



*Legend of the
Five Rings*

THE IMPERIAL ARCHIVES





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INTRODUCTION



Tamori Yuina's breath wisped around her in the chilly night air as she trudged along the mountain trail. The sun had sunk only minutes before, the final brushstrokes of purple light vanishing into the trees, but the air was already growing colder by the minute as the stars materialized above her.

"No fire?" the Dragon shugenja whispered, shifting her pack of ofuda and talismans between her shoulders.

"No fire," Tsuchi mumbled, his deep voice reverberating inside her head down to the soles of her feet. Yuina steadied her vision by forcing her knuckles into her temples. Ever since her soul's union to the earth kami only a few months ago, her whole body seemed teeming with voices. It was a distraction she was going to have to get used to.

"Concentrate," Tsuchi called from beneath her, inside her. "The stone will guide you."

Yuina huffed in response, and frozen breath swirled around her face. She muttered a prayer of protection to ward off the cold.

"Do you think this ghost will be near the lake?" she asked. The elemental spirit did not respond. She bit her tongue. By now she should have known what his answer would be.

Wait and we shall see.

Early that morning, a group of mountain villagers had run to her house, wailing and babbling about an angry spirit that had carried off someone's daughter during the night. "We need you to rescue her!" they cried. "Dispel the yorei!" Their wild pleas had unnerved her.

"I have never done this before," she grumbled to Tsuchi after the farmers had left. "Studying is one thing. Practicing is another. How can I banish a yorei?"

His answer had been the same silence.

The trail came to a fork, splitting in two directions through the wooded mountain slopes. Darkness blanketed the forest in either direction, and the starlight barely let her see a few feet in front of her. "Which way?" she asked.

"Concentrate," Tsuchi encouraged. "The path will reveal itself."

Yuina closed her eyes and cleared her mind, letting the calm of the earth steady her spirit. She felt strong, secure, grounded. She felt the weight of the world deep beneath

her. And then she suddenly felt the heaviness shift, as if there was a slight tilt of the world. As she leaned blindly toward it, she felt Tsuchi move forward beneath her feet, leading her.

She ran, trusting her feet to follow.

Suddenly the spirit stopped, and Yuina halted at once in reaction, nearly tripping over her own feet. She opened her eyes to see the moon had come out, peeking over the trees, its pale light revealing a glimmering lake. She had stopped on its edge, just before plunging into its cold water.

"The ghost is out there," Tsuchi murmured in her head.

Yuina scanned the scene, finally recognizing a wispy white shadow floating above the middle of the water. A small black dot bobbed in the water beneath it.

"The child," she gasped. She clapped her hands together and ignited a shock of energy within her spirit. She hurled it into the earth beneath her and felt Tsuchi rise in response. A bridge of rock thrust itself up from the lake's bottom, parting the icy ripples, and Yuina crossed it with light steps. As she ran, she slipped a long ofuda from her pack and rolled the paper around one hand.

"I hope this works," she whispered, and felt Tsuchi agree.

The yorei looked like a woman, with long white hair that dipped past her feet into the lake. Her limbs hung lifelessly, her head bowed, as she watched the little girl struggle in the water below. The girl cried and sputtered, fighting weakly against the black icy water. "You are my child now," the ghost crooned, her eyes glowing with a sinister delight. "We shall enter the afterlife together."

"Not until you face me," the Dragon shugenja cried, unleashing a bolt of green Jade energy from her ofuda-wrapped fist. The light crashed into the spirit, knocking it into the water. Yuina muttered a quick prayer, feeling Tsuchi's strength respond to her intentions, and her stone bridge curled around the little girl, lifting her out of the lake.

Suddenly a cold, slimy hand clutched at the back of Yuina's neck, piercing her skin with sharp fingernails. "This child is mine," the spirit howled, its face melting around a gaping maw of countless insectoid fangs. It lunged, biting into Yuina's shoulder with a hundred teeth, shredding her green silk kimono and her flesh beneath. The Dragon cried out in surprise, but she felt Tsuchi's strong spirit steadying her own, and she did not give in to the



pain. Instead she plunged her ofuda-wrapped hand deep into the hungry ghost's chest and recited the words of a funeral blessing.

The scroll burned into the spirit's ethereal body, the kanji on the paper igniting into sparks of fire. The ghost reeled away, hissing, as the words of Yuina's prayer echoed across the lake. The shugenja unrolled the ofuda, and the words flashed brighter. The spirit sprang forward again, reaching for Yuina's face, but the shugenja was ready. Lifting her hand, she struck the ghost's forehead with the scroll. With a scream, the spirit fragmented into a thousand sparks of green light that flickered before vanishing.

"I release you," Yuina whispered.

She sucked in what felt like her first breath since the beginning of the encounter. Her whole body was shaking, and her shoulder ached with pain. But the victory was hers.

The little girl lay unconscious on the stone bridge. Yuina carefully picked her up, ignoring the continued pain of her injury. She could feel blood trickling down her back, too fast for her liking. She whispered a prayer over it before heading back to the lake's edge. Tsuchi followed, sinking the bridge behind them.

"Well done," he said.

Yuina smiled grimly. "I almost lost an arm. And that was just a restless spirit."

"Patience. You will improve."

"I hope so," she sighed, letting his calm settle into her. "Will it get easier?"

His silence again answered her.

Wait and we shall see.

Welcome to the Imperial Archives!

Over the course of the five-year history of the Legend of the Five Rings 4th Edition RPG, there have been many times when we simply could not fit everything we wanted into the books we published. Moreover, there have been many topics which our writers wanted to explore but which simply did not mesh with the topics of the different books. Over time, these "orphaned" topics and pieces have accumulated, and we have decided the time has come to gather them into one place and make them available to L5R players and GMs everywhere.

This book is sub-titled "A Rokugani Miscellany" and that is ultimately what it is: a collection of all the miscellaneous topics and writings we couldn't fit into any of our earlier hard-copy books. Here you will find discussions of Shourido and the Susumu family, of the Shogun and his role in the Empire, of courtier characters and how they can be played, of the gaijin people known as the Yobanjin, of the religious role of the Emperor and the Imperial bureaucracy, the religious and cultural roles of shugenja, a list of hypothetical Minor Clans to add flavor to your campaign, and an assortment of famous NPCs from the history of Rokugan. Here you will also find game mechanics that mesh with the topics of these articles, as well as the stats for the long-missing Oni Lords (originally meant to appear in *Enemies of the Empire*).

Finally, we have included a comprehensive set of errata and corrections for the entire 4th Edition RPG line.

We hope you enjoy the Imperial Archives!



The Way of Shourido

EXCERPT FROM "THE DIFFERENCE IN OUR HONOR," BY SUSUMU GENJO

(SCRIBE FOR THE CHIEF ASSISTANT TO THE HEAD OF THE SEPPUN LIBRARIES)

Years have gone by and held me captive in these solid walls of words and honor. Rare is the day in which I do not read another tragic story of loss, some sacred accounting of life given for a higher purpose or a greater goal. Rarer still are those moments when I pause to reflect on the vast wealth of information, of history, which I have been granted. Words on the page speak of tremendous ideals... and the one thing I have learned in reading them all?

It is impossible to understand honor through a scroll.

I specialize in the study of honor, of Bushido and its many philosophies and interpretations. And of Shourido, that newly-named but ancient way of thought. I am a scholar of the soul of humanity. And I have this to say:

Bushido is not the only path to purity. There are those who will tell you the way of the Kami Akodo is the sole code by which a samurai can live. I, and a hundred-thousand stories of the past, must humbly disagree.

Bushido IS a path of honor, yes. But Bushido is also a complex contradiction, a maze of words which confuses the mind and throws the soul into inner turmoil and second-guessing. Bushido is not clear. Bushido is not simple.

And Bushido, on its own, is not pure.

Shourido is also a path of complexity. It is the "Way of Victory." It is a path to power, walked by samurai long before we of the Spider deigned give it a name. Shourido is an exercise in pragmatism, a study of reality. Yes, there are those who call it a dark path, or a path of selfishness. And to be sure, there is some truth in these accusations. The Way of Victory may be abused and manipulated to justify wrong-doing and false-thinking. It may serve as a wonderful disguise behind which to hide one's shame and failure.

But if you believe these claims cannot also be laid at the feet of the Code of Bushido, you have not spent enough time around your fellow Rokugani.

What clan, Great or Minor, may claim not to have in their past a black mark? A samurai, a daimyo, perhaps even a Clan Champion who has used Bushido to justify some cruel or dastardly action? One hardly needs to look outside our own century, beyond one's own province, to see powerful lords who defied the intent of Bushido while at the same time cloaking themselves in such words as Duty, Loyalty, and Honor. While history has perhaps justified their actions, the lords of the Scorpion and Crab during the era of the Clan War are perfect examples. Lord Shoji slew an Emperor in the name of Duty – and his only fault was not succeeding in the extinction of the line. Had he accomplished the task he set himself, we would be calling that "crime against Bushido" a victory of magnificent proportion. Lord Kisada, now the blessed Fortune of Persistence, in his life allied with the Shadowlands and allowed corruption to march at his side. He attacked the very heart of the Empire and called it Duty. What power did Bushido have to stop these men?

Yes, of course, you see Shourido and its selfish-sounding way and you blame it for the failings of others. But no philosophy alone may be blamed for the failings of weak men and women. In fact, Shourido is a belief in personal responsibility. It refuses to allow a true practitioner to lay his failings at the feet of another. In fact, of its seven sacred tenets, Shourido boasts five which restrain the self:

Determination shines a light on the path of correctness and guides a samurai to that path no matter what distasteful or shameful methods need to be utilized along the way.

Insight cuts through lies straight to the heart of proper thinking. It eliminates the emotional pull of rhetoric and gifts the true soul by combining facts into Truth.





Knowledge aids the individual by destroying ignorance, laying waste to doubt.

Perfection is the all-encompassing desire to allow no failure, no matter how small, to weaken one's resolve.

And Strength gives one the power to act upon knowledge tempered by insight, eradicating the gray lines of indecision.

Of the final two tenets, Control is the only one which requires a relationship between the Self and the Other. Proper control demands the use of every available means to manipulate others toward only one possibility: the outcome you desire.

And Will rules all. Will is that force which drives one toward action. It overrides doubt, bolsters against fear, and dismisses regrets and desires. It steels the heart against unwelcome emotion and holds back tears in the face of unbearable loss. Will throws off the shackles of pain and lifts one from the brink of death, granting that final moment in which to strike and destroy one's enemy.

How could these tenets be considered dishonorable? How could anyone see these virtues as despicable? As evil? As corrupt? No, Shourido is not a path of darkness, nor a path of selfishness. Those who defame the Way of Victory merely fear its questioning of their own ancient tradition: Bushido.

For where Bushido is a complex contradiction, Shourido is a clear-cut path to victory.

A follower of Akodo's path must constantly sacrifice one tenet of the Code to uphold another. What cooperation may be found between Sincerity and Honesty? How does one respond to a direct command from a lord which requires an act of grave dishonor? Observance of Shourido cuts away these self-doubts and grants the vision necessary to achieve the purest outcome. Shourido allows one to live without the constant struggle of inner turmoil and second-guessing which the Code of Bushido requires.

Bushido is a path which restrains one's inner power and requires men filled with fear to give up their will to samurai of greater status. Properly followed, it may lead some to victory... but it leads most to failure and death.

Shourido glorifies the inner self and demands the most rigid steel of the soul. It sharpens the mind and kills doubt. Shourido is power for the unafraid.

May my words in this Violence Behind Courtliness City reach those with the power to awaken others.

FROM THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF ASAKO KURESHIKO, SCHOLAR OF BUSHIDO

There are those who will treat a discussion on the so-called alternate path to honor, the path of Shourido, as a philosophical debate. Mark these samurai well, for they waver in their honor and fail to understand the truth behind the lies. The Code of Bushido is not some mere philosophical discussion of how to best reach a stated goal. Bushido was discovered by a Kami, one of the pure

Founders of the Great Clans who established the Empire while the Fallen One, Fu Leng, was trying to destroy it. The only mortal who has ever approached the power and honor of these Kami is Yoritomo, who now holds a place alongside them in the Celestial Realm.

Because of this origin it is not only incorrect to discuss Bushido, the proper path of samurai, as philosophy – but in fact it is blasphemy. Blasphemy of the worst and most damning sort, which demeans the proper path and erodes the walls of honor built up by centuries of right thinking. Shourido draws on the inherent sinful nature of man to hold tight to the easy-to-reach. Bushido emboldens the samurai to reach instead, to reach past the precipice of pain, loss, and potential dishonor for the more worthy position.

Some say that Shourido is new. This, too, is a lie! Shourido's so-called "tenets" are easily found in every journal, every poem, every play where weakness of the soul is described at length. As long as there have been men and women expressing selfishness, there has been Shourido. Until its codification, Shourido's tenets were rightly shunned by all as dishonorable, vilified as appropriate only for ronin scum and black-hearted villains, for they undermine the very heart of Bushido.

You ask me: "Is it possible for one to exist in tandem with the other?" And of course the answer is no. Shourido is corruption. No, that does not do it justice. To call Shourido corruption is to call the rain wet. Shourido is a vile thing which insinuates itself into the hearts and minds of the weak. It riddles their soul with holes through which other corruptions may enter. It weakens the mind. It causes tangible, physical destruction of the body. Shourido festers like a disease and the only cure is to excise the corrupted parts.

The Code of Bushido is path of selflessness, of service to others. The samurai bows to those of higher station, to the ancestors, and to a way of living which involves the care and well-being of all souls, not just one's own. Bushido is a philosophy of service and inclusion set down by the wisdom of a god. Although Akodo originally spoke of Bushido as the way of warriors, Bushido's great wisdom and inherent power spread rapidly to include all true samurai – and rightly so. It has defined honor since the dawn of the Empire and there is no force in this world which may remove it.

Shourido is not an honorable path. It focuses entirely on the self, in direct opposition to others. Indeed, it puts aside the well-being of others so it may carve a dark path to victory.





There are those who label Bushido a contradiction, especially when considering the tenets of Sincerity and Honesty. But this innate contradiction is a blessing. It requires a samurai to think, to constantly evaluate his own actions and compare them to the principles and experiences of hundreds of thousands of ancestors who have gone before. Bushido is a test, a constant struggle, with total success a near impossibility. But it is not achievement of an unreachable standard that is its purpose; rather, the struggle itself tempers the steel of the soul and makes a samurai better.

Shourido, for all its vaunted power, is a cheating, manipulative shortcut which bypasses the struggle for right action entirely. It undermines the heart of the samurai and the very fabric of our society.

Let us put away this distasteful discussion of filth. Let us consider instead ways by which we may excise this corruption from our hearts and minds and souls. Let us treat Shourido as we do all other forms of corruption, and treat those who admit to wallowing in its oily darkness as they should properly be treated – as the Empire's enemies.

FROM THE PERSONAL JOURNAL OF MIRUMOTO SAORI, FORMERLY OF HOUSE DOJI, WRITTEN LATE IN HER LIFE

A samurai could spend his entire life in contemplation on the whispered sound of a butterfly's wings. There might be merit in such an existence, but it is not my nature. My nature is to act, for to effect change in this world, one must act. Contemplation of the theories of philosophy have their place, and I have spent some portion of the effort of my mind upon them. I have felt the weight of tradition, the welcoming gaze of my ancestors, and the thrill of a new discovery examined. But in the end, a samurai must decide his proper path and then follow it on his own.

A samurai, this samurai, must act.

The Code of Bushido identifies a set of prescriptions on how one should properly interact with society. It requires one to place free will in the hands of a superior, be it daimyo, commander, Emperor, or the ancestors. But what does a samurai do when those above him are not honorable? How does a samurai decide if a path leads to dishonor and failure when he is taught to trust in the orders of his master, his daimyo, and his Clan Champion?

Why, the answer is simple: Think for yourself!

The tenets of Shourido, as they have evolved into what the Spider consider their "code," offer a way to slice through the confusion. The contradicting knots of Bushido which tangle the weak and unworthy are cut cleanly if you merely take another view.

Some have asked me how I might justify following two opposing codes of honor, and if I regard the questioner as one worthy of a response, I have a ready answer. Honor is defined by the individual, for how else could anyone comprehend any code by which to live but through the lens of the self?

Bushido lays the groundwork with the weight of history: ancestor after ancestor has defined a way of purity that cannot be questioned. Bushido's tenets are the measuring stick against which a samurai should judge all actions. It deals with how I relate to the world and to other samurai, and both its inherent contradiction and its comforting traditions offer a buffer against lesser temptations.

Shourido and its duty to the self lets me ignore the desires of society. Those who label it mere selfishness are at best confused, at worst liars. Shourido acts as a bulwark against the sins of the world and allows me to perceive when others are manipulating the idealism of Bushido for their own purposes. I am able to deny any dishonorable man's attempt to manipulate my honor, because my honor is protected on multiple fronts. When Bushido demands a contradiction impossible to resolve, Shourido proves the answer. Shourido helps me create a Self which better understands the needs of society and how to achieve them.

For those that require a simpler answer, I say this:

Bushido is my idealized goal. Shourido is the way I perfect myself in order to walk Bushido's impossible path.



The Mechanics of Two Paths

The Code of Bushido, the central moral system of Rokugan's samurai caste, is represented in the Legend of the Five Rings RPG by the Honor Rank mechanic, and a chart of Honor gains and losses is provided (on page 91 of the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook) to guide GMs and players in how to enforce the Code in gameplay.

However, no such chart has been published for the sinister new "code" of Shourido that is popularized by the Lost and the Spider Clan in the twelfth century. Why is this?

The short answer is simply that Shourido is not how the Rokugani define Honor. It is, in fact, complete anathema to the ideals defined by the Code of Bushido. Shourido is the path of the self – some say the selfish – and describes a way to achieve power. Bushido is the code of conduct for maintaining a harmonious society, while Shourido is a code of conduct to become a successful individual.

In a game where the optional Honor Roll rule (page 92) is utilized, Bushido acts as a literal bulwark against failure. A samurai may use it as a final effort to succeed, calling on his adherence to traditions laid out by the ancestors in order to achieve an otherwise unattainable victory. Other mechanical benefits of Bushido include acceptance by others (represented by the use of Lore: Bushido rolls to sense another's Honor) and bonuses to resist temptation, fear, and intimidation (rejecting the will of others). This is because a true follower of Bushido understands that following his code lets him rely on the strength of others, on the faith of the majority of the population and the strength of the ancestors.

By contrast, true followers of Shourido know that they are alone. They are solely responsible for the path of their lives and, when faced with the bowel-releasing terror of fighting an oni, they cannot rely on others to add to their inner strength. This means that Will, and by extension Willpower, is vital to a follower of Shourido. Moreover, because Shourido has neither the weight of history nor the sheer volume of followers, past or present, to justify a comparable mechanic to Bushido, adherents of the Way of Victory must be more zealous in order to gain mechanical benefit from their code. This is represented in the game primarily through the Dark Paragon Advantage,

which depicts a samurai who sacrifices the commonly accepted views of Honor in order to achieve personal power and success. Such samurai believe their code of Shourido is the right path no matter what negative light the Empire casts on it – but of course, one need only consider the disciplined, determined villains from Rokugan's history to realize that believing your path is right does not make it so.

All this being said, it is difficult but not entirely possible for an L5R character to combine the two ways of thinking – at least in game-mechanical terms. Such a samurai will never reach the extreme heights of honor achieved by legendary heroes from the past, but his mixed thinking does have its beneficial side. Typically, these characters will normally follow Bushido in every aspect of their life and maintain as high an Honor Rank as possible. However, there are always times when Bushido contradicts itself or fails to achieve the desired result. When this happens, these characters fall back on the power of the self, using the ways of Shourido to find a way out of the conundrum. This usually brings with it a loss of Honor Rank which must be regained later through contrition and service to others.

Basically, a samurai who follows both Bushido and Shourido tries to walk a fine line between the two, generally following Bushido but using the power of Shourido when required. The Harriers of the Daidoji, courtiers who dabble with Commerce, Intimidation, or blackmail... such samurai understand this fine line perfectly. Mechanically, following Shourido is represented by the Dark Paragon Advantage, but the 'power of Shourido' can also be expressed through role-playing an embrace of ruthless pragmatism. Sometimes honor is sacrificed for the greater good; adherents of Shourido are simply more consciously aware of this fact.





Voices of the Spider: The Susumu Family

When the Empress Iweko was forced to recognize the Spider Clan in the wake of the Destroyer War, she decreed the clan's remaining Tainted samurai would be exiled to the Colonies to conquer them in her name. However, she granted permission for the handful of "pure" Spider to remain within Rokugan to represent their comrades in the courts. These samurai swore allegiance to the name of Susumu, the Dark Fortune of Deceit, and to his daughter Susumu Kuroko, the first daimyo of this tiny new family within the Spider Clan. Completely bereft of the Taint, they stood in a unique position as the sole voice of the clan's interests within the Empire. Staying Taint-free allowed them to operate freely within Rokugan, or at least as freely as the rest of the hostile clans would permit. However, the Susumu did not have a long tradition of courtly arts to call on in pursuit of their duties. The so-called "Daigotsu Courtier School" had originally been created in the Shadowlands when Daigotsu ruled over the City of the Lost, and its Techniques were intended to be used by those with the Taint. When Daigotsu created the Spider Clan to infiltrate the Empire, the family tried to adapt the school for use by non-Tainted diplomats, but the results were not entirely satisfactory. The Susumu had no choice but to inherit this school and employ it as best they could.

Despite the absence of Jigoku's touch on their souls, the Susumu are famed for being completely loyal to Daigotsu, the Dark Lord of Jigoku, and their decision to remain un-Tainted is solely in order to be able to operate within the courts on Daigotsu's behalf. As soon as she assumed leadership of the new family, Susumu

Kuroko began to study ways the clan's courtier school could be modified to abandon its dependence on the Taint. Instead, she sought to rely on the perverse code of Shourido, with an especial focus on teaching courtiers to understand everything around them and, through that understanding, control their opponents. Although the Spider Clan has always embraced the so-called "Dark Virtues" of Shourido, Control is without question the main focus of the Susumu family (although they also value Knowledge). The Susumu aspire to be consummate manipulators, bending those around them to their whims. (In this they are perversely similar to the Otomo family of the Imperial house, and perhaps this may explain the surprising number of Susumu-Otomo marriages which occurred within the family's first generation.)

In pursuit of developing a new technique based on Shourido, the Susumu very carefully observed the entirety of Rokugan's courtly world, investigating the perspectives, philosophies, and methods of all the other courtier schools. No clan, no family, and no method were considered beneath their scrutiny and consideration. (It helped, of course, that some of the Susumu had previously been infiltrators of other clans and families in the Empire during the Spider Clan's earlier attempts to subvert Rokugan from within.) Moreover, the Spider did not altogether abandon the Spider Clan's earlier infiltration campaigns – they studied the other clans with the specific goal of seeking out vice in other samurai and drawing them away from virtue toward the teachings of Shourido. Even if such samurai did not become allies, their embrace of selfishness would subvert the Empire and thus serve the long-term goals of the Spider Clan.

The result of all this is that the Susumu are much broader and subtler in both their attitudes and their methods than the rest of the Spider Clan. By relying on Control as their defining philosophical trait, they embrace a path of quiet patience and flexibility. A Susumu courtier can wait with the patience of Earth for his enemies to exhaust themselves, can adapt like the Water to different challenges, can call on the knowledge of Fire and the manipulative subtlety of Air. The Susumu endeavor to be anything but what the Empire expects them to be... because they cannot be what the rest of their clan is.

The Susumu are thus an eclectic and unusual family. They share much in common with the brutal pragmatism of the rest of the Spider Clan, but they do not employ overtly dishonorable tactics or call on the power of the Taint. They are few in number and have no real political power, but they seek always to control others, manipulate the flow of any encounter, and maintain an absolute and rigid grasp of the situation around them, pushing others toward the desired ends. When the Susumu's abilities are working at their peak, those speaking with them often do not even realize why the conversation proceeded as it did, and cannot tell that the outcome was planned from the beginning by the Spider.





THE SUSUMU COURTIER SCHOOL

In truth, there is no “Susumu School.” At the end of the twelfth century the family itself has existed for barely more than a generation, and must still rely primarily on the techniques of the pre-existing “Daigotsu Courtier School.” However, daimyo Susumu Kuroko has worked to adapt the school to her family’s idiosyncratic approach to courtly duties, an effort viewed with a certain amount of suspicion by other Spider. Although Kuroko’s work is backed by the leadership of the clan, the Susumu family’s separation from the majority of the Spider Clan’s membership means very few of the rank and file can even see what the family is doing, let alone understand it.

The original Daigotsu Courtier School was focused on the corrupting power of the Taint, and while that emphasis was scaled-back when the Spider Clan began infiltrating the Empire, an assumption still persisted within the clan that the school was inherently supposed to operate in aggressive disharmony to the Empire’s normal courtly world. The Susumu effort to pursue a more “conventional” approach seemed almost disrespectful to Daigotsu himself. Those few Daigotsu samurai who

have seen the Susumu courtiers at work argue that while the Susumu may be effective in the short term, their efforts are far less likely to serve the Spider Clan’s needs in the longer term. The Susumu have focused to closely on navigating different court settings without arousing suspicion or losing control of themselves that they cannot plot anything beyond the moment in which they might find themselves. To this criticism the Susumu reply that the Daigotsu are simply too blunt and crude to understand the new family’s subtler approach.

It is worth noting that Susumu Kuroko herself was originally trained in the earlier Daigotsu Courtier School, and her efforts thus far have been based on developing new variations on that school’s existing techniques. Those trained in her new paradigm are invariably younger members of the clan, and she considers them an experiment to determine if techniques that completely reject the Taint are truly an effective means for the family to operate within the Empire. For now, she and her superior Daigotsu Kanpeki have been moderately pleased with the results... though it remains to be seen whether the Spider Clan’s future will truly require such methods.

The Shogunate

Of all the Emperor's Chosen, none are quite so intriguing as the position of Shogun. It is a position that for most of the Empire's history did not actually exist; rather, it was a theory, an ideal, a failsafe that would never be needed if honor was truly a force stronger than steel. The Voice of the Emperor, the Imperial Advisor, even the Emerald Champion all reinforce the authority of the Emperor, serving as symbols of his infallibility. But the Shogun is different. Of all the Chosen, his duty is the most martial, the most autonomous, and the most extreme. The Shogun is the prime general of all the Empire's military forces. He is the sword of the Emperor, in more ways than one.

The catch, however, is that there may be circumstances where the Emperor's sword must be used against the Emperor.

Needless to say, it is a controversial position.

The Shogun is, in some ways, a mirror to the Emperor. While the Emperor represents spiritual leadership over Rokugan and symbolizes man's connection to Heaven, the Shogun represents military leadership, martial prowess, and man's connection to earth. While the Emperor is idealized as a philosophical and spiritual warrior, the Shogun is supposed to be far more practical, able to see all matters through the lens of a martial mindset which he maintains at all times. He is expected to protect the sacred Son of Heaven from the earthly stain of martial matters, taking them onto himself. Of course, for all his prestige, the Shogun is not the equal of the Emperor; he must ultimately bow to the Son of Heaven, as must all samurai. However, the Shogun is expected to lead when the Emperor cannot. He possesses the military ability to overthrow the throne, and although no Shogun has ever attempted this, some more martially-minded samurai may occasionally whisper it would be better to have a Shogun on the throne than an Emperor. And it is this dangerous idea that prevented the implementation of the position for centuries after its conception.



The Origins of the Shogun

The concept of a “Shogun” was conceived by the ronin general Sun Tao, the revered master of warfare and leadership. During his lifetime he created 145 treatises on warfare, combining observations he made from time spent among each of the Great Clans with his own personal theories and meditations on the art of warfare. These collected scrolls and treatises are known as the *Book of Sun Tao*, and have influenced many successful Rokugani generals.

Among these musings was the concept of a great general in service to the Empire, answering to the Son of Heaven but acting independently of the Throne. This general would have the ability to muster an army from the Imperial Legions for the protection of the Empire. He would be a master of tactics and strategy, an ideal general in every sense of the word, commanding the respect of his officers by virtue of his character and skill. A man given his position not due to right of birth but solely due to his ability. As Sun Tao conceived the position, it could be bestowed to anyone the Emperor judged worthy, regardless of their prior social position, whether they can from a Great Clan or a Minor Clan, or even if they were ronin. In theory, even those born heimin could be Shogun, although their lot in life would make this unlikely.

As Sun Tao conceived it, the purpose of this general would be to advise the Emperor in all matters of military conflict, protecting the Son of Heaven from the spiritual stain of warfare and from concerns that were beneath him. If the Emperor were unwilling or unable to lead in war, the role of this general would be to lead in his stead. And then there was the most controversial of Sun Tao’s suggestions: if the Emperor were cruel to his people and unfit to rule, it would be the duty of this general to overthrow him, to completely shoulder the disgrace of such a necessary act so that the shame would fall upon no other (and commit seppuku accordingly). Sun Tao believed only a great and virtuous general could possibly fulfill such a role, and only a man of such character could ever be expected to carry out such a duty.

In his writings, he called this general the “*seii taishogun*,” meaning “*great general who faces the east*.” When he presented his proposal to the Emperor, the title was shortened simply to “Shogun.”

The proposal of this position and the duties it encompassed was controversial, to say the least. The Imperial Legions were under the purview of the Emerald Champion, and had been for many years. The only other person with the authority to muster those forces was the Emperor himself, and the idea that the Emperor might someday be unwilling or unable to lead his people seemed heretical. If any military burden did arise, it should be taken on by the Emerald Champion. Sun Tao disagreed; the Emerald Champion already commanded much influence and power as the Emperor’s yojimbo and chief of all magistrates, and it would be too much power for one man if he also commanded the Empire’s armies.

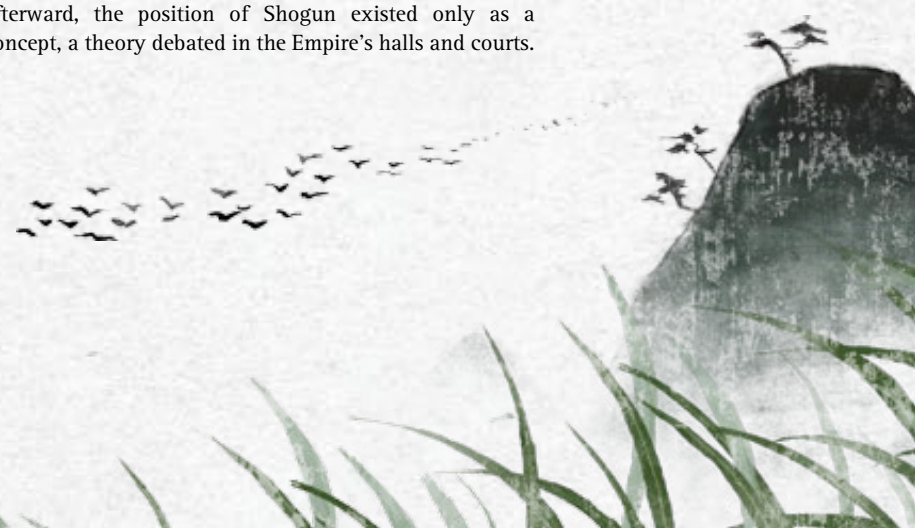


Moreover, Sun Tao foresaw that in the future the Empire would become ever more vast, its forces ever more varied, and the duties of the courts would gradually draw more and more of the Emperor’s attention. Through no fault of his own, the Emperor would eventually become too busy to lead a standing army, and would have no choice but to delegate his authority. Better that such a position be conceived ahead of time, its duties plainly written and the laws put into place.

Sun Tao also argued that the Emperor was a symbol of Heaven’s reign on earth, too godly to stain himself with the dirty business of war. Let the Shogun be the earth beneath the Heavens, he argued. Let the Shogun be the mountain that bowed to the Sun.

The Emperor listened to all the arguments. He respected Sun Tao’s wisdom, believing him to be the greatest living general of that time, perhaps even an equal to Akodo himself. But he was wary of Sun Tao’s proposal, reluctant to yield such authority to another. In the end, while he admitted seeing some wisdom in Sun Tao’s proposal, he deferred any decision for further consideration.

Sun Tao left the Empire shortly after presenting his treatises to the Emperor, and the Emperor died and passed into the Celestial Heavens before coming to a decision. With no one left willing to argue for the installation of the position, and certainly no one with any desire to do so, the argument was all but forgotten. For many centuries afterward, the position of Shogun existed only as a concept, a theory debated in the Empire’s halls and courts.





The Rise of the Modern Shogun

In the time of the Toturi dynasty, Emperor Toturi I died without a clear succession of heirs. Many assumed his eldest child, Toturi Tsudao, would ascend to become Empress. But Akodo Kaneka, the illegitimate son of the Emperor and a geisha, contested her right to the throne, for he was older than she. The power struggle that resulted became known as the time of the Four Winds.

During this era the Empire knew great strife. Seeing the struggles which Rokugan endured, Akodo Kaneka and his allies cited to the authority of his birthright to claim the title of Shogun based on Sun Tao's ancient theories. At first none would take his claim seriously, but his allies took action to grant his claim legitimacy. The Unicorn Clan Champion Moto Chagatai broke his wakizashi, a symbol of his loyalty to the throne, and knelt before Kaneka, pledging his service to the Shogun. He was followed in turn by many others, including the Daughter of Storms Yoritomo Kumiko and the great general Akodo Ijiasu, who became Kaneka's right-hand man. Courtly allies of Kaneka soon created a Mon to represent the office, and Kaneka's personal retinue began to refer to themselves as the *Bakufu*, a military term that referred to a general's personal advisors.

Not all in the Empire recognized the position. To mention the word in rival courts was dangerous, implying that what the bastard son of Toturi had done was legitimate and that his "authority" was real. Supporters of the other three Winds whispered this was simply a power grab by Akodo Kaneka – since he had no true claim to power, he had invented a position for himself to take, claiming the theoretical power of Shogun but not the responsibilities. Instead of proving himself a great leader, he simply called himself one.

Yet with every passing day, more samurai flocked to Kaneka's banner, the banner of the Shogun. To many it seemed to promise a new kind of Empire, a new kind of ruler. Kaneka had restored peace and order to the Yasuki estates during the second Yasuki War, establishing himself as a leader who would take action to maintain peace in the Empire, even if such action was controversial. It was a precedent that later Shogun would follow.

After the defeat of the Dark Lord Daigotsu, Hantei Naseru was determined to show himself the rightful heir of the Throne. In a courtly exchange with his half-brother Kaneka, Naseru referred to him as Shogun, offering the title in exchange for support of his own claim as Emperor. Kaneka accepted... and so the position of Shogun became a theory no longer. For the first time in Rokugan's history, Sun Tao's dream of the ultimate general became a reality.

THE RIVER AND THE ROCKS

The emergence of the Shogunate changed the face of Rokugani politics, even as it changed the nature of its military. Kaneka adopted the duties laid out in the *Book of Sun Tao*, but also advanced his own agendas, expanding the powers of the Shogun and cementing the office's authority. He sent advisors to the Great Clans and created ties with every major samurai family. His duties overlapped with those of the Emerald Champion, and gradually the Emperor's forces began to split, dividing between the Emerald Magistrates and the Imperial Legions. Some scholars believed a struggle for the Throne itself was inevitable. After all, the Shogun commanded the respect of every clan and the might of the Imperial Legions, and great difficulties plagued Naseru's reign, offering justification for a power grab. Yet Kaneka never overstepped his position, always showing proper deference to the Emerald Champion, and always answering to his half-brother Toturi III. Indeed, Kaneka changed in the coming decades, becoming wiser and calmer, less like fire and more like stone. It was as if the office he had forged was changing him in turn.

After Naseru's death without an heir, many expected Kaneka to step into the position. He had the support of every Great Clan, having proven himself to be a capable leader. His advisors urged him to do so, yet Kaneka would not. In his heart, he knew that to take the throne by force would set a precedent that could doom his allies and cast a stain over the office of Shogun for all time to come. Furthermore, his office was controversial and associated with military might; he would surely divide the Empire by ascending to Emperor. Kaneka's honor was stronger than his desire for the throne; he was no longer the blindly ambitious man of his youth.



However, Moto Chagatai felt differently. In the Khan's eyes, Naseru's widow Kurako was a weak and impotent ruler, merely a puppet of those around her. Chagatai believed Kaneka was the only one worthy to rule the Empire. Had his allies not intended such when they agreed to recognize him as Shogun? Again and again Kaneka refused to ascend to the Throne, and so Chagatai decided to take matters into his own hands. He launched an unprecedented military campaign to take the capital and the Throne, an event that would come to be known variously as the Winter of Red Snow or, more simply, as the Khan's March. The Khan made public his intentions to take the throne by force and make himself Emperor. Yet some believed, and still believe, that Chagatai's true intention was to force Kaneka to take the throne himself, and would have bowed to Kaneka if given the chance. Ultimately, however, scholars can only debate whether or not these were Chagatai's true goals. The Shogun fought his old ally in personal combat and fell against him, defending the capital from the Khan's invasion just as Sun Tao had always intended. The Unicorn Champion's gambit proved to be the Toturi dynasty's final undoing, and Chagatai would be known as a villain for the rest of his days and beyond.

The Shogunate in the Age of Iweko

After the ascension of Iweko I, Moto Jin-Sahn became the second samurai to hold the title of Shogun. He was awarded the position after proving both his virtue and his martial prowess in the Celestial Tournament, and the Empress immediately charged him with the duty of hunting down and purging the Spider Clan from the face of the Empire.

Jin-Sahn's tenure as Shogun was marked by many challenges. The invasion of the Destroyers tested the might of the Shogunate for several years, and during that time he also continued searching for the Dark Lord Daigotsu, taxing his forces to their limits and beyond. Ultimately, the Spider he hunted became the Empire's saviors, with Daigotsu rising to defeat Kali-Ma. At the end of the war, Jin-Sahn shaved his head and retired, feeling he had failed to uphold the standard Kaneka had created at the inception of the Shogunate. The Shogun position was in flux for a number of years afterward, alternatively vacant or filled by lesser, temporary officers. For a time,

even Shiba Danjuro, the trusted right-hand man of Akodo Kaneka during his tenure as Shogun, held the position, although he stepped down after only two years of service.

The future of the office is uncertain. At the end of Iweko I's reign, the current Shogun is Moto Taigo, ironically the son of the villain Moto Chagatai. His appointment to the position was a surprise even to those close to the Empress, and although Iweko was cryptic as to why she chose Taigo, some whisper that the dynasty is secretly sympathetic to Chagatai's difficult choice and sought to appease his spirit by elevating his son. Others believe it was to keep Taigo from seeking a claim on the Unicorn Championship, lest the Empire suffer a repeat of those dark days. His tenure is marked with ambitious moves and shifts for power, putting him in conflict with the Emerald Champion. With a new age about to dawn over the Emerald Empire, Rokugan will need a worthy general, a great man of character, a Shogun such as Sun Tao envisioned. Is Moto Taigo up to the task?

In the brief history of the office, no Shogun has dared to invoke his right to challenge the Emperor. Yet many say this is inevitable, and perhaps it is closer than it may seem...





HOW DOES ONE BECOME SHOGUN?

The Shogun is appointed by the Emperor himself. This is no small task, often likened to a samurai entrusting another with his sword. Since the Emperor is choosing someone to bestow with ultimate military authority, a samurai who might one day be compelled to overthrow him, there are many factors that weigh in the decision. Ideally, in keeping with Sun Tao's concept the Shogun should be a great tactician and commander, equal parts general, warrior, scholar, and soldier. He should be proud enough to lead men but also humble enough to be led. He should have exceptional character and honor. Most of all, he should command the respect of peers, rivals and allies alike.

However, one might argue that selecting a Shogun based on these qualities alone is unwise. After all, if an Emperor were to select a man more virtuous than himself, what if the Empire came to prefer the Shogun? If the Shogun was the greatest general, but became corrupted, who would be able to stand against him? What force would temper the Shogun's ambitions if they grew out of control? An unwise decision could do more than end a dynasty... it could doom the Empire itself. For this reason, political factors often contribute to the final decision. Rarely does the Emperor actually choose the greatest general in the Empire for the position, and he never chooses someone with ambitions greater than the political climate will accept. Of course, none discuss this reality aloud.

Those who seek to be Shogun often choose the warrior's path. They try to increase not only their martial prowess but also their glory, so their name can reach the Emperor's ears. But they also accumulate political allies and sponsorships from wealthy lords. A samurai who desires the position of Shogun must prove he is willing to kneel to another, and must appear outwardly humble, keeping his ambitions in check. A prestigious bloodline is seen as important, as is the Shogun's strength of character. Uniquely, a samurai's clan allegiance is not considered especially important, nor is the samurai's social status prior to elevation. Because the position is not hereditary and is not earned in competition, but rather granted for a single lifetime, there is no perceived danger of creating a dynastic shogunate. Furthermore, a Shogun will naturally no longer answer to his former Clan Champion, so clans cannot use the Shogunate to gain leverage over the Emperor. Even so, a Unicorn has held the position more often than samurai from any other clan, and any samurai from a clan renowned for its warriors will likely

The Greatest General

The Shogun may be the greatest military leader of the Empire, but he is still a samurai, and as such he ultimately serves the Emperor. The source of his authority is the sanction of the Emperor, he wields power on the Emperor's behalf, and ultimately it still belongs to the Son of Heaven. Of course, some argue that the Shogun's service is truly to the Empire rather than its ruler, pointing to his exclusive right to challenge the Emperor; however, the prevailing attitude is that even this duty is a shouldered burden undertaken on behalf of the Emperor, much as a yojimbo might be expected to execute his charge rather than allow him to be captured or disgraced. As one of the Chosen, the Shogun answers directly, and only, to the Emperor, and while the Son of Heaven enjoys absolute rule with only the guide of Honor to temper his actions, the Shogun's powers and limitations are far more explicit.



be a stronger contender for Shogun than one who is not. Claiming a current or past Shogun is very prestigious for any clan, of course.

THE SHOGUN'S FORCES AND THE EMERALD CHAMPION

In practice, the Shogun's personal forces consist of samurai immediately loyal to the officers of his *bakufu* (see below). The Shogun does not actually maintain a standing army of his own; he leads the Emperor's forces on the Emperor's behalf. This is an important distinction with many implications, meant to keep the Shogun's power in check. However, the Shogun can call upon the Imperial Legions for any task he may require, and he has the authority to establish dojo and train soldiers for Imperial service.

The Shogun's authority over the Legions is shared with the Emerald Champion. This overlap does lead to occasional clashes between the Emerald Champion and the Shogun, and as the Shogun's office has become more influential, the influence of the Emerald Champion has somewhat waned. This conflict began during the time of the Four Winds; when Kaneka took the Yasuki estates to end the fighting there and was challenged by Yasuki Hachi, the Emerald Champion at the time, for ownership of the territory. As Yasuki daimyo, Hachi claimed jurisdiction over the Yasuki estates, but lost the ensuing duel and forfeited the lands to the Shogun. The incident sparked strife between the two offices and this discord only grew in later years. This can cause great difficulties for officers in the Imperial Legions, who sometimes find themselves receiving conflicting orders between the Shogun and Emerald Champion – something which can result in a ruined career or even seppuku.

During the Iweko dynasty, these clashes result in a greater division between the Emerald Magistrates and the Imperial Legions. In earlier centuries, the lines between the two were blurred in spite of their separate duties, but in Iweko's reign the Emerald Magistrates answer directly to the Emerald Champion while the Imperial Legions answer directly to the Shogun. Thus, the Emerald Champion's office comes to be seen as more of a "domestic" position, while the Shogun is seen as being focused on the defense of the country against outside threats. The perception of the courts is that the Emerald Champion relies for his authority upon the Emperor, while the Shogun is more autonomous, since he can act without the Emperor's leave. In the eyes of many, this places the Shogun above the Emerald Champion in power, albeit technically equal in social rank. It is a complex relationship, one not easily measured by numbers or scales.

The Duties of Office

When Sun Tao conceived the idea of the Shogun, the role was clear, but the duties associated with that role were vague. Time has refined the duties of the Shogun, and when Emperor Toturi Naseru officially recognized the office, he also formalized it, creating a specific charter of duties, powers, and limitations. This set a precedent that is observed into the subsequent Iweko dynasty.

The specific duties of the Shogun are as follows:

1) To act as General and Supreme Commander of the Imperial Legions, second only to the Emperor

In the absence of the Emperor, the Shogun leads the Imperial Legions, the greatest army in the known world. It is also common in wartime for clan generals to defer to the Shogun and pledge their forces in his service.

2) To Maintain a Standing Army

The Shogun must also maintain the Imperial Legions. He must oversee their training, equipment, and preparation. In practice, the Shogun delegates these duties to officers, rarely handling them himself. Even so, he is ultimately responsible for the state of the Imperial Legions, and a poorly-maintained standing army reflects poorly on him.

3) To Advise the Emperor In All Matters of War

The Shogun is expected to be a tactical and strategic genius, adept in all forms of warfare. When the Emperor is leading his army, the Shogun is expected to be at his right-hand side, advising and executing his orders. This is to help protect the Emperor from *kegare*, the stain inherent in dirty and unclean matters such as bloodshed.

4) To Enforce *Sakoku*

It is the explicit duty of the Shogun to keep foreigners out of Rokugan. He is to maintain the integrity of the Empire's borders and ensure that the clans do not break the Imperial mandate of international seclusion. During the time of Rokugan's expansion after the Destroyer War and the establishment of the Colonies, this duty became especially difficult, and





the Shogun began to take on the duty of protecting and escorting caravans between the Empire and the Colonies. This specific duty may help explain the prevalence of Unicorn samurai in the office.

5) To Rule When the Emperor Is Unable Or Unwilling

This is the most controversial of all the Shogun's duties. It gives the Shogun the implied sanction to overthrow the Emperor if he is deemed unfit to rule. It also makes the Shogun head of state should the Emperor become unable to rule for any reason. These duties overlap with both the Imperial Chancellor and the Imperial spouse, creating the possibility for power struggles in the event of an empty throne.

There are obvious problems with this duty. It asks the uncomfortable question: who is fit to judge the Emperor? What mortal is worthy to judge the radiant Son of Heaven? If man's perceptions can be flawed, with what right does he challenge one whose judgment is absolute? The mere existence of this duty seems to undermine the very concept of an Emperor, of a man whose judgment and honor is beyond reproach. In the early days of the Empire, such a thing was unthinkable, and this is why the idea of a Shogun was ignored. It was not until the fall of the Hantei Dynasty and the brief madness of Toturi I that the Rokugani began to open themselves to the idea that their leaders might not be flawless or incorruptible, and that someday a Shogun might be required to act in this uncomfortable capacity. Even so, the possibility now exists that the Emperor's authority could be undermined. The Empire has never been the same since...

As with most problems within Rokugan, it is honor that tempers these flaws. When Toturi III left a vacant throne during the Khan's March, the Shogun deferred rule to Naseru's widow, the Imperial Consort, effectively treating her as having the full authority of Heaven. This created a precedent, implying forevermore that the Imperial Consort outranks the Shogun. During the early thirteenth century, Iweko I goes into seclusion to contemplate her

choice of successor, and lives up to her reputation for cryptic and unconventional orders by specifically selecting one among the court and naming that person Imperial Regent for the duration of the seclusion. This effectively robs the Shogun of the authority to rule in her stead and undermines his duty. Yet while the Shogun of the time, Moto Taigo, secretly resents the Empress' decision, he does not challenge it. His honor, and his desire to salvage the reputation and legacy of his father Moto Chagatai, stay his hand.

Will a time come when the Shogun must fulfill this uncomfortable duty? The Fortunes will not say, and the future is never certain...

6) Court and Festival Percussion

There is one more minor duty of the Shogun, and it relates to matters of the court. In the Imperial Court, the Head of Court Musicians is responsible for handling all courtly music, song, and other musical entertainment for the Emperor's guests. The exception to this is percussion instruments and court drums, which are the responsibility of the Shogun. This is because drums are associated with warriors and the military, while other musical instruments are associated with the aristocracy. The Shogun must select and train all court percussionists, and the court's Master Percussionist is actually considered to be an officer of the Shogun's personal retinue, the *Bakufu*.

