SWORD AND FAN

Legend of the Five Rings

Sword and Fan

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INTRODUCTION

Ikoma Jun stood on a windy balcony and rubbed the stump where his left arm ended. He breathed in the crisp air, taking in the final day of winter with profound sadness. Below the ground was covered in a final snowfall, a last pristine blanket before spring, not yet soiled by the march to war.

Reluctantly, Jun pulled his gaze from nature's beauty and examined the artistic display for which the balcony was reserved. The painting was remarkable: a huge shoji displaying only a brief splash of stark black lines. The artist was a profound soul named Hiruma Renzo, a darling of this year's Winter Court. Renzo's talent was for a concept the Kakita dubbed "ma," which Jun understood to mean "the space between; the consciousness of a place."

All of the art on this silk screen rested within the negative space between the lines. The emptiness spoke volumes.

"A beauty to behold, if a somewhat blunt representation of Renzo's style."

Ikoma Jun's clenched hand was the only indication of his surprise at the voice. He instantly recognized the purring tone of his rival. Bayushi Kiwadoi, rikugunshokan of the Scorpion. A former Topaz Champion who had risen to lofty heights without losing her legendary good looks.

"You refer to the disapproving reminder of unneeded death, I presume?" Jun spoke to the empty air, not deigning to look at the Scorpion samurai-ko. "Renzo merely anticipates the actions of the coming summer, Kiwadoi-san. He knows once the frozen ground has thawed you will unleash that terror you call a brother. The artist disapproves."

Kiwadoi chuckled softly and ran her fingertip gently across the silk. Certainly, between the slashed lines that represented trees, there was the vague outline of a butcher amid a pile of the dead. Pikes rose up in little lines. Upon them were dozens of blots that could, with the right mindset, could represent the heads of defeated men.

"Renzo's ability to capture the complexity of what is not being said is nothing compared to your own skill, my friend." Kiwadoi's smile grew around her words.

The silence between the rising general and the older courtier grew pregnant with energy. What was not said, what each samurai refused to lay bare, was the understanding of the power each possessed. The long breath between words spoke volumes.

"Abbot Ayushen has rescinded his endorsement of Bayushi control of the Gakka province." Jun broke the silence. "Someone has shared with him the truth behind your brother's actions and it seems he does not approve." Jun did not need to say he had coerced the abbot of the Four Temples into withdrawing his support. Nor did he need to mention his awareness of what should be a secret – that Kiwadoi had already unleashed her brother, the reprehensible Konitsu, despite protocol.

"Plans within plans and the monster is set in motion." Kiwadoi stepped forward, mere inches from brushing Jun's shoulder with her own. "I wonder, friend Ikoma, if the men who die in battle ever become aware of the machinations that sent them there in the first place. Does the afterlife bring knowledge of our whispered words? A wise general understands that war is not won only with martial prowess, but does that understanding reach the common soldier?"

Jun finally turned to look at the half-mask that enhanced the Scorpion's beautiful features. Her exposed mouth was set in a bemused smile. "Has your loss of enlightened allies turned you to theology, Kiwadoi-san?"

"Absolutely not!" Briefly the Scorpion actually seemed offended, but she recovered swiftly. "I merely find comfort in breathing life into the words we both refuse to speak. Samurai will die in the coming months because of our designs. We each move our pieces on the shogi board and gain understanding of one another's strategy, but they will never know that." Kiwadoi looked again at the painting. "You hope to neuter my ability to wage war by calling out my primary strength. If I deploy Konitsu, my reputation will diminish, yours will rise. If I fail to do so, you have taken from me a key piece. I salute you, Jun-san."

"I do not hear concession in your tone."

"'The victorious general strikes while the enemy plans,'" Kiwadoi quoted. She turned back to face her rival once more. "You will find in the coming months that while you collected information and divulged the truth of my weakness, I have chosen action. In doing so I will gain infamy, yes, but I have also obtained secrets of my own. It seems I am not alone in possessing dangers close to my heart."

Jun frowned. Kiwadoi had just claimed a traitor to his cause had given up important information. Moreover, the Scorpion was stating she knew he did not yet know who it was and that fact amused her. Too many of their conversations had gone this way in the previous months. Each ended with the Bayushi at an obvious disadvantage and the Ikoma nonetheless wondering what trap he had sprung.

"Otomo Madoka would be proud of us, Ikoma-kun. We are each so caught up in the complexity of our plans that we may have confused ourselves." Kiwadoi rested her palm on the railing and Jun heard a soft click of stone touching the wood. When she turned to leave, Jun saw a tiny stone carving. The shape of a monk, with a fracture ready to break the piece in two.

Jun did not look after the Bayushi as she walked away. He spoke toward the painting. "A threat, Bayushi-san?"

"Of course not. Merely new information to consider. Nowhere in Madoka's famous work are the enlightened brothers mentioned, and the great works of war discuss them only briefly. The stone is a reminder: the brothers are outsiders in our clashes of words and steel. You would do well to find other allies."

When he was certain she had gone, Ikoma Jun released a frustrated sigh. Not frustration with the Scorpion – she had acted according to her nature and he could hardly expect otherwise. No, Jun was angry at himself. Kiwadoi had spoken true. Like the style of "ma" in the painting, the interplay of the court had tangled the Ikoma's mind and soul. The complex network of relationships between people, ideas, and objects of desire had snared him like a web. Thinking of his fellow samurai as pieces on a board...what would his sensei think?

Ikoma Jun turned and left. Behind him, the fractured stone statuette and the beautiful display of art slowly warmed in the sun's rays. Soon the balance between words and war would shift. Soon the negative space would be filled.

What Is This Book?

Welcome to *Sword and Fan*, the latest sourcebook release for the L5R 4th Edition RPG! This book is intended to present a definitive discussion of the two core activities of Rokugani samurai: war and politics. Accordingly, it is divided into two sections. The first section, The Sword, details the implementation of Rokugani war at every level, from grand strategy through tactics to the details of battle. The second section, The Fan, discusses political life across the Empire, revealing how the words of a courtier can sometimes be more powerful than a thousand blades. These two themes, war and politics, are also explored through the words of two of the Empire's greatest written works: the *Book of Sun Tao* (considered one of the greatest works on the art of war) and Otomo Madoka's *The Subtlety of the Court* (which adopted Sun Tao's stratagems for the world of politics).

Chapter One: Strategy

This chapter deals with the topic of "Grand Strategy" – the theory of war, large scale maneuvers of armies, and the principle of winning before one even engages in battle. It also includes discussions on the life of a general and command staff in the field, both practical living conditions and the demands of command and organization. Finally, no discussion of strategy would be complete without a review of some of the Empire's most famous rikugunshokan and their glorious – or sometimes, infamous – military campaigns.

Chapter Two: Tactics

This chapter steps down from overall strategy to review the "sandals on the ground" aspects of the Empire's battlefields. It includes discussions of the formations used by the Rokugani on the battlefield, the traditional rituals and tactics of war, victory, and defeat, and the many social and cultural details of combat, such as the taking of heads post-battle. This chapter also includes a detailed discussion of ways to expand usage of the Mass Battle Table in an L5R game, dramatizing battles and making them more personal to the player characters.

Chapter Three: Cavalry Warfare

No discussion of Rokugani warfare can be complete without considering the effects of cavalry, especially in the centuries after the return of the Unicorn Clan. This chapter details the complete history of cavalry in the Empire, both before and after the return of the Unicorn, as well as discussing the specialized cavalry units of each clan. There is also a detailed examination of the care and training of warhorses.

Chapter Four: Enemies

The Sword section comes to an end with a look at the details of clan-on-clan warfare and the customs and limitations placed on it, such as the appointment of Imperial observers. This chapter also looks at the particular challenges of fighting with unusual enemies such as supernatural foes, Shadowlands armies, and the gaijin peoples from beyond the Empire.

Chapter Five: Court and Civilization

The Fan section opens with this chapter, examining the Empire's often-elaborate rules of civility and etiquette in everyday life, everything from the expectations of hosts to the importance of fashion in court. This chapter also examines the Rokugani art of the insult (a challenging business in a society where offense can be repaid in steel) and the history and significance of the fabled Tea Ceremony. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the nature and complications of inheritance, both of lands of and titles, and the question of who may be a legal heir.

Chapter Six: Politics Through the Year

This chapter details the seasonal traditions associated with court and politics, such as the inception of new daimyo during the spring and, most importantly, the annual tradition of the Winter Court. The customs and traditions of Winter Court are discussed in detail, reviewing everything from the physical layout of the court to the customary entertainments. The art of matchmaking, a major aspect of politics in the Empire and a major focus at every Winter Court, is also considered in detail. Finally, the chapter recounts the deeds and histories of several famous diplomats, courtiers, artists, and social trend-setters from the Empire's twelve centuries of recorded history.

Chapter Seven: Outsiders in Politics

The Fan section concludes with this chapter, which considers the "outsiders" of Rokugani politics and how they fit (or fail to fit) into the traditional structures of court life – the political roles of ronin and monks, and even the most unusual visitors such as the gaijin and the servants of the Shadowlands.

Appendix: New Mechanics

The Appendix includes a variety of new game mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition RPG, based on the topics discussed in both halves of the book.

Literature of the Sword and Fan

"All is war." – Sun Tao and Otomo Madoka

According to Akodo's *Leadership*, the perfect samurai is a warrior-poet who understands the need to balance skill in battle with intellectual and cultural pursuits. Akodo wrote that the right hand should wield a blade while the left should hold a book.

There are no more vital works of literature on the subjects of war and politics than Sun Tao's eponymous book and its later counterpart, Otomo Madoka's *Subtlety of the Court*. Each of these treatises is considered an essential primer on its subject matter and has been read and discussed by countless Rokugani philosophers, generals, and politicians over the centuries. It is said that to completely understand either work is impossible, but ultimate wisdom can be found in the attempt.

Each work is an examination of the essence of conflict and its trinity of blind force, the play of chance, and rational calculation. Each examines three levels of planning. First, strategy encompasses both all aspects of prior planning and the moral or political purpose behind the campaign. Second, operational aspects of strategy, breaking down assignments for each goal. Lastly, the tactical level – whether in the court or on the field of war – with its specific interplays of maneuver and counter-maneuver; sword against sword or speech against speech.

Fundamental to the study of both war and politics is the ability to comprehend the speed and fluid change inherent in both types of conflict. A successful general and a successful courtier will both observe a conflict and form an overall mental image of its shape and nature, allowing them to choose a course of action more quickly than their opponents. Indeed, both Sun Tao and Otomo Madoka say a true master must perform this cycle of observation and decision continuously, always reacting faster than any foes. Those so trained perceive more details, understand them faster, and act with clarity and confidence.

The Book of Sun Tao

"War is the continuation of politics by other means." – Otomo Madoka

A proper understanding of the *Book of Sun Tao* takes a lifetime of study and contemplation. Sun Tao himself spent his entire life travelling from clan to clan, and considered his work incomplete – he left the Empire in search of the lost Ki-Rin Clan. Despite being "incomplete," his work has been studied and commented on by the great minds of every generation since its creation. The popularity of the *Book of Sun Tao* is not limited to military commanders and theorists; it also is studied by ambassadors, merchant lords, master sensei, and religious leaders. Countless essays and commentaries have sprouted from the study of the general's book – as well as Otomo Madoka's own book, of course. In fact, the *Book of Sun Tao* encompasses many more topics than merely war – it also touches upon public administration, planning, diplomacy, and the cultivation of personal relationships, all of which are essential to the health and success of a clan.

Additional information on Sun Tao's life and how he came to write his famous book can be found in the L5R RPG 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 230.

Proper War

"There are no tactics and no weapons that may be excluded on moral grounds." – Sun Tao

Sun Tao might well be considered a deeply offensive man by the standards of Rokugan's modern society. Rokugani morality eschews the use of deception, even in war, but Sun Tao refutes this idea. He claims war is the most important thing for a leader to study and the only goal of such study is to be able to win – with deception a necessary tool to that end. For Sun Tao, maintaining the basic structure of power in society depends on behavior that violates ideals such as righteousness and justice. However, he also accepts that a balance must be struck between practicality and idealism or the Empire will devolve into a barbarous catastrophe not worthy of being called a civilization.

Limited versus Total War

"There is no instance of an army having benefited from prolonged warfare." – Sun Tao

Sun Tao claims it is not possible for war to be waged in a limited fashion. The nature of military conflict forces all commanders to use every possible means to achieve victory. However, in the same breath, the ronin general says such reasoning, in the real world, is unrealistic and dangerous. Total war may lead to battlefield victory in

The Concubines of Lord Wu

While on his great journey across the Empire, Sun Tao was challenged by the Crane to a test: clean out a ronin band that was occupying a castle in their provinces. That he was successful is obvious, but how is a matter of some controversy. One tale recounted about this event is the story of the ronin Lord Wu.

Sun Tao arrived with his small army at the castle of "Lord Wu" and made camp near its walls. He ordered his most trusted lieutenant, Terumuto, to maintain the army, and approached the ronin-held castle alone, much to the dismay of his officers. The ronin lord laughed at Sun Tao's temerity and sent out his men to capture the foolish man. However, after speaking with Sun Tao at length, the ronin lord was impressed with the general's wisdom and offered him a chance at survival.

"You are so skilled a warrior you believe you can defeat me single-handedly. Let us see your vaunted prowess in action, great commander, and if you succeed, I shall leave these lands never to return."

The ronin Lord Wu was infamous for his collection of geisha, capturing them in raids and keeping them as concubines within his castle. He told Sun Tao to take one hundred of his concubines and teach them to march in good order, obeying as a soldier upon the field.

Sun Tao systematically instructed the women until he was certain they knew the protocols and procedures of soldiering. However, when he gave them the order to march, they fell about themselves laughing. Sun Tao reviewed the marching orders again, but again the geisha laughed at his ridiculousness. Then he chose Lord Wu's two favorites and brought them forward before the others, ordering them to be beheaded.

"No!" shouted Lord Wu. "They are my favorites and must not be harmed."

"You have placed me in charge of an army, my lord. This is military justice upon the field." With that, Sun Tao struck the blows himself, killing the two geisha in an instant. Before the remaining geisha could pause to consider the matter, Sun Tao barked his orders once again. This time the women marched in perfect unison.

The ronin Lord Wu was shamed by his lack of wisdom and awed by the clarity of Sun Tao's confidence and power. He immediately disbanded his army, released his geisha, scattered his soldiers to the four winds, and joined Sun Tao's army.

the short term, but such an approach will ultimately tear asunder the very fabric of the Empire. Thus, military objectives must support political objectives, for no battle is ever fought purely for the sake of killing the enemy. Rather, war is fought to achieve specific goals: the acquisition of a province or a castle, vengeance for a slight against honor, expulsion of a foreign invasion. Alternatively, war may be fought pre-emptively to weaken political opponents and avoid having to deal with them later. This means total destruction of the enemy is not necessary – perhaps not even possible or desirable. Sun Tao certainly seems to have found a basic truth here, for throughout the centuries of Rokugan's history no Great Clan has ever been wholly destroyed by the depredations of war. (Of course, theologians would say this is because Tengoku itself protects the children of the Kami, each of whom serves a role vital to the survival of the Empire.)

Friction and Uncertainty

"One may know how to conquer without being able to do it." – Sun Tao

Sun Tao speaks of friction in war as the disparity between the ideal performance of squadrons, armies, or even political systems and their actual performance in the uncertain and dangerous real world. The *Book of Sun Tao* is in many ways a handbook for overcoming this friction, and the entire book is dominated by a paradox: training is necessary to produce a good general, but any general who comes to trust too much in the rules he has learned is headed for defeat. The successful general will study the wisdom of the *Book of Sun Tao* so profoundly that he ceases to trust it at all.

The Subtlety of the Court

"The greatest general is the one who wins without fighting." – Sun Tao

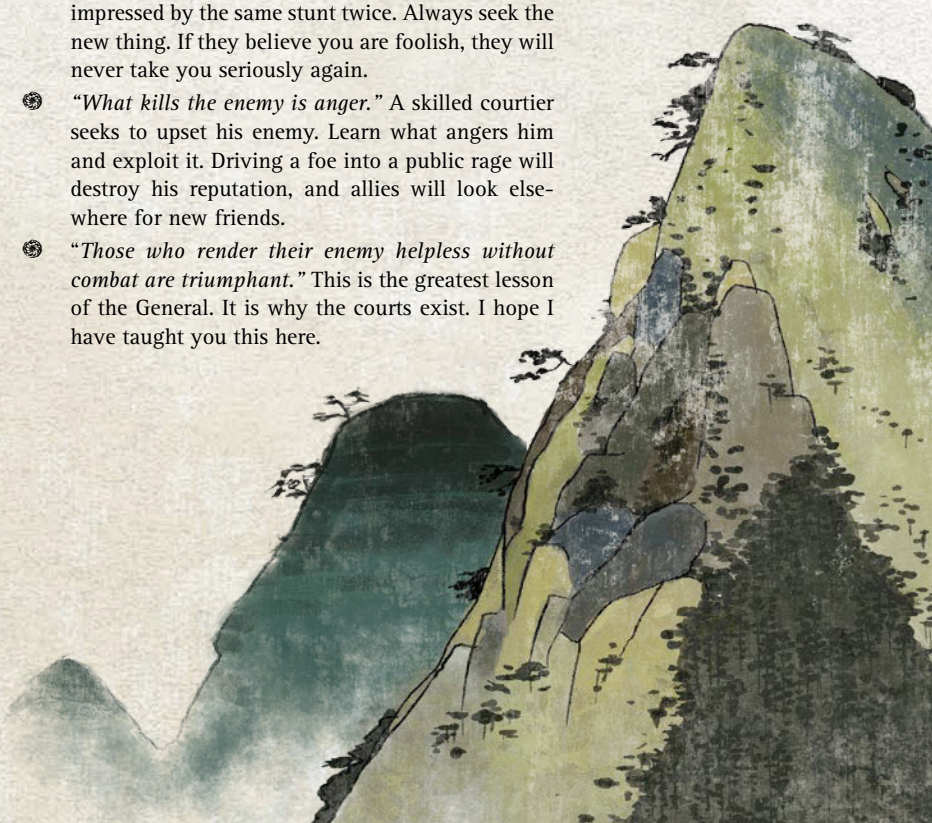
Notwithstanding his pious comment on winning without combat, Sun Tao's text is filled with advice to those generals who must fight. However, his words inspired a later writer, an Imperial matchmaker named Otomo Madoka who lived during the seventh century. (Details on Otomo Madoka's life may be found in Chapter Eight). Her essay on Sun Tao's writing, called The *Subtlety of the Court*, is considered the essential work on Rokugani politics and is studied as a survival guide by courtiers in later centuries.

Otomo Madoka examined the deceptively simple guidelines in the *Book of Sun Tao* and redefined them to embrace the methods and language of the court. Madoka herself acknowledged that she was merely rephrasing the words of the Great General according to her understanding of politics, but in doing so she recognized what lesser courtiers had known but not expressed in words: to a samurai, all is war. Even the lowest member of the court is still a samurai, and a samurai should never confront an enemy with anything less than full dedication and the strongest resolve. When the activities of the court are

treated as merely a waste of time, they will function as a waste, but when a proper samurai approaches court life as the dangerous battlefield it truly is, he attains a power no general can command. Madoko had seen powerful warlords ruined by the skills of a courtier, and simple ji-samurai rise to the heights of status among the Kuge, all through the skillful manipulation of politics – applying Sun Tao's wisdom to the war of words.

What follows are some excerpts from Madoka's work, taking quotes from the *Book of Sun Tao* and relating them to the strategies of court.

- *"Only the ignorant fight to win. The enlightened win before the fight."* A wise courtier does not confront an opponent in ignorance. Better to allow a foe a minor victory than to fight without knowing the stakes.
- *"True knowledge is in knowing, to observe heaven without stepping outside."* A skilled courtier strives for broad knowledge rather than seeking to be an expert in one thing. Knowing the names of others is vital; others appreciate when their names are remembered, and are insulted when their names are forgotten.
- *"To succeed, a general must be unfathomable."* The courtier who cannot be predicted cannot be controlled. A truly effective courtier will often act for no purpose other than to cause a stir. This distracts his enemies, causing them to wonder about his motives while his true objectives are left unknown.
- *"If you can go no further, charge. You will get through."* An effective courtier will always keep the attention of the court and draw it away from any dangerous topic. Gossip and amusing tales, preferably on topics like war, romance, or another's shortcomings, are effective at distracting the court from undesirable conversation. Telling at joke at one's own expense is an acceptable tactic, for a courtier should be willing to unhesitatingly sacrifice his dignity for the clan in the same way that a warrior sacrifices his life.
- *"Deadly ground is where only the quick survive. When on deadly ground, fight."* In the Emperor's Court, be prepared at all times to destroy one's foes and promote one's own greatness. Everyone is an enemy; when the Emperor's attention lies on another, one's own light dims.
- *"The victorious general strikes while his enemy plans."* A courtier must always be thinking, planning, and learning, even when he appears outwardly lethargic. From the moment he arrives in court, he must analyze all who are present. He must bring many gifts and arrange meetings with potential allies as soon as possible. Just as in a duel, the first to strike wins. He who flinches is defeated.
- *"The superior general attacks his enemy's alliances."* A skilled courtier undermines and disrupts the alliances of his enemies, making better offers even if his own clan has no direct need. He should spread rumors about his enemy to discourage others from allying with him.
- *"Victory can be seen, but never forced."* A good courtier is cautious even on the brink of victory, and prepares contingencies for every eventuality.
- *"The competent general attacks an enemy's army."* Only confront in open court when necessary. Seek to attack indirectly. If an enemy begins an argument, seek only to end it; those who bicker are seen as fools.
- *"A desperate general besieges an enemy's city."* Always stage confrontations on one's own terms, never the enemy's. If that is not possible, seek a meeting on neutral ground. Only as a last resort should one meet an opponent in a sympathetic court.
- *"If your army is larger, attack. If it is smaller, keep distance and watch for opportunity. If it is much smaller, retreat and bide time."* A courtier should never fear using an obvious advantage. If the enemy has a hidden trick, it is better to discover it from a position of strength. In uncertain situations, it is better to wait until one has more information. When the enemy has the advantage, avoid meeting him at all costs. Never admit an advantage.
- *"A good general chooses the right officers and lets the momentum of the army do its work."* Skilled courtiers do not try to do everything themselves, but instead delegate to capable underlings. Also, always have a loyal but incapable subordinate who can be sacrificed if the need arises.
- "*Victory is never repetitious."* The enemy will not fall for the same trick twice. The court will not be impressed by the same stunt twice. Always seek the new thing. If they believe you are foolish, they will never take you seriously again.
- *"What kills the enemy is anger."* A skilled courtier seeks to upset his enemy. Learn what angers him and exploit it. Driving a foe into a public rage will destroy his reputation, and allies will look elsewhere for new friends.
- "*Those who render their enemy helpless without combat are triumphant."* This is the greatest lesson of the General. It is why the courts exist. I hope I have taught you this here.



Other Works on War and Politics

"A leader always carries a text with him. The mind must be exercised as well as the body."
– *Akodo's* Leadership

Rokugani scholars believe no subject is as studied as war, and the myriad works written on the matter certainly would seem to prove this true. Since politics is merely an extension of war (or vice-versa depending on one's perspective), it is clear to the wise that both topics must be studied in order to attain true success in all things. While the two books described earlier – the *Book of Sun Tao* and Otomo Madoka's *Subtlety of the Court* – stand out as the pre-eminent works on war and politics, they are by no means the Empire's only literature on the subjects. In fact, neither book has had the same level of cultural impact as Akodo's Leadership, nor does either text boast the full weight of Imperial authorship in the manner of the tome known as The Wisdom of the Heavens.

The books listed below are some of Rokugan's most famous works on war and politics, but they are by no means an exhaustive compilation. There are more writings on these topics than could be studied in the lifetime of any one mortal – though several have spent their lives trying.

Akodo's Leadership

"Men follow the example of those they admire."

Written in the first century by the Kami Akodo, Leadership is considered far and wide to be the foremost literary work on not merely war but on the duty and role of the samurai. The book is studied in nearly every dojo and has served as the inspiration for countless other musings on war – including, some believe, the *Book of Sun Tao* itself. It is said Sun Tao began his famous journey after having studied the original copy of Leadership held by the Ikoma libraries. According to this legend, Sun Tao received a vision from the Kami, who told him each clan had its lesson and he must learn them all. This, supposedly, is why Sun Tao's book overlaps considerably with the Kami's work: each is a study of war, but where Sun Tao focuses on the tactical acumen and military lessons of each clan, Akodo muses on the essence of Bushido and how its virtues apply to leadership in both battle and peace. The *Book of Sun Tao* is a manual for success in war, a path to victory and victory alone, whereas Leadership is the inspiration for why a samurai must fight: "Victory is not taking the lives of one's enemies, but saving the lives of one's kin."

It may be noted that for all its fame, Leadership has not always been wholly respected within the Empire. During the fifth century, Emperor Hantei Muhaki was supposedly influenced by his Crane sensei, Kakita Kuga, to declare those portions of Akodo's Leadership that supported deception in warfare as heretical. This decision was bitterly resented by the Lion Clan, but ultimately their honor gave them no choice but to obey the Son of Heaven.

Because of its prominence in Rokugani literature, Akodo's writing has been discussed in a great many L5R RPG books and supplements. In L5R 4th Edition, details on Leadership may be found in the supplement *Great Clans*, pages 109 and 131.

Tangen's Lies

"Do not fear your enemies. Only a friend can betray you."

Bayushi Tangen's Lies is a sort of dark twin to Akodo's famous text. In fact, when the Hantei Emperor commanded Tangen to write a treatise on treachery, duplicity, and espionage, Tangen stated Akodo's Leadership to be the foremost authority on each subject. Tangen wrote his book as a brutal counterpoint to every ideal Leadership holds dear. Where Akodo advocates leading by example, inspiration, and love, Tangen dismisses each motive as less desirable than fear. A lord who is loved may disappoint his followers only once, after which he is hated... but a cruel man who rules by fear is never spoken against. Moreover, if he is capable of ruling with cruelty but remains just, admiration will come his way.

