in the absence of the Shining Prince (whom the Scorpion claimed to have killed), Toturi claimed the throne. The Emperor returned, and saw Toturi's treachery, casting him out of the court with all his family and reducing the Akodo line to ronin. The Scorpion were destroyed by imperial decree, and only Shoji's wife Kachiko and her personal attendants were allowed to live – so that they could serve the Emperor. Kachiko was made the new Hantei's wife, and the rest of the Scorpion have been hunted to this day.



Chapter Four: Epilogue

The snows melt from the mountain tops, and the Empire rises from beneath the cold frost of winter.

Soon spring will return, and with it will come war.

It is time; I must bid you farewell from the palace of the Kakita, and see the beautiful palanquins of the Great Clans begin their long journeys home. I already see the Lion preparing to gather to the west, and it is said that the Crab have lessened their forces upon the Great Wall. I fear for our Empire, and I fear for your safety. My friend, travel lightly, and remember all that you have learned here in our court. The whispers may prove deadly, and the rumors may turn to truth, but always there will be the glory of the Empire and the throne of the Imperial Hantei.

Do not let the honor of the Empire die in your hearts. Carry it through battle and through peace, and bring your own name glory. Look at the Empire around you, and know that Amaterasu smiles on those who remember her name.

We cannot prevent the future, but we can learn from the past.

May your hearts be light, and your days filled with honor. We will meet once more when the winter winds blow and the ice settles about the mountain lakes.

Doji Amieko



The Taste of Poison

Part Two

"Gently, Your Imperial Majesty. Gently..." Her sweet hands filtered away the light, pressing a cool cloth to his aching eyes. Darkness surrounded him, darkness and the sound of her luxurious voice.

He heard the whispers of servants as they moved about his bed chamber, movements that came and went as if of their own accord. Any one of them might be another assassin, sent to destroy him - the fear came, and passed. Kachiko was near him. The dream that held him close parted only slightly, the thick haze of drugs lifting to allow him consciousness.

He was safe within the shield of her presence.

The young Emperor, weary from the ache that throbbed behind his eyes, coughed again and reached for his lady's hand. Fragments of her stories drifted through his drugged mind, shifting into images of his magnificent Empire. He saw the Unicorn, racing on their steeds through Lion lands, Crab armies with great banners flying heroically above their marching samurai, and his own court, whispering of the Emperor's return.

Something was wrong with the image. Swords were bloodied, banners torn, and the men changed to demons, laughing from behind his own eyes. Something she was telling him... did not make sense. The Empire... his Empire... was in danger.

Perhaps they whispered not of his return, but of his death.

The Hantei's body shook with a sudden seizure, and he felt her smooth hands press gently against his chest. Kachiko held him to the futon as his muscles fought independently to rise, his jaw tightening with the strain. Then, the moment passed, and his tense body relaxed into pain once more.

Something was moving inside him, some voice that whispered in the night when the entire palace lay asleep. Even Kachiko did not know of it - how could he tell her, when his voice had vanished? He had tried, once, but she must have thought him mad.

Something choked his throat, and he struggled to clear it. Death?... so soon?

Opening his eyes, he could see where the wet cloth about his eyes had fallen away during his seizure. Kachiko was there,

pouring a strange green substance into his tea, her hands the color of ancient ivory. For a moment, his mind cleared, and he understood.

She was killing him.

No, she was his wife, obedient and trusted. The stories were lies.

He fought to find a way out of the blissful haze that controlled his thoughts. The stories were truth, and her hands held poison. The powder cascaded into the water for his tea, foaming slightly before vanishing into the soft green liquid.

The Crab marched into the empty Scorpion lands, destroying the men of the Eighteenth Imperial legion. His watch towers, once manned by Emerald Magistrates, stood empty and in ruins. No warning would come from the south.

Miya Yoto, old friend, where have you gone? Where are you now, when I need you the most?

In the homeland of the Lion, Unicorn ambassadors were being put to death, their innocent words ignored and their trust broken. War would begin soon, and the victor would capture Otosan Uchi. The strongest power would seize the Emerald Throne. His throne.

His Empire.

The thirty-ninth Hantei struggled in horror, and this time, Kachiko turned to see his staring eyes.

For a moment, she smiled, and then she reached to brush a gentle hand against his cheek. On her fingers, he could smell acid and bitter herbs. Fear rushed through him, and her smile grew wider. "Rest, Hantei," she said, ignoring the ritual salutation that followed his name. "Your death will be sweet..."

No. He tried to struggle against her, but his limp muscles did not respond. Like the rest of the Emerald Empire, his body did not hear his command. Unable to resist, he felt the warm tea slide down his throat, nearly choking him with its musky bitterness.

I must survive, he thought as she placed the empty cup on her tray and rose to go. *I must survive, or the Empire will fall*. Hantei felt hot tears welling in his eyes as the darkness began to descend once more. Would he even remember these revelations when he awoke from its shifting dreams? He must. No matter what force of will was required, he must struggle against her. Whatever deals must be made, whatever power must be appeased to fight for his Empire, he would gladly trade his honor, his pride - anything, so that the Empire lived on.

I must.

I must live... at any cost...



New Skills

DIPLOMACY (AWARENESS)

A trademark of the Miya, this skill focuses upon solving disputes quickly and amicably. The diplomat immediately places himself at the center of a dispute as a neutral party, hoping to make some sort of compromise. If one or more sides do not wish for assistance, the diplomat may make an opposed Awareness + Diplomacy roll against the Willpower of the main representative of each unwilling party. (Particularly bitter foes may roll extra dice to contest this, at the GM's discretion.) If the diplomat's roll is higher than the rolls of all unwilling parties, then some form of common ground has been found upon which to build diplomatic discussions. If the first opposed roll fails, then the diplomat may make no further attempts to resolve the matter until something significant changes in the conflict (GM's discretion as to what constitutes a significant change). A series of successful opposed rolls combined with good role-playing will eventually bring the conflict to a peaceful resolution. This is a High Skill.

GOSSIP (AWARENESS)

Gossip is frowned upon in the court, but to suggest that it never happens would be ridiculous. This skill makes the character a practiced gossip, which may be used in two ways: to hunt rumors or to spread them. To hunt rumors, the character must spend a day in court discussing a particular person or subject, rolling his Gossip + Awareness against a TN of 15. If the roll succeeds, the character has learned one juicy rumor about the subject. There is a base 50% chance that the rumor is true, though truthfulness doesn't guarantee usefulness. ("It's true! Shinjo Yokatsu dyes his beard!") For every raise the character makes, the chance of truthfulness increases by 5% to a

maximum of 80%. To spread rumors about a person or subject, the character must spend a day speaking about his target in court, then roll against a TN determined by the GM. In the case of a person, a good default is (Target's Glory - Character's Glory) x 10, but the TN should never be lower than 10. This skill only insures the rumor goes into circulation; it doesn't insure that anyone believes it. Also, keep in mind that gossiping behind someone's back is a good way to get challenged to a duel. This is a Low Skill.

KEMARI (REFLEXES)

Kemari is a soccer-like game often played at court. The rules are simple: a group of players stand in a circle and kick a leather ball, trying to keep the ball from hitting the ground. Though it seems straightforward, players always wear full courtly dress (tall peaked cap and kimono), making it much more complicated. The rules for playing kemari are given in Chapter Three. Note that with an extra raise, kemari can be played using the Athletics skill, so this skill is not necessary to play. Die-hard kemari addicts, however, will certainly want to learn this skill. Kemari is a Bugei Skill.

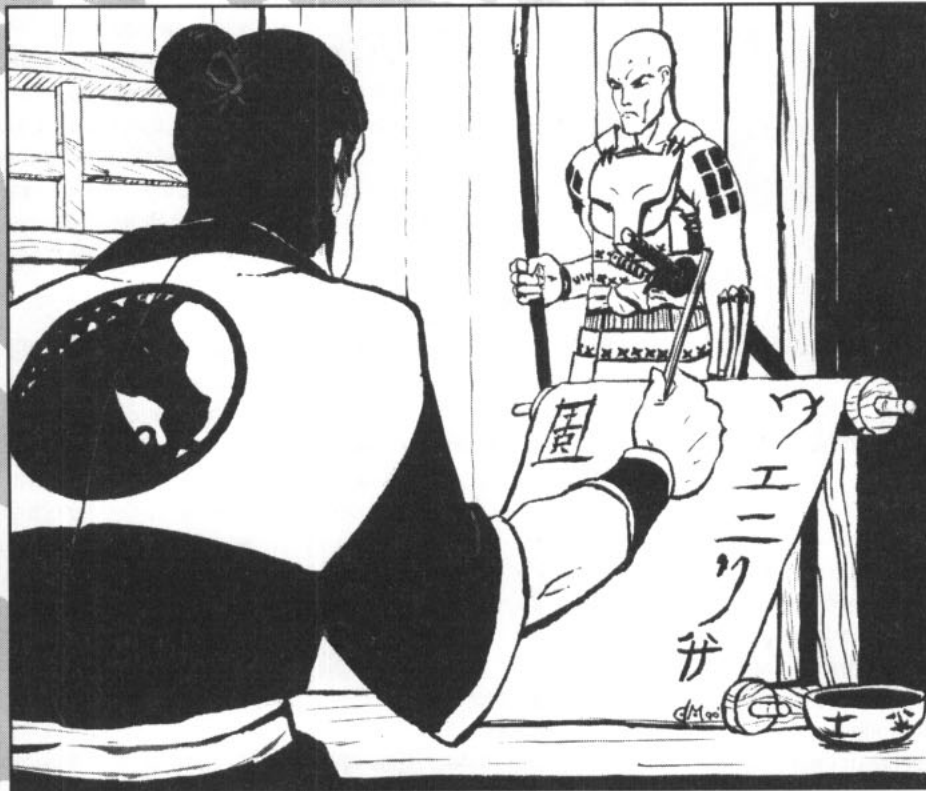
LORE: FESTIVALS & CEREMONIES (INTELLIGENCE)

This skill provides a detailed knowledge of Rokugani festivals, the days upon which they occur, and how they are celebrated. A successful skill roll provides knowledge of the appropriate rituals and ceremonies involved with a particular festival, superstitions and taboos, and what rewards are commonly bestowed for important contests and competitions. This is a High Skill.

LORE: GHOSTS (INTELLIGENCE)

A master of ghost lore has detailed knowledge of *gaki*, *yokai*, *yurei*, *ubume*, and other varieties of potentially malevolent





haunting spirits. This skill provides only the most basic awareness of shiryō and oni, mostly in how they relate to ghosts. Characters with this skill are particularly adept at telling good ghost stories. This is a High Skill.

LORE: LITERATURE (INTELLIGENCE)

This skill does not provide any talent for writing. It does, however, provide an extensive knowledge of famous poets, authors, playwrights, and their respective works. This skill may be used to remember a particular piece of written work, or simply to cite a clever quote for the amusement of the court. This skill provides an awareness of Rokugani literary traditions and conventions, which is always a boon in a land as steeped in tradition as Rokugan. When combined with Calligraphy and Rhetoric or Poetry, a character can compose letters that are works of art unto themselves. This is a High Skill.

OMENS (PERCEPTION)

Strangely shaped clouds, shooting stars, odd planetary movements, dreams, and even sneezes can have profound prophetic meanings in Rokugan. This skill allows the character to identify omens when they occur, and divine their possible meaning. Omen reading is not a precise science. A dream that seems to foretell of death or great tragedy may just as easily mean nothing at all. The GM is the final arbiter in how useful and prophetic the character's omens are. This skill has long been common among shugenja. Lately, however, many Crane courtiers

have begun to practice it, believing the ability to read the future to be a great way to display wit and cleverness. The Asahina sigh quietly; their cousins meddle with forces they do not understand. Meanwhile, the trend continues to grow in popularity. This is a High Skill.

PUPPETEERING (REFLEXES)

This skill provides a mastery of the deft, precise movements required to control the marionettes used in Rokugani puppet shows. It requires practice and patience; many of the finer puppets have fully articulated eyes, fingers, and even eyebrows. No character with a Rank of less than 3 in this skill should even remotely consider performing a professional puppet show. This skill has grown very popular in the last few years, as many samurai patrons find it easier to host a single skilled puppeteer than an entire troupe of potentially unreliable actors to serve the same purpose. As such, a skilled

puppeteer can nearly name his own wages in Rokugan. This is a High Skill.

SADANE (AWARENESS)

Another popular courtly game, sadane is the art of impromptu criticism. *Sadane* is not a mere insult but rather a biting denouncement of a piece of art, a book, or even the ethics and morality of another person. Sadane is almost always based upon the legitimate faults of the target. If a person or piece of art is genuinely without fault, sadane may be impossible. At night during Winter Court, many young courtiers meet secretly to engage one another in bouts of sadane. This is a High Skill.

TROPICAL FISH (VARIES)

This skill bestows knowledge of the care and maintenance for one particular breed of rare tropical fish. Koi, fighting fish, weatherfish, lionfish, blowfish, eels, and even small sharks are possible breeds, so long as they are small enough to live in a samurai's garden pond. Tropical fish are frequently very delicate animals, prone to shock and strange diseases. The expense of maintaining their health and strange diets can be phenomenal. A samurai with knowledge of this skill can pass conversation upon the subject at court. The subject of tropical fish is considered a humble method of bragging about one's wealth, for only a wealthy samurai can afford to own and maintain such animals. The GM may disallow this skill unless the character is wealthy enough to afford a proper fish pond. This is a High Skill.



New Advantages

BLISSFUL BETROTHAL (3 POINTS)

Your character is betrothed, and couldn't be happier about it. Maybe your spouse is rich or well-connected, or maybe you're just lucky enough to have found true love. For one reason or another, the marriage works to the benefit of both sides. You gain a significant political connection to your betrothed's family, and may purchase one of the following Advantages for two points less: Gentry, Wealth, Social Position, Ear of the Emperor, True Friend (with your betrothed only) and Kharmic Tie (with your betrothed only). Note that you do not receive either of these benefits until after the wedding ceremony, which will take place within one year. Of course, such a wonderful match doesn't come without its drawbacks. You'll have to see to your spouse's welfare, and disgruntled suitors may eye your happy new home with jealousy. Be on your guard.

CORRESPONDENCE (1 POINT)

You have become friends with someone else in Rokugan, though you've never met. Pick a character in another clan as your correspondent, or let your GM pick one. The two of you write letters to one another often, keeping one another abreast of current events in your respective domains. Not only does this provide a great source of information about unknown areas of Rokugan, but if your letters are well-written your correspondent may come to consider you a close ally or confidant. There is only one drawback: if you take longer than a week to reply to one of your correspondent's letters, even once, this advantage is lost permanently. You may reestablish communication with your correspondent, but something fundamental in your relationship has been lost and you will never become true friends or allies without some significant effort on your part.