This is the only courtly political duty entrusted to the Shogun. The Imperial Legions maintain percussionists for the purpose of marching, battlefield intimidation, and coordinating orders and maneuvers, so this is a natural synergy of duties. It has become a tool for the Shogun to win political allies; a politician's son with no martial ability might nonetheless serve the Legions as a percussionist, and thus win prestige and glory for his family when he would otherwise be unable. Drums are also an extremely important component to many religious and court festivals, and by offering his services for such things the Shogun demonstrates his willingness to bow before spiritual and political authority. It makes him seem more trustworthy while also providing a valuable service to the followers of Heaven.

LIMITS TO THE SHOGUN'S POWERS

The Shogun, in theory, can draft the entire Imperial Legions into his personal forces and march across the Empire. If he is respected by every warrior, he can theoretically conquer Rokugan in a matter of months. It is even explicitly within his right to challenge the Emperor to personal combat. So what is to keep him from taking over Rokugan?

First, the Shogun is an appointed position, granted by the Emperor. Just as the Emperor can bestow the position of Shogun, so too can he take it away.

Although it has never happened in the history of the Empire, the Emperor can at any time strip the Shogun of his rank, lands, and titles.



An honorable man would ask for seppuku before suffering such indignity. This threat is believed to keep a Shogun attentive to his duties, for ultimately he answers to Imperial authority just like any of the other Chosen. As long as the Emperor rules with the approval of Heaven, the Shogun will have to bow to his power.

Of course, there are circumstances where this would mean little. What if the Shogun refuses to abdicate? What if the Shogun decides the Emperor is not capable of ruling? It is his duty, after all, to take over when the Emperor cannot rule. What if the Imperial Legions are more loyal to the Shogun than to the Emerald Champion? Perhaps his men would choose to continue following him. Perhaps the Shogun has become corrupt and the threat of ending the Emperor's line prevents the Son of Heaven from ever issuing such a proclamation at all. These scenarios have never occurred, but in a Rokugan where one or more of these came to pass, it would certainly lead to interesting times...

This is actually a function of the Shogun's position. The existence of a Shogun, an authority who could possibly take the throne by force, is a threat that keeps the Emperor honest. It means the Emperor cannot allow himself to become complacent to the suffering of his subjects, nor can he neglect his Imperial duties; if he were to do so, the Shogun would ride in with the Legions and take over. Of course, this only works if the Shogun is actually loyal to the Empire. If he is not, he might make the attempt regardless of how competent the Emperor actually is.

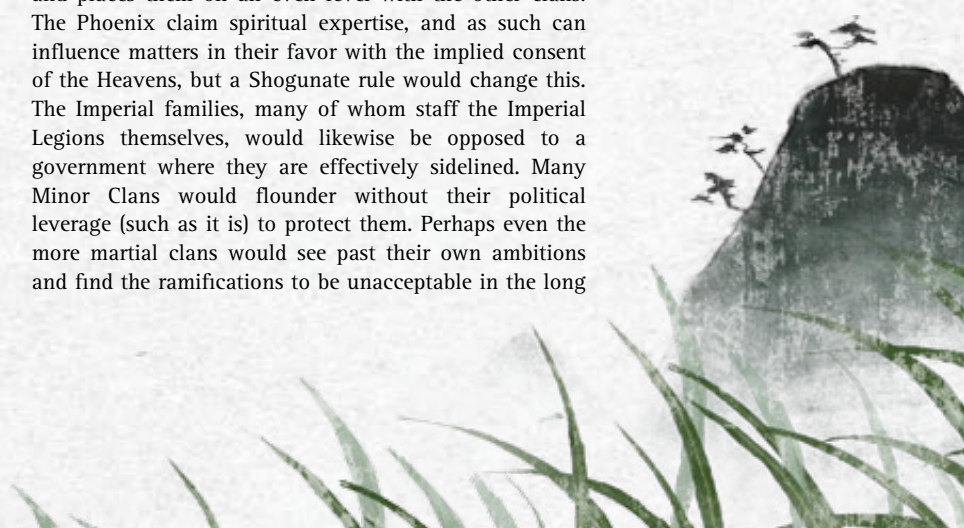
In response, those who believe in the Shogunate point out that if the Emperor is strong and capable, the Shogun will not have the support he needs to take the throne. If the Emperor has inspired loyalty in his subjects, a disloyal Shogun will be quickly exposed and defeated. No honorable samurai would follow a man who seeks to depose a just Emperor. Therefore, the existing social order and the Code of Bushido protects against such a mutiny. Even if the Shogun were to succeed, he is not an Emperor, and the Great Clans will have no obligation to follow his rule. Thus he could never truly take the throne of Rokugan from the Emperor. There will always be a balance between the two forces.

In theory.

Even so, modern Emperors choose the Shogun very carefully. This is the man or woman who will rule when the Emperor is unable. This is the man or woman who will

lead an army against him if he becomes corrupt. This is the man or woman who trains and shelters his personal forces, who guards his borders, who will draw the admiration of a whole generation of Imperial officers. He is the champion of the people, the connection between the heavenly court and its earthly subjects. No Emperor will appoint a Shogun lightly.

There is also the matter of politics. The Shogun is a military leader, not a spiritual or political one. A Shogunate government would be one where soldiers serve the function of courtiers and every matter is seen purely through the lens of warfare. This might suit certain clans, such as the Lion and Crab, perhaps even the Unicorn. Even the Scorpion might benefit, as this would ultimately make their jobs easier (after all, intrigue, assassination, and sabotage become much more possible without the threat of political repercussions). But not all clans would benefit from a purely martial reign, no matter how efficient. The Crane in particular have built their foundations on political and economic "soft" power; their ability to rebuke a clan or call upon favors protects everything they have and places them on an even level with the other clans. The Phoenix claim spiritual expertise, and as such can influence matters in their favor with the implied consent of the Heavens, but a Shogunate rule would change this. The Imperial families, many of whom staff the Imperial Legions themselves, would likewise be opposed to a government where they are effectively sidelined. Many Minor Clans would flounder without their political leverage (such as it is) to protect them. Perhaps even the more martial clans would see past their own ambitions and find the ramifications to be unacceptable in the long





term. In the end, if the Shogun cannot win the support of the Empire, it does not matter how well he is regarded, or how corrupt the Emperor. Politics serves to hold him in check even if he appears to be holding all of the cards.

Of course, even with such fail-safes, it is easy to imagine a Rokugan where the Emperor and Shogun are struggling with one another for control of the country. It happened in historical Japan, after all! With such fragile protective measures, with so much relying on the character of parties involved, so much assuming that circumstances will always support the honorable choice, it would be very easy for something to go wrong...

The Bakufu: The Shogun's Retinue

To fulfill his many duties, the Shogun retains a relatively small cabinet of military advisors and generals. These samurai are sworn directly to his allegiance, and are collectively known as the *Bakufu*.

The word *bakufu* means "tent office" and refers to the military tent in which a general resides while he leads his army. The benefit of a tent office is that it can be gathered up and transported with little fuss. In a similar fashion, the Shogun's personal retinue of advisors are expected to be flexible, accompanying him and adapting to whatever their duties require. Thus, the word *bakufu*

has come to be associated not only with the tent itself, but with those officers who directly answer to the Empire's greatest general. In the context of the Shogun, there is another meaning: a *bakufu* provides a seat of power for the general, but it is only temporary, ultimately folded up and put away when the war is over. In the same way, the Shogun's exercise of power is also expected to be temporary; when the time comes, after a failed Emperor is removed from power, he is expected to fold up his *bakufu* and put it away.

Samurai deemed worthy by the Shogun are offered appointments within his *bakufu*. It is always the discretion of the offered samurai to accept or decline, although if declining he or she is expected to have an adequate excuse prepared to save face for all involved. If he or she accepts the appointment, the samurai becomes the hatamoto (personal vassal) of the Shogun and an officer within his cabinet, equal to all others within the *bakufu*. Upon joining the *Bakufu*, members relinquish their own lands and vassals, then break their wakizashi in the presence of the Shogun. The Shogun replaces this sword with one he has commissioned (or one from a previous officer who held the same position). From that point on, the samurai's allegiance is to the Shogun alone.

The shape and scope of the *bakufu* changes with each Shogun; the nature of the Shogun determines the nature of the *bakufu*, as he appoints advisors and forms his cabinet to suit his needs and the needs of the Empire at the time. In especially peaceful times, joining the



bakufu might be primarily a political appointment, mirroring the Chosen of the Emperor. In times of war or invasion, it will be a primarily military appointment and will closely resemble the typical cabinet of any other army general. Likewise, in wartime the size of the *bakufu* grows, with dozens of samurai handling the immense administrative work the Shogun does not have time to conduct personally. In peacetime, the *bakufu* may consist of only a handful of samurai, or perhaps even just one trusted advisor.

When Kaneka declared himself the first Shogun, his initial cabinet was comprised of many influential samurai, all of whom hoped he might eventually become Emperor. Among them were the Unicorn Champion Moto Chagatai, the eventual Mantis Champion Yoritomo Kumiko, the Phoenix general Shiba Danjuro, and the Lion hero Akodo Ijiasu, all of whom broke their blades and announced their new loyalty to the Shogun. After his position was formalized, Kaneka elevated many ronin he had known from his youth to join his expanded *bakufu*, and they served as his personal advisors and part of his inner circle. Later, he offered the services of these advisors to the Great Clans as tokens of support for the Shogun's stewardship over Toshi Ranbo in the Emperor's absence. (Of all the Great Clans, only the Scorpion declined his offer.) This is a prime example of how a *bakufu* officer's duties may change as needed; he or she is expected to be whatever the Shogun requires.

THE SECOND GENERAL

The Shogun's right-hand man and the highest of his *hatamoto*. This is the highest-ranked officer in the *bakufu*, second only to the Shogun himself. If the Shogun becomes incapacitated or unable to lead, all of his duties fall to the Second General. This is a man the Shogun trusts implicitly, and is traditionally given "to one with no ambition" in Sun Tao's words.

At the dawn of the thirteenth century, there have been four Shogun in the Empire's history, but only twice has there ever been a Second General. The first to serve in this way was Shiba Danjuro, the right-hand man of Kaneka after his position became official, who eventually served a brief tenure as Shogun himself.

THE MASTER PERCUSSIONIST

The Master Percussionist is the Shogunate version of the Head of Court Musicians. He is responsible for the training of all court drummers and also for the training and management of field drummers in the Imperial Legions. He is an officer of rank equal to a *Shireiken*, and it is considered a very prestigious position.



In addition to this duty, the Master Percussionist is often the Shogun's liaison in court, and is thus considered his "left-hand man." In practice, however, he is of the same rank as the other retainers, differentiated only by the nature in which he serves the Shogun.

THE SHOGUN'S RETAINERS

The Shogun fills his cabinet with whatever retainers he finds useful. This varies from Shogun to Shogun, and could be literally anyone the Shogun finds useful, from geisha matrons to court officials, from prestigious samurai generals to lowly ronin. Once elevated into the ranks of the Shogun's personal retainers, they are effectively the same rank as *hatamoto* in a Great Clan, and are all considered equal to one another.

These retainers have two duties: to advise the Shogun in any matter pertaining to their expertise, and to serve him in whatever capacity they are capable. A merchant might help fund the Shogun's military campaigns, while a sensei might instruct his troops. In this way the Shogun sculpts his *bakufu* to accommodate his needs.



Courtier Characters in L5R

In terms of Rokugani culture, the term “courtier” can be applied to any samurai whose current duties are primarily political rather than military or spiritual. Thus, such men and woman may be bushi, artisans, or even shugenja. However, in the L5R RPG the term is most often used specifically for a character trained in one of the Courtier Schools, a character expected to spend a lifetime operating in the field of politics.

Playing such a character poses specific challenges. A bushi’s duties are usually well-delineated: guard a gate, assault a wall, hunt down a criminal gang, win a duel. Courtly duties, however, are often amorphous and rarely have clear boundaries. The courtier relaxing in a tea house may be enjoying a moment of free time, but the acquaintance he makes there or the rumor he overhears can become political currency a day – or a month, or a year – later. There is no place in the Empire, however casual or remote, that is safe from the possibility of social warfare. Any time two samurai are in the same location, politics are there with them.

For players and GMs interested in court-focused plots or campaigns, it can help to first understand what the average courtier does. By “average courtier” we do not mean the influential daimyo who negotiates a treaty between clans, but rather the lower-ranking courtly samurai, equivalent

to a bushi who spends most of his days on uneventful patrols.

There are also a number of social and mechanical considerations that can give greater depth to courtly matters, making such plots more interesting to the players.

The Life of a Courtier

After years in training, Doji Marutomo passes his gempukku and begins to serve his clan as a courtier. Now, truly, he may say his life has begun.

The first question is what form his duty will take. His immediate family is not at all influential – both of his parents have toiled in obscurity their entire careers – and he did not impress his sensei enough to gain any special preference when it is time to assign the new courtiers to their tasks. Most students in Marutomo’s position will find themselves performing tedious bureaucratic duties in remote or obscure corners of the Crane lands, with little opportunity for advancement. Fortunately for Marutomo, though, his uncle once did a favor for Doji Gennai, the governor who administers the major trading port of Lonely Shore City. A well-worded letter secures Marutomo a position in Gennai’s service.

Still, Marutomo’s initial duty is not particularly glamorous. Had his uncle saved Gennai’s life, Marutomo might be a personal secretary to the governor, but the favor was a minor one, and so is its repayment. Marutomo is responsible for arranging entertainment for important visitors to the city: theatre performances, musicians,



riding excursions, and so forth. If he acquits himself well in these tasks, he may in time rise to a position where he will actually conduct negotiations with those visitors, instead of merely assisting those who do.

But the commercial nature of Lonely Shore City means the only visitors there are rich heimin merchants and their samurai patrons. Marutomo hopes for a brighter future than a life of negotiating tariffs and rice sales. To achieve this, he must form connections, find allies, and gain influence with those who can help him.

Foolish courtiers neglect their current duties in pursuit of something better; Marutomo is wise enough not to fall into that trap. He studies the family lineages of the city's samurai visitors, looking for opportunities to add a personal touch. His efforts pay off when he discovers the grandfather of the merchant patron Daidoji Karazu was a painter of some note, proficient in a popular sumi-e style. Marutomo fails to obtain one of the grandfather's paintings, but he finds several others in that style and hangs them in the room where a local geisha will be entertaining Karazu and his entourage. That evening Marutomo subtly maneuvers the conversation until Karazu comments on the paintings, allowing him to display his knowledge of both various sumi-e styles and of Karazu's lineage. Pleased, Karazu invites him riding the next day, leaving a subordinate to take care of an impending trade deal.

Marutomo grew up in a province that breeds horses for the Crane army, and he rides quite well. He manages to keep up with the energetic Karazu, who likes to leap every hedge and stream he encounters. Before Karazu departs from Lonely Shore City, he comments favorably on Marutomo to the governor, encouraging Gennai to bring him along to the next Crane Winter Court.

This is a major coup for Marutomo. No one in his family has ever attended such a prominent event. He knows he may never have another chance like this one; if he is to move up in the world, he needs to make the most of the opportunity.

His lord has of course supplied him with kimono. As a minor secretary, though, Marutomo does not merit anything terribly elaborate, and the clothing he has will not impress anyone in Kyuden Doji. Since his family is not wealthy or influential enough to help him out, and he did not impress Karazu enough to earn a substantial gift, Marutomo quietly borrows money from a heimin merchant he assisted the previous spring. With this he purchases a more stylish kimono: nothing so ostentatious as to be inappropriate for his rank, but much more in keeping with the fashions of high society.

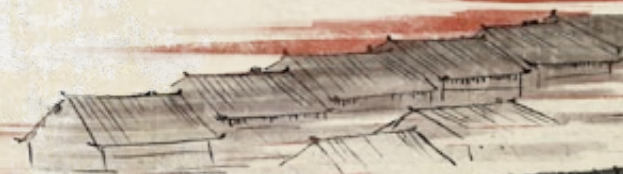
At Winter Court he almost meets with disaster. Careful attention to gossip uncovers a group of young Kakita ladies who often pass by a certain courtyard at a certain time of day, and he arranges a game of kemari there, hoping to impress them. Unfortunately, he trips on the

hem of his robe and makes an undignified spectacle of himself right when the women are passing through. He takes refuge in mocking his own clumsiness, and manages to amuse the leader of the group, who is the daughter of an influential samurai. Her favor means he gains access to a garden where minor courtiers like him are ordinarily not permitted.

Marutomo spends every spare moment he has in that garden (except when the weather drives him indoors). He does not eavesdrop on private conversations, but there is nothing dishonorable in paying attention to what is said around him. One day he helpfully passes on to a fellow secretary that the Phoenix ambassador's diviner said the next afternoon would be an auspicious time for ending conflicts. She passes this on to her own lord, who acts on the information and succeeds in reconciling two samurai who had a falling-out the previous year.

The young lady who noticed him, Kakita Chirumi, was promised in marriage years ago, but her intended was recently killed in a skirmish with the Lion. Marutomo's parents have failed to secure him a betrothal before now, and he has been working assiduously to improve his poetry; a courtly affair with Chirumi blossoms into an actual match. Her family is more prestigious than his, with an estate outside of Shiro sano Kakita; marriage to Chirumi means transferring to the service of her Kakita lord, and Marutomo ends up handling the negotiations for samurai who seek special training as Doji Warrior-Poets.

Now, Kakita Marutomo attends elegant courts and can call on favors from samurai in all the Crane families. He is still in debt to merchants, because the demands of his elevated status always seem to exceed his stipend, but that is hardly uncommon and no cause for shame as long as it is kept out of the public eye. Marutomo has not become a great hero of the Crane Clan, but he has achieved the success he always dreamed of.





Building a Courtier Character

For many players and GMs, building a courtier or other social character is quite simple, relying on a very small number of mechanical elements. Awareness reigns supreme among the Traits, while Courtier and Etiquette are the primary skills. The Willpower Trait (to resist other characters' social manipulations) and the Sincerity Skill run a more distant second. Once those have been covered, the character appears ready for anything.

It is entirely possible to depict social interactions this way, and if your game is focused on other issues (like war between clans or survival in the Shadowlands) or your group has little interest in the elaborate dance of aristocratic politics, there is nothing wrong with keeping it simple. Some players or GMs, though, may want to explore social challenges in more detail, creating situations where it takes more than a couple of key stats to be effective at court. For those people, it can be very helpful to diversify the situation by bringing other Traits and Skills into play.

COURTIERS AND TRAITS

Of the social and mental Traits, Awareness is unquestionably the most important. It is the equivalent of Agility in melee combat, the Trait by which characters will most frequently affect those around them. High Awareness measures the capacity to communicate emotion and intention well, whether in conversation or artistic display . . . but that, on its own, cannot tell the whole tale.

Without Willpower to ground them, characters with high Awareness will be social and emotional weathervanes, spinning to face a new direction every time a breeze blows. This does not merely mean they are easily manipulated, though that is certainly part of it. Someone lacking in sufficient Willpower will also wear

his heart on his sleeve – which in Rokugani society is not merely a political liability, but also a general source of shame. Laughing immoderately at a joke, openly displaying one's hatred of a rival, or visibly wincing at the off-key singing of the daimyo's daughter are all mistakes others will seize upon and use as weapons.

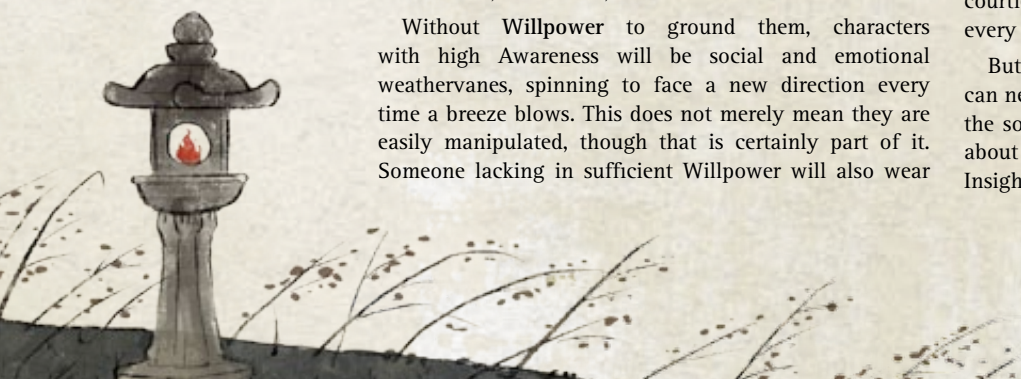
The importance of those two Traits is easy to see, but the remaining pair of mental Traits are also vital. A courtly character has to keep one finger on the pulse of every gathering, which is difficult to do without Perception. No honorable samurai would ever listen in on a conversation behind

a shoji screen . . . but even the Doji or the Ikoma will occasionally sacrifice propriety rather than risk missing out on something vital. And it is not eavesdropping to hear what people say in public, during a large gathering or wandering through a garden; a good courtier should know what the current topics of conversation are, and how people are responding to recent events. Not to mention, of course, the value of Perception in noticing trouble drawing near – whether that trouble takes the form of an assassin with a knife, or a rival intending to tread on one's hem.

Intelligence rounds out the mental and social set. This Trait is often treated as a sort of red-headed stepchild, not worth raising except to increase the Fire Ring. But a character with high Awareness and low Intelligence will be empty-headed, however pleasant she may be to talk to, and will not gain much respect. Conversely, High Intelligence and low Awareness represents a tedious blowhard, inept at sharing his knowledge in an agreeable fashion. However, a courtier strong in both Traits is a treasured resource for any lord. Intelligent courtiers can share fascinating insights rather than making pointless small talk, and are capable of analyzing political situations to predict how they will play out.

The role of Void in courtly life is less immediately clear (apart from the simple ability to add +1k1 to a roll or avoid the penalty of being unskilled). Unlike physical combat or spellcasting, social interactions have few clear-cut rules for the application of Raises. This will be discussed in more detail later, but for now it will suffice to say a courtier also needs the capacity for great achievement, every bit as much as a bushi or shugenja does.

But what of the physical Traits? Theoretically a courtier can neglect them, just as a bushi can theoretically neglect the social and mental Traits. Without the need to worry about Wounds, movement in combat, or mastering kata, Insight is the only direct mechanical benefit a courtier





may derive from raising a Ring. Any samurai, though, is expected to be a well-rounded individual, and a courtier who neglects physical improvement will not gain as much admiration as a courtier who shows strength in all areas. Even apart from that philosophical principle, there are situations where the physical Traits may have direct application.

Stamina is perhaps the most broadly applicable of this set. Some things are nearly universal in human societies, and alcohol is one of them; a courtier who cannot hold his sake will embarrass himself in short order. Whether drink is involved or not, events ranging from moon-viewing parties to secret assignments may result in nights of short sleep, and yawning in the middle of some interminable speech or ceremony the next day could be disastrous.

Because of its role in combat, **Reflexes** is also a valuable Trait to raise. It allows the courtier to practice archery, which is both a dignified display of martial ability (something every samurai should possess) and a good method of staying out of harm's way. Its defensive role can apply to more than just combat, too; there may be times when the courtier needs to dodge a sudden jostle in a crowd or an "accidental" spilled teacup, meant cause anything from embarrassment to a duel. Some kinds of courtly games may also depend more on quick hands than on analytical ability.

Agility can likewise play a role in games such as kemari, as well as dance and other physical types of artistic performance. Although a courtier may prefer to avoid studying weapons, being able to ride a horse well is certainly a virtue for any samurai. Even apart from Agility's direct mechanical applications, characters with high Agility will be admired as graceful in their movements, unlike the clods from the rival delegations.

From a courtly standpoint, **Strength** is unquestionably the least of the Traits. Indeed, in some cases keeping it low may be considered a virtue: a strong character will appear bulky and intimidating, rather than delicate and refined. For most samurai, however, raising it at least a little would be advisable. Weakness is not admired anywhere in Rokugani society.

COURTIERS AND SKILLS

Viewed in isolation, Traits only mean so much, but their relevance becomes clear when Skills come into play. **Courtier** and **Etiquette** are obviously useful, as is **Sincerity** – and some GMs may wish to include a "Flattery" emphasis for the latter, representing the delicate grey area between honest truth and dishonorable lie. However, as noted earlier in the life of Doji Marutomo, a good social character should have more to offer than simply the ability to "be social." There are many ways to incorporate other Skills on a narrative level, but the following section

also contains mechanical suggestions for different ways to apply them in the game.

The other two prominent Social Skills, **Intimidation** and **Temptation**, often seem like the sole province of dishonorable courtiers such as the Bayushi or the Yoritomo. It is important to consider, though, that they can be weapons in any courtier's arsenal, and even honorable samurai will employ them from time to time. GMs also have a great deal of leeway in ruling whether every application of these Skills entails Honor loss. Is it dishonorable to roll Intimidation when delivering a formal declaration of war? Is it dishonorable to flirt in a courtly fashion, with no intention of actually seducing the target? For that matter, even the dishonorable uses of these Skills are not always crude or blatant. A female courtier might pour tea for her opponent during an important conversation, elegantly displaying her wrist as she does so, distracting him from his point. Or she might stare fixedly at him, not so much as blinking, until the intensity of her gaze breaks his focus. She has not openly offered an assignation or threatened to break his kneecaps... but a skilled courtier should not have to do such things openly. Allowing for the occasional honorable use of these Skills encourages players to purchase them... which then makes dishonorable applications a greater temptation.

The three macro skills of **Artisan**, **Perform**, and (to a lesser extent) **Craft** are more social than they may first appear. Obviously their use can win a character some Glory, but they can also win friends. In a society where the meaning of a gift is usually held to be more important than its monetary value, a wall scroll from the painter himself might carry more weight than an equally good painting from a stranger – and a truly good painter will shape his image to flatter or please the recipient. A well-chosen song during an afternoon in the garden cannot be kept and displayed for later enjoyment, but it can





influence the mood, direct the conversation toward a useful topic, or even persuade someone to attend in the first place: "After all, Shiba Ayako-san has promised to sing for us."

Calligraphy plays a very similar role, and has other applications besides. All Rokugani samurai are literate, but not all of them have good handwriting; a request made in an elegant script will impress far more than one crudely rendered or hastily scrawled. The **Tea Ceremony** has the mechanical effect of restoring Void, but its social effect is just as important, if not more so. **Games** are likewise a good way to build social rapport – or to display superiority over a rival. **Lore** distinguishes the ignorant from the well-informed. Even **Divination** can exert an influence on courtly life, as the subtle workings of the stars make certain times auspicious or inauspicious for a given activity, or omens steer a samurai toward success and away from danger. In short, there is no High Skill that cannot potentially find application in a courtier's duties.

Bugei Skills, though less immediately vital, still have their use. Just as bushi are expected to be cultured, courtiers are more admired when they show physical ability. **Horsemanship** and **Hunting** both have recreational applications, as does **Athletics**, and even **Defense** can come in handy avoiding subtle physical assaults (as well as more blatant ones). **Kyujutsu** provides a way to be useful in war without directly endangering one's health, as well as impressing others with demonstrations of skill in court. Even samurai who never intend to set foot on a battlefield may benefit from martial training: not every courtier is important enough to be assigned a yojimbo, and a knife concealed in an obi or a modicum of skill in **Jiu-jutsu** can save one's life – or someone else's – from an assassin.

The remaining Merchant Skills are not universally applauded, but may win favor in the right corners of samurai society: **Animal Handling** among those who keep dogs or hawks, **Commerce** among the Yasuki and similar trading families, **Engineering** among the Kaiu, **Sailing**

among the Mantis or perhaps the Crane. The same is even true of the Low Skills... though of course a courtier must be careful where he displays such abilities.

It is also worth considering that the Skill / Trait pairings listed in the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook are not inflexible. Courtier is ordinarily rolled with Awareness, but a player might instead roll Courtier / Intelligence to analyze the events around him, predicting that an antagonist is setting an ally up for public humiliation. Investigation / Awareness might be a more appropriate roll than Investigation / Perception when the Skill's Interrogation emphasis is being used. A roll of Artisan: Painting / Perception could reveal subtle details of a painting meant to carry a hidden meaning, or subtle flaws that can later be criticized; Artisan: Painting / Intelligence can set the stage for a courtier to impress his host with his knowledge of a stylistic tradition. Such pairings help strengthen the notion that a social character needs to be perceptive and clever as well as pleasant to talk to.

The point is not that a courtier must be skilled in all things. Rather, the point is that success in social matters is about much more than simply "being social" (as represented by the Social Skills). A courtier can win favor from an influential samurai by knowing something about kabuki, or by riding a horse well, or by training a particularly clever dog. A good GM will offer a PC the chance to succeed by arranging situations where those skills are useful – or, conversely, set up challenges that target the PC's ignorance. And because a courtier is more likely to invest in such niceties than a bushi whose life depends so much on his skill with a sword, this gives courtiers an edge within the realm of their expertise.

Handling Social Rolls

Outside of the optional Court Battle rules provided in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, L5R makes no attempt at a "social combat" system comparable to the physical combat rules. For many players, this is ideal; social combat systems all too easily can become a constraint on roleplay rather than a method of facilitating it. But this does mean the burden lies on the GM to adjudicate social conflicts on the fly, instead of relying on clear-cut mechanics. The following sections provide some guidance for GMs who want more depth and a more consistent approach to social conflicts in L5R.

MODIFYING ROLLS

Consider the basic example of one character trying to persuade another to grant a favor. This will in most cases be treated as a Contested Roll of Courtier / Awareness against Etiquette / Willpower. The flaw in this approach, however, is that it makes no adjustment for circumstances – which in reality would greatly affect the odds of



success. “Would you loan me a kimono to wear to the feast tonight” is a very different request than “Will you please champion me in this duel,” and both of those pale next to “Please steal your lord’s private correspondence and make copies for me.” In a non-Contested Roll, the TNs for those requests would vary wildly; why should the same not be true for a Contested Roll? What if the opposing party is a friend, or a mortal enemy, or a person of high Status, or a ji-samurai who should be honored to lend his humble assistance to any request?

Certain Advantages and Disadvantages can affect these rolls, of course, but they work best for characters who are equally moved or unmoved by pleas of all kinds. A character with very little money might be deeply reluctant to lend a koku to cover a friend’s gambling debt, but easily persuaded to talk to a friend’s creditor. A happily married samurai might be difficult to seduce, but easy to intimidate. GMs can obviously adjust static TNs as needed, but they can also make adjustments to reflect conditions on a Contested Roll:

- ❦ Add or remove rolled or kept dice from the active character’s dice pool
- ❦ Add or remove rolled or kept dice from the dice pool of the resisting character
- ❦ Apply a static bonus or penalty (e.g. +5 or -5) to the total of one roll
- ❦ Grant Free Raises, or require extra Raises to be called

And, of course, the GM is always free to rule that some things are fundamentally beyond the scope of a single roll, no matter how good. All the exploding 10s in the world will not persuade the Emperor to say, “Yes, I will gladly abdicate my throne to you, stranger I have just met today.”

Raises are a particularly flexible mechanic, and can be just as useful outside of combat as within it. Their non-combat uses are less clearly defined, so the GM must ask: is the character attempting a more difficult version of the basic task, with an increased risk of failure? If so, Raises are an appropriate way to represent the situation. For example, a PC may ask permission to meet with an important samurai: this is an ordinary Etiquette / Awareness roll, likely against a static TN based on the relative status of the people involved, prior acquaintance, and other such factors. But this ordinary roll with no Raises means the meeting will happen at a time convenient to the important samurai, which might be several days later. If the PC needs to meet with the important samurai today, Raises are required – and if the roll fails to meet the new TN, the target is offended by their pushy behavior and refuses to meet at all. By contrast, Raises are less likely to apply to a Lore roll, because attempting to recall a specific detail does not make the character more liable to forget basic information. It might still be appropriate, however, if the PC wishes to achieve a particular effect with that detail. Calling Raises to remember something

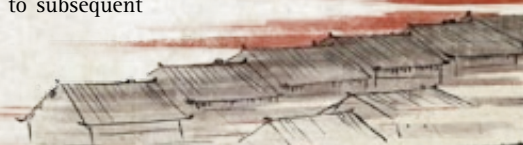


flattering about a samurai’s lineage can indeed backfire if the character misses the new TN and winds up flattering the wrong family.

Because these modifications are always going to be judgment calls on the part of the GM, they do require a cooperative mindset among the players, and may not be suitable for groups that prefer objective and well-defined rules rather than adjudication on the fly. Such groups could use these various methods of adjustment, however, to construct a social combat system for their own use – perhaps using Willpower to create a “Social TN” in the vein of Reflexes and the Armor TN, with Etiquette playing the role of Defense and “stances” to reflect the attitude of the target.

Modifiers to social rolls may be derived in a number of ways, depending on the situation and how thoroughly the players want to involve their other skills in their rolls. Rather than simply making up a bonus, for example, the GM might allow a player to add their Calligraphy Skill Rank to the Courtier roll for a request made in writing, or Perform: Shamisen Skill Rank to an Etiquette roll made to ingratiate oneself with a known music-lover. A more complex approach might involve a character making two rolls: first Calligraphy or Perform: Shamisen against a static TN, and then for each Raise called on that roll, adding +1k0 to the subsequent Etiquette roll, reflecting the extent to which the audience is impressed.

A flexible approach is particularly useful in handling social rolls that risk crossing the line into “mind control.” Many players who fail their rolls to resist Intimidation have wondered whether this means they are now required to do exactly as they are told. In reality, though, people rarely fold outright when they are frightened by someone else. Instead, the intimidation knocks them off their stride: they lose focus, perhaps clinging to their original intent but failing to muster an effective defense. In game terms, this can be represented by treating Intimidation much like Fear, with targets suffering a penalty to subsequent





actions if they fail to resist the attacking roll. Such a penalty might begin at -1k0 for a simple Contested Roll, and increase by an additional 1k0 for each Raise called. Alternatively, successful Intimidation might require targets to call Raises on actions they wish to take afterward, and if they fail to meet those Raises (or cannot call them in the first place), they do indeed give in and do exactly as they are told. In all cases, however, it is still important to bear in mind the scale of control the intimidating character is attempting to exert: browbeating someone into answering an ordinary question or stepping out of a doorway is very different from ordering them to betray a vital military secret or kill their own companions.

Modifications may also be based on in-character preparatory work or even good roleplaying. A PC who researches the interests of a target before selecting a gift could gain one or more unkept dice on the subsequent Etiquette roll, reflecting the benefit of that personal touch. The GM can give a similar bonus to a player who actually writes a tanka for a poetry contest. This obviously gives an advantage to players with the skill and inclination for such things, and might not be suitable for groups where only some of the participants fit that description. However, this kind of out-of-character effort can enrich social scenes considerably, and rewarding it in-character can encourage players to exert more effort on such things.

DIVIDING THE EFFORT

Regardless of modifications, social matters need not – indeed sometimes should not – be handled with a single roll. Not everything deserves to be played through every step of the way, of course; if the NPC is unimportant or the challenge is easy, matters can be abstracted to a single toss of the dice. Seducing another character or gaining appointment to an influential position, however, is rarely a one-shot task in reality, and therefore deserves more attention in-game.

Breaking such actions up into multiple steps provides a number of benefits. To begin with, it offers the chance to bring more than one skill into play: the seduction might proceed through poetry, gift-giving, and the occasional bit of Stealth, as well as Temptation. Also, extra steps create opportunities for other characters to get involved. Perhaps the character attempting the seduction is not exactly a Rokugani Casanova; he needs the assistance of friends, one who writes far better poetry, another who knows where to obtain a unique gift, a third who can provide a distraction while the would-be seducer sneaks through the garden. The scenario will end up taking much more time to play through... but it keeps everyone involved, and likely produces a much more memorable result.

Even when only one character is at the forefront of a social situation, it should not always be the character with the best dice pool. Although it can be tempting to have one character be “the face” and do all the talking for the party, Rokugan is not the kind of culture where samurai can delegate all their social efforts to a more eloquent friend. Aristocratic politics are based on personal connections; an individual is more likely to do a favor for someone he knows than for a total stranger, no matter how eloquent that stranger may be. In fact, sending in a substitute might even be detrimental. The courtier in the party may be a smooth talker, but a Hida daimyo who despises all non-warriors will think poorly of a bushi who sends his courtly friend to ask a favor on his behalf.

Elements of the Political Life

For players and GMs interested in running a more political campaign, it can be useful to play up certain elements of the setting that are not traditionally a focus in L5R. These elements do not have to contradict the canonical setting; rather, they can be seen as add-ons, expansions of topics that are otherwise glossed over. Developing them in more depth can create new kinds of challenges for the PCs to deal with.

POLITICAL POSITION

Status Ranks are a mechanical abstraction, representing the authority and respect granted to certain samurai based on their position in Rokugani society. A bushi appointed as a gunso is not given two Status Ranks by his commander; he is given a title and a set of responsibilities. The same is true in a courtly setting, but the system of political appointments is not as clear-cut as military ranks, and can vary a great deal across the Empire. An influential Scorpion daimyo may deliberately construct a byzantine labyrinth of titles to confuse outsiders, while a low-ranking Hida lord may keep his court to the bare minimum necessary.

Regardless of local specifics, a realm the size of Rokugan cannot run on honor alone. Just as the Emperor is served by a variety of high officials – Chancellor, Advisor, Herald, Treasurer, and so forth – so too are the Clan Champions, the family daimyo, the provincial and city governors, and

so on down the line. The number and prestige of these positions decreases with each step downward, of course; being a karo (chief advisor) to a Clan Champion is a much more significant honor than being karo to the governor of a small backwater city. But such appointments represent both challenges and rewards for player characters in a courtly game. Success in their efforts can mean achieving a coveted title, or at least alliance with someone in a position of influence, while unfriendly officials can be obstacles or antagonists within particular spheres of the court.

The range of possible appointments and their associated Status Ranks is essentially limitless, restricted only by the GM's imagination, but some things are likely to exist in many parts of Rokugan. All clans share the common necessity of enforcing the law, collecting taxes, interacting with other clans, and overseeing trade. Furthermore, while the word "servant" calls to mind an insignificant heimin, at higher levels of society, the households of lords are almost certainly being managed by lower-ranking samurai rather than peasants. The Emperor is unlikely to be served directly by heimin in any capacity; the person who kneels to put on his sandals every morning is a samurai, and honored by the right to approach the Imperial person so closely. (Even the eta who clear away the Emperor's bodily waste are a special lineage, blessed above all other hinin by their exalted position.) A Clan Champion will similarly have an entourage of samurai drawn from the ranks of the buke, who serve him in tasks that would be performed by heimin in the household of a lowly gunso.

Consider the household of a Great Clan Champion. Doji Konotari, hypothetical Champion of the Crane, lives an opulent lifestyle compared to that of a humble ji-samurai. She cannot be surrounded by peasants all the time; that would demean her status. The maintenance of her library, stable, kitchen, garden, correspondence, and wardrobe are all the responsibility of various high-ranking samurai retainers, each of them in turn overseeing lower-ranking assistants and clerks, who ultimately deal with the heimin at the bottom of the pyramid. The Minister of the Clan Champion's Household gives orders to the Overseer of the Wardrobe, who has three assistants responsible for taking care of the Clan Champion's clothing, sandals, and cosmetics, while the overseer himself arranges the creation of new kimono and other items by prestigious samurai artisans. Tasks such as embroidering the silk or removing stains from garments, however, are delegated to heimin who will never see the Clan Champion in person.

These are the sorts of appointments for which courtly samurai compete, because proximity to individuals of power confers power of its own. The actual minutiae of the positions may or may not be good plot material, depending on players' inclination and the nature of the campaign. Appropriately enough, the same is true in-character: a samurai appointed as Minister of the Port may not have the slightest desire to oversee the inspection and taxation of shipments arriving in and departing from the city – but accepts the appointment because of the prestige and advantages it brings, leaving the actual work to ji-samurai subordinates. Such divisions of responsibility create the opportunity for plot: perhaps one of those ji-samurai is pocketing a portion of the taxes, or the minister's neglect has allowed a smuggling cartel to flourish. Or perhaps all is flowing smoothly... but an ambitious PC can slander the minister in court, implying he would be a much better candidate for the position (and for the prestige and advantages it brings).

Such political complexity can be a challenge for the PCs to navigate. Getting something done at court is not a simple matter of finding somebody with a high enough Status Rank and obtaining their help; does that samurai have the specific authority the PCs need? It does no good to ask someone in the provincial treasury for assistance when the characters need permission to use the governor's garden for a dance performance. Not knowing the local hierarchy can put visiting samurai into a maze of traps: that unknown bushi a PC just insulted may turn out to be the city governor's Minister of the Stables. The next time the PCs need to travel somewhere, they may find themselves on foot, or riding the worst nags the city has to offer.



Political positions will not necessarily be filled by characters trained in courtier schools. Many low-ranking bureaucrats will be bushi who have become unfit for military duty, or who are so undistinguished in war that they have been relegated to courtly positions far from the chance for battlefield glory. Others will be shugenja or artisans, or perhaps even not trained in any school at all; samurai from lesser families and vassal lineages are often not granted admission to the clan's schools unless they show exceptional talent.

Digging more deeply into the political hierarchy of the Empire creates a way to distinguish between characters with experience in the courts and characters who merely happen to have high Awareness Traits and a few Social Skills to match. The modifications previously mentioned can apply here, so a bushi will have an easier time identifying and locating an officer in his own army than a visiting shugenja would, while a courtier in his home city has a better chance of knowing or discovering who has responsibility for keeping the list of samurai visiting from other clans. It is, after all, the job of a courtly character to know these things so the wheels of Rokugani society can turn smoothly. Being specific about titles and duties not only creates a more realistic political milieu, it makes the difference between ignorant and savvy characters much more apparent.

MONEY

An honorable samurai has no interest in money... but needs rather large quantities of it all the same.

The tension between these two things can be a fruitful source of drama. While a samurai's lord provides everything he needs, that is not the same thing as everything he wants... and samurai, like all people, are susceptible to wanting more than they have. This sometimes takes the form of obvious materialism, but often the effect is more subtle. A samurai whose personal possessions are minimal may still want to attend a play, enjoy the companionship of a geisha, celebrate a promotion with fine sake, angle for an advantageous marriage, or petition for training in a special dojo – none of which come freely. Rokugan's political economy may be based on gifts rather than cash, but even the most thoughtful of gifts is not conjured from thin air. A samurai with little money is at a substantial disadvantage compared to wealthier peers, and must struggle harder to achieve any goals... or give in to the temptation of dishonorable action.

GMs who wish to explore this conflict can do so without turning *Legend of the Five Rings* into *Legend of the Five Account Books*. A few small additions to the existing mechanics create a framework in which presence or absence of money exerts a palpable influence on the characters and their actions.





The foundational concept is that a samurai lord directly provides those things which his retainers need in order to carry out their duties – food, housing, and equipment – plus a stipend to cover personal expenses. The stipend allows the lord to avoid the nuisance of dealing with every single petty request his retainers might otherwise make; the quartermaster who will readily replace a broken piece of armor would get nothing done if he had to approve every *sake* purchase individually.

At character creation, this stipend is represented by the starting koku included in the School's Outfit. For many campaigns, that is enough. Five koku does not go very far, however, in a game that spans a year or more in character. At periodic intervals – once a year, or twice a year, or once per season, it varies in different parts of the Empire – the lord's treasurer issues the next installment of his followers' stipends. This money should reflect both the status of the follower in question and the differences in wealth between various families and clans. One possible formula is the School's starting koku multiplied by the character's Status, and then doubled. Under this approach, the Doji governor of a Crane city (Status 5, 10 starting koku) would receive one hundred koku in personal funds per year, while a ji-samurai of the Hida would have to get by on a mere six koku per year.

Even without tracking every single zeni the characters spend, the concept of a periodic stipend can guide their actions. For that Doji governor, a pet songbird is an incidental expense, a simple thing to brighten his day or a thoughtful gift for a friend. For the Hida, however, spending an entire koku on a pet would represent a substantial investment – one he likely will not undertake without extremely good cause.

The stipend has ramifications for several other existing mechanics. Because the Wealthy Advantage increases starting koku, its effect becomes magnified at higher Status ranks. By contrast, Daikoku's Curse means the character will never have quite as much money as others of the same rank. (It is unlikely that the lord would issue a smaller stipend; rather, the Disadvantage represents the character being unlucky with money, spending more of it for less return.) Similarly, an Ascetic character should still receive a stipend as usual, but should use it for purposes other than personal comfort: for example, making a donation at every temple he visits. Characters with the Greedy Disadvantage are not directly affected, but when material wealth is a theme in the campaign, bribery becomes a much greater threat to the honor of such samurai.

Several Schools and Paths are likewise based around money and its effects. Yasuki, Doji, Yoritomo, and Kasuga courtiers all concern themselves quite closely with gifts, money, or both; so do Ide Traders and members of the Daidoji Trading Council. Furthermore, the optional Way of the Daimyo rules from the L5R Fourth Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* often involve the flow of koku or other physical resources. Campaigns which include characters trained in such dojo may benefit from developing these matters in greater detail.

What happens when a character lacks money? The ideal Rokugani response, of course, is that he learns to do without, and is a better person for it. But characters in L5R often fail to live up to the ideal.

Consider the hypothetical case of Ikoma Rinmei. She has been promoted to the position of Master Archivist for the governor of Ninkatoshi, but to her dismay, she finds that her increased stipend only barely holds pace with the life she is expected to lead as a prominent courtier. Meanwhile, her younger brother is seeking entrance to the Akodo Tactical School, and while he undeniably has the skill to merit such training, her parents lack the political clout to gain him one of the few coveted spots in the dojo. Rinmei wants to smooth her brother's way by gaining favor with a certain Lion shireikan... but she cannot afford the necessary gifts to impress him.

Rinmei has four basic choices. The first is to go to the governor of Ninkatoshi and ask for money above her usual stipend, or for some item or favor she can offer to the shireikan. She is unlikely to succeed if she goes this route, though, because her brother's admission to the dojo is completely unrelated to Rinmei's duties as Master Archivist. This is something she wants, not something she needs. Her lord will probably refuse, unless she can win his favor first.





Her second option is to try to earn the money in some fashion. She has gained a small amount of renown as a poet; she could attempt to obtain an artistic patron, and use what her patron provides to achieve her goal. (Unfortunately for Rinmei, the shireikan she needs to influence has no interest in poetry.) Gaining patronage takes time, though, and may not happen soon enough to help her brother. Alternatively, she can try to sell copies of her poetry directly – but doing so will certainly cause her to lose Glory for her crass commercial behavior (and perhaps Honor as well, if she feels ashamed of lowering herself in this way).

She may choose to sacrifice her honor instead of her reputation, and obtain money through unsavory methods. Although Rinmei has been trained as a courtier, she – like all true Lion – knows how to fight; she wields a war fan quite well. She could go into the darkened streets of Ninkatoshi and extort or outright steal money from those who have it – most likely rich heimin, since targeting samurai might well get her killed. But this route carries enormous risks, and is highly unpalatable to an otherwise honorable Lion.

Rinmei's final option is to borrow the money she needs. In an aristocratic society like Rokugan's, this is not an uncommon occurrence; indeed, debts of all kinds, monetary or otherwise, are part of the glue that holds the Empire together. Many people will understand her situation and readily offer her a loan. After all, she is trying to assist her family, and surely such an honorable Lion would never default on her debt.

The hazards along this path are less obvious, but every bit as real. Depending on who she goes to for money, Rinmei might find herself in much greater trouble later on. A fellow Lion is the safest choice, but runs the greatest risk of the loan becoming public knowledge – presuming

the other Lion even loans her the money in the first place, rather than lecturing her on material restraint. Samurai from other clans probably have more koku to spare, but this will make her beholden to a Crane or a Unicorn or a Mantis, giving them political leverage over her. A Scorpion will gladly find a way to help her out... but the eventual price will be extraordinarily high.

Rinmei might instead borrow from a heimin merchant or even a criminal. Such loans are not at all uncommon; peasants have no compunctions about grubbing after wealth, which means they can amass quite a lot of it even after paying taxes and fees to their samurai overlords. An influential merchant or criminal leader may actually be far better off, at least in material terms, than most low-ranking samurai. And by offering a loan to a samurai in need, heimin reap all kinds of benefits in places they themselves cannot go.

