



Legend of the Five Rings™

Winter Court

Kyuden Asako



Rich Wulf &
Shawn Carman

Legend of the Five Rings™

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The snows fall again and Rokugan's nobility gathers once more for the Emperor's Winter Court. But this time, honor and diplomacy hold higher stakes than ever. War has swept across Rokugan, shattering the fragile peace which has held since the Scorpion coup. The Lion grow more aggressive by the day, while the Crane struggle to defend themselves and the Phoenix watch warily for signs of attack. The Crab Clan's absence spawns fresh rumors daily, and whispers abound of dark pacts that will guarantee them victory on the battlefield. In this highly-charged atmosphere, when mortal foes and shaky allies gather under the pretext of civility, a single word can change the course of history. Diplomacy is taxed to the limit as news from the battlefield slowly trickles in, and the knives which once lay concealed behind pretty lies now come gleaming into the open. The negotiations which take place here could bring victory to any side... or plunge the empire into an eternity of darkness. Welcome to the Winter Court. We hope it's not your last.

Winter Court contains a complete update on the world of Legend of the Five Rings, including:

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- Strongholds and fortresses in Rokugan.
- A complete historical update, new skills and nemuranai, astrological events, tips on being properly offensive, and more!

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Winter Court 3



Legend of the Five Rings™



Winter Court: Kyuden Asako

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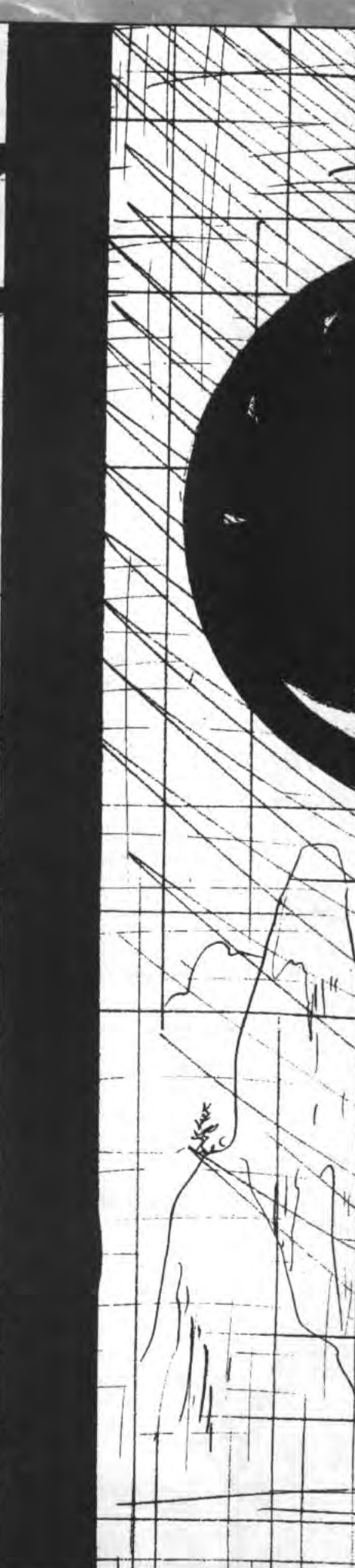
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My apologies if this letter is brief, but I admittedly have little talent for poetry. Rather than attempt to impress you with my feeble attempts to reconstruct the wondrous images of nature in coarse verse, instead let me simply present to you my humblest and most sincere welcome.

Greetings, honored guests and kinsmen.

Welcome to Morning Glory Castle, home of the esteemed Asako.

Words cannot fully express my clan's honor at the privilege of hosting the Winter Court. I believe that in this fortuitous gathering of the best and brightest of Rokugan, we shall find opportunity. Though recent developments in the Empire paint a dark portrait of the future, I believe that we may yet have a chance to find peace. The Way of the Phoenix is the way of peace, and I hope that during our short time together perhaps we may learn something from one another. Perhaps we might seize upon this opportunity for unity and proud Rokugan can be restored to its former glory.

May the radiance of the Son of Heaven illuminate us all,

Shiba Ujimitsu





It had been three days since the Emperor had arrived, and Kyuden Asako had become a very different place. Though the Emperor's illness kept him sequestered, his courtiers and hangers-on were everywhere. The castle was buzzing with activity. Shiba Ujimitsu, Champion of the Phoenix Clan, had begun to realize that silence was a rare commodity indeed.

Ujimitsu had seen the sun rise over Morning Glory Castle countless times, and he remembered every occasion. Recalling the past had never been difficult. Trying to forget the past often presented a greater problem.

The pain on his wife's face as she brought the blade home... the unrepentant curse of his daughter as Ujimitsu's sword took her head from her shoulders...

Ujimitsu walked alone upon the paths surrounding the great castle. The bitter cold bit deeply into his feet, clad only in humble sandals. He paused and knelt beside a small tree, roped off with colored ribbons. He wondered vaguely for a moment what sort of shrine this was, and who had built it.

"The shrine was constructed by Asako Hidehira during the reign of Hantei XXXIII," spoke a voice within Ujimitsu's soul. *"It commemorates a great and unexpected victory over the Lion, in a battle that has, ironically, long been forgotten."*

Ujimitsu frowned, resting one hand on the pearl-handled katana tucked beneath his obi. The blade was one of a kind, as was the blessing it carried. Ujimitsu was the vessel of the Soul of Shiba, the immortal spirit of every daimyo of the Phoenix Clan. The keeper of the Soul served the Phoenix as protector, prophet, and daimyo. The Soul followed no strict bloodline, but chose whomever it saw fit, bestowing its limitless wisdom upon the one who would lead the clan. Ujimitsu was only the latest of many. He wondered sometimes why he had been chosen, but the Soul never answered.

"Ujimitsu-sama," said a quiet voice from the road. "I see I am not the only one that fled the terrors of the court for the peace of nature."

Ujimitsu rose, one eyebrow cocked as he turned to study his visitor. A young man in robes of dark green approached, white hair hanging loose in the style of a Crane. A swirling wave tattoo encircled the young man's right eye, adding to his exotic appearance. Twin dragon mon were emblazoned upon his chest, representing the Agasha and Kitsuki families. The Phoenix smiled in recognition.

"Hisojo-san," Ujimitsu said, bowing slightly to his visitor. "I did not expect to you to accept my invitation. I am surprised to see you here."

"I would say the same, Ujimitsu-sama," Hisojo replied, bowing more deeply to the Phoenix daimyo. "But I fear such a comment would risk negating one of our nation's greatest legends."

"Which one is that?" Ujimitsu asked, regarding the Dragon curiously.

"Have you not heard that you are a ghost?" Hisojo said with a laugh. "At least, that is what the Lion officers claim. They say that you can appear whenever and wherever you wish. Surely a Lion would not lie."

"Let the Lions have their tales," Ujimitsu replied with a small grin. "Perhaps they will come true. If I could whisk myself away when I desired, I would certainly do so now."

"And miss the excitement of the Winter Court?" Hisojo returned wryly. "The heart of our culture beats within Morning Glory Castle."

"The heart of our culture," Ujimitsu nodded, looking back at the gates of the castle. "I suppose that would explain the smell of blood when Takashi and Morishigi meet."

"Or the pounding in my head whenever Tsuke and Togama enter one of their debates," Hisojo added with a small shake of his head. "I suppose we should feel fortunate that all the diplomats do is argue. Things could be worse."

"Tensions between the Asako and the Isawa have been high of late," Ujimitsu agreed. "If only the other Masters were here. Tomo has a calmer head on his shoulders, as does Uona. I think things would be different if they were here. All Tsuke does is bicker, even in the presence of the Otomo and the Imperial Guard. It is as if no one cares what is happening to the south. Even now, with all that has happened, the Winter Court is no more than a game to all of them." Ujimitsu folded his arms against the cold and brooded quietly for a moment. The Soul of Shiba was silent, but Ujimitsu could sense apprehension in its depths. The Empire was spiraling toward war, a war the scale of which even the Soul's immortal memory had not witnessed in almost a thousand years.

Agasha Hisojo was quiet for a time. When he spoke again, his sharp eyes seemed worried. "Do you think the rumors are true? That the Crab have allied with the Shadowlands?"

Ujimitsu frowned, and said nothing. There was little he could tell his friend without causing greater worries, and there was little he



could hide from the Dragon's sharp ears. Hisojo had studied with the greatest scholars, magistrates, and philosophers of the Dragon Clan. Shiba Ujimitsu, Soul of Shiba or no, was at heart just a soldier.

"I think we should return to the court," Ujimitsu said instead. "We cannot hide out here forever. We must do what we can to stop their petty squabbling, Hisojo. I know I can count on you."

"That is why you invited me here?" Hisojo asked with a laugh. "To help you play nursemaid to spoiled courtiers?"

"I am the daimyo of the Phoenix," Ujimitsu replied in a mocking tone, puffing out his chest and gazing into the distance. "Everyone must do as I say, even you, Dragon."

"I see the Phoenix reputation for humility is intact," Hisojo replied, chuckling. The two men laughed.

"Seriously, I need your help," Ujimitsu said soberly. "I realize how bad this must sound, Hisojo, but you are the only one I completely trust. After Masumi's death..." Ujimitsu's voice cracked at the mention of the name.

Hisojo rose one hand and bowed his head slightly. "Speak no more of it, Ujimitsu-sama. I understand, and I am at your disposal."

"Thank you, Hisojo," Ujimitsu replied.

"It is my honor," Hisojo answered. "Now shall we return to the court? I suppose we should be there with the bandages when the blood starts to flow."



"This is not a matter of war," Tsume Takashi said with practiced patience. The young Crane turned to face the assembled court, his hands out in supplication. He stood in the middle of the castle's large central chamber, at the center of a white tile sunburst pattern carefully sculpted by Phoenix artisans. The light of the true sun blazed through the wide windows and reflected upon the floor, casting Takashi in holy illumination. "The Wasting Disease runs rampant," the Crane continued. "The Asahina wish to move in with supplies and shugenja, treating those who can be saved before the disease spreads further. This is a mission of goodwill intended to begin the process of healing for our entire Empire. Would the Lion let the nation fester and die because of their paranoia?"

"Bah," replied Matsu Morishigi, the gruff representative of the Lion. "Do you think I am a fool, Takashi? This is a Crane trick, and a feeble one. The reputation of your family is well known. Do you suggest that you would not seize upon the opportunity to hide soldiers and weapons among these 'missions of mercy'? This is a

desperate attempt to repair your severed supply lines, Tsume." The Matsu emphasized the man's name, stressing his distaste for Takashi's lower status. A chuckle rippled through the assembled courtiers, distant relations and sycophants of the Emperor. Young Takashi's face burned in shame and anger. His hand strayed toward the sword in his obi.

"Gentlemen, please," interrupted the icy voice of Isawa Tsuke.

"You have a point to add, Master Tsuke?" Morishigi replied, glaring at the Master of Fire.

The sharp-faced Phoenix only shrugged, facing the Lion squarely. At Tsuke's side, Isawa Eizan rose from his seat. Where Tsuke was tall, cool, and composed, Eizan was short, fierce, and full of bluster. For many years, Tsuke and Eizan had served in the Emerald Legion, gaining reputations as tempestuous and merciless warriors despite their calling as shugenja. Eizan was Tsuke's yoriki, and served as his hatamoto now.

"It is a simple matter of fact that the Phoenix provinces are even more plagued by this mysterious epidemic than the Crane," Eizan snarled. "The Asahina's expertise in the arts of healing would help us save our people. Would you deny my kin a chance at life, Matsu?"

The corner of Morishigi's mouth turned up in a snarl. Outside of Phoenix lands, few knew that the Lion had set their sights on the Phoenix's rich lands as well. Skirmishes had already taken place at Nikesake. Eizan was declaring his allegiance, and Master Tsuke's, firmly on the side of the Crane. "My apologies, Eizan-san," Morishigi smiled with sincerity to shame a Scorpion. "It was my belief that the skilled healers of the Phoenix needed no assistance from ham-fisted Cranes."

"Morishigi-san is correct. In fact we do not need assistance," replied another clear voice. The heads of the court turned toward Asako Togama, the caretaker of the Asako family's great historical libraries.

"This abominable war between Lion and Crane does not concern the Phoenix," Togama pressed on. "We shall not take part in it, whether by giving aid or by receiving it with the implication that the favor be returned." The cluster of Asako shugenja and courtiers surrounding Togama murmured their assent. A young woman with a deep scar along the left side of her face scowled at Isawa Eizan fiercely. Eizan returned her glare.

"Well," Isawa Tsuke interrupted, steepling his fingers as he gazed past his hatamoto at the assembled Asako. "Perhaps you would not be so eager to withdraw from the world were you to go outside and experience it upon occasion. Neither the plague nor the war are problems that can be solved by hiding in a library." Another round of subtle laughter passed behind the fans of the Imperial visitors.

Togama opened his mouth to reply, but the sound of a man clearing his throat loudly at the back of the room diverted his



attention. All eyes turned as Shiba Ujimitsu, Champion of the Phoenix, entered. An anonymous Dragon magistrate stood behind him and to one side. A murmur of hushed comments surged through the assembly, then quieted so that Ujimitsu could address those present.

"Please, are we not all Phoenix?" Ujimitsu chuckled, glancing from Togama and his retinue to Tsuke and Eizan. "A little decorum, my friends. This Winter Court is an opportunity to begin discussions of peace, not a chance to open new wounds."

"My apologies, Ujimitsu-sama," Tsuke said, rising and bowing deeply to his daimyo. "As always, your wisdom echoes the kami whose soul you bear."

Togama gave Tsuke a curious look, then turned to Ujimitsu as well. "Indeed, my lord," Togama said. "As an expert on herbalism and medical procedures, I perhaps took Eizan's comments more personally than they were intended. Perhaps, as Master Tsuke suggests, the excitement of escaping my library has gotten the better of me." Another good-natured laugh passed through the court at Togama's remark. The librarian smiled faintly.

Ujimitsu nodded at both Tsuke and Togama, careful to show favor to neither. With practiced ease, he hid the weariness from his face as he paid his respects to the assembled representatives. Agasha Hisojo remained at his side, whispering occasional comments to Ujimitsu to keep him informed of the hidden events and undercurrents of opinion that comprised much of the Winter Court, and were more readily apparent to the magistrate's trained ears.

Presenting his greetings to the courtiers did not take as long as Ujimitsu would have imagined. Never before had the Winter Court been so small. The Scorpion, of course, were not in attendance save for Empress Kachiko, who seldom strayed from the Emperor's side. The Lion and Unicorn were few in number, and the Crab had sent no ambassadors at all. Dark murmurs passed through the court wondering if the Crab's absence painted truth upon rumor. Did Hida Kisada seek to succeed with force where Bayushi Shoji had failed with guile? Could Kisada truly have aligned himself with the Shadowlands?

Ujimitsu could not bring himself to believe it. No daimyo of any great clan could be so foolish.



"I believed so myself, once," whispered a voice from deep within the Soul of Shiba. *"My brother changed much when he fell to the earth..."*

Ujimitsu's wandering thoughts suddenly jarred back to reality, startled by a commotion in the rear of the chamber. A band of servants scurried about the entrance rapidly preparing the way for a visitor. One hurried forward and spoke in a hushed voice with Miya Satoshi, Herald of the Emperor. Satoshi's eyes widened at the servant's message, but he quickly composed himself and turned to address the court.

"May I present the arrival of the honorable emissaries of the mighty Crab," Satoshi announced, his deep voice filling the chamber.

"The Crab?" muttered Ujimitsu. Hisojo only looked at the Phoenix and shrugged.

A startled murmur echoed through the courtiers as the doors opened. Three men entered. One was a large samurai in dark, battle-scarred armor. One was a young man with long hair and pleasant features, dressed in the ceremonial dress of a shugenja. The third was unmistakable, a dark shadow of a man in long hooded robes, face painted in a garish kabuki pattern of white and black.

"Kuni Yori," Ujimitsu whispered under his breath.

Yori's eyes flicked toward Shiba Ujimitsu and stayed there.

Hisojo studied the Crab party carefully. "It looks as if the game has become more complex, Ujimitsu-sama."

"You are a master of understatement," Ujimitsu replied.



Welcome to the Winter Court of Kyuden Asako.

This is the third in AEG's series of supplements detailing the culture of Rokugan, the background, history, and politics of the Emerald Empire. It is designed to provide information to GMs and players alike regarding current events in Rokugan. This supplement is also intended to bring greater depth to the world of Rokugani politics, as well as focusing with more detail upon the powerful Imperial Houses of the Hantei, Seppun, Otomo, and Miya. While

details of the events currently taking place in the canon L5R storyline are given here, this book is by no means intended to be the final word on anything that occurs within the Emerald Empire. The GM, as always, is the arbiter of whether or not any of the information contained herein is applicable to his own vision of Rokugan. For those who choose to diverge from the canon storyline, this supplement contains a wealth of culture, history, and miscellaneous adventure hooks that can be adapted to any campaign.

Winter is a difficult time in Rokugan. When the snows fall, the rough roads become muddy and impassable. Markets close and peasants retire to the warmth of their homes. Each year, the Emperor chooses well in advance at which great family's house he will spend the winter, and invitation to the Emperor's Winter Court is a matter of great pride. Snowbound for months with the greatest warriors and most influential politicians of the Empire, the Winter Court is a place where the occurrence of great things is commonplace.

Three years have passed since the Scorpion Clan Coup. For those who wish to use the canon material in this book, the events of *Winter Court: Kyuden Asako* are considered to take place during the third year of Hantei XXXIX's reign, in the Isawa Calendar year of 1126. As winter approaches, preparations for Winter Court begin. Though the Emperor is sick, weak from his disease, the bureaucracy continues without him, led by the able mind and quick wit of Empress Kachiko. Preparations have been made. Invitations have been sent. As the snows begin to fall, the people of Rokugan pray for another peaceful winter.

However, not even a peaceful winter is a certainty any more.

The Winter Court, or indeed any court, is a fantastic setting for an adventure. Treachery, intrigue, and mystery haunt the life of a courtier at every step. You must choose your allies carefully in the court, for your enemies may not do you the courtesy of introducing themselves as such. The world of politics is a subtle one, but failure here could bring death and disgrace as permanent as that found on the battlefield.

This supplement is part of a continuing series, one per year, providing ideas for running campaigns within a Rokugani court and presenting source material for dealing with Rokugani culture. This book begins each section with a tale from this year's Winter Court, told mostly from the viewpoint of Phoenix Champion Shiba Ujimitsu. This tale is intended not only as a piece of the unfolding storyline, but as an example of courtly intrigue that could easily be incorporated into an adventure.

This book is divided into sections detailing a variety of aspects of Rokugani life. The first chapter, Dawn, deals primarily with the history of the Empire, from the origins of the feared Imperial



Legions to the methods of building castles through the ages. The second chapter, Afternoon, deals with general cultural information. Things that every well-rounded samurai should know, such as the details of the gempukku ceremony, can be found in this section. The third chapter, Night, details the darker, more mysterious side of Rokugan. Major astrological events, details on Rokugani folk magic, and tips on how to survive in the treacherous battlegrounds of the court are all given in this chapter. The final section of this book, the Epilogue, presents new skills, schools, spells, NPCs, and other information a GM might find handy. The people and items presented in this section can be used within the Winter Court, or removed and put into whatever context you find appropriate.

Recent events in Rokugan have cast a grim shadow upon the future. The Scorpion have been destroyed, scattered to plot their revenge from the shadows. The Lion have begun a savage campaign against their ancient enemies the Crane, laying siege to Violence Behind Courtliness City. Plague spreads across the lands of the Crane and the Phoenix, and the menacing power of the Wasting Disease has stolen the strength of the Emperor. Dark rumors trickle

north that the Crab have abandoned their ancient oaths and now march at the side of Shadowlands monsters. One Imperial Legion has already disappeared in Crab lands, and the armies of Hida Kisada expand rapidly on a path toward Beiden Pass. In the north, Toturi the Black Wolf gathers an army of ronin for unknown purposes. What the disgraced Akodo plans to do with these loyal followers, or how he has earned the sanction of the Dragon Champion, is yet unknown. The Unicorn gaze across their borders at the expanding ronin camps with rapidly growing unease.

Perhaps not even the snow-choked roads of Rokugan could provide an adequate buffer against the conflicts to come. It is no coincidence that the Emperor has chosen the peaceful lands of the Phoenix to conduct his court.

There was once an adage among the Akodo: "May you live in interesting times." The statement was never meant as a blessing, but as a curse. Times of great change are invariably times of great chaos, and in every war there must be a loser. The Akodo were among the first to learn that these are very interesting times indeed.

Enjoy them while you can.





My friends,

What a wondrous world we live in. The only certainty in this world is that one can never be sure of what may happen next. I am living proof; from humble origins I have been thrust into the leadership of the esteemed house of the Phoenix.

Luckily, the past remains steadfast, a guide to what has gone before and an anchor to help us determine what may be. The Asako, our hosts during this glorious Winter Court, know this better than most. The History of the Empire is their duty and their pride. Within the great scrolls of Morning Glory Castle lie countless great tales, the mysteries and secrets of a thousand years of peace. To stand within these halls and look over what they have recorded is much like standing atop a great mountain, with every road and obstacle laid out clearly to the eye.

Let us climb the mountain together, and see what we may discover.

May the wisdom of the Son of Heaven enlighten us all,

Shiba Ujimitsu



Chapter One: Dawn



"Subtlety and Grace"

A dead silence fell upon the court. Kuni Yori stood in the doorway with the attention of the most powerful men and women in Rokugan focused on him, his face unreadable as he waited patiently to be acknowledged. Yori's yojimbo was faceless behind his snarling mempo. The third man in the Crab party simply watched Yori nervously, waiting to follow his master's lead. Among the Asako retinue, Togama paid Yori no mind whatsoever, engrossing himself in quiet conversation with a younger henshin.

"In the name of the Son of Heaven, we welcome Kuni Yori, daimyo of the Kuni family," Miya Satoshi announced in the formal high language of Rokugan's nobility. "We announce the arrival of the renowned defender of the Carpenter Wall, Hida Ekiken, and the esteemed scholar, Kuni Nakiro." Satoshi was skilled enough at his duty that he gave no indication that Yori's retinue was not as welcome as he suggested. The rest of the court hid their feelings with varying degrees of success.

"Honorable daimyo of the Kuni," Shiba Ujimitsu said, stepping forward and bowing to the Crabs. "In the name of the Phoenix, I welcome you to Morning Glory Castle. I am Shiba Ujimitsu, daimyo of the—"

"Oh, I know of you, Shiba-sama," Yori replied, bowing deeply to the Phoenix daimyo. His retainers followed suit. "I apologize for my interruption, but your reputation as a loyal servant of the Hantei precedes you. I must admit, however, I am a trifle confused. Is this not the home of the Asako? Is their daimyo unable to receive guests, or simply unwilling?" Yori's deep voice echoed clearly through the chamber. Asako Togama glanced in Yori's direction, then returned to his conversation.

Ujimitsu sighed inwardly. There was nothing to be gained by publicly snubbing the daimyo of a family as powerful as the Kuni. He forced a polite smile and shrugged. "You must forgive the Asako," Ujimitsu replied quietly. "They are reclusive by nature, and do not excel at relations with outsiders."

"By the Fortunes, Ujimitsu-sama, I do believe you just described my own family," Yori said with a chuckle. "And yet, even the lowliest Crab heimin knows well enough to answer the door when he has visitors."

"Indeed?" Togama replied, glancing up at the Kuni with thinly veiled disgust. "I can believe it. The way the rumors fly, you Crabs partake in all sorts of strange customs."

Yori turned to face the librarian, pacing his way slowly across the sunburst pattern. Save for his white-painted face, the Crab seemed carved from a single shard of inky blackness. His sharp black eyes echoed the darkness just as the floor reflected the sun's light. "Rumors?" Yori replied sternly. "I have heard many rumors regarding my clan. Our duty keeps us far from politics much of the time, preventing us from defending our reputations as well as perhaps we should. I would be interested to know what you have heard, Asako-san. Tell me, Phoenix, what gossip leads you to judge me now?"

"Do not play the innocent, Yori," Togama replied, not meeting the Kuni's gaze. "Everyone knows what your clan plans in the south."

"Then there can be no harm in telling me," Yori replied. "If you would accuse me of something based on rumor, then be done with it."

"Your clan walks with darkness," hissed a young henshin seated at Togama's side. She might have been an attractive girl were it not for the jagged scar that tracked through her left eye.



Yori turned his attention to her. At his side, his yojimbo flexed his fingers, cracking his knuckles loudly. "We are all made of subtle bits of light and darkness, little one," Yori said. "Surely that is what you mean. If your accusation is simply that I carry within me the dark whims and desires all men are cursed with, than I cannot argue. Are we not all made of Lord Moon's Blood as well as the Lady's Tears? Surely that is what you mean. Certainly you could not accuse me of something deeper?"

"Stop playing games, Kuni," the young Phoenix retorted. "Scouts of the Lion and Unicorn report sighting Crab troops marching beside the Shadowlands Horde."

"The Unicorn are barbarians and the Lion are opportunists, stripped of what good counsel the Akodo once offered," Yori replied coolly. "I ask you, who was the first clan to shed another clan's blood after the Scorpion Coup, despite the new Emperor's call for peace? I think it was the Lion."

Matsu Morishigi bristled. "Watch your tongue, Crab," he growled. "You know little of our blood feud."

"I know enough," Yori nodded at Morishigi. "I know that whatever legitimate claim for vengeance you had died with Tsume Retsu. His son seems reasonable enough, yet you have stymied all the Crane's attempts at diplomatic negotiations." Tsume Takashi looked sidelong at Matsu Morishigi and frowned, but said nothing.

"Bah," Morishigi spat in defiance. "I do not know why you came here, Crab, but you should tread carefully before you realize how few friends you have here."

"Is that so, Morishigi?" Isawa Tsuke interjected, his features creased in amusement. "You presume much to threaten Yori-sama. He is the daimyo of a great family. You are nothing but a brute, held in little regard even among your own family. Is that not why you are here while the more important members of your clan plot their war against the Crane?"

A chorus of subtle laughter passed through the court. Tsume Takashi smiled openly. Morishigi opened his mouth to reply, but thought the better of it and sat down. Even the fiery Matsu was wise enough not to challenge the Master of Fire in a Phoenix castle.

Ujimitsu frowned thoughtfully as he returned to his seat. Why had Tsuke spoken in Yori's defense? Obviously there was more here than met the eye. He turned to gauge Hisojo's reaction. Curiously, the Dragon seemed absorbed in the wall decorations, not paying attention to the exchange at all. Ujimitsu returned his attention to the Crabs. Tsuke and his hatamoto, Eizan, were now stepping forward to greet the Crabs. The two men bowed deeply, a surprising show of respect from the temperamental Master of Fire. Ujimitsu noted the dark, resentful looks that passed between the Asako representatives and the confused, shocked stares of the Seppun and Otomo. If Ujimitsu sat aside and did nothing, he might be seen as

giving tacit approval to this apparent alliance between the Isawa and the mysterious Kuni. If he stepped in to intervene, on the other hand, he might be seen as heavy-handed, interfering in a castle that was not his own, in affairs that did not concern him.

Ujimitsu hated politics.

Ujimitsu rubbed his eyes for a moment as he struggled to decide what he should do. When he looked up again, he saw Asako Miyo rapidly making her way across the floor toward Tsuke and Eizan. Ujimitsu knew little about the young henshin, but for the last three days she had been one of the greatest sources of friction between the Isawa and Asako delegations. Ujimitsu rose from his place and moved to intercept her as quickly as he could without appearing foolish. She glanced back at him and broke into a run, drawing something from a pocket deep within her robes.

Kuni Yori cried out in alarm as the henshin appeared seemingly from nowhere, striking him across the face with a small object. The daimyo of the Kuni staggered and fell to the floor. Yori's yojimbo charged forward, tetsubo in hand. The girl seized his forearm in a wicked pinch and tore the weapon from the larger man's hand, tossing it across the tiles. Kuni Nakiro drew a scroll from his robes and spoke words of magic. Bands of white energy appeared around the girl's arms and legs for a moment, but dispersed with a shriek of agonized spirits. Miyo smirked, and the Crab shugenja's jaw dropped open in surprise. He glanced down at the scroll, bewildered at the failure of his spell.

Isawa Tsuke withdrew, his face a mask of fury though he seemed hesitant to interfere. Isawa Eizan had no such doubts, and quickly reached for the blade at his side. Asako Miyo grinned, drawing a tanto with her free hand and smirking at the Isawa.

Shiba Ujimitsu cursed under his breath and drew the Ancestral Sword of the Phoenix faster than either of them could act. "Stop!" he roared, his voice echoing with the power of the Soul of Shiba.

The sword's magic took effect immediately. Miyo and Eizan dropped their weapons faces blank with astonishment. Hida Ekiken's eyes burned with rage behind his mempo, but his first duty was to his lord. He helped Yori to his feet. The dark Kuni wiped the blood from his chin with the back of one sleeve and smiled directly at Asako Miyo.

"Miyo-chan, what is the meaning of this?" Ujimitsu demanded, his voice a low roar as he stepped amid the assorted combatants.

"I sought only to prove my suspicions," Miyo replied, gesturing at the floor. A short cudgel of jade lay beside her tanto, the weapon she had used to strike Kuni Yori.

"Yori-san, my apologies," Ujimitsu said, not taking his eyes off of her. "Miyo-chan's behavior is unacceptable. If you wish to seek satisfaction—"



"That will not be necessary, Ujimitsu-sama," Yori said with a grim chuckle. "I believe the girl has done me as much good as harm. Obviously I must not be some dark tsukai from the Festering Pit if the best Phoenix jade can do is split my lip, eh? No, I seek no retribution. Indeed, I thank Miyo-chan for proving me pure. You may do as you will, Immortal Phoenix. I trust your judgment."

"You are certain?" Ujimitsu asked.

"Winter Court should be a time of peace, cousin. Not a time to start wars anew. Now, if none of you minds, I think I shall retire to my chambers to have my wounds tended." Yori bowed a final time to the assembled court and turned to leave, his robes making no sound as he crossed the marble floor. Hida Ekiken and Kuni Nakiro followed in his wake, Ekiken pausing long enough to retrieve his weapon. Asako Miyo watched him leave, then gathered her weapons and returned to the Asako contingent.