Lies is as much derivative of Leadership as is the *Book of Sun Tao*, but the two books arrive at very different conclusions. In Tangen's own words, the intent of his work is to "bring wisdom to the Emperor, to show him the errors of other's 'wisdom,' and to educate him on the nature of treacherous men, so he may root out duplicity and kill it before this bitter fruit has a chance to spread its seeds."

Further detail on Tangen's Lies may be found the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Great Clans*, page 208.

Seppun Hanako's The Articles of Heaven

Less a treatise written for inspiration than a work of legal doctrine, Seppun Hanako's *The Articles of Heaven* was written as a guide to aid the young Emperor Hantei XVII after he ascended to the throne. Hanako herself had lived through the reign of the infamous Steel Chrysanthemum

and witnessed atrocities beyond count during those years. She grew sick at the sight of such travesties enacted in the name of Heaven, and vowed to prevent any such blasphemy from recurring in the future. She became a close advisor to Hantei XVII and eventually was appointed Imperial Chancellor. In addition to personally correcting as many of the earlier misdeeds as possible, she also wrote a treatise advocating a series of reforms which would avoid any repetition of the Steel Chrysanthemum's most deplorable acts.

The Articles of Heaven is essentially a set of documents touching on every aspect of Rokugani law. It proposes restrictions on many aspects of the legal system that had previously been controlled only by the Emperor's whim, such as the use of torture, treatment of accused criminals, and taking hostages during wartime. It also includes an entire treatise on increasing the quality of life for *heimin* across the Empire. Aside from the original work of Soshi Saibankan and Doji Hatsuo, no other text in the Empire's history has so deeply affected Rokugani law.

Otomo Yamato's The Divine Branch

"Only Hantei knew the pleasures and delights of the heavenly worlds. Of all the Kami, only he could know what had been taken from them."

The other books listed in this section focus directly on the ways of war, the challenges of leadership, and the world of the court. But where each of these works speaks to the mind, Otomo Yamato's *The Divine Branch* speaks to the heart. Yamato was the second child of Hantei I and younger brother to the man who would become the second Emperor, Hantei Genji. Realizing the need for a clear line of succession, Yamato became the first Hantei to formally renounce his claim to the throne. His actions created the Ritual of Abdication, in which all children of the Emperor beyond the first give up their family name and join either the Seppun or the Otomo.

Otomo Yamato wrote about his abdication in his personal journal, a work not published until after his death in the year 88. *The Divine Branch* is a look into the pure beating heart of the original Imperial Dynasty. Yamato's unique perspective grants rare insight into the forbidden thoughts of the Emperor. Yamato does not write clearly or directly, however; he writes in an esoteric manner and often uses metaphors, as well as drawing comparisons between his own mortal life and that of his father, the Kami. Hantei alone of the Kami grew to adulthood in Tengoku, and thus only Hantei could understand what the Kami lost when they fell from Heaven. Yamato alone knew what it meant to give up the throne, and his text speaks with plain sorrow about the loss. Many readers have been inspired by the Otomo's sadness to understand their own place in the world and examine their true purpose in life. If a man could willingly give up the Divine Throne in order to follow his duty, what path then would the reader take to comprehend his own destiny?

The Wisdom of the Heavens

Like Yamato's *The Divine Branch*, the compiled final words of the Emperors – known collectively as The Wisdom of the Heavens – is a unique piece of literature. Unlike Yamato's work, the dying words of past Divine rulers are not made public to the Empire at large; thus, of all the works of literature in this section, The Wisdom of the Heavens is the least likely to influence the life of the average samurai. The book is said to have been created by the Imperial Scribe, though none know which Scribe or even in which century the work was originally begun. The book itself is meant for the eyes of the Emperor alone, though of course the Imperial Scribe is also allowed to examine the text for veracity and to add new sets of final words.

Some quotations from the manuscript have found their way into the hands of others, and are preserved in the Ikoma libraries (and perhaps also in the Scorpion Clan's secret scrolls). The original text is kept hidden within the Imperial Palace. It is not known if the book survived the destruction of Otosan Uchi in the mid-twelfth century.

The following quotations are said to come from the book, although how they made it into the public is unknown. Members of the Imperial families claim these quotations are false, forgeries created by clever subversives wishing to undermine the Hantei Dynasty.

- *"It is not important to fight best. It is important to fight last. That way, when you defeat your opponent, there are no others to take his place."* – Hantei I
- *"Only get involved in the fights you know you can win."*
- *"When possible, allow others to do your speaking for you – this way, you can accuse them of misunderstanding."*
- *"Be a mother to the Empire – give it what it wants, and it will not look elsewhere for its needs. Treat it as a child, and protect it from its own desires, and it will flourish. Keep your thoughts and justifications to yourself: a child needs to know only what to do, and what not to do. Anything else confuses the issue, and explanations make you appear fallible."*
- *"Always have a scapegoat."*
- *"Think complex, talk of complex plots, but always use something simple."*
- *"Do not devote time to the plan. Put all of your energy into contingencies. Something will always go wrong with the plan."*
- *"Never kill a fanatic, or he becomes a martyr. A living man is easy to destroy; a dead man is unquestionable in the eyes of his followers."*
- *"Know your enemy's weakness, but do not use it. Allow others to know it, and let them perform your will."*
- *"Knowledge is not power. Power is the ability to deny knowledge."*

Strategy

The single command tent stood proudly amid the ordered array that was the Lion encampment. Its massive banners flapped in the breeze. Row upon row of smaller tents spread out from its central location, flowing outward from the nexus of power in neat organized lines. An honor guard stood in rigid formation around the general's temporary home. A spy or assassin would have an easy time locating the general, but a very hard time reaching him.

Near the command tent, in a position of no obvious importance, sat a small and unprepossessing tent. Inside, Akodo Unmei, rikugunshokan of the Lion Army, sat buried amid a mountain of scrolls.

Minutiae. Each report contained a tiny speck of useful information hidden within its endless lines. Logistical reports of rice supply; detailed information on the quantity of rope and canvas for the tents; a listing of all the carts and wagons available for moving equipment; pile upon pile of scout reports. Each seemed meaningless, yet they blended together to form a whole. Within this fragmented picture his trained Akodo gaze picked out a prophetic view of the battle ahead.

Unmei could see the pieces as they fell into place. "The cavalry will move through these woods, around twin hills, their true numbers hidden from Scorpion view. Matsu shock troopers will move out in front, but support will come from archers atop these very hills. It will be a beauty to behold." The general's eyes could almost see the glorious result already.

"You can see it all, my lord?" The scout spoke out of turn, but Unmei forgave the man his breach. Things on the battlefield were unavoidably less formal than in court.

"Of course not, Ikoma-san." Unmei did not look up, but made notes upon a piece of paper and set the current report aside. "I can never know with certainty, for I never have all of the information. A general gathers what he can and makes his decision. The battlefield is fluid and powerful. Forceful, like the torrential downpour unleashing water from the heavens." He took a deep breath, filling himself with energy. "The Lion army will wash away the unclean presence of these Scorpion from the Gakka province."

"Yes, my lord!"

Unmei knew he only had to find a way into his opponent's mind. Think ahead of his foe's racing thoughts. Act before the Scorpion could understand the choices offered. As soon as the enemy became fully aware, the field would already have changed. The Akodo felt sure he was staying many steps ahead of his foe. The Scorpion general would delegate her reports to lower officers. Unmei had read enough about Bayushi Kiwadoi to know she would never understand the total picture as he did, never be fully prepared. She would resort to a different sort of tactic. Well, Unmei had something in reserve for that as well. Scorpion tactics were not available to him if he wished to preserve his honor, but Unmei knew victory was more important than the reputation and well-being of a single man. If Bayushi Kiwadoi unleashed her infamous brother, Unmei had a counter in Ikoma Jidai.

However, it should not come to that. "Ikoma-san, where is the Imperial Observer now?"

The young scout responded quickly, nearly shouting. "As you commanded, Otomo Hokan rests comfortably in the Matsu portion of the camp! He will be leaving soon to observe the battle."

Unmei thought back to the Observer's words. The man favored the Lion in this conflict, and was not subtle at showing his views. "The Throne does not wish a protracted affair," he had said. "The Gakka province holds too much potential for it to be destroyed. When there is a clear victory, it is my duty to step in and decide this war without needless additional bloodshed."

Unmei chuckled. 'Clear victory,' indeed. The notion was foolish. Unless you eradicated all traces of your foe from the Realm of Mortals there would never be a clear victory. However, if the Imperial wished for a temporary clarity, Unmei would provide it.

"Give these reports to Otomo Hokan after the battle begins. Once the momentum of our planning envelops the Scorpion, the Observer will understand the victory unfolding before him and concede that the Scorpion are all but defeated."

The Ikoma bowed and left. Immediately another scout entered the tent and dropped off another pile of reports.

Akodo Unmei was never truly happy. Yet amid the exquisite order that formed out of the chaotic minutiae, he allowed himself a smile.

This would be a good war.

The Nature of Strategy

"All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved." - The Book of Sun Tao

War at the level of strategy focuses on high-level plans to achieve one or more major goals. A military strategy must therefore both pose and answer several key questions:

- What is the ultimate purpose of going to war?
- What is the final goal of the conflict, and how will it be achieved?
- Are there intermediate goals to be achieved before the final goal is reached?
- What resources are required to achieve these goals?

To see how this is applied, consider a pivotal event in the Empire's history – the Scorpion Clan Coup – from the perspective of the Scorpion Clan Champion of the time, Bayushi Shoju, and his closest advisors.

In 1123, faced with an ancient prophecy claiming the last Hantei would bring about the return of Fu Leng, Bayushi Shoju decided to thwart the prophecy by overthrowing and killing the Emperor – a decision influenced in part by the Bloodsword Ambition, but also by his loyalty to the Empire. Shoju knew such a course of action would be vehemently opposed by the other clans. Moreover, if Shoju was successful in killing the Emperor, the resulting power vacuum around the empty Imperial Throne would likely give rise to ruinous civil war between all the clans. Thus, the Scorpion needed to plan a careful strategy if they were to be successful.

Shoju's answer to the first strategic question listed above was clear: he was going to war to prevent Fu Leng from returning to the Empire. From this he could derive his ultimate goal of the conflict, to place a new Emperor on the Emerald Throne who would not bring about the return of Fu Leng. From this in turn he could derive a number of intermediate objectives:

- He would have to kill the current Emperor, Hantei XXXVIII.
- He would have to quickly seize control of Otosan Uchi, the Imperial capital, to provide a secure base of operations for the Scorpion once the Emperor was dead.
- He needed to distract or otherwise prevent the other clans, particularly those close to the Imperial capital, from reacting and marshaling their forces too quickly.
- He needed to ensure a credible successor to Hantei XXXVIII was quickly established on the Throne to restore order to the Empire.

As Shoju and his advisors identified these goals, they began to detail them. For instance, distracting the other clans brought particular focus on the Lion and the Crane, not only because these clans' territories were in close proximity to Otosan Uchi but also because their staunchly traditionalist nature would see them naturally oppose the Scorpion most fiercely. Shoju further identified the Lion Clan Champion, Akodo Toturi, as a particular threat, so neutralizing him became a further specific goal as part of his overall strategy.

As a final step, Shoju and his advisors considered what resources they had available and how these could be applied to their strategy and its goals. For the distraction of the Crane and Lion Clans, for example, Shoju knew a Scorpion agent named Bayushi Sozui had infiltrated the Lion. Sozui became a key mechanism for sowing distrust and raising tensions between the two clans, keeping them focused on their enmity with each other rather than noticing the activity of the Scorpion Clan. Meanwhile, Shoju's wife Bayushi Kachiko subverted Akodo Toturi's geisha lover, Hatsuko, forcing her to poison and kill him.

Other clan resources were similarly applied to the various other goals of Shoju's grand strategy. It quickly became clear that some resources were simply not enough for the situation – for instance, the Scorpion army was not large or strong enough to hold Otosan Uchi against the combined might of the other clans for more than a short period of time. In such cases goals had to be revised or new ones developed to adapt to these limits.

- Shoju needed to secure allies to prevent the other clans from overwhelming the Scorpion once they reacted to the Coup.

The implementation of Shoju's strategy and its outcome became the stuff of legend in Rokugan. Shoju succeeded in killing Hantei XXXVIII and seizing the Imperial capital, but failed to kill Akodo Toturi or secure allies for the Scorpion. This underscores a final reality of military strategy – it is only a plan, subject to the uncertainties of success and failure. Canny generals develop strategies that are flexible and incorporate contingencies, both to deal with failure to achieve some goals and to exploit unexpected success in others. It is this ability to adapt to changing circumstances, to mitigate the effects of setbacks and to capitalize on unanticipated success, that sets apart the truly great strategies and those who craft them.

Strategy versus Tactics

The terms "strategy" and "tactics" are often confused or even mistakenly used interchangeably. Strategy, as described above, is a high-level plan intended to achieve one or more grand objectives of critical importance to a clan or even to the Empire as a whole. Tactics, on the other hand, operate at a much lower level. Quickly seizing control of Otosan Uchi was a strategic objective for Bayushi Shoju in the Scorpion Clan Coup, while securing a particular gate in the walls or taking over a particular group of buildings were tactical objectives. Tactics are the stuff of individual battles or portions of battles. At the lowest level, tactics can address something like how an individual company, squadron, or even a lone soldier deals with an obstacle. Do they attack head on? Do they attempt to work around a flank, to come at the enemy from an unexpected direction? Do they withdraw from superior force, or hold their position and await reinforcements? Such small-scale clashes over very specific objectives are what tactics are all about, making them completely distinct from matters of strategy.

This is not to suggest, of course, that tactics are less important than strategy. Rather, both are important in their own way and the two are intimately enmeshed. A strategy is a plan; if its objectives are to be realized, individuals and groups must take action and their actions will be tactical in scope. Conversely, tactical actions that are not governed and unified by an overarching strategy are likely to be wasted effort, even if they are successful. In fact, they may end up achieving things that are actually detrimental to the strategy. Returning to the example of the Scorpion Clan Coup, Shoju could have enlisted the assistance of the Shadowlands to take and hold Otosan Uchi. This would have gained tactical "success," but dealing with the most vile and implacable *enemies of the Empire* would have seriously undermined his strategic efforts to obtain allies for the Scorpion and to restore order following the Coup. A similar problem did, in fact, bedevil the Crab Clan when Hida Kisada formed an alliance of convenience with Fu Leng's forces.

Thus a continuum exists between the small-scale and local efforts of tactics and the grand unifying vision and purpose of strategy. To express it as a metaphor, strategy is the summit of a mountain, while tactics are the great bulk of rock that exists below, maintaining the summit in its high place. To understand how this applies to military forces in Rokugan, one should consider the roles of battles and campaigns.

A battle is an armed engagement between two (or in some cases more) opposing sides. The term battle does not imply any particular scale; a duel between two samurai could be considered a battle, just like a clash between hundreds or even thousands of samurai fought over the course of many hours or days. What distinguishes a battle is that it is a discrete event and normally culminates with one side clearly victorious and the other clearly vanquished. (Of course, clear victory is not always the case – duels can result in a "karmic strike," in which both contestants lose, and larger battles can end indecisively in a draw. These situations are, however, the exception. Battles in Rokugan are usually fought to a clear outcome, in no small part because the warlike Rokugani do not easily accept indeterminate results.)

A campaign is a series of battles fought to achieve a greater strategic objective. For example, in the year 1150 the Emperor Toturi I launched his forces on a campaign designed to achieve a final decisive victory over those of his opponent in the War of Spirits, the Steel Chrysanthemum. This campaign involved three individual battles – the Battle of Drowned Honor, the Battle of Quiet Winds, and the Battle of Beiden Pass. The effect of the campaign was to convince the Steel Chrysanthemum that the Scorpion Clan, after years of relative neutrality, had finally decided to join his forces. The spirit army, emboldened by their victory at the Battle of Quiet Winds, chased Toturi's withdrawing forces into Beiden Pass. However, this was a trap; shugenja loyal to Toturi collapsed the pass on the spirit army, destroying it and forcing the Steel Chrysanthemum to sue for peace. This had been Toturi's ultimate strategic goal: forcing the Steel Chrysanthemum to abandon his decade-long effort to assert his claim to the Throne of Rokugan.

While a campaign contributes to the realization of a strategy's objectives, it is possible that a truly ambitious strategy may entail several campaigns, either simultaneously or in succession. During the Destroyer War, the Rokugani strategy was relatively straightforward: survive the onslaught of the forces of Kali-Ma and preserve the Empire. Several different major campaigns were fought over the course of the war. The first saw the forces of the Dragon, Phoenix, and Unicorn Clans, with assistance from the rest of the Empire, fight

a series of battles against the Army of Dark Fire in the northern reaches of the Empire. The second campaign involved the forces of the Empire fighting many defensive battles against Kali-ma's armies invading Rokugan from the south. A third campaign was fought against a renewed offensive by the Army of Dark Fire, while smaller campaigns were fought against plague-infested undead forces savaging the Empire's interior and against a contingent of Destroyers specifically seeking to attack through the Scorpion lands toward the city of Ryoko Owari. Ultimately, the successful prosecution of all of these campaigns – despite the fact that many of the individual battles were lost by the Empire – resulted in the Rokugani achieving their strategic goal and winning the war, albeit at a horrific cost in lives and material.

This emphasizes a final and important point regarding both military strategy and the campaigns and battles that contribute to either its success or its failure. Tactical failure does not necessarily mean strategic failure, and vice versa. This is an essential lesson. The loss of any particular battle, while potentially costly, frustrating, and discouraging, must be viewed in its strategic context. Likewise, a tactical success that contributes nothing to the greater strategy is largely meaningless. Neither result can be allowed to distract from the ultimate strategic objectives. More than one general has been brought low by allowing himself to be deflected from his grand purpose by the distractions of tactical setbacks, and obscure leaders have risen to great glory by keeping their vision firmly fixed on their ultimate strategic prize.

Strategy in Rokugan

"The clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy, but does not allow the enemy's will to be imposed on him." - *The Book of Sun Tao*

Having explained the basic roles of strategy and tactics, and the function of battles and campaigns within a strategy, it is now possible to consider how these are applied to warfare in Rokugan. Despite their obvious superficial differences, at the strategic level all Rokugani military forces are deployed and employed in much the same way. The general scheme of most Rokugani strategy proceeds through the following steps:

- Strategic planning
- Mustering of forces
- Strategic march and deployment
- Engagement
- Disengagement and consolidation
- Redeployment (possibly followed by further Strategic marches and deployment, engagements, and disengagements and consolidation)
- Stand-down out of forces

Strategic Planning

"In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns." - *The Book of Sun Tao*

Planning at the strategic level is developed by the highest levels of leadership – in the case of the Empire as a whole, by the Emperor, or by Clan Champions for their clans. However, such leaders usually make extensive use of advisors. Retired samurai and sensei have the experience and wisdom to offer valuable advice, while specialists such as senior military officers, courtiers, scholars, and shugenja can offer their own insights regarding military, political, and supernatural aspects of a proposed plan. Other sources of information, such as scouts and spies, can also provide valuable intelligence when developing a plan.

Of course, particular individuals have their own specific methods for planning, not all of which are equally effective. Authoritarian, arrogant, secretive, paranoid, or overly confident leaders are likely to make little or even no use of advisors. Tyrants such as Hantei XVI or the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban, for example, were known to create strategic plans on their own and issue absolute edicts which they expected to be carried out without question. On the other hand, when facing a subtle or insidious foe it may be vital to restrict knowledge of strategic plans to as few people as possible. For example, the Hidden Moon Dojo of the Scorpion Clan (described in the Scorpion chapter in the L5R RPG 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*) is probably the foremost agency in the Empire devoted to facing the threat posed by the Nothing. However, the Dojo's very existence, much less its plans, are known only to a handful of key individuals in the Empire; this extreme secrecy is essential when dealing with an opponent as devious and dangerous as the Nothing.

The risk with such secrecy, of course, is that having few people involved in planning also means fewer perspectives and opinions to evaluate the resulting plans, so opportunities and flaws are both more likely to be missed. For this reason, unless secrecy is absolutely essential, wise leaders always draw on the expertise and judgment of as many advisors as possible when developing their strategic plans.

Each clan does tend to approach strategic planning in a somewhat different manner. The more overtly militaristic clans, such as the Lion, Unicorn, and Crab, favor a top-down approach: the senior leaders develop a plan as a broad outline, leaving it to subordinates to fill in the details. Since these clans have large standing armies and may be involved in a number of concurrent ongoing campaigns, this is a more efficient way of using resources; senior leaders can focus on the overall goals without getting bogged down in the details of planning for any one campaign.

The Dragon and Mantis both favor a more collaborative and interactive approach, encouraging their leaders and advisors to share ideas and work together. The Dragon do this because of their broadly more individualistic

approach to all things, including military operations. The Mantis do so owing more to their origins as an alliance of Minor Clans who brought many leaders of roughly equal status together in a common cause.

The Scorpion approach strategic planning as they do all things: with a considerable degree of compartmentalization. Often, very few people know the full extent of a Scorpion plan, with subordinates being involved only in small pieces and unaware of how their tasks link to a greater whole. While this may seem inefficient, the Scorpion have developed and refined such planning techniques over the centuries, and their samurai are trained from youth to carry out their tasks without any need to know the "big picture." Thus, it is very difficult for enemies to understand – or to anticipate or disrupt – the plans of the Scorpion.

The senior leadership of the Crane varies considerably in its strategy, due in part to varying degrees of militarism over time. Some Crane Champions, such as Doji Kuwanan (Clan Champion during the Hidden Emperor era) are skilled military tacticians and warriors. Others, such as Doji Makoto (who led the clan at the end of the twelfth century, during a time of strife in the Colonies) are of a more peaceful or political bent. However, the Crane do have a strong military tradition, and those Champions not themselves of a martial nature do not hesitate to draw on their militaristic subordinates – especially from the Daidoji family – to assist them in planning and in executing those plans in the field.

The Phoenix face a unique challenge among the Great Clans due to their leadership being split between the Isawa family's Council of Elemental Masters and the traditionalist warrior Clan Champion from the Shiba family. Outwardly, it would seem reasonable for military affairs to be left to the Clan Champion while the Council deals with issues of a spiritual and supernatural nature. This is often the case, but not always. In times of peace the Champion is expected to defer to the Masters in all things. When the clan is at war, the Champion is considered to be the equal of the Masters in military matters, but speaking practically it is difficult for the Champion to actually exert true authority without the Council's support. As a result, strategic planning in the Phoenix Clan tends to be an ongoing collaboration between the Elemental Masters that may or may not involve the Clan Champion. Somewhat like the Scorpion, the Phoenix have evolved over the centuries to incorporate this unusual aspect of their nature into their approach to developing and implementing strategic plans. However, unlike the Scorpion, the process in the Phoenix is much more personality-driven. For example, the Champion Shiba Tsukune (who led during the violent era of the Hidden Emperor and the War of Spirits) frequently followed her own counsel and gave less weight to the word of the Elemental Masters. On the other hand, Shiba Toshiken (Champion during the time of the Gozoku) is not recorded as being particularly engaged with or even aware of the Gozoku conspiracy, despite one its three key architects being a member of his own Shiba family, and was apparently little more than a mouthpiece for the Elemental Council. Shiba Ujimitsu, Clan Champion in the early twelfth century until his death on the Second Day of Thunder, was noteworthy for being adept at influencing the Elemental Masters in private while always presenting a united front with the Council in public. Ujimitsu represents one of the best examples of Phoenix "leadership by committee" being effective... if those involved are committed to making it work.

Finally, it is worth noting that the involvement of advisors is not confined solely to the development of complex or far-reaching strategic plans. The commander of a single legion in the field, even the lowly chui leading just a few hundred soldiers, is also wise to draw on the experience and varied points of view of his subordinates and peers when developing his own smaller-scale plans. Indeed, the best high-ranking commanders insist on their subordinates seeking such advice. However, one truth remains the same, whether the plan is that of a rikugunshokan commanding a clan's entire army or a gunso at the head of a few dozen bushi – the final decisions and ultimate responsibility always rest with the leader himself.

Strategic Planning in the Spider Clan

The twelfth-century Shadowlands organization known as the Spider Clan has, perhaps surprisingly, a culture of collaboration in its planning and execution of strategy. This may seem odd given the Spider emphasis on strength as the sole source of authority, but in fact this trait stems from the character of the clan's founder, the Dark Lord Daigotsu. Possessed of a keen intellect, Daigotsu was well aware that his followers – composed mainly of those samurai fallen to corruption after the Battle of Oblivion's Gate – boasted a wealth of valuable expertise and insight regarding all their former clans. Moreover, Daigotsu himself learned to rely on the counsel of certain individuals, such as the dark sorceress Shahai who would become his wife, his friend and confidant Omoni, and his bodyguard Goju Kyoden. However, despite this tendency toward collaboration in planning, Daigotsu always made the final decisions in all matters.

After the official recognition of the Spider by the Empress, Daigotsu was succeeded by his son Daigotsu Kanpeki. Kanpeki seemed less open to the input of advisors, although none could deny his father's influence on his leadership style.

Mustering of Forces

"The skillful soldier does not raise a second levy, neither are his supply-wagons loaded more than twice."
- The Book of Sun Tao

All of the clans maintain standing armies, since conflict is never far from the surface in an Empire ruled by warriors. The size and readiness of those armies varies greatly, however. As always, the more martial clans – the Crab, Lion, and Unicorn – tend to maintain the largest standing forces. The Crab in particular are focused on continuously fielding a large force of samurai, due to their unique duty of defending the Empire against the Shadowlands. However, the Unicorn also maintain a large army of samurai, since their military strength relies on a specialized cavalry army that must be constantly trained. As for the Lion, they are so devoted to warfare as the essential reason for their existence that virtually all samurai in the clan are always on "active duty."