The Appendix of this book includes a new Disadvantage, Debt, which provides a mechanical way to represent this situation. It is distinct from the existing Disadvantages of Blackmailed and Obligation, though it may overlap with those, or transition from one to the other depending on circumstances; an indebted character may be forced into certain actions to conceal his state, or may offer to repay money with service instead. Debt has both the Material and Social keywords, representing the scorn with which samurai society views the issue of money, and is calculated relative to the character's stipend: a crippling debt for a poor ji-samurai would be sleeve change for a wealthy lord.

Going up in Status can solve a character's monetary woes, but this is by no means guaranteed. Except in the most ascetic corners of Rokugani society, high-ranking samurai are expected to maintain a lifestyle appropriate to their position, and the requirements of that can easily outstrip their means – especially if the samurai disdains financial matters as unworthy of his attention. Once in such a bind, a samurai may go to almost any length to rectify the balance: living in poverty where no one can see, squeezing peasants for extra taxes, or even embezzling funds.

SOCIAL WEIGHT

The standard application of Glory in the L5R 4th Edition RPG is to affect how easy or difficult it is to recognize a given character. However, famous people should carry a degree of social influence quite apart from their personal charisma, and it is possible to reflect this mechanically.

A basic method is for the GM to allow characters to add their Glory Rank to the totals of their Social Skill rolls when influencing others. This can either be a constant bonus or a triggered one, the latter approach





reflecting the character actively throwing his fame behind what he is saying. The bonus can be limited to a certain number of times per session, or triggering it can carry a cost: one point of Glory per use, burning social capital to persuade others. In either case, this bonus clearly cannot apply in any situation where the character's identity is not known.

A similar thing can be done with Status (though in that case a cost-based approach would not make sense). Although a samurai is not obligated to take orders from anyone outside his own hierarchy, it can be much harder to refuse a request or ignore the opinion of an influential lord. This can be represented through roleplay alone, but adding the character's Status Rank – or even twice the Rank – to the total of appropriate Social Skill rolls can make the weight of Status a palpable force in Rokugani life. This might be an appropriate rule for games in which the oppressive force of social stratification is a key theme in the story, with characters struggling to achieve their goals in a system designed to keep them in their place.

Even without mechanical backing, a character with high Glory should be more than merely recognizable. Famous individuals have access to places their less renowned counterparts cannot go: a PC may be merely a Status 1 soldier in the army, but if he recently killed a famous enemy samurai, influential people are more likely to invite him to social events or listen to what he has to say. A clever and ambitious character can parlay these

opportunities into promotions, alliances, and other lasting benefits. In fact, he must do so – or risk being forgotten by the following year, when his Glory has faded and the interest of the mighty has moved on to the next exciting young thing.

Keep Swimming

In conclusion: the life of a courtier is one in which all the ordinary pressures of social maneuvering are writ large, with anything from one's own future to the fate of the Empire itself resting on the outcome. Influence requires constant effort, and one misstep can bring shame that will last for a lifetime. High-ranking courtiers wield a great deal of power... but they are still motivated by the same human pressures as anyone else, from the Three Sins of Fear, Desire, and Regret to the great virtues of Bushido: Compassion, Duty, and all the rest. They can be breathtakingly noble or astonishingly petty, sacrificing themselves for their lord but bearing a grudge for a minor slight from years ago. Stories of life at court will more often focus on subtle action than grand, heroic deeds – but on the other hand, the scope for personal drama is virtually unlimited.



THE ETIQUETTE OF NAMES

Each Great Clan has only a handful of family names – a double handful if vassal families are included. In a society where there are literally thousands of Doji-sans, how do samurai make the necessary distinctions?

In many campaigns, players simply use the given names of NPCs: rather than asking for the whereabouts of Doji-san, the character inquires after Shigeru-san (or, more politely, Doji Shigeru-san). Groups that wish to emphasize etiquette and political complexity, however, may benefit from a different approach by delving more deeply into the use of honorifics.

The familiar -san and -sama suffixes are well-known to most L5R players, but they are only the most common two suffixes that can be attached to a name to show relationship or respect. The following list presents a more complex hierarchy of formality; GMs may adopt it for their own campaigns, or use it as a starting point for a personalized system.

- ☉ -chan: endearment for children or grandparents; sometimes between female friends
- ☉ -kun: samurai of junior status, or young men (and some female bushi)
- ☉ -san: samurai of equal rank
- ☉ -sama: samurai of higher rank
- ☉ -dono: samurai who is a mid-ranking lord (provincial daimyo, governor, etc)
- ☉ -senpai: anyone senior to oneself in one's School or military unit
- ☉ -sensei: one's teacher, or anyone who is an acknowledged master of a skill
- ☉ -ue: family daimyo (including vassal families)
- ☉ -no-kimi: Clan Champions and those of similar status (e.g. the Emerald Champion)
- ☉ The Emperor is not addressed or referred to by name, but rather by one or more of a host of titles: *mikado*, *tenno*, *heika*, and others.

Any of these suffixes can be attached to a family name – or in the case of Clan Champions, the clan name – but they are far from the only options. It is common for terms of rank or position to be used in the same manner as an honorific, or to be paired with an honorific as if they were names, as in the following examples:

Doji Shigeru holds the rank of karo or “minister” in his clan. Because this is a high position, most samurai will refer to him as Doji-sama (Lord Doji). There are many Doji-samas, however, and so to be more specific, a samurai might instead say Doji-karo (Minister Doji) or karo-sama (Lord Minister). This latter is especially likely when addressing him directly, as it is more respectful to use a title than a name.

But there may be more than one Doji at the rank of karo! If so, then Shigeru's responsibilities become relevant. He is the Minister of Ports – not to be confused with Doji Shizuka, the Minister of Records. As such, he might be called minato no karo-sama (Lord Minister of the Ports) or even simply minato-sama (Lord of the Ports). Regardless of which language the players use during the game, attention to the etiquette of names will remind them of the political relevance of the samurai they are addressing – which is a thing that should never be far from their characters' minds.

The same thing is true of samurai who rule over estates, provinces, cities, or other geographical domains. Doji Haruka, the chui-rank commander of Meian Castle, could be Doji-chui (Lieutenant Doji), chui-sama (Lord Lieutenant), or Meian-sama (Lord of Meian). Doji Nobutada, the governor of Itoshii province, might be Doji-saji (Governor Doji), saji-sama (Lord Governor), or Itoshii-sama (Lord of Itoshii). Full-scale political complexity could mean an influential samurai might hold multiple titles at once! At that point it becomes a matter of context and judgment: should the PCs address Doji Shigeru in his capacity as the Minister of Ports, or as the commander of Meian Castle? It depends on why they are speaking to him in the first place. The safest route is generally to use the highest-ranking title, but a military subordinate in the castle garrison answers to him as a chui rather than as a karo, and will address him accordingly.

Employing these variant titles makes role-playing more complicated, of course. But it also lends flavor to the game, especially in a political campaign, and makes it easier to differentiate between NPCs if the game has a large cast. There may be dozens of Doji-samas in attendance at Winter Court, but if a samurai tells the PCs that Minato-sama, Meian-sama, and Itoshii-sama are all in the garden, there will be no confusion as to which lords he refers to.

The Emperor as a Religious Figure

The Emperor is the undisputed highest authority in the Empire of Rokugan. On the surface this would seem primarily a matter of legal and political status, given that Imperial Law supersedes clan law and all land and holdings within Rokugan are ultimately considered the Emperor's personal property. However, there is also a very real sense in which the Emperor is the most potent and religious figure in Rokugan, more significant than even the Phoenix Elemental Council or the senior monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Indeed, this has been true since the reign of Hantei Genji, son of Hantei himself.

Imperial authority over the religious life of the people stems from the divinely-mandated authority of the Hantei line and the original supremacy of Hantei over his brothers and sisters at the dawn of the Empire itself. When the Kami fell to Ningen-do, humanity soon came to venerate them as living gods, and Hantei as their ruler was considered to have the highest divine authority of all. During the reign of Hantei I, he was seen almost as the new focus of Fortunist worship, ranking alongside the Seven Fortunes and second only to his divine father and mother, Lord Moon and Lady Sun. As such, he was considered almost from the beginning to have supreme authority over the faith of the people. It was through this authority that the teachings of Shinsei later rose to official prominence alongside the worship of the Fortunes and the veneration of the ancestors.

It may be noted that Hantei himself was not what could be considered a deeply religiously-minded person. While he found the teachings of Shinsei fascinating and of supreme benefit in the struggle against Fu Leng, and showed great reverence not only to his divine parents but the many Fortunes, he was far more deeply concerned with ruling the Empire he founded – and later with saving that Empire from his fallen brother. Religion was far more of a concern for his brothers Togashi and Shiba, and it was Shiba who recorded the words of Shinsei which became known as the Tao.

All of this changed under the reign of his son, Hantei Genji. Much of what is now accepted as the traditional relationship of the people to the Imperial Throne stems not from Hantei himself but from Genji. Genji ruled for much longer than his father, and reigned during a time of peace and prosperity, and used this time to build up the society and culture of Rokugan into an enduring structure. Most laws, customs, and religious practices in modern Rokugan hail from the early work of Hantei Genji and his aunt, the Lady Doji. And notable among these developments was the establishment of the Emperor as the head of all Rokugani religion.

Where Hantei himself had been an object of the people's worship, his children and descendents were no longer venerated in the same way. However, they carried within them a divine authority that would hold for 1100 years.



The Emperors were not viewed to be gods themselves, but they were seen as carrying a divine spark and ascending to Tengoku after death to join their ancestors in watching over the mortal world. It was Hantei Genji who developed and nurtured this viewpoint, and it was his decree unifying the Tao with Fortunism which officially made the Emperor the final authority over all religious institutions within the Empire. Genji declared that all matters of theological dispute were subject to the ultimate judgment of the Emperor, and issues of blasphemy and heresy thus also became issues of treason. He also established the Imperial power to elevate new Fortunes into Tengoku, an act which further affirmed the ongoing direct connection between the Throne and the Celestial Heavens.

The Emperor as Leader of the People's Faith

The young boy followed his grandfather through the midst of the throng, hand clutching tightly to the elder's wrinkled paw. He was allowed such closeness because of his age – and because of necessity. Personal space came at a premium today. Peasants stood near to samurai in the tightly-packed streets of the capital, their shoulders almost touching. Just a few paces away, a proud Lion stood right next to a pair of tradesmen, showing only the faintest discomfort. The boy had never seen such a thing before.

Their movement through the crowd was slow and painstaking, and the boy struggled to hold on to his patience. This was a special day indeed, and his grandfather had promised him he would see something he might never see again. Still, the thousands upon thousands of people in the square made the promise seem all but impossible.

There was a pause in their progress. The old man looked down at him, smiling with crooked old teeth. "We're almost there, Yuhei-kun. See, I told you we would make it in time. Grandpa always knows best," he added, almost as if he could hear the faint doubts floating in the boy's mind.





"I've never seen so many people in all my life," Yuhei exclaimed, raising his voice above the rumble of the crowd. They leaned against one of the building walls while the old man caught his breath. Just ahead, the boy could make out many more samurai in bright colors, standing close to each other, almost in rows. He realized that beyond them were the walls of the Forbidden City. So many samurai in one place! They could not possibly get close enough. "Are they all here to see her?"

"Aye, Yuhei-kun. They're all here to pay their respects. It is her first Chrysanthemum Festival, and the people would never miss such a chance. May the Fortunes preserve her life forever."

"Your elder speaks the truth, boy," a man's voice rumbled, echoing like broken stones grinding against steel. Yuhei shrank back from the samurai who had appeared next to them, towering over the two peasants. A line of old scars distended the face of one who had seen many battles, and a milky-white eye stared sightlessly at the two of them. "You will never see another like her. Peasant, tell me the lad's name."

"He is Yuhei, o-samurai-sama," the old man stammered. He seemed uncertain whether he should try to prostrate himself in the tightly-massed crowd. The samurai was a Lion, and they were always the most touchy – he knew that. Still, the old samurai seemed a calm sort for all the scars.

"Yuhei-kun, eh? By your leave, elder, I'll give him a boost. He should see this. And today we are all humble servants who bask in the light of her presence."

The old man did manage a bow to that, if not a complete prostration. "Come, Yuhei-kun. Do as the Lion-sama says."

Yuhei almost yelped as he was lifted up and placed upon broad shoulders. A few samurai turned shocked glances at them, but when they recognized the Lion samurai they turned back toward the gates of the city. For a moment Yuhei wondered who the old warrior was to command such respect. But then all such thoughts were drowned out by the sight before him.

Countless throngs of people stood before the gates of the Forbidden City. Above its splendid walls, glistening in the light of Lady Sun, he could barely make out the peaked roof of the Imperial Palace itself. And from within the walls he could hear the fanfare of the approaching entourage.

The gates swung open with a thunderous boom and the crowd parted, drawing back like waves retreating from the beach. An open-topped palanquin emerged, flanked by the most splendid armored warriors Yuhei had ever seen. More soldiers marched before and after it, yet the boy could not help feeling like there should have been many more. "O-Samurai-sama," he said without thinking, "why are there so few with her?" He flushed and gulped as he realized how his words might sound to a samurai.

The samurai did not shout or grow angry. Instead he chuckled very softly as they watched the procession pass by. They had a perfect vantage on the woman seated atop the palanquin. Her robes and garments glowed with the colors of emerald and gold, and a half-circle of golden leaves rested on her brow. She a picture of perfect, almost statuesque beauty, her gaze severe and at the same time serene. She had a sword through her obi, a strange sight indeed to all those present, for no Emperor had carried a sword in living memory.

"She is Hantei Yugo-zohime, boy. She is fearless before all dangers, and none in this world can stand before her gaze as a foe without trembling in fear." The Lion's voice rang with pride and devotion. "Tell me, Yuhei-kun. What do you see when you look at her?"

"It is like ... it is almost like seeing a Fortune among us," Yuhei breathed.

The Lion nodded in approval. The three of them watched as the Empress continued on her way to the ritual of the Chrysanthemum Festival.

Today was a very good day.





The Emperor's standing as a religious figure is in many ways more important to the common people than to the samurai caste. When the Empire faces bad fortune or famine, it is the Emperor whose mercy and benevolence is beseeched – and conversely, when the Empire thrives, the peasants give thanks to the Emperor's compassionate rule. The ordinary Rokugani farmer does not seek the blessings of the Elemental Council or the senior masters of the Brotherhood of Shinsei – whose identity he is unlikely to know in any case. But every peasant knows the name of the Emperor and prays to the Son of Heaven for mercy and surcease.

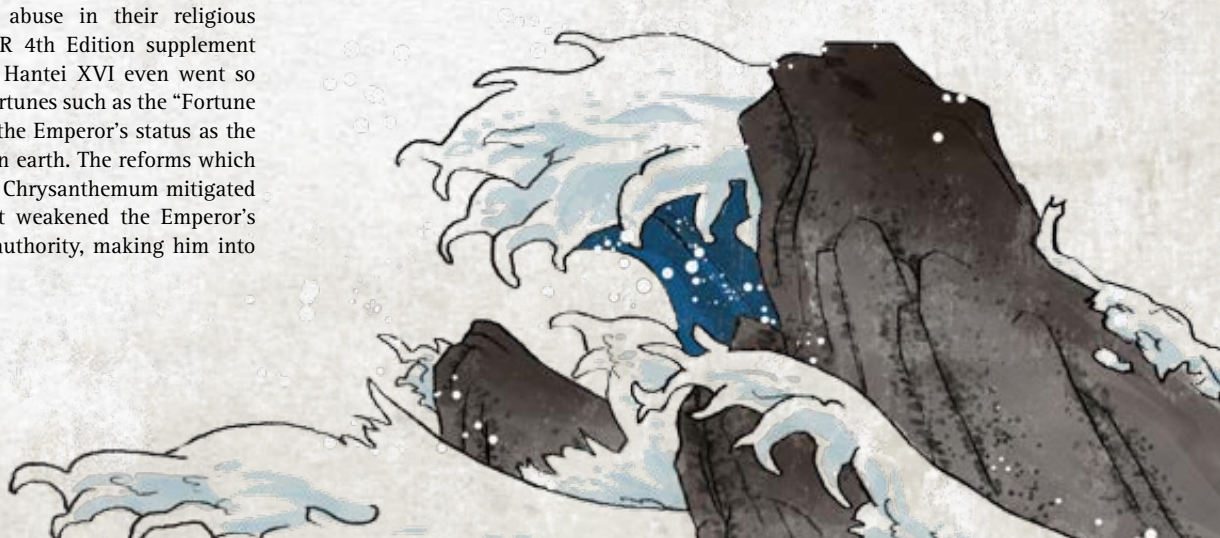
Likewise, the Emperor is the focus of celebration and veneration in almost every major religious festival of the Empire. Indeed, he is expected to perform what is considered the “official” observance of every festival, usually in the Imperial capital or in the host palace during Winter Court. All the other simultaneous performances of these ceremonies around the Empire are seen as reflections of and participations in the primary festival being hosted by the Emperor himself. The most obvious case of this is naturally the Chrysanthemum Festival, celebrating the divine authority of the Hantei line itself and its relationship with the people. However, the Emperor is expected to participate and lead in every major festival throughout the year, and has special roles to play in the Year's End and New Year's festivals. Even Emperors who are personally not inclined toward religious practice spend many hours and days each year performing these religious observances and leading the people of the Imperial capital in their worship.

Due to this constant need to lead the people in formal worship, the Emperor is always at least minimally trained in Rokugani religious theology and ceremony. Of course, traditionally the first son of the Hantei is trained in the Kakita Dueling Academy, limiting his opportunities to study religion; this is one of the reasons the Emperor is so often accompanied by Seppun shugenja, who can serve as spiritual advisors and fill in the blanks in the Son of Heaven's knowledge whenever necessary. This is especially important in later centuries when the Emperor is sometimes a man of weak intellect or lacking in dedication.

Of course, this central religious role of the Emperor can become a terrible spiritual threat if the Emperor is a genuinely dishonorable or corrupt person. Cunning or cruel Emperors, especially the infamous Steel Chrysanthemum, recognized the potential for abuse in their religious authority. As noted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*, Emperor Hantei XVI even went so far as to create blasphemous Fortunes such as the “Fortune of Dung,” seriously damaging the Emperor's status as the undisputed voice of Tengoku on earth. The reforms which followed the death of the Steel Chrysanthemum mitigated this abuse, but also somewhat weakened the Emperor's position as supreme religious authority, making him into more of a figurehead.

Despite those reforms, the Emperor's overall religious status remained largely intact until nearly the end of the Hantei Dynasty. By then, however, the Emperors were becoming increasingly bogged down in the world of mundane politics and the endless demands of the enormous Imperial Bureaucracy. These Emperors found themselves less and less connected to the religious lives of ordinary Rokugani and more and more tied up in inter-clan conflicts. The thirty-eighth (and next to final) Hantei Emperor was plagued with a malaise that divorced him almost completely from the beliefs of the Empire. He still performed as needed, going through the motions of festivals and religious rituals, but the sordid world of politics and religion within Otosan Uchi filled him with a cynical doubt in the truth of Rokugan's faith. To be sure, none of this was directly or obviously visible to most samurai, and was known only partially to those in the highest echelons of the Imperial government. However, this lack of faith was not without larger impact. The religious lives of the people began to take on a rote tone that reflected the falling star of the Hantei themselves. Only in the face of the crisis of the Second Day of Thunder and the emergence of Shinsei's heir did the people's faith fully revive to its former living and breathing aspect.

Indeed, this subtle atmosphere of religious uncertainty made Fu Leng's possession of Hantei Satorii even more insidious. By subjugating the soul of the Emperor himself, Fu Leng was able to subvert the most basic religious authority and structures of the Empire. Anyone who still venerated their ancestors, anyone who remained true to the hope of entry into Yomi or who sought to live according to the ancient teachings of Shintao, was at least partly beholden to his authority, while opposition to the Dark Kami became blasphemy. It took the emergence of Shinsei's heir, the Hooded Ronin, to expose Fu Leng's own threat and blasphemy to enough samurai to allow victory at the Second Day of Thunder. The sheer number of samurai, nearly all of them honorable and worthy men and women, who continued to serve the possessed Emperor shows how fundamental the Emperor's religious role had become and how dangerous the rote observances of the latter-day Hantei monarchs really were. Fu Leng's cunning ploy revealed the nature and weakness of Imperial religious authority at its low ebb.



After the Hantei Dynasty: The Toturi Emperors' Religious Role

Ironically, the Toturi Dynasty that succeeded the defunct Hantei line was itself plagued by considerable difficulties in handling the religious lives and affairs of the people. Arguably, only Empress Toturi II was ever truly trained in her proper religious role (through her contact with the Seppun family), and during her brief and contested reign she did perform many of the expected religious functions of the Throne – actions which were acknowledged and venerated posthumously by her brother Toturi III upon his succession.

Toturi himself was without a doubt a devoutly religious man. In fact, he lived for a time with the monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei before he became Clan Champion of the Lion. This made him both more devout and more scholarly than the average samurai, to the point that his positive attitude toward Shinseism tended to clash badly with his own clan's views. However, his later reign as Emperor was marred by near-constant internal strife and dangerous threats, starting with the aftermath of the Hantei Dynasty's fall and then extending through a series of martial and spiritual struggles – the war with the Lying Darkness, Shinjo's return and her revelation of the Kolat, the death of the Sun and Moon and the ascension

of mortals to take their place, and the War of Spirits with the returned Hantei XVI. These conflicts all brought about serious crises in the faith of the people, samurai and commoner alike. In addition, due to this near-constant state of war, Toturi I was personally all but uninvolved in matters of religious authority, often deferring to lesser agents to act in his stead. In some ways, the religious aspects of Toturi's reign more resembled the reign of Hantei I himself than that of any later Emperors.

Toturi III (Toturi Naseru) struggled with religious matters on a whole different level from his father and older sister. The death of Shinsei's heir led to an Empire-wide religious panic and hysteria, including a strange craze for "enlightenment" which seemed to have little connection to the state of spiritual insight which the Tao described. Naseru himself demonstrated a poor personal understanding of the religious needs of the people, and actually forsook his religious duties in an effort to seek the truth regarding this "enlightenment." Indeed, it was the Keepers of the Elements who proved most important in maintaining the faith of the people and stabilizing Rokugan's religious system once more. Ironically, Naseru's own quest led to his death and the extinction of his line, and later scholars suggested the Toturi line was inherently crippled by the philosophical quandary of the so-called "Age of Man" which it supposedly heralded.



The Religious Role of the Iweko Dynasty

The Iweko Dynasty saw a powerful resurgence of the traditional role of the Emperor as the head of the Rokugani religion. The Heavens themselves re-asserted authority over the mortal world, and it was the mortal Voices of the new Sun and Moon who pronounced Kitsuki Iweko to be the divinely appointed servant of the Heavens and the founder of the new dynasty. With the power of Tengoku directly backing the authority of the Throne, the new Empress was seen by all the people as a religious leader rather than a mere figurehead. Iweko's own attitude furthered this development, since prior to her ascension she had been a deeply devout and extremely pious woman with a personal wish to see the religious lives of the people restored and their connection to the Heavens re-affirmed. Once she became Empress, she made a clear and explicit effort to renew the Throne's religious role in its fullest extent... with one key difference.

One of the most noteworthy and unique aspects of the Iweko Dynasty and especially of its first Empress was her decision to de-emphasize her own humanity and personhood far beyond anything seen even among the earliest Emperors of Rokugan. While the Hantei Emperors eventually chose to forsake their personal names when they took the Throne, believing themselves to be representatives of the Imperial line more than they were individual people, Iweko took this attitude much further. She appeared before peoples' eyes only when strictly necessary, normally concealing herself behind a veil to avoid showing her features to even the most high officials. She did not speak directly to her people at all, rather using the newly-created office of Voice of the Emperor as her mouthpiece. She was no longer Kitsuki Iweko in any sense, but was purely and solely Iweko I, a mortal embodiment of the will of Tengoku, her authority directly tied to that of the Celestial realm.

This approach – the veil, the constant physical separation and distance from the people – was combined with careful and reverent performance of all the religious obligations of the ancient Hantei. The result was an environment of mysticism in which the Empress was seen as a literal 'divine figure' and her role as religious leader was re-invigorated even beyond the original intentions of Hantei Genji himself. Due to the mandate of Tengoku upon her reign, it was generally believed this change was the will of Heaven itself, and thus it was accepted unquestioningly by most Rokugani. In this way Iweko was able to not only hearken back to the original view of the Emperor as the leader of the faithful but also to build upon it, setting the tone of her successors' rule.

The Imperial Bureaucracy and Religious Authority

While the Emperor is technically the religious head of Rokugan, the realities of the Imperial office mean the Son of Heaven cannot spend his entire reign focusing on the religious affairs of the nation. Even highly religiously attuned Emperors would be hopelessly swamped and mired in the endless demands of theology and ceremony if they devoted personal attention to every religious matter deserving of Imperial attention. Thus, the Imperial Bureaucracy steps in to assist the Emperor in managing the Empire's spiritual matters.

Normally, the Emperor's main role within the religious hierarchy itself is to serve as a last line of authority in matters of grave importance or significant dispute. Otherwise, the Son of Heaven's main role is simply to officiate in various religious functions and festivals, serving as a single focus for the triple faiths of the Rokugani people: Shinseism, Fortunism, and Ancestral Worship. Day-to-day religious activities are handled – by necessity – either through the Bureaucracy or by the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

The principle authority of the Bureaucracy in all matters related to faith is a small court in the Imperial Capital – the Court of Religious Affairs and Festivals, technically a subordinate part of the Ministry of Service – which oversees all Imperial festivals and other Empire-wide religious functions. This minor court dates back to the reign of Hantei Genji and was incorporated into the Ministry of Service during the re-organization and expansion of the Bureaucracy in the fourth and fifth centuries. Almost all matters of religious concern pass through its modest hall, and as a general rule every religious edict stamped with the Emperor's seal is created through this court's authority and approval. The court is traditionally run by a Seppun rather than an Otomo, due to the Seppun family's close association with the Empire's religion. The average functionary within these halls is most commonly either an up-and-coming courtier or a bureaucratic veteran with expertise in religious matters; however, it can also be a dumping ground for courtiers or bureaucrats who have displeased their superiors and been condemned to a position of lesser importance. The latter practice is most common during





whether a new shrine might somehow offend another spirit or Fortune in the area, especially when dealing with the sometimes very jealous Greater Fortunes. Furthermore, even if all religious questions can be resolved, there are always political ramifications to building any new shrine, particularly one to a new Fortune or to one of the Great Fortunes. If the Brotherhood has concerns about a new shrine being potentially heretical in some way, this must also be taken into account. These debates can take months, perhaps even years in some cases, and if politics gets deeply involved they may never reach completion.

Political censure is a much less frequent occurrence, and can be merely a delay in approving the paperwork for a religious function, or perhaps even outright refusal to approve of religious activities in a specific area. Most typically, censure occurs when the Seppun (or some other person or organization of power within the Bureaucracy) wishes to make an example of a place or a group which are felt to be spiritually lacking. Unsanctioned warfare between the clans, for example, may draw religious censure, as could warfare that results in damage to religious sites or the defamation of temples. Censure may also be the result of personal political vendetta, just like any other sanction issued by the Imperial Bureaucracy. However, there is always the possibility of a reversal of the ruling by the Emperor if someone is able to appeal the situation to the Throne; thus, the abuse of censure is something which even a powerful lord must be careful about. Barring such exceptional situations, a religious censure is issued as an Imperial Edict and is carried out by the Bureaucracy in the same manner as any other such Edict.

Because of the near-constant needs of the Empire's religion and priesthood, the offices of this court are always open, even in the winter when the Emperor and his entourage depart from the Imperial City. During that season the staff is considerably lessened, but there are always at least a few functionaries present to handle daily operations. Indeed, this court is known to be one of the more consistently efficient elements within the Bureaucracy as a whole. Paperwork filed here is usually not held longer than expected unless something goes wrong or a higher authority becomes involved.

As noted, the leader of this court is usually a Seppun, and the lower-ranking Imperial membership is typically a mix of Otomo and Seppun. The Seppun consider it an honor to serve in this particular branch of the Bureaucracy, while the Otomo take a more mixed view. An Otomo is never assigned to be in charge of the Court of Religious Affairs and Festivals; if a suitable Seppun is not available, the court will be placed in the hands of a suitable member of the Kitsu, Isawa, Agasha (later Tamori), or Asahina families. (In the twelfth century, the Moshi family begins agitating to have one of its number assigned to head this court, though initially without success.) Most heads of the court serve for a minimum of five years, and some have been known to serve for thirty years or more, devoting the fullness of their lives to the work.

eras of low religious piety or harmony, and in such times it is considered a suitable chastisement for skilled veterans deemed too valuable to be expelled from the capital but who are in need of a dose of humility. In more religiously harmonious times (such as the reign of Iweko I), this practice is avoided, since it is felt that to regard this court as a punishment is impious.

The day to day affairs of the Court of Religious Affairs and Festivals are almost painfully dull. It is this court which reviews the paperwork on building or repairing shrines, investiture of senior leadership within the major temples of the Brotherhood, assignments and promotions of Imperial shugenja, and the planning and budgeting for all the Empire's major festivals. None of these things can happen without Imperial authority at least being aware they are occurring. Generally, these actions are actually taken prior to the paperwork being reviewed and are simply approved after the fact, due to the near-impossibility of knowing what is happening and what is needed throughout the Empire's religious organizations. Because almost all of these functions are standard and mundane (and required for the daily operation of the Empire's shrines and temples), they are generally pushed through the system with little fuss other than the time it takes for each report to be reviewed by each advisor and functionary familiar with the current Imperial Law on the subject.

Exceptions to this pattern are found primarily in instances of political censure or in cases of the establishment of new temples, shrines, or religious orders. The latter in particular always require considerable debate and review. Experts from the Isawa (and the Kitsu for shrines devoted particularly to ancestral worship) are called in for consultation, along with senior members of the Brotherhood from the relevant sects. Locations of current shrines relative to the proposed new shrine must be considered, and the court discusses whether or not there are already enough shrines in that region devoted to that particular aspect of the Imperial religion, or whether or not a local spirit truly merits individual worship and veneration. A particular focus of investigation will be



Imperial Religious Authority and Clan Shugenja

The relationship between the Emperor and the shugenja of the clans is both close and often somewhat tense. Shugenja are priests who serve the Empire's religious needs, but they are also samurai who are answerable to their individual lords. This creates a subtle but real conflict of loyalties.

In theory, at least, all clan samurai are servants of the Emperor and must place his authority above all else, doing everything in their power to accomplish the will of the Throne quickly and thoroughly. Naturally, reality is far less clean-cut. The clans all tend to place the interests of their own lands and people first, and they are all well aware that the Emperor can be swayed by politics just as they can. Thus, while supposedly service to the Emperor is the same as service to one's daimyo, in reality most clan shugenja place the needs of the clan first unless forced to do otherwise by direct Imperial attention. (Of course, this does not mean the clans consider the Emperor unfit to rule... not unless they want to be disbanded and stripped of their power and lands. The era of the Clan Wars, when Hida Kisada spoke openly of his contempt for the Hantei Emperors, was a unique time that marked the end of one dynasty and the founding of another, and even in that war-torn and disintegrating Empire the words of Kisada were exceptional.)

This conflict of loyalty means the priestly authority structure in each of the Great Clans is always somewhat more complex and tenuous than in the rest of the clan. They are subject to the Emperor's rulings regarding theology and religious festivals, of course, and this can be a source of friction when their own clan leadership takes a view which is not fully in harmony with that of the Throne. But their role truly becomes difficult when it involves military service in times of war. If an inter-clan war takes place which the Emperor views with disfavor (but is unwilling to issue an outright Imperial edict or send the Imperial Legions to enforce the peace), he can obstruct it by issuing a religious censure forcing the priesthood to oppose the needless conflict. This can easily force shugenja to stay out of the conflict completely, putting them in direct opposition to their lords. Any daimyo seeking war with his rivals must keep this reality in mind.

A few specific shugenja families have their own unique religious relationships with the Imperial Throne, due to their expertise in particular aspects of the Empire's faith. The Kitsu and Isawa in particular hold great weight when Imperial authority forms policies on religion or magic. The Isawa are widely regarded – even by their enemies – as the preeminent authorities on both veneration of the Elemental kami and on the proper worship of the Fortunes. The Elemental Council considers itself second only to the Throne as a religious authority, and this (rather prideful) view often puts the Council into conflict with the Imperial Bureaucracy and the office of the Jade Champion. No matter how much any other clan might wish to question this supremacy, the libraries of the Isawa, their pre-eminence

UNCONVENTIONAL GROUPS AND IMPERIAL RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

The Court of Religious Affairs and Festivals is – like all elements of the Imperial Bureaucracy – an inherently conservative organization, deeply hostile to new religious orders or heretical ideas. Thus, families and groups which fall outside of Rokugan's normal religious system – things like the Five Rings Heresy in the sixth century, the Unicorn Clan's worship of the Lords of Death, or the twelfth-century Spider Clan's veneration of the Dark Fortunes – do not meet with much support or approval from the court. Indeed, after Empress Iweko I is forced to recognize the Spider Clan in the late twelfth century, the Imperial Bureaucracy goes out of its way to throw every possible obstruction in the way of that clan's blasphemous religious practices.

A particular source of consternation for the court is the so-called "Order of the Spider." This monastic order is technically granted legitimacy along with the rest of the Spider Clan, and immediately begins sending occasional delegates to petition the Bureaucracy for greater representation and the construction of new shrines. The court fought against these petitions with all the bureaucratic weapons at its disposal, pointedly resisting even the most minor involvement of the Spider Clan in religious affairs without the Empress' express command. While Iweko did occasionally step in and lightly reprimand actions deemed too aggressive toward the Spider, most of these stalling tactics were allowed to continue with impunity.

During that same era, the Court of Religious Affairs and Festivals showed an unusual exception to its resistance to unconventional religious groups. In the aftermath of a somewhat infamous winter court in Shiro Moto, a member of that family who was also a priest of the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang was appointed to be the head of the court. Moto Qulang managed to serve for almost four years before stepping down by Imperial command – apparently due to an organized whispering campaign against him.





THE BROTHERHOOD AND THE MODERN DYNASTIES

The monastic orders' relationship to Imperial power changed notably during the reign of Toturi I. Toturi's upbringing was heavily influenced by the Brotherhood, since he spent many of his formative years training and living amongst monks after his father exiled him. After he ascended to the Throne, Toturi made a number of attempts to support the efforts of the Brotherhood, as well as investing significantly in rebuilding the shrines and temples destroyed by the Clan Wars. Much of what he did went unnoticed by any but the monks, but they were grateful for his compassionate generosity. As a result, the short-lived Toturi Dynasty generally had an unusually positive relationship with the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Without that relationship, it is likely that the "Enlightenment craze" which swept the Empire in the reign of Toturi III would have done far greater damage. After the fall of the dynasty, the Brotherhood constructed many shrines dedicated to the memory of Toturi and his children.

Oddly, the divinely appointed Iweko Dynasty endured a more complex relationship with the monastic orders despite their initial welcome of a ruler chosen by the Heavens themselves. This problem was mainly due to Iweko I's reluctant and pragmatic recognition of the Spider Clan, resulting in the official legalization of the heretical Order of the Spider and Order of Venom. Soon after, the equally heretical teachings of Fudo re-emerged, and many in the Brotherhood saw this as an inevitable result of tolerating the vile Spider teachings. More than one monk sought to bring these concerns to Iweko to be addressed, but the innumerable demands on the new Empress's time meant she rarely had the opportunity to speak to them. Increasingly, they found themselves shunted off to lower-ranking bureaucrats. Where this truly became problematic was in the establishment of new shrines and monasteries for the Spider orders and in addressing where, when, and how their teachings would be allowed within the Empire. The Empress' proclamation of official clan status for the Spider effectively hamstrung any resistance from the clans, leaving the Brotherhood without political allies. As the years passed, the Brotherhood increasingly perceived a rift with the Empress despite her Divine mandate, and since her two sons showed little immediate concern for the problem posed by the Spider, they increasingly feared this rift would not soon be healed.



since the pre-history of the Empire in the worship of the Fortunes and the study of the Elements and the kami, all of these make them unique. The Elemental Council is also generally considered to be the chief authority on matters of orthodoxy and blasphemy in Fortunism, and it is generally assumed the Emperor will heed their advice unless there is a strong reason not to do so.

The Kitsu, likewise, hold a similar level of understanding, respect, and authority in the practice of ancestor worship. However, unlike the Isawa, the Kitsu's authority is not so universally respected, since the practice of worshiping the ancestors was already near-universal before the family was ever founded. The Kitsu cannot claim to have invented ancestor worship in the way that the Isawa invented the veneration of the kami. Thus, although the Kitsu follow more rigid and detailed practices of ancestral veneration than most of the other clans and families, their authority does not extend beyond their borders in the same manner as with the Isawa. The Kitsu hold the ear of the Emperor not through political influence or the command of raw power, but rather through ongoing respect. In particular, the unique status and gifts of the Sodan-Senzo permits considerable latitude in commanding Imperial attention and agreement, so long as the matter pertains to the worship of the ancestors.

Imperial Religious Authority and the Brotherhood of Shinsei

The relationship of the Imperial Throne to the Brotherhood of Shinsei is an ancient one, dating back to the first century and filled with respect and honor... along with plenty of reluctant toleration and occasional fatal misunderstanding. On the one hand, the monks who serve in the many orders of the Brotherhood are widely venerated and beloved by the common people, and the Emperor's status as head of Rokugan's religion means he is considered their leader. On the other hand, their membership are all non-samurai (either commoners or former samurai who have embraced a new life), and they hold a unique position in the Celestial Order, one that is to be respected yet at the same time is technically beneath that of all samurai. Monks cannot ever claim the political authority of samurai, yet they can offer correction to samurai even in situations where it would otherwise be considered shameful or borderline blasphemous. This curious relationship creates a constant tension that always permeates any contact between the Emperor and the monastic orders.

One of the most curious aspects of the monastic orders in the modern Empire is that their members are permitted, under limited circumstances, to correct and criticize even the Son of Heaven in matters of theology. This status was established as an outgrowth of the reforms after the reign of Hantei XVI, reforms which gave the Brotherhood the ability to delay and perhaps prevent an Imperial appointment of a new Fortune; it is a truly singular power, and one which monks must use with extreme caution. Given their status as non-samurai, the Emperor has no

restraint against executing a monk who offends him – although if he does too readily, his reputation will suffer, especially with the common people. As such, both sides of the relationship have something to lose, and thus monks only speak out when they feel there is truly no other choice. Additionally, the rarity with which most monks ever see a high functionary of the Imperial court, much less the Emperor himself, makes this scenario a curiosity as rare as any known to Rokugan. (It may be noted that prior to the Steel Chrysanthemum's reign, there was no social recognition of a monk's ability to offer theological correction to the Emperor... but monks still did it, more than once. They usually paid with their lives.)

Beyond this unusual aspect, relations between the Emperor and the monks of the Brotherhood are usually positive, and seldom become mired in the sort of political conflicts and nightmares of divided loyalties that can occasionally crop up with clan priests. The Brotherhood almost always takes a stance of neutrality in all political and military conflicts between the clans, taking action only when sacred ground is profaned or the suffering of the common people become too profound to ignore. It is the view of Fortunist monks that the Fortunes do not favor one clan over the other, while Shinseist monks believe intervening in the affairs of men leads one to becoming trapped in worldly concerns rather than the search for Enlightenment.

There are exceptions to this principle of neutrality, however, and these exceptions always complicate the relations between Imperial authority and the monastic orders. The most obvious exception is that individual monks rarely, if ever, feel themselves bound in their personal actions and teachings by the larger authority of the monastic orders (this is why new sects are constantly appearing). Although the Brotherhood does have some measures for internal censure, unless a monk's teachings are proclaimed a False Path it can be extremely difficult to prevent him from continuing to spread his ideas. After all, temples, shrines, and monasteries are often far removed from each other and belong to many different sub-organizations within the huge body of the Brotherhood. Communication is slow at best, and the Brotherhood has long followed a policy of embracing many different paths to Enlightenment, so individual monks or small groups can often pursue their own ideals in contravention of both established tradition and even Imperial decree, leading to all manner of interventions in Rokugan's larger political and historical affairs. Most of the Empire's famous heresies, such as the Five Rings path and Fudoism, started or spread in this way.

Heresies aside, the most frequent reason for dissenting monks or even entire monastic orders to cause problems for the samurai caste and the Emperor is, as already noted, the Brotherhood's concern with the state of the common folk. While the cynical might argue this concern is merely the Brotherhood's self-interest, in reality this is not the case. The monastic orders receive their daily rice in any circumstance short of a major famine, and tend to be largely ignorant of the Empire's economic affairs (which they consider both unpleasantly worldly and irrelevant to their spiritual concerns). However, almost all monks embrace a path of deep compassion and brotherly concern for the plight of the peasantry, due to not only the teachings of Shinsei but also the creeds of Fortunes like Ebisu and Hotei. To see the people unduly suffer for insufficient or invalid reasons is unacceptable to most monks. Their typical response is to try to mitigate the suffering with personal aid and selfless work, but in extreme situations some monks have been known to take more extreme or even treasonous actions, such as training peasants to defend themselves (whether against bandits or against arrogant samurai), or even joining in on peasant revolts. Such actions bring the monks into direct conflict with Imperial authority, and can have severe ramifications.

Even leaving aside such extreme actions, the overarching concern of the Brotherhood with the needs of the common man is a perpetual source of conversation with the Emperor. Outside of this topic, the Brotherhood only becomes entwined in Imperial affairs when some theological controversy grows so large as to demand their involvement (such as the aforementioned Five Rings heresy). Outside of these two topics, most occasions for meetings between monks and Imperial officials concern relatively mundane matters such as construction and maintenance of shrines.



Special Authority Figures

No discussion of Rokugani Imperial politics and its relation to religious practices can be complete without addressing the various unique individuals who exert influence over such matters at different points throughout history: the Jade Champion, the Keepers of the Elements, the Grandmasters of the Elements, the Oracles of Light, and Shinsei's heirs. All these positions have exerted direct influence on the Emperor in matters of religion and magic (which in the Rokugani view are one and the same), and thus all of them have exerted significant political power. Because of the unique natures of their positions, this influence has usually brought tension, confusion, and conflict with it.

The Jade Champion is perhaps the most easily discussed of these positions, since the office directly serves the Son of Heaven, but at the same time its history is quite controversial in relation to the religious authority of the Emperor. The office in theory represents an aspect of the Emperor's personal authority and is invested with considerable power, expected to serve as a pro-active force comparable to the Emerald Champion (albeit with a far more focused field of authority). The Jade Champion is expected to preside over all matters of law pertaining to the wielding of magic, blasphemy, heresy, religious

conflicts, and spiritual purity, serving where the Emperor cannot be expected to go. After all, no Emperor has ever been a shugenja, and so none have been trained in the arts required to carry out such tasks. The Jade Champion is supposed to be the Emperor's foremost aide and adviser in handling all magical and spiritual problems and threats. He also has the power to appoint Imperial magistrates to carry out his duties across the Empire, magistrates who act with nearly complete autonomy in the same manner as Emerald Magistrates, and can even call on at least one Imperial Legion. So long as the Emperor does not assign the Jade Champion a specific task, he has nearly unlimited power and resources to pursue whatever tasks he might judge appropriate to protecting the Empire from the threats which are his responsibility.

Of course, this tremendous power and authority can also be a tremendous temptation. By contrast to the Emerald Champion, who has many responsibilities and duties constantly weighing on his shoulders, the Jade Champion has many opportunities to do as he sees fit with his office and resources. Some take it upon themselves to research some major magical project, justifying it as being for the good of the Empire as a whole. Some pursue an aggressive spiritual "cleansing" of samurai ranks throughout the Empire. So long as the Champion's actions do not draw the attention and censure of the Emperor, he can act





with impunity, and some have been known to make their office into a terrorizing inquisition. Of course, all of this is deeply offensive to the Phoenix Clan's Elemental Council, which has always seen the Jade Champion's duties and responsibilities as more properly their own. The Phoenix have frequently waged political warfare against the Jade Champion, seeking to discredit his actions, marginalize his power, and undermine his influence. Indeed, from the mid-seventh through the early twelfth century they succeeded completely, keeping the office vacant throughout that time. No other Imperial office has ever been so successfully marginalized by the Great Clans, which only goes to prove the inherent tension which the Jade Champion creates.

The relationship of the Emperor to solitary figures of religious authority is if anything even more complex than his relationship to his own Jade Champion. This is clearly seen in the phenomenon of the "family" called Naka. The name "Naka" is bestowed only on rare occasions in Rokugan's history, granted to a shugenja whose supreme mastery of both magic and theological insight earns him or her the title of Grandmaster of the Elements. In some cases this title may be passed directly from an existing Grandmaster to a favored student, but far more often a Grandmaster dies without an "heir" and the title disappears from Rokugan for generations at a time.

The Grandmaster may be anyone, of any clan. The Naka often have significant ties to the Phoenix Clan, but once they are recognized they do not claim a specific clan and traditionally adopt a pose of neutrality towards all inter-clan conflicts, military or political. In some cases this neutrality is a thinly veiled fiction, while in other instances it is genuine and quite pointed, even to the extent of rejecting the slightest allegiance to former colleagues. All those who earn the name of Naka are shugenja of phenomenal power, possessing a mastery of Elemental magic and the ways of the Spirit Realms that transcends the understanding of even the Masters of the Phoenix Elemental Council. To be sure, some Naka have been more magically potent than others, while others have shown themselves more knowledgeable in the ways of the Fortunes and Spirit Realms. Nevertheless, all of them have been revered by the whole populace as possessing incomparable spiritual and magical greatness.

In eschewing clan ties, the Naka are technically ronin. However, only a fool would ever actually refer to a Naka as a "ronin" in the normal sense of the word. More accurate would be to describe them as being on a permanent shugenja version of the 'musha shugyo' (warrior's pilgrimage of learning), having embraced a calling that transcends the importance of individual loyalties and alignments. Of course, the unaligned Naka have no real right to expect to meet with the Emperor or to act with any kind of authority beyond whatever respect their name will give them. However, no sane Emperor will fail to show the utmost respect and reverence to a Naka if they should ever meet one. Thus, while the Naka are very rarely seen in the Emperor's company, their words are generally afforded great weight, and they are capable of influencing

the Emperor's decisions on magical and spiritual matters with relative ease. Some Naka in history have abused this influence and sought political power, but most have not. What has been noticed is that all of them are difficult for the Emperor to refuse. Unless he is deathly ill, the Son of Heaven will always grant an audience for the Grandmaster of the Elements, whether out of respect for their wisdom or from fear of their power... or perhaps a combination of both.

Many of the things that can be said of the Naka can also be said of other unique spiritual and magical figures in the Empire's history, such as the Keepers of the Elements, the Oracles of Light, and the Voices of the Obsidian Moon and Jade Sun. However, a deeper complication rises up with each of these individuals that does not exist with the Naka: none of these people are appointed by human institutions or human decisions. The Naka is selected by a predecessor or by the acclamation of the Empire's shugenja. These figures, however, attain their positions through supernatural events or the direct appointment and authority of some Celestial power. This kind of authority lies completely outside of the norms of the Empire's political hierarchy, creating unusual problems whenever it interacts with the Emperor's earthly authority. While a god might bow before the Emperor out of respect, in the order of Heaven the Fortunes stand well and thoroughly beyond the authority of individual Emperors.

Most of the time, such unique figures with authority from a Celestial power simply do not interact at all with the Imperial Bureaucracy or the Emperor himself. They are aware of the Emperor and vice versa, but unless they are called upon directly, there is an unspoken understanding that they have different roles to play. They will do what they must, and the Emperor will do what he must, and the Heavens' will is enacted as a result. The vast majority of the time these individuals kept themselves aloof of both clan and Imperial politics, and in the case of the Oracles they usually operate almost entirely away from the sight of mortal men. They are realities, not political chips to be counted upon or potential rivals for authority to be opposed. However, when these individuals deign to come directly into the presence of the Emperor, their words are generally heeded immediately and as quickly as possible. Conversely, if the Emperor actually summons such persons for counsel or wisdom, the summons is almost never ignored. After all, an Emperor who is wise enough to seek the Heavens' guidance is an Emperor who the Heavens' agents will respect.