Satisfied that peace had been restored for the time being, Shiba Ujimitsu sheathed the Ancestral Sword of the Phoenix and let its magic fade. He returned to his seat and wondered what would happen next.

"Ujimitsu-sama," Isawa Eizan whispered, following close behind the Phoenix daimyo. "I beg your pardon."

Ujimitsu turned to the shugenja. "What is it?" he asked sharply.

"I beg your permission to challenge Asako Miyo to a duel," he whispered.

Ujimitsu blinked. "On what grounds?" he demanded.

"It is the Isawa family's duty to purify the grounds of Morning Glory castle for the arrival of the Emperor," he replied. "You know as well as I do that had Kuni Yori been Tainted he could never have progressed beyond our wards and blessings. Miyo's suggestion that he carried the darkness was an insult to my family. Yori may forgive her, but I do not. I wish your permission to redeem my family's honor."

Ujimitsu looked at the man for a long moment. "Permission denied," he replied, his voice a hiss. "The next time you seek to draw your kin's blood at this court, you shall have to pass through me to do it. Think well on that, Isawa. Is that understood?"

Eizan opened his mouth, an angry retort on his lips. He closed his mouth with a click and bowed deeply instead. "I am sorry, Shiba Ujimitsu-sama," he said. "I beg your forgiveness."

"Granted," Ujimitsu replied. "Now get out of my sight."

Eizan quickly ducked his head and moved away, pausing only to shoot one last wrathful glance across the room at the Asako representatives.

"You handled that well, Ujimitsu-sama," Hisojo said quietly.

"Perhaps," Ujimitsu replied, shaking his head bitterly. "I can only wonder what is to come next."

This would be a long winter.

The Imperial Legions

"All of Rokugan is part of the Imperial Legions. Every man, woman, and child must stand ready to fight for the glory of the Son of Heaven. We shall simply be there first."

— Matsu Tsuko

Few visions in Rokugan inspire as much awe and fear as the Imperial Legions. Truly the armies of the Emperor are a testament to the Son of Heaven's power. The once great clan of the Scorpion has been hunted nearly to extinction by vengeful Legions. In return for Bayushi Shoji's betrayal and murder of Hantei XXXVIII, the Legions have been commanded to show no mercy to a Scorpion who retains his family name. In contrast, many areas of Rokugan hit by the Wasting Disease have found unexpected aid from the Legions, who have been commanded to provide relief and safe escort of any person who may be able to cure or treat the disease. The Imperial Legions are a powerful symbol of both the Emperor's wrath and mercy, and can change from one to the other at the Son of Heaven's whim.

In the most technical sense of the term, every samurai, ji-samurai, and ashigaru in Rokugan is a member of the Imperial Legions. Anyone who takes up arms for a purpose other than criminal gain does so in the Emperor's name and may be called upon at some point to fight for him. However, in general parlance the term "Imperial Legion" is generally used to refer to those that have been inducted to serve directly in the Emperor's personal army, rather than a clan army.

Rokugan is a nation focused upon its military. The total population of Rokugan is roughly thirty-three million, and two million of these are samurai. Roughly eight million ashigaru can be called upon to serve in the armies of the Great Clans. The Imperial Legions draw their numbers from the samurai and ashigaru of the clans. Generally, the Emperor demands that ten percent of a clan's troops serve in the Imperial Legions.



While this may seem a large number to serve as the Emperor's guard, it is not as excessive as one might think. Roughly ninety percent of the Legions are away from Otosan Uchi at any given time. These "Wandering Legions" fulfill a variety of important duties such as patrolling the roads, protecting tax collectors, or providing protection for areas of critical importance. Judging "critical importance" is at the discretion of the Emperor, but generally describes one of two things – areas that require the presence of a skilled protective force (such as Ryoko Owari or the hidden Tomb of Iuchiban) or areas that have met with the Emperor's favor. The current Emperor, for example, has dispatched several Imperial Legions to protect the Isawa provinces in gratitude for Isawa Kaede's service during the Scorpion Coup. The Crane have perfected the art of currying the Emperor's favor, and more than a few Crane military victories can be attributed to the timely assistance of the Imperial Legions.

History of the Legions

The Emperor has had more than his share of protectors since the dawn of the Empire. However, it was not until after the War Against Fu Leng that the need for an organized personal military force became apparent. Without a single foe to unite them, the Great Clans began turning to their own concerns. Individual daimyo began to grow in power and influence. Though Hantei Genji was a brilliant and charismatic leader it soon became clear that he did not possess his father's immortality. Doji Hatsuo, the Emperor's personal champion, realized that future Emperors might not be as strong as Genji, and would need protection from usurpers. The solution was obvious. The Great Clans had sworn to serve the Son of Heaven; they could prove their loyalty by donating their finest troops.

An experienced officer in the Crane military, Hatsuo began to draft methods by which quality soldiers could be conscripted. One of the first assistants he chose was a judge by the name of Soshi Saibankan. Saibankan had long theorized a new system by which magistrates could enforce the law of the Empire, and Hatsuo was intrigued by the Scorpion's plan. Hatsuo and Saibankan soon devised a single method by which the Emperor could uphold justice and protect his reign. The new system guaranteed that the Emperor's conscripts and magistrates would work closely, with powers that complemented one another without being excessive. Almost overnight, the Imperial Legions and Emerald Magistrates were born.



Composition of the Legions

Each Imperial Legion is composed of five thousand warriors, and is assigned a number between one and four hundred. The Eighteenth Legion, for example, currently protects the city of Ryoko Owari.

All Imperial Legions are under the command of the Emperor, represented by the Emerald Champion. Along with his other duties, the Emerald Champion serves as the general of the Imperial Legions. However, as the Right Hand of the Emperor the Lion Clan Champion may take command of the Legions when the Emerald Champion's other duties demand his attention. These two individuals are seen to have equal rank in regard to the Legions. Ranking directly beneath them are the numerous *Shireikan* (Commanders). A *Shireikan* has command of five Legions, and is usually posted in a large Imperial city where he can oversee his command. Underneath the *Shireikan* are the *Taisa* (Captains), each



in direct command of a single Legion in the field. The Taisa's *Chui* (Lieutenants) come next, each commanding units of eight hundred to a thousand bushi. *Gunso* (Sergeants) command platoons of fifty to two hundred bushi, and often accompany small, elite units on maneuvers. *Nikutai* (Corporals) are placed in command of small squads of *Hohei* (Privates), the lowest rank of bushi in the Legions. Most ashigaru in the legions are either hohei or nikutai. Ashigaru nikutai are never placed in command of samurai. An ashigaru of higher rank than a samurai from another unit is expected to follow the lower ranking samurai's orders, unless they interfere with the orders of a higher ranking samurai.

A Legion may be granted permission by the Emperor to conscript additional local ashigaru to further swell its numbers, though strict limitations are imposed whenever this permission is granted. Generally, a Legion cannot conscript more than 15,000 ashigaru, who must be duly compensated for their services when they are dismissed according to Imperial Law. These ashigaru are considered to be hohei, though they are outranked by samurai of equal rank.

Joining the Legions

Samurai are inducted into the Legions from every clan, Great and Minor. Occasionally, remarkable ronin are invited to serve in the Legions as a reward. (While Miya Yoto was daimyo of the Miya family, he was notorious for granting heroic ronin such favors.) Unfortunately, ronin in the Legions seldom rise to high rank. Sometimes clan prejudices doom them to an unexceptional career. In other instances, a clan notices the ronin's potential and grants him fealty.

Induction to the Legions is never random. A samurai must be invited either by a member of the Imperial family or a Legionnaire with a rank of Taisa or higher. Alternately, a samurai can be recommended by the daimyo of his family or clan. Such recommendations are rarely turned down, unless the samurai's family is currently out of favor in Otosan Uchi. Once invited, a samurai has no choice but to join the Legion, as to ignore the Emperor's command is to betray the Emperor.

The choice of whether or not to join the Legions is not really a choice at all. A period of service in the Legions is almost invariably a path to glory and prestige, and powerful samurai families sacrifice much so that their sons and daughters can gain an invitation. Officially, one cannot buy one's way into the Legions: only the best and the brightest are to be invited to join the Emperor. Unfortunately, in reality positions within the Legion are bought and paid for quite frequently. Many Imperial diplomats allow courtiers to place their relatives in the Legions to keep the wheels of the bureaucracy greased.

To balance this minor corruption, representatives of the Legions constantly travel the Empire seeking talented samurai. At any large gempukku ceremony one can count upon a few Legionnaires making an appearance and scouting the young bushi for promising recruits. The Topaz Championship is particularly noted for this. Those samurai who do well in the tournament can expect to be approached by the Legion, and the samurai who wins is almost always granted a position as a Gunso and placed in command of troops.

Membership in the Legion generally lasts for a term of six years. Once this term of service is expired, a samurai is free to return to his homeland. There is no dishonor in leaving the Legions in such a manner, though the samurai may face a loss of prestige as they vacate their post in the Emperor's guard. At the end of the six-year period, a samurai may petition to renew his service. The samurai's conduct is placed under review for a period of ten months, and he is granted an interview by a council of officers, including the Taisa of the Legion. If the samurai's performance is deemed satisfactory, he is allowed to retain his post in the Legions for life, and usually granted a promotion. If the samurai is found wanting, he is dismissed to return to his clan. Ashigaru who serve in the Legions may not personally petition for a renewal of service, though they may be recommended by samurai who notice their talents.

Because the Imperial Legions are conscripted from every clan, relations within the ranks can be strained. "The Legion's greatest enemy is itself" is a common expression, though never within earshot of an Imperial officer. A Miya Shisha usually assigns Legionnaires to units where there will be little or no personality conflict, but the task is often impossible. Officers are instructed to have no tolerance for brawling and dissension within the ranks, and bushi who allow their arrogance to interfere with their duty can count on severe punishment. Those who continue to cause trouble find their terms of service cut off abruptly, a shameful and humiliating fate.

The Emerald Legions

Of all the Legions, the finest are the First through Tenth Legions, known collectively as the Emerald Legions. These Legions protect the city of Otosan Uchi, and help the Seppun Miharu to guard the Emperor during his travels. No position in the Legions is quite so prestigious as the Emerald Legions. An invitation to join their exclusive ranks is a coveted prize. The careers of many a courtier have been made or destroyed over an invitation to the Emerald Legions, and any bushi lucky enough to receive such an invitation is surely destined for great things.



The Emerald Legions are very much like the rest of the Imperial Legions, only more intense. Because so many of the posts within the Emerald Legions are granted through political favors, the Emerald Champion must make an extra effort to see that the rest of the positions go to those who are capable of protecting the Emperor during an emergency. Thus, a strange contrast is readily evident within the Emerald Legions. Fully half its membership are ultra-rich children of powerful families, granted their posts through no merit of their own. The remainder are the finest warriors in all of Rokugan, keen swords wielded by equally keen minds. This latter group does its best to protect the Imperial City despite the political games of its counterparts. Unfortunately, those who have purchased their positions wield great political power, and often outrank those who have earned their positions. This dichotomy causes great political tensions within the Emerald Legions.

Nowhere was this quite as evident as during the Scorpion Clan Coup. Bayushi Shoji took advantage of the weakness and incompetence of the Emerald Legion officers during his conquest of the city. His saboteurs noted the postings of the skilled and experienced members of the guard and struck their barracks first, separating them from the Forbidden City or slaughtering them outright. By negating the true driving force behind the Emerald Legions, the rest of the Emperor's forces were thrown into disarray.

In Shoji's wake, the Emerald Legions are in a fragile state. Their ranks need to be filled once more, and quickly. Due to the illness of the Emperor and the death of the Emerald Champion, however, this is taking quite a bit of time. The Emerald Legions are currently at one-fifth their former strength. Promotions from the Wandering Legions to the Emerald Legions are frequent, and samurai who prove themselves worthy have a greater chance than ever to be appointed as a guardian of Otosan Uchi.

Imperial Legions and Emerald Magistrates

The Imperial Legions have a special relationship with Emerald Magistrates, as both are under the command of the Emerald Champion. In fact, in the most technical sense, all Emerald Magistrates are Imperial Legionnaires. Though magistrates frequently work alone or in small groups outside of a Legion, they still retain official rank. Any Emerald Magistrate may attempt to draw upon the Legions for support in time of need. This power should not be used frivolously. Moving even one Legion into an area can be a dramatic drain on the local resources. If the Legion's assistance turns out to be unnecessary, it may fall to the Magistrate to make restitution.

The Legions in Your Campaign

Like their counterparts, the Emerald Magistrates, the Imperial Legions are an excellent way of introducing a party of disparate characters into the world of Rokugan. Even as the Empire spirals slowly into civil war the Legions stand together, built from members of every clan in Rokugan. A party composed of characters from different clans can be easily assembled by assigning them to a single squad in a Legion. Though the natural instinct of characters whose clans may be enemies is to fight among themselves, to do so while assigned to the Legions is to betray the Emperor, risking great shame and disgrace for one's entire family.

A squad of player characters could be a group of specialists within a particular Legion, assigned to hunt bandits, stalk *maho-tsukai*, keep the peace in Ryoko Owari, or even find a cure for the Wasting Disease. The squad could be placed in the command of a character played by a more experienced player, or even an NPC gunso. NPC commanding officers should be considered very carefully in a campaign such as this. While it certainly isn't recommended to straitjacket the party into one course of action by having an NPC bark orders at them every moment, such outside influences can be a useful tool for in case the campaign begins to wander astray. See Appendix I of *Way of the Lion* for more suggestions about the chain of command in a military campaign.

Another benefit of the Imperial Legions as a vehicle for a player character party is promotion. The Legion is a strictly regimented military organization. Those who perform admirably are promoted. A heroic player character may someday find herself in charge of a unit of troops, or perhaps an entire Legion, opening up whole new avenues for role-playing and adventure.

The Armies of the Clans

The following numbers have been updated from *Way of the Dragon*. The first number listed is the number of soldiers currently active in the military. This number includes both samurai and heimin, and does not include conscript troops. All samurai are technically of the warrior caste, but not all samurai are warriors. The elderly, courtiers, wives who chose to remain home to manage the household, and many shugenja are not counted as active members of the military.

During times of war, additional soldiers can be conscripted in vast numbers. A good deal of a clan's ashigaru spend most of their time working on farms or protecting villages rather than on patrol in the army. Given time, peasant levies can be rounded up and given rudimentary training and weapons, and these numbers could easily



triple or even quadruple. This is hardly the norm, however, as such a practice greatly drains the resources of the clan and peasant levies can be unreliable.

Crab	300,000
Crane	150,000
Dragon	200,000
Lion	400,000
Phoenix	100,000
Scorpion*	120,000
Unicorn	270,000
Mantis Clan	50,000
Other Minor Clans	150,000

* At the current point in the storyline, the Scorpion Clan officially has no army. The number listed here comprises the samurai and peasant retainers who still retain their loyalty to the Scorpion and wait in secret for their revenge.

The Seppun and the Phoenix

The Seppun have always had a strong religious background. Though the Phoenix are Rokugan's premier shugenja and keepers of the Tao, the case can be made that the Seppun have been priests even longer. When the Kami fell from the Heavens, it was Seppun who stepped forward to acknowledge their power, and it was Seppun who became the first mortal to be blessed with their approval. The Phoenix have a greater number of shugenja, and their talents with magic far outstrip those of the smaller Seppun family, but it cannot be denied that the Seppun have always been a powerful force within Rokugani religion.

The Seppun are the most beloved of the Imperial Families, both by the Emperor and by the people. As they have historically had few enemies and maintain good relations with every Great Clan, the pacifist Phoenix have always had a special admiration for them.

When the Phoenix began their analysis of Shinsei's teachings, they invited many Seppun scholars to assist.

The Seppun were the first to publicize the great strides the Phoenix made in the study of the Tao. When the Phoenix accepted Shinsei's teachings, the Seppun were the catalyst that brought the Tao to the rest of Rokugan. When the Four Temples of Kyuden Seppun were constructed, Shinseism came into its own as a religion and began gaining widespread acceptance. As the Brotherhood of Shinsei formed, the Seppun offered these temples as a home to the monastic order. The Seppun have since served as a bridge between the shugenja of the Phoenix and the monks of Shinsei, forging the two divergent halves of Rokugani religion into a complete whole.

When Hantei Genji, successor to the immortal Hantei I, was presented with the Phoenix analysis of the Tao, he was impressed. He declared the Phoenix the keepers of this new Tao, appointing his cousins in the Seppun to monitor and assist the Phoenix in their progress. The Phoenix eagerly complied, gratified that the Emperor was pleased with their work. Cooperation between the Seppun and Phoenix became a tradition, and most Phoenix discoveries are made available to the Seppun in a display of brotherhood and trust. Ironically, the families of the Phoenix sometimes share their studies with the Seppun more readily than they would with other Phoenix families. In time, the Phoenix have helped the Seppun become skilled at understanding their mystical ways.

Ever a practical family, the Seppun have turned what they have learned from the Phoenix to a practical purpose. Most Seppun shugenja dedicate themselves to protecting the Hantei from evil magic, just as their cousins in the miharu protect the Son of Heaven from physical harm. The Seppun are aware of the dark spirits that hover at the edge of the mortal understanding, existing only to corrupt the souls of men. The Emperor, the brightest, purest, and most powerful mortal of all, is an irresistible target for the dark creatures of Jigoku. The Seppun firmly believe that the safety of the Emperor's soul is in their hands. Those Seppun lucky enough to gain a position as a protector of the Emperor are zealously dedicated to their cause. Any one of them would gladly sacrifice his own body, mind, and soul to keep the Emperor safe.

Training

The Seppun Academy, training ground of the Seppun shugenja, is far from their family estates. The school is actually located in the shadows of Shiro Shiba, in a small but beautifully constructed and lavishly decorated palace. The Emperor personally invites the greatest shugenja of the Empire to this place in order to train his shugenja protectors. Needless to say, invitation to the Academy is a great honor. The vast majority of those invited are Phoenix, though



a good number of Dragon and Crane are present as instructors as well. Members of other clans, especially Minor Clans, are rarely invited to teach at the Seppun Academy.

The Phoenix consider the presence of the Academy in their lands a matter of great pride, and most of the clan's most famous shugenja have taught at the Academy for a time. Of the current Council of Elemental Masters, Isawa Ujina and Isawa Tsuke have both resided at the Academy for at least one semester. Isawa Tomo was headmaster for several years before relinquishing his position to join the Elemental Masters. Though the master of the Academy is usually an Isawa, the current head master is a bright young Asako named Kaushen. Asako Kaushen was posted to the Academy after finding favor at Winter Court several years ago. His loyalty to the Hantei is unquestioned, and he claims to have many innovative new security techniques in mind to keep the Emperor safe from harm.

The Hidden Guard

The magics of the Emperor's guardians tend to be very subtle. When the Emperor appears publicly, rest assured that a handful of shugenja hover in the shadows nearby, ready to defend against any spell cast in the Emperor's direction. The most dedicated and fanatical of the lot are the Emperor's Seppun Hidden Guard, a select group of powerful shugenja that dedicate themselves to protecting the Emperor's life. Though the Hidden Guard maintain the Seppun name, many of these shugenja are actually Phoenix; occasionally they come from other clans. Membership is a matter of pride more than prestige, as most of Rokugan is unaware that the Hidden Guard even exists.

Most of the work of the Hidden Guard is done behind the scenes. Many of those who meet with the Emperor do not realize the power of the magic that surrounds him. The Hidden Guard's magics are very practical, and very focused in application. The Hidden Guard need not concern themselves with physical threats. The *Miharu* (Imperial Guard) are more than adequately prepared to handle those. The Hidden Guard concern themselves with studying the spirit world, devising means by which magic can protect the Emperor, and finding possible ways an assassin might use magic so that contingencies can be formed.

The Seppun Hidden Guard have been granted several duties by the Hantei. It is their duty to prepare and maintain the elaborate wards that protect the Emperor within the Imperial Palace. It is their duty to visit a home before the Emperor arrives and see that it has been cleared of evil spirits or other threats. It is also their duty to see the Emperor's soul safely to Jigoku when he dies. It is not unheard of for a particularly dedicated Seppun to take his own life after the death of the Emperor so he can oversee the journey personally.

While the Miharu protect the Emperor's life, the Hidden Guard are the custodians of the Emperor's soul. They take their jobs very seriously. Seppun shugenja are noted for their grim demeanor and terrible sense of humor. They seldom pay any attention to those who offer counsel on how to do their job, even if that someone is a Miharu or a Phoenix. They are especially alert to Asako Inquisitors, and will allow a Kuni Witch Hunter in their presence so long as he has something important to say.

The Seppun and the Scorpion Coup

It is a dark time for the Hidden Guard. During the Scorpion Coup, Soshi Bantaro's students made a point of wiping out the Emperor's loyal Seppun shugenja to the last man early on during the Coup. The only graduates of the Seppun Academy who remained were elderly retirees, recent graduates, and those unskilled or incompetent enough to earn duties outside of Otosan Uchi. Rather than leave the Emperor unguarded, Empress Kachiko called most of these Seppun into active duty. In addition, many Lion and Phoenix shugenja volunteered their services to protect the Emperor at the side of the Seppun. While the Emperor has no lack of shugenja guardians, his current protectors are inexperienced and unused to working as a team. In the face of this delicate situation, some among the Phoenix Clan have considered doing away with the Seppun Academy altogether and placing the Emperor under their own clan's protection. The Seppun family admit the current problem, but are reluctant to abandon their oaths to the Emperor.



In the lands of the Phoenix there is no practice more breathtaking, or more controversial, than the Shiba Tejina. The masters of Tejina are among the most esteemed creators of beauty in Rokugan, though their creations are more ephemeral and



temporary than any of the Kakita Artisans. The Teijina are shugenja entertainers who use their magic to create illusions which amaze and amuse others. Their performances are greeted with adoration and wonder just as often as with outright derision. There are even some who consider them heretics.

History

The Teijina school of magic is a rather new one, founded roughly 150 years ago by a shugenja named Shiba Tsuna. Tsuna was an oddity among shugenja, for those of his family are normally called to join one of the many Shiba bushi schools. Due to the unfortunate internal divisions among the Phoenix families, Tsuna found that the Isawa had no place for him in their research libraries, and the Asako would not trust him as a historian. Tsuna refused to let his potential be wasted, so he decided that he must find a way to use his magic that would benefit the Empire. Tsuna claims that the solution came to him in a dream. A tiny spirit of Air visited him in his sleep. The

kami said that the sound of children's laughter was the finest sound it had ever experienced, and asked Tsuna for help in bringing more laughter to the children of Rokugan. Tsuna agreed, immediately realizing that the spirit had hit upon a solution to his dilemma.

And so Teijina was born. Tsuna found other young shugenja who were eager to try something new, and they formed a small group of traveling shugenja entertainers. Though they met with some initial resistance, their breathtaking displays of smoke, flame, and magic soon caught on among the courts. Tsuna was a success, and soon found dozens of shugenja at his doorstep, begging to learn from him.

The Phoenix Champion was quite impressed with Tsuna, but others among the Phoenix were not amused. In particular, an Inquisitor named Asako Bokkai was offended by Tsuna's behavior and jealous of his success. Bokkai publicly claimed that summoning the kami for something so petty as entertainment was disrespectful of their power. Bokkai accused Tsuna of deluding the kami into





performing for his own glorification, using their power for personal gain.

At the Emperor's Winter Court, Asako Bokkai accused Shiba Tsuna of *maho*.

Tsuna was stunned, so stunned that he did not take Bokkai's accusations seriously at first. By the time he realized that Inquisitors did not exaggerate, Bokkai's Witch Hunters had arrived to place his entire troupe in shackles. Since Tsuna had refused to deny Bokkai's initial charges, the trial commenced.

Bokkai was obviously motivated by politics, angry that a Shiba shugenja had found such favor with the Emperor while his own career stagnated. However, the Inquisitor was a clever man and knew the law well. He took great care in manipulating facts and opinion to his advantage. At the time, *maho* was defined by the law as "the use of magics for the purposes of increasing one's own power, and corrupting the natural order of the elements." This, Bokkai attested, was exactly what Tsuna had perpetrated. To those unfamiliar with true *maho* – the majority of the court – Bokkai's words made a frightening amount of sense. The Elemental Masters could have ordered Bokkai to back off at any time, but the Isawa had little love for this upstart Shiba. Tsuna found himself with few friends in court, and it seemed for a time that the wicked Inquisitor would succeed.

During the final moments of the trial, Tsuna's life was saved by the unexpected intervention of Hida Namika, the Crab Champion. Namika stormed into the court with unrestrained rage, and openly challenged Bokkai to a duel. When the startled Inquisitor asked on what grounds she challenged him, she replied "Your duty is to destroy *tsukai*, not puppeteers. When you pervert your position, it becomes my duty to destroy you."

Bokkai laughed at the Crab's challenge and nervously tried to talk his way out of the situation. Namika was through talking. She drew her sword and hacked down the Inquisitor in disgust. The outcry and political repercussions between Phoenix and Crab in the following months were monumental, and Shiba Tsuna's Tejjina troupe was forgotten during the shuffle. A more forgiving and rational Inquisitor dropped the spurious charges, releasing the artisans. Since that time, no one has openly accused the Tejjina of heresy out of fear of opening old wounds, but they still have a number of detractors who wonder whether their magic is truly respectful.

The Tejjina Today

The Tejjina do not understand what all the fuss is about. Spirits of Water and Air are naturally creative and curious. Such spirits love helping the Tejjina create their illusions, and enjoy the adulation

their displays bring as much as the shugenja themselves. The Tejjina do not puzzle over whether their magic is right or wrong. In their belief, the joy that their art brings proves the purity of their purpose. How could something be wrong if it brings so much happiness and brings harm to no one?

The argument over whether or not it is proper to use magic for the purposes of entertainment will perhaps never be settled. The Tejjina have learned to accept this, and make little attempt to change the minds of their critics. A Tejjina master never confronts those who accuse him of heresy, or argues with those who question the purpose of his magic. He usually walks away, laughs, and throws sparkling flowers on the wind. The purpose of the Tejjina art is to inspire joy; arguing about trivial matters just brings more anger and pain into the world.

Ironically, the Tejjina's greatest supporters, outside of their Shiba sponsors, are among their former enemies, the Asako family. The reason is simple – most Asako like Tejjina. The *henshin* are greatly amused by Tejjina displays of false reality, and many Asako historians have used Tejjina magics to assist in their lectures. Even the dour Inquisitors hold no grudge. Though Asako Bokkai hoped to prove otherwise, the Inquisitors know that the Tejjina are not truly *maho-tsukai*. Most Inquisitors have greater things to worry about than a handful of harmless entertainers.

The Shiba Tejjina Academy is a small school, with only a dozen or so students at any time. Those who learn from them must be invited, and the master of the Academy always keeps the troupe small. In part, this is so that all Tejjina will know one another and work well together. The small size of the school also serves to keep it beneath the notice of the larger shugenja academies of the Asako and Isawa. The Shiba Tejjina respect the other Phoenix families, and do not wish to appear as a threat to them. The Tejjina function as they always have, as entertainers. Their performances are common at Shiro Shiba and Kyuden Asako, though they have been known to make rare appearances in the households of other clans.





Historical Figures

Most Rokugani historical timelines presented to date have dealt primarily with military victories and famous warriors. While those who make war are certainly a large part of history, not as much detail has been given to other famous figures. The following section describes a few other well-known individuals in Rokugani culture, along with adventure hooks for using them in your campaign.

Seppun Hanako (570–637)

Hanako achieved her gempukku during the time of the ruthless Hantei XVI. Surviving despite all odds, she witnessed countless examples of corruption and atrocity during the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum. When Hantei XVII ascended the throne, Hanako eagerly agreed to assist the inexperienced young Emperor as Chancellor. During this time, Hanako seized the opportunity not only to undo some of the damage done by the previous Emperor, but to enact a variety of legal reforms she had long envisioned. Her greatest achievement, The Articles of Heaven, became a new basis for the laws of Rokugan. The articles placed limitations upon the use of torture, increased the quality of living for many heimin, and set strict rules for the treatment of prisoners and hostages during wartime.

Adventure Hook: An opportunistic Otomo diplomat has been researching the Articles, and has come to a disturbing conclusion. Many of the laws set down in the Articles were previously left to the discretion of the Emperor. In the Otomo courtier's mind, this means that the Articles suggest that the Emperor is fallible. He has determined to repeal the Articles of Heaven for no greater reason than to prove himself clever and further his own career. However, many other laws have been built upon the foundations established by Hanako. What other effects could result from negating this ancient cornerstone of Rokugan's legal system? What can the characters do to stop the Otomo? What if they find themselves agreeing with his twisted logic?

Ikoma Dayu (812–843)

Dayu was a controversial Ikoma *Omoidasu* (bard) whose radical opinions on history might have been discarded were he not the son of the family daimyo. Dayu was unsatisfied with the histories of the Ikoma, finding them stale, boring, and uninteresting. He believed that the historians should take a cue from the artisans of the Kakita, and make their histories entertaining as well as informative. He believed that if history were made rousing, emotional, and enjoyable, more samurai would become familiar with it. With continued reading, the minds of the warrior class would become sharper, and pride in one's clan and family would grow. Dayu's recounts of the Battle of White Stag and the War Against Iuchiban are legendary, epic tales. Many criticize the historical accuracy of Dayu's tales, but his works remain popular to this day.

Adventure Hook: While visiting the Ikoma Libraries, a player character is visited by the ghost of Ikoma Dayu. The ghost leads the character to a secluded area of a side garden, and commands him to dig. If the character complies, he finds an ancient chest containing a long-lost scroll of one of Dayu's historical tales, recounting the ancient Lion Champion Matsu Itagi's journey to (and death in) the Shadowlands at the side of Hida Tadaka. Unlike many of his other works, this scroll contains many notes indicating painstaking research and accuracy. Unfortunately this account paints Itagi as foolish and incompetent. The scroll seems to have been written shortly before Dayu died. The later portions of the scroll are written in a nervous hand and contain a few personal references to how "I will defy these Matsu thugs. The truth will out." Now it is up to the character to decide what to do with this potentially deadly piece of history.