DARLING OF THE COURT (4 POINTS)

Recently, you did something clever or heroic and the Emperor thanked you personally, to your surprise. You never met or spoke with the Emperor again. Still, the countless courtiers and Imperial hangers-on have begun to harry you at every turn, hoping that

some of the Emperor's favor will rub off on them. It's a bit of an annoyance at times, but you have to admit it's fun to be popular. For the next six months, your Glory is effectively two Ranks higher in social situations and you may spend 2 Experience Points to take any of your sycophants as a permanent Minor Ally. (There is no limit to the amount of times you may do this, if you have enough Experience Points to spend.) After six months, this Advantage goes away forever. The Minor Allies you purchased remain loyal, but they no longer hang on your every word as they did. Everyone else just seems to forget your name. Fame is fleeting. Make the best of it.

GREAT POTENTIAL (3, 8, OR 10 POINTS)

Pick one of your character's skills. The character is a natural talent in this area, and will one day be a master. When using this skill, the character may make any number of Raises, unlimited by his Void. This Advantage provides no free Raises. Taking Great Potential for any Bugei skill, even if it is also considered part of another skill group, costs 8 points. Taking this Advantage for any other skill costs only 3 points. For 10 points, a shugenja character may purchase this Advantage for a single element, for use only when casting spells from that element. A character may only purchase this Advantage once.

MEEK (5 POINTS, 2 POINTS FOR MIYA CHARACTERS)

Try as you might, you just don't look very threatening. Unless you're having a serious effect upon combat, opponents won't attack you until they've disposed of all of your allies first. If you're not attacking, casting spells, or holding any offensive weapons, they might not bother to attack you at all. Your demeanor is so non-threatening that you may roll an extra die on all rolls involving diplomacy or negotiation, even if you're simply begging for your life. This skill is particularly useful for Miya shisha, for whom an intimidating appearance is an impediment. This Advantage in no way prevents anyone from questioning, capturing, or verbally harassing the character. In most non-Miya bushi families (the Hida and Matsu in particular), meekness is often seen as a curse or a grievous error in one's upbringing.

SACROSANCT (10 POINTS)

You may only take this Advantage if your character has a starting Honor Rank of 3 or higher. Due to a great service you performed for the Hantei in the past, you are now under the Emperor's protection. This blessing remains so long as your Honor remains at 3 or above, and you do nothing to defame or dishonor the Emperor. In the meantime, attacking you or your immediate family is tantamount to attacking the Hantei himself. Any person who strikes you in combat before you strike them loses five boxes of Honor for every Wound Level they inflict. Anyone who kills you or knocks you unconscious loses a full Rank of Glory, no matter their station. Only an Imperial decree can reverse or negate either of these effects. In return, you have

sworn your utter and devoted loyalty to the Emperor. Though Akodo Toturi has fallen into dishonor, many Matsu and Ikoma have found great favor in the Hantei's eyes following the Coup and have been bestowed this status. In return, these brave Lions would follow the Emperor into Jigoku itself.

STANDING INVITATION (2 POINTS, 1 POINT FOR OTOMO, SEPPUN, OR MIYA)

For your family's past accomplishments, you have earned a standing invitation to the annual Winter Court for yourself and your retinue (up to six persons). Though this is a great honor, remember that you are representing your family and your clan. A dishonor or accident on your part will shame everyone at home as well as yourself.



BITTER BETROTHAL (3 POINTS)

Your character is betrothed. Unfortunately, the marriage is not destined to be a happy one. Perhaps your spouse-to-be is a member of an enemy family or clan. Maybe he or she is just an arrogant, obnoxious boor, or you're in love with someone else. Whatever the case, your family has plans for you to marry and expects you to submit to their will. The wedding is planned sometime within the next year, and you do not look forward to it. What's worse, your intended isn't fond of the idea, either. At best, you are doomed to live in a cold and bitter home, shackled by a political marriage. At worst, your spouse may be a spy, and your marriage may be part of a greater plot to weaken and destroy your family from within. The exact details are left up to the GM.

DOUBT (4 POINTS)

You have a problem. You have no confidence in one of your starting skills (chosen by the GM). Though you train and train, you still don't excel. The knowledge is there, but the doubt always lingers. In game terms, every time this skill is used the character must Raise twice in order to succeed. He gains no extra benefits from these Raises, and they still count toward his maximum

number of Raises. This Disadvantage can eventually be conquered, but only when the skill that is plagued with Doubt is raised to a 5, and the character uses it to defeat a superior opponent, to save the life of himself or another, or, in the case of a craft, to create a work of profound skill and lasting beauty (TN 45 at the very least).

HOHEI (6 POINTS, BUSHI ONLY)

The character has been recruited into combat fresh from gempukku with the rank of hohei, or private. He begins as a green recruit without the techniques, skills, or attribute bonus of his school, and may not use Character Points to purchase more than three of the skills initially offered by his school. He is considered Rank 0. On the plus side, the character gains double the normal amount of experience points usable only toward obtaining the starting skills of his school at rank 1, and raising the attribute associated with his school once. When this is done, the character gains his first Technique and five experience points (the benefit of on-the-job experience). At this time, all effects of this disadvantage are permanently lost. The GM may choose to allow this disadvantage only in times of war.

HOSTAGE (3 POINTS)

Hostage (3 points) The character was taken by another clan and made to swear fealty. Though he is considered a member of this new clan, he is neither fully trusted or respected. His old family has turned its back on him, and he may never learn any more Rank Techniques from them. On the plus side, the character may purchase Different School or Multiple Schools (from his new clan) for two points less.

OBTUSE (1 POINT)

You just don't get it. Poems are a meaningless babble of nonsense. Paintings are just something to cover holes in the walls. Music is a waste of time if you can't dance to it, and dancing is a waste of time unless you've drunk enough sake to drown out the music. Don't even start on that kabuki garbage. Your soul is unmoved by the finer things; even when you try, you just don't see the point. With the exception of Lore skills, Hunting, Investigation, Mountaineering, and Medicine, learning or raising any High Skill costs double the normal amount. In any social or courtly situation, you must Raise your TN twice to get the effects of a single Raise. On the other hand, being numb to the finer things is not always a weakness. In the court, people tend to ignore you. They tried making fun of you for a while, but eventually that stopped too. Other characters receive a +5 penalty to all TNs involving taunting, ridiculing, or manipulating your thick-skulled character.

The Miya Family

As the Miya maintain a closer link to the common people of Rokugan, a Miya player character need not purchase Social Advantage as an Otomo or Seppun would. Unfortunately, they also cannot purchase Bente's Blessing at a reduced cost. The Miya school is very exclusive; in addition to purchasing Different School, a non-Miya shisha must purchase a Major Ally, Sensei (legendary), or Major Obligation to another Miya character of the GM's choice.

The Miya are trained to react with their wits rather than their blades. As a result, Miya are sharp of mind and quick-thinking.

Benefit: +1 Intelligence

Miya Shisha (Herald) School

Benefit: +1 Perception

Skills: Courtier, Defense, Diplomacy*, Etiquette, Heraldry 2, Horsemanship

Beginning Honor: 2, plus 7 boxes

Starting Outfit: (All are Fine Quality) Sashimono or Nobori, Horo, Kimono, Wakizashi, 10 Koku, Steed, Light Armor

This school is considered a bushi school.

* *Diplomacy is a new Skill: see page 97.*

TECHNIQUES

RANK 1: VOICE OF THE EMPEROR

At this rank, the Miya begins to learn the subtle skills of diplomacy. If the Miya makes an opposed social skill roll, she may roll additional dice equal to her School Rank. The Miya also gains an astounding fleetness of foot in order to promptly deliver the Emperor's word. If the Miya does nothing but flee combat, she gains a bonus to her TN to be hit equal to her Rank x 5. This bonus is cumulative with a Full Defense.

RANK 2: EYES OF THE EMPEROR

The shisha who has gained this level of skill obtains a profound harmony with the Empire. The shisha gains the Way of the Land advantage for one territory, and gains it for another territory each time she gains another School Rank. If the shisha is in one of these territories she may make any number of raises on Perception checks. Any rolls to identify mons or other heraldic symbols are automatically successful if that mon originates from one of these territories.

RANK 3: HAND OF THE EMPEROR

A shisha who has mastered this technique wears an almost tangible aura of passivity. Any who directly serve or fear the Emperor will be loath to harm her. If the shisha makes no threatening moves and spends a Void Point, an opponent must spend a Void Point before they may attack her that round. Up to one other person per School Rank of the shisha can be protected by this technique, though they must also make no threatening movements and stay within ten feet.

RANK 4: GLORY OF THE EMPEROR

The shisha has developed a powerful personality, capable of intimidating lesser men. If combat has not begun, the shisha can step forward and address the leader of the enemy party, boasting of her party's skills and offering a chance to retreat. This requires a full round, and the shisha must make an opposed roll of her Awareness + School Rank against the enemy leader's Willpower + School Rank. If one side is heavily

ANCESTOR: MIYA NAGANORI 376-399 8 POINTS

Though few remember his name, Naganori is the true hero of the Victory With No Strike. Six centuries ago, the Lion maneuvered the Crane into a strict treaty of peace, then attacked the Phoenix with impunity. The Phoenix might have been slaughtered. Naganori moved swiftly, poring through volumes of ancient laws in Otsan Uchi. Finding a solution, the clever herald raced out on foot, hoping against hope he would reach the Crane in time. On the way he encountered a group of ronin working for the Lion general. They severed Naganori's leg and left him.

Two days later, Naganori arrived at Shiro no Doji, crawling on one leg and bloody fingers. He stood, bowed to the Doji daimyo, delivered his message, and died. The Lion were deterred before the battle even began.

Descendants of Naganori inherit his extraordinary devotion. By spending a Void Point, they may ignore wound penalties (including Down, Out, and Dead) for a number of hours equal to their Honor. This ability does not apply to attack rolls, only Full Defense, skill rolls, and movement. If the character's Dead level is depleted, the character dies.

outnumbered, the GM may give the other side free raises during the contested roll. If the shisha succeeds, her party gains a number of free raises equal to the shisha's School Rank x 2 during the combat to split however they wish. If the shisha's roll is more than double her opponent's, then the enemy party is affected by Fear equal to the shisha's School Rank. If the shisha attempts to use this technique during a full scale battle, success indicates that she and a number of companions equal to her Rank may adjust their positions on the battle table by one column during the first two rounds. Failure has no additional affect in large battles. This ability will function against any creature that can understand the shisha's words.

RANK 5: BLESSINGS OF THE EMPEROR

The shisha learns the final lesson, mastering the arts of non-aggression. If the shisha makes no moves to attack or undermine her enemies in any way, they may not purposefully attack her. Affected enemies may attempt to capture the shisha, and if she resists or flees they may attack her normally. When an enemy attacks a shisha of this rank, she may spend a Void Point to ignite a lingering thread of doubt in the attacker's mind. The attacker may not keep his highest damage die that round. This technique only works against those who serve or fear the Emperor.



Rokugani samurai have devised countless varieties of banners and standards. The idea of a standard is not only for quick identification in battle, but to inspire courage or fear. When a samurai sees nothing but his own colors, he feels bravery. When surrounded by enemy banners, he feels fear. In game terms, a GM might allow a general whose army is outfitted with sashimono, standards, and banners a free column shift on the battle table if facing an army without such equipment. Banners also give a character a free raise on all battle rolls for any attempts to issue commands or messages to another part of the army.

Note that, like samurai armor, standards were carried only during battle.

A samurai who wishes to have a personal mon should register it with the Miya as soon as possible to avoid confusion or duplication. Though it is possible to have a mon crafted without registering it, it is also pointless, since a mon serves no function unless it is recognized. Without recognition, a mon is just a picture. For this same reason, samurai seldom change their personal mon; to do so would demand that they establish their reputation all over again. The choice of a mon is a matter of great pride, and always a distinctly personal choice. Many samurai hire out the most skilled painters they can afford and purchase the finest quality silks to create their mons and banners, and care for their banners almost as well as they would their katana. Taking up a standard in battle is a great honor, and dropping one is an extreme disgrace.

Costs for standards are listed in terms of the amount of points necessary to begin with them using the Inheritance Advantage.

FUKINIKI

A large, cylindrical streamer, reinforced with rods or paper-maché. These are designed to be mounted on a saddle, or onto the walls of a castle. This is a fancier standard than the usual nobori (q.v.), used by more affluent families. 3 points.

GIHEI

A ceremonial wand or long staff decorated with silk and paper-maché, blessed by the spirits to bring good fortune. Only shugenja or monks may bear them, and they serve the same purposes as a standard or banner. 1 point.

HORO

A wicker cloak, symbol of the shisha. It is large, balloon-shaped, and quite awkward for walking (+5 to all physical TNs while walking). However, it gives no penalties on horseback. The wicker armor increases the shisha's TN to be hit by 10 for missile attacks from behind. (If the shisha leans down while on horseback, she is completely protected.) The Emperor has forbidden any but the shisha to wear horo. Miya shisha receive a horo at character creation.

J'UMA JIRUSHI

A Great Standard. These are enormous, painted in intricate detail, and crafted of the finest materials. Only powerful daimyos can afford them. These banners are used to indicate the general's position on the field, making them a popular target for enemy archers. The bearer of a Great Standard can move only very slowly, and cannot fight while bearing the standard. The legendary Ancestral Standards are *nemuranai* versions of these. The general of an army with a Great Standard may add 3 to his Water + Battle roll, and receives four free raises when delivering commands using the Battle skill. Priceless.

KO'UMA JIRUSHI

A Lesser Standard, but "lesser" only in comparison with the Juma Jirushi. A character carrying this standard can do little but march in a straight line and try not to be blown over by the wind (+15 TN to try to fight one-handed while holding the banner). The general of an army with a lesser standard may add 1 to his Water + Battle roll, and receives two free raises when delivering commands using the Battle skill. 7 points.

NOBORI

A simple type of standard that can be held one-handed or mounted on a saddle. It is not especially large or decorative, but it bears the mon of the samurai's clan, rank, and unit. 1 point.

SASHIMONO

This banner is attached to the back of a samurai's armor and held via cords that loop around the armpits and fasten to the samurai's chest plate. It displays the clan or family mon, along with the samurai's rank. Note that some samurai might wear as many as three sashimono at once to denote their wealth and rank. Phoenix and Crane samurai sometimes wear a pair of stylized sashimono, designed to flutter in the breeze and give the appearance of ephemeral wings. 1 point each.



"We serve the Emperor and only the Emperor. A blow against one of our own is a blow against the Imperial Hantei."

— Ikoma Ujiaki

For one thousand years, peace has reigned in Rokugan. There have, of course, been battles and skirmishes, but lengthy and costly wars are largely unknown in the history of the Emerald Empire. It was the wish of Hantei that the descendants of his beloved brothers and sisters know peace rather than bear the hardships of warfare. His descendants have continued that tradition, maintaining the peace by any means necessary. Imperial ambassadors known as *shikken* travel throughout the Empire, keeping peace between the clans whenever conflict arises. Occasionally, more drastic measures are required, such as

when Hantei XXXVIII ordered the fostering of children between the Lion and the Crane clans. For the most part, however, the peace of Rokugan is kept through the strict enforcement of the Emperor's laws by the agents of the throne: the Emerald Magistrates.