Shugenja: Conduits of the Spirit Realms

The role of shugenja in the Empire can be difficult to describe. Obviously, they lack any true “real-world” counterpart in ancient Japan, and they also do not fit into traditional fantasy game categories like “wizard” or “priest.” Many Legend of the Five Rings role-playing campaigns de-emphasize shugenja, monks, and the nature of spiritualism in Rokugan, focusing instead on themes of conventional “samurai drama” and portraying all spiritual figures – even all samurai, period – as following the exact same belief structures and philosophies. However, this portrayal sells shugenja rather badly short, and diminishes their complex social and religious role down to being mere spell-casting samurai. This chapter attempts to correct this error and allow players and GMs to depict shugenja with the full detail they deserve.

In Rokugan, just as in our own world, religious ideas are actually quite varied. Although the Empire officially recognizes only one unified religion, it is actually divided into several primary belief structures: worship of the kami (the little spirits of nature which exist within nearly every living and non-living thing); worship of the Fortunes, both Lesser and Greater; worship of the founding Kami of the Great Clans; worship of ancestors, both immediate

predecessors and the prominent clan ancestors; and finally the veneration of the Tao of Shinsei. Each of these avenues of Rokugani faith is powerful in its own right, yet all of them intermingle so closely with one another that they often appear inextricably linked. It is easy to understand why outsiders to the world of L5R – and for that matter even the uneducated within the world of Rokugan itself – may have a difficult time separating these structures of worship. However, in fact each of these systems of worship differs from the others in many ways. Also, samurai, monks, peasants, and even eta approach the spiritual realm from many different viewpoints.

Samurai approach the spiritual world most strongly through the worship of the ancestors, for every samurai household contains an ancestral shrine, and every honorable samurai believes he must maintain the name and repute which his ancestors passed down to him. Most samurai also venerate the Fortunes and the founding Kami of their clan, but they spend relatively little time praying to such beings compared to their daily rituals at their family’s ancestral shrine. Typically, a samurai will pray to only one or two specific Fortunes who are associated with his duties – sailors praying for the mercy of Suitengu, for instance, or warriors seeking the blessings of Bishamon. By contrast, very few samurai pay attention to the worship of the Elemental spirits, and in most clans the Tao is only lightly studied (the Dragon and Phoenix being the major exceptions).



Peasants and other lesser folk focus their worship primarily on the Fortunes, and are far more likely to pray regularly and fervently to many different Fortunes depending on the events in their lives. Farmers may seek the blessings of the Fortunes of Rice, Soil, Honest Labor, and several others besides, while praying for Osano-Wo to spare their lands from storms and for Ekibyogami to spare them from disease. Peasants seldom have the time or education to study the subtle philosophies of the Tao, and have only the vaguest idea that something called “Enlightenment” exists; to them, the ways of Shinsei are best left to monks and priests. The common folk do have a strong awareness that the world is filled with Elemental spirits, but they see these spirits as forces to be respected, feared, and propitiated.

Monks, by contrast, focus on self-reflection, meditation, and the philosophy of their path along the Celestial Wheel. Thus, they generally minimize any worship of the ancestors and spend great amounts of time studying the Tao and interacting with the Elemental spirits, whose powers they learn to master through mystical Kiho. Even when a monk serves in a worldly capacity, advising a daimyo or other secular master, their approach is to use their understanding of the spiritual world and ancient philosophy to relieve the evils of the mortal realm.

Shugenja stand apart from all others in the way they interact with Rokugan’s spiritual world and religious beliefs. Where monks are solitary and pursue a personal understanding of the supernatural world, a shugenja is part of the samurai caste, living and serving alongside other samurai. Moreover, because they can hear and speak the language of the kami, shugenja are uniquely aware of the spiritual worlds at all times. They pray not only to Fortunes and ancestors but also directly to the little spirits of the world, beseeching their aid. Shugenja understand events and problems which lie far beyond the scope and perceptions of the average mortal, and interpret these events for the rest of the Empire. They perceive the will of creatures the average mortal does not even know exists. They speak to the dead, to gods, to the souls of every living and non-living thing. And they are never, ever alone.

Shugenja and Faith

“The spirits are in all things, and thus all things need to be honored.” – Kitsu Suki

Rokugan is a deeply spiritual and superstitious domain, and rightly so. Even the lowliest eta sometimes has experience with the supernatural, and the power of the spirits and Fortunes influences everyone’s life. Unhappy Earth kami can ruin crops, angry spirits devour wayward souls, the ancestors look down in judgment and offer their blessings, and reincarnation is known to be real. Religion is a matter of knowledge, not faith, and only the most jaded or outright insane person will refuse to acknowledge the existence of the supernatural world. But while everyone in Rokugan is in some way religious, it is shugenja who are the primary means through which the samurai caste (and the more fortunate members of the lower castes) are able to understand and interact with these spiritual forces.

Study of the Little Teacher and his Tao is the main realm in which shugenja and monks overlap; however, there is a significant difference in approach between the two. As mentioned above, monks tend to internalize their philosophy and express it in ways that allow others to do the same. Each monk seeks his own path to Enlightenment and tries to help other individual souls find their own paths. For shugenja, on the other hand, the Tao is simply another way to understand the world, both the mortal realm and the immortal spirits. Shinsei’s teachings open the mind to the connections between this realm and others, and shugenja use the wisdom of the Little Teacher to open themselves to new possibilities and to comprehend the otherwise incomprehensible world of the kami. Where a tidbit of the Tao might lead a studious bushi to understand the dictates of his master, a shugenja will use the same knowledge to understand the motivations of a spirit or even a Fortune. All this being said, out of all the aspects of Rokugani faith, the Tao is the one which both shugenja and monks teach and use similarly. Both seek to open the minds of their students to the strangeness of the world and how to truly comprehend it.

Worship of the ancestors is an aspect of Rokugani religion where shugenja overlap with the rest of the samurai caste, merely understanding the same faith in a more comprehensive way. While a bushi may know that his ancestors are watching over him, a shugenja can sometimes directly perceive and interact with that ancestor. However, one major difference between shugenja and others is that a few shugenja can actually manipulate and even control the spirits of the past. A bushi may pray with the utmost sincerity and devotion, but it is rare indeed for an ancestor to answer the call. (Although when they do, the results are often spectacular and usually end in the samurai’s death.) But shugenja can whisper prayers that reliably draw an ancestor’s gaze, granting them blessings, guidance, and knowledge of the past. In rare cases, usually within the Kitsu family of the Lion Clan, shugenja may even enter the realms of the ancestors themselves to meet the spirits in person. Shugenja thus can serve as conduits between the past and present, calling on the wisdom of men and women long dead for aid in current situations. In the same manner, shugenja are the ones most often contacted by the ancestral spirits when they need to deliver a message (usually one of dissatisfaction) to their descendents.

The realm of faith in which shugenja most often stand alone is the worship of the kami, the Elemental spirits which suffuse every part of the mortal world. Although monks are capable of channeling the power of the little kami into their mystical Kiho, shugenja are the only group of people capable of directly interacting with the world of these spirits. Everything in Rokugan contains these spirits, and it is these elemental “creatures” (for lack of a better word) which shugenja pray to in order to craft the supernatural effects which they call “spells.” No other people in Rokugan can do this, and it is the shugenja’s understanding of the kami which truly sets them apart from all other people.





Of course, shugenja also venerate the Fortunes and the founding Kami, and indeed are capable of understanding and interacting with them far better than anyone else in the Empire. Many shugenja spells are enhanced by incorporating prayers to one or another of the Fortunes, and some shugenja have even traveled into the spirit realms and met these divine beings in person.

The importance of all these spiritual activities cannot be underestimated. Without shugenja, understanding the will of spiritual creatures is next to impossible, and without that understanding the wrath of these beings can be quite dangerous for a province, village, or clan. The actions of a single mortal can potentially endanger an entire region if he angers a kami, a Lesser or Greater Fortune, or – the Heavens forbid – a founder of one of the Great Clans. It is the shugenja who interpret the will of the spirits for the local lord, ensuring that problems are resolved before they turn into crises. Indeed, if no shugenja is present (or the only available shugenja is inept or impious), dire consequences may occur – crops may be ruined, plague or infertility can befall whole generations of families, and hostile spirits or evil kansen may be drawn to the troubled domain. At the very minimum, a shugenja is required to understand the blessings and curses of such beings, so as to advise the local lord on what must be done to properly venerate and appease them.

Shugenja do not merely know that other Spirit Realms and the Celestial Wheel exist, they interact with them on a daily basis. They truly know how harmful a stain upon the soul is to the cycle of reincarnation. They understand the damage of a broken vow and how a person will be punished for such actions in their next life. They are also aware that their powers and “spells” beseech and manipulate living creatures, beings with intelligence (albeit alien intelligence) and will. The little kami, the Fortunes, the spirits of other realms, the ancestors, all of these are beings with their own thoughts and goals, their own failings and weaknesses. To use them for a base purpose, without just cause, is not only disrespectful in the extreme, it is blasphemous. Thus, honorable and properly trained shugenja always use their abilities with humility, tempering their power with piety

and devotion. A shugenja who forgets these lessons may soon find his power diminishing, perhaps even departing him altogether.

It is worth noting that the martial and violent nature of the Empire of Rokugan stems in large part from the power of otherworldly beings. Mankind was a vicious creature prior to the fall of the Kami, but nearly every aspect of the Empire’s modern warrior culture was developed by the founders of each Great Clan and their first mortal followers. These Children of the Sun and Moon gained their knowledge from their supernatural heritage (and in the case of Hantei himself, from direct interaction with the Celestial Dragons in Tengoku). Controlled violence, the hierarchy of the caste system, enmity toward otherworldly corruption... all of these proceed from the will of the Kami. And it is the shugenja who continue to uphold that will in the modern age.

Practical Magic: Usage of Spell and Ritual

“These rituals and preparations are not ‘wasting time,’ my lord. Without them we may gain nothing at all. The spirits are fickle if they are disrespected.” – Asahina Kiyota

Despite the theological purposes behind any shugenja’s duties, the primary means by which they perform them is through the use of the special prayers commonly referred to as “spells.” All Great Clans possess at least one family line which regularly produces shugenja capable of beseeching aid from the kami, the Fortunes, the ancestors, and other powerful spirits. These spells are expected to be used for the greater good of their fellow samurai. Moreover, besides the direct power of spells, every proper shugenja is trained in dozens of religious rituals which help maintain the spiritual purity and balance of the Realm of Mortals.

Descriptions of the most common religious rites can be found in other books of the L5R 4th Edition line (most notably the supplement *Emerald Empire*, Chapter 8). Detailed here are the ramifications of success and failure when utilizing these well-known rituals.

Shugenja tend to focus their energies on the samurai caste; after all, samurai are rare and are considered to have reached a higher point along Celestial Wheel of reincarnation. Each newborn samurai child undergoes a ritual blessing at birth, the exact details of which are specific to the clan. Likewise, at each major landmark of the samurai’s life, shugenja performs complicated rituals to draw the favor of benign spirits and banish the enmity of hostile ones. At a gempukku, at a wedding, before and after major battles, preparations for major events and ceremonies, at retirement, and finally at samurai funerals – each step of life is marked by a shugenja performing the appropriate rites.

The effects of success in these rites are rarely directly noticed. Normally, success means the spirits are appeased and take no action, offering neither blessing nor curse. However, when a shugenja is especially thorough, skilled,



or devout, or enjoys special favor from a supernatural being (things represented in the game mechanics by Advantages such as Great Destiny, Chosen by the Oracles, etc), the power of the blessing ritual can manifest in a more obvious way, either temporary or (very rarely) permanent.

Negative effects are also rare, but can definitely occur if a samurai fails to undergo the proper rites, a shugenja bungles the ritual or shows disrespect to the spirits, or some other dire effect intervenes to sow disaster. An unhappy ancestor or the curse of a Fortune are terrible things to experience. As an example, consider a shugenja offering a blessing at a funeral, seeking to aid the soul in his journey from this world to the next... except the shugenja is a cursed ronin, a man who has often shamed himself with drink and failure of duty. He goes through the motions of the ritual, but his heart is not in the words, while his mind is only on his next drink. The spirit of the dead man grows wrathful at this blasphemy, but directs his ire not at the shugenja, but at his family who have allowed such a man to oversee the ritual of death. The family members find themselves haunted by a wrathful spirit, bringing great misfortune on them until they can find a way to correct the error.

The power and role of “spells” is more obvious, direct, and practical than that of rituals, but even so, no shugenja considers his prayers lightly. To simply call upon the kami every time there is a minor problem or inconvenience is to disrespect their role in the Celestial Wheel. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why shugenja are used sparingly on the battlefield, lest they anger the spirits by abusing their powers. (In game terms, it is also part of the reason why there is a limit on how many spells a shugenja can cast in a day.) It takes both a tremendous effort of will and tremendous religious understanding to properly summon forth the kami and to shape them to a desired result. Doing so haphazardly or without reverence may draw the wrath of the supernatural realms, manifesting in anything from a brief magical backlash to a serious decline in the shugenja’s ability to cast spells.

The Other Worlds

“I have walked in the fields of Yomi, and spoken with the soul of Matsu Hitomi herself. Do you think I fear any mortal threat?” – Kitsune Kumiko

In any discussion of Rokugani religion, it is important to realize that in the world of Legend of the Five Rings, the supernatural is real. Gods – the Fortunes and Kami – are quite real and frequently manifest in the mortal realm. There are worlds beyond the mortal realm and each has its own rules, denizens, and powers. The afterlife is real – the souls of the dead pass into Meido and are judged for every action taken in their mortal years. Their crimes, victories, sins, and virtues are weighed by Emma-O and their souls are punished appropriately, then reincarnated through the Celestial Wheel to resume their journey toward Yomi. Every object in the mortal world contains Elemental spirits whose actions influence everyone’s daily life.

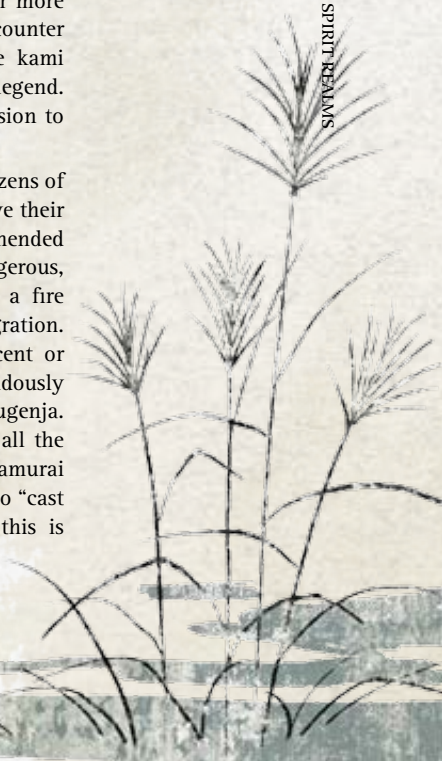


And shugenja perceive all these other worlds, interacting with them on a regular basis.

When it comes to the Spirit Realms and the afterlife, shugenja alone serve as the conduits through which the supernatural is understood and properly venerated in the mortal world. Shugenja are unique in their ability to channel the forces of the Celestial Wheel. The Kitsune understand the maniacal desire of a Spirit of Slaughter from Toshigoku and can help guide its violence away from the mortal realm. Toritaka see the Hungry Dead of Gaki-do and understand how to exorcise them. Kitsune see the mischievous animal spirits of Chikushudo and can make them into friends and allies. All of this is barely even understood by the rest of the Empire; indeed, many ordinary Rokugani do not truly understand that these other realms even exist.

As for the little kami, the Elemental spirits native to Ningen-do, shugenja alone truly understand that they are not merely hidden creatures, out of humanity’s gaze, whose wrath must be avoided. Shugenja know the spirits live amongst and around humanity at every moment in daily life. Each and every thing is bound to one or more Elements and almost all of them have kami. To encounter or communicate directly with one of these little kami without the aid of a shugenja is so rare as to be legend. Indeed, the will of the kami is beyond comprehension to one incapable of speaking their language.

All supernatural beings – the little kami, the denizens of the Spirit Realms, the ancestors and Fortunes – have their own agendas. They desire for their will to be comprehended and followed. Their wishes may be selfish or dangerous, such as a Slaughter Spirit seeking bloodshed or a fire kami who craves to ignite a destructive conflagration. But regardless of whether their goals are beneficent or hostile, whether their purposes are minor or tremendously important, they can only be truly understood by shugenja. Shugenja are the arbiters, the mediators between all the worlds and spiritual realms. Thus, while other samurai tend to prize their clan’s shugenja for their ability to “cast spells” (manipulating and entreating the kami), this is





AN EXAMPLE OF A SPIRITUAL THREAT TO THE EMPIRE

In the current storyline of the L5R collectible card game, there is a perfect example of the important nature of a shugenja's duty juxtaposed with its dangers. A shugenja of the Isawa named Nairuko delves into matters of astrology in an attempt to determine the best time for her and her Moto husband to conceive their first child. However, it is not long before Nairuko makes a startling discovery: the bloodline of the Moto carries a residual spiritual affliction, possibly an after-effect of the infamous "Moto curse" from prior generations. Nairuko researches the matter for weeks before presenting it to the Jade Champion (who is also a Phoenix). The Elemental Council, the Voice of the Masters, the greater hierarchy of the Phoenix, and the Jade Champion himself all question her research with great attention, but ultimately conclude she is correct. They decide the information must be shared with the Empire as a whole.

Dissemination of this knowledge throughout the clans immediately before Winter Court leads to a major war between the Unicorn and Phoenix, since the Unicorn refuse to accept that their bloodlines are spiritually corrupted. Lives are lost, bonds shattered, marriages annulled; Isawa Nairuko herself loses her husband. In mere months the entire Empire is turned upside down, all because of one diligent shugenja's astrological research.

As can be seen with this example, the importance of such supernatural research cannot be overstated. The political and social ramifications of such things can be far-reaching and chaotic, but this does not absolve shugenja of their duty to find and reveal vital information. Indeed, failure to do so is tantamount to a yojimbo failing to protect his charge, a courtier unwilling to speak in defense of his clan, or a general refusing to do what is necessary to win the day.



really only their basest and most mundane purpose. In truth, it is only by comprehending the will of the spirit world that mortal man can fulfill his destiny within the Celestial Order, and without shugenja this would be all but impossible.

Shugenja-themed Story Hooks

The following section offers a selection of adventure seeds, in the usual Challenge/Focus/Strike format, based on themes of supernatural problems and the various roles of shugenja.

MAN ON FIRE

CHALLENGE

In the province of a miserly daimyo, the crime of arson is on the rise. Within a few weeks, three major fires have destroyed a barracks, a food storehouse, and a small ancestral shrine. The daimyo believes the fires to be the work of an unhappy populace and has cracked down on unrest while increasing taxation to make up for the losses. The populace, meanwhile, is stricken with superstitious fear over the mysterious fires and the daimyo's apparent lack of concern, and is increasingly likely to erupt in violent panic. One or more PC shugenja are sent to the province to help investigate and discover the source of the trouble.

Focus

Investigations reveal no obvious arsonist and remarkably little in the way of direct leads. However, the PCs learn that the first fire did not occur in the barracks but in the home of the daimyo's former karo, a particularly devout man who has written many treatises on the spirits and kami. Thorough investigation can ascertain that the karo credited his intelligence and creativity to the blessings of the kami of Fire, and maintained a personal shrine to the Element of Fire within his own home. In fact, he regularly made offerings to the shrine in the form of rare and expensive paper on which he wrote his innermost thoughts.

STRIKE

The daimyo possesses the Disbeliever disadvantage, and this led to conflict with his devout karo. He was furious when he learned his karo was wasting expensive paper on such a triviality; a fierce argument ensued, with the karo not only rejecting his lord's criticism but even making the shrine public: "Perhaps the blessings of this little kami will spread throughout your domain, granting all the clarity of fire." Furious at his subordinate's defiance, the daimyo ordered the man to immediately commit seppuku. After his death, the karo's house and shrine were put to the torch... and the little kami of Fire which lived in the shrine grew terribly angry.



The angry kami has been drawing other Fire spirits to the region, and together they have caused the fires in the province. Its power and anger continue to grow and soon it will be igniting anything possible, perhaps even the clothing and hair of those it deems unworthy. Ultimately, the PCs will have to find a way to appease the angry spirits of Fire without shaming the local daimyo.

UNWANTED INSIGHT

CHALLENGE

One of the PCs is recalled to the home of his lord with no stated reason. When he arrives, the lord bequeaths to him the title and station of a karo (honored adviser), along with all the rewards and benefits such an office holds. If asked for his reasons, the lord stays: "Something potent has been glimpsed in your soul and I believe your insights will be of utmost use." Over the next few weeks, the lord comes to ask the PC for advice on all important matters, but especially his opinion of visiting guests. The strange behavior continues indefinitely, with the lord unwilling to explain. (The GM may wish to continue running the campaign normally, but periodically have the PC recalled to offer advice.)

Focus

Eventually, some of the PC's advice proves exceptionally useful and brings prosperity to the entire region. The lord orders the PC to cease all other activities and come stay in the castle to advise on all subjects, even going so far as to dismiss other long-standing advisers and rely on the PC in all things. Soon, rumors of the PC's supposed supernatural gifts begin spreading widely; there are even stories that the PC has the gift of prophecy and can sense the will of the Fortunes. The lord develops a powerful reliance on the PC, drawing enmity from former allies and entangling the PC in politics and intrigue.

STRIKE

The lord has experienced several dreams in which he is told that the PC has been gifted by the Elemental Dragon of Void with the power of prophecy. These dreams are so convincing that the lord called on the PC's advice, and the success of the PC's early suggestions have convinced the lord of the absolute truth of his dreams. Most recently, another dream has told the lord that the PC can prevent his downfall and defeat... but only if kept close at hand. The lord has become superstitious and paranoid, refusing to let the PC stray from the castle.



The GM must decide what caused these strange dreams and whether or not they are true. If they are false, what outside force is manipulating the lord, and what about the strange coincidences of the PC's advice being correct? Conversely, if the dreams are true messages from the Fortunes, how will the PC's gift of prophecy continue to manifest itself, and will the PC truly be able to save the lord from a future disaster?

PREEMPTING SISYPHUS

CHALLENGE

A local magistrate has lost his son to madness, or so he claims.

Recently, a ronin shugenja passed through town, paying for food and lodging by offering blessings to the local populace. During his stay, the magistrate's son came to visit and the two held long conversations about the nature of the world, the Celestial Wheel, and the afterlife. Days later, after the ronin shugenja departed the town, the young man seemingly went insane: he now spends each day carrying boulders from the base of a hill and carrying them to the top, placing them at the site of an ancient and abandoned shrine. After meditating at the shrine, the boy then rolls

the boulders back down the hill and begins again. When asked by his father what he was doing, the young man at first did not answer at all, but finally said: "I am praying to this ancient kami to intercede on your behalf in the next world. With enough prayer and action, this kami of earth will speak for you in the halls of Emma-O's domain. Your spirit will be cleansed of all sin and wrongdoing in advance and you shall reincarnate instantly, gifting this world with your presence once more."

No matter how hard he tries, the magistrate cannot convince his son to cease his strange activities and meditations. Nor can the magistrate fathom what sin his son thinks he has committed to require such bizarre preparations before his death. As a result, the magistrate now believes the ronin shugenja who passed through the town placed a curse upon his child; he reaches out to anyone (such as a shugenja PC) who can end the curse and restore his son's sanity.

Focus

Investigation will be difficult. The father knows little and is grieving. To question the son, the PCs will have to wait with remarkable patience – though aiding him in his "task" may encourage him to speak more readily. (Conversely, showing impatience will meet with a



complete lack of cooperation.) If one or more of the PCs are shugenja, the boy will be far more likely to open up to them; regardless, the PCs should eventually learn about the boy's conversation with the ronin shugenja.

The ronin convinced the young man that time spent in Meido, the Realm of Waiting, may be preempted by self-punishment in this world... but few are willing to spend their mortal lives going through such punishments, even for the sake of their own souls. The young man, a devout and impressionable soul, idolizes his father and considers him one of the greatest souls ever to be born. A combination of the ronin shugenja's convincing ideas and the young man's veneration of his father has led him to conclude he must spend his life in self-punishing labor and meditation so Ningen-do can enjoy the return of his father's soul as soon as possible.

STRIKE

How will the PCs convince the boy that his acts are at the least unnecessary, and quite possibly ultimately harmful to the father who worries for his child? Of course, it is possible the ronin shugenja was telling the truth and has hit upon a way to shorten the duration of a soul's stay in the afterlife. However, it is equally possible the ronin was manipulating the impressionable young man, perhaps in vengeance for some grudge against the father, or that he really did curse the boy.

In the end, if the PCs do nothing, the father will eventually try to track down the ronin shugenja and kill him for "cursing" his son. Will that end the son's self-imposed task or cause him to redouble his efforts as payment for his father's latest sin?

LAMENT OF THE SEA

CHALLENGE

An artisan from a coastal province becomes widely known for the beauty of his singing. His sonorous gift is said to soothe even the Heavens themselves, and his glory attains such heights that his daimyo is able to use it to arrange a political marriage with a far-off lord. The match will increase the standing of both domains, and the singer is the key to its success. Unfortunately, on the journey up the coast to the other lord's home, the ship is lost with all hands. Soon after, rumors reach the daimyo's court: a haunting lament is heard coming in with the tide, a lament in the dead singer's voice. Shugenja (PCs and others) are called in to investigate the rumors.

Focus

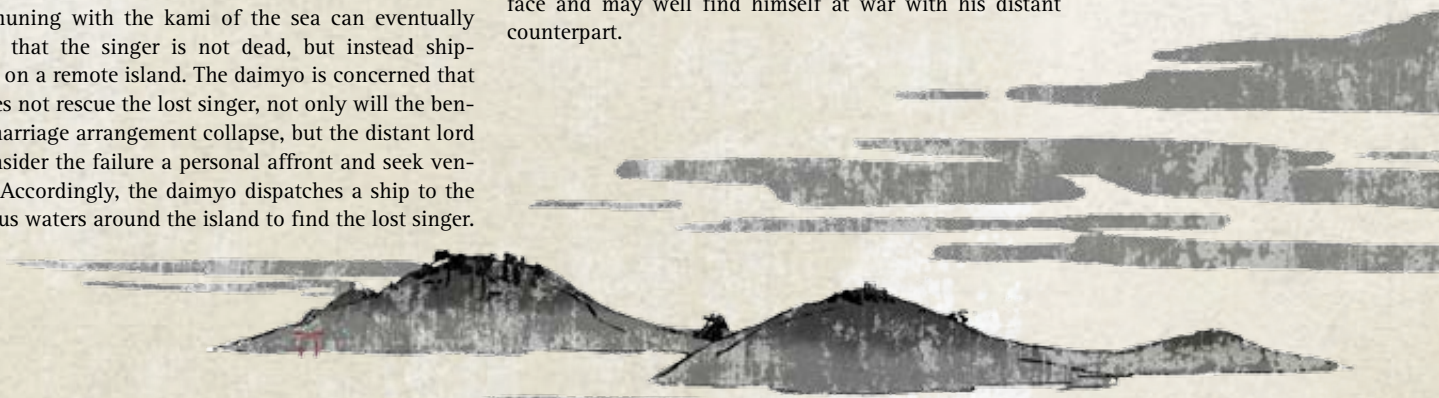
Communing with the kami of the sea can eventually discover that the singer is not dead, but instead shipwrecked on a remote island. The daimyo is concerned that if he does not rescue the lost singer, not only will the beneficial marriage arrangement collapse, but the distant lord may consider the failure a personal affront and seek vengeance. Accordingly, the daimyo dispatches a ship to the dangerous waters around the island to find the lost singer.



STRIKE

The singer does not want to leave the island, for he is now entranced by a beautiful apparition – a manifestation of Isora, Fortune of the Seashore, wrathful and temperamental as the wind. She was entranced by the singer's voice when she heard him singing from the bow of his ship, and sank the vessel so she might savor his voice all to herself. Around the island her mood is calm and peaceful, the winds and tide not disturbed while she listens to his songs. For his part, the singer has realized he has found the greatest purpose imaginable – personally soothing and venerating a Fortune.

The PCs will have to both reach the island (against opposition from Isora's power) and find a way to convince the man to return with them – and to convince Isora to let him go. If they fail, the local lord will lose tremendous face and may well find himself at war with his distant counterpart.





"I see." Shigeru nodded politely while he searched for the right words. "I... do not want to doubt the honor of any of the noble warriors who fought for the Emperor, my lord, but isn't it possible they were just telling stories? For entertainment value, perhaps?"

Toku shrugged again. "Perhaps... but I would say many samurai in the Empire have never heard of the Monkey Clan. Does that make us a story, too?" He smiled. "Or perhaps a truth waiting to be found?"

"Only time will tell, my Lord," was all Shigeru could say.

Lost Minor Clans

"Eight Great Clans and fourteen Minor. What an age, when men can raise themselves so high!"

"Fourteen, my lord?" the adviser offered. Shigeru often found himself in the uncomfortable position of politely correcting his Clan Champion. It was unavoidable, given that Toku, the first ruler of the Monkey Clan, had once been a commoner. His soul might have been elevated to samurai status by the new Emperor, but there remained many things for him to learn.

"Of course." Toku raised an eyebrow. "Did I say something strange?"

"Well, my lord," the adviser coughed. "Perhaps I am mistaken, but I only count nine. Ourselves, of course. The Fox, the Wasp, the Centipede, the Sparrow, the Badger, the Dragonfly, the Hare, and the Tortoise."

Toku seemed genuinely surprised. "Have you never heard of the Shark Clan? Or the Salamander Clan?"

"I..." Shigeru was at a loss for words, which was a rare occurrence. "I'm sorry, my Lord. I can't say that I have."

"Oh. I thought they were well known." Toku shrugged.

"Have you... your pardon, my lord, but have you ever met a member of these clans? Or any other that I don't know of?"

"I can't say that I have. But I heard of them from other samurai, back when I was part of Toturi's Army."

Rokugan is a land with a long and complex history, during which many lines of samurai have risen and fallen. Previous books in the Legend of the Five Rings 4th Edition RPG line have covered many such groups of samurai, including the Great Clans, the Imperial families, many Minor Clans, and even ronin families. This chapter, however, offers something different. What follows is a collection of new Minor Clans, most of which have never been described before, and none of which exist in the "canon" version of Rokugan.

Whether those Minor Clans exist in your own campaign is entirely up to the GM. They have been designed to have minimal impact on Rokugan as a whole, allowing them to be easily added or removed from any specific campaign. Adding new Minor Clans to your game can offer a variety of options, from additional character choices to potential new antagonists for the PCs to oppose. They can also be introduced as historical examples of older Minor Clans which were destroyed. To help make them easier to integrate to any campaign, we have intentionally kept some of the details of these clans vague, such as the exact date of their creation (or possible destruction).

Without further ado, we present to you: Rokugan's Lost Clans!

The Bee Clan

"No, no. No need to involve Hachi-san over this matter. I see now that you are right: my work is indeed inferior to yours." – Ikoma Oichi

According to the records of the Hachi family, the Bee Clan was created during an Imperial Winter Court – one which, like many others, took place in Kyuden Doji. Doji Hachi was a minor courtier of her family, but was known for her keen eye when it came to fashion or the arts. Many feared her criticism, for she held everyone to the highest of standards and would verbally assail any work which presented even the smallest of flaws. This gave her quite the formidable reputation, and the Crane Clan



often made use of her skills to crush its rivals in public. As a result, Doji Hachi was asked to arbitrate between two artists, Bayushi Sezuko and Kakita Dorai, competing in ikebana floral compositions. Hachi was informed by her clan leadership that she was to declare Dorai the winner and shame Sezuko for the flaws of her work. However, when the time came for Hachi to deliver her judgment, she realized Sezuko's arrangement was actually superior to Dorai's. After only a moment of hesitation, Hachi launched herself into a passionate speech describing the struggle between beauty and honor within her own heart, and declared that she could not betray beauty even if it cost her place within her clan. Moved by her sincerity, the Emperor declared Hachi had not betrayed the Crane Clan, for she was in fact the Champion of her own Minor Clan. Hachi chose the bee as her symbol, and changed her name to Hachi Dorai, to honor the Crane artisan who had been slighted by her judgment.

Unwilling to let the incident become a permanent stain on their reputation, the leadership of the Crane Clan decided to allow Hachi Dorai to retain the ancestral lands of her family, a small valley in the northern Crane lands, and even permitted her to recruit other Crane samurai to her cause. The Scorpion, pleased with the result of Dorai's decision, also allowed her to recruit from their ranks. However, Dorai proved as demanding with samurai as she was with works of art, and only recruited three courtiers of the Crane Clan and a single Scorpion, Bayushi Sezuko. Coincidentally, the five original members of the Bee Clan were women, and as a result many thought the clan would disappear after one generation. But Dorai had retained the political savvy for which the Doji family was known, and arranged marriages for herself and all her new clan-mates which ensured they would remain within the Bee Clan. Thus, while the Bee Clan remained very small indeed compared to other samurai families or even to most Minor Clans, its future was not in question.

LANDS OF THE BEE

The lands of the Bee Clan comprise a single small valley, surrounded by the lands of the Doji family, in the northern part of the Crane territories. The borders of the valley are never clearly defined between the Crane and the Bee, and the border is virtually unguarded due to the good relationships between the two clans. The Bee Clan's small territory is blessed with a warm, enjoyable climate and a number of highly productive beehives – though whether these inspired Doji Hachi to choose the insect as her symbol, or were brought in afterward to match the name she had already chosen, remains a matter of debate. Regardless, the sale of honey ensured a basic level of prosperity for the small clan. In the larger scale of things they would never influence the Rokugani economy, but each member of the Bee Clan always enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. The small peasant village which occupied much of the valley was a fairly happy place for peasants, for the relative wealth of the clan meant they were unusually well cared-for. However, samurai from other clans rarely visited the tiny stronghold which came to be known as Hachi no Tani, for to do so would only mean exposing oneself to all forms of criticism.

The Bee Clan has always lacked the resources to build a palace, and early on secured a military alliance with the Crane which negated the need for a fortified castle. Thus, the samurai of the Bee Clan live in small but richly decorated individual houses, grouped according to which individual founding member of the clan they are descended from. A few samurai do patrol the village, but this is mostly a ceremonial duty since the area around it is kept safe by the forces of the Crane Clan.

CUSTOMS OF THE BEE

The Bee Clan is a unique Minor Clan in that it was not born out of an act of bravery or honorable self-sacrifice, but out of an impassioned art critique. The samurai of the clan seek to emulate their founder and capitalize on the fact their status as a small, unimportant Minor Clan makes them a neutral party in others' eyes. In fact, it becomes fashionable for the lords of the more prominent courts to invite a single Bee Clan samurai to act as an arbiter of artistic matters. Despite the tension one might have expected given the origins of the clan, the Crane are in fact the main patrons of the Bee in this regard. While the Bee never overtly show favorites while delivering their critiques, there is no denying the Crane are often the true masters of their arts. Similarly, the Scorpion are some of the Bee's closest allies because they knew the word of a Hachi samurai carries both honesty and impartiality, things few ever associate with the Scorpion themselves. To be declared the superior artist by a samurai of the Hachi family is a clear sign to all that one's skill is undisputed. Even more rewarding is to receive no negative criticism whatsoever from a Bee critic, since they show no mercy when reviewing anyone's work and hold everyone to the highest of standards. (Of course, what this means is that many samurai also do whatever they can to avoid having a Bee adjudicate a contest.) As for the Bee themselves, they care little whether their services are called on or not so long as they are invited to court. However, woe to those who think their art can avoid the attention of the Bee Clan, since they maintain extensive correspondence with each other and their allies throughout the year, and seldom miss anything of artistic value during the court season.

As a clan founded by women, the Bee retain a somewhat unique social structure over the generations. Although many of the Clan Champions are male, the clan is always dominated by matriarchs descended from the five original founding members. The Clan Champion may appear to be solely in charge, but every Bee samurai knows where the real power in the clan is found. The five matriarchs gather to take any major decision regarding the clan, and in case of disagreements the one descended from Doji Hachi herself (sometimes the Clan Champion, though often not) makes the final decision. This control by the matriarchs is carefully maintained through judicious marriage arrangements which kept the vast majority of female Bee samurai within the clan and ensure each line has several female heirs at all times. The clan does not actually discriminate against males in the manner of the Centipede Clan, despite being ruled by the women of its five core



families – for example, the clan does not restrict men from attending its courtier school, whereas the Centipede do not allow men to train as shugenja. Those few Bee samurai who chose the warrior's path either do without a school's training, or rely on favors to gain admission to the Daidoji or the Kakita schools.

The colors of the Bee Clan are taken from their symbol – black, white, and yellow – and are mainly restricted to use on banners and on the armor of the few Bee warriors. This is because the members of the Hachi family have a deep love for the fashions of the court. Any true member of the clan will own a very extensive and carefully maintained wardrobe; even the warriors own several different kimono for a variety of occasions. Hachi no Tani is home to several families of tailors who work only for the Bee, producing many fine clothes, and the Bee samurai acquire even more through their networks of favors. Consequently, the Bee only wear the colors of their clan if it is appropriate for the seasonal trends; otherwise, they are content with a discreet representation of their mon. This sometimes makes them harder to locate in court, but this is not entirely a bad thing – they can be selected as arbiters for artistic competitions before the competitors realize who they really are.

DEMISE OF THE BEE

If you choose not to include the Bee Clan in your campaign, but still want them to be part of Rokugan's prior history, it is not that hard to imagine how they could have been disbanded or destroyed. After all, they constantly came in contact with powerful samurai, and angered many of them through their artistic criticisms. If even a single member of the Bee Clan ever crossed the fine line separating criticism from insult, it could have easily have led to a blood feud which would have wiped out the clan.

Alternatively, if your campaign takes place after the Clan War, it is easy to imagine the Bee Clan being wiped out by the forces of the Crab or the Lion (both of which campaigned against the Crane, and neither of whom had much respect for the Hachi family) or by the Tainted forces of the False Hoturi.

Finally, the Bee Clan might have been reabsorbed into the Crane at a later date, possibly as a vassal family to the Doji. There are many potential reasons for this to have happened. On the negative side, it might result from a slight against a Crane lord or a desire among the Crane to reclaim the resources of Hachi no Tani. More positively, the Crane might do this to shield the Bee from a powerful lord's retribution.

The Raven Clan

"He gave me a choice: retire and join a monastery, or die. So of course I shaved my head and now here I am. I thought I'd just leave at the first opportunity, but the monks here are the most vigilant I've ever met – and not afraid to deliver a beating! Curse that stupid ronin!" – Achiyo, former bandit

Long before the Raven Clan came to be, there lived a simple warrior of the Dragon Clan named Mirumoto Karasu. Karasu was a pious and honorable man, if not particularly talented in any specific way. While he never aspired to much, he found his life with the Dragon – serving aloof masters for unseen purposes – rather frustrating. When he was deployed with the Dragon armies, Karasu thought his time had finally come to shine, but before he even had a chance to fight the army retreated for inexplicable reasons. This was the final blow, and Karasu deserted, reasoning that if he was going to be a useless samurai he might as well be a masterless one.

Used to the frugal living conditions of the Dragon lands, Karasu easily managed to eke out a living in the wilds of Rokugan, sometimes offering his services to villages in exchange for small payments or merely food. Clinging to the ways of the Tao now that he had abandoned the support of his clan, Karasu always made sure to donate any extra money he had to monasteries, and the monks always treated him well in return. Before his death, Karasu gathered a few followers of a similar mind, and after his passing they continued upholding his ways, offering their services as mercenaries but giving most of their wages to the Brotherhood. Many years passed, with the small ronin brotherhood remaining largely unnoticed by the rest of the Empire, and it would probably have continued in this way if not for a fortuitous encounter between one ronin and the Emperor's cousin.

The nobleman was travelling the Empire incognito on a pilgrimage, and came under attack by a rampaging ogre. A ronin saved him, but perished fighting the monster. Once returned to the capital, the noble begged the Emperor to find a way to honor his anonymous protector, and the Emerald Champion eventually located the small brotherhood of ronin he belonged to. In recognition for their years of humble service to the Brotherhood, the ronin were named as the Raven Clan, and adopted the family name of Karasu to honor their patron ancestor.

LANDS OF THE RAVEN

Although the Emperor granted the Raven Clan the right to lands and a stronghold, the early members of the Karasu family had little wish to abandon their wandering mercenary life. They did, however, see the appeal in a central location in which to gather and resupply, so they built a single modest fortress for this purpose. Called Shiro Karasu, it was deliberately placed in a remote location, since the leaders of the new clan wanted to retain a monastic ethos even with their newfound status. It was

built in an obscure corner of the Seikitsu Mountains, with only a single small village nearby to support it. Very few members of other clans ever laid eyes on it, and there were often conflicting reports regarding its actual location, including some which even placed it in other mountain ranges.

Shiro Karasu was small, lacking in refinements and luxuries, having been built only with defense in mind. Although it could easily be held against an enemy army, the clan's lack of public recognition meant it was usually just a place to rest, recover, and pray before heading on to more duties in the larger Empire. The castle did house the spouses and children of Raven samurai, as well as those who had grown too old to travel the land and thus spent their remaining years training the younger generation. The Karasu also invited the Brotherhood to live with them, and over the course of years no less than three monasteries were built in the nearby mountains, allowing the Raven to have access to several form of spiritual advice at all times.

CUSTOMS OF THE RAVEN

The samurai who founded the Raven Clan had been ronin for several generations before obtaining recognition, a fact which strongly influenced the clan's later development. For one thing, becoming a clan does not stop them from renting out their services as mercenaries throughout the Empire, in a manner similar to the early Mantis Clan

and Wasp Clan. While many frown on such practices as dishonorable, the Raven see it as better option than remaining idle and trying to live off the tiny village in their lands. And while they do not mingle with commoners in the same manner as the Sparrow, the Raven do treat heimin with more respect than the average samurai. Many Raven samurai are also consummate hunters, used to living off the land and surviving in tough environments. They seek proficiency in multiple martial arts, including jiu-jitsu, archery, and several different melee weapons, enduring they are never caught off guard and can easily react to different situations.

But the most defining fact about the Raven Clan is its relationship with the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Raven mercenaries use their wages only to cover vital expenses, and gave the rest to a monastery of their choice, usually just the closest one. Members of the Karasu family see the Brotherhood as a force for good in Rokugan, keeping the Empire together and protecting its soul, and believe it is their duty to serve it. While many are content to simply continue donating, others take a more active role and dedicate themselves to protecting a single monastery or a specific Brotherhood order. This close relationship with monastic orders leads the Raven to adopt a strange mix of customs, placing them somewhat between monks and normal samurai. Many of them eschew meat completely, for example, and none of them drink alcohol. They live just barely above starvation and rarely speak to outsiders,





often spending long hours in quiet seclusion. Yet they all carry samurai weapons and very few of them ever shave their heads before retirement.

Tying into those practices is a certain idea of humility which influences how the Raven present themselves to others. Although they have official “clan colors” (black and grey) and a mon to represent them, most Raven samurai wear simple brown kimono and unadorned armor, which are cheaper, humbler, and more discreet. This can often lead others to believe they are speaking with ronin when they are actually meeting Raven samurai... an error the Raven seldom correct, since they do not seek fame or recognition. When serving alongside other forces, Raven soldiers camp separately and do not attempt to socialize, preferring solitude or the company of their own. Despite their aloof attitude, the Raven usually find their services in great demand, since they keep their prices reasonable and are brave, disciplined, and reliable fighters. Additionally, since they do not look for glory or acceptance into a Great Clan, the Raven often accept somewhat less reputable roles within clan armies, such as scouting or rear guard, leaving the fame for the Great Clan samurai to take.

DEMISE OF THE RAVEN

If the GM chooses to set the campaign in era in which the Raven Clan once existed but has vanished from Rokugan, there are several possible explanations. Given the clan's lack of resources and limited territory, a famine or other natural catastrophe might be all it took to wipe them out, perhaps with a few lone survivors going back to a ronin's life. Any large-scale conflict in the Empire might also have brought about their extinction, since the Great Clans would hire mercenaries en masse and send them on dangerous assignments. It is also possible the early, mercenary Mantis Clan would see the Raven as competition for their own mercenary troops and decide to destroy the Karasu family, either by force or through political means. (This could become a dangerous potential scandal in later years when the Mantis try to adopt a stance as the protector of the other Minor Clans. A clever GM could build an entire campaign around the PCs discovering the Mantis Clan's dirty secret.) If the GM prefers to keep the Mantis in a more positive light, they could have simply absorbed the Raven Clan during difficult times, offering them status as a vassal family or even a full family co-equal with the Yoritomo. Finally, it is even possible that the Raven might be absorbed into another Minor Clan, such as the Sparrow.

Regardless of the option the GM chooses, it will probably not be easy for PCs to discover the prior existence and fate of the Raven Clan, given their propensity for discretion and the remoteness of their land. It is most likely that their fate remains a mystery, their existence itself an obscure legend.

The Shark Clan

“Ah, can you smell this? These orchids have just begun blooming. Did you know different types of orchids bloom during different seasons, sometimes several times a year? But I suppose it matters little, for you will bleed out in the next few hours. A shame, really, but my new blade was in need of testing...” – Jirozame Echiyo

While other Minor Clans usually celebrate the actions which led to their founding and the hero who was responsible for them, the Shark Clan never makes the reason behind its existence public. In fact, even at the time of its creation, no one knew why this new Minor Clan was honored with such a status. The Emperor simply announced that a heretofore unknown samurai who called himself “Jirozame” had been given the right to found a clan, in reward for “exceptional service to the Empire.” Jirozame was granted a coastal territory in the southern half of the Crane lands, and was allowed to handpick samurai to join him. He recruited a hodgepodge of followers, from Yasuki merchants to Kakita duelists, even a few from the Imperial families – proving he had friends in high places.

Calling his new clan the Shark Clan, Jirozame made no public declaration of intent or duty, simply taking his followers to settle the lands they now controlled. Many thought that would be the end of it; the Minor Clan would sink into obscurity as one Emperor's eccentricity. However, complaints soon arose in the neighboring Clans – the Crane, the Crab, and even the Mantis and Sparrow – about Shark samurai carousing in nearby towns and villages, often going far beyond what etiquette would have considered acceptable even for drunken samurai, and imposing considerable expense on the other Clans. Public intoxication and belligerent behavior were the norm. Moreover, they treated the heimin population particularly badly, and took the slightest provocation as an excuse to kill them. In one notorious instance, a group of Shark Clan samurai descended upon a village in unaligned lands and, after weeks of violence and debauchery, left nothing but ruins in their wake.

Many samurai voiced their complaints against these Shark, with the Crab threatening to go to war. But the Emperor, inexplicably supported by the higher leadership of the Crane, shielded the Shark from any retribution for their actions. This only seemed to encourage the Shark, who over the years became like a sort of natural catastrophe for the locals, a storm which had to be weathered as best as could be. Even hiring ronin did little good, since the Shark seemed to have no more value for their own lives than for the lives of others. Subtler samurai tried to investigate Jirozame's background and thereby find a way to remove his Imperial protection, but they found their efforts thwarted at every turn. The wiser knew when to stop asking questions; those not so wise persisted, and were often never heard of again. Thus the Shark remained a mystery to all.



THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SHARK CLAN

As with the other clans in this chapter, we encourage GMs to make the Shark Clan their own, and therefore make the secret behind its founding something which fits their own campaign. However, here we offer a potential explanation:

Jirozame, known simply as Jiro when he was a child, is in fact the bastard son of a member of the Hantei family who consorted with a lowly servant. His very existence poses a number of political complications, since his father is married to a prominent member of the Crane Clan. Furthermore, the Emperor has just ascended to the throne and does not yet have an official heir, but has no intention of letting the son of a peasant woman be considered for such a status. Neither does he wish to foster the boy to any clan, lest they use him as leverage against the Throne. However, the Emperor is also soft-hearted and cannot bring himself to make the boy a ronin, let alone kill him. Finding no perfect decision, the Emperor ultimately decides the boy will be granted his own Minor Clan upon adulthood, making him a “lord” but shutting him out of Rokugan’s political scene. He gives Jiro a desirable territory carved from the Crane Clan lands, hoping to placate him into a life of idle pleasantness. Meanwhile, the Emperor placates the Crane Clan by showing them significant favor and securing several important marriages for them, including one to his yet unborn heir.