Otomo Reju (383–457)

Otomo Reju reached the peak of his power during the time of the gozoku. Though he was closely related to the Emperor, he felt the gozoku held the interests of the people of Rokugan closer to heart. Reju was a stern believer in the ability of higher learning, particularly the study of the Tao, to improve the morality of the people. He established several colleges in the Hub Villages of Otosan Uchi, including the House of Shining Light which endures to this day. He also wrote long discourses on the importance of morality in the life of a samurai. His many critics considered him arrogant, pretentious, and impractical. When the gozoku began their feud with the Brotherhood of Shinsei, Reju condemned the triad and withdrew his considerable financial support (leading, in part, to the gozoku's downfall). After the gozoku fell, Reju could find no place in the court of Hantei Yugo-zohime, who considered him a manipulative gozoku sycophant. Reju lived out his latter days in exile at the edge of Badger Clan territory.



Adventure Hook: The instructors of the House of the Shining Light have heard rumors that Reju spent the last years of his life transcribing his philosophies for posterity. The college would be grateful if a group of samurai would investigate the rumors, and obtain a copy of the scrolls if possible. The journey to Badger territory is long and arduous, but the House of Shining Light is an ancient institution, and would provide a powerful ally in the Imperial Courts. To make matters more complex, the lands of the Badger have been eerily silent for some time, with no word whatsoever from the Ichiro family. Has something happened to the Badger Clan?

Agasha Chuichi (214–242)

Chuichi was one of the greatest thinkers in Dragon history, and though he made many great advances in the Dragon science of *mizugusuri* (potions) he is best remembered as a healer. He lived during a time of great plague and famine, and rather than turning his back on the torment of the peasants, he ventured forth into the areas hit worst by disaster. In some of the towns, he discovered that the farmers had been reduced to eating dogs, cats, and horses. In a few rare cases he discovered civilized men reduced to cannibalism. Chuichi helped to devise many irrigation techniques to bring relief to the farmers and make farms more efficient. He also made great strides in combating the plague, and was the first to notice that the plague was, in fact, a variety of different diseases lumped together under one name due to fear and ignorance. He was able to document and cure a number of types of plague before succumbing to a particularly brutal strain in a tiny village at the edge of what was then Fox territory (and is now Unicorn territory).

Adventure Hook: Chuichi was a master of treating the plague, and the Dragon believe that his teachings may shed some light on the Wasting Disease. A few of his scrolls still exist in the Agasha Libraries, but some are now held in Kyuden Kitsune and Shiro Shinjo. The Unicorn have agreed to provide their copies of Chuichi's scrolls, but the Fox have refused to answer the Dragon's inquiries. The player characters have been asked to intercede as neutral parties. Does the Fox Clan truly possess Chuichi's lost teachings? If so, why are they hiding them?

Kuni Gennai (115–148)

Gennai was trained as a shugenja, but his true love was nature. He often sketched pictures of animals, plants, and other natural objects, accompanied by short descriptions of what they were and what was known about them. At one point he voluntarily became a ronin in order to wander the Empire and discover more creatures and plants worth documenting. Hida was angered by his follower's disloyalty at first, but came around when Gennai's works were

noticed by Hantei Genji. The Shining Prince invited Gennai to his court to review the Kuni's collection of works personally, and Hida reinstated the Gennai to the Crab Clan with full honors and permission to continue his travels as long as he wished. Gennai's works were the first cohesive attempt to catalog the natural life of Rokugan. There is no single comprehensive collection of Gennai's work, though he is said to have completed thousands of paintings during his time. His works are greatly prized, and owning one of Gennai's original works is a matter of great prestige.

Adventure Hook: A local daimyo was in possession of an original Gennai painting, a portrait of a small thrush. The painting is so valuable that a thief would have a great deal of trouble selling it without being caught. It's up to the characters to find the thief and discover why he or she would have risked stealing the painting. To make matters worse, the painting is very old and very fragile. If the characters are overzealous, they may end up responsible for destroying an irreplaceable masterpiece.

Miya Mai (452–495)

Trained by the Crane as an actress, Miya Mai's unremarkable career took a turn when a theater fire badly scarred her face and throat. Unable to pursue her first love, acting, Mai took the only course available and began writing plays. As the Fortunes would have it, the mediocre actress was a marvelous playwright. *The Emperor's Blessing*, her most critically acclaimed work, tells the tale of the end of the War Against Fu Leng and describes the founding of the Miya household. Mai considered the work "too tame" and only completed it so that the commission promised by her patron would provide enough money for her to survive. The play is widely regarded to be her best, and spawned any number of imitators. The great Scorpion playwright Shosuro Furuyari is said to have been particularly fond of Miya Mai's writings, and owned several of her original manuscripts.

Most of Mai's later plays were darkly comic and political, reflecting a cynical perception of life. Though Mai is regarded as one of Rokugan's greatest playwrights, she died in poverty due to the machinations of the powerful men and women whom she offended with her later works.

Adventure Hook: A kabuki troupe visits town, performing an obscure play written by Miya Mai entitled *Tools of War*. The play describes an ancient feud between the Lion and Crane (or any other two powerful factions in the characters' area). The performance unintentionally stirs up bad blood between the local groups, and bloodshed ensues. The actors are truly regretful, and fear further retribution. If the players are thinking on their feet, they might wonder – who sent the group to perform such a play in such a volatile time and place, and why?



Yasuki Tanaka (189–264)

Tanaka was born a simple merchant in a minor family of the Crane, long before the Yasuki Break. His contribution to Rokugani society was simple, but very important. Tanaka invented the koku. The system of exchanging items of worth for goods or services existed long before Tanaka, but it was he who designed the koku as it is recognized today. The koku's design features the kanji of the Fortunes on one side and the Kami on the other. Though they were simple and recognizable, Tanaka's coins confounded most attempts at forgery. When the Emperor inquired as to the nature of the strange little copper coin (which was, at that point, used exclusively by the Crane) Tanaka gladly gifted the Emperor with his dies. The Emperor was charmed by the clever design and the koku have been Rokugan's official currency ever since.

Adventure Hook: Though the koku's design remains unchanged, the dies must be replaced every few years due to wear and tear. It is time for the official dies in Otsan Uchi to be replaced, and the characters have been charged with delivering the new dies and disposing of the old. A group of clever thieves is planning to steal a set of dies. It doesn't really matter which one they steal: both the old dies and the new ones will work just fine for minting a few thousand undetectable forgeries.



From the Correspondence of Hiroji, Tortoise Clan Ambassador

May the Lady Amaterasu shine upon you as you take your place as kizoku of our clan, Kemmei-sama. There can be no doubt that you will lead us in our fulfillment of the tasks charged to us by the Son of Heaven himself. I regret that I was unable to attend your father's funeral ceremony, but I could not dishonor his memory by leaving his last assigned task undone.

Your courier greeted me upon our arrival in port with your request for information on the history of the Yobanjin with whom

we trade in the northern lands. It is my great pleasure to tell you all we know of them, but unfortunately our knowledge is limited.

It seems obvious that the Yobanjin are a society of warriors, similar in some ways to that of our own culture. Bits and pieces of information we have gathered over the centuries seem to indicate that they were once a nomadic people, but now appear to control a large expanse of land far to the north of Rokugan. The extent and quality of their holdings is unknown to us, as they do not permit us to travel outside of the port cities in which we conduct our trade with them. Every effort to move beyond these cities has failed.

In truth, it seems that the Yobanjin are carefully controlling the limited information we have of them, much the same way that we deliberately give them an inaccurate portrait of Rokugan. Just as it is our role to mislead them, ensuring that any potential invaders will be caught unexpected by our true might, they too could be feeding us false information to prevent potential attacks. We must continue our efforts to discover the truth behind the Yobanjin and their mysterious ways.

From the report of Asako Inoshi, Phoenix Clan magistrate

My most noble lord Isawa-sama,

The raids upon the villages under your control have been dealt with. In accordance with your orders, I took a patrol of young Phoenix bushi into the northern reaches of your provinces to investigate the recent attacks reported by the heimin.

Damage to the villages was more severe than we had expected. No fewer than seven villages had been attacked during the past two months. Nearly two dozen heimin have been killed, with twice that many injured. These villages will have great difficulty meeting their harvest taxes without assistance. The bushi accompanying me, though young and inexperienced, expressed outrage that someone would disrespect their lord's authority by killing his subjects.

Questioning the heimin of the villages that had been attacked, I determined that a common target of the mysterious bandits was livestock. Cattle are rare among the villages of Phoenix lands, and the peasants greatly value them for their milk. The raids frequently involved the theft of the cattle or killing them on the spot and taking portions of their carcasses for unknown purposes, possibly some dark ritual.

Locating a larger village in the area that possessed a few head of cattle, your bushi and I lay in wait for the bandits to appear. For three days we hid within the peasant buildings of the village, not daring to emerge into the light of day. It was difficult to deal with the uncleanness, but I was determined to stop these bandits. The bushi bore the discomfort stoically, a testament to their clan's devotion to duty.



In the early hours of the fourth morning, they appeared. Shrieking horrible war cries, they rode in from the northern mountains. They rode horses similar to those ridden by the Unicorn Clan, albeit slightly stockier and with longer hair. The barbarians' skin was darker than our own, with long flowing mustaches and shaggy manes of hair. Some wore furs laced with metal to protect them from the elements, but others left their chests exposed to the cold. They were as massive as the burliest bushi of the Crab Clan, with dark, hooded eyes and malevolent, predatory grimaces upon their faces. They bore large, bladed weapons that bore little resemblance to the elegant katana worn by samurai.

The bushi rushed forward to engage the bandits. One of the strangers gestured toward us and shouted a word that caused me pain to hear. A young Shiba erupted into flames at the very sound of the word. I quickly tried to extinguish the fire, but the kami were unable to respond. It was as if their will had been stolen and they were forced to obey the bandit's wishes. The dying bushi hurled himself into the midst of the bandits, scattering their horses and disrupting their attack. His ancestors no doubt welcomed him with honor into Yomi.

The skirmish was short, but deadly, as three young Shiba joined their ancestors. The bandit's sorcerer was quickly overcome, as the kami were eager to strike him down. It seems his dark magic angered the spirits greatly. The elemental flames that consumed him left nothing behind, not even ashes.

Following the battle, the bodies of the filthy interlopers were incinerated, and the land upon which we fought was ritually purified, as were all the surviving bushi. These barbarians will not disturb your lands again.

Yobanjin Equipment

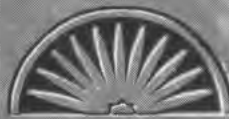
Although very rare, some items from the Yobanjin lands have made it into circulation in Rokugan. These items are almost exclusively held by the Mantis and Tortoise clans, although it is rumored that the daimyo of the Daidoji family has a supply for study. They are available to the right person and for the right price.

Ring Sword

1k3

This sword is very similar in appearance to the *parangu* blade that the mercenaries of the Mantis Clan occasionally use, albeit considerably larger. It has a much broader and longer blade than a katana, although it is far inferior to the folded steel of the Rokugani katana. A series of steel rings line the spine of the blade, and can be used to catch – and sometimes break – an opponent's weapon. The difficulty for this varies depending upon the type and quality of the item being broken.





If the wielder of the ring sword is on Full Defense and an opponent misses hitting him by a score of five or more, the wielder may catch the opponent's blade on the rings. A contested Strength roll is necessary to break the trapped item. The wielder must exceed his opponent's Strength roll by a certain amount in order to break the weapon:

Trapped Weapon	Must Exceed Opponent's Strength Roll By
Wooden weapons	5
Steel peasant weapons	10
Poor or Average katana	20
Fine or better katana	25

Crossbow 3k2

These exceedingly rare gaijin weapons are kept a close secret by those who possess them for fear that they might be considered a violation of the Emperor's decree against firearms. The wooden bolts fired by the crossbow are shorter and thicker than arrows and have less range (50' maximum), but are fired with more force. Rokugani armor offers no protection versus crossbow bolts. Crossbow bolts receive no Strength bonus on damage rolls. It takes two actions to load a crossbow.



A samurai is ever mindful of his ancestors, seeking their approval through his actions and honoring their memory with his deeds. He encounters countless physical reminders of this bond between the past and present every day: his grandfather's katana hanging upon his hip, a suit of armor forged at his daimyo's command in memory of his father, or a shrine devoted to the memory of his family's founder. Perhaps the greatest link, however, is the home from which one's ancestors lived, fought and died. Originally designed to serve as garrisons for soldiers, these great strongholds have come to serve as a symbol of authority for the daimyo of the families and clans.

Each of Rokugan's clans maintains at least one great palace, castle, or fortress that was erected when the clan claimed their ancestral lands over a thousand years ago. These great edifices are revered by the samurai who dwell within them, for they are a link to the past as great as any ancestral weapon or armor. Which is the greater essence of memory, the sword one's ancestor used to slay his enemies, or the home from which he ruled his lands and governed his people with honor?

Even samurai of other clans recognize the significance of these structures. It is very rare in Rokugan that a siege results in the destruction of a palace or castle. More frequently, the victor simply annexes the building and the surrounding lands, often renaming them in the process. This inevitably leads to feuds that can last for generations, such as the dispute between the Lion and Scorpion over Humility's Lesson. In modern Rokugan, Violence Behind Courtliness City is perhaps the most prominent example. The Lion and Crane clans have been battling over the city for decades, and it has switched hands many times as the Clan Wars have begun to intensify. Perhaps it is this exchange that led to the horrific and unthinkable actions of Lion Champion Matsu Tsuko, who led her armies to sack and burn Kyuden Kakita, home of many of the Emperor's Winter Courts in years past. The loss of their ancestral home has been devastating to the Kakita, although they now fight the Lion with renewed venom and intensity.

Types of Strongholds

Different strongholds within the lands of the Great Clans serve vastly different functions. The difference between Kyuden Doji and Kaiu Shiro is considerable indeed: the former is an opulent home devoted to the comfort and pleasure of its residents and guests, while the latter is a stark, utilitarian place devoted exclusively to defense against the Shadowlands.

Kyuden

The first and most elaborate type of stronghold is the *kyuden*, or palace. The name *kyuden* is usually only bestowed upon a stronghold that is fit to host the court of the Son of Heaven himself. Several clans choose to have but a single *kyuden* in their lands, the name being given to either the ancestral home of the founding family (such as Kyuden Hida in the Crab lands) or to the center of diplomacy and relations with other clans (a role fulfilled by Kyuden Ikoma in the Lion lands). Other clans that focus on diplomacy or trade may have several such opulent estates within their holdings. Both the Crane and Phoenix clans fall into this category.

Kyuden are, by nature, very large. They serve as the headquarters for the daimyo of at least one of the great families, and are often



equipped to accommodate ambassadors or visitors from many clans at once. Solidly constructed and designed to repel attackers if necessary, enormous effort and expense is spent in making the exterior of the kyuden resemble nothing so much as an eternal work of art rather than the defensible position it truly is. In any event, it is not uncommon for a defensive wall or even smaller buildings to surround the kyuden, which improve both its appearance and security. Exceptions to these stereotypes exist; Kyuden Hida is hardly a lush palace designed to meet the every need of those who visit there, but rather an austere fortress with few creature comforts. The Crab seem to find amusement in so labeling such a severe structure. Similarly, the strongholds of most minor clans are far from the wealth of the kyuden the Great Clans maintain, although Kyuden Gotei (which mainland Rokugan calls Kyuden Mantis) is an incredible display of wealth and excess. Still, most estates throughout Rokugan that are referred to as kyuden are similar to those described above.

Shiro

More commonplace than the kyuden is the *shiro*, or castle. Like the kyuden, a shiro is frequently the ancestral estate of a great family. However, a shiro's design places far more emphasis on function than on form. Shiro are frequently found nearer to a clan's borders than are kyuden, for they are military, defensible fortifications. Similar to the kyuden in size, shiro are designed to house a large number of troops in times of war. They also have expansive storehouses in the event of a siege.

Shiro rarely if ever host diplomatic affairs or important guests. The families that maintain them are, on average, more concerned with the execution of duty than the niceties of diplomacy. Again, exceptions exist, like the extraordinary Shiro Shinjo which combines the architectural styles of various gaijin cultures with traditional Rokugani elements. The Shinjo, however, prefer to conduct most diplomatic affairs outside their lands and continue to refer to their family's home as a shiro rather than a kyuden.

In times of war, the shiro transforms from a stark, mirthless edifice to a bustling tactical command center. Entire armies of samurai have their movements tracked and plotted, and forces are assembled and rerouted as needed through the shiro. The amount of traffic through these castles at such times is truly staggering. In the event of a siege, the shiro is virtually impregnable. Hundreds of bushi can be stationed within the stronghold, and in theory the castle stores sufficient supplies to last a minimum of several months. Military garrisons always conduct rigorous reconnaissance missions during the threat of conflict so that should an enemy force be detected moving toward the castle, supplies can be gathered in preparation for a possible siege. In the event of a siege, shiro

architecture includes many "murder holes," openings in the walls from which archers and shugenja can strike down their assailants. With defenses of this kind in place, it is not surprising that siegecraft in Rokugan is unusual.

Shinden

Although only rarely used as a stronghold by any of the great clans, there are occasions when a *shinden*, or temple, houses a significant number of samurai. The most obvious example is Shinden Asahina, the home of the Asahina family of the Crane. Shinden are designed neither for beauty nor for defensibility, but rather for serenity and tranquility. They are frequently the sites of meetings with diplomatic envoys containing primarily shugenja or monks.

Shinden vary in construction. Most are of stone, controlled as they are by the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Those few that are under the direct control of the clans are somewhat more elaborate, although still spartan by the standards of kyuden or shiro. Shinden Asahina is largely stone, though its top levels are woodwork and plaster. The simple wall which surrounds it offers meager protection against bandits or enemy forces. Most shinden have few or no defenses, occupied as they are by pacifistic families or sects.

There are other types of strongholds beyond those listed above, such as the *torid-e* (or keep), but these are the ones most frequently encountered in the lands of the Great Clans.

Placement

During the days of Rokugan's founding, the Empire was a vast, unsettled land filled with danger on all sides. Strange creatures and bloodthirsty bandits roamed the expanses of land between villages. When the Kami formed the Great Clans and began to carve out their domains, they naturally felt the need to protect their followers.

Strongholds constructed early in Rokugan's history were primarily stone fortresses (little more than elaborate keeps) that dotted the edges of a given clan's territory. These served as way stations and headquarters for the clan patrols that enforced borders and prevented incursions. These shiro were built atop hills when possible, for maximum visibility and to slow down attackers.

As Rokugan became more settled and peaceable following the war with the Dark One, location and construction of strongholds began to change. With improving methods of construction (detailed below), it was no longer necessary to build castles upon hills or exclusively of stone. New buildings began to appear on the plains along major roads and trade routes, developing the surrounding land. In addition to the defensive outposts near the borders of a clan's holdings, strongholds began to appear throughout the land as



well. It was easier to have a central point of command from which to govern the holdings, and having various castles placed throughout the lands afforded important travelers a suitable place to spend the evenings rather than along the roadside beneath the stars. (This also allowed the clan to keep a close record of the travelers' activities while within their lands.)

In addition to military or logistical concerns, there are other reasons for the placement of strongholds. Shiro Asako, for instance, was built upon the cliffs where the first rays of sunrise strike the lands of the Phoenix, a site of great beauty favored by the family's founder Lady Asako. As the beauty of the surroundings grew, it became more popular among courtiers and was eventually renamed Kyuden Asako to reflect the importance of the court held there. Similarly, when the Asahina family of the Crane was formed, Isawa Asahina ordered the construction of a great temple upon a site that he selected based upon a reading of celestial signs. The palace of the Emerald Champion, however, was constructed on a plain near Otosan Uchi so that the Champion might always be at the beck and call of the Son of Heaven.

While rare, there are cases in which strongholds are erected solely to entrap or contain someone or something. The single most prominent example of such an undertaking is the construction of the

three tombs after the defeat of the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban. The location of these tombs is unknown, but one was constructed for the exclusive purpose of containing the evil sorcerer's spirit. The other two tombs exist as false leads to trap and kill the Bloodspeaker's cultist followers when they would attempt to rescue him. Obviously, the locations for these structures were selected for inaccessibility and distance from existing villages and cities.

Construction

Designing and constructing a stronghold of any type is an incredibly exhausting and expensive task, one that is never undertaken lightly. Although construction methods have improved greatly over the course of Rokugan's history, building a stronghold is nonetheless a staggering logistical task which demands an incredible amount of resources and manpower. The labor requirements of the peasantry are so great that no construction may take place during the harvest season, lest the lack of *heimin* in the fields result in famine during the winter months.

For example, imagine that Lion Clan provincial daimyo Matsu Tamekago wishes to fortify the land that lies between Shiro no Yojin and Shiro Matsu against incursions by the Crane Clan. First he must





find a suitable location and have the plans for a stronghold drafted, if not by a Lion then by a hired merchant or architect from another clan. He must have heimin transport stone from the mountains of the southern Lion lands and, as his holdings lack suitable woodlands, purchase timber from another province or, failing that, from the expansive woodlands of the Phoenix. Once the materials are assembled, Tamekago must allocate heimin workers to the task, feed them during their labor, somehow locate additional foodstuffs to make up for that being lost in the fields, and protect his lands against the Crane during the entire process. He also must be prepared for his workers to be conscripted as ashigaru to serve elsewhere. All in all, it is an extraordinary task.



Rokugan's earliest days were filled with frantic construction as each of the new clans attempted to fortify their lands. The vast majority of early strongholds were constructed primarily of stone and almost exclusively atop hills. In addition to the strategic benefits offered by this arrangement, this type of building was most likely to endure the frequent earthquakes that Rokugan endured.

Several centuries after the conclusion of the First War, a young Crab engineer by the name of Kaiu Anou developed an architectural style that revolutionized the construction process. A slanting stone base could serve as the foundation for a castle, providing enormous stability and allowing for the use of alternate construction materials. This was a welcome development, as the gathering of stone for castle construction was a difficult and time-consuming task for clans whose lands were more fertile than rocky, such as the Lion and Crane.

With a slanting stone base, castles could now be constructed on plains rather than atop hills without risk of devastation by earthquakes. Although many castles along the border of clan lands continued to be constructed atop hills, strongholds in the center of a clan's lands could now be constructed on open plains for ease of traffic and troop movement. The upper levels of newly constructed castles were a combination of a wood skeleton coated with a plaster mixture to provide an attractive, watertight exterior.

There were obvious concerns by military-minded samurai that the slanting stone base of this new type of stronghold would be easy for enemy troops to climb. With their typical and forthright style of design, the Kaiu family again pioneered new techniques to eliminate this problem. Trapdoors and strategically placed openings in the stone ensured that anyone attempting to scale the base of a castle could easily be fired upon by archers or shugenja, or could be defeated with boiling oil or water (a technique used by the Crab

against the goblin hordes). These techniques quickly caught on with the other clans and the stone and wood combination style of construction rapidly came into wide usage.

Another siege consideration is that Rokugani strongholds do not, as a rule, have walls that include a walkway surrounding them. This is seen on occasion in the lands of the Unicorn, but generally it is not considered proper to have so obvious and obtrusive a demonstration of battle readiness flaunted before one's guests. A common practice, however, is to leave the timbers from the initial stages of construction along the wall, protruding inward toward the castle itself. In times of war, lengths of wood can be hastily laid across these timbers, resulting in a somewhat crude platform from which archers can attack enemies advancing upon the stronghold.

Construction of a castle is not finished once the building itself is complete. Constant maintenance is required to keep these enormous structures in working order. Battle, exposure to the elements, high traffic, and the ever-present threat of earthquakes and other natural disasters mean that there is always work to be done. Many daimyos have families of heimin or eta whose only duty is the daily cleaning and maintenance of the grounds. When more significant repairs are called for, heimin craftsmen are given the job of repairing the damaged area, usually under the strict supervision of an appropriately trained samurai overseer. The massive damage that can result from a siege is another matter altogether, and heimin and samurai alike repair and rebuild the facility. Nothing, not even personal homes, is touched before the castle itself is returned to operational status. Only then do homes, barracks, farms and the like receive attention.

In modern Rokugan, the descendants of Kaiu Anou are considered to be the true masters of designing and constructing strongholds. Once a vassal family of the Kaiu, the Anou applied the broad range of engineering skills taught by the Battle Master school exclusively to design of castles, palaces, temples and the like. It was not at all uncommon for daimyo of other clans to request an Anou engineer to assist them in the creation of a new stronghold within their lands. In time even the Son of Heaven himself requested the skill of the Anou be brought to bear on a new temple to be constructed within the boundaries of Otosan Uchi. The temple was such a creation of grace and beauty that the Emperor ordained that the Anou be adopted into the Miya family, so that their expertise and talent might enrich the legacy of the Emperor's Blessing. The Crab daimyo was more than willing to comply with the Emperor's wishes, and the Hantei showered the Crab with gifts and supplies to ease their burden for that harsh winter. The Anou bloodline remains strong within the Miya to this day, and the most talented and skilled architects and engineers of that family can all trace their ancestry back to Kaiu Anou.



Esteemed Lords and Ladies of the court.

I humbly invite you to attend this afternoon's entertainment. While perhaps not as subtle as the wonderful courtly games of the Crane, or as exhilarating as the boisterous athletic competitions of our Unicorn cousins, I promise you will not be disappointed.

In my experience, everyone loves a good story, and tonight we will gather to tell ours.

I have heard that my cousins from the north plan to step forward with a tale of the strange barbarians that live beyond our borders. Our visitors from the Carpenter Wall have planned a tale of the legendary Kaiu Anou, the simple architect whose designs found favor with the Son of Heaven, and whose descendants joined the great house of the Emperor. The emissary of the Crane has offered to share tales regarding the recent occurrences within our Empire. All in all, I would say this has the look of quite an interesting afternoon.

What tale will you have to tell?

May the glory of the Son of Heaven inspire us all,

Shiba Ujimitsu



Chapter Two: Afternoon



"Eternal Complications"

When he was a younger man, before the Soul of Shiba had chosen him, Shiba Ujimitsu fought in a skirmish against the Lion. He remembered the day vividly. The Matsu warriors were fierce, savage, unrelenting. Ujimitsu's unit was decimated. Only he and a handful of those in his command remained, fighting back to back on a mountain of the dead. The small skirmish had escalated out of control, becoming a matter of pride for both sides. Why were they fighting? It was unimportant. All that mattered was that they fight on, and die with honor. The choices were simple: live or die.

Now the situation had reversed itself. While Ujimitsu now had a clearer vision of why he fought – to restore peace between the clans – he did not have the slightest idea of who to call enemy, and who to regard as a friend. His choices were too numerous to count, and the possible repercussions of each movement he made were nearly incomprehensible.

Rumors of the dark alliances of the Crab were well known, but Ujimitsu's mind was occupied with darker matters still. The Elemental Masters had not neglected the Winter Court to spite the Asako, nor to study the Wasting Disease as they had claimed. Isawa Tadaka, Master of Earth, had discovered a dark magic of tremendous

power in the caves near the Holy Home Villages. He and the other masters had gathered there to study them, to find a way to fathom them. Isawa Tsuke, also an Elemental Master, now consorted with Kuni Yori. The similarities were too unsettling to dwell upon.

Ujimitsu sighed and lit another stick of incense, letting the smoke drift up and calm his nerves. The court had dispersed for the afternoon. All those present had retired to their various entertainments. Ujimitsu had taken advantage of the momentary lull in activity to return to his personal chambers and meditate. Perhaps in the serenity of familiar quarters, he would hit upon some solution to the current difficulties. Thus far, no such good fortune was forthcoming. He took up a fresh brush and continued scratching away at the scrap of parchment on his small writing table. He was nearly halfway done with a rather mediocre painting of a tiger. Ujimitsu was not a skilled artist by any means, but the feel of brush on paper did wonders for his nerves.

"You should have chosen someone else, Shiba-sama," Ujimitsu whispered, resting his hand upon the pearl-encrusted blade of Ofushikai which lay on the mat beside him. "I am not a clever man. I do not know how to play these courtly games."

"*But you realize, in your heart, that this is not a game,*" replied a voice from deep within the blade. "*That is why you were chosen. You believe that you are alone, that the spirits of your ancestors have abandoned you. Your independence has made you strong, self-reliant. We will need your strength in the times ahead.*"

"Why?" Ujimitsu whispered. "What is to happen? Tell me something that I can use!"

"*Now is not the time,*" the sword replied. "*There is thunder on the horizon.*"

Ujimitsu ground his teeth in frustration. He had long ago accepted the fact that the Phoenix were among the most enigmatic of the clans, but nonsensical answers hardly made his life any easier.

"*What Tao is that?*" the sword replied, speaking to Ujimitsu's deepest thoughts. "*Who ever claimed that being a savior would be easy?*"



"Savior?" Ujimitsu whispered. "Savior of what?"

With a sudden hush of rice paper, the doors behind Ujimitsu opened. A startled servant stumbled in, eyes wide with fear. Ujimitsu quickly put his drawing aside, hiding it from view.

"Yui?" Ujimitsu called out, taking Ofushikai by the saya and quickly rising to face the door. "Yui, what is the matter?"

"I am sorry, my lord," she replied, bowing deeply. "There is someone here to—"

"Ujimitsu-sama," Shiba Tetsu shouted, ducking through the door and falling into a deep bow before his master. "Ujimitsu-sama, there is a problem!" The young bushi's hair flew wild in the wind. He wore snow-encrusted sandals, tracking wet footprints across the nightingale floors. Ujimitsu was briefly amused by the consternation that must have caused among the Asako, but quickly returned his attention to more important matters.

"What is the problem, Tetsu-san?" Ujimitsu asked sharply, tucking his ancestral blade into his obi.

"Murder," Tetsu replied, his face pale. "There has been a murder in Morning Glory Castle."

"Summon Agasha Hisojo at once," Ujimitsu said without hesitation. "This is his area of expertise."

"He is already on the scene," Tetsu replied. "He sent me to summon you, my lord."

Ujimitsu frowned. "Why was I not summoned first?"

"I do not know, my lord," Tetsu replied, shaking his head. "I believe the Asako thought they could handle the matter themselves."

Ujimitsu cursed under his breath. He could fancy himself the great peacemaker of the Phoenix all he liked, but a true crisis quickly reminded him exactly how much the other families truly trusted him. "Come, Tetsu," Ujimitsu ordered. "Take me to the scene of the crime."