The other Great Clans generally maintain smaller standing armies and rely more heavily on the mustering of additional forces to build up their strength in times of conflict. While Lion and Crab samurai are trained as units and drilled for battle essentially throughout the year, the bushi of the Crane, Phoenix and Scorpion do so only occasionally and usually pursue other activities on behalf of their clans. Although samurai are first and foremost warriors, and if called to muster will quickly do so, assembling them into effective and cohesive fighting units can be more challenging in clans where such service is not the norm.

The Mantis Clan also maintains a large standing military force, but in this case it is the navy that is kept fully ready in an essentially continuous way. The reason for this is less due to aggressive tendencies and more due to practical reality. The ships which comprise the Mantis "Storms" (fleets) are complex and require constant maintenance. Long periods in dock will actually do them more harm than being sailed. The many and complicated skills required to effectively and efficiently operate warships also require constant exercising to remain sharp. Consequently, the Mantis keep a large number of samurai constantly aboard ship, sailing patrols along Rokugan's sea lanes, hunting pirates, exploring, or participating in seaborne military exercises.

One aspect of mustering forces that applies to all of the clans is that of raising peasant levies. In time of war, much of a clan's military force – in some cases the bulk of it – is composed of ashigaru, common foot soldiers drafted from the peasantry and armed with basic armor and weapons, usually either bows or yari (spears). While generally loyal, ashigaru are rarely skilled warriors and are often used mainly to absorb casualties and tie up the opposing ashigaru, leaving the decisive fighting to the samurai. In sufficient numbers and competently led, ashigaru can be quite devastating to the enemy, but due to the prevailing attitudes among the samurai caste, this is a rare event.

The more problematic issue regarding peasant levies is the effect that raising them has on more mundane but vital clan activities – particularly the growing and harvesting of crops, not to mention essential craft and artisanal services. After all, peasants who are mustered into legions of ashigaru and sent to war are not working in the rice paddies or doing carpentry, blacksmithing, and a myriad other essential tasks. Worse, if casualties among the ashigaru are high (and they often are), this can result in subsequent poor harvests and shortages of skilled workers. A key consideration for any clan's military planning is how many ashigaru need to be raised and how long they must be kept under arms before being released back to their essential civilian service. Miscalculation can mean disaster for a clan — famine in the short term, and a lack of goods and skilled services for much longer, which will ultimately weaken the clan's future military capacity.

Strategic March and Deployment

"The skillfully-led army may be likened to the snake. Strike at its head, and you will be attacked by its tail; strike at its tail, and you will be attacked by its head; strike at its middle, and you will be attacked by head and tail both." - *The Book of Sun Tao*

A Rokugani army on the march is a spectacular sight to behold. Thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of samurai and ashigaru march in formation, resplendent in their armor, the sun glittering off their weapons, their battle standards and back-banners fluttering, the dust of their passage lingering long after they have marched on. However, the spectacle conceals an important truth: an army on the march is a complex and cumbersome thing, requiring vast organization and intense discipline to prevent the whole affair from collapsing into utter chaos.

To facilitate its movement over long distances, a Rokugan army (regardless of clan) follows a general pattern of organization. The Main Body is preceded by a Vanguard, followed by a Rear Guard, and may be protected by Flank Guards. Scouts usually range around the army in all directions. A Baggage Train accompanies the army, while the whole of it is overseen by a sophisticated system of Command. Each of these elements is described below.

Main Body

The Main Body of the army is just that – the main forces containing the bulk of its numbers. An army's Main Body will normally incorporate most of the ashigaru, since these peasant levies are considered too unreliable to function as part of the Vanguard or Rear Guard. In addition, it will contain all those units that lack the mobility for either of those roles, as well as those parts of the force which the army's commander does not wish to use in combat until he is ready to commit them. The general himself will often travel with the Main Body, but regardless he will normally leave the bulk of his command staff with it. If he detaches himself from the Main Body for some reason, the general will always leave it under the command of a reliable and trusted subordinate, one who understands both his plan and his overall strategic intent (should circumstances change and the plan require changing while the commander is away).

The Main Body marches in whatever formation is most efficient, given the terrain and circumstances. This will typically be a column of legions, each legion arranged in sequence one after the other, since this formation is easiest to control and least affected by terrain. If the army's path is along a road, the column will normally center itself on that road, with the slowest elements – wagons, baggage trains, siege engines, and so forth – traveling along the road itself.

Mustering Special Forces

Several clans maintain specialized military forces that are unique to them. Unlike the regular armies, these forces are usually kept on "active duty" at all times, but the clan leadership must still decide whether or not to actually deploy them for any particular conflict.

The Scorpion Clan maintains a sophisticated network of spies, saboteurs, and assassins. Their shinobi devote their lives to their craft and, while not strictly a military force, they can be called upon to conduct direct operations in the field, such as gathering intelligence, disrupting enemy military operations (through both deception and sabotage), assassinating enemy leaders, or even conducting specific missions in the midst of a battle. The Scorpion are reluctant to allow the shinobi to get directly involved in combat, however, since they are limited and precious assets, very difficult to replace.

The Phoenix maintain several unusual military units that employ magical power in battle. These include the Hurricane Initiates, also known as the Fifth Legion of the Phoenix army, an Elemental Guard unit of shugenja specialized in Air magic. The Sixth Legion, a force of bushi known as the Legion of Wind, is trained to work closely with the Hurricane Initiates. A similar relationship exists between the Third Legion, Fire shugenja known as the Firestorm Legion, and the Fourth Legion, called the Legion of Flame. Given the specialized nature of these Legions, it should not be surprising that they are kept in a state of permanent muster.

The Harriers of the Daidoji family are a small but elite military unit of that clan, employed for many centuries until they are disbanded by Clan Champion Doji Domotai in the year 1168. The Harriers are scouts, saboteurs, and surveillance experts, each of whom is expected to be able to negate the effect of fifty or more enemy soldiers. In that respect they are similar to the shinobi of the Scorpion Clan, but are confined to military operations and generally not employed against non-military targets.

The Crab have long maintained a unit known as the Damned, comprised of samurai who became infected by the Shadowlands Taint while fighting against the forces of Jigoku. The Damned occupy a special fortified barracks under the close supervision of the Kuni family, and are dedicated to continuing their fight against the darkness until they are either killed in battle or must commit seppuku when the Taint threatens to claim them. (Their Kuni supervisors are also empowered to kill any member of the Damned who seems to be succumbing to the Taint too quickly.) During the late twelfth century, the truce with the new Lord of Jigoku, Daigotsu, results in the "New Taint" which is no longer infectious, and as a result the Damned cease to exist... at least so long as the truce lasts.

The Vanguard

The Vanguard is a large detachment of the army deployed ahead of the Main Body. Its purpose is to clear the path and prevent any substantial enemy force from engaging the Main Body before it can deploy for battle. Thus, while the Main Body will normally march in a column intended for maximum efficient mobility, the Vanguard will usually adopt a formation more suited for quick engagement of the enemy. This will most often be a line, with legions in battle-ready formations marching abreast. Given the difficulty of maintaining such a formation across rugged terrain, units allocated to the Vanguard will be selected accordingly – light infantry is popular, since it can easily maintain open and loose formations. Given their vital importance in covering the forward approach of the Main Body, the Vanguard units are often staffed with disproportionate numbers of trusted veterans.

When it encounters a significant enemy force, the Vanguard will immediately deploy to engage. This forces the enemy troops to likewise deploy, "pinning" them in place while the Main Body adopts a battle formation and advances to engage. The Main Body thus reinforces a fight already begun by the Vanguard, reinforcing it and hopefully winning it. This makes close communications between the Vanguard and Main Body essential. Also, implicit in this arrangement is that that Vanguard must be sufficiently strong to pose a true threat to the enemy and to hold the enemy in place long enough for the Main Body to deploy. For this reason the Lion Clan typically employs as much as a third of an army's strength as the Vanguard, and many clans also devote special assets to Vanguard duties. For example, the Phoenix will commit a relatively small but very powerful force such as the Firestorm Legion and Legion of Flame to the Vanguard. The Scorpion use a small Vanguard but will make use of shinobi to disrupt the enemy and thwart his efforts to engage the Main Body – sabotaging bridges, blocking roads, and killing enemy scouts. They also employ Soshi shugenja using Air magic to deceive and confuse the enemy, using illusions and other misdirections to conceal the location and configuration of the Main Body. The Unicorn use light, mobile cavalry forces to force the enemy to deploy with harassment tactics. (See Chapter Three for details of cavalry tactics.)

Typically, the Vanguard will operate significantly ahead of the Main Body in order to have room and time to engage and delay the enemy while the Main Body properly deploys. However, it cannot operate so far ahead that support from and communications with the Main Body are compromised. The ideal distance depends greatly on the terrain, but as a general rule it will be at least the distance which the Vanguard would occupy if it were deployed in a marching column. (One of the classic ways to defeat a larger enemy army is to sever the Vanguard from the Main Body, and a corresponding mark of inept generalship is to let the distance between the two forces become too great.)

Being assigned to the Vanguard is considered a great honor, since this implies the commander's trust and also means one will be among the first to get to grips with the enemy. Likewise, being assigned command of the Vanguard is a high honor for any officer. Some generals, however, consider the Vanguard to be so important that they choose to command it themselves, relying on subordinates to bring the Main Body forward and deploy it into battle when the time comes.

Flank Guards

The role of the Flank Guards is similar to that of the Vanguard – protecting the army's flanks, providing early warning of enemy activity, and engaging the enemy in order to give the main body time to deploy. However, while a general will pretty much always deploy a Vanguard, Flank Guards are more situational. For instance, if a general considers one or both of his flanks secure – due to terrain, reliable intelligence, or other factors – he may choose to deploy only minimal flank security or even none at all (although he will generally always have Scouts deployed, as described below).

The allocation of Flank Guards is a trade-off. Is the added security worth committing forces to the task, therefore making those forces more cumbersome to redeploy should the enemy be encountered to the front? To help address this, generals will normally allocate forces to Flank Guard duty that are fast and mobile, such as light cavalry or light infantry. Only if a significant threat is perceived is a general likely to commit heavier forces to such a duty. The notable exception to this pattern is the Crab Clan when its armies operate in the Shadowlands. Since threats in that horrific place can come from any direction at any time, even materializing from the ground, out of the water, or from thin air, Crab commanders always allocate strong Vanguards, Flank Guards, and Rear Guards that include a mixture of mobile forces, heavy forces, and magical support. This means the Guards for Crab armies in the Shadowlands are essentially small complete armies unto themselves, capable of fighting much stronger foes in protracted engagements while the rest of the army deploys and maneuvers to assist.

Like the Vanguard, the Flank Guards will operate sufficiently far from the Main Body to allow it to deploy, but not so far away as to become isolated and out of command. A general will usually calculate how long it would take to reorient his Main Body to face and fight on the threatened flank, and order the Flank Guard to operate a corresponding distance away.

While commanding a Flank Guard is still an honorable and prestigious duty, it does not carry the same weight and importance as commanding the army's Vanguard. Moreover, the army's general will rarely command or even place himself with a Flank Guard unless the situation immediately demands it.

Rear Guard

The Rear Guard is often seen as a necessary but undesirable duty; after all, no samurai wants to be deliberately kept away from the battle. The more canny and experienced generals, however, realize the importance of this deployment. An attack on the rear of a marching army can be disastrous, striking from the direction which the army is least prepared to defend and threatening vital infrastructure such as the Baggage Train and the Command structure. Moreover, the Rear Guard provides a vital "firm base" upon which to organize a withdrawal if the tactical situation turns sour.

As with the other Guards, the size and configuration of the Rear Guard is quite variable, depending on the terrain and the tactical situation. Generally, a Rear Guard contains heavier and slower forces, and may actually constitute the army's tactical reserve. Likewise, because of the distance of the Rear Guard from the rest of the army's forces – while on the march in column, a large army's Rear Guard can be several miles behind the Vanguard – armies with heavy cavalry forces often locate them in the Rear Guard. On the other hand, if the general feels his rear areas are fully secure, he may opt for a much smaller and lighter Rear Guard. The notable exception is again the Crab Clan while operating in the Shadowlands, where the Rear Guard is likely to be every bit as strong as any other Guard (and perhaps even stronger); after all, the Crab do not hesitate to withdraw from a battle if doing so offers a military advantage over the honorless foes of the Shadowlands, so having a strong Rear Guard is useful to them in multiple ways.

The Rear Guard tends to operate closer to the Main Body than the Vanguard and Flank Guards. This is because it is the army's reserve and thus is expected to be able to advance fairly quickly once the Main Body is engaged. A general who is actually concerned about an attack from his rear will not move the Rear Guard

Commanding a Guard

As noted, commanding an army's Vanguard, Flank Guard, or the Rear Guard is a prestigious duty for a samurai. Should a PC earn such a command appointment, a Glory reward is appropriate. As a baseline, the GM should consider the following:

- **Command the Vanguard** – 3 to 5 Points of Glory
- **Command a Flank Guard** – 2 to 4 Points of Glory
- **Command the Rear Guard** – 1 to 3 Points of Glory

The lowest level of reward should be considered the default. The higher levels should be awarded for PCs serving in particularly large armies, during especially important campaigns, or in situations where the Guard in question is facing a high level of threat. For example, if the PC is given command of a Flank Guard facing open terrain where enemy cavalry forces are known to be operating, 3 or 4 Points of Glory would be appropriate. The GM of course can adjust the reward based on other factors, and offer Honor rewards as well.

Naturally, if a Guard fails in its duty — for instance, an enemy force is able to slip past the Flank Guard and attack the marching Main Body — the Glory award will be replaced by a Glory loss, perhaps a large one. In a particularly egregious situation an Honor loss may also be appropriate, not to mention the possibility of being publicly shamed, reduced in Status, or even required to commit seppuku for a truly egregious failure.

While commanding a Guard, a PC's Status should be at least equivalent to that of a *chui* (Status 3.0) for small forces or a *taisa* (Status 4.0) for larger forces. Whether the PC retains the resulting Status increase afterward will depend on the success of his tenure in command.

back farther but instead will allocate more forces to it, allowing it to fight on its own for longer while he redeploys his Main Body to fight to the rear. He will also likely position more reliable and disciplined forces in the rear of his Main Body, an otherwise unusual decision. Unlike the other Guards, where space is the most important factor in deployment, with the Rear Guard the key measure is time.

Commanding the Rear Guard is not considered as prestigious as other Guard duties. However, such an appointment is still an endorsement by the general, an expression of trust in the subordinate's skill and loyalty.

Scouts

"By discovering the enemy's dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy's must be divided."

- The Book of Sun Tao

Scouts will normally range ahead of the army as well as to its flanks and rear. Scouts are light forces, usually operating in small detachments of a half-dozen or so bushi, and are not intended to fight except in self-defense. Soldiers assigned as scouts are trained in concealment, stealthy movement, and observation. When a Scout detachment observes an enemy force, it is expected to make a quick assessment of the enemy and then send a messenger back to relay the information to the army's Command. (After relaying his information the messenger is expected to return to his detachment as quickly as possible, perhaps delivering orders.) The detachment may dispatch additional messengers if ongoing observation of the enemy dictates it. Thus, once the enemy is close by a Scout detachment will often have a constant stream of messengers shuttling back and forth between its location and the Command of the army. Under no circumstances, however, will a Scout detachment leave an enemy force without "eyes on" once it has been detected – unless either ordered to do so or forced to do so by enemy action.

Scouts may also have a secondary duty to operate as a screen against enemy Scouts. In this case a Scout detachment will either fight the opposing Scouts itself or call upon heavier forces from the nearest Guard to do so. Generally, aside from this instance Scouts will always try to avoid direct engagement of the enemy. Their job is to gather information and report it back to their army, not to fight.

Most clans maintain at least some forces devoted to scouting, and some have entire schools or even families that are focused on the task. The Crab famously employ the Hiruma as scouts, men and women skilled in traversing the Shadowlands and identifying the horrifying threats from that realm. The Daidoji of the Crane, the Ikoma of the Lion, and the Kitsune of the Mantis are also well-known for their abilities as Scouts. The Unicorn, with their large cavalry forces, deploy Scouts from throughout their ranks. The Scorpion do not have forces devoted to scouting on the battlefield as such, but do employ covert forces

of shinobi in the role. The Dragon instead cultivate a force of Mountaineers, skilled in operating amidst the hills and peaks of the Empire's northern mountains. The Phoenix, as befits a clan so focused on the magical arts, draw upon the Elemental spirits to assist them in conducting surveillance of enemy forces.

The number of Scout detachments deployed by an army is mostly a function of how many scouts are available. Wise generals will use as many scouts as they can, especially since using such specially-trained bushi as mere warriors in the ranks is a waste of valuable resources. In fact, no matter how many scouts a general is able to deploy, he invariably will wish he had more.

While being a scout is not, in itself, especially prestigious – it is, after all, simply a duty performed by many samurai – a scout involved in locating and observing an enemy and thus helping his side toward victory can expect to be recognized for his skill and diligence. In such a case, the GM should reward a PC acting as a scout, typically with 1 or 2 points of Glory, more if the results justify it. Likewise, failing to detect an enemy who subsequently ends up in an advantageous position will cause a loss of Glory, perhaps a loss of Honor as well, and in particularly serious cases an expectation of seppuku.

The Baggage Train

"We may take it then that an army without its baggage-train is lost; without provisions it is lost; without bases of supply it is lost." - *The Book of Sun Tao*

It is a truism that an army marches on its stomach. Soldiers who are malnourished will not fight well; more broadly, soldiers who are not properly supplied with all necessities, including food, water, armor, weapons, and other equipment, will be less likely to carry the day for their general. Therefore, although it is hardly considered glamorous, the Baggage Train is an indispensable component of any army.

Unlike the rest of the army, the Baggage Train typically contains few samurai. Most of the Train is staffed by *heimin*, commoners who provide necessary artisanal and crafting skills to the army. Many will be drovers, animal-handlers responsible for the movement and care of the beasts of burden who carry the army's supplies or draw the wagons containing those supplies. The Baggage Train will also include carpenters, coopers to make and mend barrels, wagon- and wheel-wrights to keep the wagons in good repair, armorers and weapon-smiths to ensure the troops are kept properly outfitted for battle, and myriad other skilled folk – rope-makers, wood-cutters, cooks, herbalists, weavers, tailors, basket makers – along with a large number of unskilled general laborers.

The Baggage Train does include some samurai, both as overseers and to provide security. The most notable samurai, however, will be those who are included for their specific skills. This particularly includes samurai armorers and weaponsmiths, since samurai artisans with these skills are typically far more capable than commoners and are the only artisans permitted to work at forging swords. Shugenja who are not actually part of the army's combat forces, or who are not involved in the Command part of the army, may also accompany the Baggage Train. This includes those shugenja who are devoted to healing the sick and wounded, as well as those who call upon the Elemental kami for more mundane tasks such as purifying water.

Another important (if somewhat distasteful) aspect of the Baggage Train is the *eta*. Large numbers of the *hinin* untouchables may accompany an army to carry out unclean but necessary tasks such as disposing of human and animal waste, cleaning up other refuse, and of course collecting and disposing of the dead. The *eta* are overseen by *heimin* supervisors, since the samurai consider them little more than specialized beasts of burden.

Thus, in an army of any meaningful size the Baggage Train will tend to be large, cumbersome, and vulnerable. Generals typically try to minimize the size of their Baggage Train as much as possible, such as by having the army rely on foraging rather than carrying large stocks of food. The disadvantage of this is that the army must then devote time and energy to foraging, which slows its progress. Every general must consider this trade-off and decide to what extent it is worth putting more effort into foraging versus the burden of traveling with a larger Baggage Train. Excessive foraging can earn the enmity of the local peasantry... although foraging can also be a form of strategic attack if the army is traveling through enemy territory and wishes to deny resources to its opponent.

Scouts in the Shadowlands and the Spider Clan

The forces of the Shadowlands have seldom exhibited the kind of organization and centralized control required to employ scouts in a meaningful way. There are exceptions, of course – Moto Tsume and his legions of Dark Moto employed many of the same tactics as they had in their human lives, including the use of scouting and reconnaissance to sound out enemy positions. The greatest exception developed when Daigotsu took control of the Lost and organized the Shadowlands Horde into a dark reflection of Rokugan. He deliberately mirrored many aspects of Rokugani social and military organization, including the use of scouts. Both inhuman creatures such as goblins and Lost bushi with suitable skills were employed in these roles.

When Daigotsu formed the Spider Clan, he was able to draw on the expertise of his Lost forces to create specialized scouting units. His alliance with the Shadow Dragon also allowed him to use Goju and Ninube shapeshifters as scouts. Later, when the Spider were sent to explore the thick jungles of the Imperial Colonies, they developed considerable additional skill at scouting.

Needless to say, the Baggage Train is an attractive target for any opposing force. By destroying the Baggage Train it is possible to defeat an army without ever having to engage it in a large-scale battle. Of course, the more honorable sort of samurai may consider an attack on a Baggage Train to be a shameful path to victory, denying themselves and their opponents the opportunity for honorable and glorious battle. Less honorable sorts, however, have few compunctions at using such tactics. For example, during the War of Spirits a young samurai named Bayushi Paneki was famously believed to have poisoned the water supplies of a Spirit army, neutralizing it as an effective fighting force. Whether or not this story is true, there is no question the Scorpion will not hesitate to make attacks on an opponent's Baggage Train and supply lines; this only makes sense for them, since the Scorpion army – though skilled and capable – is usually outnumbered by its more militant neighbors. The Crane likewise do not hesitate to strike at their opponents' ability to sustain armies in the field, although they are more likely to do so through blockades, embargoes, and other mercantile tactics that hamper an enemy's ability to obtain supplies, rather than through direct battlefield attacks.

The Crab put extensive effort into making their Baggage Trains as efficient as possible. To a greater extent than any other clans, the Crab have elevated logistics into a science, since it is simply not possible to forage in the Shadowlands – a Crab army in the Jigoku's territory will only have those supplies it carries itself. The Kaiu family in particular considers matters of logistics to be a noble pursuit – in contrast to other clans where logistics are generally considered a crass but necessary burden. Only the Dragon have a similar regard for logistics, and some samurai in the Mirumoto family devote themselves to ensuring a Dragon army operating in the harsh and difficult terrain of their mountainous homeland can be properly sustained. Indeed, they do so to an extent that more "refined" samurai from other clans would consider unseemly.

An assignment to duty with the Baggage Train is not considered at all prestigious for a samurai, unless he possesses particular skills such as swordsmithing. In fact, many samurai consider such a duty to be, if not shameful, then at least a serious step down from other tasks, perhaps even a punishment. A PC assigned to such duty, perhaps because he has displeased his lord or otherwise committed a minor failure in his duties, should incur a small Glory loss.

Command and Control

"On the field of battle, the spoken word does not carry far enough: hence the institution of bells and drums. Nor can ordinary objects be seen clearly enough: hence the institution of banners and flags." - The Book of Sun Tao

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of a large army on the march is Command and Control. While two distinct things, Command and Control go hand-in-hand; one is essentially useless without the other.

Command is the exercise of the general's will. The way he implements his strategic plans, conducts his campaigns, and employs his tactics – the decisions he makes in relation to these things, and the orders he issues to his subordinates – all of these are considered aspects of Command.

Control is the mechanisms that allow those commands to be implemented. The commander's staff, the use of devices like drums, horns, flags, and banners to pass along orders and instructions, the messengers and couriers who carry information and orders, and in a few cases more esoteric means, such shugenja importuning the Elemental kami to assist in communications. Even the arrangement of forces along the march is an aspect of Control.

In a Rokugani army, Command and Control begins with the general. For a large army representing the bulk of the clan's military force, this may be the Clan Champion or a senior rikugunshokan appointed directly by the Champion. For the Imperial Legions, this may be the Emerald Champion or the Lion Clan Champion. For smaller forces, the commander may be a shireikan for several legions worth of forces, or a taisa for one or two legions. In any case, the general – irrespective of his actual rank – will develop a plan, and from this plan will emerge specific orders that are promulgated through the army. The army marches and deploys in accordance with these orders.

Of course, it is rare for a plan to be implemented completely unchanged. Circumstances shift, new information becomes available, and of course the enemy has his own say in the situation. Accordingly, the general must constantly make new decisions and issue new orders, which again must be distributed throughout the army and implemented. It is in this process of distributing and implementing orders where things tend to go wrong. Instructions may be confused, signals – whether acoustic (drum or horn) or visual (flag, banner, signal fire) – may be misinterpreted, or orders may simply be misunderstood. It is in these situations that a disciplined and well-led army, one where the

officers at all levels understand what their commander intends to accomplish, will rise to the occasion. While it may seem that Rokugan does not prize initiative by subordinate commanders, wise generals allow their underlings a degree of discretion and may even reward it. Conversely, autocratic commanders or those who lack confidence in their subordinates stifle such initiative, preferring to maintain a top-down style of command. While such an approach can seem very efficient when it is working properly, it is also quite "brittle" compared to a more flexible style, and if there is a breakdown in the command structure it quickly throws the army into a state of chaos.

Rate of March

"Appear at points which the enemy must hasten to defend; march swiftly to places where you are not expected." - The Book of Sun Tao

The rate of march of a Rokugani army varies with the size and composition of the army, the terrain it is traversing, and the way in which it is deployed. Generally, a Rokugani army is expected to cover about ten miles per day while on the march. Smaller and more mobile forces will move faster – perhaps up to fifteen or even twenty miles per day – as will forces of any size traversing through relatively open country. However, in no case is an army likely to exceed a maximum distance of twenty miles per day.

The exception to this is an army which is being "force marched," an extreme situation which can allow an army to cover perhaps as much as twenty-five miles in a single day, at the cost of greatly increased fatigue, as well as many more personnel lost to injuries and as stragglers (particularly among the ashigaru). A forced march also increases vulnerability to enemy attack and can result in the separation of the slow-moving baggage train from the rest of the force. Generals are usually quite reluctant to conduct forced marches unless they face a desperate strategic situation or the result will be such an advantage over the enemy that it is worth the risk. Generals who are particularly ruthless and simply do not care about their troops may also employ forced marches, but even such men are usually reluctant to undertake forced marches if engagement with the enemy is likely.