However, Jiro grows into a troubled (if talented) adult. The secrecy and shame of his status in his early years makes him resent both the Imperial families and the Crane Clan. Yet he also finds his mother’s lowly status revolting, and sees it as the cause of his own misfortune. She also has an older son from a legitimate marriage, and she always favors this boy over her bastard child. Jiro has few friends and falls into the wrong circles, making the acquaintance of ronin, criminals, merchants, and geisha. While he is secretly taught the ways of samurai by an esteemed sensei of the Seppun family, this fails to instill him with any sense of honor; rather, it turns him into a talented killer who also has a firm grasp of the Empire’s etiquette and political culture. When the Emperor finally gives him lands and status, Jiro calls himself Jirozame and adopts the bloodthirsty and dead-eyed shark as his symbol: a ruthless predator. He gathers equally talented but troublesome samurai around him, and sets himself to enjoy his life to the utmost... while causing the most pain to those he feels had wronged him. He also makes sure he soon has heirs who know of his legacy so they will continue troubling the Empire after he is gone. Thus the Shark Clan becomes a thorn in the Empire’s side which is not easily removed.

As a variant option, if it suits the timeframe of the campaign, Jirozame’s father might be the man once known as Otomo Jama... a.k.a. Iuchiban the Bloodspeaker. This would give Jirozame even further leverage to keep himself and his “clan” of thugs safe, as well as offering further explanation for his damaged state of mind.



LANDS OF THE SHARK

While many Minor Clans must content themselves with scraps of land and isolated settlements, the Shark are given surprisingly luxurious estates, centered around a medium-sized port town and including several productive villages. While still nowhere close to what a single Great Clan province would encompass, it is enough to make other Minor Clans envious and the Great Clans curious. The main settlement is quickly renamed Toshi no Jirozame, and features extensive docking space for merchant ships, beautiful beaches of fine sand, and a number of inns, taverns, geisha houses, and other entertainment establishments. Although these lands are surrounded on the landward sides by the Crane Clan, and the Crane always seem to adopt a passive attitude toward the Shark, Jirozame seems concerned about possible assaults and orders a series of keeps built throughout the clan's territory at key points such as crossroads and bridges. While small, these keeps are formidable and supplemented by various traps. If any Great Clan decides to invade the lands of the Shark, they will succeed – but only after a long and grueling campaign of sieges.

The central piece of this defense is of course Shiro Jirozame, set right in the center of Toshi no Jirozame. A large castle by Minor Clan standards, it is surrounded by narrow streets which make any approach difficult (and also put most of the population in harm's way). The Clan Champion always makes sure the castle is well supplied with food and water to endure a siege; there are also rumors of devious traps hidden within seemingly ordinary

houses surrounding the castle. Despite all of this, however, the heimin of Jirozame live relatively tolerable lives so long as they stay well out of the way of their masters. The Shark seem to know better than to bite the hand that feeds, and reserve most of their predations for neighboring lands.

CUSTOMS OF THE SHARK

The culture of the Shark Clan forsakes honor and embraces pleasure as a way of life. This hedonism is rooted in Jirozame's own attitude, his resolution to enjoy all of life's pleasures before his death. This includes the usual things enjoyed by many samurai, such as fine food and beverages, beautiful displays of art, and entertaining pastimes such as games and hunting. But it also extends to darker things such as recreational drugs, severe intoxication, and extra-marital relationships. While others in Rokugan may secretly share the Shark Clan's lack of virtue, they conceal their shameful acts from the public eye. A Shark samurai, however, will easily discuss his visit to a nearby brothel, boast of his affair with another man's wife, or drink himself into unconsciousness, all of this in front of other samurai. Surprisingly, this does not mean the Shark are verbally rude or uncultured. In fact, most of them come across as surprisingly well-educated and versed in many scholarly topics. (Jirozame himself considered pleasures of the mind equally important to pleasures of the body.) But while the Shark understand the rules of society and the principles of honor perfectly well, they see themselves as above them and ignore them whenever they find it convenient to do so.

This mix of cultured erudition and disregard for societal norms occasionally leads a few lords to deliberately invite Shark samurai to their courts to create controversy, although this can be a very dangerous game to play.

What makes the Shark so dangerous is their combination of political protection from the Emperor (which renders their clan largely immune to the consequences they should otherwise face for their actions) and their individual talent for violence. The Shark train relentlessly in all sorts of martial arts, with a particular focus on swordsmanship and dueling. Furthermore, while samurai are all taught not to fear death, the Shark also learn not to care about life. Not their own lives, not anybody else's



lives. In the Shark viewpoint, life is but a joke, a cruel injustice inflicted by the Fortunes, a parade of misery which only finds its end in death. Whether they or their opponents die, either result is satisfactory. This attitude makes most people very wary of the Shark, a hesitation which they recognize and fully exploit. In fact, they often enhance it by wearing elaborately decorated armors – even in circumstances where armor would be inappropriate – and strapping a no-dachi across their backs, the size of the weapon leaving no doubt as to their intentions. The Shark use their knowledge of (and disregard for) etiquette to carry their weapons in places where they should not be allowed. And finally, those who think to take advantage of a Shark samurai during their drunken revelries find the Shark are actually quite used to fighting under the influence, and will use any item their hands fall on to vanquish their enemies.

DEMISE OF THE SHARK

Of all the Minor Clans presented in this section, the Shark are the easiest to see being destroyed. After all, they actively pursue conflict with other clans, whether out of arrogance, nihilism, or merely perverse enjoyment of violence. Only the political protection of the Emperor and the Crane keeps them alive. It is quite possible this protection is tied to Jirozame himself, so once he dies the future of his clan will be in danger. Also, a later Emperor might have radically different views toward the Shark and order them destroyed. The Shark would fight bitterly, of course, and resort to the most dishonorable measures to try to survive – perhaps even *maho*, if the GM wants to give them a more sinister edge. An interesting campaign could assign the PCs as members of the Imperial Legions, leading a campaign in the Shark Clan lands to destroy the rogue Minor Clan and restore the peace... while slowly realizing there is more to the clan than they knew.

However, the Shark need not be removed through military means. For example, the Crane might slowly erode their numbers and influence through strategic marriages, eventually recovering ownership of their former lands when the Shark no longer have heirs of their own. The Mantis could also have flexed their economic muscles, purchasing more and more properties in the Shark lands and eventually convincing the Jirozame family to join their ranks. Indeed, the Mantis do have their own story of hiding shameful lineages within their ranks, and if they learned of Jirozame's secret they would no doubt want to use it to achieve their own ambitious goals.



The Salamander Clan

“Water and Fire are no more opposed than light and dark, or life and death... they are but two sides of the same coin. So it is with the world of the kami and the mortal world. To see the spirit world, all one has to do is look the right way... of course, this is easier said than done.” – Hitokage Makushi to an unconscious Crab bushi

During times of peace, it is not uncommon for shugenja to pit their magical talents against one another to see who has the best understanding of the kami. The most prestigious place to do so is undoubtedly the Emperor's Winter Court, and some Emperors have been quite fond of seeing their vassals offer miraculous displays of power. It was during such a contest that a young Phoenix Clan shugenja named Isawa Hitokage first attracted attention. While definitely talented, particularly in Fire magic, Hitokage lacked social graces and often spoke before truly considering the weight of his words. Despite this flaw, his magical skills and scholarly knowledge made him a popular guest at court, where he was often found creating dazzling shapes out of summoned flames or discussing the nature of the Fortunes with other courtiers. However, Hitokage's star fell when he was outclassed by a Water shugenja from another clan who displayed a far superior



understanding of magic. His ego hurt, Hitokage told his opponent she should not take too much pride in her victory, for the Emperor was of greater prowess than her. This sent a shock through the Imperial Court, for the Emperor was of course not a shugenja, nor had any previous Emperors shown such a gift. Thankfully for Hitokage, though, his faux pas piqued the Emperor's curiosity rather than offending him. The Son of Heaven thanked Hitokage for his faith but pointed out his error, and then charged him with discovering why the gift of shugenja was as rare as it was... and how one could obtain it. To help him in his endeavor, the Emperor gave Hitokage the right to found his own Minor Clan. Later, most would assume the Emperor had given Hitokage this gift simply to save the Phoenix Clan from the embarrassment of his actions, similarly to how the Sparrow Clan had been founded.

Regardless, Hitokage took it upon himself to fulfill the mission the Emperor had assigned him. He recruited other shugenja to his cause, mostly from the Phoenix and Dragon Clans, but also from other schools of magic. Hitokage argued that if the Emperor, the holiest personage in the Empire, could not talk to the kami, the gift of the shugenja must be somehow incomplete. He reasoned that since human beings were imperfect (formed from the purity of Lady Sun and the sinfulness of Lord Moon), their understanding of the spirits in the world around them was also imperfect. Although some mortals were blessed with the ability to talk to the kami, in truth they only had a marginally better comprehension of the true ways of the world than other folk. Hitokage posited that someone who knew all Elements equally and knew all the ways to cast spells would unlock the ultimate secrets of the universe, and would be able to bestow such understanding on others – not just the Emperor, but also everyone else. Reactions to Hitokage's radical theory ranged from mere amusement to outrage and suggestions of blasphemy, but he found at least a few optimistic (nor naïve) souls who shared his convictions. Together, these shugenja set themselves the task of attaining a new level of spiritual comprehension in order to transform both themselves and the Empire around them.

Thus the Salamander Clan was born.

LANDS OF THE SALAMANDER

The Salamander Clan is always a small group whose concerns are far more spiritual than material. The Emperor neglected to assign them a territory, so Hitokage and his newly created family decide to adopt a nomadic lifestyle. Inspired by the Water shugenja who defeated him (and who he later marries), Hitokage commissions a series of river boats; these house the entirety of the Salamander Clan, and at any given time they can be found roaming the rivers of the Unicorn, Lion, Phoenix, and Crane Clans. This allows the Salamander flexibility, since a single samurai or family can easily leave the clan and study elsewhere for a time, or even take their boat to a different destination and return later. However, the bulk of the clan always stays together, forming a hodgepodge fleet whose arrival always causes excitement in any village or town. A small heimin population accompanies the clan, mainly fishermen and traders, helping sustain the Salamander's logistics. Needless to say, given its magical prowess the Salamander Clan is rarely in danger from pirates or bandit attacks, and could easily become quite wealthy if not for a lack of interest in mundane possessions.

This life has an interesting effect on the heimin serving the Salamander, since they are unusually well-traveled, well-fed, and well-educated. Outsiders sometimes mistake them for low ranking samurai, since even their spoken dialect changes due to long-term close contact with their lords. The Hitokage family is not displeased with this, for although they see no need to abolish the lines between social castes, they do believe the gift of knowledge is for all to share.

CUSTOMS OF THE SALAMANDER

Inspired by the example of their founder, many Salamander samurai spend their lives attempting to discover every single thing related to magic. Enthusiastic learners, the Hitokage leave no stone unturned when investigating magical matters, exploring all avenues of power – a difficult enterprise indeed since they have no support from the Great Clans. Salamander attempt to learn every single spell they can, spending long hours poring over ancient scrolls in hopes of deciphering forgotten prayers. Beyond mere spells, they also study everything related to the supernatural: nemuranai, Fortunes, and spirits all receive their attention at one point or another. They even try to study Void magic, a particularly frustrating effort since the Phoenix Clan always insists on taking control of anyone born with the ishiken's gift.

The only thing the Salamander refuse to consider is maho, for they see it as a corruption of the true gift of magic, a false promise of power. Despite this rejection of corruption, however, the Salamander often come under criticism for the nature of their research. More traditional shugenja believe the Salamander effort to master all aspects of magic and bestow it upon others as borderline blasphemous. They accuse the Hitokage of impiety, saying they have forsaken the ways of the Fortunes and the Tao for mere temporal power. This hurts the Salamander, who

consider their mission sacred, but they persist in their efforts no matter how harshly they are judged.

Moreover, the curiosity of the Salamander does not stop with magic itself. They often try to learn more about the natural world around them, in hope of finding clues relating to the nature of magic. Individual Hitokage samurai study all kinds of topics, from theology to botany or even poetry, believing all knowledge is useful to understand the grand scheme of things. Individual members often pick a single area of expertise which they explore through their entire lives. However, the Rokugani as a whole are a private people, and the constant snooping inquiries of the Salamander are considered tiresome by many, if not outright offensive. Similarly, the Salamander Clan's eagerness to learn and share spells – even the most secret and obscure ones – is infuriating to other samurai who consider it improper and dishonorable to try to root out others' secrets. In private, many Salamander admit they consider the fragmented nature of the Empire to be detrimental to their research and possibly to the Empire itself. While some Salamander openly wish for a more unified Empire, most of them recognize this as just a dream, and instead try to merely strengthen the bonds of friendship between clans, advocating for peace whenever possible. This helped them avoid a complete breakdown of relations with the Phoenix, who were more than a little ambivalent about the Salamander Clan's research.

While Hitokage himself hoped to one day be able to teach anyone to cast spells, he did recognize that up until his lifetime the ability to use magic was only found in a few specific bloodlines (albeit with a few odd exceptions). Also, many shugenja are naturally gifted with a specific Element but weaker in others, something Hitokage considered a fundamental flaw. To remedy these problems, Hitokage tried to always recruit shugenja into his clan with differing Elemental affinities, and to arrange marriages between different affinities as well. This of course was difficult, since shugenja are rare and valuable for any clan, and ensured the Salamander remained a small clan throughout their history. But it did produce a steady flow of children gifted with the ability to talk to the kami; no member of the Hitokage family was ever recorded to lack magical ability. This also influences the clan's culture – intensifying its nomadic nature and causing its traditions to evolve into an eclectic blend of ideas from all across the Empire. This is even reflected in the clan's colors, which are officially black and orange but are often changed by individual samurai to reflect their personal heritage. For example, a Salamander with Unicorn ancestry might wear a black and purple kimono with the Salamander mon, while one with a Crab parent might prefer black and dark blue. This habit frequently confuses outsiders, who sneer at it as yet another of the Salamander Clan's eccentricities.

DEMISE OF THE SALAMANDER

The Salamander are a well-meaning and peaceful clan, but the nature of their research could present any number of dangers. One or more of their magical experiments could easily trigger a catastrophe that would wipe out the entire clan – consider what nearly happened to the Phoenix in Rokugan's official history with Isawa's Last Wish. The Phoenix, of course, might take pre-emptive action to avoid such a crisis, either disbanding/destroying the Salamander or absorbing them depending on the circumstances. It is also possible that the Dragon Clan (or in the modern era, the Mantis Clan) would absorb the Salamander rather than see the Phoenix destroy them and their research. In some eras the Jade Champion could also weigh in on the matter, turning a simple question of magical research into a tangled political situation.

Alternatively, the Salamander might just disappear in a manner similar to the Tanuki Clan (presented later in this chapter), leaving nothing but rumors and mysteries behind them.

The Firefly Clan

*"While you sleep, the enemies of the Empire don't." –
Hotaru family motto*

ORIGINS OF THE FIREFLY

Many famous heroes of the Empire owe their glory to a single moment of brilliance – or rather, this is how it often appears to others. In truth, a lifetime of discipline and service is what prepares those heroes for glory, and Shinjo Jaiyu is a shining example of this reality. An Emerald Magistrate who obtained his status through hard work and the honorable reputation of the Shinjo family, he was assigned the lackluster duty of manning a lone watchtower on the coast between Otosan Uchi and the Phoenix lands. Whether this was by





mere bad fortune or due to a rival trying to prevent him from rising further in the ranks of the Emerald Magistrates, Jainu did not take umbrage, nor did he try to find out why he had been selected for such an obscure duty. Instead, he simply performed it to the best of his ability, going on long mounted patrols along the coast to guard the safety of the area. However, the expanse of land was too wide to be fully patrolled by a lone man, even one as dedicated as Jainu, and he grew disquieted at the potential security risk. In response, he hired a few trustworthy ronin, using his own stipend as an Emerald Magistrate to pay their salary. At night they would light large bonfires along the coast, maintaining vigilance in the otherwise unpopulated area.

For many years nothing of note happened at this remote coast, but Jainu and the ronin in his employment never abated in their vigilance. Their dedication proved vital when a Yobanjin ship ran aground after getting lost in a storm. The gaijin tribesmen were armed and soon started foraging in the region for supplies; Jainu sent for reinforcements while he and his men marched to hold off the Yobanjin invaders. The Seppun responded to his call, and their combined efforts were able to vanquish the gaijin before they could become a serious problem. The Emperor heard the story through the Seppun and, impressed with Jainu's years of quiet service and competent leadership,

decided to grant him the right to found a Minor Clan. Jainu chose the Firefly as his symbol, representing the bonfires he and his had men maintained, and took the name Hotaru to honor his father.

Founding a Minor Clan offered both challenges and opportunities to Jainu. His territory was quite peculiar: the same narrow strip of land, running along the coast from Otosan Uchi to the Phoenix territories, that he had guarded for so long. While he had devoted followers (almost all the ronin he employed swore fealty to him), Jainu lacked resources or political clout. To remedy this, he forged alliances with both the Phoenix to the north and the Tortoise Clan to the south. He promised the Phoenix to assist them in guarding their coast in exchange for surplus crops; to the Tortoise he provided information on suspicious ships for similar favors. Jainu also married one of his female lieutenants (despite his advanced age) to ensure he would have heirs. The mixture of honor and pragmatism he had shown during his life served him well as a Minor Clan Champion, and although the Firefly Clan remained small due to its limited territories and resources, its future was assured. In fact, the Firefly Clan's numbers soon grew enough to send samurai outside its lands, trading service for favors. Many obtained positions as yoriki or magistrates, while others became explorers and guards – after all, they were used to roaming uncivilized places to



watch for dangers. The Firefly Clan never acquired much fame, however, and Jainu himself was never one to boast; therefore, the appearance of a Firefly samurai hundreds of miles away often caused puzzlement.

LANDS OF THE FIREFLY

As previously mentioned, the territory of the Firefly is a long and narrow band of coastal land, which presents a number of challenges. The areas of arable land are few and far between, and although the Hotaru make sure to farm all of them, it is still not enough to support even a small clan. Thankfully, the sea also provides food, and the Firefly maintain several fishing villages for this purpose. The heimin in Firefly lands work hard to coax enough food from the waters and the land, but they are well protected by their samurai masters. At each village the Firefly build a watchtower, and every night a bonfire is lit atop each tower. The largest of these towers is Hotaru Torid-e, the Firefly Keep. While smaller than a true shiro, the keep is a strong fortification, five stories tall. It is here the Firefly maintain their stables, sending out patrols on horseback to watch over their spread-out lands.

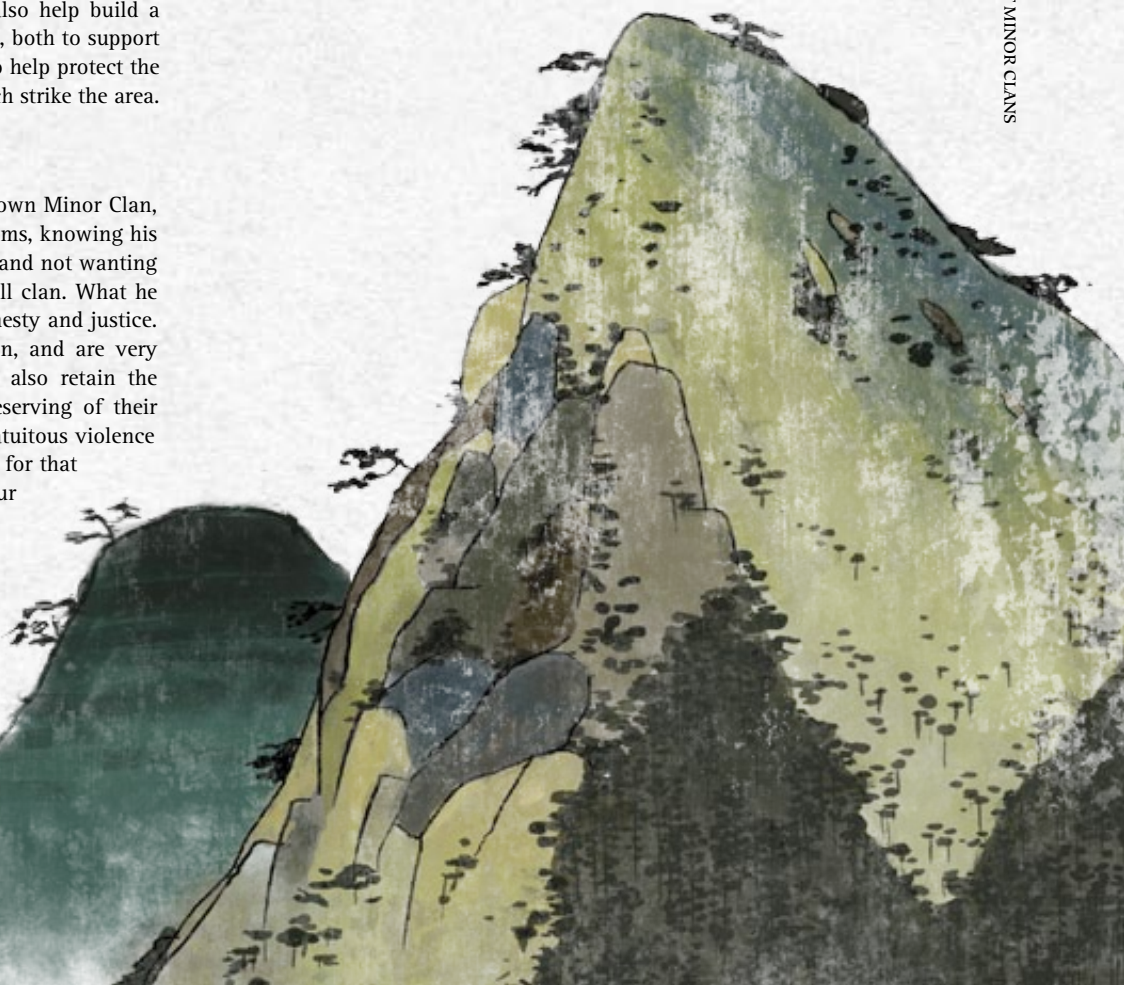
The influence of the Firefly is felt in the neighboring lands of the Phoenix, and due to their treaties the Hotaru know those territories almost as well as their own. While this initially creates some tensions with the Shiba, Hotaru Jainu cleverly avoids insulting the more prestigious family by humbly inviting Shiba sensei to teach in the newly built Firefly dojo, flattering the ego of the Phoenix. He also arranges marriages between some of his vassals and minor Shiba samurai, and soon the Shiba see the Firefly not as rivals but as kin. The Phoenix also help build a large temple to Isora near Hotaru Torid-e, both to support their cousins' religious piety and to try to help protect the Firefly from the storms and tsunami which strike the area.

CUSTOMS OF THE FIREFLY

When Jainu became Champion of his own Minor Clan, he abandoned many of his Unicorn customs, knowing his vassals would not be familiar with them and not wanting to attract too much attention to his small clan. What he kept, however, was a strong sense of honesty and justice. The Firefly dislike lying or manipulation, and are very straightforward (if always polite). They also retain the Unicorn view that the peasantry are deserving of their protection, and have no tolerance for gratuitous violence against them (or any breaches of the law for that matter). Some see the Firefly as a bit dour and overly judgmental, but others admire their dedication to the well-being of the Empire. Their constant vigilance is their most distinct characteristic, and it is said the only time a Hotaru will relax is when another Hotaru is there to keep watch. Their vigilance and suspicion can make them come across poorly when they first meet strangers, as they

THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR...

If you are a long-time reader of Legend of the Five Rings publications, you might recall the Firefly Clan from the 2nd Edition L5R RPG book *Way of the Daimyo*, where they were presented as an example of how a new Minor Clan and associated game mechanics could be created. They were never intended to be developed further; however, as is often the case, many fans wished for more discussion of the Firefly. The clan actually became something of a recurring "in-joke" for L5R, to the point where a lone Hotaru samurai was introduced as a footnote in the recent Second City box set. Thus, we decided to re-present the semi-mythical Firefly in this chapter, with a few more details and updated information. Of course, as with any of the other clans presented here, the GM is free to modify these details to suit a specific campaign. Jainu might have been a stalwart Dragon Clan magistrate, for example, or the Phoenix might have been stronger and less interested in gaining the Firefly's assistance in protecting their southern provinces, resulting in a decrease in allies and resources for the small clan.





take their time to assess new characters. However, once the trust of a Hotaru is earned, they become stalwart and amiable friends. Despite their cautious nature, the Hotaru are leery of triggering any conflict and tend to be self-effacing and polite at all times.

While they are at heart a peaceful clan, the Firefly embrace all kinds of martial arts. As part of their general philosophy of vigilance, they consider martial training to be of the utmost importance and practice as often as possible, even when not on active service. Hotaru Jainu also made sure all his vassals were competent riders, and in later generations the Firefly remain fine horsemen, used to traveling long distances over any sort of terrain.

To keep abreast of current martial developments in the rest of the Empire, Hotaru samurai frequently volunteer to participate in martial tournaments where they can face samurai from other clans. Although they usually perform adequately, Firefly bushi rarely win any of those events; however, this is considered acceptable, since their purpose is not to gain glory but to observe the techniques of other samurai in case they ever must face them in a real conflict. Of course, the humble Firefly have no intention of mounting an attack on any other clan, but they see it as their duty to be ready for any threat. The Firefly are always careful to keep this attitude to themselves, lest they offend samurai of higher status.

DEMISE OF THE FIREFLY

The most likely cause of the Firefly's destruction would simply be their duty. Standing guard in a vulnerable region of the Empire, they could be destroyed by an attack from a larger force of yobanjin pirates, although not easily and not without warning the Empire before their

defeat. Canon examples of such large-scale Yobanjin invasions include the one Toturi Tsudao faced during the Four Winds era and, of course, the War of Dark Fire in the latter half of the twelfth century.

If the GM decides to place the Firefly in an earlier era of Rokugan, they might have participated in the Battle of White Stag, and suffered destruction at the hands of the Thrane and Merenae fleets. Regardless, any survivors from the Firefly Clan could swear fealty to the Agasha, the Shiba, or even the Tortoise Clan. Another interesting possibility would be for them to lose their clan status (due to

sharply reduced numbers) but prove their honor and valor enough to join the ranks of the Seppun.

The Tanuki Clan

"Tanuki, Tanuki,

Where did you go Tanuki,

Tanuki, Tanuki,

In the forest for no one to see."

-Traditional Rokugani childhood rhyme

The Tanuki were a peculiar clan from the moment of their inception, even by the standards of the Minor Clans. One of the most unusual facts about them was that their founder was not a samurai of the Great Clans, but in fact came from a Minor Clan himself – specifically the Badger. Oddly enough, his name was never recorded, but it is believed he was a yojimbo to an Emerald Magistrate. Supposedly, he got lost in the vast Shinomen Forest after pursuing a bandit there. He was presumed dead, but emerged from the forest exactly one year later, seemingly unharmed. At first, the lone samurai seemed confused by the passage of time and unsure of what had happened. But he soon began to remember things in his dreams, especially conversations with the many animal spirits of the forest. Some thought he had simply lost his mind, but the Emperor at that time had a keen interest in all things spiritual, and he summoned the lone samurai for an audience. After three days in conversation, the Emperor granted the former Badger the right to found his own clan and to further investigate the mysteries of the Shinomen Forest. The new-made Clan Champion named himself Tanuki Jiro, leader of the Tanuki Clan, to honor the shapeshifting spirits of the forest.



Jiro recruited a few samurai to his cause, but here again his choices were peculiar. He mostly recruited from other Minor Clans, such as the Hare, the Fox, and the Badger themselves. His criteria seemed variable, to say the least, and on at least one occasion he accepted a ronin into the clan, supposedly just because she won a dice game against him. Regardless, the new Tanuki samurai traveled with their leader to the Shinomen Forest, bringing a few (understandably recalcitrant) heimin with them. Despite the sinister location, the homes of the Tanuki samurai seemed miraculously incident free for several years, and the peasants slowly adapted to their new lands, living off gathering, fishing, and hunting more than any real farming. Oddly, they are also said to have excelled at sake brewing, importing rice for that purpose; the Tanuki claimed the beverage was for spiritual usages, but visitors enjoyed it for what it was. This was the clan's only claim to fame, since most other samurai dismissed their "official" duty of investigating the Shinomen as merely symbolic. The Tanuki samurai obviously disagreed, and often disappeared into the forest for days at end, bringing back reports for their Clan Champion which he obediently forwarded to the Emperor.

LANDS OF THE TANUKI

As noted above, the term "lands" does not really apply to the situation of the Tanuki Clan. They maintained a few scattered settlements in the Shinomen Forest, many of them housing only a single samurai family with a few peasant houses clumped around it. Since the Tanuki were reluctant to harm the trees in the forest, their houses were usually built in clearings, around existing tree-trunks, or even in the branches. Ubiquitous in and around Tanuki houses were small statues and carvings of their smiling namesake, the mischievous tanuki raccoon-dog, which were considered to bring good fortune to the house. Other decorations were frequent, particularly in the many sake houses; for a clan which lived in one of the most sinister places in Rokugan, the Tanuki were oddly jovial. Many thought the large quantities of sake they produced were responsible for this merry attitude, but others also pointed out how the Tanuki never seemed to suffer from any troubles or accidents in the forest itself.

DEMISE OF THE TANUKI

The Tanuki Clan was quite the oddity, and owed its status solely to the whims of an Emperor fond of stories involving spirits. After this Emperor's passing, the Tanuki became somewhat of a laughing stock. The next Emperor often read the Tanuki Clan's strange reports in front of the Imperial Court, amusing the samurai gathered there with their bizarre tales of badgers the size of houses or a quest for a magical acorn. However, the next Emperor – grandchild of the one who had granted the Tanuki their status – found them much less amusing, and issued an order for them to stand before him for a review of their duties.

THIS ALSO LOOKS FAMILIAR...

Like the Firefly Clan described above, the Tanuki Clan is not entirely new to Rokugan. It was introduced in the world of L5R in the 3rd Edition supplement *Freedom and Fealty* (2005). It was presented there as a historical long-lost Minor Clan, intended to add flavor to a campaign and inspire some stories. However, just as with the rest of this chapter, there is no reason why you should deprive yourself of the Tanuki Clan if you like having them around! Just ignore the "demise" part of this chapter and assume the Tanuki carried on more or less the same.

So what is the significance of the "tanuki" name and image? In Rokugan, this refers to a race of trickster spirits from Chikushudo, the Realm of Animals. Like other such spirits, they are normally in a "natural" form as their namesake animal, but can take other guises and have a variety of supernatural abilities. Their animal form, the natural creature also called the tanuki, is Rokugan's version of the real-life Japanese Raccoon-Dog. Calling the Tanuki the "Raccoon Clan" would not be an exact translation, but is a valid option if the GM wants to maintain a difference between the clan's name and the family name.



The Imperial agents dispatched to deliver the Emperor's command found nothing in the Shinomen Forest. The entire Tanuki Clan had disappeared without a trace. Nothing was ever found, and to many this meant the monsters of the Shinomen Forest had finally gotten the better of the small clan. Others thought the whole clan had been but a trickster's joke and might have been entirely comprised of actual Tanuki shapeshifters. The Emperor, disgusted with the whole affair, declared the clan dead and ordered them stricken from any records, with the result that their very existence remained a secret for centuries after. They were only rediscovered when a scroll mentioning them was found in a forgotten archive which had been spared from censure. The truth of their fate remains a mystery, although it is not impossible that a later samurai might be able to root it out.





The Yobanjin

Cheyong tightened his fur coat around himself, trying as best as he could to shield his body against the cold mountain wind. His father had lit a small fire for the night, but it seemed like the flame used all its heat to remain lit, and left none for Cheyong or his father.

His father smirked at his obvious discomfort, which only irritated Cheyong.

"Stop mocking me, father," Cheyong said with as much strength as he could muster.

"The winds bring us many blessings, son. Smells, clouds, birds... cold is just one we have to bear, sometimes."

"And why do we have to be here? There's nothing in these mountains," Cheyong protested.

"Well, there are always the mountains," his father answered. "But the real reason is beyond," he continued, seeing his son's annoyed look. "Beyond those mountains, the lands of Rokugan."

"Rokugan!" Cheyong exclaimed. His annoyance at his father's humor suddenly disappeared. "You mean the Southern Country?"

"Yes," his father nodded. "The Southern Country. Rokugani is what they call themselves."

"Is it true their warriors do not wear fur? And they only eat grain? And their swords can never break?" Cheyong asked.

"There are many things said about them, some true, some not as much. They are different from us, in many ways, but we also have a lot in common."

"How is that possible?" Cheyong frowned. "They are a different people."

"They are indeed. But it wasn't always so. At the first dawn of the world, when even the mountains were young, Rokugan was no different from us, just a collection of tribes, fighting with and against each other."

"What happened?"

"The Fallen Gods," his father said, with a hint of awe in his voice. "The fell from their abode in the sky, and though they had lost their place, they still sought to rule. And so the Rokugani, they bowed."

"They bowed?"

"Yes. First they bowed to the gods. Then to the children of the gods. Then to each other. And so on, until not a man remained in their land who was free."

"But we do not bow to them," Cheyong declared.

"No, we do not bow," his father agreed.

"And even in those ancient days when gods walked the earth, some people did not bow. They were chased away, by steel and magic, for no one could stand against the gods. Many died, but others lived, and made their way here, through the mountains."

"The Unbowed Tribes," Cheyong said with pride.

"Yes, the Unbowed Tribes. But in Rokugan, they have a different name for us. They call us the Yobanjin."

Of all the gaijin groups which are known to Rokugan, the Yobanjin are probably the ones who have had the most interaction with the Empire. Living in the lands beyond the Great Wall of the North, they have frequently influenced life in the northern regions of the Empire, sometimes peacefully, often violently. But while the Rokugani consider them little better than animals, the Yobanjin in fact have a complex society. This chapter gives readers a look at that society from the Yobanjin point of view, allowing GMs and players to use them in a variety of ways in any L5R campaign.

History

Assembling a cohesive history of the Yobanjin tribes is a difficult task, for they are a scattered and fragmented people who have only limited written records. However, there are a few facts on which the Yobanjin traditions generally agree, a summary of which follows.

The Yobanjin share somewhat similar creation myths with the Rokugani, in broad strokes at least. They agree the Sun and the Moon had children, the Moon devoured them, and the blood of the Moon and the tears of the Sun mixed to create mankind. For a long time, there was no difference between the Yobanjin and the Rokugani – all of them were just a myriad of primitive tribes, surviving in their environment as best they could. They also were not



restricted to the lands which are now considered Rokugan proper; some tribes lived to the west, north, and south of what would one day become the Empire. All these tribes were primitive by modern Rokugani standards, often very primitive indeed, and mostly organized and led by charismatic warriors or priests rather than any true nobility. This period of history is barely recorded in Rokugan, and almost forgotten for the Yobanjin as well. It is difficult even to say how long it lasted – a few generations, hundreds of years, perhaps even thousands.

When the Kami fell to Ningen-do, rumors soon spread from the tribe of Seppun and its neighbors of these godlike beings who had decided to rule the land. The tribes which witnessed the Kami firsthand tended to immediately swear loyalty to them, for their other-worldly presence and might inspired awe and loyalty. But for those tribes farther from where the Kami had fallen, it was another matter. Many of them had fought and bled for the lands they called their own, living as their parents had, and the parents of their parents before. Why would they need gods who walked like men to rule over them? Often, these tribes refused to submit to the Kami and fought for their independence, but they were soon brought to heel or destroyed. The followers of Akodo in particular confronted many such rebellious tribes, proving themselves to be superior warriors at almost every turn. Other tribes saw the futility of resistance and resigned themselves to a life of servitude, laying down their weapons as the armies of the Kami came to them.

Some tribes, however, tried a third option: escape, fleeing to distant lands in the hope that the Kami's reach had its limits. Many of these refugees met their demise in the bleak wastelands to the west of the Empire or in the Burning Sands to the northwest. Others fled south and became the first to discover the nascent Shadowlands, dying or being corrupted to later serve as troops in Fu Leng's invasion. But a few found their way north through the mountains to a land of steppes, rivers, and hills. The tribes were fragmented, traumatized by a long and dangerous journey from their homelands and bitter fighting with the Rokugani. News followed them from Rokugan of a war against an army of demons and monsters led by a fearsome dark god; thankfully, the new lands of the independent tribes were separated from Rokugan by high mountains. The tribes fought, allied, and quarreled endlessly over who could claim which lands, with new identities emerging while older ones were lost. Although the tribes never united and would often be at odds with each other, they all shared the same general sense of self-determination and freedom, a refusal to bow even to gods. The Rokugani eventually named these people the Yobanjin, but to themselves they would always be the Unbowed People.

While Rokugan experienced a technological and cultural jump with the arrival of the Kami, Yobanjin society took much longer to develop. For at least three centuries after the Fall of the Kami, the Yobanjin remained a mostly nomadic society, following their herds and living off the land. They also had to contend with many dangers, for their new lands were rife with predators, from lions and wolves to giant hawks and strange unnatural creatures called death-worms, not to mention the Ujik-hai raiders of the north, who saw the Unbowed Tribes as easy pickings. These harsh conditions kept warrior traditions strong within the proto-Yobanjin, and they gradually learned to not only survive but thrive in the lands they called their own. The taming of the giant hawks gave some tribes unique advantages, allowing them to fight back against the Ujik-hai, while Yobanjin shamans bent the Elements to their will, learned how to master unique flying mounts called "wyrms," and passed their esoteric wisdom down through the generations. However, it was when the Yobanjin actually started to build their own cities that they really began to thrive.

The early Yobanjin cities were usually built on the coastline or on the banks of rivers. Commerce thrived, and although the various tribes remained fiercely independent, war became rare instead of the norm. With those settlements came new technological developments. Although they never mastered steel to the level of Rokugani smiths, the Yobanjin developed a strong tradition of metalsmithing, including concepts such as the ring sword and the crossbow.

Contact with Rokugan slowly resumed once the yobanjin became more established and had the resources both to travel and to protect themselves. Although some tribes attempted to peacefully contact the Rokugani, they were often met with suspicion or outright violence. Centuries of separation had led the Yobanjin to develop very different customs and, of course, a dif-



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ferent language. Their weapons and armors were crude by Rokugani standards, and they wore leather and fur garments, considered spiritually impure in the Empire. Their cuisine also included a lot of red meat, which Rokugani thought disgusting. The only place the Unbowed People could find in Rokugan was as mercenaries, and even that was considered controversial. Still, it allowed the Yobanjin to acquire wealth and the Rokugani to acquire wholly expendable troops.

Other tribes chose a more direct approach, targeting northern Rokugani villages for raids to seize food and wealth by force. The Yobanjin would strike quickly, sweeping out of the mountains on their strange mounts, their alien warcries bringing terror to the heimin. In the space of a few minutes they would appropriate oxen, harvest, tools, and whatever else they could carry. Some of the animals would be ritually sacrificed by the shamans, leaving carcasses behind as a grisly testimony. The Unbowed People felt no guilt over these raids; after all, if the Southern Country was not strong enough to protect its own riches, it did not deserve to keep such things.

Relations with the Empire suffered further strain after the Battle of White Stag, as the Emperor forbade all commerce with gaijin and most samurai adopted a policy of killing gaijin on sight. However, the newly created Tortoise Clan maintained covert commerce with outside peoples, and to a lesser extent some relations continued with the Phoenix

Clan. In the face of such greater hostility the Yobanjin matched the Rokugani trade restrictions, confining visitors to border villages and ports, preventing the samurai from learning too much.

Although they continued to thrive over the years, the Yobanjin never came together as a nation; commerce and marriages between tribes alternated with feuds and wars. The Yobanjin culture placed great emphasis on personal and tribal freedom, and attempts at unifying the tribes under a single banner always failed. Some traits were shared by the majority of tribes, however, resulting in a common culture despite the lack of political unity. The rujia philosophy, shamanistic beliefs, and a single language (including, eventually, a writing system) allowed the different tribes to maintain a collective identity as the Unbowed People. Moreover, the tribes did occasionally make common cause in the face of common enemies, such as an Ujik-Hai raid or the occasional strange creatures emerging from the Burning Sands. While the Yobanjin were not always victorious in these conflicts, they always made a fierce fight and never tolerated anyone to remain on the lands they called theirs.

Their biggest challenge, however, actually came from within their own lands. A large, powerful, and sentient wyrm known as Zurong appeared among the tribes, demanding tribute in cattle, harvests, and human sacrifice, destroying the camps and villages of those who refused. The reign of Zurong affected a majority of the tribes and was a



time of strife for almost all Yobanjin. In the end, a coalition of forty-nine warriors – each from different tribes – managed to vanquish Zurong, and the names of those warriors are still remembered as heroes throughout all the Yobanjin lands. That time was a glorious moment for the Unbowed People, when they stood united and reaffirmed their independence. Nonetheless, they returned to their normal ways afterward, albeit with a greater appreciation for each others' valor.

Another major change for the Yobanjin came with the return of the Unicorn Clan to Rokugan. Suddenly there was a part of Rokugan that did not view the Yobanjin as mere barbarians; the Unicorn were much more open to dealings with gaijin of any kind, and trade increased between the two groups (mostly covertly to avoid Imperial wrath). Many Yobanjin mercenaries served in Unicorn armies, for the descendants of the Ki-Rin had no qualms at using gaijin troops. And many Unicorn quickly mastered the Yobanjin tongue, allowing for easier communication and a moderate amount of cultural exchange. Further change came in the twelfth century when the rest of the Desert Moto rejoined the clan; the Unicorn became even more openly accepting of gaijin as the Moto took the reins of the clan, and trade not only increased further but became much more open.

Perhaps it was this newfound prosperity which led several tribes to join their forces under a single warlord and attempt an invasion of the northern Phoenix provinces. The warlord, Baxing from the Mountain Sons tribe, thought the Yobanjin had become strong enough to claim some of the fertile Rokugani lands, and viewed the Phoenix as too weak to defend themselves. The Yobanjin invaders were unpleasantly surprised by the magical power of the Isawa and the prowess of the Shiba bushi, but nonetheless managed to occupy several Phoenix provinces before they were eventually defeated by Imperial Legions led by Toturi Tsudao, the Emperor's daughter. To the other tribes, this series of events proved the Unbowed People were not destined to be united or to reclaim the southern lands, and dreams of conquests or a great unified Yobanjin empire were abandoned. Moreover, since many of the major tribes had lost significant strength in the war, the balance of power was greatly affected by their defeat; other tribes seized their lands and riches, inaugurating a long period of turmoil, infighting, and general decline which left the Yobanjin weakened as an overall group.

Thus they were exceptionally vulnerable when the Dark Oracle of Fire arrived in their lands.

In the late twelfth century, a Dragon samurai named Tamori Chosai succumbed to the Shadowlands Taint and became the Dark Oracle of Fire. However, thanks to the clever actions of heroic samurai, he was immediately banished from Rokugan. While this kept the Empire safe

from his schemes, the Yobanjin were not so fortunate. Chosai saw them as a weak people pliable to his dark ends; through a mix of false promises and powerful magic, he slowly but relentlessly expanded his influence among them. Some tribes willingly swore themselves to his service, hoping to get revenge against Rokugan or against rival tribes. Others were coerced, duped, or simply destroyed. In less than a generation, Chosai took control of many of the major tribes and sent them to war with Rokugan. The scale of this invasion, the so-called War of Dark Fire, was greater than anything the Yobanjin had attempted before, and the damage to Rokugan was equally great. However, the loss of life for the Yobanjin was colossal, as Chosai did not care whether his troops lived or die as long as the Empire suffered. In fact, he used his dark magic to turn many Yobanjin warriors themselves into suicidal weapons, exploding in lethal flames when they died.

A few tribes fought against Chosai's forces, sometimes even allying with the Rokugani, and while they could never hope to defeat him they remained a thorn in the Dark Oracle's side for the duration of his campaign against the Empire. In the end, the forces of Rokugan prevailed, and the Dark Oracle disappeared from the sight of the tribes. But the damage had been done – the Unbowed People lost about half of their population. Many tribes had been completely destroyed, while others were too weak to survive on their own and had to merge with their neighbors. For the most part, the tribes agreed to set their normal differences aside for a time as they struggled to rebuild their numbers. Even a generation later, the Yobanjin were not even close to matching their pre-war numbers, and the effects on their overall society remained to be fully felt. With Rokugan focusing its attention south towards its new Colonies, the Unbowed People could at least avoid further attention from the Empire while they rebuilt themselves.

Whether the next step in the complex relationship between the Yobanjin and the Emerald Empire will be violent or peaceful remains to be seen.





Yobanjin Culture

Although many Rokugani consider the Yobanjin to be uncivilized, this is a misconception deriving from two primary reasons. First, the two peoples have only had limited contact with each other, and the Yobanjin have withheld a great deal from their occasional Rokugani visitors, preventing them from forming a full picture. Second and more important, the only “real” culture for most Rokugani is their own, so anything deviating from their norms is seen as uncivilized no matter the reality. However, the Yobanjin have built cities, developed their own complex language and writing script, and follow their own unique philosophy and spirituality; they are certainly different from the Empire, but are undoubtedly a real culture in their own right.

The essential social unit in Yobanjin culture is the tribe. Inherited from the pre-Empire Rokugani societal model, the tribal structure is deeply enshrined in Yobanjin culture. Each tribe has its own name and totem, its own lands, and often its own dialect of the Yobanjin tongue. Tribal identity is fiercely defended, and attempts at cultural assimilation strongly opposed. Even militaristic tribes who conquer their neighbors will often let the defeated peoples keep their own practices, since to do otherwise would be seen as a destruction of their very souls. There are dozens of tribes in the Yobanjin lands, and a comprehensive list has never been made since the exact number rises and falls constantly. Unlike the Rokugani, the Yobanjin have no caste system and everybody belongs equally to the tribe, from the humblest of farmers to the greatest of warriors. To be cast out of a tribe is thus a great punishment reserved for the direst of offenses, since it means one is entirely cut out

from both family and land. However, tribes also accept new members far more readily than do the Rokugani clans, and an outcast can always join another tribe should he prove his worth to them.

Tribal size varies widely, with the smallest tribes comprised of only a few dozen members, while the largest number in the thousand; most fall somewhere in between. Small tribes often meet their end at the hands of larger neighbors, or request asylum from another tribe after suffering through a bad winter or at the hands of their enemies. Larger tribes run the risk of exhausting the land around them, or dividing along different social or personal lines into smaller tribes. There is no formal way to create or disband a tribe – any self-sustaining group which is able to protect itself and its lands is a tribe, if it chooses to call itself one. The most successful large tribes often settle in one place and build a city; more rarely, they may cooperate with other tribes to build a mixed city. The majority of the smaller tribes, by contrast, live a rural or nomadic existence.

Further strengthening the social fabric of the Yobanjin tribe is the rujia philosophy. Its origins are lost to time, but are thought to have come from Zhongshi, the oldest city in the Yobanjin lands. As the city’s tribe emerged into newfound prosperity, a class of thinkers emerged who sought to develop a cohesive system of values. Their works were initially preserved through oral tradition, but later were copied into many tomes once the Yobanjin developed a writing system. Their rujia system encompassed eight central values which have since come to be accepted by nearly all tribes as a core part of Yobanjin cultural identity.

The first of these values is called Ren, or humaneness; the Yobanjin consider each and every one of their people as a human being, and see how they treat others as proof of their



own humanity. The second is Yi, meaning righteousness; the Yobanjin believe in everyone's responsibility to do good. The third, Li, dictates that all actions should follow proper rite and reason. Excess is not a Yobanjin value, and they behave in a measured way in all matters. Zhi, meaning knowledge, is the fourth value; the Yobanjin understand one needs to know the world to properly live in it. Xin, or Integrity, rejects lies as a stain on one's soul, and asks all Yobanjin to speak the truth. Zhong, meaning Loyalty, exalts one's dedication to the tribe and its rightful ruler. Xiao, or filial piety, does not mean absolute obedience of parents, but rather respect for parental authority and proper behavior towards them. Finally Jie, meaning continence, requires proper self-restraint in all matters.