"Roll him over please, Oki," Hisojo said calmly. The gathered courtiers and artisans gathered in the story garden viewed the grisly scene with unmasked horror, but the young Dragon magistrate seemed unperturbed. His hands were folded neatly in the sleeves of his robes. Even his long white hair seemed undisturbed by the

winter breeze. His eta servant quickly obeyed his command, rolling the bloodstained corpse onto its back.

"Hm," Hisojo grunted, kneeling in the snow to inspect the body.

The assembled onlookers gasped and whispered among themselves. Though Hisojo took great pains not to touch the corpse or the blood that marred the fresh snow, he had come much closer to the body than any of them would have dared.

"What is happening here, Hisojo?" Shiba Ujimitsu said, forcing his way through the crowd to stand by the magistrate's side.

"See for yourself, Ujimitsu-sama," Hisojo replied, gesturing at the corpse.

The dead, empty eyes of Isawa Eizan stared up at the sky. On the ground nearby, a broken tea set marred the stone path.

"Fortunes," Ujimitsu swore. He scanned the crowd. At the edge of the onlookers, Kuni Yori watched with mild interest. He nodded respectfully at the Phoenix daimyo, then returned his attention to the corpse.

"Did anyone see anything?" Ujimitsu asked. "I see only one set of footprints, too small for a man."

"The serving girl, the one who found him here," Hisojo nodded to a young girl at the front of the crowd. Her hands shook violently and her face was pale with terror. The hem of her fine silken robe was stained with blood. "I have already interviewed her."

"What's going on here?" shouted a harsh voice. Isawa Tsuke charged through the crowd of onlookers, his face livid with anger. He took a single look at the dead man, then glared at Ujimitsu. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Why was I not notified of my hatamoto's death?"

"I was only just notified myself," Ujimitsu replied sternly.

"Get this Dragon out of my way," Tsuke demanded with a curt gesture. "I am hereby assuming full command of this investigation."

"I believe Hisojo knows what he is doing, Tsuke," Ujimitsu replied.

Tsuke laughed harshly. "With all due respect, my lord, I retain my position as an Emerald Magistrate. I am not about to let some half-wit Dragon of lower rank stumble about and ruin the investigation of my assistant's murder. This is a Phoenix matter. A Phoenix will solve it."

"Tsuke," Ujimitsu began, an edge of caution in his voice.

"No," said Hisojo, holding up one hand. "It is all right. I can do nothing further here. I take my leave now, Master Tsuke, and wish you good luck." The Dragon bowed deeply and turned to leave. His eta servant followed closely behind.

"The wisdom of the Dragon is eternal," Tsuke replied, eyeing the younger man carefully as he turned and took his leave. Tsuke quickly turned and faced the crowd. "Now, who is a witness?"



Ujimitsu slipped away as quickly as he was able. Moments later he caught up with Hisojo and his servant. The Dragon was carefully removing his sandals at the entrance to the castle while Oki waited patiently. Ujimitsu paused beside them, removing his own shoes as well.

"No wonder you have so much trouble in the courts," Hisojo said with a chuckle. "One would think that the daimyo of a Great Clan could afford better shoes." He nodded at Ujimitsu's old, well-worn sandals.

"A token of my old life," Ujimitsu shrugged as he rose to follow the Dragon into Morning Glory Castle. "One of the few reminders I have remaining. Now, what did you find?"

Hisojo cocked one eyebrow. "Whatever do you mean? I was merely showing Master Tsuke the proper respect. I am certain he has the matter well in hand."

"Indeed," Ujimitsu grinned. "Now what did you find?"

"Nothing Master Tsuke cannot figure out for himself. It's obvious, really. Only one set of footprints, and that maid could not have possibly carried Eizan there. No one in the garden noticed Eizan entering. He was pushed from the window above, and fell to his death. I intend to find the window from which he fell. Perhaps there are more clues."

"Tsuke will care nothing for your evidence."

"I know," Hisojo said, nodding slowly. "Yet often evidence can lead to the proper testimony. The Kitsuki Method works, when it is allowed to work."

Ujimitsu was silent for a moment. "One day they will listen to your theories, Hisojo-san," he said, an odd sadness in his voice.

Hisojo's silence echoed the Phoenix's. "You know that I am sorry for the fate that befell your wife and daughter. I did all that I could for them. The fault was mine, not yours."

"No. The stubbornness of the Seppun court was neither your fault nor mine, and my daughter chose her own fate."

They continued walking in silence.

A sudden cry echoed from the hallway to their left. The two men paused as a young woman in bright orange robes suddenly came around the corner, tears staining her face.

"Ujimitsu-sama, is what I have heard true?" she demanded, seizing the daimyo's robes in both fists as she wailed in grief.

Ujimitsu gave her a curious look, carefully removing her hands from his robes and clasping them in his own. "Yes, Hirofumi-chan, I am sorry, but it is true," he said calmly.

"Where is he?" she cried. "Where did they find him?"

"In the west garden," Ujimitsu replied. "Perhaps you should return to your chambers. The body is still—"

"I must see him!" she wailed, quickly turning away from him and charging down the hallway.

"Well, that was unseemly," Ujimitsu said, watching her leave, "but grief often is."

"Indeed, Ujimitsu-sama," Hisojo replied, also watching her. "I was unaware that Eizan had a wife. She looked vaguely familiar, but I do not recall her from the courts."

"Isawa Hirofumi, a Tejina of minor note."

"Tejina? I am unfamiliar with that term."

"Tejina are illusionists," Ujimitsu replied. "It is their duty to make the palaces of the Phoenix look as beautiful and mystical as possible. The best Tejina are those that are unnoticed, so she stays away from the courts. I would not be surprised that you have not seen her, though I would bet you have seen her handiwork. The radiance of the central chamber, the sunburst, is a Tejina creation. Have you noticed how it glows even when the sky is cloudy?"

"Ah. The limitless magic of the Phoenix." The two continued walking through the halls of the castle. "Tell me, Ujimitsu-sama, is there anyone in the castle that might have the motivation to kill Eizan?"

"Where should I begin the list?" Ujimitsu asked wryly. "Eizan was as brash and abrasive as his master. The way I hear it, not even his friends were immune to his abuse, verbal and physical."

"A charming man. Someday, I hope, I will have the opportunity to solve the murder of a saint. It would help me sleep better at night, knowing that the victim deserved to be avenged. It seems that day has not yet come. By the way, I checked on your Kuni guest earlier."

"Indeed?" Ujimitsu replied, surprised. "What did you find?"

"Nothing. The Crab's reputation for defense is well warranted. I was unable to proceed too closely to Yori's quarters without being turned away by his wards."

"He has placed wards in a Phoenix castle?"

"Paranoid, perhaps. Discourteous, certainly. But hardly illegal. What I found more curious was what my servant, Oki, reported. Though only three Crabs traveled with Yori's party, the servants bore four palanquins into the guest quarters that house them."

"What was in the fourth palanquin?" Ujimitsu asked, looking at Hisojo's servant.



Oki blinked in terror, uncertain how to respond to the attention of a Great Clan daimyo. He quickly dropped to the floor.

"It's all right," Ujimitsu laughed, unable to hide his amusement. "You can get up. I merely asked you a question."

"I do not know, Immortal Phoenix-sama," Oki replied, rising but keeping his head down as far as possible. "Even the servants do not know. They were turned away and told to leave the palanquin unopened."

"Curious, neh?" asked Hisojo.

"Another mystery," Ujimitsu sighed.

"At least I could solve this one rather easily," Hisojo replied.

"How is that?"

"I could pay a visit to Yori, and ask him directly what he is hiding."

"Is that not a bit dangerous?" Ujimitsu asked.

"Sometimes the obvious approach is the most reliable," Hisojo replied. "Yori is a Crab. Perhaps he will appreciate my honesty. If he tells me the truth, then we will know. On the other hand, if I do not return, then your suspicions will be justified."

The Gempukku Ceremony

Of the many rituals that characterize the life of a samurai, none are simultaneously so joyous and as solemn as the gempukku ceremony. It is a time of rejoicing, for a child has become a man and will take his place alongside his brothers, bringing honor and glory to his family and clan. It is also a time for solemn reflection, for if the child is not yet ready he will bring dishonor to his people.

Certain elements of the gempukku are universal throughout Rokugan. Almost without exception, there are certain trials that a young adult must complete before ascending into true adulthood. Upon completion of these trials, he is presented with his daisho and welcomed into the ranks of his clansmen. The nature of these trials, however, varies considerably among the Great Clans and families of Rokugan.

The Crab

Confronted with war and death from the day of their birth, young Crab samurai are well prepared to face the trials that await them as they begin their adult lives. This is just as well, for the gempukku of the Crab is among the most grueling and difficult in the empire. This is an issue of pragmatism with the Crab, for if the new samurai are not truly tested and proven worthy before taking their place upon the Great Wall then they weaken the clan and the empire as a whole.

The Hida family is particularly demanding in their assessment of potential samurai. Applicants are required to demonstrate a wide variety of martial skills, mental fortitude, and resistance to physical injury. Often, they must present proof of a confirmed kill of a Shadowlands creature. The Hiruma are very similar in their demands, although cunning and speed are emphasized, and often the gathering of information is the goal of a trek into the Shadowlands. Any brave young soul who brings back an item from the lost Hiruma Castle is guaranteed passage into adulthood.

The other families of the Crab are less martially inclined. The Kuni question their youths intensely regarding the nature and weaknesses of the Shadowlands, while the Kaiu are mercilessly interviewed regarding military theory and siege engineering. The Yasuki, however, require only that a profitable deal can be reached with a manipulative opponent.

The Crane

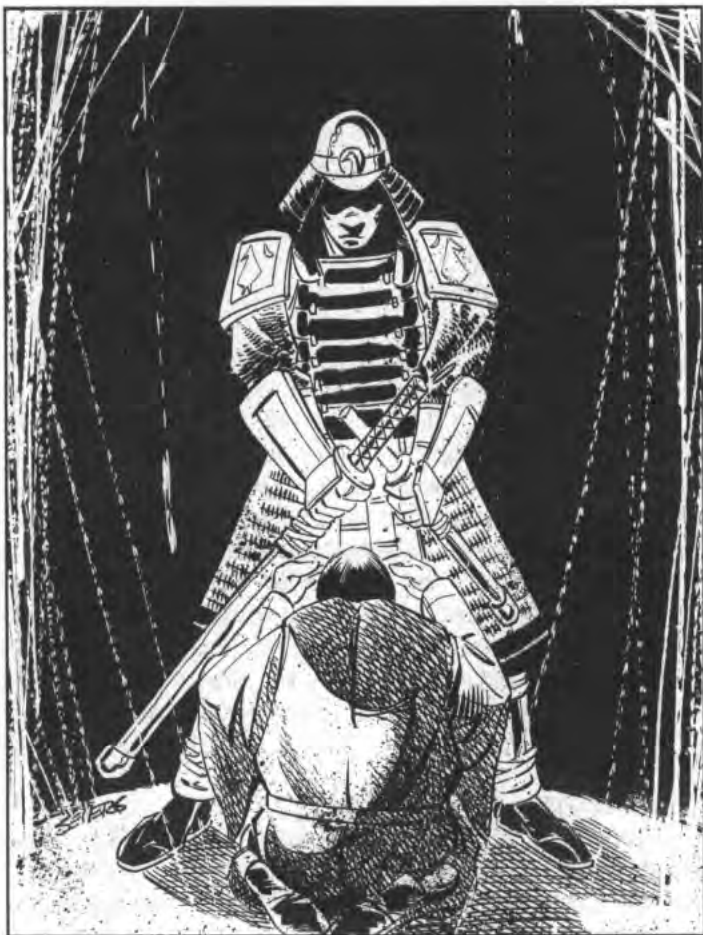
Elegant in all things, the Crane view the gempukku as an opportunity for the demonstration of skill and grace. They consider themselves the epitome of Rokugani sophistication, and they accept no less from their young samurai.

Regardless of training, the Doji require their applicants to demonstrate not only knowledge of their chosen craft, but also skill in the arts of oratory and conversation. The Kakita, on the other hand, require only a devotion to the student's art of choice, be it the art of the blade or of origami.

The mystic Asahina require young samurai to successfully craft a simple *tsangusuri*. Obtaining the correct materials for this ritual is as much a part of the trial as the ritual itself. At the other end of the spectrum, the Daidoji require only a demonstration of martial skill with a number of weapons and a demonstration of total loyalty to the clan. Unique among the Crane Clan, the Daidoji commemorate the gempukku with the tattooing of the family mon upon the wrists of the newly inducted samurai.

The Dragon

The ceremonies of the Dragon Clan are considerably less enigmatic than other aspects of their lives. Dominated as the clan is



by the pragmatic Mirumoto family, the gempukku is seen as a means to an end, with little associated fanfare.

The Mirumoto are the most traditional of the Dragon, and they require only that a young samurai be competent in the skills of his training before admitting him to the ranks of the Dragon Clan. The Agasha demand that their applicants possess a command of the basic tenets of their own alchemical practices in addition to a working knowledge of traditional shugenja practices. With their unique value system, the Kitsuki family spends significant time with each young samurai, testing their knowledge of basic logic and forensics, much of which flies in the face of common Rokugani values.

The order of the Togashi monks, of course, has no gempukku ceremony. They instead require applicants to achieve a certain state of mind before accepting them fully into their ranks. This spiritual and emotional journey is represented physically by the individual's arduous climb to reach Kyuden Togashi.

The Lion

Unquestionably the most martial of the Great Clans, the gempukku ceremonies of the Lion Clan logically place great emphasis upon the military arts, both theoretical and practical. This is best represented by the now-defunct Akodo family, who required their young samurai to display proficiency in the arts of war as well as in the theory of battle and military history. With the passing of the Akodo, other Lion families have come to focus much more upon the practice of war than the theory of war.

Much has been said of the Matsu family's gempukku practices. The ritual fluctuates considerably from punitive and cruel during times of lengthy peace to rapid and superficial during times of war. With the Lion Clan weakened by the loss of the Akodo and the war with the Crane Clan raging, the Matsu's requirements have slackened. A familiarity with the sword and a burning passion for battle are all that young samurai must possess to join the war.

The Ikoma and Kitsu families continue much as they have for centuries. The Ikoma demand extensive knowledge of the Lion Clan's illustrious history as well as a demonstration of the applicant's skill in his chosen profession. The Kitsu's gempukku practices are among the most secretive in the empire, but it is believed that it involves communing with and summoning the spirits of ancestors from Yomi.

The Phoenix

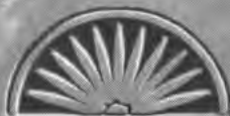
Steeped in ritual, the Phoenix believe that the gempukku is a vital test of a student's learning. His performance sets the tone for his entire life. Those who perform well may expect prestigious positions within the clan. Those with a mediocre display, however, are rarely assigned to worthwhile posts.

The Isawa demand their young samurai perform elaborate rituals that tax the body with their length and the mind with their complexity. Unlike most bushi-oriented families, the Shiba believe that proper philosophy is as important as martial skill.

As the most isolated of the Phoenix Clan, the Asako family's gempukku ceremonies are shrouded in secrecy. It is said that extensive philosophical and theological discussions comprise the bulk of the applicant's testing, but even this is uncertain.

The Scorpion

Not surprisingly, the former Scorpion Clan's gempukku rituals were a closely guarded secret, though rumors abound regarding their dishonorable practices. It is said that the devious Bayushi expected their young samurai to be as gifted in the arts of deception as in warfare. The Shosuro placed undue emphasis upon the shameful skills of stealth and poisoning as well as whatever talents their students studied, while the Soshi supposedly practiced some



dark form of shadow sorcery that destroyed the souls of those who wielded it.

The worst accusations point to the vile Yogo family, however. It is said that they surpassed even the Kuni with their study of the Dark One. Some even whisper that their gempukku ceremonies were filled with *maho* rites and blood rituals.

The Unicorn

Despite their many *gaijin* customs, the Unicorn have very simple and very traditional gempukku for their young adults. The Shinjo and Otaku families, of course, place an extraordinary emphasis upon mastery of horsemanship, although martial prowess does play a large role as well. The Iuchi require a working knowledge of various *gaijin* rituals as well as the traditional means of Rokugani sorcery. The Ide, to an even greater extent than other courtier families, are concerned with an applicant's ability to empathize with and interpret others' intentions. The virtual opposite of this is found in the Moto, who value only undying loyalty to the family and clan, and a terrible vow to never fall before the minions of the Dark One.

The Minor Clans

Isolated as they are socially (and often geographically) from the other clans of Rokugan, minor clans frequently develop individualistic practices. Their ceremonies reflect the unique outlook of the small clans that conduct them and, as such, can differ strikingly from the accepted gempukku practices found among the Great Clans.

The Dragonfly, Centipede, Fox and Sparrow clans all conduct gempukku ceremonies very similar to those conducted by the Great Clans (accounting for philosophical differences, such as the Fox's reverence for *kitsune* spirits and the Centipede's for Amaterasu). The Badger and Mantis clans are also fairly mundane, although the Badger place a disproportionate amount of emphasis on feats of strength and the Mantis upon loyalty to the clan above all else (even above, some say, the Son of Heaven).

The Falcon, Tortoise and Wasp clans have traditions that deviate considerably from the norm. The Wasp accept any who meet the exacting standards of their lord, Tsuruchi. The Falcon Clan places emphasis upon the decidedly non-traditional skills of stealth and hunting. The Tortoise, however, school their young adults in arts best left to the lower classes, including base mercantile interests, the use of peasant weaponry, and other foul tasks unsuited to true samurai.

Magic and Religion

The ronin pulled his straw cloak tight about his shoulders to ward off the rain. Despite the foul weather, he was exhilarated. He had gotten away clean and no one was the wiser. His teachers would be horrified to hear what he had done, but did he care? They were old, pathetic, useless. They saw the kami as guides, nothing more. Heiji saw the spirits for what they really were – tools. Thanks to his magic, he had entered the temple and escaped without notice. He would be a rich man as soon as he traveled to a town where the stolen relics wouldn't be recognized – or the buyers didn't care.

"Excuse me," said a deep voice. A tall man stepped into the road, face lost in the shadows of his hooded robes. "Are you the ronin named Heiji?"

"What if I am?" Heiji snapped back, glaring up at the stranger. "Out of my way, priest. I'm busy."

"I think you have time to talk to me," the man replied. He held up one hand, displaying the jade seal of an Emerald Magistrate. His robes fell open to reveal the dark red kimono beneath, blazing with the fiery mon of the Phoenix.

Heiji cursed. Yanking a scroll from his belt, he rapidly began to read the words of magic, summoning fire spirits to smite the magistrate. The Phoenix sneered and cut the air with a single gesture. Heiji gasped, the air torn from his lungs. He crumpled to his knees, grasping his throat. The Phoenix calmly walked forward and kicked the ronin solidly in the chest. Heiji fell backward in the mud.

"Return the relics, surrender your weapons, and confess," commanded the Phoenix, pointing one hand at the ronin. A crackling aura of red fire surrounded the Phoenix's fist, flame hissing like a snake as the rain boiled around it. "You have already doomed yourself to execution, ronin, but if you do not comply I shall lose my temper."

The ronin nodded eagerly, desperately. He threw the satchel of stolen goods to one side, along with his katana, tanto, and pouch of scrolls. The Phoenix gestured, and the fiery aura vanished. Heiji was



seized from behind by two burly doshin as a third snatched up the weapons and relics. The Phoenix stood apart, looking down at the ronin's pouch with what seemed to be regret.

"How..." Heiji whispered hoarsely, air slowly returning to his lungs. "How did you find me?"

"You were a disrespectful fool, ronin," the Phoenix replied irritably. "You were given a great blessing when you were born with the power to speak to the spirits. You chose to abuse your gift. I did not. The kami led me to you, and I brought them justice."

The ronin's jaw dropped open. "No," he mumbled as the doshin dragged him away. "I thought they were only tools..."

"How sad," the Phoenix replied. "I pray that they think more kindly of you when your spirit goes forth to meet them – but I would not hold my breath."

Living With Magic

Rokugan seethes with magic. From the smallest flower to the greatest mountain, every part of nature flows with the power of the *kami*. Even those born without the gift of magic can feel the energy that flows through the land. The kami are powerful and often unpredictable, but they are an accepted part of life. Though few have the power to command spirits, even the lowliest peasant may know a few prayers and folk rituals to appease a wrathful kami.

Shugenja are a relatively small part of Rokugan's population, but they play an important role. They are not merely sorcerers; they are living symbols of the power of the spirits. They are heralds of the unseen world, a link of communication between the mortal plane and the various spiritual realms that pervade it.

The kami do not provide a shugenja with his powers so that he may smite his enemies or prove the righteousness of his religion. Magic does not make the people of Rokugan any more pious, nor any less. The people would know that the Emperor is the Son of Heaven even without magic. The powers of a shugenja do not exist to prove the sanction of the Celestial Order, but rather symbolize the raw wonder of the land. Only the most brazen shugenja considers magic anything less than miraculous, and only a deranged heretic would take his magic for granted. Even the simplest magic is a blessing. Even a minor summoning proves that the gods are watching. For this reason, shugenja wield a great deal of power figuratively as well as literally. To cross a shugenja is to risk the wrath of the kami. Fortunately, the primary duty of most shugenja is to the Tao. They are far too concerned with spiritual matters to waste time seeking political power.

If it were not so, they would not be shugenja.

Shintao and Cults

Though the word carries negative connotations, the strict definition of a "cult" is "a religion that has not gained widespread acceptance," and that definition is used here.

The Shintao religion demands no true worship per se. Shintao is more philosophy than religion, though some worship of the Fortunes has become a part of most Shintao sects. As a result of this, the Shintao school of thought makes allowances for the possibility of other philosophies, and conflicts on the basis of religion are rare in Rokugan. Shintao is a religion whose followers use whatever parts of the religion work for them and discard the rest. Perhaps as a result of this relaxed and very personal approach, Shintao is practiced in every part of Rokugan and other religions are scarce.

However, there remain a few who do not find solace in Shinsei's teachings. For some, even the flexible philosophies of the Tao are not enough. The Bloodspeakers are the most notorious cult in the Empire, but other minor religions have appeared in its long history. Cults worshipping Lord Moon, the ruins of the Naga, and the strange sea beast known only as the Orochi have sprung up at one time or another. Not all of these groups are violent, predatory organizations, although a number of them are considered subversive in some way.

While the practice of religions other than Shintao is not illegal, it is generally considered curious and disturbing. Many samurai have accepted Shintao so deeply that they cannot understand why someone would choose another path. Such samurai conclude that the existence of a cult must be a symptom of some greater problem, and wipe out cult activity wherever they find it. The Phoenix Clan, in particular, are extremely intolerant of any cult behavior, though they usually deal with the situation by attempting to communicate with cultists in a reasonable fashion. The policy of the Elemental Masters is that the majority of cult activity is caused by confusion. Through reason and peaceful discussion the true path, Shintao, will become clear once more. In the case of *maho-tsukai* and violent cults this is often not the option, but the Phoenix always make at least a token attempt at a peaceful resolution.

Many shugenja are baffled by the existence of cults. After all, is not their magic proof that the Fortunes exist? Why would anyone seek another road when it is so obvious that the kami walk beside them? The simple truth is that proof is a very subjective thing. For those that have lived all their lives in an Empire where shugenja can work magic, magic is no longer miraculous. Though shugenja themselves are continually amazed by their own powers, to those on the outside magic is just another fact of reality. To many commoners, this reality is harsh, brutal, and unforgiving despite the fact that magic exists. When Shinsei and the kami cannot provide solace, the answer must lie somewhere else.



Shugenja rarely become so disenchanted with their own magic. However, those who do join cults or lose their faith do not lose their power to communicate with the kami. Many have speculated as to why this happens, but the best answer seems to be the simplest. Kami are not human, and do not think like humans. The spirits keep their own counsel when choosing who will become a shugenja, and only they will decide when the time has come for someone to lose their magic. When one becomes a shugenja, he remains a shugenja for life. Presumably, those who abuse their powers are suitably punished when they go on to the next life.

Spells in the Court

Magic can be a powerful advantage. By summoning spirits a shugenja can spy on his lord's foes, separate truth from falsehood, or appear to be someone else. Magic has existed since before the Empire, and the Great Clans have attempted to use magic to provide advantage since the beginning of time. A shugenja who thinks himself clever for using a spell against an important courtier is fooling himself. Any experienced courtier takes magic into account and plans accordingly.

A few daimyo have attempted to forbid spell-casting in the court, albeit with little success. Shugenja are priests who summon their magic through the use of prayer. To forbid magic in the court would be to forbid religion, an act certain to make a daimyo very unpopular. A more subtle approach is through enforcing rigorous ceremony. If a shugenja begins casting a spell, the lord of the house may ask him to pause in order that the kami be properly honored. He will then summon his own shugenja to join in the prayer, and perhaps choose the sutra to be chanted himself. The chance of a shugenja who acts so obviously managing to cast the spell he had intended are slim to none unless he openly defies the wishes of the lord of the house.

Since the Emperor is the head of the Shintao religion, only those that are deemed worthy may quote religious texts (including spells) in his presence. Such individuals are usually limited to the Elemental Masters, the Emperor's Seppun shugenja, the heads of major shugenja families, and Emerald Magistrates. Those who have not been given direct, specific permission to use magic in the Emperor's presence would be wise to assume that they do not have it.

The best bet for those attempting to cast spells to gain advantage in the court is to do so discreetly. Hiding one's magic is a dishonorable act, but there are plenty of shugenja in the courts who would gladly sacrifice their own honor for the benefit of their family and clan. A shugenja can attempt to cast a spell while hiding from view, disguise the chant of a spell beneath a cough or nonsensical mumbling, or perhaps even pretend to be dancing.

Casting With Subtlety

If a player (or NPC) wishes to conceal the casting of a spell, use the following guidelines. The basic TN to hide a spell from view is a Stealth/Awareness roll with a TN of 15. This Target Number assumes that no one is paying particular attention to the shugenja. If someone is watching the shugenja, they may make an opposed Investigation/Perception roll against the shugenja's Stealth/Awareness roll.

Many other factors can affect the concealment of a spell. Some spells are designed for stealth. Air spirits are generally inconspicuous, while Fire spirits tend to draw attention to themselves. Void magic is, on the whole, the most subtle of all magics as few individuals have perceptions sharp enough to note the ebb and flow of Void. A shugenja may make a Raise specifically for the purpose of casting the spell discreetly, but he may not make more than one for this purpose. (Note: all spells from Way of the Crane and Way of the Scorpion are designed for stealth, even if their effects are not obviously stealthy.)

Spells which obviously emanate from the caster, such as The Fires From Within, may be cast discreetly, but all discretion ends once the spell comes blazing from the shugenja's hands.

The shugenja's TN is modified as follows. If the shugenja is making an opposed roll to deceive an observer, apply the appropriate modifier to the opponent's total roll.

The spell is a Fire spell: +5 TN

The spell is an Air or Water spell: -5 TN

The spell is a Void spell: -10 TN (+10 TN if observed by someone with more than 3 Void)

Shugenja has Affinity with this spell: -5 TN

Shugenja has Deficiency with this spell: +5 TN

Shugenja has learned the spell as an Innate Ability: -10 TN

Spell is designed for stealth or has an effect involving misdirection or illusion: -5 TN

Spell has dramatic, obvious effects such as bright lights, noises: +5 TN

Each Raise caster makes to shorten casting time: +5 TN

Caster makes a Raise to conceal the spell: -5 TN

Magic and the Law

Magic and the law are strange bedfellows in Rokugan. Though a few of Rokugan's finest magistrates have been shugenja (including the famous Phoenix Inquisitors), generally the two do not mix. Many samurai are unsettled by the idea of using magic to investigate crimes, believing that to use the kami to hunt criminals is akin to



dumping their problems on the spirit world. No good can come from demanding such things from the spirits. Others feel that the pursuit of justice is an essential use of a shugenja's power, using the Fortunes' gifts to do good and punish the wicked.

Though many officials are wary of magic, only foolish magistrates ignore it. The kami have a rather loose concept of morality at best, making renegade shugenja the most dangerous sort of criminal. In one thousand years, the magistrates of the land have become familiar with the common spells of such criminals. Wicked shugenja who believe their magic places them beyond the reach of the law are in for a nasty surprise.

Strangely, while magistrates occasionally make use of magic in apprehending a perpetrator or during interrogations, information gleaned by magic is inadmissible in the courts of the Empire. The testimony of spirits, even noble ancestors, counts for nothing. Spells which detect the truth or read men's souls cannot be used to gain a conviction, not even in the lands of the Phoenix.

The origin of this custom can be traced back to Rokugan's early days. Shortly after the end of the war against Fu Leng, a young shugenja named Soshi Kenzan was accused of the murder of a Matsu Gihei, a prominent Lion general. The Kitsu *sodan-senzo* summoned Gihei's spirit to testify against Kenzan, and Kenzan was executed for his crime. After punishment was exacted, the Soshi family revealed that Matsu Gihei was in fact still alive, and had been held hostage by the Soshi for the several months. The Kitsu were outraged, and demanded to know how the Soshi had perverted their magics. The Soshi countered that they had done nothing, that the Kitsu magic was at fault, and that spirits who no longer lived in Rokugan had no place providing testimony against the living.

Tensions mounted between the Lion and the Scorpion. Eager to prevent Rokugan from falling into civil war, Hantei Genji, the Shining Prince, personally arbitrated the matter. The use of magic to procure or produce testimony was forbidden from that time forward by the Shining Prince. He decreed that the kami served shugenja as spiritual guides and protectors, not as arbitrators of human law. Further, he punished the Scorpion for their deception, awarding the Lion Clan deeds and titles in Scorpion lands. The Lion's injury was mollified by the Prince's favor. The Scorpion also accepted the Shining Prince's judgment without argument.

To this day it is unknown how the Kitsu family's magic was twisted. The Scorpion, unsurprisingly, have had nothing to say on the matter.



Practical Magic

The daimyo of the Great Clans are all well aware of the power of magic. Every Great Clan has at least one family dedicated to the study of the kami, and the lords of the clan make good use of what their cousins have learned. Samurai who are granted audiences with powerful individuals such as Hida Kisada and Doji Hoturi often do not even realize the power of the magic routinely used to protect these individuals. Those who pay a visit to the Emperor face greater magic still, and may never notice.