It should be noted that there are other circumstances which can affect the rate of an army's movement. An army attempting to march in winter conditions – a dire situation indeed, given the harshness of Rokugan's winters – is fortunate to manage five miles per day. However, on rare occasions some remarkable feats of strategic movement have been achieved by Rokugani armies. For example, during the Scorpion Clan Coup, a Crab army marched from its own lands to the gates of Otosan Uchi in less than a week. Similarly, Moto Chagatai's attempt to seize the vacant Imperial Throne in 1169 saw his Baraunghar army achieve a remarkable feat of strategic movement, employing powerful magic in an enormous ritual to relocate the bulk of Chagatai's forces to close proximity of the Imperial capital, bypassing the Lion army blocking their path. However, such extreme instances of strategic movement are quite rare.

Engagement

"The onrush of a conquering force is like the bursting of pent-up waters into a chasm a thousand fathoms deep." - The Book of Sun Tao

Once the enemy is encountered, the armies will normally engage in battle. The details of engagement are generally a matter of tactical maneuvers, discussed in Chapters Two and Three, while the nature of engagements with specific enemies is discussed in Chapter Four. Suffice to say that battle tests the ability of the general and his army to implement orders, adapt to a quickly changing situation, and maneuver into positions of advantage, all while confronting the enemy's disposition, the terrain, and other factors.

Disengagement and Consolidation

"A victorious army opposed to a routed one, is as a pound's weight placed in the scale against a single grain." - The Book of Sun Tao

Once fought, a major battle will either be a victory or defeat for the army – or, in rare cases, an indecisive stalemate. Regardless, at some point the army will disengage from battling its foe and begin the process of consolidating and re-organizing so it is either ready for further engagements or can execute a strategic march back to its base.

A defeated army will be fortunate to leave the field intact. Rokugani soldiers, both samurai and the ashigaru levies, are fierce and passionate combatants; an enemy that breaks or is routed from the field is quite likely to be run down and slaughtered by the victors. Some commanders will allow this to happen to ensure the maximum impact of their victory; others may seek to restrain their forces, to prevent them from becoming overextended, scattered, or exhausted (which will leave them potentially vulnerable to counterattack). More disciplined armies, such as the Lion and Crab, are more likely to be able to restrain their soldiers in this way. This sort of restraint is particularly important in the Shadowlands, where the defeat of one force may simply lead into a battle with another and perhaps even larger mass of Tainted monstrosities.

Even if a defeated army is not run down and slaughtered, it may still require many hours or even days for it to regain some semblance of order. In this case, disengagement and consolidation is a matter of immediate survival, followed by a lengthy and difficult period of damage control and slow reconstitution before the army regains any effective fighting capability.

A victorious army, of course, has more options available to it. Depending on the tactical situation and the overall strategic goals, a general may keep his army on the field, continue advancing, or even withdraw – the latter choice usually being taken because he has now achieved his strategic goal or wishes to occupy more favorable terrain. In any case, a period of some consolidation is still required, during which the army recovers its wounded, reorganizes its disarrayed and depleted ranks, resupplies itself, and rests. The eta accompanying the Baggage Train will gather the dead from the field and burn them, a grim but important undertaking in a world where the dead may rise as undead monstrosities.

In the case of a stalemate in which neither side has emerged clearly victorious and both armies are at least somewhat capable of continuing to fight, both sides will normally retire from the field to rest and consolidate. Whether the fighting will subsequently resume is largely up to the opposing generals, who sometimes use the lull in fighting to conduct a parlay. Again, the eta (in this case of both sides) will cleanse the field of its dead before further combat can occur.

Redeployment

Following consolidation, the army will redeploy. This redeployment may entail resumption of the march; the army will re-establish its guards, once again organize itself into march formation, and resume moving toward a new strategic objective – seizing a particular location, occupying a piece of key ground such as a mountain pass, or engaging in further battle. The cycle of march, deploy, engage, disengage, consolidate, and redeploy can potentially occur many times, especially during a lengthy campaign. Usually, the arrival of winter and inclement weather puts an end to the strategic movement of an army, forcing it to occupy winter quarters such as a captured city or fortress. In this case hostilities are likely to resume in the spring.

Alternatively, redeployment may involve a return to friendly territory or a friendly base. Perhaps the strategic plan that led to the mustering and march of the army in the first place has been achieved, meaning there is no longer any requirement for hostilities. Or the army may have sustained such heavy casualties that it is no longer capable of fighting effectively, so the general may fall back to obtain reinforcements, hoping to resume hostilities another day.

In any case, redeployment involves organizing and marching the army, essentially in the same way as with the original Strategic March.

Stand-Down of Forces

Also referred to as "mustering out," when soldiers are released from military service until they are required again. For samurai, being released from military service generally means merely that the samurai is no longer required for specific military duties and is returned to the service of his lord. Naturally, a samurai is never truly free from military service; whether bushi, shugenja or courtier, any samurai is always considered to be in the service of his clan.

For *ashigaru*, being released from military service is just that. They cease to be ashigaru and revert back to whatever role they served as *heimin* – whether farmer, artisan or laborer – before being mustered for war. Some clans allow them to retain their weapons and armor, in order to simplify logistics when they need to be mustered again, but more commonly they are disarmed completely in order to maintain the proper social division between peasants and samurai.

Victory with No Strike

"Supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting." - The Book of Sun Tao

Implicit in all these discussions of strategy is that success must be achieved through war, campaigns, and battles. However, Sun Tao recognized that great victories could also be achieved without actually facing an opponent across a battlefield. To some extent this view is reflected in another Rokugani method for settling disputes – the iaijutsu duel. Those who study the art of the duel often claim that most duels are decided before steel is ever drawn, during the moment in which the opponents take their stances and study one another. The actual act of drawing and striking is merely confirmation of what has already been determined. This is why there is no shame in acknowledging that one's opponent is superior and conceding defeat before the strike. The victor has won the duel by convincing his opponent that he has already lost, breaking his enemy's will to fight.

The same principle can apply to conflict at the strategic level. If a general can convince his opponent he has already lost – or at least that he cannot win – he gains a massive psychological advantage. It may even be sufficient to convince the opposing general to surrender, or at least to concede defeat and quit the field. The most common psychological lever for imposing this sort of victory is the threat of overwhelming force, but other and subtler means of breaking an opponent's will to fight also exist.

An excellent example of this is the battle known as "Victory With No Strike," the culminating battle of a campaign fought by the Lion against the Phoenix in the fourth century. The Lion had invaded the Phoenix lands, intent on capturing more territory to increase their food production. The Crane, allied with the Phoenix, were unable to intervene militarily because of a recent non-aggression pact signed with the Lion. While the Lion pressed their campaign into Phoenix territory, winning victory after victory, the Crane desperately sought a way to assist their Phoenix allies; trade embargoes and other economic actions slowed the Lion but could not stop them. The Crane finally hit on the solution of dispatching a large contingent of Daidoji to "deliver supplies" to the Phoenix at their position near Sleeping Thunder Mountain. The Lion were immediately caught in a dilemma due to their non-aggression pact with the Crane. They could honor it, allowing the Daidoji force onto the field and into the ranks of the Phoenix, but to continue the battle they would have to risk breaching the pact and fighting the Crane. The alternative was to block the Crane from the field – which again would risk breaching the pact. The Lion ultimately stood down their forces and negotiated a truce rather than incur the dishonor of breaching a treaty that both parties had signed in good faith. The Crane broke the Lion Clan's will to continue hostilities without ever having to draw a blade.

A more conventional instance of winning before the clash of arms has begun is the Battle of Kyuden Tonbo in the year 704. The Lion samurai Akodo Yokutsu mustered 5000 troops and marched on Kyuden Tonbo, the Fortress of the Dragonfly, to confront his former betrothed and her Dragon husband. However, the Dragon and Phoenix Clans both chose to support the couple and Yokutsu found them waiting for him with much larger armies. Realizing he was facing insurmountable odds, Yokutsu attempted to retreat, but the combined Dragon-Phoenix force blocked his routes and refused to let him go until he agreed to accept the marriage. Because of the bloodless outcome, the Emperor saw fit to bestow on the couple the privilege of forming a new Minor Clan, the Dragonfly.

All this being said, Rokugan is a martial culture, steeped in the glory of battle, and samurai are usually ready and willing to fight even if their cause seems lost. It takes a strong and clever leader to rein in his tempestuous samurai and seek victory without bloodshed. However, wise leaders know that preserving their forces today leaves those same forces intact tomorrow, when battle may be unavoidable.

War at Sea

From a strategic perspective, war at sea is little different from conflict on land. Much of what is described above continues to apply, at least in terms of broad principle. The details of how a fleet is organized to sail – the equivalent of a march to battle – are different, of course, but the commander will wish to achieve the same things. He will want to deploy fast and mobile forces to give early warning of the enemy; he will want to protect the main force of his fleet from decisive engagement by screening it with guard forces; he will want to maintain a reserve so he can influence the battle at a crucial moment; he will be concerned about supply and replenishment, protecting his ability to carry out these vital logistical tasks.

What distinguishes war at sea is the extent to which it requires a much greater amount of specialized equipment and a far higher degree of specific expertise than war on land. Clans can quickly muster levies of ashigaru around core fighting forces of samurai to swell their armies, but a navy cannot be so easily expanded. Ships are slow to build and difficult to maintain; the skills required to sail and fight them are complex and require much training and practice. This is part of why only a few clans maintain significant fleets and why large naval campaigns are rare in the Empire's history. Aside from the Mantis, only the Crane, Crab, and Phoenix maintain fleets, and none of them approach the strength of the Mantis. Perhaps the largest single naval action fought in Rokugani waters was between two rival Mantis fleets, one loyal to Yoritomo Kumiko, the daughter of Yoritomo, and one led by Yoritomo Kitao, who had claimed rule of the clan after the death of Yoritomo Aramasu and who had later become Tainted by the Rain of Blood. The Battle of Broken Waves, fought just off the Phoenix coast, resulted in the deaths of both leaders and the annihilation of Kitao's corrupted fleet.

Notable Campaigns in the Emerald Empire

Not surprisingly, the history of the Empire is replete with military campaigns fought between the clans, as well as between the Empire as a whole and threats to it from both outside and within. Some of the more notable of these campaigns are described here, with particular emphasis on what strategic objectives the campaign was intended to achieve.

The Crane-Crab War (The First Yasuki War)

The closing decades of the fourth century marked almost three hundred years in the Empire without a major internal war, although there had been many smaller conflicts and limited disputes between the clans. This changed in the year 387 when Emperor Hantei Fujiwa sought a way to counter the growing power of the Gozoku. He particularly wanted to disrupt the Crane, whose powerful presence in the courts was assisting the Gozoku in consolidating their political power. Fujiwa sought the strategic objective of driving a wedge between the Doji and the Yasuki families of the Crane, thereby diminishing both their economic and political might in the Empire. To achieve this, he influenced the Lion and Crab to apply military pressure to the Crane while he worked his own political schemes against the Doji.

Initially, Fujiwa's plan worked. The Crane Champion, Doji Mizobu, reacted to the military overtures against his clan with a hostility bordering on paranoia. He was particularly incensed by the construction of Crab fortifications close to his clan's holdings. Unfortunately for Fujiwa's strategic plan, tensions between the Crane and Crab suddenly erupted into open warfare. The Crab quickly mustered their forces and marched into the Yasuki provinces of the Crane. A series of battles ensued, but the Crab were able to maintain the momentum of their invasion, eventually seizing Clear Water Village, an important holding in the Yasuki lands, and fortifying it as a base for further campaigning.

The Crab had in fact gone far beyond the Emperor's wishes and established a strategic objective of their own – namely, welcoming the Yasuki family into their own clan. This would not only immediately give the Crab additional resources, it would provide them with the political and economic clout that their clan otherwise so sorely lacked. The Yasuki themselves were complicit in this, resenting what they saw as undue control over their affairs by the Doji. The Emperor now sought to intervene, seeing his own strategic planning fall to tatters as the Crab pressed their claim to the Yasuki, but his efforts were ineffectual. The Crab resumed their attack, seizing

more territory from the Crane before economic sanctions led to supply shortages that slowed their advance. The Crane counterattacked, driving the Crab back to Clear Water Village, but failing to take the holding even after a protracted siege. With Yasuki assistance, the Crab were able to break the Crane trade embargoes, resupply their forces, and resume their offensive. After many years and near-exhaustion on both sides, the Emperor finally managed a successful intervention to end the war, although the Crab achieved their strategic objective of incorporating the Yasuki and their lands into their clan.

From a strategic point of view, the First Yasuki War is a study in contrasts. The Emperor, Hantei Fujiwa, established a strategic objective – driving a wedge between the Doji and the Yasuki – but it was at best a murky one with no clear or measurable successful outcome. This ambiguity gave the Crab the opportunity to establish a clear and focused strategic objective – annexing the Yasuki family and their lands – and pursue it to completion, albeit at heavy cost.

The Second Lion-Phoenix War

Following the events that culminated in the battle known as Victory With No Strike, an uneasy peace settled over the Lion, Phoenix, and Crane clans. This peace lasted for most of a century, although it was marked by the typical sporadic skirmishes found between rival clans. In the middle part of the fifth century open conflict flared once again. This time, however, the Lion strategic objectives were more nebulous; rather than seeking to seize arable land from the Phoenix, the hot-tempered Lion Clan Champion Matsu Itagi simply sought to prove his clan's superiority on the battlefield. Starting from his ascension to Lion Clan Champion in 401, Itagi had launched a long series of attacks on his neighboring clans, most notably the Phoenix. For the most part Itagi was successful on the field of battle, albeit often resorting to brute force and headlong attack rather than more subtle maneuvers and tactical actions. It quickly became clear that in open terrain the Lion were all but unstoppable. However, Itagi failed to capitalize on his battlefield successes, seemingly content to merely defeat opposing forces in battle and then withdraw to consolidate his forces, resuming the march in the next year and seeking battle once more.

Despite this lack of strategic goals, Itagi was a popular Champion, well-loved among the Lion for his prowess on the battlefield and the many victories he won. Popular reports claimed that Matsu Itagi won more than one hundred battles. The dominant political force in Rokugan at the time, the conspiracy known as the Gozoku, grew wary of the aggressive Lion and their dynamic and tempestuous leader, and sought ways to blunt his success. Indeed, it is possible Itagi's failure to follow up and build on the gains he made on the battlefield was in part the result of Gozoku meddling. However, the Gozoku also believed it was necessary to bring an end to the Lion's string of victories against the Phoenix. The opportunity to do so finally came in the year 408.

Realizing they could not hope to defeat the superior forces of the Lion in open terrain, where there was room to maneuver and charge, the Phoenix sought to bring the Lion to battle in a more confined place. Itagi finally obliged. After defeating a Phoenix army on the plains north of Otosan Uchi, he uncharacteristically launched his forces in immediate pursuit. It remains unclear why he did so; perhaps the Gozoku had a hand in it, feeding false intelligence to the Lion Champion. The remnants of the defeated Phoenix army fled northward, through Kiken na Roka (Treacherous Pass), which was garrisoned by a small force of bushi and shugenja led by a samurai named Shiba Kaigen. Kaigen had long studied the integration of bushi and shugenja in battle, developing unique and unorthodox tactics to use both together, the strengths of one offsetting the weaknesses of the other. In the ensuing battle, the Lion were unable to maneuver or bring their full force to bear. Kaigen's defenders were virtually wiped out, but their innovative use of military force backed by magic inflicted terrible casualties and held the Lion at bay. Worse, they gained enough time for the Phoenix to reconstitute their previously defeated army, which marched back into Treacherous Pass to reinforce the garrison and even take the offensive. The Lion were forced to withdraw, their first significant defeat in eight years of almost continuous campaigning. Shiba Gaijushiko, one of the Gozoku leaders, used the sacrifice of Kaigen and his garrison as a rallying point against the Lion, forcing Itagi to finally cease hostilities within the Empire.

Matsu Itagi provides an excellent example of how tactical success devoid of strategic purpose amounts to little more than gratuitous bloodshed. Itagi sought only to prove his clan militarily superior to others, a feat which he achieved over and over again until his failure at Treacherous Pass. Had he developed a coherent strategic plan and used it unite his many battlefield successes into a greater purpose, the Lion could easily have become the preeminent clan in Rokugan.

The Mantis – Ivory Kingdoms War

During the middle of the twelfth century, a bitter conflict raged in Rokugan known as the War of Spirits, pitting Emperor Toturi I against the paranoid and delusional Hantei XVI. But while this war split the Empire, a far more secretive conflict engulfed the Mantis Clan far from Rokugan's shores. Toturi had learned that sinister forces had gained power in the Ivory Kingdoms, a gaijin empire far to the south and west of Rokugan. The Emperor realized the Empire could ill-afford another threat from overseas while it remained locked in bitter civil war, and commanded the Mantis Clan, under its Champion Yoritomo Aramasu, to learn the nature of the danger and do whatever was necessary to stop or at least minimize it.

Aramasu immediately crafted a clear strategic plan with three essential objectives. First, he needed to determine the exact nature of the threat. Second, he needed to draw the threat out and then, third, neutralize it so it no longer posed a danger to Rokugan. With these objectives set, Aramasu sent spies to the Ivory Kingdoms, a painstaking but necessary process. After several years, Mantis agents were able to determine the threat was a dangerous cult, the Cult of Rhumal, which had infiltrated the Kshatriya houses (the Ivory Kingdoms' equivalent of samurai nobles). One Kshatriya line, House Suresh, remained free of Rhumalite influence and became a Mantis ally in the coming struggle.

With his first objective achieved, Aramasu now sought to draw out the Rhumalites. His agents orchestrated a series of conflicts among the Kshatriya nobility, blaming the struggles on rival houses and weakening the Rhumalites in the process. When he judged the time right, Aramasu revealed his clan's presence in the Ivory Kingdoms and proclaimed his support for the Kingdoms' ruler, the monarch known as the Maharaja. Enraged, the Rhumalites mobilized their own forces and launched a seaborne attack against the Mantis. The Mantis used careful tactics to offset their attackers' numerical superiority and kill their leadership.

Aramasu was now ready to move on his final strategic objective by offering the Maharaja all of the information he had gathered through years of careful espionage. The two rulers formed an alliance and together launched a campaign to destroy the remaining Rhumalite insurrectionists. This led to a series of battles over the ensuing three years; initially these were conventional "set piece" battles both on land and at sea, but as the Rhumalite losses mounted, the campaign took on more of the character of a hunt. By the end, virtually all the Rhumalite forces had been destroyed or dispersed and all of their strongholds razed, ending the immediate threat to Rokugan. (Unfortunately, sufficient numbers of Rhumalite fanatics escaped to resume their efforts a generation later, eventually bringing about the downfall of the Ivory Kingdoms and raising the vile army known as the Destroyers, which would attack Rokugan – much as Toturi had feared.)

In contrast to Matsu Itagi, who fought battles solely for the sake of fighting them and no other strategic purpose, Yoritomo Aramasu demonstrated strategic brilliance in dealing with the Ivory Kingdoms. He developed a clear plan with specific, achievable, and measurable objectives, then focused all of his clan's efforts on achieving them successfully.

The War of the Rich Frog

The War of the Rich Frog, fought in the years 1165 and 1166, pitted the Unicorn and Lion Clans against each other over control of the unaligned settlement called Toshi sano Kanemochi Kaeru – the City of the Rich Frog. Located on the Lion-Unicorn border, the city had come under the control of the Unicorn Clan after their return to the Empire. In 1159 the Kaeru, the ronin family that ruled the city, were offered fealty as a vassal family to the Ikoma. This set into motion events that led to war.

Initially, the Unicorn response was surprisingly muted. However, in 1165 the Khan of the Unicorn, Moto Chagatai, launched a surprise attack after extensive preparations, striking only once he was sure his forces were ready. The reaction across the Empire was one of indignation, since Imperial decree forbade war between the clans without Imperial sanction. However, the decree had been drafted prior to the Unicorn's return to the Empire, and Chagatai argued the Unicorn were exempt. His overall objective was to establish a secure foothold on the Lion's border and use it for further incursions into Lion territory. Following the initial success of his campaign, however, Chagatai's plans went astray because of two unanticipated factors. First, the sorcerer Iuchiban unleashed a horrific magical attack on the Empire known as the Rain of Blood, causing massive disruptions to both sides. Second, the Emperor – not wanting to alienate either the Lion or the Unicorn when the Empire was in such disarray – called on the Dragon to intervene in the conflict. What was to have been a quick and decisive war dragged out in a protracted stalemate, with losses mounting on all sides and the city itself changing hands several times. Chagatai's overall objective now changed. He wanted to end the war quickly while retaining what gains he had made.

Marshaling his forces, Chagatai engaged the Lion at the Battle of Sukoshi Zutsu, a village near Kaeru Toshi. During the battle Chagatai fought what he believed to be

the Lion Champion, Matsu Nimuro, in personal combat – however, this was actually a duplicate of Nimuro created by an evil nemuranai, the co-called Egg of P'an Ku. Nonetheless, the Lion withdrew following the apparent death of their Champion, retreating back to Kaeru Toshi. Shortly thereafter the Imperial Legions, under the command of the Emerald Champion, intervened to bring the war to an end.

Although he did not achieve his initial objectives, Moto Chagatai showed strategic flexibility in assessing the situation facing him and adjusting his objectives to accommodate. Having the vision and willingness to adapt to a changing situation is essential for effective strategy, for remaining slavishly committed to a strategy that is no longer achievable is a sure way to face strategic defeat.

Notable Generals of Rokugan

Many great generals have bestrode the battlefields of Rokugan through its history. Some are well-known for their exploits, whether successful or not, while others are obscure despite their skills and achievements.

Matsu Itagi, Tempestuous Champion

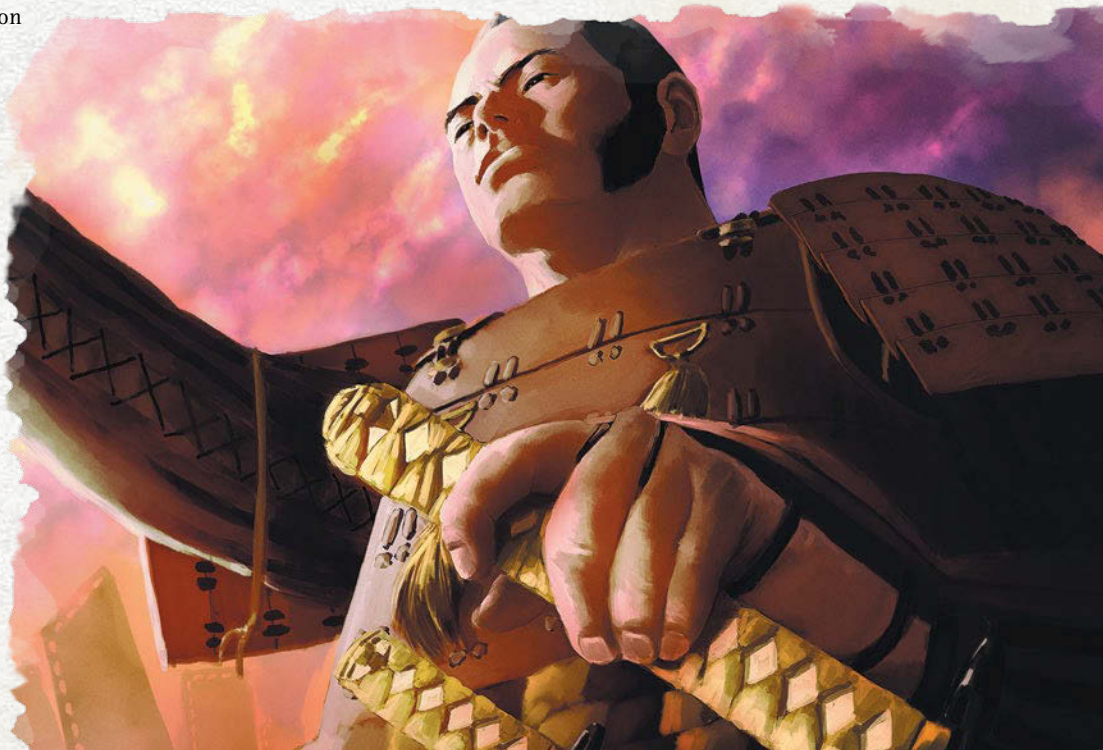
When he assumed the Championship of the Lion Clan in 401, Matsu Itagi, though relatively young, was still well-known throughout Rokugan. He was a giant of a man, standing well over six feet tall and built like an ox. By the time of his death, he could claim more than one hundred victories on the battlefield and triumph in at least two dozen iaijutsu duels. Brash and uncompromising, he was beloved of the Lion Clan—many considered him their greatest Champion since Akodo himself—but it was his tempestuous nature that was to prove his downfall.

Almost as soon as Itagi had assumed the mantle of Champion, he launched the Lion on a succession of military campaigns aimed at his neighboring clans. He harbored a particular desire to do battle with the Phoenix, not forgetting that clan's defeat of his at the end of the First Lion-Phoenix War over sixty years before. He also harbored a grudge against the Crane, who had cleverly assisted the Phoenix, trapping the Lion in their own non-aggression pact and leaving them no honorable way to resolve the conflict short of surrender. Strangely, Itagi's greatest ire was directed at the Crab, a clan that didn't border his and with whom he is recorded as having few direct interactions before the end of the Second Lion-Phoenix War in 408. His resentment of the Crab, however, was due to no particular slight or defeat. The fact was that Matsu Itagi was driven by an obsessive need to prove the Lion the most powerful military clan in the Empire. The Crab, he believed, were his clan's only true rival in that regard. For the first eight years of his reign as Champion, however, he had to content himself with testing the Lion against the Phoenix and their Crane allies.

For eight years, the Lion proved supreme. In battle after battle, Itagi led the Lion to resounding victory. A strong leader and wily tactician, Itagi would maneuver his armies into positions of advantage; when he sensed the critical moment of the battle was at hand, he would launch himself into the fray, leaving the tactical command of the army to trusted subordinates. Invariably, the blood-spattered Itagi would cleave his way through the enemy line, breaking it and putting his foe to rout. Few were able to stand before him, and he never accepted surrender. To face Matsu Itagi across steel was to die.