Together, these virtues aim at making the Yobanjin into moral, courteous people, and are held in near-sacred regard by the vast majority of the Unbowed People. In contrast to Rokugan's code of Bushido, *rujia* can be embraced by anyone regardless of social status, but it is particularly admired among tribal leaders. While tribes have different systems of leadership ranging from simple tyranny to hereditary inheritance to oligarchy, no tribe will tolerate an un-virtuous leader for very long, and revolts against immoral leaders are seen as a legitimate action. This does not mean all Yobanjin leaders are paragons of virtue, of course, especially since the tenets of *rujia* are open to interpretation, but the code does provide a general standard by which all are judged.

Another uniting factor in Yobanjin culture is shamanism. Much like other Yobanjin practices, it appears barbaric to the Rokugani, but in truth has many similarities to the Empire's shugenja tradition. Every tribe has at least one shaman, with larger tribes often having several. A shaman must be born into his gifts, which often manifest through visions, seizures, or sudden changes in personality. The gift frequently runs in families, and those who exhibit it are apprenticed to an older shaman. Shamans may be either male or female, and the Yobanjin make no distinction between gender when it comes to serving the gods. Shamans are equally respected and feared, for while their proximity to the spirits makes them powerful it also leads to strange, erratic, and incomprehensible behavior. Moreover, it is the shamans who summon and bind the creatures called "wyrms," which associates their powers with the terrible reign of the rogue wyrm Zurong. Thus, many Yobanjin only approach a shaman in dire circumstances, otherwise seeing to their own spiritual needs through simple rites and personal prayers.

Spiritually, the Yobanjin view the world in a broadly similar way to the Rokugani: the gods reigning in Heaven and the world filled with spirits. However, the Unbowed People tend to concern themselves less with the gods and more with the spirits, which they see as closer to them. Thus, while the Yobanjin acknowledge hundreds of divinities, their shamans usually pray directly to the spirits of the wind, earth, water, and fire. Shamans are tasked with warding their tribes against harmful spirits and beseeching the spirit world for help in time of duress. They use a variety of means to gain the spirits' favor, from

incense and sacrifices of token items all the way up to a practice considered gruesome by Rokugani standards: animal sacrifice. This is not done out of cruelty, but as a surrender of important resources to obtain the favor of the spirits. Regardless, Yobanjin shamanism does not use scrolls, and while its results are often similar to Elemental magic, for the most part it does not exhibit the great power and flexibility attained by Rokugani shugenja schools. (The ability to summon and control wyrms is a partial exception to this pattern, and one which is rather disturbing to those Rokugani who know about it.)

The Yobanjin language may have once been similar to Rokugani, but minimal contact led the two to diverge quickly. In fact, the tribal structure of Yobanjin society would probably have led to even further devolvement into many different dialects if they had not developed a written form that served to maintain a minimal amount of uniformity across their culture. Spoken Yobanjin has many nasal and guttural sounds not present in Rokugani, and samurai find it offensively animal-like in nature. However, it has a great deal of complexity and the small scholar class of the Unbowed People has developed many different characters for it. Some of these share a superficial resemblance to Rokugani kanji, but often have very different meanings.

Naming practices are much more freeform in the Yobanjin lands than in the Empire. Most tribesfolk have a two-syllable name chosen by their parents, but in large tribes or cities a one-syllable surname is added in front of it; however, none of these rules are uniform or strictly followed. The tribes themselves usually name themselves after some kind of natural phenomena as a way to please the spirits. Thus, an influential Yobanjin scholar from a large city could introduce himself as Li Wongchai of the Small River Tribe, and be referred to as Li Wongchai, or simply Wongchai by his friends. Due to the variety of titles and governing systems adopted by the various tribes, and the complexity of familial honorifics, there is an almost endless array of ways to address each other in Yobanjin society, and when dealing with strangers it is best to err on the side of caution and politeness.

The Rokugani view the Yobanjin as an extremely violent, brutal, and warlike people. This is not surprising given that most contact with the Yobanjin has occurred during their raids into the Empire or through hiring them as mercenaries. And while there is much more to Yobanjin life and culture than war, it is true that martial conflict has a central role in the life and ways of the Unbowed Tribes. The strong focus on independence leads many tribes to view all their neighbors as potential enemies, tribes often wage war against each other for land and resources, and most young folk are routinely trained as warriors. The lack of a caste system means almost anyone in the Yobanjin tribes can and will become a warrior, regardless of origin, and the history of the Unbowed People is full of tales of poor or ill-favored folk who rose to fame through their martial prowess. Training is harsh and demanding, with little allowance for failure, and it is not uncommon for inferior students to die in their first battle.



Yobanjin clothing tends toward the practical, especially in the nomadic and rural tribes which rely chiefly on furs or leathers. City-dwellers also make use of simple woven cloth, and the better-off urbanites import silk from Rokugan to make a garment called a changshan. Warriors wear leather shirts covered in small metallic plates, a much cruder design than Rokugani armor but one which is also much easier to put on and take off.

The lack of caste also makes education less formal, and often consists of a master-apprentice situation, for warriors as well as any skilled professions. In larger towns, simple schools do exist, where teachers instruct their students in anything from martial arts to calligraphy. Great respect is accorded to the school sifu,

a title similar to sensei, as knowledge is one of the hallmarks of the rujia philosophy. It may be noted that shamans are nowhere near as learned as shugenja, preferring a holistic and spiritual approach over intellectual knowledge; thus, the small minority of genuine scholars in Yobanjin society are a separate and respected elite group, found almost entirely within the cities.

Relationship with Rokugan

More than any other gaijin nation or people, the Yobanjin have a long-term and complex relationship with Rokugan. Although they may have once shared a common origin in the tribes who preceded the fall of the Kami, this is little known to most Rokugani, and over the subsequent centuries the differences have grown significant enough that all Yobanjin are now regarded as gaijin and treated as such. While this means death on sight in many regions of the Empire, the proximity of the Yobanjin to Rokugan's northern border has made attitudes more nuanced in some eras. Specific clan attitudes are described below, but some generalizations may be made.

While samurai despise gaijin of all kinds, they do find the Yobanjin to be capable warriors, if a bit crude. Hence their popularity as mercenaries despite the controversy attached to such usage. In fact, a few Rokugani commanders prefer Yobanjin to ronin, since they are more reliably courageous, just as cheap, and more expendable.

Commoners, however, generally react to Yobanjin with simple terror. Their strange manners and clothes instantly mark them as foreigners, and heimin who are wholly unused to seeing gaijin may even take them for monstrous creatures. Those who live on the Empire's northern frontiers will probably recognize the Yobanjin as the legendary

All this being said, it may be noted that the Yobanjin usually do not practice all-out war. Unless a truly grave insult was given prior to the conflict, tribal warfare is usually limited in scope, and more likely to be comprised of a series of quick raids and counter-raids against enemy resources and warriors rather than to be waged through large-scale battles. Major set-piece battles occur only during the most bitter conflicts between the largest of tribes, when complete conquest is the objective. Yobanjin cities are generally considered off-limits for full-scale warfare due to their value as centers of trade and scholarship, although they usually maintain a sizable force of warriors to deter any un-virtuous folk who might attack them.

Many other aspects of Yobanjin culture seem strange or repellant to the Rokugani but nonetheless show a degree of refinement which marks the Unbowed People as more than mere savages. For example, Yobanjin cuisine is quite varied and sophisticated, although it includes many kinds of red meat (which most Rokugani find disgusting). It is often intensely flavored with various spices, especially garlic, which the Rokugani likewise find off-putting.

Perhaps the greatest surprise to those few samurai who visit the Unbowed People is that many of them – including their warriors – appreciate the arts. Even the most nomadic tribes (which are also typically the most warlike) practice music and poetry, favoring a style of guttural singing accompanied by simple instruments such as flutes carved from animal bones. In larger settlements, Yobanjin music can feature a dazzling array of instruments and voices, producing music which the tribes love but would strike a Rokugani as pure cacophony. The cities also feature other art-forms, especially elaborate paintings on long scrolls of tanned animal hide.



raiders who sometimes invade their lands, and will give them a correspondingly wide berth. It may be noted that almost all Yobanjin bring weapons with them to Rokugan, so even peasants who do not recognize them as gaijin will assume they are samurai and treat them accordingly. For the Yobanjin, this can be quite hilarious, although their laughter only makes them seem more sinister to the poor peasants.

THE CRAB CLAN

Far from the northern border of Rokugan, the Crab lands have had very few interactions with the Yobanjin over the course of history. On the rare occasions when mercenaries from the Unbowed Tribes are willing to travel that far south, they do find good employment with the Crab Clan, since Crab officers care little for who hires with them so long as they fight well. Used to fending off giant hawks in their mountains and death-worms on the plains, the Yobanjin do not flinch easily in the face of Shadowlands monsters – however, they have little to no knowledge of the Taint, requiring close supervision to prevent them from becoming corrupted.

It is rumored that during exceptionally tough periods of their history the Crab have allowed Yobanjin warriors to participate in the Twenty Goblin Winter or even to marry into the clan outright, accepting the impure lineage as the price of rebuilding their depleted numbers. However, such stories have never been confirmed, and are firmly denied by any Crab one might ask.

The Crab Clan's distance from the northern frontier has prevented them from developing any significant trade contacts with the Yobanjin, although a handful of enterprising Yasuki have managed to form covert contacts. In any case, the Yobanjin offer little in the way of goods that might interest the clan of Hida.

THE CRANE CLAN

One might expect the clan of Doji, the representatives of culture and civilization in Rokugan, to have nothing whatever to do with dirty barbarians like the Yobanjin. However, the truth is more complicated. First, while they rarely publicize it, the Crane have always been the foremost employers of Yobanjin mercenaries. Having no contested borders with the Unbowed Tribes, they feel little animosity for them, and due to the relatively small size of their own armies (and the large size of their coffers), the Crane are often looking for mercenaries to protect their lands. The Daidoji, who often take it upon themselves to deal with unsavory tasks necessary for the good of the clan, are usually the ones who deal with the Yobanjin. In fact, a few members of the Daidoji family are fluent in the Yobanjin tongue and will occasionally travel undercover to the Yobanjin lands to recruit promising warriors – of course, this is a closely guarded secret. On occasion, the Crane have even covertly extended protection to a specific tribe, proving their influence extends even beyond the borders of Rokugan.

THE DRAGON CLAN

One of three Great Clans which hold lands on the northern border of Rokugan, the Dragon have always had contacts with the Yobanjin, if not on a regular basis. Unfortunately, such contact has rarely been pacific. The lands directly beyond Dragon borders are comprised of cold, high mountain peaks, making life difficult for the few tribes inhabiting those territories. When the winter comes, the temptation to strike against Rokugani villages is strong. Usually, a few squadrons of Mirumoto bushi are enough to push back any incursion, and the military officers of the Dragon Clan see this as good training, a way to prepare young recruits to face stronger enemies.

While the tattooed monks will also fiercely protect the land of their clan, they show more curiosity towards the Unbowed People, and occasionally travel to Yobanjin lands as part of their never-ending quests for enlightenment. The Agasha showed some curiosity toward Yobanjin herbalism and shamanistic magic, but after they morphed into the more militaristic Tamori, they took a dimmer view of their northern neighbors, preferring to fight them alongside their Mirumoto cousins.

In the late twelfth century, the Dragon are one of three clans to experience the full onslaught of the Dark Oracle of Fire, and as a result many Dragon samurai families develop a strong and enduring hatred of the Yobanjin. The more peaceful elements of the clan lament this attitude, but it remains to be seen whether this wound can ever truly heal.

THE LION CLAN

The Lion Clan has little use for the Yobanjin. Before the return of the Ki-Rin, the Lion would occasionally suffer a mild incursion into their northern lands and quickly move to dispatch it, finding it almost enjoyable to fight an enemy without any political entanglements (albeit also lacking the glory of facing fellow samurai). The Lion have never been known to make use of Yobanjin mercenaries, believing that even the most lowly ronin is infinitely preferable to a gaijin barbarian. The Yobanjin can be fierce, but they are little more than dogs as far as the Lion are concerned, and to fight alongside them would be an insult to one's ancestors. Moreover, as the Right Hand of the Emperor, the Lion see any gaijin presence on Rokugani soil as criminal, and often refuse to allow Yobanjin mercenaries through their borders even when they are accompanied by other Rokugani samurai. Indeed, the Lion have often tried to complain about the practice of hiring Yobanjin in the Imperial Court, but the Crane (and more recently, the Mantis and Unicorn) have always managed to avert any political consequences for employing such creatures, further enraging the Lion. Yobanjin with experience as mercenaries are aware of Lion attitudes and know that if they are deployed against Akodo armies they will be favored targets for destruction; they will have to fight twice as hard if they are to have any hope of surviving the encounter.



THE MANTIS CLAN

The Mantis have had both positive and negative interactions with the Yobanjin, and as a pragmatic clan prefer to deal with each situation as it comes rather than judge the entire group as a whole. The Yoritomo frequently visit Yobanjin ports to conduct trade, and although the Yobanjin trade was never as lucrative for the clan as that with the Ivory Kingdoms, it was still a meaningful source of wealth. While trade with gaijin was illegal for most of the Empire's history, such issues never stopped the Mantis, and their control of sea trade routes meant they rarely had to worry about such laws being enforced against them.

Some enterprising tribes of seafaring Yobanjin see Rokugani ships as targets ripe for the taking, and gaijin piracy has always been a risk for both the Mantis and for other clans who take to the seas. Moreover, clever Rokugani pirates (including some Mantis ones) sometimes masquerade as Yobanjin when raiding ships or coastal villages, further damaging the repute of the Unbowed Tribes.

Outside of the Yoritomo, the other Mantis families have had little contact with the Yobanjin, although on a few occasions the Tsuruchi have been forced to track criminals into Yobanjin lands who had thought to escape the law by leaving Rokugan.

THE PHOENIX CLAN

The relationship between the Phoenix Clan and the Yobanjin is a very complex one. In most ways the Phoenix are a very traditional clan that rejects gaijin influences of any sort. Their northern border is also the closest of all clan territories to the Yobanjin lands, and since the Phoenix army is the smallest of any Great Clan they often lack the resources to fully patrol that border, resulting in frequent incursions. Thus the Phoenix regularly denounce the Yobanjin as a danger to the Empire, and the Shiba have always refused to fight alongside Yobanjin mercenaries, having lost too many of their comrades in battle against them.

On the other hand, Isawa curiosity could not leave the Yobanjin entirely alone, and rumors of magical shamans and strange creatures always draw their attention. One of the biggest secrets of the Phoenix Clan is a small village called Yobanjin Mura, situated in the far north of the clan's territory, which is used to covertly trade with a few select Yobanjin tribes. While such trade was and is illegal, Imperial law defined "trade" as a fair exchange of goods, so by giving the Yobanjin unfair deals the Phoenix were technically not trading with them. The village has many inhabitants of mixed blood and is a useful resource for acquiring exotic materials required in alchemical and magical research.

There may be another reason for the close Phoenix-Yobanjin relationship. Supposedly, a Dragon samurai once discovered what he believed to be evidence that the Isawa family itself had Yobanjin origins. Although he kept his discovery between himself and his lord, it may be that the depth of connection between the Phoenix and their northern neighbor is deeper than even they suspect or are willing to admit.

THE UNICORN CLAN

The third Great Clan to hold lands in the northernmost parts of Rokugan, the Unicorn are probably the friendliest of those three clans to the Yobanjin, but also have the least contact with them. Yobanjin lands mostly lie farther east than where the Unicorn dwell, and while both peoples are willing to travel long distances when required, exchanges between them are relatively rare. While all Unicorn approach gaijin people with an open mind, the Yobanjin remember all too well the raids of the Ujik-Hai nomads who went on to become the Moto family. Thus the Moto are always received in a very cold manner in Yobanjin lands.

For the other Unicorn families, the Yobanjin represent a good opportunity to trade outside of Rokugani borders. And while the Unicorn armies are rarely lacking in numbers, Yobanjin mercenaries can sometimes find good work in Unicorn lands and appreciate the fair treatment they receive there.

The Unicorn have also found a most unusual use for the Yobanjin: spouses. Many Unicorn families embrace a tradition from their wandering days which dictates one should always seek for a spouse outside of one's ancestor's lineage... something which can be quite difficult in Rokugan. The Yobanjin offer a discreet option to resolve the problem, since most other Rokugani cannot tell the difference between a Yobanjin and a Unicorn with strong foreign blood. Of course, most Yobanjin are not terribly interested in marrying a Rokugani and moving to the Empire, so the Unicorn often have to prove their worth and win the heart of their intended spouse if they want to be successful in their quest. Needless to say, this is all quite unlike a normal Rokugani wedding arrangement, and such activities are kept very private lest they damage the Unicorn Clan's reputation with the rest of the Empire.

THE MINOR CLANS

Perhaps because they themselves live on the fringes of Rokugani society, often on remote scraps of land the Great Clans did not want, several of the Minor Clans have had extensive contact with the Yobanjin over the centuries. The first Minor Clan to take note of the Yobanjin was the Badger, guardians of the only major pass through the Great Wall of the North. Although the pass was not seriously threatened for many centuries, Yobanjin raiding groups did sometimes try to pass through, and Ichiro steel made sure they did not go farther.

The next Minor Clan to interact with the Yobanjin was the Tortoise, who saw the Yobanjin ports as a strategic location for their operations to monitor gaijin activity. Tortoise merchants are a frequent sight on the Yobanjin coast, and play a dangerous game of surveillance and counter-surveillance under the cover of trade.

Finally, when the Ox Clan formed in the twelfth century it settled in lands which border Yobanjin territory. The Ox frequently clashed with the Yobanjin, but also adopted some of their mannerisms, like the use of ring swords and even some of their cuisine.

Lands of the Yobanjin

The Yobanjin territories form a long stretch of land which starts north of the Phoenix and Dragon Clan. It is bordered on the west by the Burning Sands desert and on the east by the ocean, and extends for hundreds of miles to the north, eventually fading into the steppes held by the Ujik-Hai and various other nomadic peoples. The land has shaped the culture of the local tribes, and the sailing tribes of the east often seem to have little in common with the mountaineers of the south; without the emergence of the few Yobanjin cities and the accompanying culture (writing and the rujia philosophy) they would long since have diverged into separate peoples.

Overall, the Yobanjin lands are less fertile than in Rokugan, and in many regions farming is simply not a viable option. The few cities are concentrated in the area where agriculture and fishing can produce a food surplus; elsewhere, nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles are the norm. The winters are also noticeably harsher than in Rokugan, and survival through the cold season is never guaranteed for even the largest of tribes.

Significant areas of Yobanjin territory land have never really been tamed and are home to wild predators, ranging from natural dangers like tigers and wolf-packs to high-supernatural ones such as giant hawks and the so-called death-worms. Traveling through the Yobanjin lands is thus never without danger, and the fact that so many tribes have not only survived but thrived in this environment is a testimony to the indomitable spirit of the Unbowed Tribes.

THE MOUNTAINS

The Yobanjin mountains are cold, dangerous, and unforgiving, yet are home to a wide variety of tribes. Herding is the most common activity in the area, with only a minimal amount of agriculture, and even in good times these tribes live on a bare minimum of food; hunger can easily lead to violence, and the tribes here are known for their aggression and brutality even compared to other Yobanjin. The strongest tribes sometimes build fortresses among the peaks to protect themselves from their rivals, and the sight of an entire town surrounded by strong walls and perched high on a jagged slope is enough to give even a Rokugani pause. Most of the tribes dwelling here have been shaped by Rokugan (which they call “the Southern Country”) more than other Yobanjin. Many of them speak at least a few words of the Rokugani tongue, and some even have Rokugani blood. The tribes living closest to the border of the Empire all raid or trade with the Rokugani on occasion, and the savage war cries of Yobanjin warriors are well-known to those who live in the south. A few of these better-organized

tribes also manage to trade with the tribes of the Plateaus region (see below) or, more rarely, with Rokugan. Typically they exchange iron ore or rare mountain herbs for food, luxury items, and manufactured goods, easing their bleak existence. Rokugani silk, tea, and rice are highly sought and fetch a high price in Yobanjin markets, allowing a select few tribes to prosper through trade. Those are often the tribes who know the best ways through the mountains and can also provide valuable guides to adventurous Rokugani.

At the other extreme, some mountain tribes live in complete isolation, satisfying themselves by eking out a meager but safe existence in the mountains, and slowly drifting away from their connection to broader Yobanjin culture.

Beyond the harsh weather and poor food production, the mountains are also an exceptionally physically dangerous land for their inhabitants; threats include avalanches, active volcanoes, and the legendary giant hawks who nest in the highest peaks.

THE PLATEAUS

North of the mountains are broad and relatively flat expanses of land, battered by harsh winds but able to grow enough grass to sustain large herds. Those plateaus are separated by narrow valleys, sometimes canyons, where a few streams and rivers flow through on the way to the ocean. It is easy for travelers to get lost in these lands, since the plateaus can go on for miles without any noticeable features. Furthermore, the area is the main hunting grounds of the legendary death-worms, which are said to attack lone animals or travelers by springing from beneath the ground. Some legends claim there is a relationship between the death-worms and the flying “wyrms” which Yobanjin shamans summon for their chieftains to ride into battle, but this may be only a folk tale.





The safest way to live on the plateaus is to stay together in large numbers, and the tribes here prefer to move about in groups of hundreds or even thousands, carefully guarding their herds from horseback. The canyons are dangerous as well, prone to rock slides and flash floods. During the winter season, the plateaus are blanketed in snow and bitter cold, while the fierce winds grow even worse, masking the roars of the death-worms; lone travelers often disappear, sometimes never seen again, other times found later as frozen corpses. The Yobanjin settle into their tents and conserve their energy as much as possible, avoiding travel and war until the spring.

THE RIVERS

Between the plateaus and the coastline, the land gradually descends and the rocky canyons give way to wide valleys that open onto fertile plains. Many rivers run through this region, but most of them ultimately find their way into two main waterways: Chenzhong He, the Ponderous River, and Bai He, the White River.

Chenzhong He is a quiet, deep river which carries a lot of sediment washed down from the uplands, making the lands around it very fertile. However, navigation on it is often slow and difficult due to muddy waters hiding sharp rocks. Bai He, further to the north, is both longer and faster, easier to navigate except during the winter when freezes over. During the warm months it teems with fish, prized through Yobanjin lands for their taste.

This whole region is the most densely populated part of the Yobanjin lands, as the rivers and plains allow for extensive cultivation of millet, wheat, and sorghum. However, open plains also mean invasions, since there are no geographic obstacles to raiders, and the tribes here maintain strong armies and fierce martial traditions.

The most important aspect of this region is the presence of several large cities which form the heart of Yobanjin culture. The vast majority of the Yobanjin's artistic and scholastic groups live here, far from Rokugan here their activities remain all but unknown to outsiders. Here may be found the city of Zhongshi, the beating heart of all the

Yobanjin (described below), as well as a number of other major settlements:

- ☉ **Qiang Qiang**, the northernmost of the cities, has strong walls to resist Ujik-Hai raids. Its people are tough but somewhat isolationist, and endure despite brutal winters.
- ☉ **Jin Lu**, a city which sits at the edge of the Burning Sands, and one of the richest in all the Yobanjin territories. The culture of the Burning Sands has influenced the city, and spices, silk, and even gold can be found there.
- ☉ **Zhengfu**, the largest city in the Yobanjin lands, was founded by three militant tribes after they agreed to cooperate with each other. While generally peaceful, it is a formidable power in the region. The city's size and wealth attract refugees during hard times, occasionally forcing it to close its gates when it cannot accommodate any more. Some Phoenix scholars have visited Zhengfu, which they refer to as the "City of Gold."
- ☉ **Long Sheng**, a city built at the confluence of many rivers, boasts more of the notorious Wurm Riders than any other place in the Yobanjin territories. Rumor claims many other strange and supernatural creatures are found in the city, and shamans often travel there to study or obtain exotic ingredients.

THE CITY OF ZHONGSHI

While Zhengfu is larger both in size and population, Zhongshi is truly the heart of Yobanjin culture and history. The oldest known city in the Yobanjin lands, it was founded over a thousand years ago near a curve of the Chenzhong He, the Ponderous River, and has grown and prospered ever since. While it was once only the home of the Small River Tribe, over the years it has welcomed other tribes within its walls, and many different groups control a few homes or neighborhoods there even when they spend the majority of their time outside, visiting only for the winter or for important occasions. Consequently, the city has a chaotic style of architecture, each tribe contributing its own ideas over centuries.

Zhongshi is the only city to be ruled by a Governor, chosen each year by the senior representatives of the various tribes living in the city. The rules and laws of the city are quite complex, and can be rather daunting for those unfamiliar with them; it is said even the Governor does not always know how the city really functions. However, those rules have also served to maintain balance between the different tribes, preserving their rights and privileges and ensuring security for all. The city levies a small tax on anything which passes through its gates, and this money is used to fund a city guard, famous throughout the Yobanjin territories for its martial skill and moral integrity. This peaceful atmosphere has allowed the city to develop an exceptionally large scholarly class, and many philosophers and artists can be found roaming its streets. Other Yobanjin will travel to Zhongshi when they need answers to difficult or mystifying problems, resolution of



thorny legal disputes, or a safe place to conclude a truce with an enemy tribe.

Zhongshi has never been visited by any Rokugani, at least so far as the Yobanjin know; they hold the city in almost sacred esteem, and worry what the samurai would do if they ever saw its wealth and its ancient treasures. Among the most prized of these are the statues of the forty-nine warriors who defeated Zurong, each meticulously carved from marble. Other valuables include the oldest known scrolls with the fundamentals of rujia philosophy, and the so-called Tree of the Gods, an ancient pear tree whose fruit is said to grant wisdom and longevity. (Control of these sacred pears is traditionally reserved to the Governor.)

THE COAST

Stretching for hundreds of miles, the Yobanjin coast exhibits a variety of landscapes, peppered by the villages and occasional cities of those who live from the bounty of the sea. Fish is caught all year round, making those settlements somewhat more prosperous in the winter months. However, the northern waters are more often storm-wracked than even the rough waters of Rokugan, so food is plentiful it is not always easy to catch.

The Yobanjin are wary of foreign ships, particularly from Rokugan, and only three of their ports are open to foreigners. Farthest south, the city of Fu Gang is a prosperous port which deals mostly with Tortoise smugglers. The Yobanjin make a game of trying to deceive the Kasuga, and often offer ludicrous stories about the interior of the Yobanjin lands. Since they try to learn about Rokugan at the same time, and the Tortoise respond with deceptions of their own, the city is full of lies and false appearances, and its inhabitants are considered duplicitous by the rest of the Yobanjin tribes.

The second port, Bo Cheng, is the largest, but since it lies farther north it receives fewer visitors from Rokugan. This port is entirely under the rule of the powerful Divine Wave tribe, who maintain influence over much of the coast through a mixture of intimidation and commercial influence.

The last open port is the small city of Chandeyang in the far north. This place has never received any Rokugani visitors, but on rare occasions merchant ships from the Merenae, the Thrane, or other more distant lands will come there to trade. The inhabitants of Chandeyang are of a wary nature even compared to other Yobanjin and defend their homeland fiercely, so foreigners always approach with care. In the winter, the sea freezes, making this city completely isolated.

THE STEPPE

To the north and west, beyond the plateaus and the riverlands, the land becomes drier and the climate harsher, making cultivation all but impossible. Settlements grow progressively more rare as one travels farther out, with only a few nomadic tribes to be found here and there. These few tribes were harassed for centuries by the ferocious Ujik-hai (later known as the Moto), who saw the Yobanjin as the wolf sees the sheep: an easy source of sustenance. Consequently, the steppe has long functioned as a vaguely defined outer border in the minds of the Yobanjin, limiting their expansion.

Things changed in the early twelfth century when the remaining Moto departed for Rokugan, abandoning their ancestral lands. Suddenly the main threat to the steppe was gone, and in subsequent years the nomadic Yobanjin tribes expanded into the now-empty territory. They discovered some of the secret tombs of the Ujik-Hai in the new lands, but soon learned to give them a wide berth – despite the presence of impressive treasures, the wrath of the Ujik-Hai ghosts was too much to bear.

During the War of Dark Fire, when the Dark Oracle of Fire imposed his tyranny over the Yobanjin people, many found refuge on the steppe, bolstering the tribes living there. After the demise of the Oracle, most of these refugees returned to their lands, but some stayed with their new tribes or tried to settle farther north or west. Thus, while the war devastated the core Yobanjin territories to the south, the northern regions became more prosperous, a complete reversal of fortunes. This led many Yobanjin to further distance themselves from Rokugan and seek trade and contact with other gaijin nations instead. Some of



them even heard rumors of the distant Yodotai, an empire far more aggressive and expansionary than Rokugan, and began to build fortifications in the western territories in preparation. Even with the Ujik-Hai gone, the steppe may still be a place where blood is spilled.

The Major Yobanjin Tribes

As previously mentioned, the number of Yobanjin tribes is ever-changing. Listing them all would be a fruitless effort; however, a few have shown great longevity, serving as key players in the history and culture of the Unbowed People. The more notable ones are described below.

DAUGHTERS OF THE FLAME

The Daughters of the Flame are a matriarchal tribe from the southern mountains. While a few other tribes are matriarchal, the Daughters are both the largest and the most famous of them by a wide margin. They hold shamans in high respect, and many powerful shamans are found within their ranks. Living next to an active volcano, the Daughters revere its spirits as their most sacred God, which they call Mother Fire. They see Mother Fire as the source of warmth but also of death, to be both respected and feared. This shapes the Daughters' approach to other things in life: they are a peaceful tribe who seek to nurture their members, yet at the same time fight fiercely against their enemies and are not afraid of death.

Despite living in the southern part Yobanjin territory, the Daughters have usually left Rokugan alone – they simply have little interest in the samurai or what they can offer. Instead, the Daughters trade with other tribes in the area, offering them crops from their fertile volcanic soil or beautiful jewelry made from volcanic glass, taking in exchange herd animals or exotic components for their magical rituals. However, it is forbidden for anyone not of their tribe to ever lay eyes on the inside of their sacred volcanoes, and other tribes spread dark rumors of the horrible fates which await those who transgress against this rule.

Unfortunately, the Daughters face a dire time during the War of Dark Fire when they resist the Dark Oracle's domination to the bitter end. As a result, the tribe is all but destroyed, leaving only a few survivors to seek shelter among other tribes. Still, these handfuls of descendants do their best to maintain their traditions within their families, passing their beliefs from mother to daughter.

MOUNTAIN WIND TRIBE

Another tribe from the southernmost part of the Yobanjin Territory, the Mountain Wind are one of the tribes with the most peaceful contact with Rokugan, maintaining diplomatic relations with both the Badger Clan and the Crane Clan. Perhaps because of this, the Mountain Wind are known by other Yobanjin for being very honorable, having no taste for treachery or deceit, and delivering swift justice against their enemies. The tribe lives a harsh life in the cold mountains of the Yobanjin territories, but their hardships





are somewhat alleviated by their trade with the Empire. They sometimes act as guides for adventurous samurai, and regularly offer their services as mercenaries – especially for conflicts waged in inhospitable terrain. Many of the Mountain Wind tribe speak broken Rokugani, with some being genuinely fluent in the language. Although they see the way of the samurai as too constricting, the Mountain Wind tribesmen appreciate samurai honor and follow a similar social model, with their warriors leading the tribe. Of course, they still reject any sort of caste system, and view personal honor and martial prowess, rather than birth, as the true measures of someone's worth.

The Mountain Wind Tribe barely survives the War of Dark Fire, fighting with all its strength against the Oracle. However, their dedication wins them allies both at home and in Rokugan, and they receive a great deal of help afterward to rebuild their tribe.

SONS OF THE MOUNTAIN TRIBE

Although they originated in the Mountains from which they draw their name, the Sons of the Mountain long ago extended their reach to other areas, included the plateaus and several villages along the coast. There is one universal rule in this tribe: you only own what you can keep. As a result, they launch frequent raids against other tribes, and their internecine conflicts produce chieftains as strong as they are devious. The Sons of the Mountains ally sometimes with elements of the Mantis Clan and the Tortoise Clan, and although that alliance is eventually dismantled by the Emerald Champion in the twelfth century, prior to that time it grants them even greater prosperity.

With their size and wealth the Sons of the Mountains maintain a large army, and show more sophisticated tactics and strategies than most Yobanjin. However, their reach constantly exceeds their grasp, and they often find themselves pushed back by coalitions of angry neighbors. Even when they are on the defensive, though, their warriors remain some of the most feared in all the Yobanjin territories.

The Dark Oracle of Fire has no difficulty convincing the Sons of the Mountain to join him, and they lead his forces in most engagements. As a result, the Sons suffer gruesome casualties in the War of Dark Fire, and are reduced to mere shadow of their former power. Their survival is only due to the fact their neighbors were also devastated, for otherwise it is likely the rest of the tribes would have united to exterminate them. As it is, the remnants of the Sons of the Mountain exist in uneasy truce with the rest of the Yobanjin, but are hurriedly rebuilding their strength and forging alliances. Despite their losses, they have not abandoned their dream of ruling a united Yobanjin nation.

THE TRIBE OF THE SKY

Another tribe from the mountains, the Tribe of the Sky is famous even in Rokugan for its notorious Hawk Riders. Although such riders can occasionally be found in other tribes, the Tribe of the Sky has access to a large supply of great hawk eggs, and relies on time-proven methods of training the animals. They can often field a dozen or

more Hawk Riders at a time, allowing them the freedom to roam across the Yobanjin territories and strike at anyone who earns their wrath. The Tribe of the Sky places great emphasis on personal freedom, and its members come and go as they wish. Members of the Tribe of the Sky can thus be met anywhere from the northernmost steppe to Rokugan itself. Although they have no particular dislike for the Empire, the tribe often raids unprotected Rokugani villages, seeing them as easy pickings for cattle and grain.

The bond between a hawk and its rider is a personal one, and while the eggs are seen as a collective tribal resource, every hawk goes where its rider goes. The tribe sees this relationship as an intensely spiritual one, allowing them to travel through the sky in the manner of the spirits or even the gods, and all members of the tribe are exceptionally pious – their shamans most of all.

During the War of Dark Fire, the tribe is forced to serve the Dark Oracle when it takes their children and hawk eggs as hostages. Acting as scouts and aerial attack forces for the Army of Dark Fire, the tribe loses many of its members, hawks and men alike. However, the hawk nests are left unharmed by the end of the war, allowing the tribe to begin a rebuilding process.

CHILDREN OF THE FROZEN PEAKS

Living in the coldest part of the mountains, the Children of the Frozen Peaks are almost a different people than the rest of the Yobanjin. Their language is radically different, almost incomprehensible aside from sharing basic grammar, and they have their own crude writing system which relies on syllabic characters rather than logographic characters. They even look different, their skin deeply tanned and lined by the reflection of sunlight on the snow-capped mountains. However, they still join with the rest of the Yobanjin when matters require the attentions of all the tribes. One of their warriors, Chodek, is known to have participated in the fight against Zurong, and for this alone the Children of the Frozen Peaks always have the respect of other tribes.

The Children are a pious tribe and express their faith by weaving beautiful carpets as a tribute to the spirits of the mountains. Their existence is simple and often difficult, yet also joyous; it is said a Child of the Mountain can find happiness in all things. The tribe believes the laughter of children is pleasing to the gods, and thus strives to give its youngest members a carefree existence. They are also known for their domestication of mountain yaks, which they use for milk, wool, and as beasts of burden.

Sadly, the Dark Oracle of Fire takes a personal dislike – or perhaps a perverse liking – to the Children, and ‘blesses’ many of them with his fire during the War. The Children become the maddened shock troops of the Army of Dark Fire, driven to swift and explosive deaths against the armies of Rokugan. The tribe does not survive the war, but some in the Yobanjin lands believe – or at least hope – that other, smaller similar off-shoots might have survived hidden in the mountains.



THE DIVINE WAVE TRIBE

The legends of the Divine Wave tribe tell how when they sought a place to settle on the coast, they found another tribe living there. They offered to share the space, but the other tribe rejected their offer, casting them out in the wild. A day later, a tsunami ravaged the coast and leveled the settlement, making way for them to settle where their enemy once dwelt. Since then, the tribe has revered the spirits of the waves, who bring them the bounty of the sea and crush their enemies. From their original city of Bo Cheng, which grew to become the largest port in the Yobanjin territories, the Divine Wave Tribe has spread along much of the coast, founding several smaller villages and taking other tribes under its wing. The tribe is rich by Yobanjin standards and has trading agreements with other tribes and foreign peoples. However, the Divine Wave have not always followed the most savory of practices in seeking their wealth, and rivals have often accused them of racketeering or piracy. It is said the tribe is generous to its allies, but merciless to its enemies.

The Divine Wave tribe's economy suffered during the War of Dark Fire, as trade was cut off and many of its ships were used as expendable transports to ferry troops to Rokugan. However, the towns and villages remained mostly unharmed. In the aftermath of the war, the chieftains of the Divine Wave quickly reasserted their authority, and the tribe has once again become a key player in Yobanjin politics. They have also begun expanding their piracy in order to recoup their losses from the war.

THE SMALL RIVER TRIBE

This tribe's name seems a bit ironic, given that they mostly reside in the city of Zhongshi near the massive Chenzhong He river. However, the Small River Tribe still remembers its origins as a minor nomadic tribe, and this has allowed them to retain a certain level of humility despite having founded what is arguably the center of Yobanjin civilization. The tribe has always had

a guiding hand in the affairs of the city, and its members can be found at all level of its government, but they do not always rule Zhongshi outright, and other tribes have taken the lead more than once.

The Small River Tribe governs itself in a manner more akin to an extended family than anything else, with elders carefully guiding the younger generations. Thanks to the tribe's influence in Zhongshi, all members can boast of an extensive education – a most unusual thing among the Yobanjin, and an advantage that lets them find positions as advisers or scholars all across the lands of the Unbowed People. Unsurprisingly, the Small River Tribe are also some of the most vocal proponent of the rujia philosophy, and it is undoubtedly through their efforts that rujia has spread so widely through the Yobanjin as a whole. The Small River Tribe also has an unending thirst for knowledge, and has collected volumes of lore from all across the Yobanjin lands and from many of the lands beyond. They have an ambivalent attitude toward Rokugan, since they would love to know more about the Empire but also fear the xenophobic, warlike samurai.

During the War of Dark Fire, the members of the Small River Tribe are ruthlessly hunted by the armies of the Dark Oracle, who fear their wisdom and knowledge. Many are hidden by other tribes, sometimes at great cost. After the war, the survivors' skills are instrumental in rebuilding Yobanjin society.

CARRIERS OF THE FIRE

Based in the city of Qiang Qiang (but also controlling multiple fortresses in the northern steppes), the Carriers of the Fire are a hardy people. They coax meager harvests from poor land, and fish the waters of the icy Bai He River to sustain themselves. The greatest strength of the tribe, however, resides in a unique resource: coal, which is abundant in the area. This has allowed the tribe to survive the harsh northern winters and to develop several advanced metallurgy techniques for creating tools and weapons.

The Carriers of the Fire are instinctively distrustful of outsiders, even Yobanjin from other tribes, and often close the doors of their fortresses if they have any doubts about their visitors. For countless years the Carriers fought off assaults from the Ujik-Hai, and their fortifications originated as defenses against those raids. Thus, they long ago came to see all outsiders as potential threats first and foremost. They hold this opinion on Rokugan as well, but given the distance which separates them from the Emerald Empire they never deal with more than a handful of samurai. Regardless, the Carriers of the Fire are a tribe with an exceptionally large proportion of warriors, although the army remains subordinate to a council of elders from Qiang Qiang.





When the Dark Oracle of Fire starts spreading his influence across the land, the Carriers are the most successful in resisting him, entrenching themselves in their cities and fortresses. They lose many lives, and several of their settlements burn, but survive due to the Dark Oracle's strongest attention being focused to the south. As a result, Qiang Qiang becomes a rallying point for many refugees from smaller tribes, and after the war the Carriers of the Fire find their influence over the rest of Yobanjin society has dramatically increased. They are now one of the largest tribes among the Yobanjin, and have friendly relationships with many others, an odd reversal of their former isolationist existence. However, this has not ended their suspicion toward outsiders, and they pay close attention to reports of Senpet refugees and Yodatai scouts on the steppe. While others might bask in the glory of victory, the Carriers know it is only a matter of time before a new threat appears, and they are determined to make themselves ready for it.

The Yobanjin Wyrms

One of the strangest aspects of Yobanjin culture – and one of the most alarming to the Rokugani – is their mastery of the bizarre flying serpents known as “wyrms.” These rare creatures are sometimes used as mounts by Yobanjin chieftains, powerful war-leaders, and famous shamans. Despite their rarity, they are so distinctive and memorable that for many Rokugani they are synonymous with the Yobanjin themselves, proof that the “northern barbarians” are half-monstrous people who consort with dark powers.

The exact nature of the wyrms is something of a mystery. This much is known: somehow they are summoned and magically bound by the most powerful Yobanjin shamans, who use the magic of the Elements to link each unique wyrm to a unique mystical amulet. The wyrm is then bound to serve and obey the bearer of that amulet, whoever that might be. (There has been at least one instance of a Rokugani samurai using a captured amulet to take control of a wyrm.) However, if the amulet is ever destroyed, the wyrm ceases to exist. Barring that, a wyrm can only perish if it is physically slain – the creatures are ageless, and some of the more powerful tribes claim to possess wyrms which measure their age in centuries.

However, such information raises as many questions as it answers. Where do the Yobanjin summon these wyrms from? Some Rokugani have speculated that the wyrms are actually nothing less than Ryu of the Celestial realm, somehow trapped and bound into twisted, perverted forms by foul gaijin magic. Yet given that Yobanjin shamans are so much weaker than Rokugani shugenja overall, how could they possibly manage to forcibly summon and enslave the very servants of Heaven? Many Rokugani have preferred to assume the wyrms have a more sinister origin, being summoned from Sakkaku or perhaps even Jigoku itself. Still others have speculated that the wyrms are some form of “natural” animal, possibly related to the death-worms of the Yobanjin plains, which are twisted and changed by Yobanjin rituals.

NPCs from Rokugan's History

Many previous books in the L5R 4th Edition line have included histories and game-statistics for notable personages from the history of Rokugan. However, for space reasons not all of these NPCs were able to fit into the previous books. Herewith we present a few of these missing people: three founding figures of the Crane Clan, an infamous geisha from the Clan Wars, and a hero of the Destroyer War.

LADY DOJI, THE CRANE KAMI

"As the Sun and Moon gave shape to the formless, so must we create order from chaos."

With hair like silken ebony and eyes the color of a summer sky, Doji was without question the most beautiful of all the Kami. It was her wisdom that shaped the future identity of the Emerald Empire. She was the mother of the arts and spent her life building the language, culture, and traditions of a great civilization.

Doji was one of the Kami, a child of Amaterasu and Onnotangu, born in the Celestial Heavens. Unlike Hantei, she experienced the Heavens only briefly before she was swallowed by her jealous father, and thus did not fully comprehend what she and her siblings lost when they fell to Ningen-do and lost their divinity. Fascinated by the strange world of mortals, she and the other Kami set out to explore it, and as she wandered the land Doji saw much potential. When the Kami re-gathered five years later, she told Hantei the mortals were not without worth, but lacked direction. She proposed the Kami offer them that direction through their leadership, and her siblings agreed to forge a harmonious kingdom on earth that matched the harmony of the Heavens. As noted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories* (page 12), the Kami fought a tournament to choose their leader. Despite not being a warrior, Doji did surprisingly well, besting Shiba when he could not read her stance before losing to the ferocious and perceptive warrior Akodo.

After the tournament, Doji became an advocate for the new Empire among the mortals. She went to the human leaders and promised them the Kami would teach and protect them in exchange for their humble obedience. Her words were eloquent and her beauty and grace inspired all that she met, and the local tribes flocked to the banners of the Kami.

For Doji, the most important moment in the early Empire came when her brother decided to choose a champion to help him govern Rokugan. The first Emerald Tournament is described in *Imperial Histories* (page 30), and it was at this event that Lady Doji met the man named Kakita, the victor in the tournament. Hantei was impressed by the mortal who was his new champion, and Kakita for his part was hopelessly smitten by Doji's beauty. However, Doji was livid at the suggestion she lower herself to marrying a mortal. She demanded three impossible tasks of Kakita as a condition for their union. A full description of Lady Doji's tasks and how Kakita cleverly overcame them may be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans* (page 45). While Kakita was away seeking the answers for Doji's challenges, he left his twin sister Kiyamori in Doji's service as a handmaid. Kiyamori told Doji endless tales of her brother's courage, honor, and wisdom. Doji might have dismissed the advocacy as nothing more than a sister's love, but Kiyamori was a skilled poet and a prodigy with language, and over time she won the Kami over. When Kakita returned the following year and answered her challenges, Doji willingly and indeed joyously married her brother's champion.

The next several decades were the best in Doji's life. She forged a love with Kakita that shone like a star in the early years of the Empire. She birthed five children, each destined for greatness. She traveled to some extent, but let most of her followers come to her... which they did in huge numbers. Her passion for beauty and creation led her to develop arts like ikebana and poetry. Together with Kiyamori she created the written language of Rokugan. Doji was also Hantei's closest advisor and formed the basis of Imperial politics. It was her counsel that established the traditions, protocols, and procedures underlying the government and courts of Rokugan. Like her siblings, Lady Doji met Shinsei, who is said to have taught her the importance of appreciating the beauty everywhere in nature.

The Day of Thunder was a tragic time for Doji. Her eldest son Doji Yasurugi was assassinated by an oni, and Yasurugi's twin Konishiko took up her brother's blade and followed Shinsei to confront Fu Leng. Although the Seven Thunders defeated the Dark Kami and saved the Empire, the double loss of their two eldest children hurt both Doji and her husband Kakita deeply. Kakita withdrew from Doji and his friends and became ever more obsessed with his art of iaijutsu; Doji understood his pain but could not find a way to soothe it. Her grief was somewhat eased a few years later when her youngest son Hayaku ventured into Shadowlands and returned bearing his sister's sword, a deed which led to his being named the founder of the Daidoji family, defenders of the Crane.

The next few years were a time of continuing loss for Lady Doji. In the year 45 she was forced to say goodbye to her sister Shinjo, who left to explore the lands beyond the





Empire. The next year was even worse: Kakita's obsession with iaijutsu led to his lethal duel with Mirumoto Hojatsu, and her brother Hantei died from the wounds he had suffered fighting Fu Leng's armies four years earlier. Doji did her best to resist the grief and depression which threatened to overwhelm her. She persuaded the Crane Clan to celebrate Kakita's death as the fulfillment of a life dedicated to an ideal, rather than a reckless act by a doubting man. She redoubled her efforts to make Rokugan a place of joy, learning, and civilization, although she was never as carefree as her earlier days. She dedicated herself to guiding her nephew, Hantei Genji, the second Emperor of Rokugan. They became close allies and she cemented the Crane's position as the Emperor's Left Hand. She was proud to see her son, Kakita Shimizu, become the Emerald Champion, serving the Emperor as her husband had.

In the year 49, Doji arranged for Hantei Genji to have a chance meeting with a Crane named Doji Oborozukiyo at a cherry blossom viewing. Genji was awestruck by the beautiful maiden as she stood surrounded by drifting cherry petals. Doji guided the two of them through a long courtship, an event designed to awe and enthrall the entire Empire. Under Doji's guidance, their courtship and marriage became a cultural archetype and set the fashion for the Empire. More importantly, the wedding helped shake Rokugan out of its grim post-war tone, as everyone fell in love with the Empress as Genji did. This restored faith in a bright future for the Empire, as Doji had intended.

Unfortunately, the joy of the wedding for Doji was curtailed the following year when the Matsu launched a military strike against the Kakita lands. The Matsu claimed the right to avenge repeated insults from the Kakita family, and their assault inflicted heavy damage on the Kakita lands. Doji appealed to Hantei Genji and her brother Akodo to stop the violence. However, when Bayushi and the Scorpion sided with the Matsu, Genji allowed the conflict to continue so long as the security of the Empire was not compromised. Akodo likewise refused to stop his vassals, as he felt their cause was honorable, but he did restrict the Matsu from escalating their attack into a full war against the Crane. Akodo's intervention likely spared the Crane Clan from destruction, and the Matsu halted their attacks when the Kakita withdrew into lands beyond their reach. Doji never forgot what she saw as reckless, bloodthirsty, and short-sighted behavior from her brother's followers,

and she dedicated her clan to minimizing the Lion's power in any way possible. She also spent many years touring the rest of Rokugan, visiting each of the other clans in turn, making contacts with all of the new noble houses and seeking out those who shared her passion for art, beauty, and joy. Many political alliances were born from this tour of the Rokugan, which also did much to further spread the Imperial culture she had created for Otosan Uchi.