The following are a few examples of how spells in the *Player's Guide* are used in practice, tactics that all shugenja who are familiar with these spells should be aware of. The use of these spells has been so indoctrinated into the customs of the Empire that their use is perfectly normal, acceptable, and often unnoticed. Most are cast as rituals of purification or personal blessings. Only those familiar with shugenja realize the true power of these simple prayers.

Benevolent Protection of Shinsei – This spell's long duration and powerful effect upon violent behavior make it very popular as a security measure. Meetings with Crane, Phoenix, and Scorpion dignitaries nearly always take place under the protection of this spell. Miya diplomats and Ide emissaries favor its effect on hot tempers during delicate negotiations. Since the Emperor is the Son of Heaven and head of the Shintao religion, any building he occupies is affected by this spell as if it were a Shintao temple. When the Emperor appears in public this spell is nearly always in effect.

Benten's Touch – This is one of the most commonly used spells in court settings. Important courtiers nearly always have a shugenja provide this blessing before an important meeting. Most Emperors rarely use this magic, as the reputation of the Son of Heaven is usually enough to intimidate people.

Blessings of Jizo – This spell is has a very short duration, but its effects are quite potent. The Emperor's Hidden Guard see to it that this spell is in effect upon the Emperor at all times when he appears in public, unless he commands them to release it. In other words, any spell cast upon the Emperor without his permission not only fails, but rebounds upon its caster. Any important functionary who has access to powerful Air magic (such as Isawa Uona or Soshi Bantaro) is likely to use this spell frequently, but they are not likely to have such constant protection as that which guards the Son of Heaven.

By The Light Of Lord Moon – This spell is used each night to purify the chamber in which the Emperor will sleep, and most important daimyo make frequent use of it as well. It doesn't really purify much, but it does a good job of finding hiding assassins, secret entrances, and the like.



Cloak of Night – Shugenja who undertake a career of thievery or assassination would be foolish not to take this spell. When it makes an object invisible, the object also becomes transparent to the use of Sense. The target becomes as invisible to the kami as it is to everyone else.

Commune – This spell is used by magistrate shugenja more than any other. It can provide a wealth of information, from interrogating a murder weapon about its owner to questioning a local kami about recently cast spells.

Echoes of a Breeze – This spell is frequently used by the Emperor so that his shugenja keep in communication. The Lion, Unicorn, and Crab habitually use it when organizing troop movements. An important diplomatic envoy (of any clan) is always accompanied by a shugenja who knows this spell so that important news may be relayed home instantly. At least one shugenja with this spell attends the Emperor at all times, so that he may contact the Hidden Guard in case of emergency. (See also Heart of Mortality.)

Evil Ward – The low Mastery Level and long duration of this spell make it extremely useful as a protective measure. Most daimyo (of both Great and Minor clans) have this spell cast daily, both on their personal quarters and on areas where they will receive guests. The Kuni family use this spell as a barrier, encircling the cells of Tainted prisoners and test subjects to prevent escape.

Hands of Jurojin – Obviously, this spell is indispensable when dealing with poisons. It can also be used to cure drunkenness and negate the effects of opium use. Hands of Jurojin is ineffective against certain diseases, including the Wasting Disease, certain strains of plague, and the common cold. Magical poisons also seem to be unaffected, but luckily such poisons are quite rare. The GM may feel free to determine what is and is not affected by this spell. A dishonorable shugenja may use this spell posthumously in order to remove all traces of poison from a corpse.

Heart of Mortality – Most important officials travel under this spell's protection. The Emperor's Hidden Guard could not function without Heart of Mortality. The highest-ranking members of the Hidden Guard all know it, and have cast it upon the Emperor so that their magic can protect him even when they are not present. Should the Emperor be suddenly wounded or fall to poison, the Hidden Guard can immediately restore him. Many daimyos are wary of using this spell, as it places a great deal of trust in the shugenja. In the case of the Hidden Guard, all shugenja are tested rigorously to ascertain their loyalty to the Emperor. Those who seek to abuse that trust are immediately dealt with by the Emperor's miharu as well as the rest of the Hidden Guard.

Path to Inner Peace – This is the most commonly known spell outside of Sense, Commune, and Summon. The only shugenja who

do not use it are those who cannot, or those rare few who have decided to focus themselves in entirely different areas.

Peace of the Kami – Some diseases and poisons are unaffected by this spell, as in the case of Hands of Jurojin. However, a few diseases and poisons not affected by Hands of Jurojin are cured by this spell, including the common cold but not including the Wasting Disease. The GM may feel free to determine what is and is not affected by this spell.

Power of the Ocean – Shugenja who have access to this powerful spell often use it to operate tirelessly in times of crisis, lending their powerful magic to the cause at all times. When the spell nears the end of its duration, the shugenja may use Sympathetic Energies to transfer the spell (and its negative aftereffects) to a willing apprentice, then cast Power of the Ocean again so that he can continue operating as a tireless juggernaut of magic. The Elemental Masters make frequent use of this tactic.

Preservation – Many important Imperial artifacts, especially paintings and calligraphy, are protected by this spell. Most major art collections have an attendant shugenja to cast this spell. The Kuni family's skill with Earth magic makes this spell a boon, helping them to preserve important maps, scrolls, and other artifacts despite the constant corrupting effects of the Shadowlands. A number of Kuni use this spell to preserve corpses of creatures brought back from the Shadowlands for further study.

Purify Water – This spell is generally cast as a blessing at the beginning of important banquets, thus removing the threat of poison in the food. Sake and other alcoholic drinks are usually kept out of the range of this spell, as it removes the alcohol and ruins their potency. Needless to say, this makes sake a popular choice as a vehicle for poison.

Quiescence of Air – This simple spell is frequently used to mask conversations from potential eavesdroppers. When using this, a daimyo could hold a conversation with his advisors in a crowded room and none would overhear. Secrets on the Wind can be used to get around this spell's protective power.

Rays of Amaterasu – This spell often sanctifies major meetings between diplomats. The radiance not only reminds all present of Amaterasu's blessing upon the land, but it also roots out those who secretly bear the Taint.

Reflections of Pan Ku – Obviously, this spell is of great utility in analyzing murder weapons and other evidence. Though evidence pales in importance compared to testimony, the proper evidence can lead a magistrate to a suspect, and thus to a confession.

Reflective Pool – Magistrates often monitor potentially dangerous individuals with Reflective Pool, and daimyo use it to keep tabs on guests whom they do not trust. In such situations, the magistrate or daimyo arranges matters so that their quarry will be



spending a lot of time in an area with which the shugenja is familiar, and thus can monitor.

Sacred Ground – Though the name gives this spell a holy connotation, it is used just as often for darker purposes. For a few notorious shugenja assassins, this spell is the ultimate escape hatch. Once the deed is done, Sacred Ground whisks the perpetrator away with no sign of his passing.

Secrets on the Wind – Perhaps the best espionage spell in existence. Scorpion shugenja often use this spell in combination with Sympathetic Energies, passing the magical ear-piece on to someone else so that they can overhear conversations that they were not meant to hear. Conversations overheard with this spell are inadmissible in court.

Sense – As noted in the *Player's Guide*, this spell can sense the presence of poison as long as the shugenja has the Lore (Poison) skill. At any major function involving the Emperor, assume that everyone who is admitted to the Emperor's presence is "blessed" in such a manner. Unfortunately, this simple spell can be stifled by more powerful magic.

Silent Waters – This is an incredibly useful spell for emergency planning. If a problem can be imagined, Silent Waters can prepare for it. It is most often used in conjunction with Path to Inner Peace and cast during times when a daimyo is most likely to be attacked, using Sympathetic Energies to transfer the spell to the daimyo. If the daimyo is injured, the spell immediately activates, setting the attacker back a few moments and giving the daimyo's bodyguards a few moments to react or bring their charge to safety. With their Affinity for Water, Lion and Unicorn shugenja use this tactic most frequently.

Symbol of Earth, Air, Fire, Water – These symbols are quite frequently used as protective measures. Shugenja magistrates place these symbols in prisons to prevent inmates from escaping. Some yojimbo cast these spells in areas of their master's choosing, then use Sympathetic Energies to transfer immunity to the symbol to their lord.

Sympathetic Energies – A subtle, but extremely useful spell. Any shugenja who enters a career of service for an important courtier or daimyo needs this spell, and those who seek a career in the Emperor's Hidden Guard must have it. The ability to transfer enchantments creates a world of potential in spells that would otherwise only affect the shugenja, and allow a shugenja to focus far more effectively within a group.

The Tie That Binds – Magistrate shugenja with access to this spell always take the time to become familiar with a dangerous suspect once he has been apprehended. That way, should the suspect escape, this spell can be used to unfailingly track him down.

Waiting Flame – Any daimyo who has access to a shugenja who can cast this spell is likely to use it often. The most common stipulation for the ward to activate is if someone enters the area who does not bear a certain item. This item is changed on a daily basis, and only the daimyo's personal bodyguards and family are told how to avoid the flame.

Whispering Wind – Obviously, this spell is of great utility in interrogations. Unfortunately, its use is inadmissible in court (meaning that the magistrate cannot testify that another witness's testimony is false because he has cast this spell). It can, however, be used to sort truth from falsehood during an investigation or interrogation, and may eventually lead to a proper confession.

Wisdom of the Kami – Shugenja magistrates often need a variety of skills to undertake their investigations, and this provides them. Dishonorable shugenja may also use it to gain the skills they need for infiltration and espionage. It is inadmissible to use this spell to gain expertise on a subject in order to give testimony on that subject. Important courtiers often have their shugenja transfer this spell to them using Sympathetic Energies, so that they can appear clever and well-informed on a variety of topics.

An Empire In Flames

Rokugan is at war. There are few places where it is blatantly obvious, but it is a truth that many have accepted. As the Emperor's health continues to fail, the hostilities between the clans grow. The Lion and the Crane have committed themselves to a war that seems to have no possible outcome other than extinction. Other, less overt conflicts flare all across the Empire. The Emperor's *shikken* and Emerald Magistrates desperately seek to quench the flames, but in many cases it is far too late.

The March of the Crab

The eyes of the Empire are focused upon the Crab Clan this winter, as a huge force has marched north from their duty upon the wall and occupied Beiden Pass, the "crossroads of the empire." Many



wonder who guards Rokugan against the Shadowlands with so many Crab samurai camping in the northern lands, but few are bold enough to ask. Though little is known for sure about the affairs of the Hida family, there are numerous rumors circulating in court, none of them pleasant. Kuni and Yasuki ambassadors have arrived at the various winter courts, however, and they are resolute in their assertions that nothing unusual has taken place. They are completely unwilling to discuss the nature of the Crab's occupation of the Pass, much to the frustration of many.

The Emerald Legions

After the death of Doji Satsume, the Emerald Legions of the Emperor are without a leader. The Emerald Champion is the lord and master of the Legions, but with the Son of Heaven fallen ill and unable or unwilling to call for a Test of the Emerald Champion, they are without leadership and unable to respond to the conflicts blossoming across the empire.

Rumors abound that several different forces are attempting to direct the Legions. The Emperor's wife Bayushi Kachiko, Champion of the Lion Clan and the Emperor's right hand Matsu Tsuko; Satsume's successor, the new Crane Champion Doji Hoturi; representative of the Imperial Families Otomo Banu – all are reported to be vying for the loyalties of the Legion. Should the Legions ally themselves with any one of these contenders, the balance of power within the Empire will shift dramatically.

Phoenix Border Skirmishes

In one of the most surprising military developments in decades, a border skirmish between the forces of the Lion and Phoenix clans is threatening to turn the Lion-Crane conflict into a two-front war for the ruling Matsu family.

A recent Phoenix patrol south of the clan's borders ran afoul of a small Lion force. Led by Shiba Tsukune, the Phoenix were investigating the proximity of the Lion-Crane war to the boundaries of the Phoenix holdings. Belittled and insulted by the hostile Lion commander, Tsukune nonetheless attempted to find a peaceful solution to the confrontation. When that avenue proved impossible, battle erupted, and Tsukune and her men decimated the Lion force.

The rumors in court are that Matsu Tsuko is enraged, and has sworn a blood feud with Tsukune. The young Phoenix samurai-ko seems unaffected by the incident.

Strange Journey

The Crane Clan is known to have dispatched an envoy to the Islands of Silk and Spice shortly before the onset of winter. This has caused speculation regarding the Crane's plan. The Mantis winter court has little to offer them, and it would seem that Crane resources

would be better spent dealing with the war with the Lion and the plague outbreak. Some speculate that the Crane believe the answer to the plague's cure lies in the Silk Islands, while others believe that they are attempting to gain the aid of the Mantis in a trade embargo against the Lion.

Toturi the Black

The movements of Toturi the Black have been of interest to courtiers since his banishment years ago. His recent actions, however, have gained the attention of every court in the empire. After amassing a sizeable force of ronin, Toturi was granted an audience with the Dragon Champion Togashi Yokuni shortly before the latter's disappearance. In an unthinkable move, Yokuni appointed Toturi the general of the Dragon army.

All of Rokugan is keeping a wary eye on the Dragon lands, waiting to see what action Toturi will take. To make matters worse, it seems that a political alliance with the Unicorn Clan is likely and could be signed any day. This would give the Black Lion a military force to rival the Great Clans. It is said that political representatives of this alliance have begun arriving in courts across the lands, demanding to be heard along with other courtiers and ambassadors. It remains to be seen what will come of this unprecedented occurrence.

Mysterious Disappearance

Behind fans and in secluded chambers, courtiers at Winter Court whisper about the disappearance of Asako Masanao. The sinister Inquisitor was a guest at the Emperor's court last year, but has since vanished from the face of Rokugan. Some believe that he was killed to conceal some dark treachery, while others think that the evil forces he battled for so long have defeated him. Still others wonder if perhaps the unthinkable has happened, and he has been corrupted himself. If one such as he can fall, is anyone truly immune to the dark influence of the Fallen Lord?

The Fate of the Badger

Whispers of Crab magistrate Kaiu Osuki's journey to the Badger Clan's holdings tell of the minor clan's near-total destruction by an unknown enemy. Their fortresses show signs of heavy fighting, but there are very few bodies. Ichiro Chuga, daimyo of the clan, was said to have been crucified in his castle's courtyard. The remaining Badgers from across the Empire, no more than two dozen at most, have vowed to avenge their kinsmen and rebuild their clan, but most within the Empire consider the Badger Clan all but extinct.



To the Esteemed Guests of Kyuden Asako,

First, I apologize on behalf of Lord Shiba Ujimitsu that this letter does not come from his own hand. While he has nothing but the deepest respect for those gathered under the roof of Morning Glory Castle, he has chosen to dedicate his energies toward unraveling the tragic web of events that occurred this afternoon.

I am certain you have heard details of the matter by now, and will not add fuel to the flames of rumor by speaking of it further.

Instead, let us forget of that which troubles us, and leave justice in the hands of those empowered to dispense it. As the sun draws low and the night approaches, let us look out upon the stars and see what we might find.

I guarantee you that we will find something of interest.

Your Humble Servant,

Asako Togama



Chapter Three: Evening



The sun had set upon Morning Glory Castle, but few dared to sleep. Burning lanterns shone in every window and every garden. Every bushi and magistrate remained awake, investigating Isawa Eizan's murder, under the direction of Master Tsuke. Every courtier and diplomat lingered to discuss the day's events with others. It was all Shiba Ujimitsu could do keep tempers from flaring into outright violence as suspicions spread wildly. He stood in his personal chambers now. Five others stood before him, four Phoenix and one Dragon.

"Why have you summoned me, Ujimitsu?" Tsuke snapped, intentionally omitting the respectful suffix from his daimyo's name. "I am in the middle of an investigation."

"And I am attempting to assist you in this investigation, Master Tsuke," Ujimitsu replied, concentrating on keeping his patience with the curt Master of Fire. "That is why I have summoned all of you here. Isawa Tsuke, Asako Togama, Asako Miyo, Isawa Hirofumi: I believe you all know Agasha Hisojo. He has proven himself a friend of the Phoenix in the past, and he offers us his advice now. We can depend upon him to be discreet."

"Why do we require his discretion?" Togama demanded bluntly. "The Asako are not to blame in any of this."

"We do not yet know who is to blame," Hisojo replied. He looked pointedly at Asako Miyo. The young henshin darkened slightly, and looked away.

"What do we know?" Isawa Tsuke asked. "I have found no one who has any testimony of use."

"I have heard that your hatamoto was a self-reliant man," Hisojo nodded. "Though there were guards posted at the base of the stairs, I noticed that he had no yojimbo."

"He needed none," Tsuke retorted. "Eizan knew how to take care of himself."

"And yet he is dead," Togama replied. Tsuke leveled a dark glare at the Asako. Hirofumi wept quietly at the Master of Fire's side.

"Master Tsuke has a valid point," Hisojo cut in politely. "Eizan should have had nothing to fear. When I visited Eizan's apartments, I found them heavily warded in fire magic. Only my own skill with the fire kami was able to unravel the protections he placed without harm. There are few people in Rokugan who could have passed through them as I did, and not even I could have passed without disturbing them. Even so, I found the wards undisturbed. Someone passed through them entirely and pushed Eizan from his own window."

"Or perhaps the fool killed himself," Miyo replied. "Did you consider that?" Isawa Hirofumi waived quietly, hiding her face in the sleeve of her robe.

"I think not," Hisojo replied. "When I communed with the spirits in Eizan's apartment, I found them agitated. Eizan had been using magic to defend himself before he was attacked."

"Then the murderer was an individual resistant to magic," Tsuke mused. "Not only resistant to magic, but agile enough to gain entry to an apartment on the third floor of a castle without disturbing the guards below. I noticed the henshin displayed a surprising resistance to magic earlier, and the Asako monks are known for their rigorous physical training." He turned to Asako Miyo.



"Are you accusing me, Master of Fire?" Miyo asked without fear. Tsuke shrugged. "Your distaste for my hatamoto is well known, Miyo. Where were you when Eizan was murdered?"

Togama frowned. "Miyo was updating the catalogues in my own library," he replied. "My assistants can testify to the fact."

"But you did not see her yourself," Tsuke replied.

"What does it matter?" Togama replied. "We are all ignoring the obvious, are we not? There are vipers in Asako Castle, and they travel under the mon of the Kuni. The Crab is strong against magic. Perhaps one of them might have killed Eizan?"

"Why?" Ujimitsu asked. "Yori had absolutely no motivation."

"You are witnessing the motivation!" Togama replied. "We are at each other's throats, are we not?"

"The Kuni is well aware of popular opinion regarding his clan," Tsuke retorted. "I hardly Yori would risk murdering a total stranger."

"You did not seem like strangers to me," Togama answered. "Perhaps whatever deal the three of you were concocting went sour, and Eizan bore the brunt of the Crab's wrath?"

"Gentlemen," Ujimitsu interrupted. "Speculation and hollow accusations will accomplish nothing."

"Oh, I beg to differ," said a voice from behind the nearby shoji screen. "Hollow accusations will give your clan all the excuse it needs to condemn mine before the war even begins." The screen slid aside and the dark figure of Kuni Yori swept into the room. He nodded politely at Ujimitsu, and the Phoenix Champion returned the Crab's greeting.

"Ujimitsu-sama?" Togama said, looking to his daimyo with a look of surprise.

"Yes, I knew Yori was here," Ujimitsu said. "I suspected him, as all of you did, but I offered him the chance to defend himself."

"Which I did." Yori smiled pointedly at Togama. "I was not in the castle at all during the time of Eizan-san's murder. I was in the guest estates your family so graciously provided for me, dining with Seppun Eijiro. Eijiro-sama is a well respected captain in the Imperial Legions, and has already testified to the esteemed Ujimitsu-sama regarding my whereabouts. My yojimbo and student were present, as well. Would you discount the word of one who once swore his life and soul to defend the Hantei?"

"No, I would not," Togama said without hesitation, though the admission clearly grated upon him.

"Good," Yori replied. "Then perhaps you would allow me to do you the good turn of solving this small matter so that you can all sleep well in your beds, satisfied with the goodwill my clan bears?"

"You have a solution to this?" Tsuke asked quickly. "You have a witness who can bear light on this crime?"

"Not precisely," Yori replied. "I do, however, have a friend who can shed light on the testimony of certain other witnesses. A friend

whose credentials are unquestionable. A friend who, perhaps, a few of you may already know. Ekiken, bring our guest forward."

The burly Crab yojimbo emerged from behind the shoji. One thick hand was wrapped around the arm of a much smaller man, stumbling along at Ekiken's side like a child. The newcomer wore clean robes of white, but his hair was long and tangled. His left eye was swollen, glazed. His hands shook nervously and he chewed his lower lip as he viewed the room. He looked like a caged animal, prepared to dart for cover at any moment.

"May I present the esteemed Asako Oyo," said Yori, allowing himself a small grin.

"What?" Togama scoffed. "I know of no such man. What is the meaning of this? Dressing up some derelict in the robes of a samurai and carting him in here? You insult my family!"

"You insult your own family with your ignorance," Yori said evenly. "My apprentice, Kuni Nakiro, discovered this man wandering the mountains while he studied with your family. He calls himself the Spell Seeker, but even I am not sure what that means. At first, Nakiro assumed him to be a simple madman, but in time it seemed as if there was a strange ring of truth to his words. He claims to know the secret cipher of the Phoenix, and Nakiro agreed that what Oyo has written seems to resemble the cipher of your great library. I have brought samples if you wish to see for yourself."

"Indeed I would," Togama replied. "What other proof have you of his heritage?"

"A wild tale of his escape from a Phoenix asylum in the dead of night. Again, Nakiro looked into the man's story and discovered it to be true, with a catch. Though a man named Oyo was indeed committed to the protection of the henshin, this happened well over a century ago. However, the kami that swirl about Oyo do not lie. He is one hundred and forty years old, and he has some interesting tales to tell of the venerable Asako family."

"An asylum?" Togama's customary even tones were replaced with nervous excitement. "He is a fallen henshin! He walks a False Path!"

"If he has survived for over a century, how false could his path be?" Tsuke asked with a small laugh.

"Yori-sama, I demand you turn this man over to my custody," Togama demanded. "If he is, as you claim, a ward of the Asako family he must be returned to our care as soon as possible, for his own sake."

"For his sake?" Yori asked. "Or for the sake of your family's secrets? Tell me, Togama, what are the henshin? Oyo has hinted at the truth, but I can make little sense of some of his ravings. I, for one, would like to know the truth."

"I know I would like to know as well," Tsuke said. He glanced at Oyo with a predatory sneer.



"Ujimitsu-sama, this has no relevance," Togama said, turning to his daimyo with an imploring look. "We are here to solve a murder, not humiliate my family."

Ujimitsu nodded. "Yori, get to the point," he said.

Yori bowed with exaggerated courtesy. "Of course, Immortal Phoenix. Oyo knows more than the dark secrets of the henshin. During his time at the asylum he met many other henshin who walked False Paths. One tale, in particular, you may find illuminating. This henshin was such a failure that she was cast from the monastery and expunged from the Asako records. Few remember her at all, save her sister, the man she married, Oyo, and perhaps a few of the monks who trained them. Today, that young woman is known as Isawa Hirofumi, and her sister is known as Asako Miyo." Yori looked pointedly at Hirofumi and Miyo.

Hirofumi's eyes widened. "I did not... I could not have..."

"Tell them nothing, Hirofumi," Asako Miyo snapped. "They deserve nothing."

"I will be the judge of that, Miyo-chan," Ujimitsu retorted. "You were saying, Hirofumi?"

"I did not kill my husband..." she said, her expression glazed. "I could not have... Surely, I could not have..."

"You could not have gained entry past the guards, no," Agasha Hisojo finished. "However, your sister was fully capable of doing so."

"I was in the Asako libraries," Miyo laughed. "Were you not paying attention, Dragon?"

"Were you?" Hisojo asked. "Your sister is a Tejina, an illusionist. The Phoenix hereabouts tell me that an illusion lasts longer when it resembles reality. The two of you resemble each other greatly, save of course Miyo's scar and Hirofumi's longer hair and elaborate makeup. It would be a simple task for Hirofumi to mask herself as you, and appear in the library while you killed Eizan."

"You cannot prove anything," Miyo snarled.

"Perhaps I cannot," Hisojo replied. "But until I do, Asako Oyo must remain in the custody of Isawa Tsuke for interrogation. If at any time, you wish to confess, I am certain Tsuke-sama will return him to you. Master Tsuke, I hope you find the decision of this 'half-wit Dragon' satisfactory."

"Indeed I do." The Master of Fire nodded at the Dragon, the corner of his mouth turning slightly in a satisfied grin.

"You cannot!" Togama exclaimed. "Master Tsuke has always lusted for the secrets of my family! Were he to interrogate Oyo—"

"That is not my problem, Asako-sama, it is yours," Hisojo replied sharply. "Perhaps if you wish to keep the secrets of your family safe, you should have a long talk with Miyo-chan."

The librarian frowned, turning quickly to Asako Miyo. The young henshin looked away, her face torn with frustration.

"Ujimitsu-sama, please," Togama pleaded. "I beg you, do not do this to my family. You do not know what you are unleashing."

Ujimitsu considered for a long moment. He looked at the earnest face of the librarian, then turned to the milky, confused gaze of Asako Oyo. Kuni Yori's face was, as usual, entirely unreadable. Isawa Tsuke looked eager. Asako Miyo burned with rage and Hirofumi's face was torn with obvious guilt. There was no doubt in his mind that the sisters had conspired to kill the abusive Eizan. But should he turn Oyo over to Tsuke, exposing the secrets of the henshin for the sake of one man's death?

The Soul of Shiba had no answer.

"For the time being the Dragon speaks my mind in this matter," Ujimitsu replied. "Take Asako Oyo into custody, Master Tsuke. Should Miyo confess, Togama, then perhaps the two of us will have a long talk about this henshin asylum. In the meantime, I want each of you to consider which is more important to the Phoenix: secrecy or justice?"

Folk Magic, Omens, and Superstitions

"Leaving already?" Togashi Mitsu asked, glancing up from his bowl of soup.

Mirumoto Daini sighed. "I cannot sit in idleness." He glanced back at the thick-shouldered ise zumi. "We must have taken a wrong turn back there on the mountain paths. This village is not on our map." The young samurai pushed open the doors of the teahouse and strode out into the afternoon sun.

Mitsu sighed, finished the scalding hot soup in a gulp, and rose. Depositing a few coins from his pocket on the table, he smiled at the serving girl and hurried after his companion. Daini stood a few steps out in the street, glancing from one direction to another.

"It will do you no good to worry," Mitsu chuckled. "We shall reach Toturi's camp in good time." Mitsu wandered off to the side of the road, where an old woman sat jangling a cup of wooden sticks.

"This is an important mission, Mitsu-san," Daini said. "I wish you would begin to take it seriously."



"I am taking it seriously," Mitsu replied. "This woman is a prophet. She shall tell us which way we need to go." The old woman looked up at Daini, smiled a toothless smile, and spilled the sticks upon the ground.

"This is no time for peasant superstition," Daini snapped impatiently. "We must think rationally."

Mitsu looked up at his friend. "Your logic is why we are lost now. Perhaps it is time we tried something irrational."

Daini frowned in disapproval.

"Do you have a better idea?" Mitsu asked.

"No," Daini admitted. "I do not."

"Excellent," the ise zumi replied with a grin. "Then you can be the one to pay her."

Magic is a powerful force in Rokugan, and an accepted part of everyday life. Samurai who show skill at commanding the kami become shugenja, and others who can see the dance of the Elements join the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Of course, the spirits can also speak to any who know how to listen, and even the most cynical samurai learns to recognize a few common omens and superstitions. Folk

magic is a blanket term used to describe most of these simple methods of understanding the kami.

The source of superstition and folk magic lies within the nature of kami. The spirits of Rokugan neither think nor behave as mortals do. They possess values and motivations utterly unintelligible to most. Divination allows spirits and humans to understand each other for a time. In return for the diviner's respect, the kami offer guidance and advice. Obeying superstitions can placate angry spirits, or frighten mischievous ones away. Omens are seen as attempts by the spirits to offer warnings of the future. Some popular forms of folk magic predate the fall of the Kami, though most of these have since been adapted and incorporated into the philosophy of the Tao.

Many shugenja and scholars, particularly among the Phoenix Clan, have theorized about the reasons behind many omens and superstitions. The Rokugan superstition against traveling directly northeast is believed to be tied to the Shadowlands. As the Shadowlands lie to the southwest of Rokugan, spirits of evil and darkness must travel to the northeast in order to corrupt mortals. Those who travel directly northeast walk with evil, and are doomed to ill fortune. Whether this theory is true or not is only known by the *kansen*. This is only one example of many rational theories behind popular superstitions, but one can rest assured that if a superstition is prominent, the Phoenix have at least one theory regarding it.

Many shugenja have attempted to collect and document the local folk magic and superstitions of Rokugan, but with little success. Most heimin guard their secret rituals well for fear that good fortune will desert them otherwise. Folk magic rituals and popular superstitions vary wildly from one region of Rokugan to the next, but the following is a list of a few of the more common beliefs. These are listed by Great Clan, not as an attempt to exclude areas occupied by Minor Clans or Imperial Families, but merely because these are the largest areas of Rokugan. Also, keep in mind that it is entirely possible that a superstition or folk ritual could spread from one area of Rokugan to another. (Many of the more widespread superstitions of Rokugan are listed on page 199 of the *Legend of the Five Rings Player's Guide*.)

Crab Provinces

It is unlucky to leave home without a small piece of jade, even outside of the Shadowlands. Most denizens of Crab territory consider this simple common sense.

Hanging a bowl of rice at the edge of a farmer's field keeps goblins away.

Stepping on a piece of obsidian with your bare foot is a bad omen.



The Rokugani Months

Each Rokugani month has a common name, used by the general populace, and a formal name, used in ceremonies, festivals, and birth records. Rokugani astrology typically uses the common names, as astrology is very popular with the common people. There is no apparent connection between most of the kami used in the names of the formal months and the animals that name the common months (for example, Doji has no symbolic connection with the goat); the two systems were devised independently.

Also listed on this table are a few of the more common personality traits associated with a person born during that month or year.