The Emerald Magistrates speak for the Emerald Champion, the right hand of the Hantei, who in turn speaks for the Emperor himself. Unlike many prominent posts in Rokugan, the majority of Emerald Magistrate positions are not granted as favors or boons, but rather are earned through glorious service to the Empire. Ideally, an Emerald Magistrate is a highly motivated, intelligent, and skilled individual whose heart burns with devotion to the Emperor and his laws. By their very presence, these valiant samurai both exemplify and enforce the law. It has been this way since the inception of the Emerald Magistrates.

In the earliest days of the Empire, the Emerald Champion had no magistrates to assist in his duties. Instead, each province or city had its own selected judge, who would interpret and enforce the law as he or she saw fit. This led to an extremely arbitrary judicial system that varied considerably from place to place. Displeased with the notion that his laws were not properly enforced, the Emperor instructed his Champion, Doji Hatsuo, to establish a more consistent system.

Hatsuo summoned a particularly popular judge, renowned both for his courtly skills and his penchant for fairness: Soshi Saibankan from Taiyo One Toshi. Possessed of a strong (some might say uncharacteristic) sense of justice, Saibankan proposed a system by which individual samurai, each selected for their devotion and ability, were dispersed throughout the Empire to enforce the law, all answerable only to the Emerald Champion himself. Furthermore, Saibankan wrote a charter that would detail the exact duties of the magistrates, including which crimes fell under their auspices and which were to be left to the individual cities or provinces. Together, Hatsuo and Saibankan presented this concept to the Hantei, who ordered its implementation immediately.

In modern Rokugan, Emerald Magistrates face threats the likes of which their predecessors never imagined. Treacherous courtiers, *gaijin* interlopers, fugitives from the Shadowlands, *maho* cults, treasonous conspiracies, and even mysterious creatures of the Living Darkness threaten the Empire. The peacekeepers of today's Rokugan have had to destroy entire villages in order to ensure that a *maho* cult did not endanger the greater good of Rokugan, or to execute innocent heimin to preserve the honor of a city governor. Some of them see petty crimes such as theft, assault, and even opium trafficking as barely worth their time, permitting their underlings to deal with them or ignoring them altogether. These are not evil men, merely men who have seen the true threats and chosen to face the greater evil.

It has been this dedication, this grim resolve on the part of Emerald Magistrates that has prevented war all these years. The countless battles that have been narrowly averted over the course of the Empire's history were bought with the lives of selfless

Magistrates who sacrificed themselves for the sake of peace. Even the unthinkable death of Hantei XXXVIII at the hands of the traitor Bayushi Shoji could not break the unwavering devotion of the Emerald Magistrates and their Champion. But new news has come from Ootosan Uchi, news that has struck terror into the hearts of otherwise dauntless Magistrates across the Empire.

Doji Satsume, the Emerald Champion, is dead.

Without him, the Magistrates' task becomes impossible.

These beleaguered and battle-weary samurai have powerful methods at their disposal which aid in their duties. Centuries ago, Saibankan taught the first Emerald Magistrates the methods that had served him so well as a judge. This became tradition, as seasoned magistrates returned to Ootosan Uchi to train promising new recruits in the ways of their position. Over the centuries, these veteran magistrates' teachings evolved into unique Techniques available in only one dojo throughout the Empire: the dojo of the Emerald Magistrates, located at Rokugan Yogasha Shiro.

Others look to the Emerald Magistrates and now wonder if they can maintain the fragile order that teeters on the brink of collapse. The Magistrates do not wonder. They know their duty, and they know that they must overcome, no matter the cost.

It is what they do.

(For more information on Soshi Saibankan, see *Way of the Scorpion*, page 62; for the Charter of the Emerald Magistrates, see *City of Lies*, book one, "City of Stories," page 4.)

The Emerald Magistrate Dojo

Of all the schools scattered throughout Rokugan, none is more selective than that of the Emerald Magistrates. There is no Benefit, nor beginning Skills package. There are no Rank 1 or 2 techniques. The sensei at this school do not teach their ways to new, untested samurai. Rather, they take the finest among the Magistrates and give them additional training. When an Emerald Magistrate who has demonstrated outstanding service and skill is ready to learn a new Technique from his home school, he may instead be granted the opportunity to study within the Emerald Champion's dojo. There he learns one of the following Techniques instead of that of his school.

Example: Daidoji Tsueno has risen through the ranks from doshin to yoriki and now to full Emerald Magistrate. His record is spotless and his reputation is impeccable. When it is time for him to return to the Crane lands and learn his Rank 4 technique, he may instead receive the honor of learning the Rank 4 Technique listed below. Then, one day when the time is right, Tsueno may return to the Crane lands and learn the Rank 5 Technique of his school.

MECHANICS

Two things must happen for a character to learn any of these Techniques. The Emerald Champion (or another extremely high-ranking Magistrate) must offer him the chance to do so. Gamemasters should only offer this option if they feel that the player in question has done an outstanding job of role-playing. Secondly, the PC must spend a number of experience points. This represents the incredible rarity of this honor as well as the powerful nature of the Techniques.

Note that simply because a character has been invited to learn one of the Emerald Magistrate techniques in no way gives him the right to expect to learn the others. Each one must be offered separately, as a reward for outstanding service to the Emperor and the Empire.

RECOMMENDED SKILLS

There are certain skills that a Magistrate must possess in order to benefit from training at the Emerald Dojo. Students should be skilled in Courtier, Heraldry, Investigation, Law, and Sincerity. As a result of studying at the Emerald Magistrate School, the character may learn the Obiesaseru skill. Any time that the Magistrate uses these skills to either enforce the Emperor's laws or to investigate the culprit or circumstances of a criminal act, he is considered "on duty" for the purposes of the Techniques below.

TECHNIQUES

RANK 3: SAIBANKAN'S METHOD

The magistrate has grasped the simple but effective methods originated by Soshi Saibankan. Once per session, the magistrate may spend a Void point to automatically succeed on any test involving one of the skills in the "Recommended Skills" list. This technique costs 10 experience points to learn.

RANK 4: FOR THE EMPIRE

The blessing of the Son of Heaven truly shines upon his defenders. Having achieved Rank 4, the magistrate may spend a Void point to negate the damage-reducing abilities of his opponent, inflicting damage as normal for a number of rounds equal to his Honor Rank. Oni powers, Shadow powers, protective effects from spells, and *maho-bujin* Techniques may all be countered by this Technique. This technique costs 15 experience points to learn.

RANK 5: IN HIS NAME

At this level, the burning passion to serve the Emperor permeates every breath the magistrate takes. When undertaking any task in fulfillment of his sacred duty (on duty, as above), the magistrate has a number of Free Raises per day equal to his Honor rank. This technique costs 20 experience points to learn.

Who's Who in the Winter Court

OTOMO SHISHI

Earth: 3

Willpower: 4

Water: 2

Perception: 4

Fire: 3

Intelligence: 4

Air: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Yasuki Merchant 3

Honor: 1.0

Glory: 4.6

Advantages: Crafty, Different School

Disadvantages: Obligation (Toturi) 4, Greed 3, Proud

Skills: Appraisal 5, Commerce 5, Defense 2, Etiquette 3, Farming 2, Forgery 3, Gambling 2, Gossip 2, Heraldry 2, Manipulation 2, Sincerity 3, Tanto 1

Those who are unfortunate enough to encounter Otomo Shishi rarely have anything pleasant to say afterwards. The man is fat, slovenly, and prone to talking about himself. His arrogance frayed the Otomo family's patience, prompting them to send him to the Yasuki to study economics.

Shishi took the intended insult as a personal challenge. He became a master trader, surpassing his teachers in knowledge and learning the value of a koku in the Yasuki manner. The lure of wealth and material possessions seduced him, and he quickly amassed a large fortune. Shishi's relatives, who despised him, were nonetheless pleased with his accomplishments and invited him to court once more. Shishi became even more self-obsessed, believing himself an unsurpassed genius.

Then he made his first mistake. Two years ago, during a large border skirmish between the Lion and the Crane, Shishi invested heavily in rice and steel. He forged papers to pass through Lion lines, hoping that his Otomo mon would dissuade soldiers from asking questions. The beleaguered Cranes would pay him well for all his trouble. Unfortunately, Shishi's caravan crossed paths with



OTOMO SHISHI

Akodo Toturi's unit. The forged papers did not fool Toturi for an instant.

Shishi might have been ruined. Toturi had full rights to destroy his supplies and turn the man over to the authorities. Instead, Toturi simply confiscated the supplies and sent Shishi on his way. Shishi didn't pause to argue; he turned tail and fled as quickly as his horse would carry him, thanking the Fortunes for the Lion's mercy.

Already Shishi's trade thrives again. While the rest of Rokugan suffers, the fat merchant's stores grow larger. However, he fears that his joy will be short-lived. From the west, he hears rumors that Toturi, now Toturi the Black, is raising an army. He fears the former Champion will soon remember the debt the merchant owes him. Armies cannot march without supplies



SEPPUN NAKAO

Earth: 4

Water: 4

Fire: 2

Agility: 3

Air: 2

Reflexes: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Seppun Miharu 3

Honor: 3.8

Glory: 3.5

Advantages: Large, Social Advantage, Tactician, True Friend (Kakita Yoshi)

Disadvantages: Can't Lie, Cowardice (Moderate), Idealistic

Skills: Archery 3, Battle 4, Bushido 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Heraldry 3, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu 4, Obiesaseru 4, Painting 2, Siege 3, War Fan 2, Yarijutsu 2

Seppun Nakao is a good soldier, a taisa in the Nineteenth Imperial Legion. He is tall and strong. His armor and weapons are well tended. He carries bushido in his heart. His loyalty is unquestioned. He always follows orders.

In fact, if anything truly negative could be said of Nakao, it is that perhaps his vision has been too dazzled by the Son of Heaven. Though he sometimes disagrees with the orders he receives, he fears what repercussions may occur if he were to speak his own mind. He has the potential to be a brilliant general



SEPPUN NAKAO

and officer, but he leaves strategy to others. Slowly, slowly, the weight of his polite deference is crushing his soul.

The only person to notice this has been Kakita Yoshi. The courtier and the taisa found an unlikely friendship many years ago after Nakao selflessly averted an attempt on Yoshi's life. Yoshi was impressed; though the Crane has many allies, he has few true friends. Nakao, in return, respects Yoshi for his dedication to non-violent methods. In a way, he wishes he could be more like the Crane. Yoshi has offered to arrange for Nakao to be promoted several times, but Nakao always declines the privilege. He feels that a man should succeed according to his merit, not his friends. If he just stays quiet and follows orders long enough, he is certain to succeed. Nakao believes that his responsibilities of his latest assignment guarantee his success.

The Nineteenth Legion has been assigned to guard Beiden Pass.

OTOMO YAYU

Earth: 2

Stamina: 3

Water: 2

Perception: 3

Fire: 3

Air: 3

Reflexes: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja 1

Honor: 2.3

Glory: 2.3

Advantages: Different School, Meddler, Minor Ally (Naka Kuro)

Disadvantages: Bad Health, Black Sheep, Fascination (Legends)

Skills: Bard 3, Bojutsu 2, Calligraphy 1, Investigation 2, Meditation 3, Poetry 2, Shintao 3, Spellcraft 2, Theology 2

Spells: (spells marked with an asterisk are innate abilities) Sense, Commune*, Summon, Counterspell, Bo of Water, Castle of Air, Evil Ward, Mists of Illusion*, Whispering Winds, Wings of Fire

Yayu was born sickly, barely able to walk until the age of five. But although his body was weak, his mind was sharp. While other boys played at being samurai, Yayu spent his days voraciously devouring legends of ancient heroes. He read every scroll that his family library had to offer, and later begged to be schooled at the Isawa academy. Yayu dreamed of the countless tales that the Phoenix libraries must hold. As an Otomo, his wish was easily granted.

Yayu was a skilled apprentice. He finished lessons quickly, leaving as much time as possible to devote to the countless scrolls of myths and legends. After a time, the Phoenix began to worry for him. He became increasingly distant, withdrawing from reality and disappearing into his fantasy world. One day, Yayu looked up from his scrolls to see an old man standing



OTOMO YAYU

before him. The man's face was unfamiliar, lined with age and wisdom. He introduced himself simply as "Kuro."

"Would you like to hear a story, Yuyu?" Kuro asked.

"Yes," Yuyu replied.

Without any warning, Kuro whisked the two of them across the face of Rokugan. Before them, Yuyu saw an army of ronin warriors rallying under a strange wolf mon, facing off against the impossible might of a Crab army. Around them, the jagged maw of Beiden Pass clawed for the sky. Though the odds seemed hopeless, the bravery and cunning of the ronin prevailed. At the great battle's climax, the mighty ronin general lifted his war fan overhead. Yuyu turned to Kuro with eyes full of wonder.

"What is this?" Yuyu asked. "Whose tale is this?"

"It has not yet happened," Kuro said, an odd twinkle in his eye, "and the tale is yours, if you would but strike out and find it."

Yuyu left the library that day, and has not returned since. His teachers are bewildered. His family is outraged and ashamed. Yuyu walks the face of Rokugan alone, destitute, uncertain of his destination.

He has never been happier.

SEPPUN TOSHIKEN

Earth: 2

Willpower: 3

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Agility: 3

Air: 2

Reflexes: 3

Void: 3

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 1

Honor: 3.5

Glory: 1.5

Advantages: Balance, Great Potential (Iaijutsu), Higher Purpose (Surpass Kakita Toshimoko)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Illegitimate), Jealousy (Kakita Toshimoko), Obligation (Kakita Ichiro) 2, Proud

Skills: Athletics 1, Archery 2, Courtier 2, Defense 1, Etiquette 1, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu 1, Sincerity 1, Tea Ceremony 1

If a single word can be used to describe the young Seppun Toshiken, that word is "intense." Though it has been only a year since his *gempukku*, the fifteen-year-old Toshiken has already triumphed in three duels. He is relentless in his quest to forge himself into the perfect warrior. His pale eyes burn with a quiet anger, keeping others at a distance. Most believe his attitude stems from a thirst for advancement, since his family are only minor vassals of the Seppun. This is not the full story.

In reality, Seppun Toshiken is the son of Kakita Toshimoko, the product of a half-remembered encounter between the duelist and a yojimbo's daughter. Toshimoko could have adopted Toshiken as his own son, but has chosen to deny any knowledge



SEPPUN TOSHIKEN

of the boy. He did this not out of anger or pride, but out of fear. Toshimoko felt that he had failed so greatly in raising his first son, Ichiro, that to meddle in young Toshiken's life would only make matters worse. Still, Toshimoko has watched Toshiken from afar and is quietly proud of the boy's progress. He is much like his father.