When she learned of Togashi's apparent death in the year 102, Doji believed she was now the last of her brothers and sisters save for her brutish brother Hida, to whom she had not spoken in decades. The grief of earlier years returned and she decided there was no longer a reason for her to remain in the mortal world. She approached Doji Ochiba, the wife of her son Doji Nio, and shared with her several secrets that have been passed down ever since from each Crane Clan champion's wife to the next. With her affairs in order and a peaceful transition of power ensured, Doji went to the seashore one last time. She raised her arms to the sky and a huge wave crashed over her. When the water retreated, she was gone. Some say she did not die but became part of the ocean itself, still dancing among the waves when the moon shines upon the sea.

DOJI, FOUNDER OF THE CRANE CLAN

AIR: 8	EARTH: 6	FIRE: 7	WATER: 7	VOID: 7
AWARENESS: 10		WILLPOWER: 8		PERCEPTION: 8
Honor: 9.8		Status: 8.0		Glory: 10.0

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 4 (Insight Rank is so much higher as to be meaningless)

Skills: Artisan: Ikebana 7, Artisan: Origami 6, Artisan: Painting 6, Artisan: Poetry 7, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 8, Courtier (Manipulation) 9, Defense 3, Etiquette (Conversation) (Courtesy) 8, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 5, Meditation 5, Perform: Biwa 5, Perform: Dance 7, Perform Song 6, Perform: Storytelling 4, Sincerity 7, Tea Ceremony 7, Lore: Heraldry 3

Advantages: Allies (Hantei among others), Balance, Benten's Blessing, Blissful Betrothal, Great Potential (all skills), Irreproachable, Paragon (Courtesy), Touch of the Spirit Realms (Tengoku), Voice

Disadvantages: True Love (Kakita), Lost Love (after Kakita's death)

ALTERNATE SPECULATIONS: DOJI AND THE NOTHING

After Shosuro returned from the Day of Thunder, she brought with her the force called the Nothing, lodged deep within her soul. The Nothing, also known as the Lying Darkness, is fully described in the L5R 4th edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire* (page 129). When Shosuro "died" in the arms of Bayushi in the throne room of the Emperor of Rokugan, the Nothing became aware of all the Kami who were gathered there, recognizing them as agents of the creation it hated.

Did the Nothing have a hand in the deaths or disappearances of so many of the Kami over the next century? Certainly its hold on Shosuro was the reason Bayushi eventually left his clan and died searching for her. Did the Lying Darkness also whisper to Akodo, heightening his fear of more monstrous invaders in Rokugan? Perhaps it was this influence that caused Akodo to sacrifice himself to destroy a Tsuno army, using his last spark of divinity to collapse the Seikitsu Pass down upon himself and the invaders alike. Did Hida resign from leadership of his clan in the year 63 because he felt a subtle and sinister influence on his thoughts? Is that why he eventually went on a suicidal march into the Shadowlands in search of his son?

In this interpretation, Doji may have suffered the most under the focus of the Nothing. Her husband Kakita fell into the sins of regret and desire. The Lying Darkness pulled him away from her, from his friends and his family. In the end the Nothing drove him into an unnecessary and lethal duel with the son of Mirumoto. While Kakita's death was a triumph for the Lying Darkness, Doji still held the Nothing at bay for more than fifty years, until at last all of her siblings were gone except for the reclusive Hida. In her loneliness the Nothing found an opening and drove her to despair. Yet Doji would die in the same manner as she lived — in the creation of something unique: a beautiful and perfect suicide.



Doji Nio, CRANE FOUNDING FATHER

Doji Nio stood next to his mother on a balcony overlooking the cherry orchard near the Imperial Palace. The newness of the palace was evident everywhere. Even the wood was freshly lacquered, its scent filling the air. The new orchard below them was in full bloom, and it reminded Nio of the newly-founded Empire itself – young, growing, planted in fertile soil. As long as disaster did not strike, Rokugan and the cherry trees alike would grow large and beautiful.

Only seven years before, heroes from each of the clans had joined with Shinsei to stop Fu Leng on the Day of Thunder. Every one of the Thunders had died, and the Crane Clan had lost both of the Twin Thunders, Nio's two older siblings. Nio still missed them terribly. But the Thunder had won, Rokugan was preserved, and the orchard would continue to grow.

His mother Doji watched the scene below in the way her brother Akodo might study his legions on the battlefield. Nio watched her, his heart warm with admiration. This was her domain. She had created it, but she did not seek to control it. Instead she played the court like a musician would play a favored instrument.

Finally he asked: "Honored Mother, why are you not below with the others?"

"All is in place," Doji replied. "I must let the waters flow as they will. If I enter the current, I will cause ripples that might disrupt the flow. There is but one chance at this perfect strike."

"What do you mean, Mother?"

In answer, Doji gestured to a young Crane maiden who stood among the cherry trees. She was achingly beautiful, her long ebony hair perfectly arranged and adorned with golden pins and with several flowers at the height of their bloom. Her kimono was the finest silk and decorated with a subtle pattern of misty clouds drifting before a shining moon. Her face was painted a snowy white, with a slight hint of magenta around the corner of her eyes. Her lips were the color of roses. Nio found himself near-breathless at the sight.

"Who is that maiden?"

"Doji Oborozukiyo. She is the daughter of one of my first followers. She is a prodigy and as lovely as the sunrise over the sea."

Nio marveled. "I've never seen anything like her."

Doji smiled softly in response. "Neither has my nephew."

As if her words had summoned him, her nephew – the Emperor, Hantei Genji – entered the orchard, followed by his huge entourage. Nio realized they had come to enjoy the beauty of the spring cherry blossoms.

Doji watched intently as Genji approached the young Crane woman. She turned to face the Emperor, and as she did a breeze rippled through the trees. Cherry petals fluttered down around her. She gave the faintest of smiles before bowing low before the Shining Prince.

Genji stared in wonder at the woman before him before motioning for her to rise from her prostration. He spoke to her softly, and though Doji and Nio were too far away to hear the words, the meaning behind them was clear. Oborozukiyo fell into step beside the Emperor. As they walked through the falling blossoms, Genji could not pull his eyes from her.

Doji nodded in satisfaction. "War, death, and the Shadowlands. Such things are all we have thought about for a decade. Now it is time for the Empire to think of something else."

The Kami turned to her son. Her blue eyes were as brilliant and clear as the summer sky, brighter than Doji had seen them since Kakita's passing. "The Thunders won the war, but she... she will win the peace."

The second son of Doji and Kakita, Doji Nio became the founder of the Doji family. Nio was a tall man who inherited his mother's refined elegance and his father's stoicism. He did not dye his long hair as many later Crane would do, since that custom did not gain widespread acceptance until after his death. Nio also inherited his mother's drive to create a better civilization for all of Rokugan and worked tirelessly throughout his life toward that goal.

Nio was one of Rokugan's greatest poets and calligraphers. His most famous work is *My Mother, the World*, a book which discussed the concept of *Setsugekka* – a phrase that stands for three symbolically interlinked aspects of nature: snow, ocean, and flowers. Nio compared these three aspects to the spirit of the ever-changing world of the Emerald Empire. *My Mother, the World* is said to be the most beautiful example of calligraphy in Rokugan history, and the original version of the work is still held at the Seppun library. Over the centuries, artisans throughout Rokugan have aspired merely to be in the same room with this incredible creation, and have traded many political favors just to spend a few hours studying the fabled scroll.

Nio married Doji Ochiba, a confidante of his mother Doji, who later became the last person to speak to Doji before her disappearance. Doji gave her the relic known as the Tears of the First Emperor, as well as the words that became the motto of the Crane Clan.

In addition to being a superb diplomat and artist, Nio was also a master of commerce, an activity which had not yet become as embarrassing to samurai as it would in later eras. He worked with the Yasuki to organize Crane caravan routes throughout the fledgling Empire, leveraging the fertile lands of the Crane to support a massive trade



network. From this solid foundation the Crane fortunes flourished and grew, making them the wealthiest samurai in the Empire for many centuries to come. Nio is rumored to have written a treatise on economics that reveals many of his methods, but no extant copies of this treatise are known to exist. Perhaps the text was lost, although rumors spread by political rivals claim the Doji purposefully suppressed the treatise out of embarrassment that their founder gave so much thought to such a low skill. (The Yasuki claim the Doji hid the work after the Yasuki left to join the Crab, lest Nio's mastery escape the clan's control.) It is also possible that the treatise never existed in the first place and is only a rumor designed to diminish the prestige of the Crane.

As his death approached, Nio declared his large estate at South Hub village on the outskirts of Otosan Uchi should be used for the support of "Rokugan's authors of beauty." This became Kyuden Nio, a communal home for myriad artists from poets to painters. Sadly, the beautiful palace was destroyed in the year 1158 as part of a desperate bid to drive off Hakai, the Onisu of Death. The play was successful, but Kyuden Nio was never rebuilt.

DOJI NIO, CRANE FOUNDING FATHER

AIR: 4 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 4

INTELLIGENCE: 4

Honor: 5.3 Status: 8.0 Glory: 8.0

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 4 (Insight Rank 6)

Skills: Artisan: Ikebana 5, Artisan: Poetry 8, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 8, Commerce 6, Courtier (Manipulation) 7, Defense 3, Etiquette (Conversation) (Courtesy) 7, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Crane Clan 3, Sincerity 6, Tea Ceremony 5, Perform: Storytelling 3

Advantages: Allies (beyond counting), Benten's Blessing, Clear Thinker, Paragon (courtesy), Social Position (Doji daimyo)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (commercial dealings)

KAKITA, LEGENDARY DUELIST

"One man, one sword, one strike."

Together with his wife Doji, Kakita founded the Crane Clan and was instrumental in creating many of the customs and traditions of Rokugan. The Crane consider him to have been one of the most honorable men who ever lived, and there is no disputing that he is one of the most creative artisans in the early Empire. He is credited with inventing the katana, the fighting art of iaijutsu, and the biwa. He founded the first swordsmanship dojo (which would

eventually become the Kakita Dueling Academy), and his descendants and relatives founded four different major samurai families. Probably no other mortal man has had as much influence on Rokugan as Kakita.

Kakita is believed to have been born to a chieftain of one of the tribes in the northern lands of Rokugan, probably about four years after the Kami fell. Shortly before his birth the Kami Shiba visited his tribe during his journey through the lands, and while Shiba did not stay for long his appearance impressed the tribesmen greatly. Kakita grew up with tales of the mighty gods who fell from the sky during a solar eclipse.

Growing up, Kakita was closest to his twin sister Kiyamori, who had a deep fascination for the written word. The two would spend hours discussing poetry and philosophical topics, things far beyond the comprehension of most folk in their tribe. As a son of the chieftain, Kakita also would often help hunt down dangerous beasts or fight enemy tribes. All of the northern tribesmen were smaller in build than those to the south, and preferred fighting techniques that relied on speed and precision rather than raw strength. Kakita proved to be a master of these fighting methods, refining them to a higher level than anyone had seen before. When he was 19 years old, rumors reached his tribe of the tournament announced by the Kami to determine Hantei's personal champion. Kakita set off for Otosan Uchi with his sister, who wished to look upon the Kami with her own eyes. Their journey was eventful, and Kakita had ample opportunity to display his honor and his skill with the blade, while Kiyamori collected samples of the languages from the tribes they passed.

When they arrived at Otosan Uchi and Kakita announced he would fight in the tournament, most disregarded the small man who spoke little and carried a





KAKITA AND THE KENKU

Within the Crane Clan, it is popular to claim that Kakita actually learned the ways of iaijutsu from one of the legendary Kenku rather than simply refining and advancing the fighting style of his people. The tale is told in many forms, but the following is one of the more popular versions:

When he was 15 years old, Kakita hunted down and slew a troll who had wandered into his tribe's lands. During the fight, Kakita noticed an old man watching him. When the troll was dead, the old man approached and told him the world was changing. The Kami had fallen from the sky, and soon they would call on mortals to join them and build something legendary. The old man offered to teach Kakita how to become a great warrior if he agreed to answer the call of the Kami when it came. Kakita's already knew the tales of the visit by Shiba, and he readily agreed. However, when Kakita asked for the old man's name, he would only call himself Grandfather.

Grandfather trained Kakita, refining the young man's earlier techniques. It took him years to master these advanced techniques, which would become the basis of the iaijutsu art. When Grandfather deemed him ready, he sent Kakita on a quest into the mountains to the north. There Kakita found an old woman working a forge who introduced herself as Grandmother. She was expecting Kakita and immediately set him to work forging a blade worthy of the art of iaijutsu. She required him to do most of the labor, showing him how to fold the metal again and again and again. After dozens of failures, Kakita finally crafted a blade. It was crude compared to that used by Grandfather, but Grandmother deemed it sufficient. Kakita named his new weapon the katana.

With his sword complete, Kakita turned to Grandmother and demanded to know who she really was, declaring it was obvious she and Grandfather were the same person. He wished to know the true identity of his sensei. The old woman replied, "Show me your stance" and drew her own blade. When their swords clashed, Kakita was the victor, placing his blade at Grandmother's throat. The old woman smiled and said only, "You have learned well." Then she transformed into the birdlike form of a Kenku, taking flight and crying "Remember your promise." Kakita never saw her again.



strange sword. A full account of the First Tournament of the Emerald Champion can be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories* (page 30). In brief, his slim lightning-quick blade bested all contestants until he faced Matsu, the chief follower of Akodo. Matsu had crushed and humiliated her opponents, an attitude that did not sit well with Kakita. When he managed to defeat her, he refused to offer her the courtesy he had granted to his other foes, treating her with the same disrespect he claimed she had shown to all of her opponents. Matsu demanded satisfaction for the insult, and Kakita explained his reasoning to the Emperor. Hantei validated Kakita's argument and proclaimed him the victor and Emerald Champion.

Hantei and Kakita soon became friends, leading to Kakita's later romance with Lady Doji. During his quest to seek answers to Doji's challenges, Kakita learned much about the larger world of Rokugan. He met Yasuki, a wealthy and wise old woman who helped him on his quest in return for securing her children a place in the Crane Clan. True to his word, Kakita arranged for his sister Kiyamori to marry Yasuki's son.

Working with Hantei and his wife Doji, Kakita helped create the culture of the Empire and establish his art of iaijutsu as the basis for all duels of honor in the Empire. He wrote *The Sword* to summarize his thoughts on dueling, swordsmanship, the katana, and martial philosophy. This text is considered one of the enduring classics of Rokugani literature and is still studied in the twelfth century. Kakita also founded the first dojo in Rokugan, passing his knowledge on to all who had the discipline and ability to learn. All four of his sons excelled at dueling, and his fourth son Shimizu became the first iaijutsu master of the Dueling Academy.

For all his honorable repute, Kakita was a man with strong opinions and a knack for attracting rivals and enemies. (Indeed, it can be argued that Kakita's contributions to Rokugani culture include not only art and iaijutsu, but also the blood feud.) Matsu never forgot the insult he dealt her at the Tournament of the Emerald Champion, and that enmity would cost Kakita's family – and indeed the entire Crane Clan – greatly in the many centuries to come. Hatred between the families festered and the Matsu family's unstated goal became the destruction of Kakita's entire line. Throughout his life, Kakita was challenged by brash Matsu samurai, and while he never lost these duels, each death merely deepened the Matsu family's determination to seek vengeance.

As if this was not enough, Kakita also developed a fierce rivalry with the Empire's other early master of swordsmanship, Mirumoto of the Dragon Clan. Mirumoto endorsed a two-sword style that used both the katana and the wakizashi together, and that focused on pragmatic realities of combat rather than the idealized philosophical and artistic approach which Kakita championed. Kakita disliked the style greatly and also had issues with Mirumoto himself, who was sometimes accused of being a thug or a bully. Kakita viewed iaijutsu as a sort of philosophical battle in which the duelist must seek to overcome the opponent's spirit in order to deliver one perfect victorious sword-

strike. He wrote scathingly that Mirumoto's style was "the coward's way." Although Mirumoto perished on the Day of Thunder and thus never met Kakita in a duel, Mirumoto's adopted son Hojatsu pursued the rivalry, expanding his father's writings (called *Niten*) and traveling the Empire fighting duels against all comers. On the Emperor's 40th birthday, Hantei asked Kakita and Mirumoto's son to fight a duel to prove which man's style was the greatest. A whole day passed as the two men remained perfectly still upon the field, neither able to risk an attack, knowing that to strike would mean their own certain death. As the sun set, they parted with honored bows, and Kakita thereafter mitigated his attacks on the *Niten* philosophy.

Kakita served as Emerald Champion for twenty years, but the death of his eldest twin children during the First War with Fu Leng affected him deeply. Being a twin himself he understood the tight bond between such siblings, and he had rejoiced in watching his eldest children grow into adults. Their deaths on the Day of Thunder, compounded with the later lingering death of Emperor Hantei, were tragedies which the Emerald Champion could not prevent. These events drove Kakita into deep introspection. Had he failed to teach his children his theory of the One Perfect Strike? Could they not have used that to strike down Fu Leng? Had he spent his entire life pursuing a flawed philosophy?

With doubt eating at him, Kakita had to know if the One Perfect Strike was truly the superior method of swordfighting. This led to his death on his 39th birthday, when he again encountered Mirumoto Hojatsu, this time during an inter-clan skirmish he was observing as Emerald Champion. The two faced off once more, and this time they clashed. Kakita killed Hojatsu, but Hojatsu mortally wounded Kakita. Spurning treatment, Kakita had his son Shimizu give him Mirumoto's blade. "Finish your duty to your master," Kakita said, fell upon the sword, and died. Kakita's death left a terrible hole in the young Crane Clan, and arguably the Lady Doji never truly recovered from the loss of her husband. Even the Matsu family was distraught, for Kakita had died before they could properly avenge their founder.

KAKITA, LEGENDARY DUELIST

Air: 5	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 4
Agility: 5				
Honor: 9.5	Status: 7.0	Glory: 10.0		

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 3 (Insight Rank 6)

Skills: Artisan: Poetry 3, Athletics 6, Battle 7, Calligraphy 5, Courtier 3, Defense 8, Etiquette 5, Games: Shogi 4, Iaijutsu (assessment, focus) 9, Investigation 4, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu (katana) 8, Kyujutsu 3, Tea Ceremony 3, Perform: Biwa 6, Sincerity 4

Advantages: Great Potential (Iaijutsu), Prodigy, Quick

Disadvantages: Idealistic, Small, Sworn Enemies (Matsu, Hojatsu), True Love (Lady Doji)



HATSUKO, INFLUENTIAL GEISHA

"Every samurai has a weakness. Toturi's is a charming geisha. Unfortunately for him, she is one of us." – Bayushi Kachiko

Hatsuko was a geisha and a model of her art. Her beauty, gentleness, and empathy made her immensely desirable to many high-ranking samurai. Akodo Toturi, Champion of the Lion, fell under her spell and favored her greatly. As a result, Hatsuko played a pivotal role in the Scorpion Coup, first agreeing to poison Toturi at the behest of Bayushi Kachiko, but then protecting her beloved from death by refusing to give him the full dose of poison. However, her greatest impact to the Empire would not be made until after her apparent death.

Hatsuko was the daughter of a ji-samurai in the service of the Nanbu, a small vassal family of the Soshi. Later documents suggested Hatsuko may actually have been a scion of a long-forgotten branch of the Yasuki family, but this would eventually be proven false. Regardless, Hatsuko's family sold her to the Shosuro, who trained her as a geisha in the school known as Uchi no Chiisaite (the House of Little Hands). She excelled in her training and became one of the school's greatest pupils, for she had an amazing gift for making her clients feel like the focus of the world. She could draw out the most reluctant samurai and convince him to relax and confide in her. Of course, as with all Shosuro-trained geisha, she was also taught to watch, remember, and obey. When her training was complete, the Scorpion arranged for her to be purchased by the Bright Wind geisha house in Otsan Uchi, where she became part of the vast Scorpion intelligence network in the Imperial capital.

Hatsuko was little more than a useful informant for the Scorpion until she was drawn into the events of the Scorpion Coup. She had won the heart of Akodo Toturi, who found her innocent and charming, cherishing her greatly. Unfortunately for the Scorpion, she in turn had also become smitten by the handsome Lion's courage, strength, and honor. When Bayushi Kachiko called on





Hatsuko to poison Toturi in preparation for the Coup, Hatsuko could not bring herself to murder her beloved. Toturi was drugged but survived, and Hatsuko hid him in the Kosuga District of the Imperial City. There he would eventually recover and emerge to lead the clan armies against the Scorpion.

Accounts differ as to Hatsuko's fate after that. Some stories claim she committed suicide in grief and remorse, hurling herself over the cataract known as Sorrow's Falls. Other tales claim she was brought before Bayushi Kachiko to account for her failure to murder Toturi. Hatsuko begged for mercy for her and Toturi, appealing to Kachiko as a woman, but the Mother of Scorpions had no tolerance for failure and ordered her guards to dispose of the geisha. Scorpion bushi dragged Hatsuko through the city and hurled her over Sorrow's Falls. Whichever story is true, her body was never found.

In reality, Hatsuko was rescued from death by the Dragon of Water, which carried her away from Ningen-do and outside of time itself. Though she did not know it, Hatsuko was pregnant with Toturi's child, a boy destined to be Kaneka and exert a great influence on Rokugan. The Water Dragon protected her and her unborn child until the time was right for the child to enter the world. It also warned her that Toturi must be kept ignorant of his son's existence lest his enemies use the child against him. Hatsuko tearfully accepted the Dragon's judgment and allowed it to remove all her memories of Toturi and the love they shared.

The Dragon of Water kept Hatsuko outside of time for almost a decade before he returned her to Ningen-do with her newly born son. She named the child Kaneka and raised him in a small hut in the depths of the Shinomen Mori. There she instilled in him an understanding of honor and the Code of Bushido and taught him many of the skills she thought a samurai would need... although

martial skills were beyond her knowledge. When Kaneka came of age, he heard the call of destiny and departed, leaving his mother behind to enter the civilized lands of the Empire. With her destiny fulfilled, Hatsuko died and is believed to have ascended to the Realm of Yomi; the Dragon of Water would later reveal Kaneka's true lineage to him.

HATSUKO, FAVORED GEISHA

AIR: 4	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 2
INTELLIGENCE: 3 PERCEPTION: 3				
Honor: 4.5		Status: -1.0		Glory: 3.0

School/Rank: Insight Rank 2

Skills: Courtier 4, Etiquette (Conversation) 6, Games: Go 3, Games: Shoji 3, Investigation 3, Perform: Biwa 5, Perform: Dance 3, Perform: Song 4, Sincerity 7, Slight of Hand 3, Tea Ceremony 5, Temptation 4

Advantages: Great Destiny (to birth Akodo Kaneka), Inner Gift (Empathy), Precise Memory

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Scorpion agent), True Love/Lost Love (Akodo Toturi)

HIDA HIROTO, IDEALISTIC COLLABORATOR

"One great wall requires one great clan. Two great walls requires two great clans." – Hida Hiroto

Born in the year 1155 to a Hida father and an Ide mother, Hiroto was a curious blend of the strength and directness of the Crab with the adaptability of the Unicorn. He fought for the Crab in the Destroyer War, where he lost an arm to the minions of Kali-Ma. However, after this crippling Hiroto made his greatest contributions to his clan in the courts of the Empire.

Hiroto was born the eldest of four siblings. With his father away on the Kaiu Wall most of the time, Hiroto helped his mother care for his sisters and brother. Hiroto idolized his father, holding him up as the idealized version of what a samurai should be, and was a sociable child with a knack for making friends. He trained as a Hida bushi like his father, and was only a year past his gempukku when the Destroyer War began.

Hiroto found himself on the Kaiu Wall, fighting the hordes of desperate Shadowlands creatures pushed forward by the advancing Destroyer legions. Hiroto's luck saved him several times, whether it was a weapon breaking at the right moment or a slain Shadowlands beast falling on his attacker. The other Crab came to see him as a good luck token, even rubbing his bristle-topped head to get some of the luck before battle. Hiroto thought he had seen the all the fearsomeness the Shadowlands could offer, but the Destroyers themselves proved to be far worse. The ironclads came in an unstoppable wave, and while he



and many other Crab fought valiantly, their numbers and power were too much. When the Kaiu Wall collapsed under the onslaught, Hiroto was again lucky, surviving the disaster and retreating to join the siege of Shiro Kuni. Again his good fortune served him when he was chosen to accompany the many secret scrolls of the Kuni family when they were evacuated to the Crane lands.

Later, Hiroto joined with the remnants of the Crab army to continue the fight against the Destroyers, who were now marching across southern Rokugan. The armies of the Empire met the invaders outside of Ryoko Owari, where the Destroyers were joined by the entity called the God-Beast of Kali-Ma. Hiroto stood with the other Crab to fight the spawn brought forth by the God-Beast, and it was in this battle that Hiroto lost his arm – once again barely dodging a blow which should have killed him. By the time he recovered, the God-Beast was dead and Kali-Ma herself had been slain, ending the Destroyer War.

Without his arm Hiroto could no longer help guard the Empire. Instead he entered the courts and attempted to serve his clan by gaining supplies and support from the other clans. His missing arm proved to be a political benefit, since it reminded everyone of the Crab Clan's immense sacrifice and the constant danger the Shadowlands still presented. The experience of fighting in the Destroyer War had granted him a belief that everyone could work together to the benefit of all. This baffled many of the other courtiers, but Hiroto constantly sought to overcome their skepticism and create deals where both sides benefited fully from the exchange.

Hiroto took a wife from the Scorpion Clan to improve relations between the two clans, an important step in their mutual effort to contain the new Festering Pit in Scorpion lands. He spent considerable time acting as a liaison between the Scorpion and the Crab at the newly-built Scorpion Wall. Hiroto's wife became an invaluable political resource, giving him advice and steering him free of diplomatic traps. Together they ensured full resources for the construction of the Scorpion Wall and the supplies for the armies stationed there.

Hiroto's efforts made him a universally-recognized figure in the courts. Although he was not large for a Crab, he was muscular and broad-shouldered, and normally pinned the sleeve of his kimono to the shoulder of his missing arm, giving him an off-balance look. He had numerous scars from his many near-death experiences, and when he was not conducting politics he enjoyed telling others the stories of how he got each scar (and the incredible circumstances that kept each one from killing him). Now middle-aged with half-a-dozen sons and daughters, he spent almost as much time searching for good marriages for the children as he did procuring supplies for the Crab and the Scorpion. Although much of the Empire began to reassert clan rivalries as the Destroyer War faded into history, Hiroto still held to the idealized views of his youth, believing in a Rokugan in which all the clans worked together for the greater good.

HIDA HIROTO, IDEALISTIC COLLABORATOR

AIR: 3	EARTH: 4	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2	VOID: 3
AWARENESS: 4				
Honor: 5.8		Status: 2.0		Glory: 5.0
School/Rank: Hida Bushi 2/Severed Hand Path (Insight Rank 4)				
Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 3, Courtier 4, Defense 3, Etiquette 5, Heavy Weapons 6, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 4, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Sincerity 4				
Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Luck (x2)				
Disadvantages: Idealistic, Missing Limb (left arm)				



The Oni Lords

Herewith are five of the most powerful oni known to the mortal world. Only the most epic of player characters should be confronted with such challenges.

AKUMA NO ONI

Generally believed to be the oldest true Oni Lord (although some would consider the ancient First Oni, summoned by Fu Leng himself, to be an Oni Lord as well), Akuma no Oni was summoned by a misguided Phoenix shugenja named Isawa Akuma. The demon hates all mankind with a burning, eternal hatred that can only be slaked by the complete destruction of Rokugan. It is able to rally huge armies of lesser oni and Shadowlands beasts and has launched repeated assaults on the Crab lands in the centuries since its creation. Fortunately, its impatience to destroy the Empire is so great that it usually attacks too early.

Physically, Akuma no Oni is nearly thirty feet high, a bipedal monster with strange joints, massive three-fingered claws, a trio of glowing yellow eyes, and three burning tongues that slaver constantly from its gigantic toothy maw. It enjoys both feasting on human flesh and torturing those mortals who fall into its merciless clutches.

AKUMA NO ONI

AIR: 6	EARTH: 8	FIRE: 6	WATER: 6
REFLEXES: 7		INTELLIGENCE: 8	STRENGTH: 7
SHADOWLANDS TAINT: 8.0			ARMOR TN: 50
INITIATIVE: 10K7+10			
ATTACK: CLAWS 10K7 (SIMPLE)			DAMAGE: CLAWS 10K5
BURNING TONGUES 10K7 (FREE)			BURNING TONGUES 4K4
REDUCTION: 15			WOUNDS: 75: +5; 175: +10; 250: +15; 325: DEAD.

Skills: Battle (Mass Battle) 8, Intimidation 6, Temptation 5

Special Abilities:

Burning Saliva: When Akuma no Oni's tongues touch flesh, they leave burning saliva in the wound. During the Reactions Stage of every Round after the tongues hit, that foe will take 3k3 fire damage. This last for 10 rounds or until the saliva is washed away. Simple water will not wash it away – it requires vinegar or alcohol.

Fear 7

Huge

Magic Resistance: Akuma has three Ranks of this Advantage.

Multiple Tongues: Akuma no Oni can attack with all three of his tongues in the same Round, once with each tongue. This is a special exception to the rule that each type of Free Action can only be taken once per Round.

Shadowlands Power: Akuma no Oni has the akutenshi power Awe of the Dark One (see the chapter on "The Lost" in Enemies of the Empire for details).

Spell Casting: Akuma no Oni can cast any Fire or Earth spell (except spells with the Jade or Wards keywords) as though it is a Rank 4 shugenja with an Affinity for Fire. It does not need scrolls to cast these spells and the casting time for its spells is always one Simple Action, regardless of their Mastery Level.

Superior Invulnerability: So powerful is Akuma no Oni that even jade will only inflict half damage (rounded down). Likewise, spells of Mastery Level 3 or less inflict only half damage.

KYOSO NO ONI

Kyoso no Oni is unique among the Oni Lords for being an actual amalgam of oni and human, the power of a terrible demon merged with the body, mind, and soul of Agasha Kyoso. The original Kyoso was a powerful young Dragon Clan shugenja who fell in love with the Asahina family dai-myō. Their planned marriage was derailed by a rival, and the heartbroken Kyoso listened to the whispers of kansens, summoning an oni and then physically merging with it so she could achieve her vengeance personally. After ravaging the Crane lands, the new Kyoso no Oni headed to the Shadowlands, where she has remained since.





Kyoso appears to be a twenty-foot-high nude woman with bright red skin, four breasts, four clawed arms, and several antler-like horns protruding from her head. Her lower body is a massive scaled serpent. Like her many spawn, she can hurl bolts of terrible black fire from her claws, searing the very soul of her foes. Kyoso is an independent Oni Lord, forming alliances with different factions within the Shadowlands as she sees fit, and using her human memories and knowledge to visit woe upon Rokugan.

Late in the twelfth century, a large group of samurai succeeded in trapping Kyoso no Oni's demonic spirit within a powerful artifact known as a Black Scroll. Many of the samurai died winning this victory, which also unexpectedly resulted in the liberation of Agasha Kyoso from her possession by the demon. Whether Kyoso no Oni will remain eternally imprisoned within the Black Scroll remains to be seen, however.

KYOSO NO ONI

AIR: 7	EARTH: 7	FIRE: 7	WATER: 6
REFLEXES: 8		INTELLIGENCE: 8	STRENGTH: 8
SHADOWLANDS TAINT: 8.0			ARMOR TN: 50
INITIATIVE: 10k9+2			
ATTACK: CLAWS 10k9 (SIMPLE)		DAMAGE: CLAWS 8k4	
BLACK FIRE 10k9 (FREE)		BLACK FIRE 5k4	
REDUCTION: 15		WOUNDS: 748: +5; 96: +10; 150: +15; 216: DEAD..	

Special Abilities:

Black Fire: Kyoso no Oni may hurl bolts of black fire at any foe within 100 feet. These blasts of soul-searing power ignore the effects of armor on the target's Armor TN. They also ignore Reduction. Each time a foe is hit by black fire, he must make a Void roll at TN 25 or lose one Void Point. If the bolt takes away his last Void Point, or he has none to begin with, he falls unconscious for two hours. No normal or magical effect can wake him, but any effect that causes him to regain at least one Void Point will immediately awaken him.

Fear 5

Feed Upon the Soul: If Kyoso no Oni kills a foe she instantly devours the victim's soul. This reinvigorates the Oni Lord, causing her to instantly heal Wounds equal to 10 x the Insight rank of the enemy she killed.

Magic Resistance: Kyoso no Oni has three levels of the Magic Resistance Advantage.

Magical Talent: Kyoso no Oni can cast Fire and Earth spells as though she is a Rank 5 shugenja with no Affinity or Deficiency. She seems to know

these spells instinctively and does not need scrolls, simply casting whichever spell is most useful to her. She cannot cast any spell with the Jade keyword.

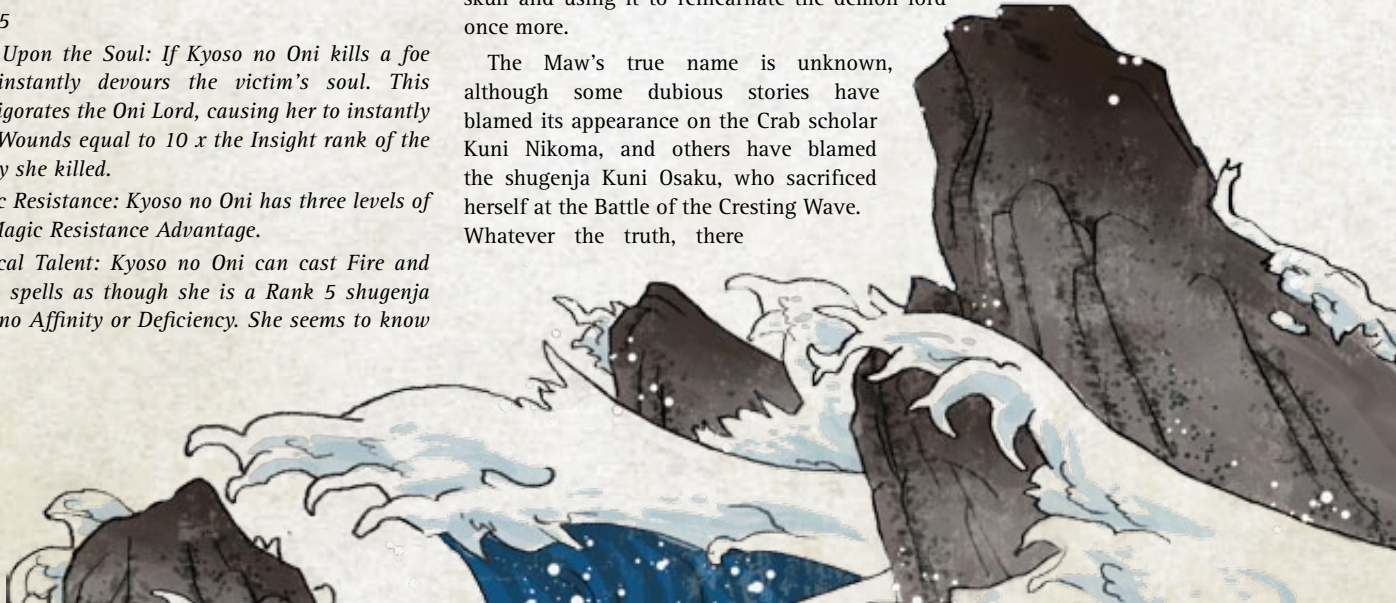
Multiple Arms: Kyoso no Oni may hurl her black fire up to four times in the same Round (once for each claw). This is an exception to the normal restriction that each Free Action may only be used once per Round. She can still make Claw attacks normally in the same Round.

Superior Invulnerability: Kyoso no Oni takes half damage (rounded down) from jade weapons.

THE MAW

One of the most powerful Oni Lords ever to walk the surface of Ningen-do, the Maw led an army out of the Shadowlands which nearly broke the Crab – only the construction of the Kaiu Wall in less than a month allowed his defeat at the Battle of the Cresting Wave. After he was killed, his skull was purified and mounted over the gates of Kyuden Hida as a demonstration of the Crab Clan's might. Unfortunately, during the twelfth century the sorcerer Shokansuru succeeded in stealing the Maw's skull and using it to reincarnate the demon lord once more.

The Maw's true name is unknown, although some dubious stories have blamed its appearance on the Crab scholar Kuni Nikoma, and others have blamed the shugenja Kuni Osaku, who sacrificed herself at the Battle of the Cresting Wave. Whatever the truth, there





is no denying the sheer power of this terrible demon lord. The Maw is a massive creature, fifteen feet tall and with a grotesquely muscular body and thick scaled skin. Its massive head is vaguely reptilian, with huge fanged jaws and a heavy bone ridge that protects its small but disturbingly intelligent eyes. Vicious spikes sprout from its spine and limbs, and its body ends in a powerful tail covered in more spikes. However, more terrifying than the Maw's physical powers (formidable though they be) is its ability to rally and lead huge armies of lesser Shadowlands creatures. The Maw is a consummate general, a tactical and strategic thinker able to match wits with the finest generals in the Empire. Once before he almost destroyed Rokugan, and he may yet do so again.

THE MAW

AIR: 4	EARTH: 10	FIRE: 6	WATER: 10
REFLEXES: 6	INTELLIGENCE: 7		
SHADOWLANDS TAINT: 9	ARMOR TN: 40		
INITIATIVE: 10K7			
ATTACK: CLAWS 10K8 (SIMPLE)	DAMAGE: CLAWS 10K6		
BITE 10K9 (COMPLEX)	BITE 10K8		
REDUCTION: 20	WOUNDS: 200: +10; 400: +20; 600: DEAD.		

Skills: Battle (Mass Battle) 8, Investigation 5

Special Abilities:

Fear 6

Huge

Maho-Tsukai: The Maw can cast any maho spell as though it has Insight Rank 5. It does not need to spill blood to cast maho spells.

Regeneration: The Maw heals 10 Wounds during the Reactions Stage of each Round.

Shadowlands Power: The Maw has the *akutenshi* power *Awe of the Dark One* (see the chapter on "The Lost" in *Enemies of the Empire* for details).

Superior Invulnerability: The Maw cannot be harmed by any elemental spell of Mastery Level 1 or 2. Higher Mastery Level spells can affect it normally, but it has three Ranks of Magic Resistance against them.

SHIKIBU NO ONI

Although its tale is not well known outside the Crab provinces, the demon lord Shikibu no Oni is listed with the names of other oni lords by scholars. Despite this, Shikibu no Oni is not a physical threat, at least not compared to its comrades. Instead, Shikibu is a spiritual threat, one that consumes and discards those in its path as casually as a samurai might discard a half-eaten rice ball. After its initial defeat, Shikibu was cast into the Shadowlands by the Crab, where as far as any human knows, it has remained ever since.

Shikibu no Oni was created by the collaborative efforts of a mournful Hiruma and a curious Kuni. Hiruma Shikibu had lost his young and beautiful wife, the absolute love of his life, and solicited the help of the Kuni to summon a demon that could restore her to life. Shikibu no Oni wore the wife's form for a few weeks, just long enough to consume the Hiruma's soul, then moved on to create mischief and sow discord in the Crab courts. The demon continued to move from body to body, leaving death in its wake, until the Kuni who assisted in its creation managed to expose it. The beast was battered and broken by the unrelenting numbers of the Crab, and it was driven into the Shadowlands, a realm it deplores. It remains there, occasionally sending its spawn into the Crab lands for information and sabotage.

Shikibu no Oni, and to a lesser extent its spawn, possesses the ability to project its spirit into the bodies of others, eradicating the soul of the body being possessed in the process. Particularly strong-willed individuals can resist this process, but it is exceedingly rare for such a thing to occur. Shikibu no Oni can depart its body, returning to it after going through one or more host bodies. If its original body is destroyed, the oni lord is severely weakened, but will eventually transform the body of a host into a duplicate of its original form. In time, its supernatural abilities will return as well, but this takes longer.

SHIKIBU NO ONI

AIR: 6	EARTH: 8	FIRE: 6	WATER: 5
AWARENESS: 8	INTELLIGENCE: 8		STRENGTH: 8
SHADOWLANDS TAINT: 8.0	ARMOR TN: 35		
INITIATIVE: 9K6			
ATTACK: CLAWS 8K6 (COMPLEX)	DAMAGE: CLAWS 6K5		
REDUCTION: 15	WOUNDS: 60: +5; 120: +10; 180: +15; 240: +20; 300: DEAD.		

Skills: Courtier (Manipulation) 6, Etiquette 4, Intimidation (Control) 7, Sincerity (Deceit)

Special Abilities:

Fear 5

Invulnerability

Maho Tsukai: In its true body, Shikibu no Oni can cast any maho spell of up to Mastery Level 5 as a Complex Action without the need to spill blood. In a host body, this is reduced to Mastery Level 3 or lower.



Possession: Shikibu no Oni can project its consciousness into the body of any intelligent, living being within ten miles of its true body. This requires a successful Contested Willpower Roll to enact. If Shikibu is successful, the target is killed instantly and its body is taken over by the Oni Lord. The body's physical abilities, including Traits and Skills, remain the same, but the mental Traits and Skills are those of Shikibu no Oni. Host bodies are consumed at a rate of one week per Insight Rank, becoming prematurely aged and desiccated and finally disintegrating. From a host body, Shikibu can transfer its spirit to any other living, intelligent being in sight. If the Oni Lord's original body is killed, its host body can be converted to a duplicate of its original form. This takes a number of weeks equal to the host's original Willpower. Special Abilities are regained at a rate of one per week after the host has completed its transformation.

TSUBURU NO ONI

The so-called "Lord of Gluttony" laired for centuries in the desolate volcanic plains on the eastern edge of the Shadowlands, sending forth its spawn to harvest human souls to feed its endless hunger. It generally chose to remain there rather than approach the Empire, but its spawn caused more than enough trouble to make up for it. Those few mortals who came to visit it received cryptic advice and mad prophecies before the Oni Lord devoured them.

Tsuburu looks like a larger, eighteen-foot-high version of its spawn: a bloated purple-pink humanoid with greasy black hair (often worn, mockingly, in a samurai topknot), hugely muscular clawed arms, and a massive jaw which can unhinge to devour mortals entire. Its body is covered in boils and sores, each one marking a human soul which it has consumed.

Supposedly, Tsuburu no Oni was finally killed in the mid-twelfth century by a large group of Hida warriors. However, it may yet return, for its skull was never purified as the Maw's was

TSUBURU NO ONI

AIR: 2	EARTH: 9	FIRE: 4	WATER: 3
		AGILITY: 5	STRENGTH: 10
SHADOWLANDS TAIN: 7.0		ARMOR TN: 20	
INITIATIVE: 7k2			
ATTACK: GRAB 10k5 (SIMPLE)		DAMAGE: GRAB 10k4	
REDUCTION: 20		WOUNDS: 80: +5; 160: +10; 240: +15; 320: DEAD.	

Special Abilities:

Fear 6

Huge

Invulnerability

Swallow Whole: If Tsuburu no Oni successfully hits someone with his Grab attack, he can choose to hold onto it. The victim has one Round to break free with a Contested Strength Roll before the Oni Lord devours him as a Free Action. Those inside the Oni Lord's stomach suffer 4k4 Wounds and gain 2 point of Shadowlands Taint during the Reactions stage of each Round, and can do nothing but scream. The soul of a creature slain within Tsuburu no Oni's stomach becomes one of the many moving lesions dotting its back and belly.

Teleport: Tsuburu no Oni can, as a Simple Action, teleport to any location within a mile. This counts as having moved his maximum movement for the Round.





New Mechanics

SHOURIDO AND THE SUSUMU

At the end of the twelfth century, the Susumu have existed as a family for only a single generation, and have barely begun to differentiate themselves from the earlier methods of the Daigotsu family. This is represented mechanically by giving them a Path rather than their own full School.

From a strictly “historical” sense, the value of the Susumu Path is limited, since it can only be used in games set in or after the Age of Exploration. However, as with other such specialized mechanics in L5R, GMs can freely modify the Susumu Path to fit other eras or storylines. For example, if Shourido emerged earlier in Rokugan’s history, any number of different groups might have developed a Technique based on embracing and exploiting the Way of Victory.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: SUSUMU COURTIER

- Technique Rank: 1
- Replaces: Daigotsu Courtier 1
- Benefit: +1 Willpower
- Starting Honor: 1.5
- Skills: Courtier (Manipulation), Etiquette, Sincerity (Deceit), Temptation, Lore: Shourido, Investigation, any one Low or High skill
- Outfit: Same as Daigotsu Courtier

TECHNIQUE: THE WAY OF VICTORY

Susumu courtiers learn how to use the Code of Shourido to strengthen their own efforts in court and to ferret out and intensify the selfish impulses of other samurai. You gain the Student of Shourido Advantage for free (if for some reason you already possess this Advantage, the Experience Point cost is refunded). After a few minutes’ conversation with another samurai, you may make a Contested Social roll of your Temptation/Willpower against your opponent’s Etiquette/Willpower; with a success, you detect whether the character has any personal flaws which would make him amenable to the appeal of Shourido. (You do not learn the specific nature of the flaws, merely whether they exist. From the GM’s viewpoint, in addition to role-played flaws, this could also detect the presence of Disadvantages such as Brash, Compulsion, Consumed, Contrary, Disbeliever, Driven, Failure of Bushido, Cast Out, Dark Paragon, Forbidden Knowledge, and Perceived Honor.)

NEW ADVANTAGE: STUDENT OF SHOURIDO [MENTAL] (9 POINTS, 6 FOR SPIDER CHARACTERS)

Truly dedicated followers of the Way of Victory are able to prevail despite their rejection of Bushido. When rolling to resist Temptation, Intimidation, or Fear, you may choose to add +5 to your roll instead of adding your Honor Rank to the roll. If the optional Honor Roll rule (page 92 of the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook) is being used, you may roll 5 dice instead of rolling dice equal to your Honor Rank.



THE SCORPION MASKMAKERS

Although every clan has artisans who specialize in the creation of courtly masks, the Scorpion Clan takes such artistry to a much higher level. This is hardly surprising given the importance of masks to Scorpion culture.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH:

SCORPION MASKMAKER [COURTIER/ARTISAN]

- Technique Rank: 2
- Replaces: Bayushi Courtier 2, Soshi Shugenja 2, Yogo Shugenja 2
- Requires: Craft: Maskmaking 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 3

TECHNIQUE: CONCEAL THE EYES

The artisans who craft masks for Scorpion samurai know how to direct attention away from the wearer's face (and any social cues it might reveal) to the distracting mask itself. Once every three months, you may craft a mask which is especially effective at concealing thoughts and emotions; this mask matches the abilities of the Inheritance Advantage with the Sincerity Skill (L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook, page 150-151), and creating it requires two Raises on your Craft: Maskmaking roll. Also, your experience at using masks to conceal emotions teaches you how to read others' intentions without relying on facial expressions. You gain a +2k0 bonus on any Social Skill roll to detect falsehood or concealed intentions in others.

Well-Connected

The Ally Advantage in the L5R Core rulebook represents specific individuals who will go out of their way to assist you, while the Spy Network Advantage represents an illicit network of informants. The Well-Connected Advantage is much more generalized, but operates on a more limited scale. Characters who possess this Advantage are integrated into the fabric of a particular court so well that they can call on a large number of people for small acts of assistance.

NEW ADVANTAGE: WELL-CONNECTED [SOCIAL, 3 POINTS PER RANK]

Choose one court when you purchase this Advantage. One time each session per level of the Advantage, you may roll Courtier / Awareness at TN 20. If successful, you gain the benefit of one minor favor from someone else at court. This favor should not be something that inconveniences the benefactor, and it will only be a small piece of information (e.g. "the daimyo intends to go hunting tomorrow") or a simple bit of assistance ("I assigned you to a later guard shift"). The favor, however, will always be useful to some task you are currently pursuing.

Courtiers may purchase this Advantage for one point less.