Common	Formal	Associations
Spring		
Hare	Sun	Very emotional, a dreamer.
Dragon	Moon	Brash, but charismatic.
Serpent	Hantei	Attentive, but often selfish.
Summer		
Horse	Akodo	Curious and versatile, but restive.
Goat	Doji	Sensitive and compassionate, but moody.
Monkey	Shiba	Honest and generous, sometimes arrogant.
Fall		
Rooster	Bayushi	Charming, but often critical of others.
Dog	Shinjo	Sincere and friendly, but indecisive.
Boar	Hida	Tenacious and implacable, but overbearing.
Winter		
Rat	Togashi	Spiritual, lucky with money, but sometimes overzealous.
Ox	Fu Leng	Has high standards, hard working, but unforgiving.
Tiger	Tenth Son	Clever and inventive, but very secretive.

Stitch a doll with only one eye and make a wish. The doll's spirit will help the wish come true, but bad fortune will follow if you do not quickly stitch a second eye on the doll afterward.

Those who have been hit by lightning and survive are blessed by Osano Wo, and can see the future. This does not include magical lightning, but only the natural wrath of a storm.

Ryujin, a great coral dragon, lives in Earthquake Fish Bay. Throwing scraps of coral in the sea at the beginning of an expedition will ensure calm weather during the journey.

Crane Provinces

A woman who sticks herself with a needle while speaking has been unfaithful.

Erecting a circle of rough stones and praying inside it draws the favor of the Fortunes.

Illness can be cured by throwing seven peas in a well and praying for good fortune.

Carrying rice in one's pockets attracts the protection of Inari, Fortune of Rice. Giving this rice to one of Inari's children (a fox) is extremely good luck.

One should never pour one's own sake.

The spear is the favored weapon of Bishamon, Fortune of Strength. All warriors who seek his favor should know how to use one.

Write the name of your enemy and throw it into Three Sides River. As long as you have been truly wronged, your enemy will have bad luck. If he has not wronged you, the bad luck will return to you threefold.

Dragon Provinces

Young maidens can tell the future by sitting at a crossroads and stringing together the remarks of strangers who pass by. This is often done to determine who one's future spouse will be.

If a child draws a picture of his nightmares, a baku will come to eat the bad dreams. Though baku are often dangerous spirits, a visit from one is a good thing in this case.

A blacksmith should never let the fire die in his forge. If the forge absolutely must be cleaned, the fire must be removed on a torch and kept alive or the forge will never produce good steel again.

A child who does not cry when he is born will become a fearless and mighty warrior.

When meeting a ghost, speak politely. So long as you remain polite, the ghost will do the same.

Saying the name of a dead murderer will attract the killer's ghost, unless one quickly prays to Jurojin for protection.



Lion Provinces

Burying a man alive within the foundations of a bridge provides stability. Usually, criminals are used for this purpose. The ghost is believed to be trapped within the bridge and frightens away other spirits.

Before a soldier leaves home, he must eat rice from a *tegashizwa* leaf. Hanging this leaf above the door will guarantee that the soldier returns home safely.

A tree that glows blue in the night is the home of evil spirits.

Taking the head of an enemy is very good luck. If one eye is closed and the teeth are exposed, or the eyes point downward, the head becomes unlucky. If the eyes are closed or both point in the same direction, the head is very lucky. (In any case, a samurai who takes the head of an enemy will want to get himself purified later, as it is still dead flesh.)

Spiders are lucky creatures, though being bitten by one is unlucky. Never kill a spider, or its spirit will haunt the home and bring bad luck.

Phoenix Provinces

Shouting and slashing at trees with a sprig of pine frightens away ghosts.

Carrying a rice grain carved to resemble a Fortune will guarantee the protection of that Fortune.

Badgers are bad luck and full of mischief. Do not speak to such creatures, or you invite their attention.

If you meet a stranger alone in the forest, do not speak to them, for they are surely a spirit. Leave ghosts alone, and they will mind their own business.

A large stomach is a sign of the favor of Hotei, Fortune of Contentment. A stout, happy man is believed to have found a bit of enlightenment.

The first day that snow falls during the winter is the luckiest day of the year.

Never laugh at another's superstition, even if you do not agree with it. Laughing at superstition is in itself bad luck.

Scorpion Provinces

Sprinkling salt on a new garment (especially a mask) will bring the wearer good fortune.

Drinking fresh blood from a rooster will cure indigestion.

As Bayushi was the third to fall in the Great Tournament, the number three is unlucky. Never leave home in a group of three, for this is especially unlucky. It is better by far to find a fourth, or leave in two separate groups.

A girl born with green eyes will never be able to tell a lie.

Rats are the servants of Daikoku, Fortune of Wealth. Throw a grain of rice to a rat and you will receive good fortune and great wealth. If you must kill a rat, always go to a Temple of Daikoku and offer some rice in apology, or poverty will follow.

Whisper a secret in a temple of Benten, and she will help to keep it safe.

Unicorn Provinces

The future can be divined by reading the cracks within a piece of burnt deer shoulder bone.

Finding the hand print of a child is good luck.

The first horse born in the springtime is the luckiest. If it is stillborn, bad fortune will follow for the entire season.

Never cut your hair when the moon is full, or it will fall out.

Splitting an arrow on the target with a second arrow is an extremely good omen.

A house built with wood from the Shinomen will have bad fortune.

Finding a frog that has swallowed a koku is the best omen possible, and portends great wealth for the finder.

Writing the name of a Fortune on your right arm will grant the strength of that Fortune. Writing the Fortune's name on your left arm will grant you the wisdom of that Fortune. Using this magic too often, or doing both at the same time, is greedy and brings bad luck.

Kawaru

Foretelling the future is a popular form of folk magic, and countless methods exist to do so. The most popular method of divination is certainly *Kawaru*. *Kawaru* was written during the third century by Isawa Teruyo, a great shugenja skilled at reading destinies. It is based upon six-lined figures known as hexagrams. The system begins with a ceremony of ritual purification; then a casting of stones or sticks randomly determines a hexagram that pertains to the caster. Each hexagram is associated with a particular course of action, symbol, or virtue. By correctly interpreting the results, the caster can read the future while learning something about his own personality.

Kawaru is said to be infallible, but interpretation can be difficult. The actual scroll of the *Kawaru* is quite slim, but volumes have been dedicated to its interpretation. Wise women known as *itako* dedicate themselves to translating the results of *Kawaru* castings. Every large village has at least one of these prophets. Any mistakes made following the results of *Kawaru* are believed to be the fault of the *itako*, or due to the interference of some evil spirit that the caster attracted by not properly purifying himself.



Astrology

Astrology is another popular method of divination in Rokugan, involving the movements of the sun, moon, stars, and other heavenly bodies. A wealth of knowledge about the past, present, and future can be obtained by observing the location of objects in the night sky.

Besides the many stars that dot the sky – and Lady Sun and Lord Moon – there are seven major heavenly bodies which move across the sky throughout the year. Whether these are small moons, planets, comets, or something else entirely is unimportant to the current state of Rokugani science. (The exception is among the Dragon, who have so many conflicting theories as to what these bodies may be that getting into the matter in detail would be another chapter in and of itself.) To most Rokugani astrologers, these bright, moving bodies are clearly symbolic of the Fortunes. As such, they have been named after the Seven Fortunes – Benten (Fortune of Romantic Love), Bishamon (Fortune of Strength), Daikoku (Fortune of Wealth), Ebisu (Fortune of Honest Work), Fukurokujin (Fortune of Wisdom), Hotei (Fortune of Contentment), and Jurojin (Fortune of Longevity).

For the purposes of astrology, the sky is divided into twelve sections called “houses.” These houses are determined by the position of the moon at that time of year, and are named after the Rokugani months. A stellar event holds different connotations depending upon its house. A meteor shower in the House of the Rat, for example, could symbolize great wealth because the rat is a symbol of Daikoku. The possible interpretations and symbolic explanations are endless, and GMs and players alike are encouraged to use their imaginations when interpreting stellar events.

The current year is also highly symbolic in astrology. Each year is attached to a specific house according to a twelve-year cycle, and to a particular elemental ring (Water, Air, Fire, Void, and Earth, in that order). Each element is associated with two consecutive years, then the next element in order dominates the next two years. With twelve houses and five elements, the cycle repeats every sixty years, and astrologers keep careful note of the passing of these cycles, as important events are believed to happen when the cycle begins anew. The combination of element and house determines possible events that may occur during the year. Last year was the year of the Void Rat. The current year (1126 by the Isawa Calendar) is that of the Earth Ox. Next year is the year of the Earth Tiger, indicating that a new cycle is about to begin in the following year (which would be Water Hare). Only astrologers keep track of the year in this manner; the rest of Rokugan reckons time by the regnal year of the Emperor.

The most common use of astrology is in determining an individual's personal house. The personal house is a combination of two elements – the house occupied by the moon when the person

was born and the year in which they were born. These elements combine to tell a great deal about the individual's personality and destiny. (See the callout boxes for more details about elements and houses.)

A Quick Primer on Astrology

The following are the terms most frequently used to describe an object's current position and movement in the sky. These positions are referred to as aspects. The following is an extremely simplified version of the art of astrology, just enough information so that you can use astrological terminology in your campaign.

Conjunction – When two bodies occupy the same house in the sky. Bodies in conjunction represent a concentration of the energies they represent, for good or ill.

Sextile – Two bodies form a sixty degree angle (there is exactly one house between them). This foretells opportunity offered by whatever the bodies represent.

Square – When the position of two bodies forms a right angle in the sky (there are exactly two houses between them). Such an aspect indicates a challenge ahead.

Trine – Two bodies form a one hundred and twenty degree angle (there are exactly three houses between them). This represents the protection of the respective bodies.

Inconjunct – Two bodies form a one hundred and fifty degree angle (there are exactly four houses between them). This represents open conflict between the two bodies, and bodes ill.

Opposition – When two bodies occupy opposite houses in the sky. Bodies in opposition indicates radical change, either through rapid growth or sudden catastrophe.

The Astrological Year

The following is an example of thirteen years from an astrological cycle. From this pattern, the entire sixty-year cycle may be inferred.

Year	Example Events	Element	House
1116	Sword of Yotsu otokodate founded.	Earth	Hare
1117	Yoritomo becomes daimyo of the Mantis Clan.	Earth	Dragon
1118	Death of Ichiro Akitomo, Badger Champion.	Water	Serpent
1119	Isawa Tadaka succeeds Isawa Gojinwa as Master of Earth.	Water	Horse
1120	Death of Akodo Arasou, Lion Champion.	Air	Goat
1121	Battle of Three Man Alliance Plain.	Air	Monkey
1122	Opium War in Ryoko Owari.	Fire	Rooster
1123	Scorpion Clan Coup, death of	Fire	Dog



Hantei XXXVIII.

1124	The Naga awaken. Formation of Toturi's Army.	Void	Boar
1125	War erupts between Lion and Crane.	Void	Rat
1126	Current year. Crab army moves into Beiden Pass.	Earth	Ox
1127	Next year.	Earth	Tiger
1128	Start of new cycle		

Using Divination in Your Campaign

Though the Astrology skill is listed in the *Player's Guide*, most forms of divination do not require mechanics. If the GM wishes the divination to work, it works and offers a few vague clues. If it would not be proper for a the party to receive an important clue out of the clear blue sky, the divination offers false or misleading information: "Benten and Jurojin are inconjunct today. You're not sure what it portends, but perhaps you should hold off writing to your betrothed for another day."

In any case, divination is no more or less reliable than making an educated guess. Many of the predictions of formalized schools of divination such as *Kawaru* and astrology are mere suggestions of safe, sensible behavior that would work well in any situation. Many samurai believe that divinations are nothing more than foolish superstition, while an equal number believe that they are truly being guided by the Fortunes and adhere to the suggestions of divination rigidly.



The Elements

Each cycle of twelve years is delineated by an element. The current cycle is Earth; the next cycle is Water. The following are a few common personality associations for each year.

Water: Artistic and expressive, but fearful or fickle.

Air: Strong and self-controlled, but competitive.

Fire: Cheerful and passionate, but can be very destructive.

Void: Resourceful and practical, but sometimes impatient or unpredictable.

Earth: Stolid and dependable, conservative, and stubborn.

The Subtlety of the Court

Though many samurai dread the thought of politics, sooner or later it becomes necessary to pay a visit to the courts. The great decisions of the Empire are made in the courts of the Great Clans, and the most far-reaching and important decisions are made at the Emperor's Winter Court. Careers are made or ruined by the deft movement of a courtier's fan. A samurai who learns the nuances of courtly life can bring honor and glory to himself and his family. A samurai who enters the political area unprepared could very well perish.

In the year 689 there lived in the Imperial City a powerful courtier by the name of Otomo Madoko. Madoko worked for many decades as the Imperial Matchmaker, arranging marriages for the Imperial Family. During her long career, she witnessed the reigns of four separate Hantei Emperors. She was a great admirer of the works of the ronin general Sun Tao, and had committed the entire Imperial Manuscript of the *Book of Sun Tao* to memory. Once, on a dare from a clever Lion courtier, Madoko was encouraged to compare the tactics of the General to the tactics of the court. Madoko was amused by the request, and eagerly complied. The resulting work, an essay simply entitled *The Subtlety of the Court*, has been adopted as a survival guide by many courtiers since.

Madoko recognized what other courtiers had not expressed in words: to a samurai, all is war. Even the meekest courtier is still a samurai, and a samurai never confronts an enemy with anything less than the fullest dedication and strongest resolve. Those who apply this to the court as they would on a battlefield, prosper. Those who treat the court as a vacation, a reward, or a chance to indulge in the pleasures of wealth are doomed to fail. Otomo Madoko had seen mighty generals sent to the heart of the Shadowlands through the machinations of clever courtiers. She had seen simple ji-samurai gain great status and become generals themselves. All of this was done through skillful manipulation of political currents.



What follows are a few excerpts from *The Subtlety of the Court*. The book takes a series of quotes from the great general Sun Tao, and then applies them to courtly life in Madoko's own words. The advice contained herein can be of great use to a samurai unaccustomed to political subterfuge.

"Only the ignorant fight to win. The enlightened win before they fight."

A wise courtier does not confront an enemy about whom he knows nothing. Better to let an opponent win a minor victory while you retreat to research his background and weaknesses, than to confront him directly when you do not know what is truly at stake.

"True knowledge is in knowing, to observe heaven without stepping outside."

A wise courtier is skilled in many things, rather than an expert at one thing. Should the conversation venture onto a topic with which you are familiar, you may use your knowledge to appear wiser than you are, and your enemies will fear you. The court's attention is fickle, and remains on nothing overlong. If the conversation does venture beyond your limited knowledge, change the subject rather than look the fool.

"To succeed, a general must be unfathomable."

To be truly powerful in the court, you must occasionally act for no reason, and do something for no purpose other than to cause a stir. While your enemies wonder at the motivations behind your action, your true objective will lie unimpeded. Always know the names of everyone who attends the court. People appreciate it when you remember their names, and will be more amenable to your requests. If you wish to insult someone, it helps to pretend that you have forgotten their name, even if you have not.

"If you can go no further, change. You will get through."

If someone turns the topic of discussion toward subjects dangerous to you, change the subject. If you can find something more interesting to talk about, the former topic will be forgotten. Sex, war, and the shortcomings of those who are not present are always inviting topics for the court. Do not be afraid to tell a joke at your own expense, as this will also draw their attention away. Just as a warrior must not fear giving his life for his clan, you must not fear the sacrifice of your own dignity if it keeps the clan's honor safe.

"Deadly ground is where only the quick survive. When on deadly ground, fight."

There is no deadlier ground than the Winter Court. Everyone who is present has come to further his own objectives. Everyone is your enemy, for while the Emperor's favor lies on someone else, your own light dims. You must be prepared at all times to do whatever you must to destroy your foes in the eyes of the court and promote your clan to greatness. There is no room for mercy at the Emperor's Court.

"The victorious general strikes while the enemy plans."

To an outsider, courtly life may appear ponderous and slow-moving. Nothing could be further than the truth. A courtier must give the appearance of lethargy while in the presence of his foes, while in reality his mind is working to undo them. Whoever strikes first wins, and just as in a duel of swords it is the samurai who flinches that is struck down. The first thing you must do upon your arrival at the court is learn the names and affiliations of everyone present. Learn their opinions toward your clan, and toward the enemies of your clan. If any of them pose a threat, immediately put plans into action to undo them. If any of them can benefit you, you must arrange to meet with them on your own terms as soon as possible. A wise courtier always brings a few gifts with him to the court, not just for the master of the house, but just in case he may need them to impress potential allies. Rest assured, you will use them.

"The superior general attacks his enemy's alliances."

If you discover that your enemy is meeting with potential allies, you must meet with them first and make a better offer, even if said parties have nothing to offer you in return. At the very least, you shall turn them away from your enemy and cause rumors to grow in your wake. Rumor and suspicion are your most powerful weapons. Obtain faithful servants of the lower classes to spread rumors throughout the peasantry belittling your foes. Peasants hear everything and tell everyone. These rumors will eventually find their way to other samurai. Your foe will be dishonored and your hand in the matter will be entirely concealed.

"Victory can be seen, but never forced."

Even when it seems that your triumph is well in hand, exercise an element of caution. Even the surest plans can be undone, and you must be prepared with contingencies on all occasions. In particular, when one is negotiating peace, it is helpful to have letters drawn up in advance in event of your failure with couriers prepared to deliver them unless you arrive to tell them otherwise. This way, in case of a crisis your allies may be notified in the quickest fashion imaginable and the armies can attack swiftly should your negotiations fail.

"The competent general attacks an enemy's army."

Confronting your foe in the court is a loathsome but necessary prospect. Avoid argument. If your opponent starts an argument, do not seek to win, seek only to end the argument, even if you must lose. Those who bicker and argue are seen as fools. Only begin an argument if you wish to appear a fool and drag your opponent down with you. Do not underestimate this tactic.

"A desperate general besieges an enemy's city."

Always confront your opponent on your own terms. Do not appear in an environment controlled by your enemies unless there



is absolutely no other choice. Try to arrange a compromise of some sort, a meeting on neutral ground. Never admit an advantage.

"If your army is larger, fight. If it is smaller, keep your distance until opportunity strikes. If your army is much smaller, flee and survive."

If you have an obvious advantage, do not be afraid to use it. Perhaps your enemy has some trick up his sleeve, but there is no better way to find out than to act while you are stronger. If, on the other hand, you are uncertain of your enemy's strength, bide your time until your spies and informants can divine the truth. If you know that your enemy has an advantage, avoid meeting with him at all costs. Stall, feign illness if you must, or send intentionally incompetent representatives in your place until the situation changes.

"A good general chooses the right officers and lets the momentum of the army do its work."

A skilled courtier realizes that he cannot do everything himself, and knows how to delegate authority. Surround yourself with experts and seek their advice in all things. I recommend the following: a military officer to give advice on military matters, a yojimbo to provide protection and security, a shugenja for matters of magic and religion, and a spy. A wise courtier is not afraid to employ a spy to gain knowledge of his enemies. Ronin function especially well in this regard. They are often skilled in stealth, no one pays them much mind, and the peasantry often tells ronin secrets they would not share with a true samurai. Choose individuals whom you know to be loyal, or pay them well enough that their loyalty is not a concern. In your circle of advisors, it is often useful to include someone whom you know to be incompetent and disposable, but utterly loyal. Should the court turn against you, you can always have them take the blame or provide a timely distraction.

"Victory is never repetitious."

In the court as much as anywhere else, you must be aware that your enemies will not fall for the same ploy twice. In addition, using the same tactics again and again suggests a lack of wit. Never show a lack of wit. If people believe that you are foolish, they will never take you seriously again.

"What kills the enemy is anger."

Showing undue emotion in public is weakness. Find out where your enemy is weakest, discover what upsets him, and create an environment in which he will fly into a temper in front of others. While he rages, his allies will flee to seek more stable cohorts.

"Those who render their enemy helpless without combat are triumphant."

This is the greatest lesson of the General. It is why the courts exist. It is what I hope I have taught you here.

On Being Properly Offensive

Running a campaign at Winter Court, or at any court, can be exciting and demanding for GM and player alike. Courtly life is a constant role-playing challenge. Some players may feel unprepared for such an adventure, and fear the prospect of politicians more than ghosts, oni, or goblins.

The key to surviving in the court is wit. Properly insulting an enemy can cause him to appear a fool, greatly reducing his influence. Of course, not just any insult will do; a courtier needs to say something to which his enemy cannot possibly reply. Subtle (and often not-so-subtle) duels of insults are common, and many samurai with no taste for courtly life often compare such exchanges to spoiled children at play. The following is a list of general guidelines for insulting someone at the court.

Keep it personal. If the target has a reputation for being a fool, do not insult him for being fat. It just doesn't make any sense. If someone has a Dark Secret or Bad Reputation, those are your primary targets. Do not ignore obvious openings.

Keep it true. Wild accusations and specious insults may be humorous, but they won't hold any water if your target defends himself. Wait until you have some ammunition rather than making a mistake.

Be funny. If you're not funny, the court may see your attack for what it is – a petty attempt to degrade your enemy's character in public. If you can be amusing, however, then the court may not mind. In fact, they'll keep listening to see what you'll say next, and how your quarry defends himself.

Do not talk to your enemy. Talking directly to your opponent gives him a perfect opportunity to reply. Instead, talk to someone else loud enough for everyone present to overhear, preferably someone of higher status. That way, your enemy is forced to interrupt you in order to defend himself, making him appear doubly foolish.



Quote the sages. Quoting anything well known, especially the Tao, as part of your insult is very effective. In a way, you're not insulting your enemy. Shinsei is. There's not much one can do about that except try to quote back, and if he's not familiar with the material he may be stuck. (This is why a decent rank of Shintao is always handy for a courtier.)

Skew titles. Everyone has a proper rank in Rokugan, and a courtier is expected to remember where everyone stands. Calling a higher ranking samurai "san" or referring to a dignitary simply as "samurai" is a very blunt insult, but an effective snub of their character.

Be prepared for the consequences. A particularly nasty jab may end in a duel. Always be prepared for that eventuality with a suitable second or some other backup plan.

For your convenience, a list of insults follows. Remember that an insult tailored specifically for an enemy is more effective than a generic jab. For the sake of simplicity, Doji Hoturi and Mirumoto Hitomi are the targets of these insults. Actually insulting either of these individuals is not recommended.

"I have heard rumors about the enduring virtue of your wife, Hoturi-san. Of course, as Shinsei once said, the withered apple needs not fear theft."

"Hitomi-chan is noted for her wisdom. After only one day at the monastery, the monks were quite certain that they could teach her no more and sent her on her way."

"We should be honored to have a great swordsman in our midst. We should, I say, but unfortunately they sent Hoturi-san instead."

"The grooming practices of lady Hitomi are quite dubious. I notice she has brought many large, strapping stable boys, yet only one horse."

"I have heard that Hoturi-san has offered his strong right arm to the Emperor. We have yet to see how the Emperor will respond to such an insult."

"Hitomi-chan's prowess on the battlefield is well noted. She is an absolute wonder. Every time the enemy sees her banner on the battlefield, everyone wonders why she is still alive."

"Hoturi-san is well known for his good fortune. It seems like a friendly spirit is always looking over his shoulder. Proof positive, if you ask me, that the kami have a sense of humor."

"Hitomi-chan is not yet married, but it is no fault of her own. Her parents had several quality prospects in line before they realized that she was a woman."

"Hoturi-san is the sort of man I would depend upon. If I were traveling, I would want a man like him at my side. I do not think I would be able to find all the best brothels and opium dens alone."

"I am pleased to be here at the court, in the household of such a wise, honorable, and generous host. Can anyone question the

hospitality of our host? The presence of Hitomi-chan alone speaks volumes for our lord's tolerance."

"Through hardship, we find enlightenment. With this in mind, can anyone argue that those that must live with Hoturi-san must be the most enlightened in Rokugan?"

"Hitomi-chan has given us a great gift in being with us here today. Let us hope that she soon offers us the greater gift. Her absence."

Astrological Events

The night sky has been full of omens in the past year, many of them dark and foreboding. Astrologers have gathered in Otsan Uchi and the remote hermitage of Asahina Tampako, the foremost expert on astrology, in order to interpret these omens. The exact details are unknown, but dark times seem to lie ahead for Rokugan. Here are a few of the more notable astrological occurrences and other omens. (See the section on Astrology on page 54 for explanations of some of these astrological terms.)

- **Benten and Bishamon were inconjunct** during the most recent Topaz Championship. These two Fortunes are regarded more highly by the Crane Clan than any other, and for the two of them to appear in such an ominous manner during one of the Crane's most important gempukku ceremonies bodes ill. In addition, Daidoji Tsumerai, regarded by many to be the favorite in this year's competition, was defeated in the final rounds by a relative unknown, Mirumoto Uso. Some say that this is a dark omen for the Crane's coming war with the Lion, and only by soliciting the Dragon's aid can the dark connotations of the omen be outweighed.

- **A bright red comet shot across the sky during the month of the Horse.** The comet's light was particularly bright in the territories of the former Scorpion. Shortly after the event, Imperial Legionnaires posted in the area began reporting high levels of nezumi activity. It seems the ratlings are fleeing east from Crab territory in heretofore unseen numbers. Those ratlings that have



been questioned on the manner shriek wildly about a "wide-eyed demon that rides fire in the sky."

- **A meteor shower occurred near Shiro Shinjo.** The patrol of samurai who noted the shower reported that their horses seemed unusually nervous during the spectacle. The next morning, the samurai investigated the area and found several large meteors composed of a strange white metal that was surprisingly dense and heavy. The metal was delivered to Shiro Shinjo at the Unicorn daimyo's request. Several emissaries from the Agasha family have beseeched the Unicorn for permission to study the metal, but have been met with polite refusal.

- **A lunar eclipse occurred** on the final day of the month of the Hare, also referred to as the month of the Sun. During this twelve hour eclipse, Moshi Euiko, sister of aged Centipede Clan daimyo Moshi Juiko, gave birth to a daughter with bright green eyes. The Centipede are very excited about this occurrence. The girl is clearly blessed by either the Sun or the Moon, though the Centipede shugenja are uncertain which. If she is indeed blessed by the Sun, she is destined to be one of the greatest shugenja the Centipede Clan has ever known. If she is blessed by the dark specter of Lord Moon, her future is less certain among the sun-worshipping Centipede. The Moshi have determined to watch the child's progress closely. The girl has optimistically been named Nikko ("Sunlight").

- **A dark foretelling occurred at Kyuden Hida.** A pair of Kuni shugenja experimented with a rare form of divination in which two colored pieces of paper are dropped from a great height to reveal the answer to a question. Their question was simple: who is more worthy to rule Rokugan, Hida Kisada or Hantei XXXIX? Both scraps of paper were caught in a gust of wind and blown into a signal fire atop the Carpenter Wall. When the shugenja attempted the question again, they received exactly the same result. No one outside of the Kuni family, not even Hida Kisada, has been made aware of this foretelling.

- **A bright red star appeared in the House of the Ox.** This star was only seen in the immediate vicinity of Otosan Uchi, and disappeared after a mere six hours. Even those only as far away as South Hub Village did not see the star. The Emperor's shugenja believe that this is a dark omen, and portends a threat to the Emperor's life, as the House of the Ox is the sign under which the Emperor was born.

- **No stars at all were visible** in the city of Ryoko Owari for three days directly following the Chrysanthemum Festival. The Legionnaires who reported the incident claim that the sky was darkened from the constant fires in the area, but the locals are not so certain. Some fear that the cast-out Scorpion are experimenting with dark magic up in the mountains, and that their experiments are nearly complete.



- **A murder of crows burst from the earth** near the Mountain of the Seven Thunders. The cloud of birds soared directly for the temple, then turned away sharply and headed for the sky, their calls echoing for miles. The Brotherhood of Shinsei is quite disturbed by the occurrence, as many of the elder monks have interpreted the omen as a sign that they should flee. From what or whom they should flee is the question. Many *sohei* (warrior-monks) from the Temple of Osano-Wo have begun exploring the Empire in groups, searching for any possible threat to the followers of Shinsei. The monk who first witnessed the event, a young nun named Eisai, disappeared three days after reporting it.

- **A grand square** (four heavenly bodies formed in a perfect square) of Daikoku, Hotei, Jurojin, and Ebisu occurred on New Year's day. Under normal circumstances, such an unusual occurrence would suggest prosperity in the new year. However, in context of the many other dark omens that have occurred this year, many astrologers feel that this is a warning from the Fortunes and an offering of their protection for those who respect their power. In reply, the number of supplicants at the major temples of the Empire has nearly tripled in the last few months, and new monks and shugenja are being trained in record numbers.



I began this correspondence with an apology, and I must end it with one.

I had hoped that during our time together some hope might be salvaged for the peace of the Empire, but it seems that such is not the case. The tragic events that have unfolded before us have created even deeper divisions, and I find that I must take full responsibility. If I were a more dutiful host, a more watchful lord, perhaps this might not have happened.

But one cannot worry about the past. The past cannot be changed. As I mentioned previously, the past serves as our guide into the future. Let us take what we have learned from this tragedy and put it to good use. There is nothing to be gained from death and conflict.

I hope that each of you will see the wisdom of my words, but when I look into the eyes of those assembled here, I fear for the future.

Mark my words, there are dark times ahead.

Shiba Ujimitsu



Chapter Four: Epilogue



"Make haste, Ekiken; the snows are beginning to fall once more."

Yori stood at the edge of the gardens, silently watching his yojimbo and servants arrange the palanquins, carts and horses. The doors of the nearby guest quarters opened slowly, and Kuni Nakiro appeared. Stepping into his sandals, he crossed the garden to Yori's side. The young shugenja seemed preoccupied, his face creased in a frown.

"Is there a problem, my student?" Yori asked mildly.

Nakiro paused for a moment, watching the snow drift over the sculpted gardens of the Phoenix. "What have we done here, Yori-sama?" he asked, looking nervously at his teacher.

"We have done our duty, Nakiro-san," Yori replied. "We have caused division among the Phoenix, the sole clan with enough knowledge of the Shadowlands to stop us. You should be overjoyed, Nakiro. I could not have done it without you."

Nakiro nodded, head bowed. "Thank you, Yori-sama."

Yori studied the young man for a moment. "And yet, you have doubts. You are uncertain whether our clan's new alliance is a wise one."