But Toshimoko does not know what truly drives Toshiken. Toshiken knows the truth: Kakita Ichiro was only too happy to tell him. His half-brother happily informed Toshiken of how their father was shamed by his illegitimate son, and how Toshimoko despised him. According to Ichiro, Toshimoko believed Toshiken to be "a foul accident, a bastard abomination doomed to failure."

Unfortunately, the boy has inherited more than Toshimoko's skill with the blade. He has also inherited the Grey Crane's temper.

MIYA SATOSHI

Earth: 3

Water: 5

Fire: 4

Air: 3

Reflexes: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Miya Shisha 1, Matsu Bushi 3

Honor: 3.2

Glory: 8.7 (Miya daimyo)

Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Ear of the Emperor, Multiple Schools

Disadvantages: Brash, Overconfident, Insensitive

Skills: Archery 4, Battle 3, Calligraphy 1, Courtier 1, Defense 2, Diplomacy 1, Etiquette 3, Heraldry 4, History 2, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 4

One of the greatest surprises at the Winter Court this year was the appearance of Miya Satoshi, new daimyo of the Miya. His father, the aged Miya Yoto, is absent for the first time in decades. Though the inner politics of the Miya family remain private, many of those who know Yoto wonder if the transfer of power was voluntary.

Satoshi has long been a silent detractor of Miya traditions. He was fostered to the Matsu soon after *gempukku*, and it is said that he knows more of war than peace. He prefers the former. He is a proud, swaggering young man, with no desire to be a diplomat. Though his eyes shine bright and his smile is quick, not many would call Satoshi friend. There is a humorless quality to him, an anger brimming just beneath the surface. He has no tolerance for foolishness, cares nothing for diplomacy, and despises the ronin that his father found so interesting. Even Koan, the shugenja who stayed for so long in Yoto's home, has been banished from Miya lands.

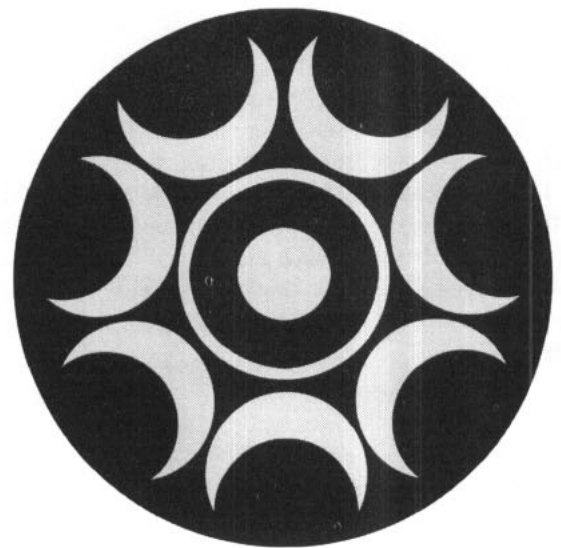
When Satoshi first arrived at the court, it was thought that the Emperor would set the boy straight. For so young a daimyo to challenge the role of an Imperial Family would certainly not be tolerated. Indeed, the Emperor summoned Satoshi to a private



MIYA SATOSHI

meeting. The entire court believed that their predictions were correct, and Satoshi would soon be set back on the proper path.

Instead, Satoshi returned brimming with confidence and courage, an odd, maniacal glint in his eye. Since meeting with the Hantei, Miya Satoshi knows exactly what he must do.



MIYA KATSU

Earth: 3

Willpower: 4

Water: 3

Fire: 4

Air: 3

Void: 3

School/Rank: Miya Shisha 3

Honor: 2.6

Glory: 2.9

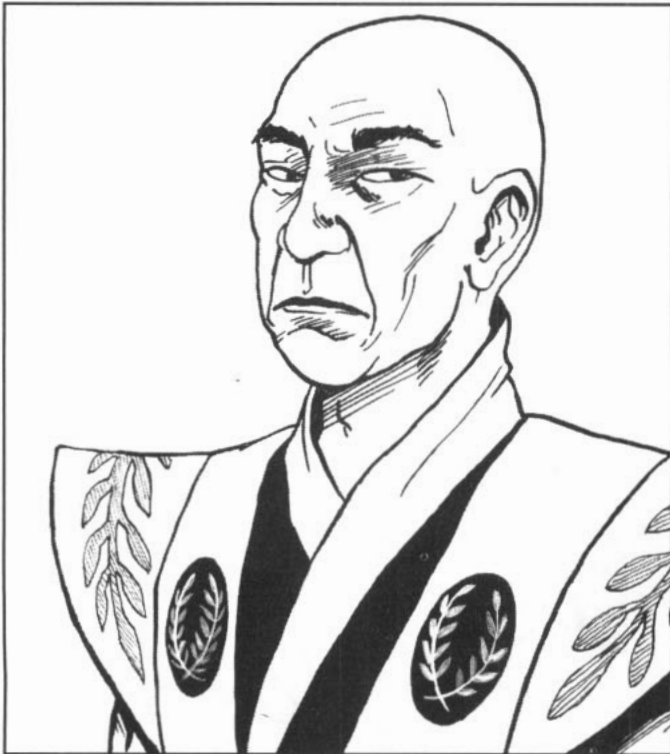
Advantages: Clear Thinker, Irreproachable 3, Kharmic Tie (Usagi Ozaki) 1, Social Position (Emerald Magistrate), Way of the Land (Phoenix), Way of the Land (Scorpion)

Disadvantages: Contrary, Driven (to enforce the cause of justice), Meddler

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 1, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Heraldry 3, Horsemanship 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 4, Law 3

Miya Katsu is an orderly man. He is a deliberate man. He is a thorough man. He is a strict man. And now, for the first time in his life, he is a confused man.

Two years ago, the Emerald Champion gave Katsu a mission: find and bring to justice the man who murdered a Phoenix magistrate. Initially, the clues led him unerringly to the trail of a ronin bandit named Ozaki. Witnesses had seen him enter the magistrate's home; others had seen him emerge after the fire,



MIYA KATSU

carrying something in his arms. Katsu arrived only a moment too late to catch Ozaki himself. The ronin was daring and clever, and always one step ahead.

Katsu didn't give up. Investigating his quarry's past, he learned that Ozaki was a Hare, the last man who still dared to carry the Usagi name. He had narrowly escaped the destruction of Kyuden Usagi and shortly afterward seemed to have disappeared. Digging deeper, he learned that Ozaki's sister Tomoe had survived as well. She was to have married general Bayushi Tomaru, but had vanished as well shortly after the Usagi Massacre. Tomaru stubbornly refused to discuss the topic, and vehemently ordered Katsu to leave his domain.

Katsu began to grow irritated. Things weren't adding up. Why had the Scorpion attacked Usagi Castle? What was Ozaki doing in Phoenix territory? And how had Katsu been alerted to the crime so rapidly? In the course of his research, Katsu learned that his orders to catch Ozaki were issued before Ozaki had killed the magistrate!

Katsu knows that there is something larger going on here, and it only serves to drive him on. Only days away from tracking down Ozaki again, he has been drawn away to the Winter Court. Now he will be forced to while away the months with cronies and sycophants while the trail grows cold.

When he leaves Kyuden Kakita, Katsu has sworn he will find Ozaki. And when he does, he will find out what's really going on.

OTOMO KISAGARASU

Earth: 3

Willpower: 7

Water: 2

Perception: 4

Fire: 4

Intelligence: 5

Air: 4

Void: 4

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 4

Honor: 4.8

Glory: 4.0

Advantages: Different School, Ear of the Emperor, Major Allies (Otomo Family), Perfect Memory, Sacrosanct

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (shrew), Lost Love (husband), Meddler

Skills: Conversation 3, Courtier 5, Etiquette 4, Gossip 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Knife 1, Law 3, Manipulation 5, Painting 2, Poison 3 (occasionally brews sleeping drugs), Sadane 3, Seduction 2, Sincerity 4

Kisagarasu is one of the most fearsome individuals at Winter Court. She is an ancient widow, her skin wrinkled like old parchment. She moves with a reptilian speed that belies her age and has a venomous stare that could strip the skin from an ox. Kisagarasu resumed her maiden name after the Coup, when her Bayushi husband was put to death by the miharu. Kisagarasu

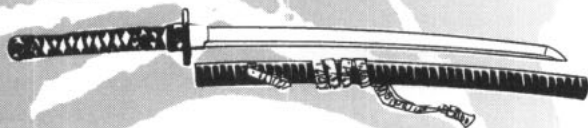


OTOMO KISAGARASU

herself was spared, as her position placed her above reproach. Otomo Kisagarasu is the Imperial Matchmaker.

This withered crone prowls the halls of the Winter Court like a hunting hawk, ever watchful for young men and ladies who stray from the bounds of propriety. Those who find displeasure in her eyes, or whose families have found disfavor with her Otomo masters, can expect to find themselves married off to a creature from their worst nightmare. No one knows how she does it. No one knows what twisted her soul so, for she acted like this even before her husband's death. One thing is undeniable: Kisagarasu has a flawless ability to stitch together the most painful, horrible, utterly detestable marriages conceivable, not just for one but for both parties involved.

Through these painful matches, the Otomo brew conflicts meant to weaken the Great Clans. The Otomo can thus marry off a potentially dangerous bachelor before his family can form a useful alliance, or simply make a grisly example to discourage others. It is said that more wars have started and ended by the



click of Kisagarasu's bracelets than by Hida Kisada and Miya Yoto combined.

But Kisagarasu does not do what she does for the Otomo. One can clearly see it in her eyes; Kisagarasu loves her job.

MIYA YUMI

Earth: 2

Willpower: 3

Water: 2

Fire: 3

Air: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Miya Shisha 2

Honor: 3.8

Glory: 1.6

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Quick, Voice, Way of the Land (Lion)

Disadvantages: Brash, Soft-hearted, Unlucky 1

Skills: Bard 4, Courtier 2, Dance 2, Defense 2, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 1, Heraldry 5, History 4, Horsemanship 2, Law 3, Obiesaseru 3, Oratory 2, Yarijutsu 2

Six years ago, Miya Yumi and her older cousin, Satoshi, were sent to the lands of the Lion to learn that proud clan's ways. Satoshi went to learn with the Matsu. Yumi was more curious about the strange old men that stood at the corners of the room,



MIYA YUMI

writing down all what they saw. These were the Ikoma Omoidasu, the bards.

The Ikoma loved Yumi. She was bright, energetic, and had a boundless capacity for learning. She tended to talk too much, but in a future diplomat such a vice was certainly excusable. She was more than eager to learn the ways of the Omoidasu, but the Ikoma refused to teach her. She was charismatic and clever; a born peacemaker. But instead, Ikoma Kaoku instructed her in the history and law of Rokugan. She learned dutifully, though her clever mind still learned a few of the old historian's tricks.

When Yumi returned home, she was startled by the changes her cousin had undergone. Satoshi was brash, temperamental, and argumentative. At home, he was openly disrespectful to his father, whom Yumi thought was the most wonderful old man in the world. When Satoshi seized control of the Miya and forced Yoto to retire, Yumi ran to her uncle's side, anger blazing in her eyes.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked him, her hand on her *nage-yari*.

Her uncle smiled sadly, which he seemed to do so much of late, and placed his hand on her shoulder. "I will be fine," Yoto said. "Worry about the Empire. Use what Kaoku has taught you. Bring peace even as Satoshi brings war."

Yumi swore that she would not fail. She is here at the Winter Court to learn about the war that seems to be brewing so that she will know where her skills will be needed. Many of those who disapprove of Satoshi's actions look at young Yumi and see hope. Satoshi has noticed her as well. Though he is publicly respectful of his cousin, he feels she is an example of the weakness that he must overcome to prove the Miya strong.

The Emperor told Satoshi that an example must be made.

ASAKO MASANAO

Earth: 3

Water: 2

Perception: 3

Fire: 3

Intelligence: 4

Air: 5

Void: 4

School/Rank: Isawa Tensai 4 (Air)

Honor: 4.2

Glory: 1.9

Advantages: Forbidden Knowledge (Inquisitor), Great Potential (Air), Inner Gift (Precognition)

Disadvantages: Driven (to punish the wicked), Bad Reputation (too driven to punish the wicked)

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Etiquette 1, History 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Maho) 5, Lore (Shadowlands) 4, Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Omens 3, Shintao 2, Theology 3

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, By the Light of Lord Moon, Command the Mind, Essence of Air, Gift of the Wind, Howl



ASAKO MASANAO

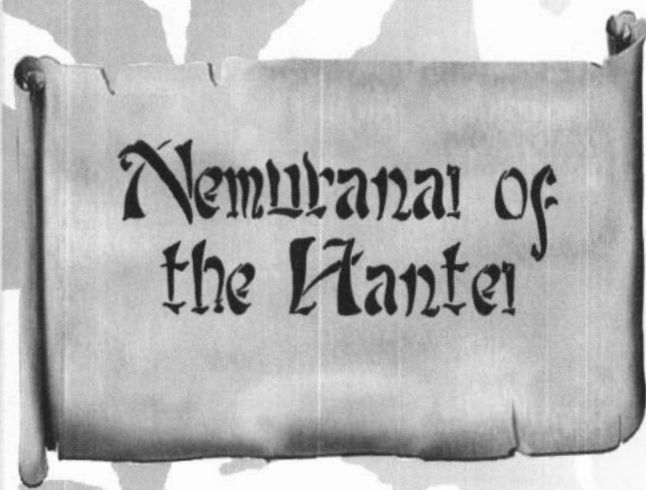
of Isora, Know the Mind, Major Binding, Minor Binding, Secrets on the Wind, Tempest of Air

Asako Masanao has no friends. "Friends interfere with duty," he says. He is a grim, pale, overbearing wraith of a man who patrols the length and breadth of Rokugan hunting the Tainted. In order to prove his dedication, Masanao has had eyes tattooed on his hands by the Dragon Clan, and refers to them as the 'seekers of truth'. The Kitsuki respect his faith in their methods, and consider him a friend in the Emperor's court. His reputation speaks for itself; in the last four years, he has personally brought 23 Tainted to the Emperor's justice. He executed more than half of those himself. His name is known and feared. Between his sharp eye and his mastery of Air there is hardly any secret he cannot divine.



Though the dark inquisitor seems out of place at Kyuden Kakita, he is a man with a mission. Shortly after the Scorpion Coup, Masanao was plagued by one of his visions, visions that come to him only in time of great evil. This one was worse than any of the others. He saw the whole of Rokugan brought to its knees. He saw the Great Clans laid low by He Who Must Not Be Named. He saw the Dark One in human guise.

Though the vision did not tell Masanao Fu Leng's mortal identity, it told him where to begin his search: Winter Court. Masanao called in a favor from the Phoenix Council of Elemental Masters, and obtained an invitation to Kyuden Kakita through their request. He knows that his quest will not be easy. He can trust no one. He would not have asked for this duty, but by the Fortunes he will complete it – or die trying.



THE EMERALD THRONE

"The purity of the Emerald Empire must not be adulterated lest the throne itself crack, and fall, and sever the trust of the Seven Great Clans and their Thunders."