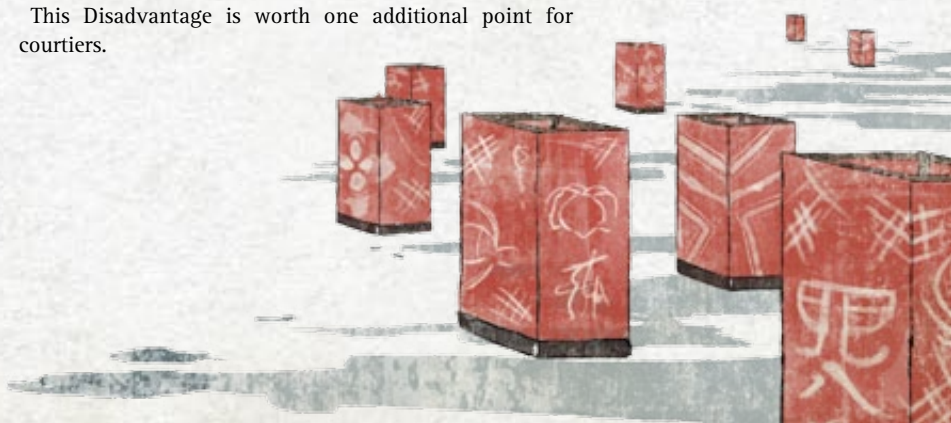
Debt

Samurai try to avoid dealing with financial matters, but this very reticence puts them at a disadvantage when they find themselves in situations where they do need money. This weakness is sometimes exploited by rich samurai (and sometimes even rich commoners) to gain leverage over others.

NEW DISADVANTAGE: DEBT [MATERIAL, SOCIAL, 2/4/8 POINTS]

Whether through bad luck or simple imprudence, at some point you found yourself short of money and "solved" this problem by taking out a loan, either from a wealthy commoner or a fellow samurai. You are expected to repay this loan, and until you do, the shame of your indebted state hangs over you. For 2 points, your debt is equivalent to one quarter of your yearly stipend – a small amount, but you will have to save carefully to repay it. For 4 points, you owe your entire yearly stipend, and for 8 points, you owe substantially more than that. If others learn about your debt, you will at a minimum lose Glory (probably at least a Rank, more if your debt is large) and your fellow samurai may come to look down on you; your lord may also disapprove of your irresponsibility. In the long term, a persistently indebted samurai may be publicly shamed, losing Status or worse. Moreover, even if you keep the debt secret, your creditor may decide to use it to pressure you into doing things on his behalf (this should be handled by the GM through role-play).

This Disadvantage is worth one additional point for courtiers.



Yobanjin Weapons and Skills

For the most part, the Yobanjin will use Skills that are identical to those of the Rokugani. However, they have little contact with Rokugan's culture, and the GM may wish to prohibit Yobanjin from learning the more civilized and artistic Skills (especially the High Skills). Warlike Skills will generally be the same as in Rokugan, although the GM may add Emphases that better fit the Yobanjin (e.g. Horsemanship could acquire the Emphases of Eagle and Wyrms). Also, the Yobanjin rules use more "generic" terms such as Swordsmanship or Archery for warrior Skills, eschewing Rokugani names like Kenjutsu. (This was also done with the Ivinda schools published in the Second City box set, and for the same reason – to emphasize the foreign nature of these Schools.) Obviously, no Yobanjin will learn Iaijutsu.

For the most part, Mastery Abilities for the Yobanjin will be same as for the Rokugani, but there are exceptions. The most notable example is swordsmanship, since the Yobanjin use of the "ring-sword" causes them to pursue a different style of sword-fighting. This can be represented mechanically by giving them different Mastery Abilities than the "standard" Rokugani ones.

YOBANJIN RING-SWORD

Many of the Yobanjin fight with the so-called "ring sword," a sword with large looped rings in the hilt which are used to try to snare enemy blades. Mechanically, a ring-sword functions in the same way as a Rokugani sword, including the requirement to use a Simple Action...

NEW WEAPON: YOBANJIN RING-SWORD

- Keywords: Medium, Gaijin
- DR: 2k2
- Price: 10 koku

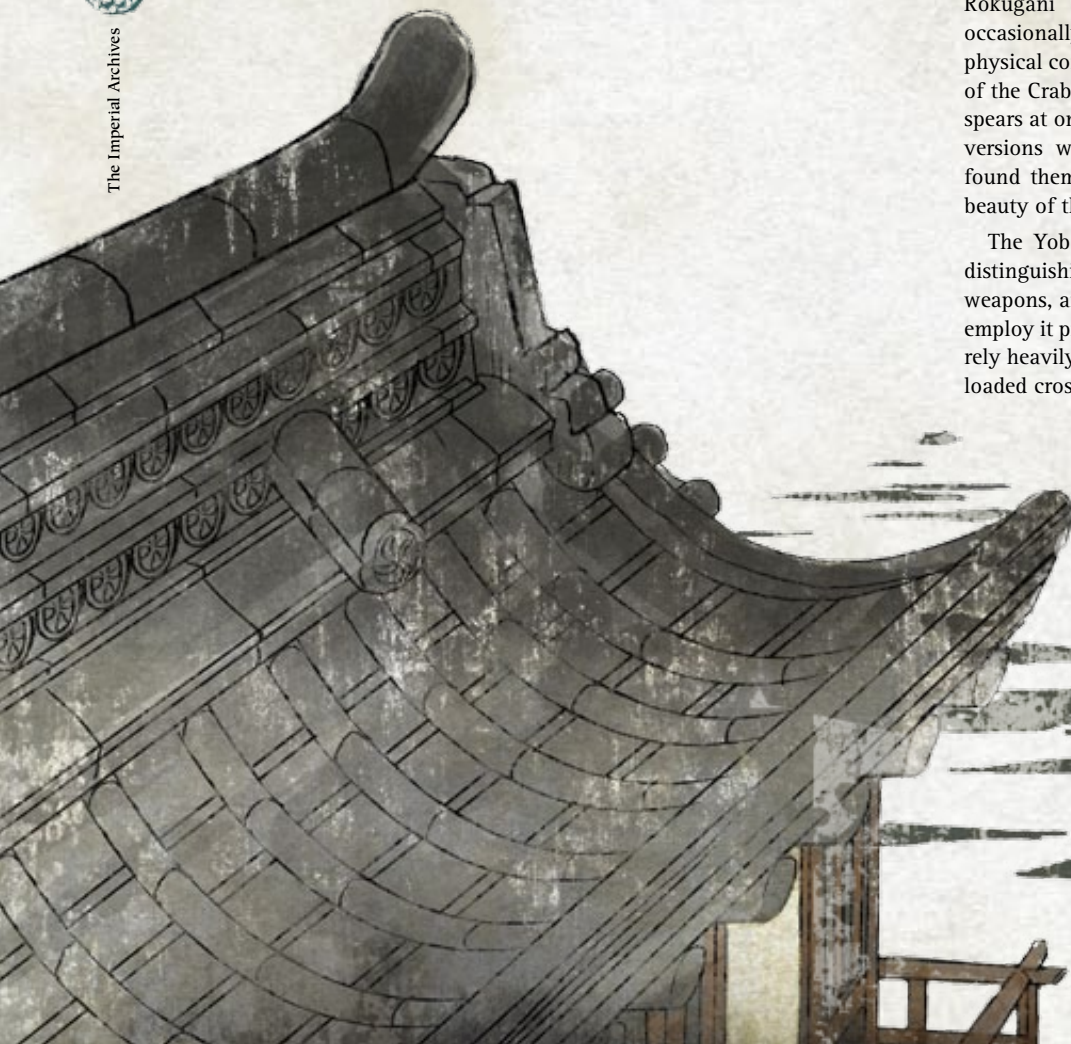
NEW YOBANJIN SKILL: SWORDSMANSHIP (RING-SWORD)

- Mastery 3: When using a ring-sword, you may perform a Disarm Maneuver against an opponent wielding a Small or Medium weapon for one less Raise.
- Mastery 5: You may ready a sword as a Free Action instead of a Simple Action.
- Mastery 7: When using a ring-sword, you gain +1k0 damage, and you may perform a Disarm Maneuver against an opponent wielding a Large weapon for one less Raise.

OYUMI (CROSSBOW)

Within the Empire, the crossbow – known to the Rokugani as the oyumi – is a weapon used only occasionally by bandits or other criminals. The oyumi's physical concept was originally devised by the Kaiu family of the Crab as a massive siege weapon, used to hurl giant spears at oni and other Shadowlands beasts. Smaller-scale versions were eventually developed, but the Rokugani found them to be crude and lacking in the artistry and beauty of the bow, and largely rejected their usage.

The Yobanjin, however, feel no special scruples over distinguishing between "honorable" and "peasant" weapons, and use the crossbow freely. Indeed, some tribes employ it preferentially over the bow, especially those who rely heavily on flying mounts such as eagles or wyrms. (A loaded crossbow can be fired one-handed, unlike a bow.)





NEW WEAPON: CROSSBOW

- Keywords: Medium, Peasant
- DR: 4k2
- Range: 150'
- Special Rule:** Reloading a crossbow requires two Complex Actions.
- Price: 5 koku
- Note:** A crossbow relies on its own mechanical force to deliver damage, and thus does not add the wielder's Strength to its DR.

NEW SKILL: CROSSBOW (AGILITY)

The Crossbow Skill is considered Bugei by the Yobanjin and other gaijin cultures, but is treated as a Low Skill in Rokugan.

- Mastery 5:** You may now reload a crossbow with only one Complex Action.

Yobanjin Paths/Schools

The culture and society of the Unbowed People is too diverse and too fungible to support the development and retention of warrior Schools in the manner of Rokugani martial traditions. However, basic fighting methods have propagated throughout the Yobanjin lands, and these may be represented by a Rank One Path, as shown below. GMs who wish to add more depth to the Yobanjin may opt to create tribe-specific Rank Two or Rank Three Techniques for the older and more powerful Yobanjin tribes – for example, the Tribe of the Sky might have a Technique based on riding its giant hawks into battle.

The shamans are another matter, for the traditions of the Yobanjin religion have been preserved across all of the tribes for a thousand years and more. Thus, the shamans can legitimately be represented in game mechanics by the equivalent of a School.

The “Integrity Rank” of the Yobanjin Path and School depicted below represents their adherence to their culture’s Rujia philosophy (see page 74) rather than Rokugan’s code of Bushido. Mechanically, it may be used in the same manner as Honor (including “Integrity Rolls” if the GM is allowing the optional Honor Roll rule).

NEW PATH: YOBANJIN WARRIOR

- Technique Rank: 1
- Replaces: N/A
- Benefit: +1 Agility
- Starting “Integrity”: 4.5
- Skills: Athletics, Crossbow, Lore: Theology (Yobanjin), Swordsmanship (Ring-Sword), any two appropriate skills
- Outfit: Yobanjin clothing, light armor, ring-sword, crossbow, leather satchel

TECHNIQUE: STRENGTH OF THE UNBOWED

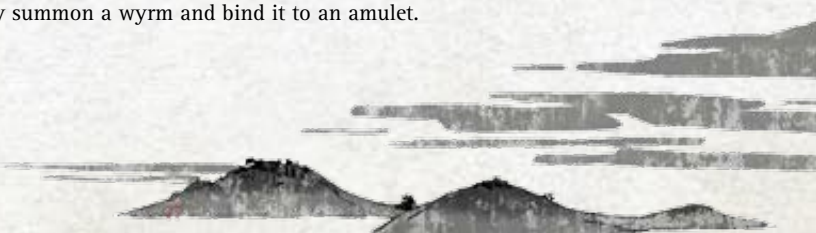
The Yobanjin focus their training on the preferred weapons of their people and on the strength found in their Rujia philosophy. You gain a +1k0 bonus to your Swordsmanship and Crossbow Skill rolls. Once per skirmish, you may add your “Integrity” Rank to the total of either a Skill roll or a Damage roll with a ring-sword or a crossbow.

NEW BASIC SCHOOL: YOBANJIN SHAMAN (SHUGENJA)

- Benefit: +1 Willpower
- Starting “Integrity”: 4.5
- Skills: Athletics, Defense, Hunting, Knives, Lore: Theology (Yobanjin), any one appropriate Skill
- Starting Spells: Sense, Commune, and any three Rank 1 spells.
- Outfit: Yobanjin clothing, knife, leather satchel

TECHNIQUE: SPIRITS OF THE MOUNTAIN

Yobanjin shamans are able to cast Elemental spells without scrolls, but can only cast spells of Mastery Rank 1, 2, or 3. (At the GM’s option, spells which are specific to Rokugani culture may be excluded.) Once per year, a shaman may summon a wyrm and bind it to an amulet.





Optional Rules: Shugenja and Religion

The basic L5R rules for spellcasting are designed to be fairly simple and intuitive, allowing the game to move quickly without bogging down on remembering obscure rules or making detailed calculations. However, the downside of this approach is that it makes spellcasting very “utilitarian,” which goes against the setting’s theme of magic being intimately tied into religion and the spirit world. Accordingly, GMs and players who wish to add more depth to the depiction of shugenja in Rokugan can opt to add some or all of the following optional rules to their game.

PURITY AND SPELLCASTING

All Rokugani believe that they can become spiritually impure through a variety of ways – most commonly by touching “dirty” substances such as blood and dead flesh. A shugenja who has become impure in this way could well find it difficult to gain the attention of the kami, who will shy away from his aura of spiritual pollution. Casting a spell on an impure person will also be more difficult, for the same reason. On the other hand, a shugenja who rigorously pursues purity at all costs will likely find his spellcasting a little easier, as his spiritual aura is more pleasing to the kami.

In game terms, the effects of impurity can be represented by a -2k0 penalty to the shugenja’s spell-casting rolls. If the contamination is particularly egregious, or if it lasts a long time without the shugenja undergoing a ritual of purification, the penalty can be increased to -2k1 or even -2k2. If the character simply refuses to get purified no matter how severe the contamination, the GM could

even begin removing spell-slots at the rate of one per week until the character finally seeks proper cleansing.

An impure shugenja may also be visited by kansen who offer to fulfill the spells he needs. Of course, casting a spell with the help of kansen will result in gaining a few pips of Shadowlands Taint.

If a shugenja attempts to cast a beneficial spell (such as a healing or defensive spell) on an impure person, the GM can likewise apply a penalty – starting at -2k0 and increasing depending on the severity of the impurity – to the spells. Offensive spells should not be penalized, since the spirits will be more than willing to visit harm on someone who violates spiritual purity.

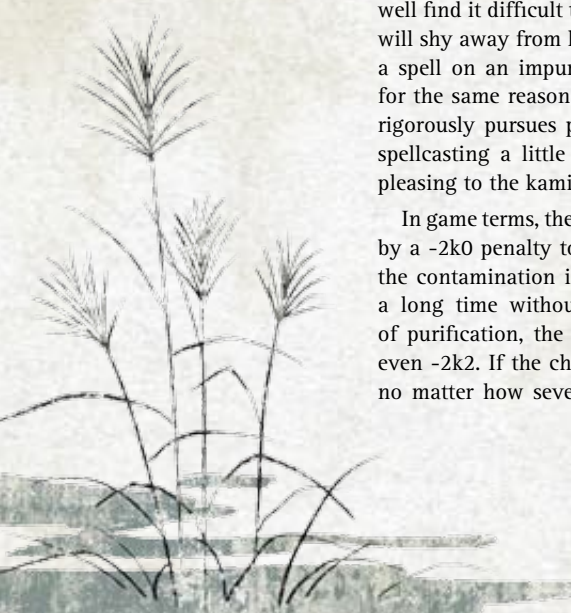
A shugenja who goes to inordinate effort to avoid contamination (and especially one who gives up in-game advantages or otherwise deliberately makes things harder for himself in order to avoid unclean things) can be rewarded with a +1k0 or even a +2k0 bonus. A similar reward could be offered to a shugenja who makes a point of never eating animal products (flesh or eggs).

WORLDLINESS AND SPELLCASTING

Since shugenja are supposed to be primarily stewards of the Empire’s religious needs, it is often seen as somewhat inappropriate for them to involve themselves in things like commerce, politics, or courtly romance. Although shugenja as a whole do not isolate themselves from the world to the same degree as monks, nonetheless some shugenja families (such as the Asahina) do cut themselves off from such “worldly” activities, viewing them as spiritually compromising or, at best, as distractions from their true duties. Conversely, some clans (most notably the Scorpion and the Mantis) actively embrace the mixing of magic with worldly activities.

GMs who wish to emphasize the impact of a “worldly” life on a shugenja’s spiritual abilities may choose to impose penalties on spell-casting based on the character’s participation in such activities. A shugenja who is role-played as obsessing over money or politics, as avidly pursuing romance or becoming besotted with a geisha, can potentially suffer a die-penalty as the GM sees fit.

Another option might be to apply a penalty based on the character’s Ranks in the “worldly” skills of Commerce and Temptation (perhaps even Courtier, although this will limit the character’s options in a court-driven campaign). The character’s total for his Spellcasting Rolls is reduced by the total of his Ranks in these Skills, reflecting his distraction from spiritual matters by the affairs of the world.





Conversely, a GM who wishes to reward a PC who rejects worldly distractions can award spellcasting bonuses to characters who actively refrain from such inappropriate activities. A GM could also make it easier for such characters to resist worldly appeals (such as opponents using Temptation or Courtier to influence him), perhaps by awarding a bonus to defensive social rolls based on their Ranks in Meditation or Lore: Theology; this would reflect how a life of piety can render a priest all but untouchable by such social "attacks."

SPELLCASTING AND RELIGIOUS DEVOTION

Shugenja are expected to spend a significant amount of time each day in prayer, spiritual contemplation, and meditation. Even the most "practical" shugenja such as the Kuni, Soshi, and Yoritomo spend a great deal of time with such activities. In an L5R game, it is usually just "assumed" that characters are doing this during the times when they are not engaged with the current adventure, but this can lead to the players more-or-less forgetting that their characters are supposed to be devout priests. Also, a character who is played as being intensely devout and spiritual will still cast spells exactly the same as everyone else, no matter how dedicated he might be. The following suggestions offer ways to off-set these tendencies.

A character who fails to be properly dedicated to his spiritual devotions – skipping over religious duties, failing to spend some time each day in prayer or meditation – can suffer die-penalties in a similar manner to a character who is spiritually impure. In this case it is recommended that the penalties start at a mild -1k0 and then slowly escalate over time if the character fails to mend his ways.

A character who puts extra effort into religious observance and meditation – and especially a character who forgoes other activities in order to make sure he keeps up with his prayers – can receive a corresponding mild bonus, typically +1k0. The GM can increase this award for characters who are truly dedicated, but it should probably not escalate to adding kept dice.

GMs and players may or may not wish to require this sort of religious observance to be actively depicted in role-play. After all, it can be rather boring for the player of the shugenja to be stuck praying while other characters are off investigating or fighting bandits. Ultimately, it is a judgment call for the entire gaming group as to whether a shugenja's efforts to be more pious should require a "price" in game-play, and if so, how steep that price should be.

RITUALS AND GAME EFFECTS

The following section offers options for GMs to add mechanical effects to the various religious rituals which shugenja perform. Although these rituals are not "spells" in the normal game sense, they can still have meaningful effects in a world where the supernatural is real. GMs can use these effects to emphasize the importance of shugenja in all aspects of Rokugani life.

To reflect the power of a ritual of cleansing (used after a samurai has encountered something "untouchable" such as dead flesh, blood, etc) the GM can inflict a -1k0 penalty on the samurai's rolls until a shugenja is consulted and the ritual enacted. If the samurai takes too long (more than a week, say), the penalty can gradually increase, to -2k0, then -2k1, etc. Of course, a samurai who rejects the Celestial Order (such as a Spider) would probably be immune to such penalties. However, for an honorable Rokugani the weight of impurity can eventually intensify to the point where almost any action is rendered nigh-impossible.

A shugenja who performs a ritual of blessing at a birth, wedding, or funeral might be required to make a Lore: Theology/Void roll at a suitable TN (20 would be typical) to ensure that no evil spirits profane the event. A failed roll might result in a temporary die-penalty to the people involved (reflecting minor misfortune from hostile spirits), or could become a "story hook" by introducing a more serious curse or long-term spiritual imbalance in the lives of the people involved.

Samurai who have drawn the hostility of spiritual beings (kami, denizens of the Spirit Realms, etc) can labor under a variety of mechanical penalizing effects such as TN penalties, die penalties, or even Conditional Effects like Fatigue. A shugenja can resolve these problems through rituals of appeasement to the spirits, rolling Lore: Theology/Void at a higher TN (at least 25 for a minor curse from a local kami, higher for more difficult situations) to successfully end the affliction.

At the outset of a major undertaking such as a battle or a major court debate, a samurai could undergo a blessing from a shugenja to enhance his connection to one of the Elements. With a suitable Lore: Theology roll using the appropriate Element, the shugenja could bestow a single +1k0 bonus for the samurai to use with a roll involving that Element during the ensuing event. For example, a courtier who was blessed with Fire might use the bonus on a roll involving Intelligence.



Official 4th Edition Errata and Clarifications

CLARIFICATION OF THE 4TH EDITION DUELING RULES

The 4th Edition of the Legend of the Five Rings RPG extensively re-worked the rules for Iaijutsu Dueling, and based on the number of questions asked in the nearly five years since publication, the new dueling rules can be somewhat confusing to both old and new players. Accordingly, this section offers clarifications of the more frequent questions about dueling.

A Duel is Three Rounds: The rulebook mistakenly refers to an Iaijutsu duel taking place over two Rounds. This is an editing artifact from an earlier draft of the rules that somehow made it into the final version. The correct rule is that an Iaijutsu duel takes place over three Rounds (Assessment, Focus, and Strike).

A Duel is not a Skirmish: For simplicity of game terms and rules, the timing and structure of a duel is organized into Rounds rather than invent some other unique term for the three phases of the duel (Assessment, Focus, Strike). Also, by structuring a duel in Rounds, it can take place during a larger skirmish scene – for example, a duelist PC and a bandit leader might engage in an Iaijutsu duel while the rest of the PCs and the remaining bandits fight a normal skirmish. However, it cannot be emphasized enough that the duel itself is NOT a skirmish; players should not assume that the normal skirmish rules and mechanics, such as Initiative, apply to duels.

Center Stance and Duels: In a normal skirmish, a character cannot stay in Center Stance for more than one Round. However, in an Iaijutsu duel, the two duelists are assumed to enter the Center Stance at the beginning of

Round One (Assessment) and remain in it until the end of Round Three (Strike), regardless of their normal Initiative. Thus, the Center Stance bonus will be available on both Round Two (for the Focus roll) and on Round Three (for either the Strike roll or a damage roll, as the player chooses). Rank 5 Kakita Bushi will also get the bonus on Round One (for the Assessment roll).

An additional note in this regard: If both duelists are still alive and fighting after the Strike phase, the duel becomes a normal skirmish. On the first Round of that skirmish, both duelists will emerge from the Center Stance and assume whatever other Stance they choose (again, if they are Kakita Rank 5 they can choose to remain in Center Stance). They will get the Center Stance bonus on one roll of their choice on Round One of the skirmish.

The Strike: The Iaijutsu strike is a “normal” attack roll (albeit with extra Raises if the duelist won the Focus roll by a lot). The use of Maneuvers on the Strike roll is at the discretion of the GM, since some of them will be easier to justify in this context than others. The Called Shot Maneuver is probably perfectly legitimate in an Iaijutsu strike, but a Disarm or Feint Maneuver is harder to justify.

Defense and Armor TN: During the Strike phase of an Iaijutsu duel, characters are assumed to have their normal Armor TN. The reference on Core rulebook page 139 to the Defense Skill applying to duels (“make you more difficult to hit in a skirmish or duel”) is an error and should be ignored.

Initiative and Duels: The references to Initiative in the dueling rules are included purely as a convenience for GMs who are running duels as part of a larger skirmish scene. They are intended to provide “timing cues” for when the GM should have the duelists perform their Assessment and Focus rolls in the Round. Initiative has no actual effect on the duel itself, and Techniques which rely on Initiative cannot be applied to Iaijutsu duels.

Duels and Actions: Again, a duel is not a skirmish, so the rules on what Actions can be taken during a Round do not have any real applicability to a duel. Characters do not need to worry about whether they have an Action to draw their weapons, for example. Similarly, a character who can attack as a Simple Action will still only get one attack during the Strike phase.

The Physical Nature of a Duel: The ideal form of a duel consists of two duelists facing off, a few paces apart, with their blades sheathed until the moment of the Strike – at which point they leap forward, drawing their blades near-simultaneously. However, a duel does not have to exactly conform to this ideal – for example, many Dragon samurai will start a duel with their swords already drawn, and battlefield duels routinely take place with the characters already having their swords drawn. The one universal principle is that a duel is fought only with swords, and usually the katana. A contest fought with other weapons is not an Iaijutsu duel – it is merely a



one-on-one skirmish. Mechanically, these physical details make no difference to how an iaijutsu duel is resolved – the same Assessment/Focus/Strike format is followed.

Mirumoto Rank 2: The bonus from this Technique applies to all three rolls in an Iaijutsu duel (Assessment, Focus, and Strike).

ERRATA, 4TH EDITION CORE BOOK:

General clarification of rounding-off: Situations may arise where a number is halved. What happens when this is applied to an odd number? In most cases, the GM chooses, but there is one specific case where the numbers are always rounded down: When determining the XP cost of Kiho for non-Brotherhood monks.

Page 80 and page 140, Unarmed Attacks and Improvised Weapons: An unarmed attack normally has a base DR of 0k1. A character who uses the “Improvised Weapons” emphasis of Jiu-jutsu to attack with a physical object will have a DR of either 0k1 or 0k2, as chosen by the GM (the GM should base this judgment on the size and effectiveness of the object in question).

Page 91, Table 2.3: The “enduring an insult to yourself” Honor boost for characters of Honor Rank 9-10 should be 0, not +2.

Page 94, Table 2.5: The Imperial Treasurer should have a baseline Glory Rank of 4. Geisha should have a baseline Glory Rank of 3.

Page 102, Character Creation: The seven “free” School Skill Ranks awarded by a Character’s School are assumed to be used before the player begins spending Experience Points to purchase additional Skill Ranks. GMs may opt to change this, but be aware that this will dramatically increase the value of School Skills.

Page 103, Example of Character Creation: The School Skills listed for the Phoenix character are incorrect. The Skill list under the actual School (page 123) is correct.

General Clarification of Bushi School Techniques: Some School Techniques refer to “melee attacks” – this category does not include Unarmed attacks unless it specifically mentions them.

General Clarification of Shugenja School Techniques: The Asahina Shugenja technique, Kitsune Shugenja technique, and Komori Shugenja technique require Complex Actions to activate. The Tonbo Shugenja technique is a Free Action to activate.

Pages 110 and 128, Clarification of Doji Courtier Rank 3 and Bayushi Courtier Rank 3 Techniques: These Rank 3 Techniques refer to “2-point Allies” and “2-point Blackmail” which seemingly contradicts the descriptions of the Allies and Blackmail Advantages on page 146. These Techniques bypass the normal point-restriction of the Allies and Blackmail Advantages. The “2-point” benefits are mechanical representations of the fact that the character now has a bit of influence with this NPC – dirt for the Scorpion, friendship for the Crane.

Page 114, Togashi Tattooed Order School: The School should have the Artisan: Tattooing skill (instead of Craft: Tattooing).

Page 118, Kitsune Shugenja School: The Kitsune technique does not allow them to detect the Shadowlands Taint Disadvantage.

Page 120/219, Kitsune Family: Two different family Trait bonuses are listed for the Kitsune family. This is not actually an error; the +1 Willpower bonus applies to the Kitsune as a Minor Clan, while the +1 Awareness bonus applies to the Kitsune as a family of the Mantis Clan. However, GMs who find this to be unrealistic may opt to restrict the Kitsune to one or the other Trait bonus throughout their history.

Page 128, Bayushi Courtier Rank 5 Technique: This Technique refers to a nonexistent “Bad Reputation” Disadvantage (a legacy term from previous editions of L5R). In 4th Edition, this should be the “Social Disadvantage” Disadvantage (found on page 162).

Page 131, Iuchi Shugenja School: The absence of a Scroll Satchel from this School’s Outfit is an oversight. They should have a Scroll Satchel like the other shugenja schools.

Page 145, Intimidation Skill: The “default” Trait for Intimidation should be Willpower, not Awareness.

Page 152-152, Sacred Weapon: The Spider Clan Sacred Weapon (the Black Steel Blade) was written for the period in Rokugani history before the “New Taint,” and as such is an item specifically oriented toward the Spider Clan’s original identity as corrupt infiltrators. For games set in the Age of Exploration, the Black Steel Blade’s Taint-bestowing abilities no longer work. GMs are of course free to homebrew a replacement Sacred Weapon Advantage for the “modern” Spider Clan.

The Rise spells (pages 173, 180, 192, and in the Book of Fire supplement): The four Rise spells have caused some confusion with players who try to interpret the summoned kami as a Creature, leading to questions about mechanical effects like Initiative, how it takes Actions, and so forth. However, the summoned kami is not a Creature – it is an ongoing spell effect. Thus, it does not have to take “Move Actions” in the conventional sense, it simply moves the distance desired by the caster (up to the allowed maximum). It can be assumed the kami will act on the caster’s Initiative, since the caster is controlling it. It is the GM’s judgment whether the kami will act on the Round that the caster summons it – given that these are Rank 6 spells, however, they probably should be able to do so. It is presumed these spirits are immune to the effects they impose on others’ movement. They can also generally ignore effects which would target Mental Traits or Rings, although it is possible an odd situation might arise where such an effect could have an impact on them – the GM should use common sense and good judgment in such situations.





Page 213, Chuda Shugenja School: The Chuda chooses one Element to be his Deficient Element. Any Maho spells which use that Element are cast unmodified (e.g. the Affinity for Maho and the Deficiency in that Element cancel each other out).

Page 253, Deathseeker Path: The Honor requirement for the Path should read "Honor Rank 5+."

Page 255, Iuchi Traveler Path: The flavor text of the Path says that multiple spell slots can be expended to travel greater distances. This is incorrect (the Technique does not actually grant such an ability) and should be ignored.

Page 231, "Playing a Monk" Sidebar: The sidebar states that Brotherhood monks start with Glory 1 and Status 0. This is incorrect. The entry on page 95 is correct: monks start with Glory 0 and Status 1.

Page 261, Kiho rules: Internal Kiho with no listed duration are assumed to last until the monk either (a) switches to another Internal Kiho, or (b) no longer concentrates on controlling the Elements within him (i.e. when he falls asleep, goes unconscious, dies, etc).

Page 261, Utilizing Kiho: The example refers to the Kiho called The Great Silence as Martial, but the actual description of the Kiho on page 262 labels it as Mystical. The description is correct – it is a Mystical Kiho.

Page 266, "Non-Brotherhood Kiho" sidebar: The sidebar refers to non-Brotherhood characters who may be eligible to purchase Kiho as using only their Ring to determine if they meet the Mastery Level to purchase a specific Kiho. However, the sidebar on page 266 refers to "Ninja who are being depicted in a mystical or supernatural fashion" as using their School Rank to determine if they meet the Kiho Mastery Level. This is incorrect – Ninja would use their Ring just like any other non-Brotherhood characters.

Page 266, "Non-Brotherhood Kiho" sidebar: The sidebar text reading "Characters affiliated with other Monk Schools may purchase Kiho at one half times the normal cost, using the same rules for Mastery Level" should simply read "Characters affiliated with other Monk Schools may purchase Kiho at one half times the normal cost."

Page 321–322, creatures: Horses and falcons have the same Skill listing (Hunting and Intimidation) as the Unicorn War Dogs. This is an error. Falcons and horses do not have any Skill Ranks.

Page 329, Ugulu no Oni: The oni should have the Special Ability of Huge.

Page 398, Index, entry for Off-hand Weapons & Multiple Attacks: The correct page is 141.

Map error: On the map in the front and back inside covers, there is a "SC11" marked, indicating a Scorpion holding. However, the description of Scorpion holdings on page 354 makes no mention of a "SC11" location. The inclusion of "SC11" on the map was a layout error.

ERRATA, ENEMIES OF THE EMPIRE

Page 13, Crocodile: The Special Ability 'Fleet 2 (while swimming)' should be 'Swift 2 (while swimming)'.

Page 180, Kenku Swordsman School: The absence of a "Starting Honor" for the Kenku School is not an oversight. Although the Kenku race is given an "Honor" stat to represent their overall sense of moral purity, they do not follow Bushido, and human characters who train in the Kenku School will already have an Honor Rank from their previous normal lives.

Page 187, Tsuno Ravager School and Tsuno Soultwister School: Both of these Schools incorrectly list "Kenjutsu (Tsuno Blade)" under their School Skills. This should actually be "Heavy Weapons (Tsuno Blade)" as shown in the Core rulebook (page 330) and the Tsuno Blades sidebar (page 189 of Enemies of the Empire).

Page 219, sidebar on Effects of the Shadowlands: There is a reference to spell slots being regained through meditation. This is an artifact from earlier editions of the L5R rules. In L5R 4th Edition, characters cannot regain spell slots from meditation.

Pages 163 and 253, Pekkile no Oni and Pekkile spirit: The Pekkile spirit should have the same Skill list as the Pekkile no Oni.

ERRATA, EMERALD EMPIRE

Page 79, Imperial Scion Rank 2: This Technique refers to an "Opposed Courtier / Etiquette Roll". It should be Courtier / Awareness.

ERRATA, GREAT CLANS

Page 102, Mirumoto Master Sensei: This Advanced School lists a prohibition against the "Proud" Advantage. This was a "legacy error" referring to an Advantage that was published in previous editions of L5R but which does not exist in 4th Edition. Substitute "Overconfident" instead.

Page 138, Matsu Beastmaster: Their Rank 4 technique allows their warcats to make claw attacks as a Simple Action. This seemingly contradicts the 4th Edition Core rulebook which already lists lions as being able to make claw attacks as Simple Actions. The reason for the



discrepancy is play-balance – allowing the Beastmasters' warcats to start play with Simple Action attacks makes them overly powerful compared to other characters. Thus, for the purpose of game balance, Matsu warcats (as opposed to wild lions) are assumed to only be able to make claw attacks with a Complex Action until they are sufficiently trained.

Page 166, Mantis Brawler: The Rank 1 Techniques says "You still gain the Prone Armor TN bonus against ranged attacks." This refers to an aspect of the Prone Condition that was in an early draft but got dropped in the final version. Although GMs are free to apply such a bonus if it seems appropriate, if you are playing strictly by the rules text, this line of Brawler Rank 1 should be ignored.

Page 202, Dance of the Winds Kata: This Kata is listed as being available to Shiba Bushi and "Daidoji Bushi." This should be Daidoji Iron Warrior.

ERRATA, STRONGHOLDS OF THE EMPIRE

General note: It is important to remember that Strongholds of the Empire was originally intended to be a "transitional" product that would release before the 4th Edition Core rulebook. As a result, the mechanics included in the book were finalized before the last round of tweaks and revisions to 4th Edition, and some small inconsistencies crept in.

Ide Caravan Master: The Technique is listed as replacing the rank 1 technique of "Ide Courtier" – this should read "Ide Emissary" instead.

Doji Warrior-Poet: The Path refers to the skill of Perform: Poetry; as both a requirement and part of its technique. However, in the Core rulebook, Poetry is an Artisan Skill. Although Poetry could be seen as both a Perform skill and an Artisan skill, depending on how it is being used, for the sake of simplicity it is best to assume it is always an Artisan skill and adjust the Path's wording accordingly.

Shadow Blade: This alternate Path requires the Skill of Ninjutsu 3, but the Technique refers to "weapons with the Ninja keyword." However, there are no such weapons – the concept of a [Ninja] Weapon tag was dropped late in the development of 4th Edition. To correct the Technique, allow it instead to apply to all weapons using the Ninjutsu Skill, and to the Ninja-to sword.

ERRATA, SECOND CITY BOX SET

"The People" Book, Page 104, Kshatriya Warrior School:

The Skills of Archery, Hand-to-Hand and Swordsmanship are considered to be mechanically identical to Kyujutsu, Jiu-jutsu, and Kenjutsu – they have the same Mastery Abilities and use the same Traits. The Ivory Kingdoms considers them to be the equivalent of Bugei Skills, although the Rokugani for the most part would regard them as Low Skills. (The Mantis or the Tortoise might consider them Bugei Skills.) They will have different Emphases, obviously, based on the weapons of the gaijin lands.

Ivinda bows and swords have somewhat different outward physical designs than Rokugani weapons, but are considered mechanically identical. A Rokugani character can wield an Ivory Kingdoms sword with the Kenjutsu Skill, and vice versa.

The Kshatriya School lists a "shield" in their starting equipment. However, there no official rules for using shields – the item was included for completeness and to ensure that there were no inconsistencies if we ever published shield rules in the future. A Kshatriya does not suffer any penalties for fighting with a shield in one hand and a melee weapon in the other hand.

ERRATA, IMPERIAL HISTORIES 2

Page 197, Kaiu Shipmasters Alternate Path: This Path is listed as replacing "Kaiu Engineer 3 or Kaiu Siege Master 1". However, Kaiu Siege Master is itself a Path, not a School or Advanced School. The Shipmasters only replace Kaiu Engineer 3.

Page 271, Yuki No Onna: This creature is missing an Air Rank. It should be 4.

ERRATA, SECRETS OF THE EMPIRE

Page 236, the Generic Ronin Bushi School: The Rank One Technique allows an Earth Roll to cancel Wound Penalties. The Rank Five Technique upgrades this with the ability to "spend a Void Point to activate your R1 Technique without requiring a Willpower Trait Roll". The reference to a "Willpower Roll" is an error – it should refer to "Earth Roll."

Page 238, the Fuzake Shugenja School: The school is missing its Trait Benefit. It should be +1 Willpower.

ERRATA, BOOK OF WATER

Page 179, the Seppun Astrologer Path: The Skills listed in the Requirements section are incorrect. Replace them with Divination (Astrology) 4, Lore: Omens 5

Page 178, the Battle Healing Advantage: This was mistakenly given the [Mystical] tag (due to confusion with the Kiho rules). It should be [Spiritual] instead.



Missing Creatures, Book of Air

The L5R 4th Edition supplement *Book of Air* contained incorrect game mechanics for several creatures discussed in that book. The corrected versions are presented here; in addition, the descriptions and game statistics of the Wyrms have been updated to reflect this book's more thorough and Yobanjin-focused discussion of those creatures.

GREATER ELEMENTAL TERROR OF AIR: KAZE NO ONI

Kaze no Oni are created by the Dark Oracles at the start of the twelfth century; there are no records of their appearance prior to that time, although GMs may always choose to rule that the Oracles took action earlier in the Empire's history. They resemble the giant swollen corpses of infant birds, standing high atop long legs that trail away into insubstantiality. Their affinity to the Air kansen gives them an unnatural ability to absorb spells and hurl them back at their enemies, making them a particular threat to shugenja.

KAZE NO ONI

AIR: 6	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2
		AGILITY: 4	PERCEPTION: 4
SHADOWLANDS TAINT: 6			ARMOR TN: 35
INITIATIVE: 8k6			
ATTACK: BITE 6k2 (SIMPLE)			DAMAGE: BITE 4k2
REDUCTION: 5 (BYPASSED BY JADE, CRYSTAL, OR OBSIDIAN)		WOUNDS: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90: DEAD	

Skills: Spellcraft 5

Special Abilities:

Fear 3

Huge

Invulnerable

Magic Resistance: The Kaze no Oni has two Ranks of Magic Resistance against non-Air spells, and three Ranks against Air spells.

Spell-Filching: Any time an Elemental (not maho) spell is successfully cast within 50' of a Kaze no Oni, the oni may attempt to steal it. The oni makes a Contested Roll of its Air against the shugenja's Ring in whatever Element the spell belonged to; the oni gets a Free Raise to this roll if the spell is Air, while the shugenja gets a Free Raise if the spell is Earth. If the oni wins the roll, it steals the spell and can store it, releasing it later – effectively casting it in game terms – as a Simple Action. The oni can store a maximum number of spells at the same time equal to its Air, and cannot attempt to steal spells unless it has room to store them.

LESSER ELEMENTAL TERROR OF AIR: YOSUCHI NO ONI

"Take soul, breath, and leave only dust behind...."

The Yosuchi no Oni are shadowy, insubstantial demons who float through the air, resembling nothing so much as a tangle of tattered semi-incorporeal silk with a vaguely-defined head. Like their larger cousins, the Kaze no Oni, they are creations of the Dark Oracle of Air and are first seen around the start of the twelfth century.

The Yosuchi no Oni is almost as insubstantial as the Element from which it was created, and is thus both difficult to fight and dangerous to those it attacks. It drains the life-essence of its prey directly, drawing it out through its vaporous appendages. Only magic and weapons of sacred substances like jade can affect it. Fortunately, it is quite vulnerable to attacks from those sources.

YOSUCHI NO ONI

AIR: 4	EARTH: 1	FIRE: 3	WATER: 1
REFLEXES: 6	WILLPOWER: 3		PERCEPTION: 3
SHADOWLANDS TAINT: 6			ARMOR TN: 35
INITIATIVE: 7k6			
ATTACK: APPENDAGE 7k3 (SIMPLE)			DAMAGE: 1k1, PLUS LIFE DRAIN (SEE SPECIAL ABILITIES)
REDUCTION: NONE			WOUNDS: 25: +5; 50: DEAD: DEAD

Skills: Stealth 5

Special Abilities:

Fear 3

Insubstantial: The Yosuchi no Oni can pass through solid walls and objects up to a foot thick. Its Appendage attacks ignore any benefit from armor to the target's Armor TN.

Life Drain: The Yosuchi no Oni's attack drains the victim's very life. Those who are struck by the Yosuchi's Appendage must make a Contested Roll of their Earth against the Yosuchi's Air; if they lose the roll, their Earth Ring is reduced by 1 Rank (with a corresponding reduction in Wounds). If a character dies from this effect, his body crumbles instantly into dust.

Magic Resistance: The Yosuchi no Oni is considered to have two Ranks of Magic Resistance against Air magic (only).

Superior Invulnerability: The Yosuchi no Oni takes no damage from any attacks save for those made with magic spells or with weapons made from jade, crystal, or obsidian.

Swift 4

NUE

Nue are large bird-spirits from Chikushudo; they resemble a predatory bird roughly the size of a dog, but with an oddly human head and face. They possess a human-like cunning but the mentality of aggressive animals, and will attack any prey they think they can kill. They are known for carrying out flying ambushes, such as by flying between their prey and the sun, or flying behind clouds.

NUE

AIR: 2	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2
REFLEXES: 5		AGILITY: 4	PERCEPTION: 3
INITIATIVE: 6k5			ARMOR TN: 30
ATTACK: CLAW/BEAK 6k4 (SIMPLE)			DAMAGE: 4k2
REDUCTION: 3		WOUNDS: 15: +5; 30: DEAD.	

Skills: Hunting 3, Investigation 3, Stealth 3

Special Abilities:

Diving Attack: If the Nue makes an attack in the Full Attack posture and dives at least 20' during the attack, it gains a +1k1 damage bonus.

Spirit

Swift 3 (when flying)

TSURU

Tsuru are shapeshifting spirits similar to kitsune, koumouri, and tanuki. In their natural form they appear to be very large and elegant cranes, but they can shapeshift into a beautiful human body with somewhat elongated facial features, or into a human-crane hybrid that somewhat resembles a Kenku. On some occasions they have been mistaken for Kenku, especially since in their bipedal forms they are fond of carrying swords and engaging in duels. They are proud creatures and easily insulted, insults which they prefer to answer with duels.

Tsuru

AIR: 4	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 2	WATER: 1
		AGILITY: 3	PERCEPTION: 4
INITIATIVE: 5k4			ARMOR TN: 25
ATTACK: SWORD 7k3 (COMPLEX) OR BEAK 3k3 (COMPLEX)		DAMAGE: 4k2 (SWORD) OR 1k1 (BEAK)	
REDUCTION: 3		WOUNDS: 15: +5; 30: +10; 45: +15; 60: DEAD.	

Skills: Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 4

Special Abilities:

Duelist: The Tsuru can assume the Center Stance and perform Iaijutsu duels. When dueling, the Tsuru uses its Air instead of Void for Focus rolls.

Shapeshifting

Spirit

Swift 4 (when flying)

WYRMS

"These deadly Yobanjin warriors bring their fearsome steeds into the middle of combat, where man and beast fight as one. Gruesome, and effective." – Mirumoto Kei, twelfth century

Wyrms are huge warm-blooded reptilian serpents, often as much as thirty or forty feet in length, with colorful bodies and heads covered in baroque shapes and whiskers that superficially resemble the heads of the legendary Elemental Dragons. They are encountered in the lands

of the Yobanjin beyond the Great Wall of the North Mountains, where they are used as war-mounts by the Yobanjin warrior elite. Some of them have wings and some do not, but all of them are able to fly, winding through the air in a manner resembling a normal snake swimming through water.

For many centuries, Rokugani scholars believed the wyrms were natural creatures which the Yobanjin somehow managed to tame. In fact, some scholars insisted the wyrms did not actually fly, but merely created the illusion of flight as they raced across the ground. Others took the view that they were supernatural or perhaps even demonic, and after the War of Dark Fire this became the generally accepted viewpoint.

Wyrms are controlled by magical amulets created by the Yobanjin shamans, and whoever holds an amulet can absolutely command the wyrm associated with that amulet. The wyrms do not seem to serve willingly, and will not fight unless commanded to by the one who holds their amulet; some shugenja have reported sensing a profound spiritual anguish in the presence of wyrms, leading to speculations that they may actually be creatures from the Spirit Realms who have been enslaved by the shamans.

WYRM

AIR: 2	EARTH: 4	FIRE: 1	WATER: 3
REFLEXES: 5		AGILITY: 7	STRENGTH: 6
INITIATIVE: 6k5			ARMOR TN: 35
ATTACK: ITE 7k7 (COMPLEX) OR CONSTRICT 8k6 (COMPLEX)		DAMAGE: 8k2 (BITE) OR 5k5 (CONSTRICT)	
REDUCTION: 6		WOUNDS: 32: +5; 64: +10; 96: +15; 128: DEAD	

Skills: Jiu-jutsu 2

Special Abilities:

Amulet – Any person who possesses the wyrm's amulet can infallibly command the wyrm, but it will take no action if not commanded. If the amulet is destroyed the wyrm instantly vanishes from the mortal world.

Aura of Anguish – Any shugenja who casts spells in the vicinity of a wyrm will sense the anguished spiritual nature of the creature and must roll Insight Rank/Willpower at TN 30 or be overwhelmed and Stunned (as per the rulebook Condition).

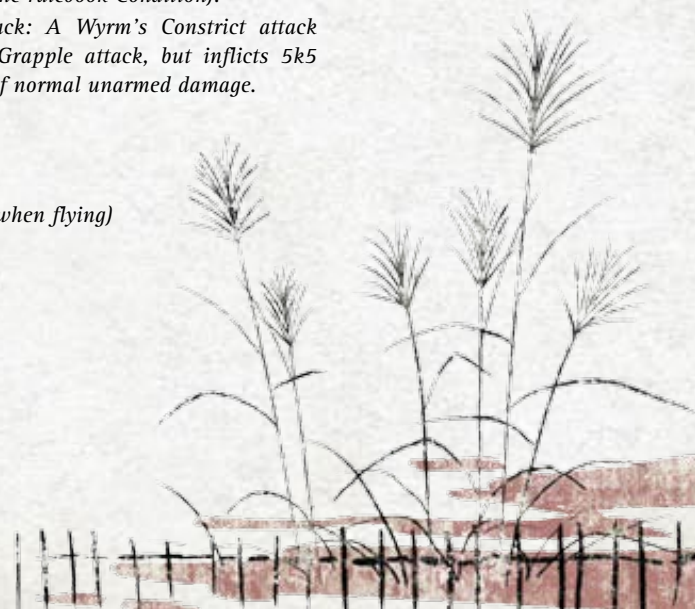
Constriction Attack: A Wyrms's Constrict attack is considered a Grapple attack, but inflicts 5k5 damage instead of normal unarmed damage.

Fear 3

Huge

Spirit

Swift 2 (Swift 4 when flying)





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