For all that, however, Itagi proved a relatively poor strategist. He rarely followed up on his battlefield successes, and frequently campaigned with no greater objective than to simply battle and defeat his foes in the field. When he was finally given a resounding defeat at the Battle of Treacherous Pass in 408, he had little to show for his years of campaigning aside from thousands of dead. It was easy, therefore, for his political foes—notably the Gozoku—to use the defeat, and particularly the noble sacrifice of the Phoenix in Treacherous Pass who had inflicted it, to reign in the mercurial Itagi and force him to cease his hostilities against the other clans.

In 412, to finally prove himself superior to the Crab who defended the Empire from the Shadowlands, Matsu Itagi entered that vile realm intent on fighting his way to the Festering Pit of Fu Leng and destroying it. A



long time passed with no word on his fate. To avoid a greater war with the Lion, who believed Itagi had been tricked into a suicidal mission, the Crab Clan Champion, Hida Tadaka, entered the Shadowlands to find out what had become of Itagi. He found him barely clinging to life, and after an arduous journey back to the Empire, returned the lifeless body of Matsu Itagi to his clan. He was buried as he lived, a hero to the Lion Clan.

Matsu Itagi, Tempestuous Champion

Air: 5	Earth: 5	Fire: 5	Water: 4	Void: 4
Honor: 4.0		*Status: 8.0*		*Glory: 8.5*

School/Rank: Matsu Berserker 5 / Akodo Bushi 3

Advantages: Crab Hands, Daredevil, Fame, Large, Tactician

Disadvantages: Brash, Contrary, Driven (to prove Lion military superiority)

Skills: Athletics 5, Battle 6 (Mass Combat, Skirmish), Courtier 4, Defense 6, Etiquette 3, Games 6 (Go, Shogi), Heavy Weapons 5 (Dai Tsuchi), Iaijutsu 6 (Assessment, Focus), Investigation 4, Intimidation 4 (Bullying), Sincerity 1, Jiujutsu 1, Kenjutsu 8 (Katana, Wakizashi), Kyujutsu 6 (Yumi), Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: Law 2, Lore: History 1, War Fan 4

Kata: Reckless Abandon Style

Shiba Kaigen

Early on, Shiba Kaigen was recognized as something of an anomaly among bushi. Even in the Shiba family, with their focus on protecting the shugenja of the Phoenix Clan, Kaigen stood out. While the main emphasis among the Shiba was the protection of their shugenja charges, Kaigen believed it was possible to more thoroughly integrate bushi and shugenja, to find ways for the strengths of one to overcome the weaknesses of the other. He was a skillful warrior, and as he gained status and stature within his clan he worked to realize his vision. Long hours spent studying treatises and scrolls devoted to spellcraft made Kaigen something of an authority on the theories of Elemental magic, even though he had no facility to importune the kami himself. Some shugenja resented Kaigen's "intrusion" into their field, but many more were intrigued, including the Elemental Masters who oversaw the clan. Kaigen's studies were, if not actually encouraged, at least indulged.

Kaigen's opportunity to test his theories came late in the Second Lion-Phoenix War, when the forces of Matsu Itagi rampaged onto the plains north of the Imperial capital. The Phoenix army met the Lion and was soundly defeated; it withdrew northward through the narrow defile known as Treacherous Pass. Kaigen, now a taisa commanding a single legion, was assigned to garrison the pass. As the defeated Phoenix army withdrew past him, Kaigen clearly saw his strategic objective. He and his legion – less than a thousand samurai, mostly bushi but including contingent of shugenja – had to hold the pass against the pursuing Lion in order to give the Phoenix time to assemble a new force to face them. Failure would mean the Lion would be able to enter the lands of the Isawa and roam at will, an unthinkable failure for a loyal Shiba. Kaigen therefore readied himself and his force, preparing for his theoretical techniques on integration of magic and steel about to be tested.

The Lion crashed into the garrison and were met not just by conventional weapons but by waves of Elemental power. Fire roared, winds howled, and rock splintered and crashed as the kami were roused to fury. Even so, the Lion – led by the fierce Champion Matsu Itagi – might have carried the day without Kaigen's clever leadership and tactics, perfectly integrating steel and magic into an unbreakable bulwark. After days of fighting the garrison was finally overcome, Kaigen falling alongside the last of his troops, but he had achieved his objective – the recovered Phoenix army marched into Treacherous Pass and moved to engage the Lion. Disorganized and having suffered terrible losses, the Lion had no choice but to withdraw from

the pass with the Phoenix in pursuit. Itagi's army was harried all the way back to the Lion-Phoenix border, never able to offer any battle it could realistically win; it was a humiliating defeat for the proud Matsu. Worse, it allowed his political foes to finally put an end to his campaigning.

For his efforts and sacrifice Shiba Kaigen was memorialized among the Phoenix as a great hero, known in the clan's ancestral records as One Man Alone. To this day, all Phoenix crossing the Treacherous Pass stop at the place of the battle to repeat Kaigen's oath: "My breath I give to the Phoenix!" However, Kaigen has an even more enduring legacy than this. Convinced of the value of his work, the Isawa still invite his Shiba descendants to spend a year in their schools, studying spellcraft and the techniques for integrating the way of the warrior with the way of the shugenja.

Shiba Kaigen, Innovative General

Air: 4	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 3	Void: 4
Honor: 4.5	*Status: 5.5*	*Glory: 6.0*		

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 5

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 4 (Mass Combat, Skirmish), Calligraphy 3, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Games 3 (Go), Kyujutsu 1, Iaijutsu 4 (Focus), Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 6 (Katana, Wakizashi), Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: Shugenja 3, Lore: Elements 3, Meditation 3 (Void Recovery), Spears 4, Lore: Theology 4

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Leadership, Sage, Tactician

Disadvantages: Ascetic

Bayushi Tozasu

Bayushi Tozasu exemplifies the concept of loyalty as it is perceived and idealized by the Scorpion Clan. He was the senior rikugunshokan of the Scorpion Clan in the early ninth century, an accomplished general skillful at both the strategic and tactical levels. His Clan Champion, Bayushi Ogoe, entrusted all the clan's military operations to him and up until the year 815 he never lost a significant battle. He became a close confidant and advisor to Ogoe, and between them the two men made the Scorpion Clan into a dominating political, military, and economic force in the Empire.

Unfortunately, this success was actually a problem. Ogoe realized that the Scorpion had attracted too much scrutiny and resentment from the other clans, impeding the clan's ability to function in its traditional role as the Emperor's Underhand. He needed to diminish the Scorpion's overt standing in the Empire... and discovered a way in the newly-returned Unicorn Clan.

The Unicorn fascinated Bayushi Tozasu. During their long effective exile from the Empire, they had developed a style of warfare wholly unlike that of any other clan. They made extensive use of cavalry, to such an extent that their infantry forces had only relatively minor roles. Tozasu devoted himself to studying the Unicorn, both to learn how to better employ cavalry on the battlefield and to be able to counter their forces should the Scorpion ever face them in battle – which seemed likely, given the new border shared by the two clans. Tozasu realized that despite its mobility and its strength on the charge, cavalry had fundamental weaknesses – most notably, it was not suited to protracted melees. If its charge could be absorbed and the force of its impact blunted, disciplined ranks of infantry could easily prevail in the subsequent struggle. Cavalry locked in close combat would be relatively easy to separate into small groups or individuals and then defeat in detail. The key, Tozasu decided, was using troops trained and equipped with long-reach weapons, particularly spears that could be set into the ground to receive a charge. He also knew it was essential to protect the flanks of the army against the more mobile cavalry, and experimented with forming infantry into square formations that effectively had no flanks and rear. By the time Bayushi Ogoe called upon Tozasu to discuss the Unicorn, the rikugunshokan was confident he could fight and defeat them.

Unfortunately, Tozasu was never able to test his ideas against the Unicorn. Ogoe instructed him to engage the Unicorn and lose, in order to publicly shame the Scorpion and make them less of a threat in the eyes of the rest of the Empire. Tozasu was of course mortified at being ordered to deliberately lose a battle, but he knew his duty. Loyal to the end, Tozasu met the Unicorn at the Battle of White Shore Plain, where he carefully used everything he had learned about his horse-borne foes to fight them entirely

wrongly; he considered everything he had planned, then did exactly the opposite. He let his ranks be outflanked, units were overrun by enemy charges, and the Scorpion army was quickly torn apart and destroyed. The Scorpion Clan had loudly and publicly boasted of an easy victory, and was reduced to a laughingstock throughout the Empire. Bayushi Tozasu committed seppuku on the field of his defeat, cleansing his shame and that of his clan for losing. With the attention of the other clans now focused elsewhere, Ogoe was able to resume the shadowy and covert duties for which his clan was best suited.

Outside the Scorpion, sadly, the brilliant Bayushi Tozasu is remembered only for his one great "failure." Within the clan, however, he is a hero, remembered not only for his skill as a strategist and tactician but for his utter devotion to his clan.

Bayushi Tosazu, Victorious in Defeat

Air: 4	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 4	Void: 4
Honor: 2.5		*Status: 5.5*		*Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 5

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 5, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Games (Go) 3, Iaijutsu 2, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Warfare 3, Lore: Unicorn Clan 2, Sincerity 3

Kata: Breath of Wind Style

Advantages: Crafty, Leadership, Tactician

Disadvantages: Antisocial, Fascination (newly-returned Unicorn Clan)

Daidoji Masayoshi

Daidoji Masayoshi is an enigma. In a clan considered staunchly traditional and focused on honor, Masayoshi was a pragmatist, willing to do whatever was necessary to get things done. A brilliant field commander, Masayoshi faced the Crab during the First Yasuki War, using his knowledge of the land and a wide range of unorthodox tactics to inflict great damage and discomfit his foes.

Born into a traditional family, Masayoshi quickly developed an affinity for the outdoors that many of his fellow Crane considered unseemly. The young Daidoji was frequently seen running through fields, climbing trees, swimming across streams, and generally engaging in physical activities far beyond those expected of a samurai. However, Masayoshi was learning not only how to harden his body against physical demands but also how to read the land, know its character throughout the seasons, and – as his martial training progressed – how to use it advantageously in battle. At the time of his gempukku, Masayoshi was a mediocre swordsman but a crack shot with a bow and an expert at maneuvering through all types of terrain. He chafed when assigned to the regular duties of a samurai, particularly when engaging in formal set-piece battles as part of an infantry line. To Masayoshi, the only logical choice for the Crane — a clan heavily outnumbered by the militant Crab to their south and the Lion to their north — was to make use of unconventional tactics. As he slowly rose to more senior levels in the army, he worked hard to influence Crane military thinking, edging it away from established tactics and toward quick maneuver, ambush, and the use of traps and deception. Many of his fellow Crane samurai frowned on such an underhanded approach to warfare, but his success in border skirmishes with both the Crab and the Lion could not be denied. Eventually, the senior Crane leadership gave Masayoshi command of a Daidoji legion with the understanding he could train and employ it as he saw fit.

By the time of the outbreak of the Crab-Crane War (otherwise known as the First Yasuki War), Masayoshi's impact on the Daidoji had been significant. While most Daidoji legions were still focused on conventional line tactics, several of them had adopted Masayoshi's unconventional approach to battle, and nearly all had incorporated at least some elements of it. Masayoshi was soon granted command of all Daidoji forces, and immediately set about using his forces in a series of

quick hit-and-run raids and ambushes designed to force the more ponderous Crab legions to keep pausing and deploying, slowing their advance and frustrating their troops. For the most part he was successful; Masayoshi controlled his forces like a virtuoso playing a musical instrument. He paid scant heed to casualties, concerned only with inflicting as much harm on the hated Crab invaders as possible. However, the Crab forces were ultimately simply too strong to be stopped by the elusive Daidoji alone. Becoming increasingly desperate to stop the Crab, the Crane Champion, Doji Mizobu, ordered Masayoshi to bring the Crab to decisive battle. Masayoshi objected, citing the Crab's military superiority, but was overruled. Dutifully he engaged the Crab close to Clear Water Village, after employing as many ambushes, traps, and deceptions as possible to even the odds. It was not enough. The Crane army fought hard and well, but the implacable Crab forces ground them down and eventually pushed them aside. Masayoshi could only watch helplessly as Clear Water Village fell into Crab possession – and with it, effective control of the Yasuki lands.

Daidoji Masayoshi would continue to fight the Crab as they pushed on into the Kenkai Hanto, the Peninsula of Hardened Waters, which became the main battleground of the war. Here he could claim success; his tactics, now focused on the Crab supply lines and baggage trains, combined with Crane economic warfare to finally halt the Crab advance. For a time Masayoshi even enjoyed the luxury of counter-attack, his forces pushing the Crab back out of the Kenkai Hanto and closing in on Clear Water Village. But here again Masayoshi ran afoul of his Champion. Doji Mizobu demanded the holding be retaken, while Masayoshi wanted to bypass it, cut it off, and maintain the impetus of his advance against the weakened Crab. Again Mizobu prevailed, and the Crane laid siege to Clear Water Village, which had been fortified by the Crab. Sometime during the week-long attack, Daidoji Masayoshi was mortally wounded. He died facing the grim knowledge that the siege had given the Crab the respite they needed, allowing them to resupply and resume their offensive.

Although Masayoshi is not well-known outside the Daidoji family, his influence on Crane warfare – and by extension on warfare throughout the Empire – was profound. Akodo, in his treatise Leadership, wrote: "On the battlefield, all actions are honorable." Daidoji Masayoshi took that to heart, developing strategems and tactics that would come to be used extensively by not only the Daidoji (especially the secret Harriers) but by specialized forces, scouts, and unconventional troops of all clans. A particularly spectacular example of his legacy was the Battle of the Osari Plain, in which fifty Daidoji defeated a force of Lion ten times their number with a combination of ambush and the use of gaijin pepper. It was a great victory... and just as controversial as Daidoji Masayoshi had been himself.

Daidoji Masayoshi, Cunning Tactician

Air: 4	Earth: 3	Fire: 4	Water: 4	Void: 3
	Stamina: 4			
Honor: 4.5		*Status: 6.0*		*Glory: 2.0*

School/Rank: Daidoji Iron Warrior 4

Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Battle (Skirmish) 5, Calligraphy 2, Defense 4, Hunting (Survival, Tracking) 4, Investigation (Notice) 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 7, Iaijutsu 1, Lore: Heraldry 1, Lore: Crab Clan 1, Lore: War 2, Stealth 4 (Ambush)

Kata: Striking as Void, Striking as Water

Advantages: Crafty, Silent, Tactician, Way of the Land (Daidoji and Yasuki Provinces)

Disadvantages: Driven (defeat the Crab Clan in battle), Insensitive

Moto Narantsetseg

Moto Narantsetseg was an accomplished taisa in the Khol, the Unicorn Army of the Center, at the time of the War of the Rich Frog. Young Narantsetseg had demonstrated great aptitude not only as a warrior but as a leader; even as a boy, when he began to train under the Moto sensei he quickly outdid his peers and

advanced to the head of his class. Possessing a keen and incisive mind, Narantsetseg proved able to quickly assess any tactical situation and rapidly develop an effective plan to deal with it. Unfortunately, for all of his accomplishment on the battlefield, the blunt-talking Moto had virtually no empathy for others and treated his subordinates as little more than tools to be used to accomplish his objectives. The Clan Champion, Moto Chagatai, recognized Narantsetseg's value to the Unicorn, but also recognized that a leader must be inspirational to his followers as well as adept at his craft. Therefore, he arranged for Narantsetseg to be given a carefully-chosen command staff who could function as both bridge and buffer between the abrasive Moto and his subordinates. The result was a curious arrangement – a selection of extraordinarily patient men and women who subjected themselves to Narantsetseg's foul temperament, then translated it into orders and instructions that were invariably brilliant in their execution.

Strange though the arrangement was, it was difficult to argue with success; Narantsetseg was a key commander for the Unicorn during the War of the Rich Frog. In the years leading up to the war, he conducted much of the secret training of the Unicorn forces to allow them to defeat the Lion. Once hostilities commenced, he led his legions to repeated battlefield success against the Lion and later, when they intervened in the conflict, against the Dragon. During the Rain of Blood Narantsetseg proved to be a pillar of strength, fearlessly exposing himself to the full effect of the Rain in order to maintain order amid the chaos. It was said afterward that the glowering Moto was simply too stubborn to succumb to the power of Jigoku. Narantsetseg went on to plan much of the Unicorn campaign that culminated in the Battle of Sukoshi Zutsu, the final great battle of the war. He commanded the Unicorn's left wing, which included much of the Khol and the White Guard, and supported Moto Chagatai as the Khan charged into battle against the Lion Clan Champion.

After the war, Narantsetseg embraced the worship of the Shi-Tien Yeng-Wan and devoted himself to learning the ways of the White Guard. During Moto Chagatai's march on Toshi Ranbo to claim the vacant Imperial Throne, Narantsetseg again proved an invaluable asset to the Unicorn. Chagatai needed a general who could put aside any concern for the welfare of his soldiers in order to conduct a daring attack through the Lion lands in the dead of winter. Narantsetseg was one of the key architects of the strategy that ultimately led the Unicorn to the Imperial City, and there he fell at the gates of the capital, struck down by a Lion arrow even as he organized yet another charge against the defenders.

Moto Narantsetseg, Master of Maneuver

Air: 5 Earth: 5 Fire: 4 Water: 4 Void: 4

Agility: 5

Honor: 3.5 *Status: 6.0* *Glory: 4.5*

School/Rank: Moto Bushi 5 / White Guard 2

Skills: Animal Handling (Horses) 4, Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Battle) 7, Defense 5, Horsemanship 6, Heavy Weapons 3, Hunting (Survival) 3, Investigation (Notice) 4, Kenjutsu (Scimitar) 6, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 4, Lore: Theology 5, Lore: Warfare 2, Spears (Lance) 5

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Tactician, Wary

Disadvantages: Insensitive, Gaijin Name, Obtuse

Tsukuro, Lost General

Not all of the great generals of Rokugan's past are heroes. Some are villains... and some, such as the creature called Tsukuro, are the stuff of nightmares.

Little detail is recalled of Daidoji Tsukuro; even the year of his birth is in doubt. What is known is that when he was born, it was prophesized by the Asahina that dark magics that had once tainted his ancestors would again be manifest in him. The young Tsukuro was determined to rise above these dire predictions and become a great hero, going so far as to claim he would one day become the Emerald Champion of Rokugan. Unfortunately, the Asahina prophecy clung to him, preventing him from gaining credit for any of his accomplishments. Although he proved to be a skilled leader and tactician, no one wanted to acknowledge any successes being attributable to the "Cursed Crane."

Deeply embittered, Tsukuro turned first to opium and then to even darker pursuits, accepting bribes and covering the wrongdoings of petty criminals. Eventually he was accused of a serious crime – it was later suggested that he was framed by his own family in an attempt to rid themselves of him – and ordered to commit seppuku. He refused and fled, eventually entering the Shadowlands. Under circumstances known only to him, he died in that wretched land... and was reborn as a revenant, an undead monstrosity. It was now that the full horror of the

Asahina prophecy became clear. Tsukuro had become an *akutsukai*, a servant of evil, and the Empire would pay the price for his dark ancestry.

History does not explicitly record Tsukuro's depredations against the Empire prior to the twelfth century, but the Crab maintain sufficient records to suggest that many Shadowlands campaigns fought against Rokugan during those centuries were led by him. His already considerable strategic and tactical acumen were augmented by the horrific power of the Taint, and Tsukuro is thought responsible for many attacks that led to the deaths of thousands of Crab samurai. He finally came to the attention of the rest of the Empire during the Clan Wars, when he was one of several powerful Shadowlands creatures who commanded forces in the Crab armies. The misguided alliance between the Crab Clan Champion Hida Kisada and the Shadowlands, brokered by Kuni Yori, allowed Tsukuro to rampage across Rokugan and fight in major battles at Beiden Pass and elsewhere. In the end, however, Fu Leng's plans were undone at the Second Day of Thunder, and Tsukuro returned to the Shadowlands, remaining there until the Dark Lord Daigotsu ascended as the leader of the Lost.

Tsukuro helped lead Daigotsu's armies against the Empire when they seized a portion of the Carpenter Wall; he also designed and led much of the attack on the Imperial Capital, Otosan Uchi, when Daigotsu captured it in the year 1159. There Tsukuro faced the Emerald Champion, Yasuki Hachi, in personal combat — an irony given Tsukuro's ancient claim he would one day be the Emerald Champion himself. Hachi prevailed and Tsukuro was destroyed, his corrupted soul sent to Jigoku. However, he returned to trouble the Empire again during an attack on Shinsei's Last Hope, a sacred village maintained by the Crab south of the Carpenter Wall. Tsukuro attacked the village with the help of the Ashura, powerful demons made from the very stuff of Fu Leng's dreams. Shinsei's Last Hope was almost overwhelmed, and only the timely arrival of the Crab army turned the tide. Tsukuro was once again destroyed and forced back to Jigoku, to wait until he might be remade once again.

Tsukuro's tale is a cautionary one, perhaps, but it does serve to illustrate that strategic and tactical prowess are themselves neither good nor evil — it is the intent behind them and the use to which they are put that determines their virtue or corruption.

Tsukuro's mechanical statistics are found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*.

Chapter Two

Tactics

The crushing weight of bodies pressed down like some Fortune's palm, grinding flesh into earth. Nothing should have lived amid that haphazard and misshapen pile of the dead. Yet near the bottom Bayushi Konitsu, covered in blood and mud and broken armor, pondered his fate.

He'd lost his mask during the worst of the battle. A particularly tenacious Lion Deathseeker had ripped it clear just as the Bayushi commander slid a blade between his ribs. The Lion's weight had tripped Konitsu and the two had become entangled with the growing piles of dead on the front line. Konitsu could – should! – have gotten up. But in everything rests opportunity, as his sensei used to say.

The battle was lost. In fact, near the end it had become clear to Konitsu that Bayushi Kiwadoi – his rikugunshokan and twin sister – had actually planned for the Scorpion to fail here. They were expendable. The loss of their legion would draw the Lion further forward, thinking they had momentum on their side. Konitsu knew the tactic well and understood it perfectly... yet he could not help but feel betrayed.

So when he had fallen the Scorpion commander had stayed down. The battle dragged on for hours, the Scorpion legion unwilling to give in to the inevitable. And Konitsu hid, the Deathseeker's body across his chest. Blood and chill rainwater soaked him to the bone while he considered his fate.

Just across from him lay another Scorpion with a plain white mask. A spatter of blood had sprayed across the pure eggshell shape. He found the pattern mesmerizing. There was life in that random spray of blood... life and death. Twin forces in juxtaposition, protecting the On *beneath. Konitsu decided he would take the mask and commission a copy from an artisan.*

What was the purpose of battle, the point of life, if he would be discarded like a stone on a Go board by his own sister? Konitsu had hours to consider the question, and his final understanding did not really surprise him.

Who needs purpose when one has duty? Loyalty and victory are sufficient to themselves.

Nearby, the sound of two men talking broke Konitsu's reverie. The first man wore Otomo colors, and Konitsu realized he must be the Imperial Observer sent to watch over the battlefield and ensure the war was conducted in accordance with Imperial law. The second man was the Otomo's escort through this dizzying pile of death. An Ikoma scout, it appeared.

"Hokan-sama, please forgive me, but I must insist." The Ikoma was racing to keep up with the surprisingly spry Imperial bureaucrat. His head swiveled to and fro, looking for danger on the field. "It is not unusual for peasant looters, or bandits, or Scorpion deceivers to hide in such places. You are not safe."

Konitsu watched as the two came closer, circling around a mass of dead pikemen, then stopping with their backs to his own small mountain of death. He could hear the arrogance dripping from the Otomo's voice. "You will protect me, Ikuya-kun. My reports must go through to the Imperial City as soon as possible. This battle will prove key to the final resolution of the war and my superiors are anxious to know the result."

"Your safety as Imperial Observer is more important, Lord Otomo. If you would return to the camp, we can – "

"What, Ikoma-kun? So you can coddle me like some simpleton while your army moves on, advancing to the point of no return?" The Otomo wiped his hands down his kimono, smoothing its wrinkles. Deep frown lines etched themselves into his face. "No, I think not. I carry your general's battle plans, his maps of these lands, and a detailed listing of the dead Scorpion officers. This information will be enough to show the Lion have won and end the needless bloodshed your clan is so fond of-- What is it now, Ikoma-kun?" Otomo Hokan watched in confusion as the young scout's sword fell from limp fingers. The Imperial Observer stumbled back in shock as a sword's blade slid through the Ikoma's torso. The scout fell aside and Bayushi Konitsu rose to his feet, covered in blood and mud, reeking of the stench of death, appearing less a man and more as some undead abomination.

"You should listen to the Lion, Otomo-sama." The Scorpion stepped over the Lion's body and leveled his sword at the Imperial. "They understand the ways of war."

The Otomo stammered, "You... you are the Lion commander... the Lion think you dead. You were hiding in the bodies? Feigning death?" Hokan's upper lip curled in disgust as he remembered himself. The Observer

lifted his hand, palm open in the gesture of Imperial authority. Probably he intended to issue some intimidating proclamation, but Konitsu did not let him speak further.

The Scorpion watched as Hokan's head flew away, a gout of fresh blood splashing across the plain white mask on the ground.

"Let them think me dead. As my sensei used to say 'Luck is when Opportunity meets Preparation. Only the willing are able to seize its power.'" Bayushi Konitsu knelt to retrieve his new mask. He lifted it up to examine the new spray of blood across the pure white surface. "A fine addition to the pattern. I will see you remembered, Hokan-san, as well as your wise scout friend."

Hours later, an ashigaru looter found a head mounted atop the broken haft of a yari, as though on display after a victory. That was strange enough, but then the peasant soldier found the corpse, still wearing the colors of the Imperial house. The body was bereft of all belongings other than his garments... and his coin. The ashigaru shrugged and tucked the string of koku under his clothing. It was more money than he had ever seen, and could buy him a good life if he survived the rest of this war. He left the dead for others to find.