Nakiro glanced up at his master quickly. "Yori-sama, I would not question—"

Yori held up one hand and smiled gently. "It is all right, Nakiro-san. I understand. You have been away from the Wall for too long, studying with these Phoenix. You do not understand the great advances we have made in controlling the darkness. Lord Kisada is a wise man. Do you truly believe he would ally himself with the darkness were there any doubt that I could control it? Am I not the heir to Mokuna's wisdom?"

"I suppose my worries are unfounded, master," Nakiro replied. "I am sorry if I seem uneasy."

"Perfectly understandable." Yori nodded. "You were trained to fight the darkness. Standing beside it can be a difficult adjustment. Do not worry about such things. Merely have faith in your teacher. I have the journal of Mokuna to guide me. Do you not have faith in me?"

"Completely, my lord," Nakiro said quickly. "I have complete faith in you."

"Good," Yori said, smoothing his dark robes with one long-fingered hand. "Then you will accept one more important mission from me."

"Yes, my lord?"

"Remain here in the lands of the Phoenix. Isawa Tsuke was a bit overeager to enter into an alliance with us, and Ujimitsu knows more than he admits. I believe the Elemental Masters are plotting something. The presence of Oyo should cause significant confusion among the Isawa for a time. Perhaps you can learn something in the meantime."

"I am to be a spy?" Nakiro asked, surprised.

"Why, Nakiro-san, do not be naive," Yori answered. "You have never been anything less."

Nakiro blinked. "But the Phoenix are our friends..."

Yori turned to face Nakiro, black eyes hard with grim resolve. "No, Nakiro. The Phoenix are our enemies, as are all others weak enough to stand with the Hantei. You are a Crab. One day, we will all stand at the side of the Great Bear under a new Dynasty. A Hida Dynasty. Never forget that."



"Yes, Yori-sama."

"Excellent. Now return to your Asako friends. No sense in arousing suspicion prematurely, neh?"

Nakiro nodded, bowed to his master, and made his way across the garden toward Morning Glory Castle. His master watched him, eyes hidden within the darkness of his robe.



"Leaving already, Yori-san? The Winter Court has hardly begun."

Kuni Yori turned from his palanquin, eyes narrowing. His expression quickly softened to a courteous smile, and he bowed deeply to the daimyo of the Phoenix Clan. "The Immortal Phoenix," he said pleasantly. "I did not expect you to come to personally see me off. The hospitality of your clan is truly legendary." Yori glanced past Ujimitsu for a moment. "But where are your guards? Your attendants? In the lands of the Crab, Lord Kisada is hardly seen outside Kyuden Hida without his staff and his bodyguards."

"I am not Lord Kisada," Ujimitsu replied, "and perhaps there would be others here to wish you farewell, had you told anyone that you were leaving."

Yori gave a tight smile. "I thought it best to leave discreetly. I seem to have worn out my welcome quickly. However, fear not. My apprentice, Nakiro, has my blessing and Lord Kisada's sanction to represent the Crab in any capacity you or the Emperor may require. Is there anything else?"

"I just wanted to ask you a few questions about the murder," Ujimitsu said. He looked at Yori's servants and yojimbo. "Alone," he added.

Yori nodded, dismissing the others with a wave of his hand. Folding his arms in the sleeves of his robes, he began slowly pacing the garden path. Ujimitsu walked at the dark Crab's side. "What, specifically, might I help you with?" Yori asked. "I notice that your pet Dragon is not here."

"Agasha Hisojo is busy keeping the Asako and Isawa from one another's throats."

"A pity, that. The families of the Crab never fight among one another so. Perhaps if your clan had a focused purpose, as we have, you would not be so quick to condemn one another."

"We have a purpose. We are the keepers of the Tao."

"Ah," Yori said faintly. "A heavy burden. You should try guarding the Wall sometime."

"Don't be so quick to judge, Yori-san. You might be surprised what you find in the Tao. There is one passage which you may find interesting. Shinsei once said, 'There are no coincidences...'"

Yori smiled. "Indeed. No coincidences, only auspicious occasions."

"You arrive here in the midst of this chaos with the one witness who could solve the entire affair, and effectively cripple my clan at the same time. That seems a rather auspicious occasion to me, Yori-san," Ujimitsu said.

"Indeed," Yori replied. "Very auspicious. But unintentional. Now what is your point, Phoenix?"

"My point is that I have had enough of your games, Kuni," Ujimitsu said flatly. "What is Hida Kisada planning? Why has he sent you here? How did you know what would happen?"

Yori looked at Ujimitsu, his expression one of mild surprise. "Is the Immortal Phoenix threatening me?"

Ujimitsu returned Yori's stare. "You are in my territory, Crab. As powerful and cunning as you may be, one word from me and you'll never see the Carpenter Wall again. Call your yojimbo if you think he can save you. Both of you will discover what Ofushikai can do."

"So the firebird has teeth," Yori nodded with respect. "And I thought you were a man of peace."

"I was a soldier first. Did Kisada send you to weaken us so that we could not stand against you when he stages his own coup?"

"My, what a suspicious mind you have, Phoenix."

"I'm losing my patience, Yori," Ujimitsu said, hand resting on the hilt of Ofushikai.

"Indeed?" Yori asked. "As you lost your patience when you struck down your daughter? Or did you do that because the Hantei told you to?"

Ujimitsu's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Please, Phoenix," Yori chuckled. "You are a good man. An honorable man. You obey the Emperor, and while I respect the faith you have in him I do not share it. I ask you this: what has the Son of Heaven done for you? Ordered your wife executed for a crime she did not commit; commanded you to murder your daughter because she dared speak the same objections you carried in your own heart. And what of your predecessor, Shiba Burisagi? How was his loyalty rewarded? Struck down on the spurious testimony of a harlot. A harlot who, I'm certain you do not need to be reminded, now rules Rokugan as Empress. Executed by a Crane whelp without even the dignity of a proper duel. I'm certain the Hantei must have an equally fitting reward planned for your undying loyalty, Immortal Phoenix. But why am I telling you this? Surely you must remember Burisagi's death just as clearly as if it were your own..."

Ujimitsu said nothing. The Soul of Shiba ensured that the memory was indeed perfectly clear, as was the bitter pain of the Scorpion's sting. He could still see Hoturi's blade arcing toward him...

Yori pressed on. "Is this the Emperor you would serve, Phoenix? Do you truly believe that Kisada would not be doing you a favor should he choose to remove the diseased Hantei dynasty? Kisada does not punish strength and conviction. He rewards it."



Ujimitsu stopped walking, hand tight around the hilt of Ofushikai. Yori paused a few steps away, not turning to look back at the Phoenix. The snow continued to swirl about them. Ujimitsu's eyes burned into the back of the Kuni's head. One stroke, one sweep of his sword and he could end it all. No one would blame him. No one would care. He was lord of the Phoenix, after all. The Isawa would cover for his crime. The Asako would probably thank him.

He would be no different from Hoturi, the man who murdered Burisagi.

He would be no different from the Seppun who ordered his wife's death.

He would be no better than himself, the murderer of his own daughter.

"Well," Yori said, a mocking tone in his voice. "Make a decision, Phoenix. I have a long journey ahead of me."

Ujimitsu's hand dropped from the hilt of the ancestral sword of the Phoenix.

"No," Ujimitsu said. "When I strike you down, it will be on the battlefield. Get out of my province, shugenja."

The lord of the Phoenix turned and walked away, alone.

Kuni Yori's laughter echoed through the garden behind him.



Yori was not laughing now.

The snow all around was stained with blood. The body of Hida Ekiken had been torn limb from limb, and dangled from the wreckage of the palanquins. The servants had been slain to a man. Steam rose from the new-fallen snow around the cooling corpses.

Only Yori remained, dark robes spotted with mud, snow, and blood. The green light of jade shimmered around his fists, shining brightly against the dark of night. The shambling, undead creatures hovered at the edge of Yori's light, glaring at him uncertainly through dead eyes.

"Come at me, then," Yori demanded, unleashing a burst of jade into their front ranks. Three more went down with a sizzle of burnt flesh. "I am not another mere heimin. I am Kuni Yori! I am your master!"

"...Are you?" came a reply, a hollow echoing voice from deep within the darkness.

The forest grew deathly quiet. The shambling creatures had vanished, replaced by a smoky grey mist. The sound of uneven breathing pierced the silence, just at the edge of the light.

"Identify yourself," Yori snapped, searching for the source of the reply. "What is the meaning of this attack?"

"We are... of the darkness, Kuni," came a halting, distorted voice. "Does the darkness need... a reason?"

"No. Nor do I need one to destroy you. Now face me!"

The edge of the darkness rippled. A tall figure stepped into Yori's light. It wore the blackened armor of a samurai, but its face was a mask of sagging flesh, stitched together with dark wire. It clutched a long obsidian blade in one bony claw of a hand. Deep red light burned in its eye sockets as it studied the shugenja.

"You are no mere zombie," Yori said.

"Hardly..." the creature replied. "I am... Tsukuro."

"What do you want from me? We had a bargain with the Shadowlands."

"Lord Kisada... has a bargain. You are merely... a Crab far from home. You held the keys to... immortality in your hands and discarded them... merely to cause dissent. I was sent to ask you... why?"

"You mean the henshin?" Yori replied. "Bah, forget the henshin. There are easier paths to eternity. Their manner of enlightenment does not interest me." Yori shouted three harsh words in the language of magic and unleashed twin beams of green energy from his palms. The magic shimmered around Tsukuro. The fleshy mask hung about the abomination's neck began to smolder and drop away, but Tsukuro remained standing.

"You are as powerful... as I have been told." Tsukuro's head nodded slightly. The mask had fallen to reveal a wide, fleshless grin. "This is a waste... of energy. I do not wish to harm you. As you said, we are... allies."

"Why did you kill my men?" Yori demanded.

"They are... nothing. They are unprepared to see what the master..." Tsukuro trailed off. "They had no... imagination."

"The master?" Yori asked.

"He wants... to know," Tsukuro went on. "He wants to know how you summoned the *shiyokai*... the dream demons that to drove the Phoenix twins to murder... How you did that... without gaining any hint of... the Taint..."

Yori smiled slightly. "If your master needs something from me, he should be more polite."

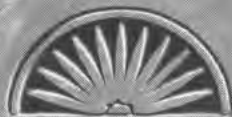
"We care nothing... for what you think," Tsukuro replied. "We are merely... curious. We are willing to... reward you for your... cooperation..." The creature turned and walked away, disappearing quickly in the shadows at the edge of Yori's pale light.

"And what if I do not follow?" Yori called out.

"That... would be unfortunate," Tsukuro's voice replied. "The choice... is yours." The sound of the creature's heavy footsteps receded in the darkness.

Kuni Yori stood where he was for several more moments, his painted face creased in deep thought.

After a time, he folded his arms in his sleeves and followed.



The Seppun Shugenja School

The Seppun Shugenja school is extremely selective. Though only those who show talent are offered a position protecting the Emperor, gaining entrance to the school is often a matter of political influence. Any Otomo, Seppun, or Miya character may choose to attend this school, and any character from a Phoenix family may attend by purchasing the Different School advantage. Members of any other family must purchase both the Ear of the Emperor and Different School Advantages in order to be accepted to the prestigious Seppun School.

Seppun Shugenja tend to be grim, practical, and thorough. They specialize in magics that alter or disrupt other magics, and are particularly adept at combining multiple spells in strange but potent combinations. Sympathetic Energies and Silent Waters are two particularly popular spells among these shugenja.

Seppun Shugenja School

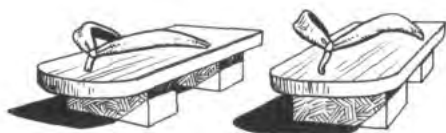
Benefit: +1 Perception

Skills: Calligraphy, Courtier or Etiquette, Obiesaseru, Meditation, Investigation, Shintao, Theology

Beginning Honor: 3, plus 5 boxes

Beginning Spells: Sense, Commune, and Summon, plus 3 Air and 3 Water. Seppun Shugenja have an Affinity for *both* Air and Water, but they have a Deficiency for *both* Fire and Earth.

Starting Outfit: (All are Fine Quality) Kimono, Traveling Pack, Scroll Satchel, Tanto, Wakizashi, First Aid Kit, 10 Koku, Steed, Emerald Badge of Office



The Shiba Tejina School

The Shiba Tejina are artisan shugenja, masters of entertainment magic. The Game Master should feel free to limit a party to one Tejina PC, not due to their overwhelming power (in fact, they are roughly equal to an Isawa shugenja) but because of their rarity. There are only twelve students at the Academy at any time, meaning that only a handful of graduates wander Rokugan, usually keeping close ties with the school. Their history and background are described elsewhere in this book.

Tejina tend to be good-natured, friendly, and very energetic. Their greatest love in life is bringing joy to others. The laughter of a child and the smile of a stranger is the only reward they seek. The kami provide the rest.

Shiba Tejina School

Benefit: +1 Awareness

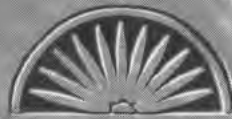
Skills: Calligraphy, Courtier, Etiquette, Meditation, Lore (Myth and Legend), Shintao, Tejina

Beginning Honor: 2, plus 5 boxes

Beginning Spells: Sense, Commune, and Summon, plus 3 Air, 2 Water, and 1 Fire. Tejina tend to favor spells involving illusion. They have an Affinity for Air and a Deficiency for Earth, plus special additional Affinity rules described below.

Starting Outfit: (All considered to be Average Quality; player chooses one item to be of Fine Quality) Kimono, Traveling Pack, Scroll Satchel, Wakizashi, Tanto, 4 Koku, First Aid Kit, 2 Blank Scrolls

Affinity/Deficiency: Tejina shugenja gain an additional rank of Affinity for any spell that creates an illusion or alters the perceptions of others. This is cumulative with their Affinity for Air magic. They also gain a Deficiency with combat spells (any spells that do damage to an opponent) which is cumulative with their Deficiency in Earth. Spells affected by Tejina Affinity in the Player's Guide and this book



are listed here. The GM's word is final in determining whether spells from other sources gain Teijina Affinity. Any spell that causes damage in any way automatically gains Teijina Deficiency, even if that damage is conditional (as in the case of Jade Strike).

Affinity: Aura of Flame, Benten's Touch, Cloak of Night, Cryptic Cipher (though a Teijina would not have access to this Imperial Spell, it is an illusion spell), Essence of Air, False Face, Mists of Illusion, Quiescence of Air, Reflective Pool, Secrets on the Wind, Spirit Script, Walk Without Passing, Way of Deception.

Optional Rule: Skill Groups

Legend of the Five Rings Second Edition rules introduced the concept of Bujutsu skills, which tied together groups of weapons under a single skill. A character can thus become adept with a large number of weapons by spending a minimal amount of skill points. In Second Edition, skills are more useful than they have ever been, so the conservation of experience points by consolidating these skills can help immensely, especially at low Ranks.

Unfortunately, non-weapon skills have no such groups. Those who do not have the extra points to spend may find themselves adrift in some non-combat situations, with no similar skills to call upon. For this reason, this supplement introduces the concept of Skill Groups.

Learning a Skill Group

Purchasing a Skill Group costs the same amount as purchasing a skill, but each Skill Group comprises several specialized skills. When a character chooses a Skill Group, he selects up to four skills from the list associated with that group. These are the skills he is somewhat familiar with, and can use with his Rank in that Skill group. Any skills that are not chosen are considered to be unskilled, though the character may attempt to use a similar skill as usual. If a character takes a Skill Group that contains Low Skills, he does not

lose Honor for learning them, only for using them. He can, however, choose not to learn them to remove the temptation entirely.

Skill Groups represent a broad base of knowledge rather than a specific area of expertise. As a result, any skill rolls made when using a Skill Group have their TN increased by 5.

If a character should later learn one of the specific skills within one of his Skill Groups, he must learn it as a separate skill and pay for it normally. However, there are benefits to specializing with one of the skills within a previously known group. If a character uses a specific skill which is also in one of his Skill Groups, the character may add his Rank in the Skill Group to the total of his roll. There is no cumulative benefit to having a skill in multiple Skill Groups, and only one may be added to any skill roll.

No matter how many skills may be listed in a Skill Group, a character may only choose a particular Skill Group once. Broad, general knowledge can only take someone so far.

As this is an optional rule, a GM should be careful to consider giving skill groups to previously published NPCs as well as PCs.

The current Skill Groups are as follows. Some skills (such as Instruction and many skills from *Way of Shinsei*) are not in any group at all, as they represent a far too specific range of knowledge to be included in a Skill Group.

Skill Groups

Animal Group

Animal Husbandry
Falconry
Horsemanship
Hunting

Athletics Group

Athletics
Climbing
Kemari
Stealth

Courtier Group

Courtier
Diplomacy
Etiquette
Gossip
Heraldry
Manipulation
Sadane
Sincerity



Kagaku (Science) Group

Explosives
Herbalism (Merchant Skill)
Medicine
Poison

Literature Group

Bard
Calligraphy
Oratory/Rhetoric
Poetry

Lore Group

History
Lore (Ancestors)
Lore (Festivals and Ceremonies)
Lore (Ghosts)
Lore (Literature)
Lore (Maho-Tsukai)
Lore (Nemuranai)
Lore (Shadowlands)
Lore (Shugenja)
Lore (Tropical Fish)
Any other Lore Skill
Research

Magic Group

Astrology
Calligraphy
Cipher
Lore (Shugenja)
Omens
Spellcraft
Spell Research

Magistrate Group

Hunting
Intimidation
Investigation
Law

Medical Group

Advanced Medicine
Autopsy
Medicine
Torture

Meditation Group

Lore (Bushido)
Meditation
Shintao
Tea Ceremony
Theology

Merchant Group

Appraisal
Commerce
Forgery
Gambling
Kuenai

Performance Arts Group

Acting
Dance
Music
Puppeteering

Shadowlands Group

Goblin Culture
Lore (Shadowlands)
Lore (Maho-Tsukai)
Ratling Speech

Siegemaster Group

Armorer
Engineering
Locksmith
Siege
Traps
Weaponsmith

Thief Group

Hisomu
Kuenai
Mimic
Poison
Sleight of Hand
Stealth



New Skill

Tejina (Perception, Tejina only)

This skill involves a highly tuned knowledge of illusionary magic. A character with this skill may roll his Tejina skill against a TN determined by the GM (generally the caster's Air x 5) to determine whether or not something is an illusion. If the roll is successful, the character not only realizes he is looking upon an illusion, but sees through to the truth. When casting any illusionary magic, the character may add his Rank in this skill to his roll. This skill is exclusive to the Shiba Tejina school. This skill cannot be taught to anyone outside of the Academy because of the intense expertise in illusion magic it demands.

New Advantage

Harmonic Alignment (10 points, Imperials and Monks only)

Dwelling as they have in close proximity to the Emperor their whole lives, members of the Imperial Families have been known to achieve a state of elemental harmony similar to that found in certain enlightened monks. Shugenja liken this balance of one's chi to the balance found within jade or crystal. Those who have achieved

Harmonic Alignment feel ill at ease in the presence of corruption, such as that created by the Living Shadow, Shadowlands creatures, or those who possess two or more Ranks of Taint. When such an entity is in the character's immediate vicinity, the GM may secretly roll and keep the character's Void versus a TN of 15. Success reveals to the character that something impure is near.

Secret Magic

This year's Winter Court is a place full of magic, and no clan in Rokugan has greater mastery over magic than the Phoenix. The following are a few secret clan spells devised by Phoenix researchers. Though typically the following spells should only be allowed to Phoenix characters, those who train at a Phoenix shugenja school or prove themselves exceptionally trustworthy may be offered one of them as a reward.

Watchful Spirit

Element: Air

Mastery Level: 3

Duration: 1 Day

Area of Effect: 1 Target

Range: 100'

This spell summons a watchful kami to follow a single target who is selected when the spell is cast. The invisible spirit follows the target until sunrise the next day, or until the caster chooses to cancel the spell. When the spell ends for any reason, the kami immediately returns and provides the caster with a vision of the target's current location, lasting only a moment. The caster may question the spirit further using Commune, but will have to deal with the normal complications of eliciting information from spirits.

While the air kami is following its target, it may be detected normally by use of the Sense spell or any other effects that can detect the presence of invisible spirits. If directly threatened with magic, the kami flees and the spell ends.



False Face

Element: Air

Mastery Level: 2

Duration: 1 Hour

Area of Effect: Self

Range: Self

This spell creates an illusionary cloak that masks the caster's voice and appearance. The spell simply makes the caster appear to be someone else. The TN to cast the spell is modified depending upon how radically the caster is changing his appearance.

Different Sex: +5 TN

Extreme Changes (creating armor out of nothing, different race): +10 TN

Cosmetic Changes Only (clean clothes, colorful makeup): -5 TN

Change of Height: +5 TN per 6"

Impersonate Specific Person: +15 TN

Once the disguise is in place, suspicious viewers may roll Investigation/Perception against the caster's School Rank x 5 to see through the disguise. Only those that are purposely scrutinizing the character have a chance of noticing anything wrong.

The illusion fades if the disguise is physically pierced in any way, so it is recommended to keep the illusion close to the original. Even then, the disguise can be shattered by dusting the caster with salt, rice, or flour.

Raises may be made to increase the difficulty of seeing through the illusion. Each Raise increases the TN of seeing through the disguise by 5.

Fire Guardian

Element: Fire

Mastery Level: 4

Duration: 12 Hours

Area of Effect: 1 Object, no more than 50 lb.

Range: Touch

This spell requires ten minutes to cast.

Inspired by the warding magics of the Yogo family, many Phoenix protect precious objects with this variant of Waiting Flame. The spell covers the object to be warded with an invisible aura of elemental flame, causing the affected object to become extremely warm to the touch. This is the only warning a potential thief receives before the spell's true purpose becomes clear.

If anyone besides the shugenja moves the warded object more than an inch, flames erupt in a 10' radius and inflict XkX damage, where X is the caster's Fire. The object affected is not harmed by the flames. Simply touching the object does not trigger the spell, unless touching it causes it to move.

The object must be touched voluntarily to set off the ward, so the magic can be difficult to use as a weapon. During sieges, cunning Phoenix have cast this spell on koku or other valuables, then left them where their enemies would be sure to find them. This spell can be cast upon doors.

Spirit Script

Element: Any

Mastery Level: 1

Duration: 1 Hour

Area of Effect: 10' radius

Range: 10'

This strange spell is a variant of Summon, and versions of it have been researched for every element, including Void. Spirit Script allows the caster to summon invisible elemental spirits, creating an image of his choosing. The image may be any object or person the character has seen before, so long as it fits within the area of effect. Alternately, the character can write a message of no more than five hundred words or craft a simple map. The image remains where it is placed for the duration of the spell. The caster may change the image as often as he wishes so long as is still in range. Any image created by this spell is entirely invisible to anyone but the caster.

At first this spell may seem of limited use, as only the caster can see what he has created. However, by casting Sense (using the same Element the caster used to cast Spirit Script) the image can be seen clearly. The Phoenix use this spell to leave messages for one another, or to communicate secretly using magic in the presence of those who cannot see the spirits. This spell has been specifically refined for this purpose, and thus it gains a +5 bonus to all attempt to cast it subtly (see "Casting With Subtlety," page 41).

Note: If a character chooses this as one of his spells, he must decide which of the five versions he knows - Earth, Fire, Water, Air, or Void. Thereafter, that is the version that he must cast unless he takes the other versions as separate spells. As usual, only Ishiken may have Void spells. (See *Way of the Phoenix* for more details on Ishiken.)

Spells of the Imperial Families

The Imperial Families do not have nearly as many shugenja as any of the Great Clans. However, Imperial shugenja tend to have great amounts of wealth and idle time with which to do research, and thus the Imperial Families have created a handful of their own spells. The Imperial Families guard their secrets well. No one outside the Imperial Bloodline is deemed worthy of knowing these spells.



Any Otomo, Seppun, or Miya character who attends a shugenja school may select one or more of the following spells in lieu of a spell from the *Player's Guide*, but the character will be expected to hide the family's secrets from outsiders.

Miya's Sasumata

Element: Water

Mastery Level: 2

Duration: 1 minute

Area of Effect: Self

Range: Self

This spell brings into existence a shimmering sasumata (man-catcher) composed of pure spiritual energy. The weapon has a DR of XkX, where X is the caster's Water. This damage is not true damage, however. If Miya's Sasumata does enough damage to reduce a target to the Down, Out, or Dead levels (or beyond) the target is instead knocked unconscious for a number of hours equal to the caster's School Rank. If the weapon does not do enough damage in one strike to produce this effect, the weapon simply makes the target slightly sleepy. This spell is often used by Imperial Magistrates to bring in dangerous suspects alive and without harm.

Except for DR, Miya's Sasumata has all of the attributes of an ordinary sasumata (see p. 178, *Player's Guide*).

Raises can be used to increase the effective DR of the weapon. For each raise the number of dice rolled (not kept) is increased by one.

Cryptic Cipher

Element: Air

Mastery Level: 1

Duration: Permanent

Area of Effect: 1 Piece of Paper or Parchment

Range: Touch

This spell is used frequently by courtiers and messengers of the Emperor to protect important messages. To cast this spell, the shugenja must write the true name of a person on the message with his own hand. The magic causes a subtle spirit to rearrange the message. Once the spell has been cast, the kami departs and the message does not appear magical in any way.

To anyone but the true recipient, the message appears to be something else – a list of supplies, a note to the shugenja's mother, a love poem, whatever the caster chooses. The true recipient will see both the false message and the true one, and can read both messages clearly. Reflections of Pan Ku will reveal that something is strange about the note. Even then, the true message does not appear unless the shugenja casting Reflections of Pan Ku makes four Raises specifically for this purpose.

The Final Gift

Element: Earth

Mastery Level: 3

Duration: Instantaneous

Area of Effect: 2 Targets

Range: Touch

This potent spell requires one hour to cast, at the end of which time one poison, one disease, or all Wounds currently affecting one target is transferred to the other target. Both targets must be conscious and willing or this spell will not function. Damage already done by poisons or diseases before this spell is cast remains.

Certain poisons take effect far too rapidly for this spell to be of use, and many diseases seem to be immune to this spell. The Wasting Disease, in particular, is entirely immune. Diseases and poisons of magical origin are similarly unaffected, causing some to wonder whether the Wasting Disease is of supernatural origin. Whether or not another disease or poison is affected by this spell is up to the option of the GM.

This spell is rarely used, but has saved the life of more than one Hantei Emperor. Usually, a condemned criminal is offered the option of a full pardon and burial with honor if he volunteers to be subjected this magic in order to save a dying samurai.



In contrast to the powerful, legendary nemuranai usually detailed in *Legend of the Five Rings* supplements, the following nemuranai are designed for use by player characters. With that in mind, each of them has been created with a suggested point cost for characters who wish to begin play with one, using the Inheritance Advantage. GMs should feel free to increase or decrease these costs to suit the flavor of their own campaigns, or to forbid characters from starting play with them altogether.



The Golden Frogs of Kaeru (4 points, limit 3 per party)

These strange items appear to be a set of twelve beautifully crafted *netsuke* (decorative clothing fasteners). Each resembles a plump smiling frog with an item clutched in its forefeet. They are carved of solid amber, with a large insect frozen eternally in the middle of each one. The frogs were crafted sixty years ago by an anonymous ronin shugenja to pay off a large gambling debt he owed the ronin Kaeru family in the City of the Rich Frog.

The Kaeru soon sold them to an interested Asahina fetish collector for the astonishing sum of 7000 koku. However, during their delivery the caravan was attacked by bandits and the *netsuke* were lost. In the decades since, a few have turned up across the face of the Empire. Iuchi Karasu is known to own one. Kemmei of the Tortoise Clan is rumored to hold another. Asahina Dorai, the grandson of the fetishist who originally paid for the *netsuke*, owns four of them and is interested in obtaining the complete set. He will pay a modest sum for any of the *netsuke* which are brought to him, but would pay much more for all eight.

Powers of the Golden Frogs

The *netsuke* are potent charms of good luck. Each is associated with a particular skill, indicated by the tool or weapon the frog holds. While wearing the *netsuke*, a character may add his Void to the total of all rolls for the appropriate skill. The objects held by the frogs and the skills they affect are as follows: abacus (Commerce), sword (Kenjutsu), fan (Courtier), brush (Calligraphy), kabuki mask (Acting), bow (Kyujutsu), whip (Intimidation), dagger (Stealth), torch (Investigation), tea cup (Tea Ceremony), chisel (Locksmith), and a monk's staff (Shintao). It is rumored that if all twelve *netsuke* are worn simultaneously by the same person, they bestow an even greater power. The Kaeru family would know the truth, as they are the only individuals who ever possessed all twelve at once. The GM may determine which of the Golden Frogs are held by Karasu, Dorai, and Kemmei (if he truly has one), so that certain of these *netsuke* may be considered out of bounds for PCs.

Dragon Ya (1 point each)

One of the newest creations of the Agasha family, Dragon Ya are arrows treated with potent combinations of pyrotechnic chemicals and *mizugusuri* potions. Dragon Ya appear to be normal arrows, but when struck against a hard surface, the chemicals activate. A variety of Ya have been created by the Agasha, but some of the more common types follow. Each arrow may be used once before the chemicals become inert.

Blue Ya – This arrow releases a cloud of swirling blue Water spirits when it strikes. Anyone within five feet must make a raw

Willpower check vs. a TN of 20 or fall asleep. Sleepers awaken immediately if anyone approaches within five feet or if they take any Wounds.

Yellow Ya – This arrow releases a cloud of noxious Air spirits, causing those who breathe its vapors to choke and cough. The vapors billow out in a ten foot radius around the arrow's point of impact. Anyone within the cloud receives a +10 TN to all actions while they remain within the cloud, and for one round after escaping it.

Red Ya – This arrow explodes with the power of elemental Fire, inflicting 3k3 damage on anything within three feet of the impact and setting combustibles ablaze.

Green Ya – This arrow releases a cloud of dust and pollen, thick with the power of elemental Earth. Those that breathe the pollen must make a raw Stamina roll vs. a TN of 20 or be blinded by the dust for ten minutes. Such blinded characters receive a +15 to all TNs and have difficulty moving about or making decisions based on sight. Dousing the eyes with water for a full round will remove these effects.