—The Prophecies of Uikku

The Emerald Throne was carved from precisely cut blocks of emerald over a thousand years ago by the greatest Crane and Otomo artisans of antiquity. Its power is in its blessing: anyone who has been attuned to the throne is considered to have a +2 Intelligence, Awareness, Perception and Willpower bonus for all purposes so long as they remain attuned to the throne. Becoming attuned is quite simple and is a natural process of being Emperor. By sitting upon the throne for a mere four hours a day for one month, the throne attunes itself to the new Emperor. The spirits of the throne are obedient and loyal, seeking to enrich the lifeblood of the throne. The artisans of old guaranteed their work, saying "So long as the throne is strong and whole, so shall the empire be."

The throne is, of course, no longer strong and whole, and neither is the current Emperor, so whether its powers are still

intact is a matter of some speculation. No doubt were the current Emperor hale enough to mount the Throne, he would receive its blessings only intermittently if at all.

ANCESTRAL SWORD OF THE HANTEI

A powerful and noble item, this sword need not even be drawn for the bearer to gain its strengths, although it is a 6k4 *nemuranai* katana when unsheathed for combat.

In game terms, the bearer of this sword may use his highest Ring in place of any trait. So long as the katana is worn, this benefit may be used any number of times per day. The sword does not confer this bonus on anyone with the Shadowlands Taint or anyone with honor lower than 2. Shugenja carrying the Sword of the Hantei feel a great deal of power emanating from it. A shugenja may use any Ring for any other while casting spells.

ANCESTRAL ARMOR OF THE HANTEI

This ceremonial armor is kept under constant guard in a sacred place in Otosan Uchi, enshrined within a rare glass display. There are always four Seppun *miharu* standing guard over the armor; their lives are forfeit should harm come to this treasured item.

When the first Hantei took the throne, all manner of samurai sought to shower him with gifts as a sign of respect. Kaiu Chuke, one of the first Kaiu's most talented followers, created the perfect armor that would last the centuries. Later blessed by Imperial shugenja, the armor has rarely left its display, being taken out only during coronations and significant imperial ceremonies. In all this time, it has never faded, rusted or splintered. It is a testament to the hands of the Kaiu and the faith of the Miya.

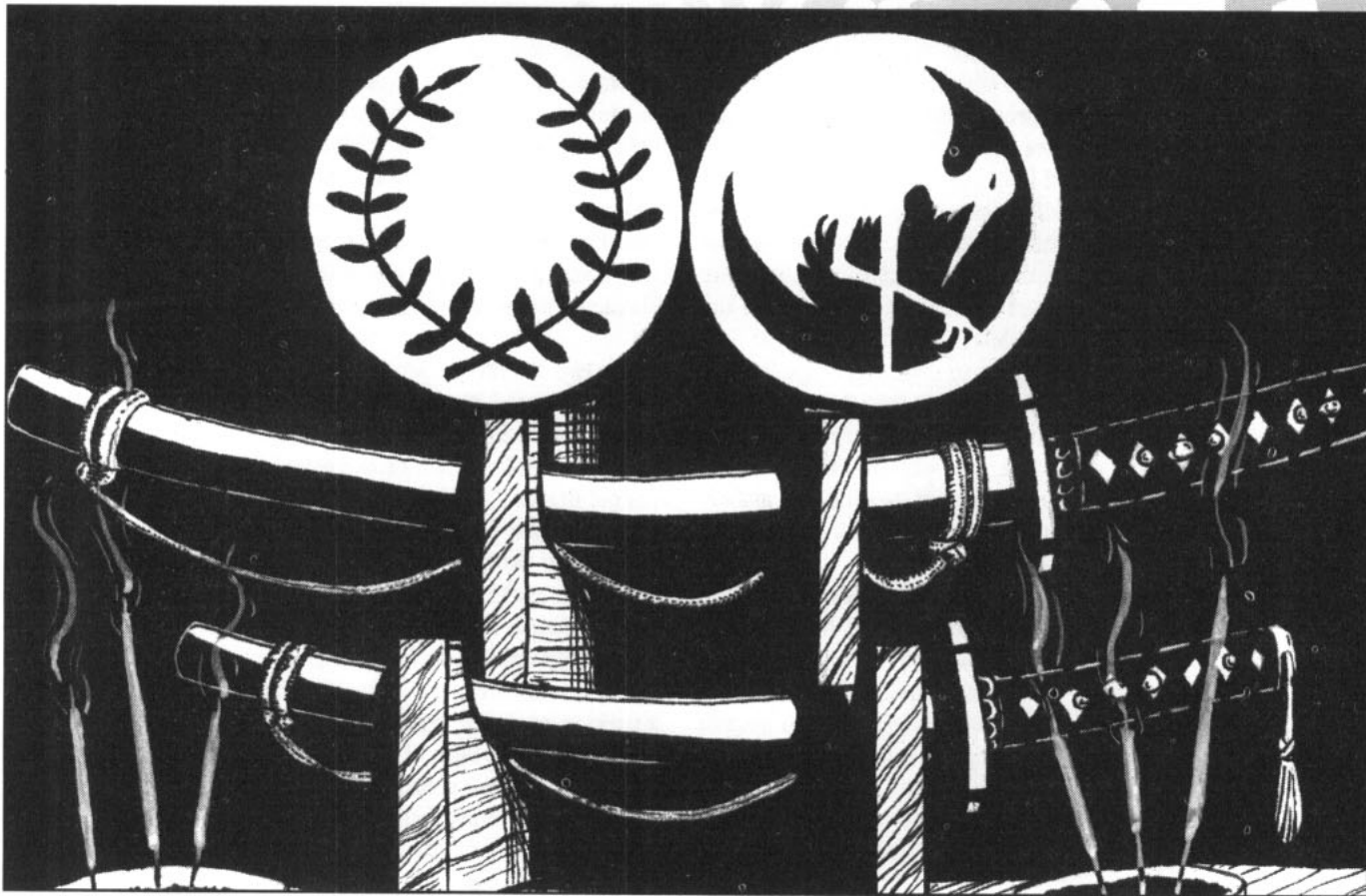
While worn, the armor increases the glory of the wearer by 3 full Ranks and provides him with the Obiesaseru skill at Rank 5.

ANCESTRAL SWORD OF THE SEPPUN

Honorable, loyal and tempered, the Seppun represent the highest degree of morality among the Imperial lines. As such, they have the honor protecting the Hantei and are responsible for the blessed katana known as "Fijimira's Glory." The story of Seppun Fijimira is familiar to all scribes and historians of the Imperial Court. Eight centuries ago, Seppun Fijimira snatched from the air a poisoned arrow intended for the Emperor's son. Fijimira bowed and removed the offending arrow from the room, sending guards to find the assassin. Four days later, he died in his chamber from the contact poison that had been meant for whoever would pull the arrow from the Hantei's body.

The capital's greatest healers tried desperately to save Fijimira in those last moments, but his body succumbed nevertheless. The proud and honorable Hantei demanded an explanation, and when none could be offered, he demanded action. The sword of Fijimira was the Imperial response.

Every bearer of Fijimira's sword has died protecting the Emperor within three years of first drawing it; it is the price of carrying such a blade. In addition to granting the bearer two



additional unkept initiative dice, the samurai also earns the Combat Reflexes advantage for free. The wielder's TN to be hit is as if he were always on Full Defense, no matter what action he actually takes.

In addition, the bearer receives two additional unkept dice when trying to resist toxins or poisons in the body. GMs are encouraged to have the spirit of Fijimira visit and speak with the samurai, always haranguing him to be more alert and ready.

GOHURI'S JADE GOBLET

There is a children's story of a strange visitor to the wedding of an Emperor's daughter. The ceremony was the most beautiful and lavish event that had ever been seen on the face of the Empire, and afterward the guests waited patiently for their turn to see the beautiful bride. Scores of samurai and courtiers lined the walkway to the temple. As the storytellers phrase it, "The streets were filled with the honor of the empire."

One man dared step from the throngs of samurai lining the streets; he climbed onto the Emperor's Road and walked past everyone. As he neared the Imperial family, guards leapt to attention and drew their swords to discipline the cur that would dare set foot upon the Imperial road. The Captain of the Guard came forward and ushered the interloper away from the Imperial Family.

Seeing that the man was frail and could do no harm, the Captain asked the stranger calmly why he had disturbed the wedding. In response, the stranger held out a partially wrapped goblet. His hands wrung at the wrinkled paper and flecks of soft jade crushed in his palms.

"I have had a vision. The empire's worth will not fit into this cup."

The Captain laughed at this unusual statement. "Explain your riddle, old man."

The old man grew bold and stood up a little taller. "If you can fill this goblet, then I shall give you the Empire."

The Captain laughed again. "Such a thing cannot be given. Certainly not by a man like you."

"The same can be said of you filling the goblet."

In a sudden fit of anger, the Captain drew his sword and killed the old man. The goblet was crushed under the guards' feet and thrown into a trash heap. The incident was never mentioned and the wedding proceeded undisturbed.

Days later, the bride was sorting through her gifts, aided by her three attendants, when she came upon a crude jade goblet. It had no markings and looked as if it had seen a great deal of use. Not finding any use for the gift and not remembering anyone giving it to her, she left it for her attendants to take.

That night her attendants played a small game of chance to see who would get the cup. The game grew angry, and then violent. As tempers rose, the three attendants fought with fists, and then with stones. They bludgeoned one another to death and when morning came the bodies of the attendants lay in their chamber, completely drained of blood.

The Captain of the Guard was summoned. Upon entering the room, he immediately recognized the goblet as the one the old man had carried. He demanded to know: how had the thing gotten into the palace? None had an answer for him, and the imperial sycophants lowered their heads in shame.

Imperial shugenja were brought in to inspect the goblet. They took the goblet away to research in private, but they too would die by their own hands. Several more attempts were made to learn the goblet's secret. Each time, the only answer was death. For months, the Imperial court struggled to find an answer without disturbing the Emperor with the news of an evil cup somewhere in the city.

One day, the Captain recalled the old man's riddle. The Captain took the goblet to the Emperor. Without hesitation he knelt before the Emperor and said, "If you can fill this goblet, then I shall give you the Empire." The initial response of the Emperor was as might be expected, and the Captain almost found himself without a head. But this story has a happy ending.

The Emperor lifted his *sakezuki* pitcher, and attempted to pour water into the cup, but the water drained and vanished as quickly as it was poured. Within seconds, the cup was dry, and no sign of the water remained.

Astounded, the Emperor summoned his finest shugenja to speak to the spirits of the cup, but it did not whisper to their spells, and no spirit seemed to exist within its jade form. Whatever liquid was placed into it vanished, and no solid matter – food, silk, or paper – could be placed into the bowl of the jade goblet at all.

The jade goblet remains a mystery, and a small shrine has been built to house the artifact. It is considered a great enigma to the Empire, and is the purpose of many pilgrimages to the Imperial City.

Anyone who visits the shrine where the goblet rests, and successfully fills the cup (GM's discretion; we aren't going to tell you how it should be done) gains a one-time bonus of 10 XP and 15 Insight.



THE GHOST OF A THOUSAND HUNGRY EYES

Exactly one hundred and forty-one years ago, an Isawa diplomat and shugenja named Hakagure was murdered while sleeping in the Imperial Palace, his throat slit in the middle of the night. A gruesome scene was left for the Asako scribes to find the next morning. For several days the Ikoma and Asako argued over the exact details of the death and how it would be recorded. After a week of deliberations, the Hantei ordered the two camps to stop their arguing and to write twelve words into the history books: "Hakagure passed in his sleep. The Empire shall miss his watchful eye."

For two months nothing was said about Hakagure's passing, and the imperial historians whispered that his name should be stricken from the true records. Worse yet, a plot was forming among two disloyal Ikoma to murder the emperor in the same manner that the "too-knowing" Hakagure had died. In the dark of night, after the Emperor had gone to rest early from a bout of nausea, two Ikoma slipped past the night sentries and visited their noble leader.

Once inside the Emperor's chambers, these two samurai in name only nevertheless found themselves unready to murder the Son of Heaven. Before they could rethink their actions, a ghostly apparition appeared, crackling with white fire and smoky lights, hovering over the form of the sleeping Emperor. Rooted with fear, the two did not move. Shadows moved across their faces with no light source to throw them. The ghost came closer and stole the breath from their mouths: their screams were never heard, their bodies never found.

That morning the Emperor found in his chamber a single stone tablet with the name "Hakagure" etched into one side and "Guardian" on the other. Perhaps somehow aware of his narrow escape, he had the tablet framed and displayed. Never again would there be an attack against the Emperor in his bed chamber.

THE TABLET OF HAKAGURE

Hakagure is a benevolent gaki of great power. While a noble and honorable samurai rests near the tablet, no harm will come to them. Those that would seek to attack a samurai of Honor 3 or higher who sleeps under the Tablet of Hakagure will be visited by the Ghost of a Thousand Hungry Eyes. None that have seen it have lived, but it is understood to be a powerful image and an evocative spirit.

Earth 3

Fire 4

Air 4

Awareness 6

Water 3

Perception 8

Rolls when attacking: 8k4

Rolls for damage: 10k4

TN to be hit: 20

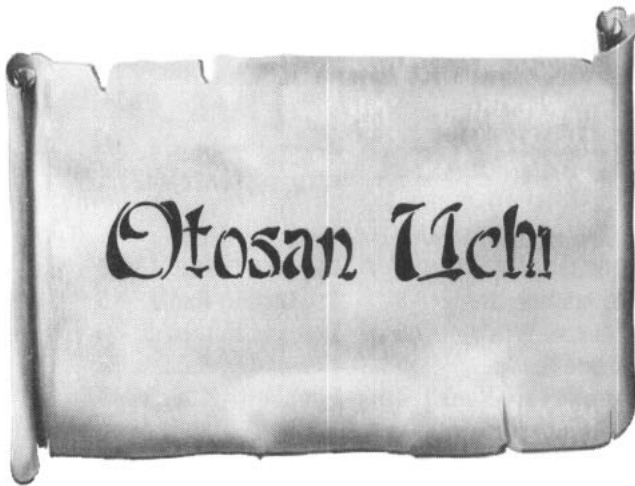
Wounds per level: 30: -1, 75: -2, 120: Destroyed

Special abilities: Hakagure cannot be harmed by non-magical means.

THE CHIME OF THE HEAVENS

The Chime of the Heavens is a small bronze and silver chime carved with a hundred tiny kanji, each dedicated to a celestial kami. When struck by a shugenja of Rank 3 or higher, the sound of the chime resonates as a hundred songbirds echoing through an empty chamber. All that hear it (within 300 feet) are overcome with a calming feeling as if Calm Mind had been cast. In addition, all Void Points are restored and the samurai must spend 1 Action doing nothing.

If the Chime is struck by anyone other than a Rank 3 (or more) shugenja, the chime makes a small imperceptible ring without any magical effect.