The Rokugani Battlefield

"Defeating an enemy without destroying him is the noblest victory of all." – *Akodo's Leadership*

"Better to have a graveyard of dead enemies than a single living one." – *Tangen's Lies*

Rokugani warfare happens on numerous levels, and victory and defeat are measured in myriad ways. War can be a mental activity, involving the distortion of the enemy's perceptions through ambiguous posturing, deliberate misinformation, and denial of communication. It can also be fought on a moral and political level, destroying the enemy's ability to win by disrupting his alliances and creating disunity and fragmentation within his ranks. Ultimately, however, every war comes down to an engagement in the field, as the armies clash and their commanders struggle to achieve victory and escape defeat.

Combat tactics in Rokugani warfare tend to be simpler than in other cultures, since once the samurai clash the battle tends to devolve into countless individual skirmishes. However, the battlefield maneuvers that lead up to those clashes can play a vital role in how the overall engagement plays out.

Battlefield Formations

Although Rokugani warfare began as a crude matter of simply arming soldiers and hurling them into the enemy line until one side broke or retreated, that soon changed as soldiers and generals learned to take advantage of terrain, space, different types of troops, and momentum. Akodo himself wrote about the concept of army formations in *Leadership*, and over time these early concepts were refined and improved.

As with all aspects of warfare in Rokugan, modern formations include a number of basic methods that are universal across the clans. While individual clans and families have invented their own tactics, the most basic approaches are so universally applicable that everyone uses them no matter what their army looks like. Even armies as wildly different as the Crab and Phoenix employ the same basic maneuvers to try to gain advantage over their enemy. These common formations are taught to soldiers, commanders, and generals all across the Empire. Despite this broad familiarity, they still remain effective, simply because executing and countering formations takes time and effort – if a general chooses the wrong one for the situation or the opponent, he is unlikely to get a chance to correct his error before the armies clash. Using a formation is thus quite challenging, and requires quickly and accurately analyzing the enemy's strengths, weaknesses, and positions, then responding appropriately.

"Anchored Line"

One of the basic objectives of any battle is to break the enemy's front line and thus disrupt their entire army. The concept of the Anchored Line formation is to prevent this by using a heavy defensive unit to protect lighter units behind it – heavy infantry blocking advance against an archer squad, spearmen covering for skirmishers, and so on. The units usually stay within close proximity to each other so enemy units cannot simply bypass the "anchor" and strike the softer target beyond. The anchor may even be entrenched in some way – spears set into the ground, small trenches or barricades constructed to stymie enemy attacks, or the like.

Naturally, an Anchored Line formation is difficult to maintain while moving. The entire point is to be an immovable obstruction, which is easier to achieve when the defending soldiers are allowed to plant both feet firmly in the ground and ready themselves for enemy attacks. Although it is possible to move forward in such a formation, it requires them to advance very slowly.

"Archer Squad"

Even a single squadron of archers can be a significant problem for the enemy. Every army employs basic countermeasures against archer fire – straw barriers, concealing terrain, and even shugenja spells when they are available. Soldiers are also trained to wait for a pause in enemy arrow fire and charge from cover during that moment. The Archer Squad formation seeks to overcome these defenses by coordinating fire between two or more squadrons of bowmen. While one squadron fires, the next

readies its arrows, maintaining a constant rain of attacks on the enemy.

"Archer's Row"

Though the Archer Squad formation has advantages, sometimes sheer strength in numbers is able to overcome opponents where guile and positioning will not. An Archer's Row formation gathers several squadrons of archers into one place, coordinating their fire in order to overwhelm a portion of the enemy army with a relentless barrage of arrows. Unless the enemy is heavily armored, it can effectively stop infantry advance through one particular area - restricting the kind of enemy threats the army has to contend with. Archer Rows can also be used as part of a slow advance or retreat - as one unit fires, the next one moves several steps, and the two alternate as long as needed.

The Archer's Row is actually considered the default deployment for armies with large numbers of archery units, such as Mantis and Crane armies. Even in other armies it is a common tactic, since most samurai are well-trained with the bow. Thus, most commanders factor the possibility of an Archer's Row into their own plans, although the most common response is simply to wait out the barrage before advancing – an army cannot bring infinite arrows, after all. As a result, anti-archer measures are well-known and widely employed by most armies.

"Cautious Advance"

Though there is no particular name for this formation across the Empire, all clan armies understand the value of deploying with caution as they advance toward the enemy. This is probably the most basic formation of all, and typically features all the main front-line legions moving forward in a group at a slow pace. Sometimes the individual units will alternate fast and slow advances, allowing different forces to maintain the front while others stay behind in reserve. The purpose of a Cautious Advance is to give the army as much time as possible to react to changes in the enemy's deployments, while maintaining its own ranks. Naturally, such slow speeds remove the possibility of quickly seizing on the enemy's mistakes or openings quickly. This is a problem, but also somewhat the purpose of the Cautious Advance, since such "openings" might actually be ploys or traps by the enemy. Instead of falling into such ambushes, the army advances slowly and retains a strong position throughout.

"Lotus at Dusk"

Tactics of surprise and ambush have always been somewhat controversial in the accepted bounds of Rokugani warfare, even resulting in an Imperial condemnation of portions of *Leadership* itself. It is often considered dishonorable to make attacks on unprepared foes or on helpless targets – such as burning farm villages to deny supplies to the foe. However, the idea of what is a "fair" or "prepared" target is extremely subjective, and many commanders stretch such ideas to their limit in order to gain advantage.

What has never been in question, though, is the validity of making a large-scale surprise attack against an enemy army. While the victim of such attack might wish to call it cowardly, in fact Rokugani culture accepts that once the call of war is answered and the armies are mustered, only a poor general tries to fault his enemy for attacking him by surprise.

The Lotus at Dusk formation was first adopted by the Scorpion, but rapidly gained popularity and is now used by many clans. The formation is simple, requiring only two ingredients – multiple units and poor visibility. As its name implies, the preferred time to launch it is at dusk (or just before dawn), although fog or smoke can also be utilized. The general splits his army into multiple smaller units and sends them with much noise and energy in spreading directions. The pattern of movement evokes the wide petals of the lotus flower, hence the name. The purpose of the formation is specifically to distract the enemy and cause chaos as the spread out units suddenly converge, striking from many directions in low light, making their true numbers and intentions difficult to discern. The disadvantage of the formation, of course, is that an enemy who sees through the surprise and deception can potentially defeat the individual units in detail.

"Marching Column"

Many generals have had their plans of victory and conquest suddenly thwarted by a simple problem – harassment of their marching army before it ever reaches the enemy force. Indeed, in the Empire's early history armies on the move were considered easy targets, since they lacked reconnaissance and could be surprised and overwhelmed by a sudden ambush. When not deployed for attack they were simply a column of men, unprepared and vulnerable. The Marching Column formation was developed as an answer to this problem.

While the clans have different configurations of the Marching Column based on the strengths of their particular armies, the basic premise is always the same – moving soldiers in a way that prevents surprise attack while maintaining a decent marching speed. This usually involves moving in multiple columns, with heavier units on the outside flanks but screened with scouts. Units are kept relatively close together so they cannot be isolated and picked off one at a time, but not so close that they crowd or obstruct each other.

Obviously, only so much can be done to keep a marching army ready for combat. However, the reality is that it very difficult to ambush an unprepared foe with a full army; such attacks are limited to smaller forces and scout units, and this formation is generally enough to handle such threats. The basic weakness of the Marching Column is the fact that the units are somewhat too close to each other to allow for any complex deployments, which also means archer fire has little chance of avoiding friendly targets in the event of a major engagement.

Crab Formations

The Crab Clan favors formations that compliment the clan's strengths – brute physical superiority and heavy weapons and armor. It may also be noticed that the Crab formations are heavily influenced by the clan's centuries spent defending the Empire's southern border against the Shadowlands, leading to certain practices unknown to the rest of Rokugan.

"Heart of the Mountain"

The Anchored Line formation was originally developed by the Hida family before being adopted by those outside the Crab Clan. While the other clans saw the basic premise was sound, only the Crab felt the need to further improve the idea. Relying on Hida strength and Kaiu heavy armor, the Crab were able to devise a formation that could block not only charging enemy soldiers but also the unnaturally strong foes of the Shadowlands.

Like the Anchored Line formation, the Heart of the Mountain places heavily armored units in front of softer targets. This frontline unit, however, deploys in a checkered formation where the front line is literally held in place by the soldiers behind it. When the front rank is engaged, the second rank soldiers eye where the line might be threatened, and either step up to assist or simply stand behind their comrades to help them keep their footing. This type of fighting is entirely unique to the Crab, whose soldiers see little need to seek individual glory when facing monstrous Shadowlands foes. The result is hardly graceful or elegant, and often confuses Rokugani foes who expect the Crab to immediately break out into individual combat when engaged. To the Crab, however, there is no need for elegance or personal display when rampaging oni are trying to knock their way past the Crab frontline.

Like any defensive formation, Heart of the Mountain is almost useless when the army is attempting to move forward. Hence the Crab preference for letting their foes exhaust themselves with failed attacks before counter-attacking.

"Hida's Formation"

After refining the Heart of the Mountain formation in their early history, Crab generals began to apply the same basic concept to offensive maneuvers. Experience showed that a heavy front line moving forward slowly was vulnerable to enemy forces outmaneuvering or overwhelming even the strongest soldiers. But where the Lion might have thought to shore up this weakness, the Crab decided to use this disadvantage as a potential strength.

Hida's Formation is similar to the Heart of the Mountain, placing heavy armored units to the fore in a staggered formation, but with larger openings between units. The front line does not hold position but instead makes a slow, inexorable advance, overwhelming the enemy by simple marching over and through them. Because of their spread-out deployment, enemies often attempt to push into the Crab ranks as the army advances... which is exactly what the Crab want. Enemies find themselves surrounded by enormous Crab warriors who shove and slam them from all sides as they keep advancing. Most enemy soldiers are battered into exhaustion and then cut down by the Crab in the last few ranks of the formation. All the while, the unit continues advancing slowly.

This formation only works if the Crab are able to advance slowly across open ground with no concern for their flanks. Rugged terrain can disrupt the formation and cause the whole conflict to degenerate into the usual Rokugani skirmishing, while open flanks leave it vulnerable to being defeated in detail.

"Soul of the Crab"

All families of the Crab Clan understand war. To this end, when all the Crab families come together on the same battlefield, the diversity of tactics and precision with which they are executed is stunning and terrible to

their foes. Hida warriors, Kaiu siege weaponry, Hiruma scouts, and Kuni magical power acting in concert creates an army which few enemies can defeat. The Soul of the Crab formation is designed to take advantage of the clan's full resources in those rare battles where all of them are on the same field.

The formation places Hida veterans in the center of the army, with Kaiu siege engines protected behind this line of heavily armored warriors. Hiruma scouts are placed well in front of the rest of the army, tasked to disrupt enemies before the rest of the army advances. Often the formation will hold position for an extended period of time while the Kaiu siege engines batter the enemy forces with deadly precision. The priests of the Kuni hold a safe position near the Kaiu where they can bolster the physical strength of the Hida, heal the wounded, and unleash a barrage of Jade magic if the enemy includes Shadowlands forces.

This formation can also be used defensively or even from behind fortifications, making it one of the reasons why attacking a Crab stronghold is generally seen as a very poor idea. The enemy army is forced to advance into the teeth of Hiruma ambushes and Kaiu barrages before engaging the nearly invincible Hida legions, and it is impossible to get past the Hida to attack the Kaiu or Kuni.

Crane Formations

As one of the smaller military forces in the Empire, the Crane focus on maximizing the impact of their troops, winning with the least amount of force needed. Daidoji commanders excel at making disabling strikes, crippling their enemies instead of overpowering them, and the leaders of the clan use their political and economic clout to bring any conflict to a swift end.

"Iron Pillar"

The Crane do not have the endless armies of the Lion or the Crab to defend their lands, so one of their basic principles is preserving the lives of their individual soldiers as best they can. Heavy armor and other such physical protections only go so far, but blunting an enemy's attack and wearing down their morale is an effective combination that can end a conflict quickly and with modest bloodshed. The Crane realized early on that robbing an enemy of a victory was one of the surest ways to do that.

The Iron Pillar formation is formed by two to three ranks of heavily armored soldiers, but with only one rank of the formation engaging the enemy at a time. The remaining ranks stand several feet behind the front line, and periodically a signal causes the front rank to fall back behind the rest, being replaced with fresh troops. Traditionally, this signal is given at the moment the enemy is about to kill too many soldiers for the line to hold. The replacement of a faltering line with a fresh one is frustrating or even demoralizing for the enemy.

The chief disadvantage of this formation is the difficulty of executing it successfully. Once Rokugani samurai are engaged in combat, it can be quite challenging to get them to break off and withdraw in an organized fashion. Even the well-disciplined Daidoji bushi sometimes succumb to their passions and continue to fight when they are supposed to retreat.

As one might expect, Iron Pillar is practically useless for advancing, but is extremely effective at holding ground or at keeping an enemy army's attention while other units move into position for a flank attack. It is easy for enemy generals to become focused on attempting to defeat a unit that constantly seems just about to buckle... but never quite does.

"Strike and Move"

The Daidoji family has defended the Crane lands since its inception, and has become extremely adept at devising unorthodox tactics to confuse, anger, and fluster enemy generals. A formation the Daidoji call "Strike and Move" is focused on retreating in a manner that punishes enemy pursuers so severely that they eventually break off the chase entirely. This allows the Crane to either truly retreat or spring a counter-attack on an exhausted enemy.

When this formation is employed, lightly armored Daidoji skirmishers create a loose series of ranks with six feet or more between each bushi. They conduct a retreat, but periodically – at a signal from the unit commander – the ranks stop, turn, and strike in pairs at a single foe. Many Daidoji who use this formation make a specialty of striking to maim – attacking the legs, ruining the sword arm, and so on. After each strike the Crane resume their retreat, while the enemy pursuit is disrupted and slowed.

The basic weakness of this formation is the same as many defensive formations – it is difficult for Rokugani samurai to fight in this orderly way for long before losing their cohesion. Also, extremely aggressive or well-protected foes can disrupt the rhythm of the formation. Experienced generals can also recognize the formation and avoid taking the bait, holding back their pursuit or using archery to cut down the Crane.

"Soul of the Crane"

While the enemies of the Crane Clan have learned to respect and fear the prowess of the Daidoji family, many tend to forget the Kakita duelists are not without their own place on the battlefield, and Doji soldiers can be both graceful and surprisingly tenacious in combat. When soldiers from the three families work together, the results can be quite surprising.

This rarely seen formation coordinates several different groups of soldiers, including Daidoji heavy infantry and light ranged skirmishers, Doji bushi, and Kakita infantry and archers. The arrangement of the units places the seemingly vulnerable Kakita forces in the center, a tempting target for an enemy attack. The foe is controlled and baited into this particular attack, but finds the target far more dangerous than expected. Instead of attempting to protect the archers or light infantry, the Daidoji and Doji heavy soldiers countercharge into the exposed enemy forces. Once executed, the formation tends to dissolve into a chaos of individual combats, but the initial maneuvers usually grant the Crane a decisive advantage.

Dragon Formations

Though the Dragon Clan is governed by the Kami Togashi for most of its history, the Mirumoto family is always the one charged with the task of guarding the clan's lands. However, unlike many families with a strong military tradition, the Mirumoto not only respect the power of the Elements, they embrace it – and their formations reflect this understanding.

"Spirits and Steel"

The Dragon have always taken a controversial approach of using shugenja as soldiers, even throwing them into the front lines of heavy engagements. While other clans may have shugenja present as advisors or support units, or an occasional shugenja combatant leading a unit, the Agasha and their successors the Tamori have no hesitation in holding a katana and standing beside their Mirumoto clansmen in battle. As a result, canny Mirumoto generals devised ways for the two to work in unison.

This formation seeds several squadrons of Mirumoto soldiers with shugenja – typically at a 10-to-1 or 12-to-1 ratio. These units are arranged to allow the shugenja to both fight and cast spells in support of their comrades, and are used to hold key positions or take vital objectives. Instead of the more typical wide-spread or long-distance magical effects seen in other armies, the embedded shugenja in the Spirits and Steel formations are able to make coordinated magical strikes in tandem with their bushi comrades, complementing sword and spear with a quick lash of flame or a hurled boulder. Additionally, the shugenja can obstruct the field for the enemy or erect quick fortifications to help defend themselves. The enemy must thus contend with a variety of unexpected challenges from a single formation, making Spirits and Steel extremely difficult to counter – especially for those unaccustomed to facing magic on the battlefield.

The benefits of this formation come with one obvious risk, however – exposure. While Dragon shugenja are more martially inclined than those from other clans, they still lack the training of a true bushi, and their numbers are limited. Thus, the use of this formation always carries with it the possibility of serious losses if it is defeated. One of the best ways to defeat this formation is to single out and kill the shugenja within it – though that is challenging in itself.

"Souls in Harmony"

The Dragon are not alone in using shugenja in combat, but they are unique in employing purely shugenja infantry units to attack the enemy. While the Phoenix do have their famous Elemental Guard shugenja, who are protected by their complementary Elemental Legion, the Dragon have sometimes used the surprising tactic of sending units of pure shugenja into combat – with devastating effect.

This formation consists entirely of shugenja, typically two to four small squadrons of them. While the formation does not employ any complex arrangements or strategems, it is nonetheless potent. The normal approach is to place half the squadrons on the front to engage the enemy bushi while the other half use their magic to strike down enemies from range. Since the shugenja go into action wearing armor and carrying swords, many enemies have no idea what they are facing until these Dragon soldiers suddenly unleash blasts of fire and stone. Indeed, this formation is credited with originating many rumors of Mirumoto bushi being able to command the secrets of the Elements as well as the Niten techniques. Even after the formation's true nature is revealed, the enemy can have a difficult time defeating it... and if they ignore it in favor of engaging other portions of the Dragon army, they make themselves targets for its destructive magic.

Even more than Spirits and Steel, the Souls in Harmony formation has the basic weakness of exposing rare and irreplaceable shugenja to potential death on the battlefield. For this reason, many Dragon generals choose to add supporting squadrons of bushi to the formation, tasked with reinforcing the shugenja if they come under heavy pressure from enemy troops.

"Soul of the Dragon"

Though the other clans often deride the Dragon's unorthodox tactics, wise enemies respect the clan's ability to create flexible forces and to deal with many different opponents and situations. No tactic in the Dragon's arsenal displays this asset so strongly as the complex and confusing formations they can field with the combined forces of their different families.

The formation called Soul of the Dragon brings out two strengths of the Mirumoto – their powerful foot soldiers and their limited numbers of surprisingly effective cavalry archers – while complementing them with the power of the Elements and the clan's mystic tattooed men. The center of the formation is a squadron of heavy Mirumoto infantry, with two smaller squadrons of ise zumi protecting its flanks. The tattooed men and their unique powers are able to weaken and disrupt enemies before they engage the Mirumoto. Arranged in two long columns to either side of the formation's core are four small squadrons of Mirumoto cavalry archers, while behind the front line of Mirumoto and Togashi combatants are two ranks of Dragon shugenja, protected to their front by the infantry and to the sides by the cavalry.

This formation presents a formidable opponent to most foes, since the combination of horse archers and quick-footed monks makes a flanking attack extremely difficult, while a long-ranged encounter faces both archery and magical barrages. The shugenja are protected from all sides but their rear, but even if an enemy is able to attack from that angle, they are hardly defenseless. The formation's only real weakness is that sustained combat will gradually disrupt and degrade its structure, dissolving it into isolated pockets of troops who no longer support each other. The Dragon usually seek to defeat their foes quickly before their formation breaks down.

Lion Formations

It should be no surprise that the Lion Clan boasts the widest array of both battle strategies and battlefield formations. They are, after all, the clan which originated the whole concept of an organized military and have taken it to new heights with each century. It is difficult to generalize about the Lion approach to formations, except to say that all of them are executed with precision and discipline. The Akodo generals have an almost endless supply of army configurations at their disposal, and have great experience in switching from one to another quickly.

"Rain of Death"

Typical Rokugani army arrangement separates out ranged units such as archers from the front-line soldiers, for many reasons. Just as the Akodo were the first to organize in such a fashion, they were also the first to experiment with breaking that convention. The result is a formation of mixed units that contains both heavy infantry and a small number of archers. By arranging these archer units among the regular infantry, the general can place them on the front line to deliver the maximum impact on the foe. Most protection against ranged attacks comes from distance, cover, and awareness – soldiers know when they are within range of enemy archer fire, and the arcing shots of long-range archery often leave much to be desired in accuracy. By moving archers closer to the front, the Lion bowmen can strike with the precision typical of the Akodo, killing key figures such as unit commanders.

This formation's effectiveness, however, relies on enemies being unaware of the danger until it is too late. The number of archers is relatively low, so if they are detected before the enemy draws close their fire is easily mitigated.

"Tiger's Mouth"

An effective and visually impressive formation, the Tiger's Mouth arranges two long narrow columns of spearmen who advance into the enemy line at the run. Once they penetrate the enemy's front, they are expected to turn toward each other and attempt to crush the enemy forces between their ranks. If this is done properly it can be quite devastating, since enemy forces caught between two lines of Lion soldiers (usually ferocious Matsu bushi) are unlikely to survive. Like many formations, the Tiger's Mouth is essentially a one-shot action, since the troops are unlikely to stay in position once the full chaos of battle descends. However, even a single successful execution of Tiger's Mouth can rip open the front of an opposing army, leaving it deeply vulnerable to follow-on attacks from the rest of the Lion forces.

Of course, if the two spearman units are outflanked or overwhelmed before they can fully execute their maneuver, the formation will usually collapse without success. In order to avoid this, the Tiger's Mouth is traditionally executed by troops chosen for their aggression, running speed, and agility, allowing them to carry out their maneuvers before the enemy can fully react.

"Soul of the Lion"

In warfare, few things are as feared as a charging line of Lion bushi, and there are many reasons why. Fearless Matsu, seemingly omniscient Akodo officers, and unpredictable Ikoma create a force that few wish to confront.

This formation places Matsu heavy infantry at the fore, leading the charge against an enemy line – often with spears or other polearms, in order to deliver the maximum shock impact. Behind them are Akodo swordsmen, while Ikoma light infantry guard both flanks of the formation with archery. The formation attempts to maintain its ranks as long as possible, the Matsu forcing a deep wedge into the enemy lines and leaving wounded or bypassed foes to be dealt with by the Akodo. At its best, this formation is an engine of pure destruction, methodically destroying one opposing line after another while the Ikoma ward off those who try to reinforce or to strike the flanks. Of course, once the Soul of the Lion runs out of momentum, a general melee ensues and the formation dissolves – but with any luck, by then the enemy army is already wrecked beyond repair.

Mantis Formations

Throughout its history, first as a Minor Clan and then a Great Clan, the Mantis Clan has taken an unusual approach to organized warfare. The Mantis typically eschew many conventions of war from the mainland, and place a much greater emphasis on adapting quickly to the enemy and coming up with spontaneous strategies on the spot. Despite this, they do have a few tried and true formations they employ consistently.

"Kaimetsu-Uo's Formation"

In their days as a Minor Clan, the Mantis relied heavily on the fact that the Great Clans underestimated them. Although they would prove their worth to whomever they hoped would hire their mercenary soldiers, they also attempted to downplay that strength so their enemies would not see them as too great of a threat.

This formation is an expression of that philosophy: heavy infantry so massively and ornately armored that light infantry soldiers can effectively hide in their ranks until they close in on the enemy. Just before engagement, the light infantry moves out to either side, attempting to quickly flank the unit the heavy infantry is attacking. Like many formations that rely on the element of surprise, the basic advantage of Kaimetsu-Uo's Formation is lost if the enemy is aware of the ruse. Additionally, the formation's densely-packed ranks make it somewhat more vulnerable to enemy archer fire, since each arrow is much more likely to find a target.

"Closing Wave"

An exercise in the view that the most direct attacks are the most effective, this formation spreads one large unit out in a wide half-circle as it moves forward. The goal is to encircle and overwhelm an enemy unit. Mantis soldiers in this formation typically use polearms or spears to try to press the enemy soldiers back into themselves, although they have close-quarters weapons ready for the inevitable melee.

This formation requires both space and numerous soldiers to be effective, which can sometimes be problematic. Against a foe superior in numbers or armament, the formation can quickly collapse, and experienced Mantis commanders usually try to use it only against enemies who are weaker.

"Soul of the Mantis"

In contrast to the other two signature formations of the Mantis Clan, the Soul of the Mantis is a defensive deployment, using at least three units forming a half-circle and holding their ground against an attacking enemy. It uses archery to deplete the enemy as they advance, luring the enemy into an aggressive attack which can then be counter-charged with infantry. In contrast to the other two formations, which trace their history back to the clan's early days, this one was devised after the Mantis attained Great Clan status and incorporated the Tsuruchi family into their ranks.

Many clans tend to forget that while the Tsuruchi archers are greatly skilled, they are hardly helpless in hand-to-hand combat. Consequently, unlike other armies that attempt to cover and protect their bowmen, the Mantis see no problem in leaving them exposed to bait overconfident enemies into a trap. Also, the semi-circle formation sometimes lures the enemy into attempting to spread out and seek the flanks, which is usually a signal for the entire Mantis force to counter-charge.

Phoenix Formations

Phoenix tactics and army formations focus on the guiding principles of bringing a conflict to its end as swiftly as possible and with as little loss of life as possible. Due to both Isawa magic and Shiba skill, Phoenix armies are highly maneuverable and often choose to withdraw after disabling an enemy army, rather than trying to pursue and destroy them.

"Blessings of Steel"

One of the most basic formations taught by the Shiba, Blessings of Steel puts three Shiba infantry units – usually well-armored heavy infantry – in a defensive formation around a group of shugenja. The Shiba advance in a wedge, with the shugenja unit fortifying the bushi and easing their movement. With the Phoenix warriors enshrouded by protective and bolstering magic, one Shiba bushi can easily equal three or four enemy samurai. However, since the shugenja cannot indefinitely maintain these blessings upon the entirety of the formation, the Isawa assign only those shugenja with keen tactical minds to partake in Blessings of Steel. As the formation advances into battle, the shugenja focus their aid on those they believe will make the most impact, or who assisted in keeping the center group safe.