Black Ya – This arrow is not magical at all, but simply releases a cloud of thick black smoke in a thirty foot radius. The smoke is laden with chemicals that make it unusually dense, causing it to linger in the air for some time. Unless the environment is particularly windy, the smoke lingers and obscures sight for a full hour. Six of these arrows may be obtained for a single point of Inheritance.

All Dragon Ya are very fragile and should be carried with caution, as a jarring impact or extreme heat could cause them to activate. Those who use them typically carry them in thick, padded leather cases designed specifically for this purpose.

(An Agasha character with the *mizugusuri* skill can attempt to create any of the above Dragon Ya. Each has a TN to create of 20, with the exception of the Black Ya, which contains no magic at all and can be created by anyone with the Explosives or Kagaku skill and the proper materials.)

Slayer's Vial (8 points)

These odd little items seem to be of barbarian make, and the dark power they possess surely originates outside of normal Rokugani magic. A Slayer's Vial appears to be an exotic flask crafted of frosted glass, containing a sticky black residue. Most experienced Emerald Magistrates recognize a Slayer's Vial when they see one, and destroy them whenever possible. Despite this policy, these barbarian items turn up in Rokugan with disturbing regularity. Though the Unicorn say that the magic of the Slayer's Vial is definitely of barbarian origin, they claim they are not responsible for the presence of these items in Rokugan.



Powers of the Slayer's Vial

When first opened, the vial appears to contain a dark black residue, as if some chemical had evaporated within. If the residue is mixed with fresh blood, it immediately dissolves and bubbles as if placed over a fire. The resulting mixture is a potent magical poison, and the vial produces enough to smear over one weapon.

If the poison is injected into a living creature's bloodstream (via a knife, arrow, etc.) the victim must make an Earth roll vs. a TN of 20. If the roll fails, the poison races through the victim's bloodstream, causing their skin, bones, and muscles to rapidly dissolve. Victims receive one Wound per round until they die. Hands of Jurojin or similar magics can save the victim's life, but there seems to be no non-magical antidote to the poison.

If the bottle is emptied, the black residue appears within it once more at sundown the next day. No honorable samurai would be caught using such a magic item, as its barbarian origin and similarities to blood magic are too unsettling to ignore. Anyone caught using such an item is likely to be executed on charges of maho, treason, or both.

Hotei's Spice (2 points for one dose)

This extremely rare spice hails from a remote monastery deep in the mountains of Phoenix territory, where a group of monks and shugenja serving the Fortune of Contentment dedicate themselves to its cultivation. The spice is extremely difficult to produce, and the details of its creation are a carefully guarded secret. The monastery only sells two or three pouches on each New Year's Eve, and makes enough money from these sales to subsist for the rest of the year.

The magic of the spice is a simple one. When sprinkled upon food and eaten, it causes the meal to taste absolutely perfect. The spices are highly sought after by great chefs and gourmets. Simply owning a pouch is a matter of great esteem. To serve a guest food prepared using the spice is an incredible compliment.

The Power of the Spice

The magic contained in Hotei's Spice is a simple one. It causes the food to taste like what the eater wishes the food to taste like. Most of the time this causes the eater to experience the most perfect version of whatever he is eating.

As a final note, the spices carry the power and blessing of one of the Seven Fortunes. Those who revere Hotei can expect the spices to have a positive effect, no matter what happens. Those who do not pay the Fortunes the proper respect can expect disaster. Bitter or pessimistic individuals (those who know nothing of contentment) will find that any food treated with the spice tastes like sawdust.

Subtlety of the Court (8 points)

Like the ronin general who inspired the work, Otomo Madoko created seven copies of *Subtlety of the Court*. The original copy is owned by Otomo Banu, cousin of the Emperor. He treasures it greatly and values the weathered scroll above any of his other possessions. The other copies have passed through several owners and could be anywhere by now.

The Power of Subtlety of the Court

The seven copies penned by Madoko have grown so greatly in legend that they have become awakened – they are minor nemuranai. Whoever studies one of these original manuscripts rapidly becomes skilled in the ways of courtly life. Learning or raising any High Skills requires only half the normal expenditure of experience points while the manuscript is in a character's possession so long as he reads from it regularly. Only one individual may profit from *Subtlety of the Court* at a time. The original may very well possess greater power, but only Otomo Banu knows for sure.

Serenity Lanterns (5 points each)

An extension of the Phoenix Clan's pacifistic outlook, these subtle nemuranai are found in virtually every major stronghold throughout the clan's holdings. Inconspicuously placed in the chambers of court, the light from a serenity lantern soothes the tempers of those around it, calming heated discussions and generally lowering the possibility of violent outbursts. Unfortunately, the lanterns are unable to quell the intense violence of a premeditated attack (as so aptly demonstrated by the events surrounding the Emperor's niece a few years previously), but they do help to ease what would otherwise be tense and potentially dangerous situations. Characters who attempt to initiate violence (not in defense of themselves or others) in the presence of such lanterns may not spend Void points for any combat roll or use Free Raises for combat purposes.

Kouken Blades (Phoenix only, 4 points)

The lords of each major stronghold in the Phoenix Clan holdings have in their possession a small number of these blades for their most trusted guards and yojimbo. Crafted by the greatest weaponsmiths of the clan, they are powerful defensive weapons. By the nature of the earth magic that awakened them, however, they are less and less effective the farther from their home they travel. Within the stronghold where they were created, these blades have a DR of 3k3 and grant their wielder one Free Raise for Kenjutsu per School Rank per day. Kouken Blades removed from their home retain the Free Raise benefit but lose the damage bonus so long as they remain within the Phoenix lands. Outside of the Phoenix lands, they are reduced to a DR of 3k1 with no Free Raises, and will often break if used in combat.



Imperial Ancestors and Characters

The Imperial Family of Rokugan traces its origins to the beginning of history, but that does not mean that the bloodlines are always purely Hantei. Those who prove themselves wise, strong, and brave make excellent additions to the Imperial Family, and the Emperor's matchmakers are always ready to snare such individuals. The descendants of great historical figures are often invited to marry into the Imperial Family, and thus ancestors of nearly every clan might be found watching over a Miya, Seppun, Otomo, or Hantei.

This mix of bloodlines means that the player character who hails from an Imperial family may select any Ancestor from any clan, subject to the GM's approval. Such an ancestor costs fifty per cent more than usual (round up) and the player may wish to detail how his ancestors found their way into the Imperial Family.

The ancestors in this section are spirits of those who once were in the Imperial Family, those who married directly into it, or those whose children married into the Imperial Family. Any of them may be chosen by Imperial characters at normal cost. Some are available to members of other clans as well, as noted in the descriptions of the individual ancestors.

Doji Nio (Crane or Imperial Ancestor, 4 points) d. 179

Doji Nio was the eldest son of Doji and Kakita, and is regarded as one of the greatest poets and calligraphers in history. Though only one of his original works survives to this day ("My Mother, the World"), copies of his poems and essays grace nearly every library in Rokugan. The basic elements of Rokugani art and poetry were inspired by Nio's innovations, and many view him as one of the fathers of the Empire's culture. Descendants of Doji Nio may spend any amount of Void Points when making any skill rolls involving High Skills.

Seppun Hanako (Imperial Ancestor, 5 points) 570-637

Seppun Hanako was Imperial Chancellor early in the reign of Hantei XVII. During her lifetime she instituted a variety of political reforms (described in more detail in the History section of Chapter One), not the least of which were The Articles of Heaven. Descendants of Hanako know the best thing to say in a variety of situations, and are extremely resourceful and knowledgeable in a variety of subjects. Characters who take Hanako as an ancestor may use their Etiquette skill as a Similar Skill when attempting any unskilled rolls involving High Skills.

Otomo Madoko (Imperial Ancestor, 2 points) 640-690

Madoko was the Imperial Matchmaker during the reigns of Hantei XIX through Hantei XXII. Her experiences left her with unmatched skill in the courts. Her best-remembered work, *The Subtlety of the Court*, is considered an essential guide to courtly life. Those who carry Madoko's blood gain a Free Raise when using any non-Lore High Skill.

Shiba Gaijushiko (Imperial or Phoenix Ancestor, 5 points) 357-439

Shiba Gaijushiko's story is a strange one. According to Phoenix records, he was nothing more than the Imperial Scribe, but those who know history remember that he was much, much more. At one point, he led the gozoku triad that controlled the reigns of Hantei Fujiwa and Hantei Kusada. He survived the usurpation of his power by Doji Raigu. He survived the downfall of the gozoku itself, finding a position in Hantei Yugozohime's court by betraying his former comrades. He was a ruthless, cold, treacherous man but he was quite adept at surviving despite all odds and lived to a ripe, bitter old age. Any character descended from Gaijushiko gains +10 to his total when making an opposed Skill roll in a social situation.

Yasuki Tanaka (Crane, Crab, or Imperial Ancestor, 2 points) 189-264

Tanaka was the wily Crane merchant who devised the original design of the koku. Descendants of Tanaka are naturally clever and tend to invest their money well. Characters who purchase this ancestor gain a number of Free Raises equal to their Rank on all Commerce Skill rolls and may add their Awareness to all Skill roll totals when they are convincing someone to buy something. Although Tanaka is a Crane ancestor, he costs 4 points for Crane characters due to the bad blood resulting from the Crab-Crane War and the Yasuki Break.



Miya (Imperial Ancestor, 3 points) d. 85

The name Miya means many things in Rokugan – builder, diplomat, messenger, protector. Born a simple vassal of the Otomo, Miya became a hero when he brought the Emperor's Blessing to the land, helping to undo the damage wrought by the armies of Fu Leng. His name carries a power all its own, and those descended from his blood carry a nobility stronger than mere honor. Descendants of Miya may add their School Rank to their Honor during all Honor Tests. However, the character may never take an action that would drop his Honor below 2 (Honor Tests that could potentially drop his Honor below 2 are the exception to this). If, at any time, the character's honor does drop below 2 he must report to his daimyo or to a major temple as soon as possible in order to find a quest by which he may purify himself and regain his honor.

Kaiu Anou (Crab and Imperial Ancestor, 3 points) 282–337

Perhaps the most gifted architect that Rokugan has ever seen, Kaiu Anou's prowess in the art of design and siege was unquestionable. He played a role in the design of several notable Crab structures, and oversaw the rebuilding of Hiruma Castle after the failed siege in the year 314. Granted the vassal family name Anou, his descendants went on to be absorbed into the Miya family, although there are some among the Kaiu who can trace their ancestry to him as well. All of Anou's descendants receive his keen insight into the design of strongholds of all types. They receive a number of Free Raises per day equal to their Void Ring, which may be used on any Battle, Engineering or Siege roll that involves structures of any sort.

Doji Hatsuo (Crane and Imperial Ancestor, 8 points) 136–183

Doji Hatsuo, together with Soshi Saibankan, founded the Emerald Magistrates to enforce the laws of the Son of Heaven and later assembled the first Emerald Legion. Hatsuo took his role as the Emperor's champion very seriously, and was known for his devotion to justice and impartiality. His spirit still watches over his descendants and those magistrates or legionnaires who extol the virtues he held so dear. A character with a bond to Doji Hatsuo may meditate one full hour each morning when the sun rises. Those that do so gain a number of bonus Void points equal to their School Rank. These Void points may be used on any Courtier, Heraldry, Investigation, or Law rolls. Bonus Void points not used are lost by the next sunrise. (Any character who is a member of the Imperial Legions may also choose Doji Hatsuo as an ancestor.)



Agasha Hisojo

Earth: 2

Willpower: 4

Water: 2

Perception: 5

Fire: 3

Intelligence: 5

Air: 3

Awareness: 5

Void: 3

School/Rank: Agasha Shugenja 3

Honor: 2.3

Glory: 3.6

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Irreproachable, Read Lips, Servant (eta), True Friend – Shiba Ujimitsu, Ocean Tattoo (see *Way of the Dragon*)

Disadvantages: Adopted Blood, Fascination (mysteries), Meddler

Spells: (*italics denotes Innate Ability*) *Sense, Commune, Summon, Fires From Within, Hurried Steps, Summon Fire Spirit, Fires From the Forge, Elemental Ward, By the Light of Lord Moon, Waiting Flame, *Reflections of Pan Ku, Essence of Air, Rays of Amaterasu*

Skills: Astrology 3, Calligraphy 3, Courtier 4, Defense 5, Etiquette 4, History 3, Ichi Miru 5, Kagaku 5, Kenjutsu 4, Law 6, Meditation 4, Mizugusuri 4, Nazodo 6, Shintao 3, Tanto 2



Agasha Hisojo is an amiable young Dragon Magistrate, quick-witted and clever. Nothing escapes his sharp eyes, no nuance slips past his trained ears. Those who know Hisojo describe him as a unique and mysterious individual, but that seems to be the standard when one is describing a member of the Dragon Clan. Though he is obviously of Crane ancestry, he bears the Agasha name, has been trained by the Kitsuki, and bears a tattoo of the Togashi. Whenever someone asks of his past, he chuckles and changes the subject to "less complex matters."

Hisojo's career has taken him from one end of Rokugan to the other. His skills as a magistrate are in high demand. His training by the Agasha and Kitsuki give him unique skills in analysis and investigation, and his tattoo makes him a tireless engine of justice, requiring neither food nor rest. A proponent of the Kitsuki Method, he believes that when the law is broken, pieces always remain. No matter how small those pieces may be, they will restore the truth when reassembled.

To date he has failed in only one investigation.

It was over ten years ago. Shiba Masumi, a young bushi, had been accused of murder. Seppun Kossori, an advisor to the Emperor, testified against her. Agasha Hisojo happened to be passing through the area on an errand for the Kitsuki. He immediately saw through Kossori's spurious testimony and presented evidence that proved the Shiba's innocence. Unfortunately, despite his impassioned pleas Hisojo could not sway the court with his evidence. When all was said and done, the bushi was forced to commit seppuku and her daughter was executed for cursing the decision. Shocked by the grisly outcome, Hisojo remained in the area for a time to console Shiba Ujimitsu, Masumi's husband. Ujimitsu appreciated Hisojo's sincere attempt to clear his wife's name, and the two became good friends. Hisojo is the only person with whom Ujimitsu will discuss his family, for he is the only man that bothered to help them.

Hisojo was greatly surprised when Ujimitsu was later chosen to bear the Soul of Shiba, and wonders vaguely what destiny lies in store for his tormented friend. He is present at this year's Winter Court at Ujimitsu's personal invitation, and is prepared to assist the Phoenix daimyo in any way he is required.

Mozoko

Earth: 2

Willpower: 4

Water: 2

Perception: 4

Fire: 2

Intelligence: 5

Air: 4

Void: 4

School/Rank: None (Heimin)

Honor: 0.8

Glory: 0.0

Advantages: Bland, Read Lips

Disadvantages: Obligation (Otomo family) 4, Social Disadvantage (Heimin)

Skills: Craft (Searnstress) 8, Etiquette 5, Heraldry 5, Investigation 6, Locksmith 4, Medicine 3, Stealth 6

Mozoko is a plump, smiling woman in late middle age. She dresses in simple, homespun garments and has an unremarkable face. Though Mozoko has been a fixture at Winter Court for many years, only one man knows her name. She is not a bushi, a courtier, or a shugenja. She is just a maid. Yes, just a simple maid working for the not-so-simple Otomo Banu.

Mozoko was trained since birth for her position. In all matters of courtliness and etiquette she performs suitably; no one ever notices her presence. She appears, at times, somewhat incompetent at her job. Not enough to dismiss her, but too much to bother remembering her name. Mozoko is very adept at listening. She listens, and every word she hears finds its way to Banu's ear.

As a servant, Mozoko is allowed where samurai would not demean themselves to go. She roots through garbage for rumors on the other denizens of the court. She hides behind shoji screens while lovers embrace. She creeps into rooms while daimyo are away, rifling through their possessions so that Banu can appear clever and well informed. If she does her job well, Banu may reward her with





nothing more than a few words of encouragement. If she is ever caught, she will be killed. Mozoko knows and accepts this; she would rather die than sully her master's name should she be caught while poking about where she should not be.

Miya Yuritogen

Earth: 3

Water: 2

Perception: 3

Fire: 3

Agility: 4

Air: 4

Void: 4

School/Rank: Gaze of Sun Tao 1, Miya Shisha 3

Honor: 2.9

Glory: 0.0 (Ronin)

Advantages: Hero of the People, Multiple Schools, Way of the Land (Otosan Uchi), Way of the Land (Miya Provinces)

Disadvantages: Overconfident, Social Disadvantage (Ronin), Sworn Enemy (Miya Satoshi)

Skills: Courtier 3, Defense 4, Diplomacy 6, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Heraldry 4, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 7, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Katana 5, Kuenai 7, Meditation 4

Upon meeting Yuritogen, one cannot help but like him. He is a jovial, friendly old man whose sagging face folds quickly into a pleasant smile. He is an excellent conversationalist and a generally

pleasant person. He hardly has the look of one of the most deadly duelists in Rokugan.

Certainly, he would be the first to point out that he has only ever killed one man in a duel. The truth is, Yuritogen is skilled enough that he does not need to kill. He has won dozens of challenges by crippling or disarming his opponent, and many more by simply forcing foes into surrender with the unsettling sneer he wears during combat.

Though Yuritogen goes by his family name, Miya Satoshi would be quick to point out that this man is no longer a Miya. When Satoshi forced his father into retirement and began to turn the Miya away from their pacifistic roots, Yuritogen was one of many Miya who was disgusted by Satoshi's leadership. As a show of defiance, Yuritogen became a ronin but maintained his family name. When questioned on the matter by a magistrate, he replied, "I am not in defiance of the Miya. Satoshi is in defiance of our purpose. If he wishes me to discard my name, he may come and ask me himself." Wary of Yuritogen's reputation as a duelist, and hesitant to strike down his own kin, Satoshi simply avoids the old man.

Yuritogen currently resides in East Hub Village, where he works as an agent for reputable ronin seeking work. He has been invited to the Winter Court at the behest of the Crane. It is heavily rumored that the Crane are seeking his advice on hiring ronin mercenaries to combat the Lion, a thought which disturbs Miya Satoshi – who favors the Lion and despises ronin of all kinds – more than he can adequately express.



Seppun Mashita

Earth: 3

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Agility: 4

Air: 4

Void: 4

School/Rank: Mirumoto Swordmaster 3

Honor: 3.4

Glory: 4.6

Advantages: Balance, Higher Purpose (become a legendary duelist), Quick

Disadvantages: Dependent (Grandfather), Jealousy (Kenjutsu/Iaijutsu), Obligation (Miya Satoshi), Small

Skills: Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Katana 6, Kenjutsu 4, Kyujutsu 2, Lore (Bushido) 5, Meditation 6, Weaponsmith 2

Mashita is a skilled swordsman from a tradition of legendary Miharu. His grandfather is the famed swordsman Seppun Haruhiro, whose career was cut short when he stepped in front of an assassin's arrow. He saved the life of Hantei XXXVI, but lost the use of his legs



as the ninja's poison ran its course. Mashita's parents died young, and Mashita has looked to his crippled grandfather for guidance and inspiration throughout his life. Haruhiro used his political connections to win Mashita a rare invitation to learn from the Swordmasters of the Mirumoto, and has watched the boy grow into a talented duelist.

Haruhiro lives vicariously through Mashita's exploits. Mashita lives to please his grandfather, and to live up to the reputation of his family. He loves the art of the sword, and eagerly leaps upon any opportunity to prove his skill, often traveling to distant lands to test himself against masters. Unfortunately, his grandfather's health has deteriorated in recent months, so Mashita's travels have been limited. In addition, much of his family's fortune has been exhausted on rare herbal medicines shipped from the old Soshi provinces to ease his grandfather's pain. Nearly destitute, Mashita was amazed when his debts were canceled by none other than the Emperor's Herald, Miya Satoshi. He was even more amazed when he was presented with an invitation to the Emperor's Winter Court at Kyuden Asako.

His happiness ended, however, when Satoshi demanded he repay the favor.

Satoshi wants Mashita to duel Miya Yuritogen to the death.

If he does not, Satoshi will no longer pay for Haruhiro's medicines.

Satoshi knows Mashita will do the right thing.

Isawa Hirofumi

Earth: 2

Water: 3

Perception: 3

Fire: 2

Intelligence: 3

Air: 3

Awareness: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Shiba Tejina 2

Honor: 2.1

Glory: 3.4

Advantages: Different School, Ear of the Emperor, Heartless

Disadvantages: Contrary, Dark Secret (twin), Spoiled

Spells: (*italics notes Innate Ability*) *Sense, Commune, Summon, Mists of Illusion, False Face, Secrets on the Wind, Path to Inner Peace, Sympathetic Energies, Aura of Flame, The Eye Shall Not See, Reflective Pool,*

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 5, Etiquette 5, Gossip 3, Lore (Myth and Legend) 4, Meditation 5, Shintao 1, Tejina 7, Theology 1

Hirofumi is renowned among the Phoenix as a master of Tejina. The illusions she creates lift the hearts of the young and old alike, and bring beauty to the world. Unbeknownst to most, the greatest illusion Hirofumi has created is her own life.

Hirofumi and her twin sister, Miyo, were discovered as homeless waifs in the hills near Morning Glory Castle. The pair were taken into the custody of the Asako when their potential as henshin was discovered. Soon after she was adopted, Hirofumi's potential was quickly overshadowed by that of her sister. Eventually, Hirofumi failed in her studies altogether and was expelled from the Academy.

The henshin masters could not bring themselves to simply abandon the orphan alone in the cruel winter. Though she had no potential as a henshin, her talents as a shugenja were quickly discovered. Through an arrangement with the Shiba, she was inducted into their Tejina academy and adopted by a prominent Shiba family. She was eventually married off to Isawa Eizan as one of many attempts to iron out the poor relations between the Phoenix families, and took his family name.

Isawa Eizan cares little for Hirofumi, considering her little more than a trophy wife. He sleeps in separate bed chambers because of his excessive paranoia. He is belligerent and abusive on the rare occasions when they are alone together. Hirofumi has grown to hate her husband, and has long sought a way out of her terrible marriage.



Asako Miyo

Earth: 3

Water: 3

Strength: 4

Fire: 3

Agility: 4

Air: 2

Awareness: 3

Void: 2

School/Rank: Asako Henshin 2

Honor: 2.5

Glory: 1.0

Advantages: Daredevil, Hands of Stone, Magic Resistance (6)

Disadvantages: Antisocial (4), Bad Fortune (disfigured), Dark Fate

Riddles: Riddle of Air (Rank 1), Riddle of Fire (Rank 2)

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Dance 5, Defense 4, Hand-to-Hand 5, History 2, Hunting 3, Medicine 4, Meditation 6, Shintao 5

Miyo is a tormented woman. Her henshin teachers have long worried that her tempestuous nature and quick temper could lead her down a False Path into ruin. Despite her fiery personality and strong tendency toward anger, she grasps the teachings of her teachers very quickly, and has already progressed rapidly down the Path.

Unbeknownst to her teachers, Miyo has maintained contact with her twin sister. No one outside the Henshin Academy remembers Hirofumi's past, but Miyo could never forget. Hirofumi has begged Miyo to help her find a way out of her marriage, but Miyo has been unable to help – until now.

On the first night before Winter Court the solution came to her in a dream, a prophecy of Eizan laying dead before her. The vision was so crisp, so clear, she knew exactly what she needed to do. The sudden revelation struck her as odd, but Miyo did not worry overmuch. Surely she was being blessed by the Fortunes, granted with the wisdom she needs to give her sister freedom.

She would kill Isawa Eizan, and her sister's magic would help her.



Ide Dosemi

Earth: 2

Willpower 4

Water: 3

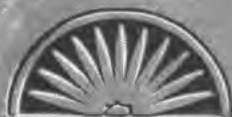
Intelligence 5

Fire: 4

Air: 3

Awareness 5

Void: 4



School/Rank: Ide Emissary 4

Honor: 3.7

Glory: 4.2

Advantages: Allies (many), Social Position (shikken)

Disadvantages: Soft-hearted

Skills: Commerce 3, Courtier 6, Craft (Bonsai) 2, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 5, Heraldry 3, History 3, Horsemanship 3, Investigation 3, Kemari 2, Law 4, Meditation 2, Shintao 2, Sincerity 3

A pacifist in a society of warriors, Ide Dosemi has spent his entire life attempting to still the hearts and passions of men. As a young man his skillful negotiations with other clans won him the attention of the Imperial Court. After defusing a particularly unpleasant squabble between the Otaku and Matsu, he was invited to become a shikken, one of the Emperor's peacekeepers.

Over the past four decades, Dosemi has prevented a number of small skirmishes from erupting into outright war between the clans. The Lion Clan in particular has experienced his intervention on numerous occasions, and respect his forthright and honest ways.

The past two years have been very difficult for Dosemi, as he has proved unable to stop the escalating violence between the Lion and the Crane. He has arrived at Kyuden Asako with a grim yojimbo to give it one final effort. If negotiations fail again, Dosemi will move on to other conflicts blossoming throughout the Empire. The flames of war must be contained at all costs.

Dosemi is particularly concerned about the arrival of Kuni Yori at court and the corresponding Crab activity near Beiden Pass. If another clan joins the war between the Lion and the Crane, the situation may escalate to a degree that the outcome will threaten the entire empire.

Kuni Nakiro

Earth: 3

Stamina 4

Water: 3

Fire: 2

Air: 2

Void: 3

School/Rank: Kuni Shugenja 2

Honor: 2.2

Glory: 2.4

Spells: Earth's Protection, Evil Ward, Fire from Within, Fires That Cleanse, Preservation, Purify Water, Reversal of Fortunes, Summon Earth Spirit

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Dark Secret



Skills: Calligraphy 3, Defense 3, History 2, Jiu-jutsu 1, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Phoenix Clan) 5, Lore (Shadowlands) 4, Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Research 4, Shintao 2

Nakiro was sent to the Phoenix lands by his mentor Kuni Yori many months ago. An academic young man, Nakiro was delighted at the opportunity to study with the Phoenix, although his mentor's instructions to report any strange occurrences left him feeling somewhat deceitful.

While walking alone through the beautiful woodlands, Nakiro came across a raving stranger who suffered from many wounds and ailments. Nakiro took the man in and nursed him back to health. Eventually he realized that the lunatic ramblings of the man were in fact the secrets of the mysterious Asako Henshin, the learning of which had unhinged and destroyed his mind. Returning immediately to the Crab lands, Nakiro presented Asako Oyo to his mentor Kuni Yori.

Now Nakiro finds himself back in the lands of the Phoenix alongside Kuni Yori. To his horror, Yori has transformed Nakiro's simple act of kindness into a plot that could destroy the Phoenix Clan's status in the Empire. In public, he is the perfect adjunct to Kuni Yori. He is courteous and efficient, and follows his lord's instruction without question or hesitation. In private, however, he is overwhelmed with the enormity of the role he has played in this dark game. He cannot sleep, and has begun drinking heavily in his quarters at night.



Moto Chang

Earth: 3

Willpower: 5

Water: 4

Fire: 3

Intelligence: 4

Air: 3

Void: 3

School/Rank: Iuchi Shugenja 3

Honor: 2.9

Glory: 3.4

Spells: Armor of Earth, By the Light of Lord Moon, Courage of Seven Thunders, Fire from Within, Heart of Nature, Reflective Pool, Silent Waters, Sympathetic Energies, Ties That Bind, Whispering Wind

Advantages: Gaijin Gear (longsword), Social Position (Emerald Magistrate), True Friend (Mirumoto Kyuzo)

Disadvantages: Gaijin Name, Moto Curse

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, Defense 3, Heraldry 3, Horsemanship 4, Hunting 3, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 3, Law 3, Longsword 4, Lore (gaijin) 2, Meditation 3

Moto Chang's parents spent their lives patrolling the western borders of Rokugan, facing all manner of dire threats. Born into such a life, Chang was trained with the blade from an early age. When presented to the clan, his parents were shocked when the Iuchi asked to train him as a shugenja. With reservations, they agreed.

Chang's career has been exceptional. His fierce intensity has served him well as a magistrate for the clan and for the Emperor himself. His lifelong training with the blade earned him an invitation – unprecedented for a shugenja – to train in the Emerald Champion's dojo. Together with his fellow magistrate, a duelist of the Dragon Clan, he has earned great glory and honor in the name of the Emperor.

With the coming of war, Chang's role has changed. He has been assigned to protect one of the Hantei's most gifted shikken, an Ide emissary who still believes that peace can be reached through words. His role in court is to unsettle the Ide's fellow diplomats, giving the old man another advantage in negotiations. While Chang does not relish the task, he performs it as best he can.

Chang senses something amiss with Kuni Yori, but cannot place his finger upon the nature of his wariness. He has begun observing both Yori and Kuni Nakiro very carefully.

Tsume Takashi

Earth: 3

Water: 3

Fire: 3

Agility: 4

Air: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 3

Honor: 2.8

Glory: 3.2

Advantages: Ally (Daidoji Tsuneo), Gentry, Social Position (daimyo of Tsume vassal family)

Disadvantages: Heart of Vengeance (Lion)

Skills: Battle 3, Conversation 1, Courtier 2, Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Falconry 2, Heraldry 2, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 2, Kyujutsu 2, Sincerity 1, Yarijutsu 4

Life was so simple once. As the only child of the Tsume vassal family daimyo, Takashi once had everything he wished for. Though his family's lands were not the most expansive, they were wealthy enough to provide for his every whim. He was notorious even among the Doji for his hedonistic ways.

His father's murder changed all that.

Takashi was not prepared to take control of his family's affairs. Overwhelmed, he came dangerously close to losing all his family had gained. He struggled desperately back from the brink of oblivion, restoring his lands to their previous status over a painstaking period of years. Finally, when he felt he could relax, hostilities with the Lion escalated, and his lands became the front line of a new war.

War has transformed Takashi. He has risen to meet every challenge, becoming the leader that his subjects and clan needed to fight for them. Keeping the counsel of his Daidoji advisor, he has led his people to fight and reclaim their land from the Lion Clan. He has sworn it will not fall again while he lives. Takashi has come to court at the behest of the Crane Champion, Doji Hoturi. He advises the Doji diplomats as to the status of the front lines, helping them make decisions in negotiations with other clans. Many young ladies at court are taken with his dashing looks, but the horrors of war reflected in his eyes turn most away.

(More information on Takashi and the Tsume vassal family can be found in the adventure module *Honor's Veil*.)