Warning: The following pages contain material that was first presented as the aftermath of "The Scorpion's Sting," the adventure included in the Otosan Uchi boxed set. Players and Gamemasters are forewarned that reading this section will spoil any surprises encountered therein.

In the two years since the Scorpion Clan Coup, the Imperial City of Otosan Uchi has suffered through a trying time. Following the Coup, most of the Outer City lay in ruins, the Imperial Palace gutted by fire, and thousands of the city's defenders (more than eighty percent of its peacetime garrison strength) had been decimated. A new Emperor – the former Sotorii – sat upon the Emerald Throne, and much of the ruling strength of the city had been lost to betrayal, murder, or random death.

But today, the Imperial City has been returned to its former glory, and the Six Great Clans are once again content to bow to the leadership of their mighty Emperor. Things have returned to normal within the Capital. The brilliant veneer that once defended Rokugan's throne of power from all opposition has been restored, once again the confluence of trade, military strength, and courtly intrigue.

The following sections contain updated information regarding the reconstruction of Otosan Uchi – district by district – along with a few plot hooks for characters to become embroiled in. Descriptions of new governors are provided when appropriate (usually because the governor at the time the boxed set was presented either died or were deposed during or following the Coup). Notes about Otosan Uchi's revised security protocols are also presented, along with updated rankings for each district.

Hayasu District

District Rank:	8	Imperial Rank:	8
Population Rank:	3	Production Rank:	3
Relative Wealth:	8	Political Influence:	8
Crime Rank:	6	Corruption Rank:	3
Appearance Rank:	5	Popularity Rank:	8

Prior to the Scorpion Clan Coup, the Hayasu District set the standard for breeding, wealth, military strength, and courtly grace together into one unblemished whole. Today, it remains among the highest-regarded districts of the Outer City. Largely untouched during the fighting of the Coup, Hayasu required even less refurbishing than the Ekohikei Districts (see page 122); its streets remain clean, its citizens and guardsmen are orderly, and its government is efficient and timely.

Following the Coup, Hayasu spearheaded the movement to reorganize and revitalize the Outer City's defenses. While many in the Imperial Court demanded a return to "the Empire's roots", seeing the Outer City as an untamed frontier too vulnerable to adequately protect from invaders, Shinjo Hayasu and her coterie of bushi fought for more attention and resources, Imperial advisors for the troops of the Outer City, and to fill the gaps in the Outer Wall.

Eventually, they were heard. Governor Hayasu's valiant magistrates and yoriki had ensured that no attack on their district during the Coup was successful, and they had even formed a "people's militia" (with ashigaru drawn directly from the eta villages beyond the Outer Wall), which helped to liberate Toyotomi from the Scorpion invaders. Their example was not lost on the Imperial Court, who eventually sided with them to improve the Outer City's defenses.

Today, the few samurai heroes who survived the Coup have been promoted to command status within Otosan Uchi, leading the training of *Hitobito Shimingun* ("people's militia") units across the city. The defenses of every district of the Outer City is now supplemented by patrols of ashigaru (commonly heimin and hinin, trained to use peasant weapons and tactics against mass invaders). Law enforcement and small-scale disruptions are still handled by Imperial Magistrates and guardsmen, however, so these troops are not regularly called upon.

Modern Hayasu is not without its flaws, however. In the wake of the Scorpion Clan Coup, with so much of the Outer City being

guttled, leveled, and rebuilt, it was difficult for many established criminals – who rely upon front-organizations and secondary trade through merchant quarters – to elude the attention of local authorities. Many gangs, opium rings, and smugglers were revealed during the rebuilding, and eliminated.

Yet one flourished. The Kolat – who were already based beneath the Hayasu District (see *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 85) – simply went into hiding until the city's operations returned to normal. Once the trade quarters of the various districts were rebuilt and reopened, the conspiracy (who had influenced many of the architects and builders) moved in and started again where they left off. Today, the Kolat web in Otosan Uchi is as convoluted as ever, but every strand eventually leads back to the Hayasu District, where Otaku Hitoshi – Governor Hayasu's second-in-command – lords over them with an iron fist (see *Beneath Otosan Uchi*, page 122).

SHINJO HAYASU, DISTRICT GOVERNOR

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 17

Improved Statistics: School Rank 5; Earth 4, Strength 4; Kenjutsu 4, Law 4, Leadership 3

Higshikawa District

District Rank:	7	Imperial Rank:	6
Population Rank:	7	Production Rank:	7
Relative Wealth:	7	Political Influence:	6
Crime Rank:	4	Corruption Rank:	7
Appearance Rank:	4	Popularity Rank:	6

The Higshikawa District has gone through perhaps the most severe reinvention since the Coup, even though its governor remains in place. Born of the Shosuro family, Governor Mukai realized the horrible depths of his own betrayal as the Scorpion swept through the city streets. The terrible atrocities he witnessed his own kin committing within his portside district eliminated any devotion he had to his new mother-in-law, Shiba Shineba (see *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 27).

Mukai used the connections his mother-in-law had established for him as a weapon to fight the Scorpion and return the glory he once knew to Otosan Uchi. He offered to swear fealty to the Otomo in exchange for a place in the new government that would follow the Coup. He organized peasant resistance throughout Higshikawa (including the heimin who stockpiled food in Peddler's Row; see *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 78), and murdered his mother-in-law when she tried to defy his commands.

Today, Mukai is a proud member of the Otomo family, working closely with the Imperial Court at all times (he is perhaps closest of all the Outer City governors to the seat of Rokugani power). Officially, Mukai has been placed in charge of all port operations in the city, and defenses for the Bay of the

Golden Sun. This brings him in near-constant conflict with Governor Ureiko, the governor of the former Kosuga District. He is "advised" by Otomo Toreiki, an Otomo diplomat secretly grooming him as a figurehead for his family.

OTOMO MUKAI, DISTRICT GOVERNOR

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 27

Improved Statistics: School Rank 3; Air 3, Fire 3, Void 3; Courtier 4, Sincerity 4

OTOMO TOREIKI, IMPERIAL ADVISOR

Rank 4 Otomo Seiyaku; Air 4, Earth 3, Willpower 5, Fire 4, Intelligence 5, Water 3, Perception 5, Void 3

Notable Skills: Acting 3, Appraisal 3, Cipher 3, Calligraphy 4, Courtier 4, Etiquette 4, History 2, Kenjutsu 3, Law 4, Manipulation 5, Obiesaseru 5, Oratory 3, Shintao 3, Sincerity 4

Other Options: Allies (many within the Forbidden City), Blackmail (to hold over Mukai's head), Cruel

Hojize District

(Formerly the Hinjaku and Hojize Districts)

District Rank:	5	Imperial Rank:	5
Population Rank:	5	Production Rank:	5
Relative Wealth:	5	Political Influence:	3
Crime Rank:	6	Corruption Rank:	4
Appearance Rank:	4	Popularity Rank:	3

The northwestern quarter of the Outer City has traditionally been carved into two separate regions. Though they are considered a single district by the Imperial Court, their social strata, financial strengths, and resources are grossly unequal. At the time of the Scorpion Clan Coup, the more affluent of the two, Hojize, was administered by a callous and greedy merchant, who had "gifted" the other to his ill-respected cousin, Hinjaku.

The cousins hated each other and waged a personal war of defamation and inconvenience between their territories. But when the fighting began, they were forced to pool their resources, finally overcoming their familial hatred. During the final hours of the Coup, Hojize died of a massive heart attack, leaving his territory to Hinjaku. Many believed that Hojize's dying bequest would not be honored due to Hinjaku's inexperience and lack of social grace, but an honored Lion bushi and close friend to the Imperial Court, Matsuo Hokitare, stepped in to speak for his ability.

Hokitare had spent several months prior to the Coup in the field, defending his lady Tsuko from Crane aggression. But a lingering wound had forced him to retire from that post, and he returned to the Imperial Capital several days before the Coup began, seeking the solace of Hinjaku's funeral grounds. Hokitare personally witnessed the Dragon governor take charge against the Scorpion; from the very beginning, Hinjaku opposed Shojū's forces, even fielding eta and heimin against the invading menace.

Before his death (several days after the Coup), Matsu Hokitare spoke in Hinjaku's defense within the Imperial Palace. The debt owed to Hokitare for uncovering an earlier Scorpion plot against the Empire (see *Way of the Lion*, page 76) was enough to convince the court, and so – for the first time in the Imperial City's history – one governor ruled both territories.

Hinjaku retained the name "Hojize" for the newly combined district, in honor of his fallen cousin. He also dedicated half of his resources to establishing several temples, shrines, torii arches, and other holy sites within the Hojize District, to continue their family's strict devotion to Shintao and the Fortunes. Today, religious pilgrimages to the Hojize area are nearly as common as to Mojiki District (see page 120), and Hojize is recognized as one of the principal sacred sites in the Empire.

Hojize's focus remains with the dead and dying, however. With his newfound resources, Governor Hinjaku has been able to clean up the eta villages, crematorium, and lost shrines at the northwestern edge of the Imperial City, ensuring that they appear just as dignified as the mercantile and military establishments in his district. More and more bushi – as well as those of higher and higher Glory – visit before their imminent deaths, or ask to be interred here. Many such visitors are veterans of the Lion-Crane war, who often lend insight to the newly formed peasant militias stationed here (see Hayasu District, page 117).

MIRUMOTO HINJAKU, DISTRICT GOVERNOR

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 31

Improved Statistics: School Rank 3; Air 3, Fire 3, Void 3; Courtier 4, Sincerity 4

Juramashi District

District Rank:	5	Imperial Rank:	5
Population Rank:	6	Production Rank:	5
Relative Wealth:	7	Political Influence:	3
Crime Rank:	6	Corruption Rank:	5
Appearance Rank:	3	Popularity Rank:	2

The Juramashi District has had no governor for nearly two years. Following the Coup, the Governor Seppun Meiyori was deposed by Emperor Hantei XXXIX. The Otomo family, who had recommended that Meiyori be removed, were unable to convince the Imperial Court to accept their proposed replacement (an Imperial sycophant clearly without merit). The attentions of the Imperial Court soon turned to rebuilding the city, then restructuring its defense, and so on, until the fact that Juramashi lacked a governor was nearly forgotten.

As the district can operate on its own for extended periods of time, relying upon its gokenin and support staff to collect taxes, and local magistrates to enforce justice, finding a replacement governor never became a concern. One problem after another

diverted the attention of court diplomats, leaving Juramashi to fend for itself.

All things considered, Juramashi has fared well. Lower Juramashi (also known as South Juramashi) has been rebuilt by the citizens, merchants, and priests who live and work there. Upper Juramashi remains a primarily residential area for those of high standing, its borders now constantly patrolled by yojimbo privately hired by its occupants. It is rumored that Upper Juramashi will eventually secede, forming a new district in Otosan Uchi, but no solid evidence of this has yet come to light.

Mamoru District

(Formerly known as the Meiyoko District)

District Rank:	6	Imperial Rank:	6
Population Rank:	5	Production Rank:	6
Relative Wealth:	7	Political Influence:	7
Crime Rank:	5	Corruption Rank:	2
Appearance Rank:	7	Popularity Rank:	8

The conditions in the Mamoru District have improved more since the Coup than anywhere else in Otosan Uchi. Present governor Mamoru, formerly Yogo Mamoru, has fulfilled many of Shosuro Meiyoko's intentions, cleaning up much of his new holding and disposing of many illicit elements hidden beneath its surface.

Haven (Location 428) and the Ivy Palace (Location 429) were both destroyed during the fighting, and took the two largest criminal footholds in the district – the lieutenants of local oyabun Ide Tenseko – with them. Neither has been rebuilt; instead, the properties have been used to expand the Komichi equine park (Location 430), which is now considered a favorite place to spend time in the Imperial City.

The corrupted monk, Tetsudai, has been found and put to death for his crimes during the Coup, and the tunnel he used to smuggle Scorpion troops beneath the Miwaku Kabe has been collapsed. Daraku – the self-serving courtier using the Imperial courts as his own personal playground – was eventually caught trying to bribe the city guard, arrested, and imprisoned in the Palace of Remorse (Location 375).

By the same token, much good has been accomplished by the new governor of the district, Mamoru. Retired until the Coup and Meiyoko's subsequent disappearance, Mamoru has chosen to command this part of the Imperial city until "the work Meiyoko started is finished."

Mamoru is wise beyond his years and has the benefit of observing (and often advising) two former governors of this district. Further, many of the local residents know and trust Mamoru, lending him support, services, and suggestions whenever possible. For instance, the famed swordsmith Toshiyori (Location 456) has aided in arming and training the district guards, as well as clearing and filling the old ruins of Yogo

Tenari's estate (423), and using them as a military staging ground. Today, district guards are posted at this site at all times, supplementing (and therefore ingratiating) the troops stationed at the Northern Miwaku Kabe (Location 761).

Mamoru has also completed the Makoto Wall (Location 444), separating his territory from that of Governor Teketshin to the west, and the Palace of Remorse. Between this and the staging grounds at Location 423, the Mamoru District has effectively been sealed off from all districts other than Higshikawa, which supports Mamoru in all things... for now.

Governor Mamoru continues to live in his personal home (as before his promotion), refusing to move into Meiyoko's palatial estate. Publically, he claims that he is "saving" the governor's estate for a time when he can pass the district on to someone "worthy of the honor", but close advisors and friends know better. Mamoru is heartbroken that he has lost not one, but two personal friends to this district (Meiyoko and her father, whom he advised), and his decision is compelled by grief.

(YOGO) MAMORU, DISTRICT GOVERNOR

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 56

Improved Statistics: Fire 5, Water 3, Stamina 4; Archery 3, Defense 4, Law 4, Lore (Otosan Uchi) 4

SOSHI SARU, HATAMOTO TO GOVERNOR MAMORU

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 58

Improved Statistics: Void 5, Intelligence 4, Perception 5; Law 3, Lore (District Governors) 5

Mejiki District

(Formerly known as the Ochiyo District)

District Rank:	8	Imperial Rank:	8
Population Rank:	6	Production Rank:	2
Relative Wealth:	7	Political Influence:	8
Crime Rank:	0	Corruption Rank:	0
Appearance Rank:	9	Popularity Rank:	9

Prior to the Scorpion Clan Coup, Governor Asako Ochiyo sequestered himself within a warehouse he acquired (Location 656), secretly working on a statue of Lady Sun, whom he had seen in a vision. None save his hatamoto and adopted son Takao was allowed inside the building, nor were any even aware that he suffered from such dementia.

The Coup brought terrible tragedy upon the Ochiyo District, as Scorpion forces descended upon a group of monks who refused to allow them into the Temple of the Sun Goddess to bless one of their fallen bushi. The monks' deaths sparked widespread retribution across the district, which had remained largely untouched throughout the opening days of the Coup. Holy relics,

shrines, and temples were destroyed in the ensuing violence, stripping Otosan Uchi of many irreplaceable sites and icons.

Governor Ochiyo was nowhere to be found throughout the fighting, hidden within his makeshift studio. Takao did his best to put an end to the fighting, but was disregarded as "merely a child assuming the role of a man," the same reasoning which would prevent him from replacing Asako Ochiyo as governor.