While the Shiba are excellent protectors, the shugenja brought into combat in this way are still in danger, especially once battle is fully joined and the neat lines begin to break down. Enemies who see this formation often make an immediate strong attack, hoping to breach the lines and kill or capture the shugenja in the center.

"Soul of the Phoenix"

This rarely-seen formation occurs only when the entire Phoenix army takes the field. It is a deployment of all four of the Elemental Guards, each located behind the ranks of its associated bushi Legion: the Avalanche Guard, the Firestorm Legion, the Hurricane Initiates, and the Tsunami Legion. There is little a capable general cannot do with such a force at his command.

The only true drawback of this formation is the dizzying array of possibilities. Though the formation is a simple placement of all eight units together, the magical and physical resources which they bring to the field are almost infinite. Fortunately, when this formation takes the field it is usually commanded by the Phoenix Clan Champion, who can call on the memories of all previous Champions to utilize the army to best effect. The Imperial Histories record that this formation has never been defeated, for it brings the stunning true might of the Phoenix to bear on the foe. Given the vast array of available capabilities, it should not be surprising that every defeated foe has given a different account of the Soul of the Phoenix.

Scorpion Formations

Unsurprisingly, the Scorpion Clan employs strategies that focus on misdirection and confusion, attempting to stymie enemy plans more than to advance its own goals. Many enemies of the Scorpion often find the cost of their victory is too high or not worth the frustration and humiliation endured in its pursuit.

"Bayushi's Knives"

After enduring harassment and insult both on and off the battlefield, few enemies can resist the enticing target of a fleeing Scorpion. The Bayushi family learned this early on and devised a formation that relies on quick movement of bushi and the fervor of enemies to carry the day. When

Spider Clan Formations

The Spider Clan is an organized force born from the chaos and darkness of the Shadowlands, and its brief twelfth-century history does not allow much opportunity for the development of sophisticated tactics. What few techniques they do manage to devise highlight their brutal and straightforward fighting style. The ability of Tainted bushi to crush their foes gives a whole new meaning to the term "heavy infantry." Another advantage brought to battle by Tainted soldiers is the mental connection many of the Lost share, at a conscious or unconscious level. The Dark Lord Daigotsu was able to teach his followers to draw on this link in a way not wholly unlike the Naga's Akasha, allowing them to transfer ideas and training quickly between units.

"Memories of the Lost"

This formation draws on the mental connections between Lost soldiers by matching units of veterans with units of disposable soldiers. The link between them allows the lesser troops to fight and act with greater skill than they would otherwise. Of course, this does not make them seasoned veterans themselves; rather, this formation makes otherwise near-worthless soldiers into at least minor threats to the enemy.

"Daigotsu's Discipline"

This basic formation consists simply of two columns of heavy infantry with a narrow front. The twin units charge into the strongest point of the enemy's line, attempting to breach the front and give the Tainted troops free reign to slaughter all those around them. Tainted soldiers, whether of the Daigotsu family or otherwise, can easily slay large numbers of mortal counterparts, so breaching the enemy front allows them to use this advantage to its greatest potential.

The best responses to this formation are either to have a resilient front line which can repulse the initial charge – a capacity generally found only among the Crab – or else to be mobile enough to flank the narrow columns before they can strike home. However, the latter approach requires killing a large number of the Spider bushi before they can force their way into the defending ranks, since the lives of individual Spider are not considered particularly valuable by their commanders.

it is executed, two units break ranks and begin to retreat in an outwardly panicked manner. They seek to lure the enemy into a pursuit, putting on the appearance of fear and defeat, but at a proper signal they halt, turn, re-form, and engage their pursuers. This is done once the enemy has lost all cohesion in the chase, allowing the Scorpion to achieve a brief moment of decisive superiority and swiftly cut down their scattered enemies.

Most bushi are unwilling to engage in such a tactic, viewing it as shameful to feign fear, but the Scorpion have no such scruples. This formation is vulnerable to an enemy who can undertake a disciplined pursuit, as well as to cavalry forces which can overrun the retreating troops before they can re-form. Under such circumstances, the faked retreat often becomes genuine.

"Soul of the Scorpion"

The Bayushi and Shosuro families have worked together closely since the clan's inception, and the field of war is no different in this regard. Though the Shosuro shinobi work primarily as raiders and assassins away from the front lines – a duty which the Scorpion euphemistically refer to as "scouting" – the students of the Shosuro dojo also sometimes make appearances on the field of battle. The most common tactic, which Scorpion generals refer to by this formation name, involves the Shosuro infiltrating the battlefield prior to the day of combat, concealing themselves with disguise and camouflage.

Once the Scorpion general identifies a key target in the enemy lines, a heavy force of Bayushi infantry advance on that position. But when combat begins, the shinobi suddenly emerge from hiding and enter the fight. (They do not appear on the field in their infamous "black pajamas," of course.) In the chaos of battle it seems as though the Scorpion forces have suddenly multiplied, and the surprise onslaught is often enough to overwhelm the enemy unit and thus disrupt their entire army.

The chief weakness of this formation is that the shinobi are relatively lightly armed and armored, relying on surprise to make their attack effective. If the enemy is able to rally, the rare and valuable ninja may be slaughtered.

Unicorn Formations

Both before and after their return to the Empire, the Unicorn devised tactics and formations that exploited the clan's cavalry forces, especially their speed. The Unicorn enjoy attacking enemies from unpredictable directions or in surprising ways.

"Invincible Advance"

A favorite of the Moto, the Invincible Advance formation requires two units of heavy cavalry. The units advance in sequence, one in front of the other. The lead unit is expected to charge right through the enemy ranks, the soldiers only striking at those within reach. This disrupts the enemy line and leaves it in chaos when the second unit charges home. If space and time allow, the first unit will try to reform and then charge back in from the opposite direction, crushing the enemy between the two cavalry forces – however, this requires a great deal of room to maneuver around the enemy, and thus is not always feasible. Additionally, if the enemy has a second or third line that can advance to reinforce the first, the cavalry may find they are the ones trapped and destroyed. Thus, the Unicorn prefer to use this formation only when their enemies are spread thin or have already been weakened with archery or skirmishing.

"Four Winds"

One of the more unusual (and for the enemy, frustrating) formations used by the Unicorn, the Four Winds assembles a large force of light cavalry into one oversized unit, creating an impressive sight as it advances on the enemy. The light cavalry advances toward the foe, but even as the center closes in the flanks break off and form two arcs around the sides of the enemy. Given a sufficient advantage of numbers, these two flanking wings will each have sections break off into an even wider arc to completely encircle the enemy. The speed with which this formation is executed allows for little response time from enemy generals, who can find their army forced within minutes to fight on the front and flanks at the same time.

The Unicorn can execute this formation in many different variations and on surprisingly small battlefields. Its main weakness is that it requires a large number of light cavalry; heavy cavalry are too slow to execute the maneuvers effectively. However, light cavalry does not have the armor and strength of heavier units, so the formation can also be defeated by a stalwart defense. A common variant of this formation is to place heavy cavalry in the center while the light cavalry is restricted to the flanks, forcing the enemy to commit its main strength in the center as well.

"Soul of the Unicorn"

Some Rokugani like to argue over whether the most powerful heavy cavalry units in the Empire are the Utaku Battle Maidens or the Moto White Guard. The very unfortunate few who have stood against both at the same time can attest that some questions are better left unasked. When the swift Shinjo, fearless Utaku, and merciless Moto take the field together, it is well apparent why the return of the Unicorn changed the face of Rokugani warfare.

This formation is the classic attack structure which the Unicorn have used ever since their arrival in the Empire, and often encompasses an entire army rather than just a few units within the army. The center of the formation is composed of thick columns of heavy cavalry – Utaku Shiotome and Moto bushi. Units of light cavalry and Shinjo horsebowmen support the advance from behind and on both flanks. The formation initially advances slowly while the horsebowmen weaken the enemy defense; at a suitable moment, the Unicorn sound the charge and the Utaku and Moto troops hurl themselves forward to break the enemy line. As the combat progresses, the Shinjo either strike the flanks to support the heavies, or break off to threaten new targets and obstruct enemy counterattacks.

This formation is aimed specifically at mounting a single overwhelming attack, either to take a key objective or break the enemy's army. However, it is also occasionally used as a feint, convincing the enemy that an attack is going after a specific portion of the field... only to see the superior speed of the Unicorn cavalry redeploy them to a new weakness exposed in the enemy's ranks.

Rituals and Traditions of Battle

The samurai of Rokugan judge victory in conflict and warfare in different ways; actual success in battle is but one way, albeit the most telling. Rituals of war, customs of victory and defeat, add significance and meaning to every samurai's participation in war. Most of the rituals, customs, and cultural mores discussed here are common throughout the Empire, although some are specific to particular clans.

Treatment of the Wounded

Although samurai will fight without mercy while a battle endures, the Tenet of Compassion dictates that attitudes must change once a conflict is over and the field is won or lost. Many clans have a tradition of sending *heimin* onto the field to treat and retrieve the wounded after a battle. Naturally, these *heimin* will aid their own side's wounded first, starting with samurai and then the ashigaru. However, the Crane, Phoenix, and in some cases the Unicorn are known for also helping the enemy wounded, asserting that to leave a courageous fellow samurai untreated is a violation of Compassion (and arguably Courtesy as well).

However, this attitude toward wounded men is not universal. Pragmatic and ruthless clans such as the Scorpion and Crab do not always take such a generous view, and even the most compassionate clans may sometimes give rise to generals who are ruthless while on campaign even if they are souls of compassion away from the field of war. Such commanders believe allowing wounded men to heal and rejoin their defeated army is foolish, perhaps even dishonorable – after all, what samurai would wish to live after his side is defeated? These generals impose the ritual of *todome no ichigeki*, sending out soldiers or even *heimin* with small knives to end the lives of badly wounded foes. Of course, such actions are often bitterly condemned by the more idealistic samurai of the Empire.

Battlefield Heraldry

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

- The Book of Sun Tao

Of the myriad aspects of war, knowledge of the enemy – information about his ancestry, his past, and his temperament – is perhaps most vital to success in battle. Heraldry is the declaration of the self and of loyalty; in Rokugan, this declaration is meant to convey the power of tradition and the pride a loyal samurai feels for his family and his lord. Moreover, unity and camaraderie are enhanced by service under the same banner. For the informed, however, heraldry is also both a signpost toward victory and a tool of intimidation. After all, opposing commanders and units can be identified by the mon they fly on their banners, and such information can be used to ferret out their identity, goals, and history before facing them in battle. It is rare for even the newest of commanders to lack knowledge of history and heraldry, and any experienced soldier will be familiar with every level of markings that can be found on the battlefield. Scribes record heraldry and its changes constantly, and a wise commander will familiarize himself with such information.

Typically, the majority of soldiers in a Rokugani army will wear sashimono (back-banners) identifying their unit and commander. Gunso, chui, and taisa will carry their own banners identifying their commands and listing the glorious battles in which they have participated. Finally, the great J'uma Jirushi of the families and clans list the history of their generals and armies, their exploits and victories, oftentimes with detailed citations, awards, and other such information intended to glorify their side and intimidate their foes. Thus, all banners are capable of providing at least some basic of information, such as unit, Status, fame, and sometimes personal details of the identified soldiers. And even the lowest-ranking officers will wear other heraldic symbols that can identify their rank: knotted or decorated tassels tied at the end of a hilt, for example, with more knots or unusual decoration equaling higher rank and importance.

Of course, all such information is fluid. A single battle can produce changes that may take weeks or months for scribes to record. A change in control of a new province or holding may not be recognized for some time. Glorious duels and slayings of sworn enemies must be recorded onto banners. Some generals actually bring artisans into the field to ensure the army's J'uma Jirushi is properly modified as a campaign progresses, allowing each victory to be proclaimed on the next field and thus weaken the resolve of the opposing side.

Because banners convey so much information, the more cunning generals will also use them to deceive the enemy. For example, a commander may send in banner-bearers representing numerous different units in order to create an oppressive sense of power and numbers, or put false banners on his troops to conceal the true nature of his forces or the true location of key units. Even the more honorable armies, such as those of the Lion and Crane, have been known to manipulate and exploit heraldry in this way.

Battlefield Boasting

"War is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will." – Tangen's Lies

The sight is a common one: a general steps out ahead of his men, into the empty space between two massed armies, and begins to shout the history of his ancestors and his own personal victories. The opposing commander does the same. One may seek to inspire his own side and weaken the resolve of the opponent's forces, while another may try to incite anger in his opposing foe in hope of provoking a personal duel. This tradition of battlefield boasting, sometimes called the ritual of declaration, is so common in Rokugani war that its occasional absence is a surprise.

Sensei at the various war colleges liken the ritual of declaration to the opening stages of an iaijutsu duel, when each duelist seeks to detect the weaknesses of his opponent. (Indeed, much like a duelist may concede before swords are drawn, there have been instances of generals who recognize no positive outcome for spending the lives of their men, and lead their armies off the field without giving battle.) However, this pre-battle rhetoric is not left to the field commanders alone. Even while the armies march, courtiers spread gossip designed to shake or bully the enemy, hoping it will reach the ears of rival commanders and shake their resolve. Countless battles have been prevented by such tactics, as the right phrase in a suitably receptive ear can have devastating effects.

It should be noted that boasting, both on the field and off of it, is not always sincere. Lying about the prowess of a general, embellishing an army's strength or a commander's record, or even misrepresenting the actual identity of the general himself are all tactics which have been employed from time to time, honor notwithstanding. The Scorpion, unsurprisingly, engage in such deception with ease, although they often do so in subtler fashion by making themselves and their armies appear weak and lacking in confidence. (For more discussion of such dishonorable actions, see the section on Forbidden Tactics later in this chapter.)

Desertion and Other Failures of Duty

It should go without saying that desertion is viewed very negatively indeed in Rokugan, a society with a proud tradition of loyalty, duty, and service to those of higher station. Furthermore, one of the infamous Three Sins that the Rokugani seek to avoid is Fear. Thus, desertion is considered such a repulsive act that many commanders will even execute deserters from opposing armies if they catch them. The Rokugani see no possible excuse, no reasonable explanation, for such a failure of judgment and duty.

Desertion is not only a personal crime but one that affects the entire army. Knowledge that one's fellow soldiers have fled from battle rips apart morale, breaks down unit cohesion, and can cause a general collapse on the field of battle. A single deserter can cause a rout if he is not punished quickly and harshly. Thus, most officers try to slay such traitorous individuals immediately, usually by decapitation.

Any deserters "lucky" enough to escape the battle who are later captured alive are punished with a more ritualized process of execution. Generally, a commander will gather all such deserters together for execution before the assembled rank-and-file. Decapitation without any option for seppuku is the traditional punishment, and is considered so degrading that a commander will rarely use his own blade to accomplish the task. Instead, a specially-designed sword called a gunto is utilized, the sword brought out only for executions and then put away immediately afterward, lest the offending dishonor corrupt others. (There is also a far harsher form of decapitation called *nokogiribiki* – punishment by sawing – discussed in the Forbidden Tactics section later.)

Failure in adherence to duty is the most severe of battle crimes, but desertion is not the only form such crimes can take. Theft of rations and supplies, offering false testimony against fellow soldiers, general dereliction of duty, and repeated minor infractions all represent lesser forms of betrayal. When the clans are not in outright war, these lesser crimes are punished with fines, punitive duties, or with a shaming loss of rank and status. Relegation

to inferior service – perhaps even serving alongside the ashigaru – is particularly popular. However, when a clan's army is on active campaign, punishment is much more severe, and the Crab and Lion Clans maintain this level of discipline at all times. Decapitation for such lesser crimes is still rare, but public flogging and cuffing are common, as is a denial of battlefield assignment (itself a punishment so shaming that many samurai will request seppuku in response).

Looting and Destruction

War is fought for reasons beyond counting, but no reason is as common as control of resources. Consequently, armies often try to weaken their foes by seizing or destroying valuable resources, both property and retainers. Victors do this to ensure their triumph is not short-lived, while the defeated do the same to deny their foes the fruits of victory.

Typically, a victorious general will seek out the most valuable commodities and the most skilled *heimin* in a conquered territory and claim them in the name of the clan – perhaps even adding them to his own possessions. Skilled commoners such as artisans, carpenters, and blacksmiths are especially prized. Goods and foodstuffs unique to the region are also considered especially desirable and many campaigns end with wagon trains carrying great loads of such loot back to the homeland.

Destruction of resources may be employed by both sides, depending on the circumstances. A ruthless defensive rikugunshokan will destroy food and shelter or even kill useful *heimin* rather than let them fall into enemy hands. A victorious invader may do the same to ensure the defenders do not recover quickly from the war. Prized farmlands are burned, rice paddy dikes torn open, silk works and sake works wrecked, and *heimin* killed or scattered. Of course, this sort of ruthless tactic can easily descend into atrocities, leading to peasant uprisings or other undesirable results.

Hostage Taking

The custom of *hitojichi* (claiming hostages) dates all the way back to the dawn of the Empire, and at times has even been used by the Emperor himself in order to impose peace on the clans. For example, Emperor Hantei XI, whose reign saw the first battle with the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban, required every major family daimyo and his family to spend a minimum of two months of every year in the capitol city of Otosan Uchi as "guests of the Emperor," discouraging the clans from waging war in the uneasy aftermath of the Bloodspeaker's attack. Similar methods have been used by the clans with each other, taking hostages to reinforce a treaty or ensure a peace.

The *hitojichi* traditions were badly abused during the mad reign of Emperor Hantei XVI, who routinely tortured and executed hostages to maintain his power. After his death, Seppun Hanako's *Articles of Heaven* established stricter requirements for the honorable treatment of hostages. The Articles called for hostages to be exchanged not only to secure a treaty after a war but also prior to war as a way of averting the conflict. Indeed, the law allows the Emperor to ensure peace by issuing an Imperial decree to force a hostage exchange on unwilling factions.

Hanako's *Articles of Heaven* suggest the second son or daughter of a daimyo be chosen for the purpose of serving as a hostage. This assures dedication to the new peace while also protecting the eldest heirs. The length of time a hostage spends with his or her "hosts" can vary widely. For simple treaties or short-term truces, hostages remain with their captors for no more than a year, but a major war can result in hostages spending a decade or more away from their homes. They are treated as honored guests, exposed to the traditions and customs of their captors, and often train alongside the samurai of their "host." In some instances, this has actually led to a hostage swearing fealty to the host, but this is quite rare, and in most cases the hostage eventually returns home.

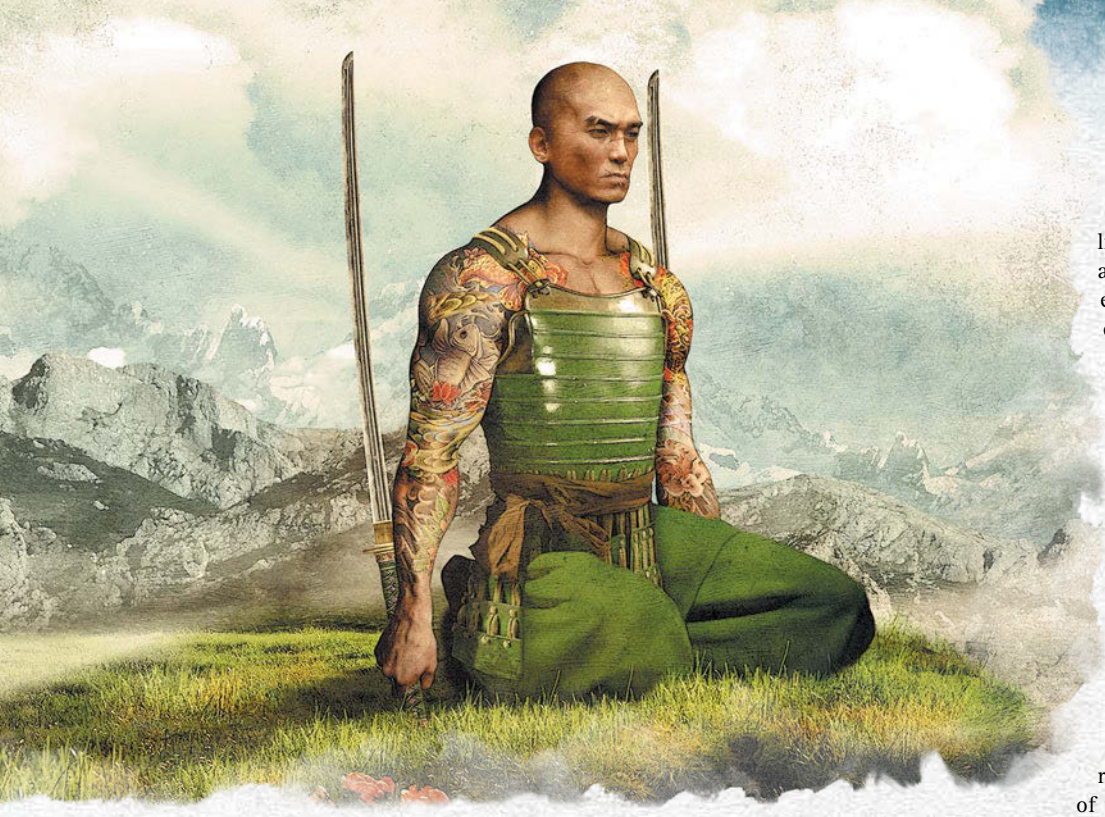
It is considered highly dishonorable for a hostage to attempt escape. After all, the hostage's presence represents the given word of his family and clan, all of whom will be shamed if he flees. Should a hostage actually violate this principle and escape, he will most likely be summarily executed by whoever finds him – even his own family.

Limitations on Standing Armies

"To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." – Sun Tao

Gentei higi, the ritual of restriction, is often used by political clans to contain the threat from their more aggressive neighbors. The size and power of all standing armies in the Emerald Empire is limited by the Will of Heaven – as expressed through the Emperor's words – and by the Imperial Bureaucracy. Clan Champions who wish to significantly increase the size of their armed forces must lobby the Imperial authority with their reasons. Increasing an army without permission may result in Imperial censure, loss of status and holdings, or even a visit from the Imperial Legions. All of these restrictions are ultimately expressions of the first Hantei's victory over his brothers and sisters, granting him the right to control and limit their military forces.

In modern times, the ritual of restriction serves as a way for the smaller clans to place limits on the military potential of larger clans. By appealing to the judgment of the Throne, they can prevent the more aggressive clans from overwhelming them. After the end of the Hantei Dynasty, the reign of the Toturi sees this constraint become far less reliable, as the Toturi Emperors saw little interest in trying to restrain the martial clans. The Iweko Dynasty and its mandate from Heaven restored this authority, but the tumultuous events of the late twelfth century – the Destroyer War and subsequent settlement of the Colonies – wrought an environment in which the Throne seldom imposed restraints on military forces.



Tattooing

In most of Rokugani society, tattoos tend to associated with criminals and bandits, or at best with the enigmatic Ise Zumi monks of the Dragon Clan. *Heimin* instinctively fear anyone with a tattoo, while samurai regard such defacing of the skin as crude and repellant. However, there are exceptions to these views among soldiers of certain clans. They consider tattoos to be marks of honor, badges of respect, and works of art commemorating glorious deeds. Such bushi seek out skilled tattoo artists, or learn to create tattoos themselves. Some commanders actually encourage their soldiers to acquire tattoos denoting their unit, seeing this as a way of boosting morale. Other soldiers etch a personal chop, a family mon, or the name of their commander as a way of showing loyalty. Finally, soldiers may get tattoos to commemorate a specific battle or campaign. Regardless, these customs are found mainly among rank-and-file samurai – those of higher social rank tend to be far more cautious when it comes to marring their flesh.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Dragon are the most likely samurai to get tattoos, and favor unique designs which have special personal meaning. The Mirumoto are the most likely of any bushi in the Empire to commemorate a major battle – won or lost – with permanent ink on their skin. They believe the artwork serves as a physical reminder of insight gained, wisdom discovered, and adversity faced or awaiting. Samurai of the Crab and Mantis also tend to take a liberal view of tattooing – the Mantis in particular, doubtless due to their long associations with sailors and pirates. Bushi of the Mantis have been known to all but cover themselves in vicious and intimidating markings, distinguishing themselves and cowing their opponents. The Crab are less likely to embrace tattoos to such an extent, but they are also the clan least likely to refrain from tattooing in the upper ranks of their leadership – the Clan Champion Hida O-Ushi, for example, famously tattooed much of her arms and upper body.

Other Great Clan samurai are much more limited in their approach to the tattooing art. The Daidoji of the Crane Clan are a rare exception; they traditionally place a tattoo of their family mon on their inner wrists at their gempukku, a permanent reminder of their sworn duty to the Crane.

Although the Lion as a whole avoid tattoos, it is not unheard of for Matsu soldiers to add decoration to their skin after an especially glorious or spectacular victory. They consider the pain of the tattoo process a reminder of their fallen brethren, and typically favor simple and clear markings which serve as reminders of the honor and glory of the fallen.

Lastly, it should surprise no one that many ronin get tattoos. In particular, ronin who belong to an otokodate – a ronin brotherhood – will often get a tattoo of their group's name or symbol in lieu of a clan samurai's mon. Individual ronin bushi may also get tattoos to commemorate their deeds or intimidate their enemies.

The Price of Defeat: Battlefield Suicide

"A great general accepts none of the credit, and all of the blame." – Akodo's Leadership

Seppuku is the ultimate physical expression of the Code of Bushido, a samurai inflicting the most agonizing of deaths on himself in order to purge the shame of his dishonor from his family name. Seppuku is usually conducted as an elaborate ritual, with many witnesses, a final haiku poem, and a "second" whose duty is to sever the samurai's head before he can flinch or show pain. However, not all ritual suicides take place in such refined circumstances.