The district was not, however, defenseless. Seppun Mojiki – who had long sought the position of governor – was pivotal in easing tensions between the Scorpion invaders and the religious castes before the Coup's end, and went on to establish order in the days following Shoju's death. Consequently, Mojiki was offered the governorship by Hantei XXXIX shortly thereafter, and has administered this area ever since.

Takao lobbied to remain the district hatamoto, a request he was eventually (some would say reluctantly) granted. Though his dedication to his studies with the Elemental Masters keeps him away more than he would like, Takao remains a prominent figure in Otosan Uchi's political forum, periodically speaking on behalf of many lesser-known religious groups across the city.

As for former Governor Ochiyo, little is known. When he failed to defend (or even distract himself with) his district's problems during the Coup, he was dismissed, and many cast him out of mind. "Just another Asako madman to ignore," some said. Nearly a year after the Coup, Ochiyo emerged from his workshop, his masterpiece complete. He spoke only to Takao, and then only long enough to donate the remarkable statue he had chiseled to the Temple of the Sun Goddess (Location 709), where he is said to reside to this day. None have ever seen Ochiyo walking the halls of the magnificent temple, nor heard his voice, but the devout are certain he is still there.

SEPPUN MOJIKI, DISTRICT GOVERNOR

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 62

Improved Statistics: School Rank 4; Air 3, Void 3, Willpower 3, Perception 3; Calligraphy 2, Law 4, Lore (Politics) 4, Oratory 4, Sincerity 5, Theology 4

TAKAO, DISTRICT HATAMOTO

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 62

Improved Statistics: School Rank 3; Air 3, Earth 4, Fire 6, Water 4, Void 4; Astrology 3, Meditation 4, Oratory 3, Shintao 4, Sincerity 3, Theology 3

ASAKO OCHIYO, ASAKO FUSHIHAI

Reference Location: *Otosan Uchi: Book One*, page 61

Improved Statistics: School Rank 5; Air 5, Void 6, Perception 4; Craft (Sculpting) 5, Investigation 3, Lore (Amaterasu) 5, Lore (Asako) 3, Shintao 5; Contrary

Ochiyo is a Rank 5 Asako "fushihai" (as described on page 65 of *Way of the Phoenix*). He is therefore considered to be one step along the Path of Man away from apotheosis – the point at which he will ascend to godhood and become a Minor Fortune.

Teketshin District

(Formerly known as the Toyotomi District)

District Rank:	3	Imperial Rank:	4
Population Rank:	5	Production Rank:	6
Relative Wealth:	5	Political Influence:	5
Crime Rank:	5	Corruption Rank:	4
Appearance Rank:	6	Popularity Rank:	7

Toyotomi's political, social, and military strength was decimated during the Scorpion Clan Coup. Governor Toyotomi himself was assassinated by a Scorpion spy. Both his chief advisors were killed during the fighting. His troops were slaughtered in the streets, defending Otsan Uchi from the invading forces of the Scorpion. And countless courtiers, diplomats, and peace-makers were lost with huge swaths of the populace when the armies of the Six Clans burst through the Outer Wall and finally engaged Shoji's minions.

Toyotomi District (now known as Teketshin, after its new Isawa governor) was leveled during the Coup – burned, collapsed, and trampled until little remained of the beauty and order it formerly possessed. More than half of its residents were dragged away by eta after Shoji's fall, and there were virtually no resources left to rebuild.

Without the help of its neighbors, Mamoru and Hojize, this area might have been lost forever. But in the memory of Shiba Toyotomi's remarkable passion, his dream has been restored – one painful step at a time.

Chief among this district's saviors has been the Tortoise Clan, who devoted almost a full year to clearing away the rubble and starting over. Today, thanks to their efforts, Teketshin District has been erected anew, with dozens of new businesses, courts, merchant plazas, shrines and temples, and inns. Many of the residents who fled the area when the fighting began, or relatives of those who died when the fires started, are trickling back home now, ready to begin again.

Governor Tekenshin is a humble man, with simple aspirations. He reads his predecessor's field journals with unparalleled focus, seeking the wisdom that made Toyotomi's administration so special. Teketshin looks on Shiba Toyotomi was a masterful martyr, which only further draws him into the hearts of long-time and returning residents of the area. "Though Shiba Toyotomi was here only a brief time," Teketshin once said, "his presence will be felt among us always. He is the reason we are all here today."

ISAWA TEKENSIN, DISTRICT GOVERNOR

Rank 3 Isawa Shugenja; Air 3, Awareness 5, Earth 3, Fire 4, Water 3, Void: 4

Notable Skills: Bard 2, Calligraphy 4, Courtier 3, Etiquette 4, History 2, Law 2, Lore (Shugenja) 3, Poetry 3, Shintao 4, Sincerity 2, Spellcraft 3, Tea Ceremony 4

Other Options: Elemental Attunement (Air)

Yatoshin District

(Formerly known as the Kosuga and Tsai Districts)

District Rank:	6	Imperial Rank:	8
Population Rank:	4	Production Rank:	5
Relative Wealth:	5	Political Influence:	5
Crime Rank:	3	Corruption Rank:	8
Appearance Rank:	4	Popularity Rank:	5

Control of the Kosuga District (formerly two "sub-districts" administered by separate governors, and the Tsai District, whose governor betrayed the Empire during the Coup) is now firmly in the hands of Yotsu Ureiko of the Falcon Clan, who gave the new united district the name her sub-district had carried. Just over a year ago – long after the Otomo secretly gained control of the Higshikawa District (see page 118) – Ureiko approached the Imperial House with a plan: they would force the angry and willful Hida Kosuga into wedlock with her, and she would bow to their needs in the future. This plan was ideal for the Otomo, who would thereafter gain sole Imperial control over both port districts in the city.

The Otomo offered Hida Kosuga command of several field units patrolling the Plains of Fast Trouble to the northwest of Otsan Uchi, promising that he would never have to deal with the courtiers of the Imperial City again. All he had to do was marry Yotsu Ureiko, bringing her into one of the Great Clans. Kosuga quickly accepted this post, regardless of the personal sacrifice that came with it, and has remained in that position ever since.

Governor Yureiko has since worked to cement her control of her territories, maintaining them as separate 'sub-districts' to keep things orderly and neat. The Imperial Mint remains the focus of the territory previously governed by Kosuga, while the port city and trade masters remain part of her own well-oiled machine.

The Tsai areas – largely untouched during the Coup since the former governor's troops garrisoned the area while he went to ground – remain a profitable (and highly crime-ridden) zone of trade and leisure. Many residents of Tsai's former district refuse Ureiko's administration, operating independently more often than not. She allows them to do so, so long as they pay their taxes.

So far, the Otomo have not required much of Yureiko, permitting her reputation to grow before calling upon her. But soon, that will change. Very soon...

HIDA KOSUGA, IMPERIAL TAISA (CAPTAIN)

Reference Location: *Otsan Uchi: Book One*, page 49

Improved Statistics: Reflexes 3; Battle 3, Horsemanship 3, Kenjutsu 4

YOTSU UREIKO, DISTRICT GOVERNOR

Reference Location: *Otsan Uchi: Book One*, page 50

Improved Statistics: School Rank 3; Earth 3, Water 3, Void 3; Acting 4, Courtier 4, Kenjutsu 4, Seduction 4

The Ekohikei Districts

The four districts surrounding the Forbidden City suffered greatly during the final hours of the Coup, as fully half the structures between the Miwaku Kabe and the walls around the Imperial Palace grounds were burned, toppled, or otherwise brought down. Lack of emergency support teams inside the Enchanted Walls increased the devastation.

The Hito District was hardest hit; nearly every building and well over half of the territory's residents were lost. Lion and Unicorn forces – long held in check by the superior position and numbers of the Scorpion invaders – swept through the area, excising the betrayers with extreme prejudice. Battle Maidens and Berserkers brought in to reinforce the weakened Six Great Armies became unmanageable as they witnessed the carnage and destruction left behind by the Scorpion, and consequently inflicted nearly as much damage themselves. In the end, the only major structure left standing in this area of the capital was the Northern Enchanted Wall, which still required massive internal work. The Hito District has been in the process of rebuilding ever since, and is not expected to return to its former glory for some time yet to come.

Conversely, the Karada District was largely untouched by the attacking forces. Shoji expressed very little interest in controlling the area, and so the liberating forces found little resistance there. Most Karada buildings survived the Coup untouched, including the famed Yasuki trading grounds, the Crab Embassy, Shinden Yaruki Jukko, and the Imperial Museum of Antiquities.

The Kanjo District suffered terrible losses along all its bordering streets and neighborhoods, but somehow its interior remained untouched throughout most of the fighting. It is believed that this had something to do with the confusing, labyrinthine alleys which comprise its center, most of which are far too small to lead an effective force through. All three embassies in this district, as well as the Imperial training grounds and the holdings of the Emerald Champion, were lost and have been rebuilt in the last two years.

Chisei was the least affected by the conflict. Only structures along the Road of the Most High (Location 563) and the Forbidden City's wall were damaged, and most of those could be repaired rather than rebuilt. The Crane Embassy was set aflame, but saved by the valiant efforts of Crab footsoldiers, fresh from the fighting in Karada. None of the religious or social landmarks here was even touched.

Except for the Hito District (which is still reeling, the weakest link in the post-Coup Empire), the districts of the Ekohikei have largely returned to normal. Trade and court functions resumed within weeks, and armies were replenished soon after. Citizens and businesses have been trickling back in ever since.

The Forbidden City

Nearly the full perimeter of the Forbidden City was ravaged by the last desperate battles of the Scorpion Clan Coup. Traps laid by the occupying armies toppled parts of the wall onto the approaching forces of the Six Great Clans. Shugenja of the Phoenix, Crane, and others penetrated the wall with explosive fury, sending Scorpion defenders retreating into the Imperial Palace or into last-second *seppuku* attempts. Buildings closest to the walls were used as siege materials or pulled down to slow Hida Kisada's advancing armies.

The worst fighting inside the Forbidden City occurred in the south, where the Clan Guest Homes (Locations 743–745) were overrun and used as offensive bunkers from which to plan and advance upon the Scorpion. The Imperial Water Gardens and the Miya Palace were transformed into bloody battlegrounds where more blood was spilled than anywhere else inside the Inner Walls. Weeks of purification rituals and endless prayers came before, during, and after rebuilding of these sacred sites.

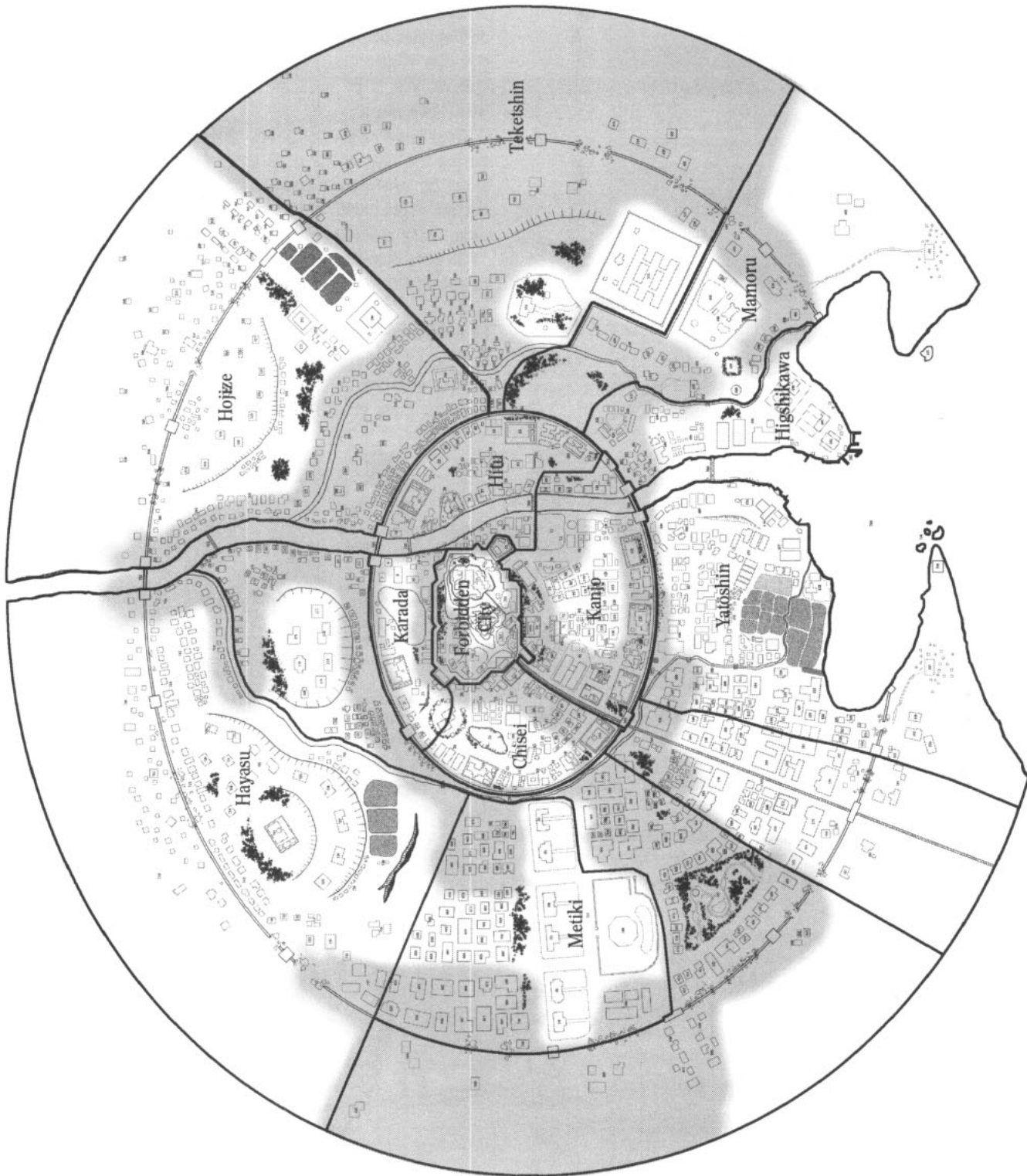
Finally, like many universally respected areas of the Imperial Capital, the Palace and the Scorpion's Tale (Location 751) were largely spared. By the time the armies of the Great Clans pierced the Scorpion defenses at the base of the Imperial Mound and began to convene around the Palace, Shoji was already hours dead and the will of the defenders was sapped. Taking the Palace was merely a matter of sweeping through its corridors for stragglers and lone terrorists.

Since the Scorpion Clan Coup, the Forbidden City has thrived. First upon the long list of areas needing attention, the Palace and surrounding grounds (including the Clan Guest Homes) were returned to their immortal beauty within one month after the Coup. The Emperor and his Court have wasted no time in restoring their strength and reasserting their will.

Beneath Otosan Uchi

Most of the tunnels and sea-caves occupied at the time of the Coup have been collapsed – either as a result of the fighting or by Imperial decree. The Emperor and his new Court see the undercity as a threat, citing Shoji's numerical strength and sudden attack as all the reason they need for “rapid renovation” down-below.

Only two areas described in the Otosan Uchi boxed set survive to this day: the Kolat operation (which has grown substantially, including some 200 operatives city-wide, mostly within and below the Hayasu District), and Ide Tenseko's private island stronghold from which all the city's oyabun operations are directed. Competitors for the Capital's illicit trade, these two grounds come into frequent conflict with one another, though mostly out of sight. Currently, the Kolat – who have been here much longer – have the advantage in this hidden criminal war.



— New District Divisions



Areas largely rebuilt after the Scorpion Clan Coup

Wandering Duelist

Three years ago, your life changed forever.

A letter arrived, addressed to your dead brother, who had perished several weeks before. It bore an Imperial seal – that of the Miya Family, who are known for their generosity and full hearts. You carefully opened the scroll, hoping against hope that it contained a release from this terrible fate you have endured...

The last of your line, you were born shortly after a bitter battle with the Tortoise that cast your father out of the Empire and made him ronin. He lived long enough to make you understand what your family had lost – all the famed accolades that were not ignored by the Imperial line and everyone else in Rokugan.

Your father wanted you to hate the Imperials for their protection of the “lower-caste” Tortoise. He wanted you to be his message to the Imperial Court – a message none of them could ever forget. But you never shared your father’s passion for hatred – nor his inability to accept your place in life.

The Imperial letter did not contain miraculous words of forgiveness for your father’s sins. It was a romantic missive from a Miya diplomat in the Imperial Court, inviting your brother to meet her there (apparently for the first time). The words she used were graceful and compelling, and the kanji delicate and coy.

You were immediately smitten, as you know your brother must have been.

Since then, you have written several return letters to her, and she has responded with blushing enthusiasm. You genuinely believe that she has similarly warm feelings for you,

and hope that – somehow – you can transcend your simple beginnings and win a place by her side.

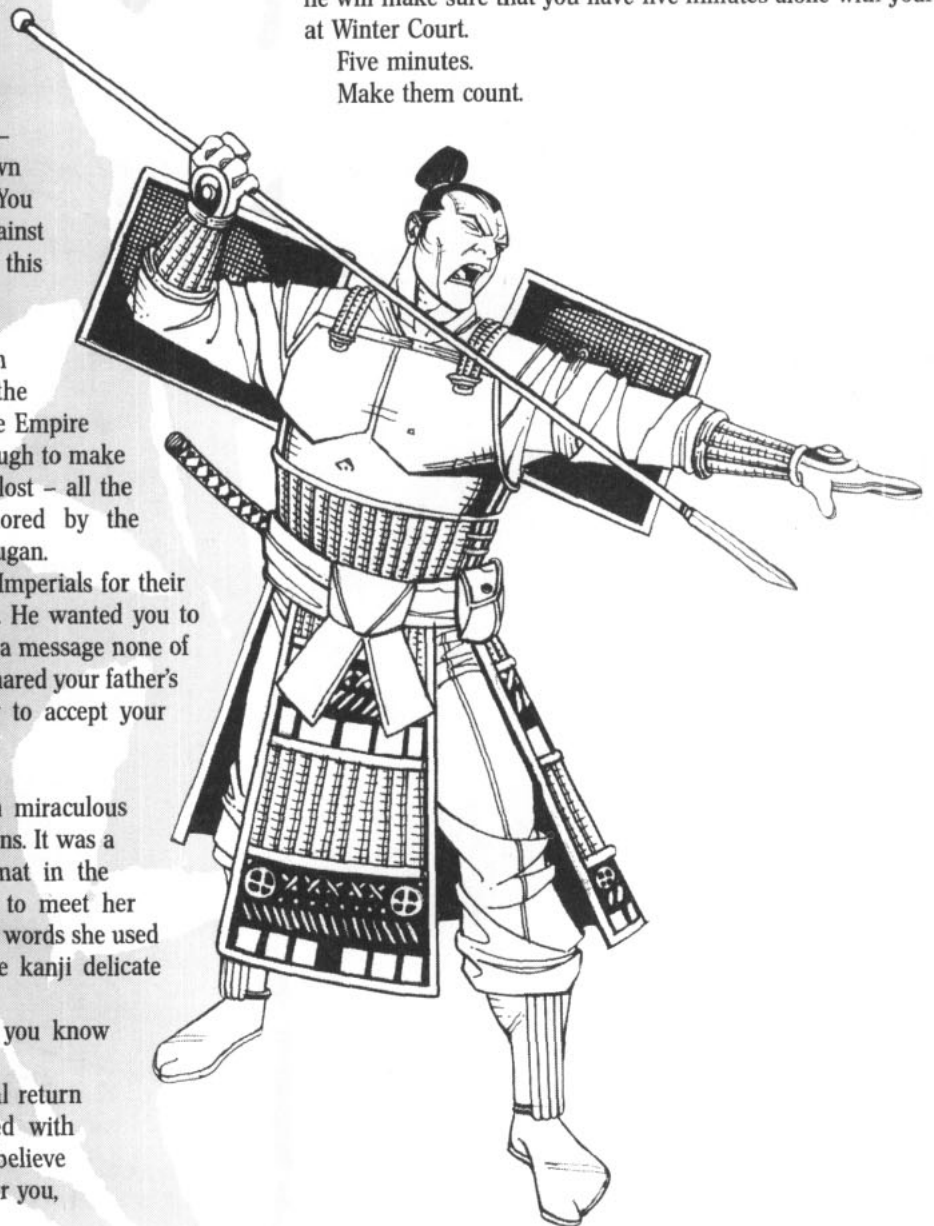
Unfortunately, that may be more difficult than it sounds. She is an Imperial, respected and highly placed. Although she is expecting you this Winter Court (and has arranged for your invitation), she believes you to be someone else. Worse, she has no idea that you were born ronin.

Your heart cries out for her. You have not felt such elation, even during the heat of the most bitter duel, which you are known for along the northern coasts. Your most fervent hope is that you can see her – speak with her – once before you are found out. Then you might have a chance of showing her who you really are.

To gain that chance, you have struck a dangerous deal. You have promised Otomo Ryisen – a scoundrel with little care for Imperial tradition or social morés – a favor. Anything he desires. In return, he will make sure that you have five minutes alone with your love at Winter Court.

Five minutes.

Make them count.



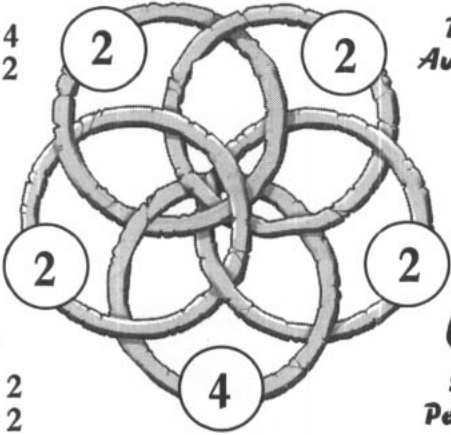


Legend of the Five Rings

Name: Wandering Duelist **Clan:** True Ronin **Profession:** Bushi

Fire
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 2

Air
Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2



Earth
Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water
Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void
Void Points Spent:

Insight: 155

Techniques

None

Primary Weapon
Katana 3k2

Primary Armor
Light (if any)

TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)
15

Skills

Athletics	2
Etiquette	1
Hunting	1
Iaijutsu	3
Kenjutsu	2
Lore (Courts)	1
Oratory	1
Shintao	3
Sincerity	1

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

School: None **Rank:** N/A

Advantages/Disadvantages

Blissful Betrothal	+3
Correspondence	+1
Great Potential (Iaijutsu)	+8
Obligation (Otomo Ryisen)	-4
Social Disadvantage	-3
True Love (Miya)	-3

Glory: 1
□□□□□□□□□□

Honor: 2
☒☒☒☒☒☒□□□□□□

Experience Points:

Miya Diplomat

You have never been very good at being noble... or focused, or careful.

Born a Miya, you have led the life that your parents wanted you to lead. You danced and laughed with the other children. You bowed and smiled when the other parents were watching. You even learned all the names, birthdays, and accomplishments of thirteen generations of proud Miya courtiers, diplomats, and heralds.

And yet you have never been truly happy. You find court to be infuriating and boring. You see your peers as unbearable sycophants with no thoughts of their own. The Imperial Court grinds ever on, always sure of itself and its own purpose, but never settling on anything except that there is more to say.

Early on, you learned the power in listening. The words that flowed so freely in court were intriguing – and useful. You can use them for favors, like the wonderful steed the Unicorn Ambassador lets you ride so that you won't tell his lord about his pesky smuggling operation. And the Crane artisan who is teaching you how to play the *biwa* – so that you won't reveal her secret liaison with one of the lower castes.

Gossip has become your sole outlet in court. You are careful not to use too much information at once, and to make sure the targets of your blackmail never reveal your tactics. So far, you think you've been successful, but your luck can only last so long. Sooner or later, you're going to get caught – and then what will you do?

You've only shared your worries with one other person – a brilliant samurai you've never met. The two of you have been sharing letters for several years – since he saw you

traveling through the Phoenix lands with an Imperial caravan and somehow arranged for a missive to be delivered to you.

His words were strong and challenging, and dared you to look outside the confines of your preconceived world. They held up a stark mirror to your innermost fears and doubts, and made you realize the scope of what you were missing in life.

He made you feel alive.

You have been trading letters with your secret admirer for many years now, and have come to rely upon them for comfort when the demands of your position start to weigh too heavily on your gentle spirit.

Once, several weeks ago, the letters stopped coming. You were heartbroken, and cried yourself to sleep more nights than you could count. Then, just as you felt you couldn't go on any longer, a worn scroll made its way into your hands.

Within weeks, you made plans to meet, sure that the noble samurai who had written such courageous statements was your path to happiness – even if it means defying everything you are.

Everything you have ever been.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Miya Diplomat

Clan:
Imperial

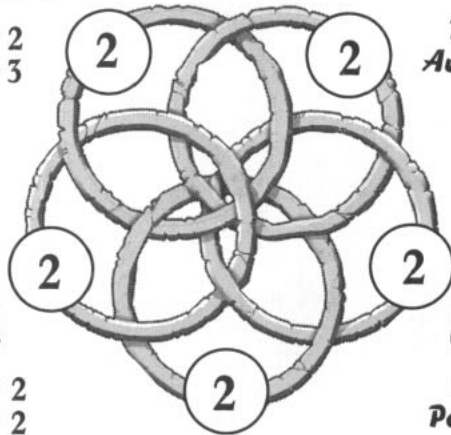
Profession:
Bushi

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 3



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Primary Weapon

None

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Courtier	2
Defense	3
Diplomacy	1
Etiquette	3
Gossip	3
Heraldry	2
Horsemanship	1
Sincerity	2

Insight: 117

Techniques

Voice of the Emperor

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

School: Miya Shisha

Rank: 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Bad Reputation	-2
(Gossip)	
Blissful Betrothal	+3
Correspondence	+1
Meek	+2

Glory: 2



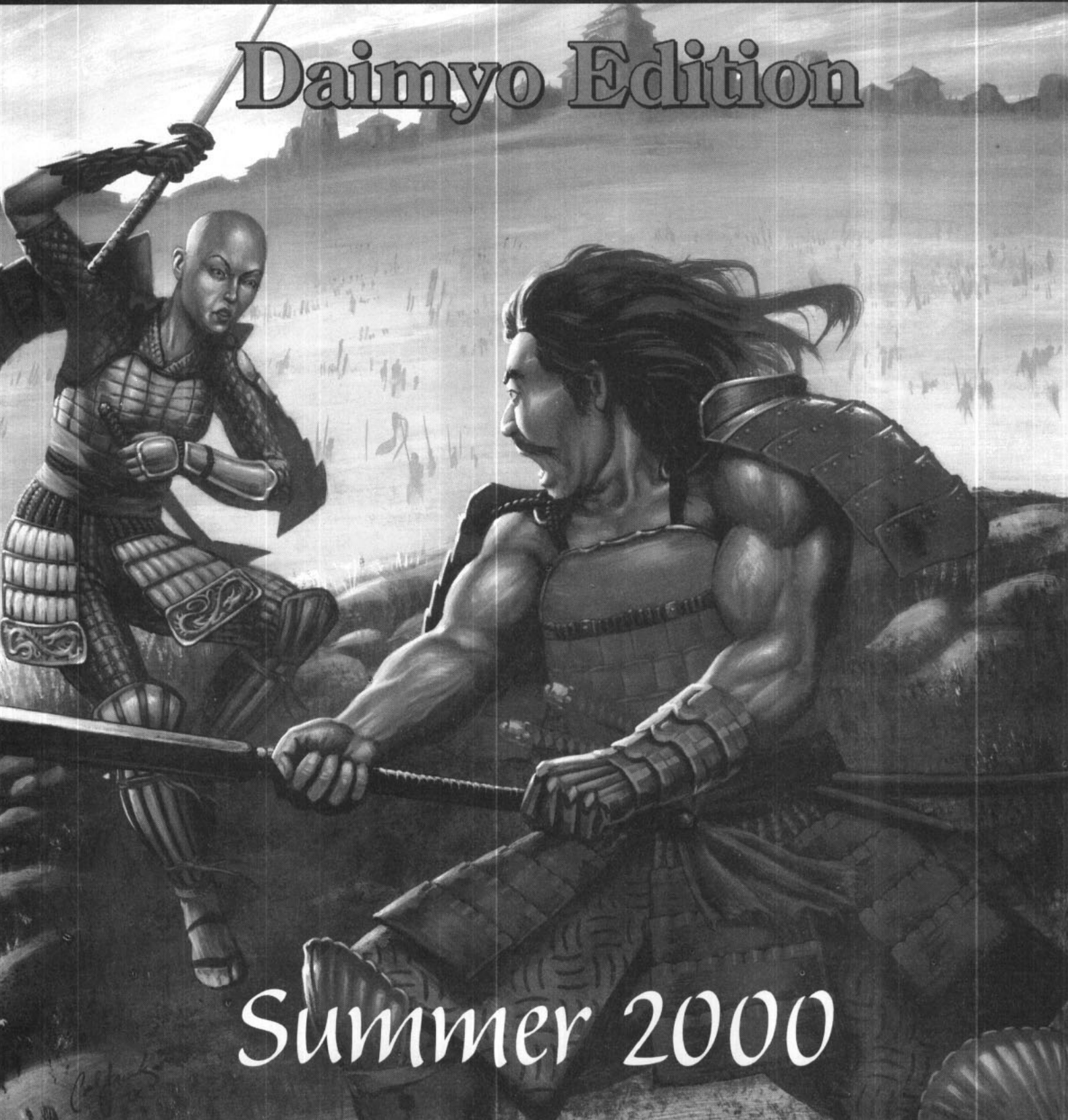
Honor: 2



Experience Points:

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