Upon the field of battle, a failed rikugunshokan who is not outright slain in his defeat will usually commit seppuku on the field in order to expunge the dishonor of his failure. This is a rare instance in which it is considered acceptable for a samurai to commit seppuku without first seeking permission, and soldiers who encounter a foe who is clearly preparing to kill himself will often hold back and wait for him to do so – after all, only a truly dishonorable samurai would deny another samurai the chance to preserve family honor. In fact, this seppuku commonly includes not only the general but also command staff, personal retainers, and lower-ranking officers who die alongside their commander in honorable solidarity. Even if the defeated general escapes the battle and returns to his lord, he will usually ask for permission to commit seppuku to atone for his failure, and it is rare for this request to be denied.

The mass seppuku of an entire unit, legion, or populace, while extremely rare, is not wholly unknown. The greatest example of this in Rokugan's history is probably the

fabled incident known as the Night of Falling Stars. The Lion general Matsu Aigito conducted a three-week siege of the Crane castle Shiro no Yogin. The Crane barricaded themselves within the city and used underground runners to resupply themselves, but finally a contingent of ronin soldiers in the Lion army found them out. The tunnels were destroyed, the runners slain, and that night with defeat clearly impending every Crane in the castle – men, women, and even children – chose to leap from the castle walls rather than face the shame of defeat and surrender. The dying Crane carried torches with them to their deaths, filling the night with symbolic falling stars.

It should be remembered that the act of seppuku is a universal tradition across the Empire, and while some clans are more willing to endure or forgive failure than others, no clan will ever deny that a samurai has the right to request seppuku after defeat. To be sure, the Scorpion thrive on deception and sometimes the "failure" of a Scorpion army is only a stepping stone to later victory, but even Scorpion generals commit seppuku with regularity. Similarly, the intensely practical Crab do not always readily commit seppuku on the field, but a failed general may instead be allowed to go "looking for Hida," committing suicide with a final hopeless attack on the Shadowlands. Ultimately, no matter the clan or the situation, a general is expected to take responsibility for the failure for his army, and it is rare when this does not lead to death.

Taking and Displaying Heads

Perhaps the most obviously brutal ritual of war, the exhibition of severed enemy heads is considered a glorious show of one's battlefield prowess and success. Many samurai carry several sturdy burlap sacks tied to their armor for the purpose of collecting the heads of those they slay. Once an enemy is dead, it is a simple matter to remove the head, either with a swift strike from the katana or with the use of a tanto or aiguchi. The heads are carried back for display after the battle.

The history of headhunting probably dates back to before the fall of the Kami, and the original justification for this bloody but effective method of boasting is unknown. However, the most likely reason is to prove one's deeds. Defeating a renowned (or infamous) opponent always brings great glory to the victor, and a severed head is the ideal way to prove such an act to one's lord. Likewise, for a ronin mercenary, a notable victory can earn an increase in pay, a rise in rank, or even a potential oath of fealty to his employer's clan. Thus the tradition of collecting heads endures, and in modern times the taking of heads is one of the very few instances in which a samurai may touch dead flesh without instantly dishonoring himself. Some generals disapprove of the practice, however, because it encourages their soldiers to break ranks and charge rashly deep into enemy lines in search of notable trophies.

Magistrates and wardens also engage in head-collecting. The heads of criminals and bandits are often preserved for later display to prove their defeat to the populace. The heads may even be packed in salt for preservation and carried days or weeks away from the site of death.

Atama Tenji – Head Displays

Although the most common practice with enemy heads is for each soldier to present his heads to his commander, there have been instances in which a general or daimyo may wish to use severed heads for a larger display of triumph. In these cases the general orders the construction of an *atama tenji* – a display of heads. Wooden posts (often taken from destroyed enemy buildings) are erected in a structure similar to a *torii* arch – twin posts rising up to support a central arch. Spikes are driven through the top arch and the heads of notable enemies are mounted on them, creating a terrifying memorial to victory.

An *atama tenji* may be small, displaying the head of only a single notable foe in his hour of defeat, or it may be large enough to fill a town square, a gruesome piece of architecture often built in the heart of the defeated enemy's stronghold. No matter the size, the purpose is twofold: revealing the glory and power of the victor, while intimidating the followers of the defeated.

During certain bloody eras of Rokugan's history, such as the reign of Hantei XVI, battlefield commanders would issue sizeable payment – in the form of confiscated lands or property – in exchange for enemy heads. This sometimes could be problematic due to the cumbersome nature of severed heads, and occasionally the expectation was lessened to require only noses or ears. In some conflicts this resulted in bloody battlefields being littered with *hanazuka* (nose mounds) or *mimizuka* (ear mounds) where the parts were counted and rewards issued.

In normal times, such customs are abhorred by most of the Empire, but the Crab Clan does use these methods with its famous Twenty Goblin Winters, which award fealty to ronin who can deliver the severed heads of twenty goblins. The Crab will accept ears or noses in place of full heads, recognizing the difficulty of hauling a huge bundle of goblin heads back to the Wall. It should also be noted that the custom of taking heads is not universally accepted by all clans. The Crane and the Phoenix in particular dislike the practice, seeing it as brutal and uncouth, and their generals usually forbid it to their soldiers.

Despite these restrictions, chopping off the head of an enemy is such a powerfully symbolic act that it appears time and again in Rokugani culture, especially in Noh and Kabuki theater. The ronin actor Ginza earned fame for his play about the merciless Matsu Gongoro, face and helm streaked with the blood of his enemies. Ginza would raise a massive stage sword, the size of a tree limb, to the accompaniment of thunderous drum beats. With the aid of clever stagecraft he would proceed to lop the heads off a dozen or more enemies, then meticulously arrange each one atop a spiked dais for display.

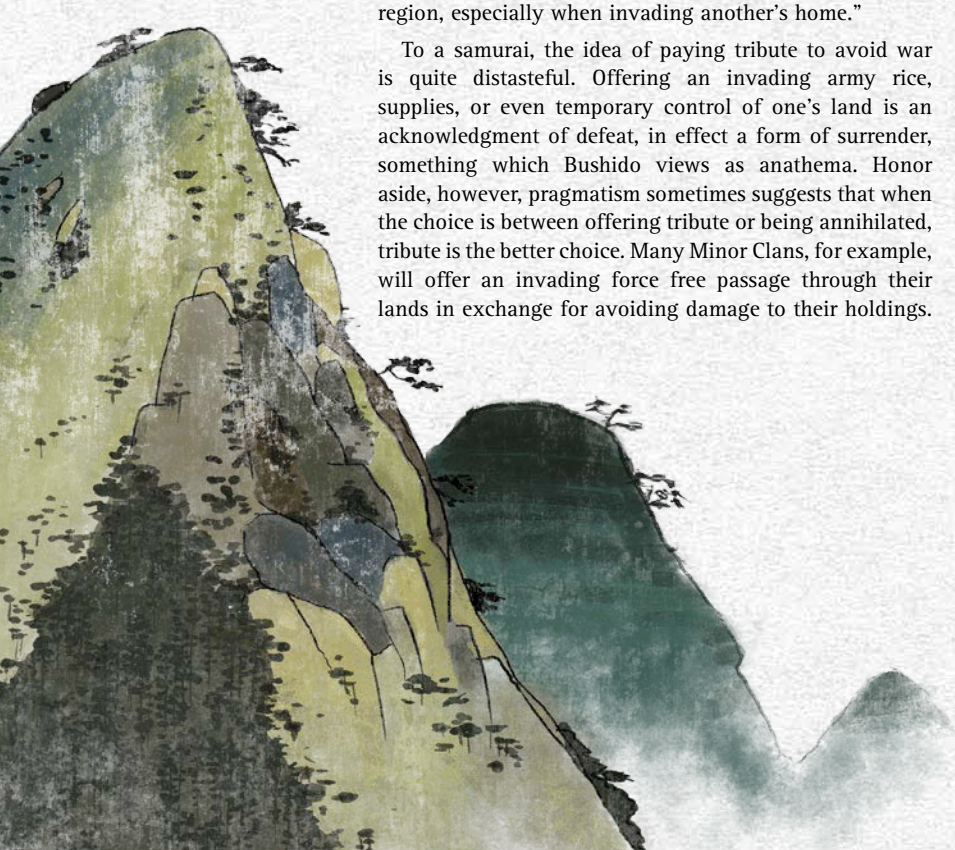
Paying Tribute

Under Rokugani law, all lands belong to the Emperor, and the clans are all mere stewards overseeing the management of the Emperor's property. However, in practice the daimyo see the lands they rule as their own possessions, to use and exploit as they see fit so long as they pay their proper taxes to the Throne at the end of each year. This being the case, lords always try to avoid placing too much burden on their own lands during wartime, preferring instead to draw as many supplies as possible from the enemy territories they invade. As Sun Tao says, "You must forage, you must take from the surrounding region, especially when invading another's home."

To a samurai, the idea of paying tribute to avoid war is quite distasteful. Offering an invading army rice, supplies, or even temporary control of one's land is an acknowledgment of defeat, in effect a form of surrender, something which Bushido views as anathema. Honor aside, however, pragmatism sometimes suggests that when the choice is between offering tribute or being annihilated, tribute is the better choice. Many Minor Clans, for example, will offer an invading force free passage through their lands in exchange for avoiding damage to their holdings. Similarly, an invading rikugunshokan will sometimes send out scouts and couriers to request a tithe of food and supplies in lieu of annexing the region. After all, provinces on the borders between clan lands may change hands a dozen times over a single century, and it is in these territories that tribute is most likely to occur.

Tribute may be offered in a simple fashion or with grand ritual. If a ritual is held, the general of the army will meet publicly with the ranking local official – this could be anyone from a provincial daimyo down to a village headman. A ceremony takes place in which the official hands over token gifts representing the larger tribute, such as a bushel of rice, a barrel of fish, or a wagon full of supplies. This is done before as large an audience as possible so as to remind everyone that submission has been made to the invading army. Of course, a wise and compassionate general will never take more tribute than necessary, since to do otherwise may drive the populace to desperation and revolt.

In some cases, tribute may take the form of a long-term concession. Trade concessions may be added to peace treaties, for example. Reparations of this sort usually only last a few years or at most a single generation, although that is often more than enough for the defeated side to swear eternal vengeance. Hostages, as discussed earlier, can also be considered a form of long-term tribute.



Forbidden Tactics

"Winning is the most important thing in war."
– Sun Tao

There are no tactics or weapons that Sun Tao excluded from use on moral grounds, although the Great General would be the first to admit that not all theories can be used in practice. This section discusses those wartime tactics and actions which the Empire considers to be at least shameful and, in some cases, wholly beyond the pale. Of course, a few groups such as the Scorpion Clan are known for their deliberate use of forbidden methods of war, both for the practical advantages and sometimes to incite rage in their foes. The Crab Clan considers no tactic off limits in its ceaseless war against the Shadowlands, a foe wholly without honor and thus undeserving of honor's protections. Moreover, even the most honorable clans have a few rogue commanders who seek victory by whatever means necessary, claiming they are motivated by duty. A common trick is to issue verbal orders for horrific actions and then later disavow any knowledge of subordinates' disgraceful actions.

Deception is a near-universal tactic, utilized by even paragons of Bushido such as the Lion. However, certain types of deceptions are never used by honorable clans. For example, lying in one's battlefield declarations and heraldry is considered altogether loathsome by the Lion

Clan, who are mindful that Bushido requires a samurai to "own every word he speaks." Other samurai have been known to use such tactics, however; for example, recounting a false lineage that serves to cow an opponent with the weight of history. Manipulation of heraldry is rare but also sometimes used, since a commander who shifts the banners and symbols of his units can trick his enemy into a fatal misstep.

Unchecked or deliberately ruthless destruction of lands and holdings is sometimes considered to cross the line into dishonorable or forbidden action, especially among the more compassionate clans such as the Crane or Unicorn. In its most extreme cases this can become a deliberate effort to render a land completely unusable to the enemy, crippling the production of goods and services by destroying mines and sake works, killing skilled artisans and craftsmen, and burning and wrecking houses, family shrines, watch posts, and castles. (Such tactics are rare but not wholly unknown, and have even been used in defense – during the Hidden Emperor era, for example, Daidoji Uji wrecked and salted the farmlands conquered by the Mantis in order to deny the invaders the crops.) At its most extreme, this approach can even lead to wholesale extermination of the enemy samurai population.

Destroying major castles or other such ancient structures is considered especially heinous to most Rokugani because it represents an annihilation of history and tradition. In this regard, an especially damning action is the destruction of ancient texts, records of lineage, and other such written documents that detail the defeated side's history and traditions. Few leaders are willing to allow such a travesty. This act becomes especially shameful in the twelfth century after the War Against the Darkness, in which the ancient Shadow sought to destroy humanity's past with this very tactic.

Looting the field of battle is an action so shameful that even ronin must avoid notice when doing it. Still, a pragmatic commander may choose to turn a blind eye to such an act, especially if the war is a desperate one and every resource is needed. Normally, enemy daisho, banners, and other items of prominence are either exchanged after the conflict – an act of courtesy between samurai, so that the fallen are properly respected and their legacy passed on to their family – or kept as trophies, publicly displayed and admired. The latter option is especially popular for banners, and most great Rokugani castles have displays of enemy banners captured over the centuries. However, vindictive or ruthless generals have been known to order the destruction of all such items, either to deny resources to the enemy or to inflict humiliation.

Desecration of bodies (aside from the tradition of taking heads) is considered truly despicable, but more than one enraged samurai has stooped to such actions, hacking apart or otherwise shaming the corpses of his foes.

It may be noted, finally, that Rokugani do not consider it proper to take other samurai as prisoners (except for shugenja, whose rarity makes them precious resources). Capturing a samurai is denying him the chance to die with honor, and any action which emphasizes his captivity is a

Nokogiribiki: Punishment by Sawing

As briefly mentioned in the earlier section on desertion, a few commanders have been known to employ an extremely harsh and controversial form of battlefield punishment: *nokogiribiki*, or punishment by sawing. Nokogiribiki was rarely used even in the Empire's early history and was largely abolished after the reign of Hantei XVI. The punishment was reserved for the worst criminals: traitors, spies, and deserters on the battlefield. If a soldier's actions were said to fall into those categories and had disrupted the battle to a "significant degree," or put the lives of fellow soldiers in great danger, nokogiribiki could be imposed. The process was simple and brutal: the offending criminal was buried in the ground, with only his head remaining free. A simple bamboo saw was placed on a nearby stand or thrown on the ground next to the prisoner. Those harmed by his crimes were then encouraged to use the saw on his neck. Needless to say, this was both a slow death and a supremely agonizing and shameful one.

The practice of nokogiribiki is believed to have originated in the dawn of the Empire with the actions of a man called Kaiu Zenjubo. He was a tribal chieftain who swore fealty to Hida's follower Kaiu and served in the First War against Fu Leng. However, when he was assigned to fortify Kaiu's personal keep, he instead gathered resources and followers for himself, hoping to become a power in the land once the war was over. When Kaiu's troops were forced to retreat to the castle, they found shoddy construction, weak soldiers, and walls in disrepair. Kaiu lost more than half his troops in the ensuing battle, which saw the castle's front wall collapse and bury hundreds of men alive.

Investigation quickly revealed not only Zenjubo's dereliction of duty but also a plot to assassinate Kaiu himself. Kaiu knew he could no longer trust the former chieftain, but he also knew he needed Zenjubo's men for the war effort. Accordingly, he ordered Zenjubo buried like the men who had perished at the castle wall, leaving only his head sticking up. Kaiu took a simple saw from his workshop and threw it at the feet of Zenjubo's former followers. "You have each served foolishly and been betrayed by this man," he said. "Zenjubo's actions have claimed the lives of half my men, men who are your brothers and cousins. Your honor and mine have been diminished by the failure of this traitor. See that he is punished, and then rebuild my wall."

Several days passed before the traitor finally died, although he ceased to be able to scream after only a few hours. From that point on, his men became one of the most loyal units under Kaiu's command... and the fearsome tradition of Nokogiribiki was established.

further humiliation that shames both the prisoner and the captor. Even the Scorpion do not engage in such actions openly (although they have sometimes secretly captured enemy samurai for a variety of purposes). However, the infamous Hantei XVI violated this principle more than once, and a few especially heinous generals, ronin leaders, and bandit chiefs have been known to commit such violations. For example, a fifth-century ronin leader called Batan was able to win several battles by taking prisoners, roping them together, and using them as human shields against enemy archery fire.

Expanding the Mass Battle Rules

"Live alone and you shall die alone. Stand with your brothers and you shall celebrate your victories in this life and the next." – *Akodo's Leadership*

Rokugan is an Empire built on war. The land is protected by samurai who train their entire lives for combat; tradition is upheld and honor maintained by the threat and use of violence. Any courtier will admit that while proper etiquette is upheld by custom, the danger of enraging a samurai with a three-foot razor blade certainly helps maintain decorum.

Battle is important to most L5R games, but not every GM will wish to put characters into the Mass Battle system. Some stories may restrict battles to "off-screen" events that help move the overall plot. Some may go the other direction, with multiple game-sessions of bloody fighting, or even build an entire campaign around the shadow of ever-present war. Much of this depends on what sort of characters are in the GM's group. Characters focused on combat will thrive in a game built around warfare, but clever courtiers and peaceful monks may feel left out or marginalized by combat themes. However, in truth war and its consequences are so important in Rokugani culture that it would be foolish to believe only those trained as soldiers are engaged in the struggle. This section is designed to help the GM find ways to use all character types on the field of battle and to personalize and expand the Mass Battle rules so they engage the energy and attention of all the players.

Personalizing Mass Battle

"Think complex, talk of complex plots, but always use something simple."

– Wisdom of the Heavens

A battle necessarily includes hundreds or thousands of troops, mixes dozens of plots and a hundred different interpersonal relationships into one giant muddy mess. Only the GM has complete knowledge of the entire course and contents of the battle. In general, to characters at the "ground level" a Mass Battle should feel foggy and unclear, inducing a sense of confusion, isolation, and danger; the PCs cannot understand what is happening outside of their immediate surroundings. As the characters assume higher ranks and more authority, however, the GM can slowly demystify the tangled mess of battle, offering more specific and clearer information.

In general, the more personalized the GM can make the battle, the more it will emotionally engage the players. The worst possible choice is to just say: "You are fighting in a war between the Scorpion and the Unicorn." Without any specifics, Mass Battle is just a series of meaningless die-rolls, damage taken, and Glory gained. Instead, the GM should tailor a large-scale conflict to the PCs, just like with a skirmish. Give specifics to the conflict, a name to the enemy general, a specific location and purpose for each battle. Let the characters form connections with the commanders... on both sides. Set the battle in a location where the characters have already played through multiple adventures and are familiar with the landscape and the inhabitants. Tie the purpose of the battle to a pre-existing plot in which the PCs are directly involved. If possible, the GM should speak with each of the players about their character's background and motivations, and how those can tie into the duty (and Glory) of serving in battle.

From a mechanical perspective, the easiest parts of the Mass Battle system to tailor to the players are the Heroic Opportunities and Duels. The GM should spend time prior to the game deciding which Heroic Opportunities will work best for this specific conflict and this group of characters. If one character has a strong tie to the commander, let him get Opportunities like "Protect the General" or "Pick Up the Banner." If one player likes to portray his character as especially aggressive, perhaps "Overwhelm" or "Take the Enemy Banner" will fit best. Personalize each Opportunity, eschewing conflicts with generic NPCs in favor of pre-existing opponents that have already earned the PCs' enmity. This approach should be used even more strongly with Duels on the battlefield. Mass Battle is the perfect place for a Sworn Enemy or Nemesis to appear, resolving that personal plotline in bloody fashion – and by the same token, it is the perfect place to start a Blood Feud, creating a new storyline for the future. Do not waste the incident on a nameless generic NPC when a specific foe would add depth and flavor to the game.

Another tactic for Duels, even when they are against unknown generic NPCs, is to make them more personal by foreshadowing them in earlier game sessions. Perhaps the PC earns the enmity of a clan or family during Winter Court, only to face samurai from that clan on a later battlefield. The GM can even insert flashbacks in the midst of battle, reminding the PCs of earlier conflicts and their consequences: as an enemy samurai screams out "Show me your stance!" the PCs recall a court rivalry where the seeds of animosity were sown. The GM can also insert details of recollection while the player rolls for Assessment, Focus, and Strike, offering details about the enemy's history, accomplishments, and previous victories and defeats. When the final blow is complete, the player will feel a connection to the defeated foe – or, conversely, a real motive for revenge after falling to that foe. Instead of a few die-rolls and some Glory points, the encounter is elevated into real drama, victory or defeat made more worthy and meaningful because of greater knowledge.

Finally, the GM should also seek ways of personalizing the Levels of Engagement. Merely telling a player that his character is deep in the fighting (Heavily Engaged) or safe behind the ranks (Reserves) is overly generic and lacks dramatic impact. The story can be enriched by adding detail and flavor to the Engagement Levels, turning them into actual locations and fellow soldiers. For example, if the PCs are defending a castle, turn Heavily Engaged into the town outside the walls, Engaged into a position atop the walls themselves, while Disengaged is the courtyard behind the walls and Reserves is deep inside the castle itself. A creative GM can also choose to sketch out the terrain of a battlefield and the positions of the opposing armies, then assign the differing Engagement Levels to specific places on the field. Reserves can be standing beside the Command Staff or viewing the battle from a nearby plateau. Disengaged samurai stand amid the bulk of the army, ready to be deployed. Engaged soldiers stand with elite units and veteran troops, fighting on the front lines, while Heavily Engaged troops are assaulting the enemy key units or holding off the elite of the opposing army. Regardless, the GM offers detail and flavor that makes things real and personal.

Using the Rules of Mass Battle

There are multiple rules and options for playing out Mass Battle scenarios, scattered across the L5R 4th Edition rules and supplements. In order to decide the best rules for a particular session, the GM should first decide how important a single battle, campaign, or war will be to the course of the game. If the GM wants a simple showcase battle that resolves in one session, the rules in the Core Rulebook are more than sufficient to the task. They allow the PC to shape the battle's outcome, engage in dangerous combat, and resolve the conflict quickly – typically in one to three Mass Battle Rounds. The battle will not dominate the entire session, and non-bushi can be involved by placing them in the Reserves (or in other ways, suggested later).

However, if one or more of the PCs is at high rank, able to participate at the level of an officer or even a commander, more options become available. The L5R Core rulebook's Mass Battle Rules can certainly allow for PCs to serve in these roles, but additional material can be incorporated from other books. For example, the L5R 4th Edition supplement Emerald Empire contains Appendix Two: Way of the Daimyo, which allows characters to pursue a more detailed approach to warfare by taking the Warlord Station and managing the fate of a unit or an entire army. Other PCs can participate in a supporting role, all of them coming together to influence each Round of Mass Battle.

Whether or not the PCs are in command positions, the GM can expand their options in Mass Battle with the materials on Siege Warfare in *Emerald Empire* (pages 243-246), *Great Clans* (pages 30-32), and *The Book of Earth* (pages 192-194). It should be noted that in a siege, the Mass Battle is far more likely to occupy the lion's share of the story and the play-sessions. However, this does not have to limit the players' options. They can be 100% engaged in the siege while still having many opportunities for role-play and for scenarios involving intrigue, investigation, or small-scale action. After all, a siege often takes weeks or months in a single location, allowing many opportunities for the PCs to affect the outcome outside of the actual combat. Politics, commerce, allies and enemies all come into play in ways a short field battle would not allow. Courtly politics or covert action can change the commanders, resupply a besieged garrison with troops or food, force a temporary halt to the fighting, or even end the conflict altogether through Imperial decree. A siege is in many ways the ideal way to mix Mass Combat with role-play, highlighting the ways in which politics and Bushido affect the Empire.

Non-Bushi and Mass Battle

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

– Otomo Madoka's Subtlety of the Court

Any L5R game with non-bushi in the group can encounter problems with Mass Battle. Some monks can fight, of course, and shugenja can often take up a battlefield role as either healers or magical "artillery," but brittle courtiers and artisans with little to no combat skill should logically not even be involved in Mass Battle. Moreover, some monks and shugenja are intensely pacifistic and refuse to participate in warfare. How can the GM give such characters a role to play in a war-oriented campaign?

In the case of courtiers and other politically-oriented characters, the GM can often grant them significance by magnifying their role before the battle actually gets underway. After all, it is the nature of their occupation to manipulate their foes, spreading lies and gossip, sowing distrust among enemies while calling in the support and favor of allies. The GM can allow these PCs to use their abilities to directly influence the campaign, bestowing mechanical benefits on the Mass Battle resolution to reflect the chance before a battle begins to work their magic and reward their efforts with mechanical benefits when the time for battle arises. Similarly, pacifistic monks or shugenja can serve as spiritual advisors, strengthening the resolve of their side (or weakening the opponents' morale). All of these options allow the players to feel their characters have played an important role toward victory without forcing them to actually put their characters onto the Mass Battle Table.

A further option for "social-oriented" characters involves the nature of Rokugani military rank. In Rokugan, simple merit does not always equate to position, even for such an important duty as the command of an army. The wisest daimyo and Clan Champions do try to ensure that competent samurai are assigned to the defense of the clan's holdings, but many nepotistic relatives, ambitious courtiers, and manipulative power-brokers are able to finagle their way into high-ranking positions in the military. This means that when armies face each other there is no assurance that their leaders are well-trained tacticians or indeed that they are soldiers at all. Any particular rikugunshokan is just as likely to have gained his assignment through fame or political influence as for merit – and if such political appointees do not follow the advice of their better-trained subordinates, their battles may end up as atrocious displays of incompetence.

What happens if the PCs are assigned to serve under an incompetent leader and then sent out to wage war against the enemies of their clan? Or, what if the general is competent but many of his command staff and senior officers are less capable? The PCs may find themselves trying to convince their commander to listen to the advice of the wise over that of the outspoken or influential. This creates a situation in which the entire outcome of a war may rest on the ability of non-bushi characters to communicate, persuade, and manipulate.

Yet another option for non-bushi arises in situations where one side sends emissaries to meet with their opponents. What if a courtier or monk PC is sent to negotiate with the enemy general and his command staff? A clever PC can try to spread suspicion among the officers, or lead the commander toward the worst stratagems by means of clever words or feigned weakness. A monk or shugenja can proclaim the disfavor of the spirits or Fortunes, weakening the opponents' willingness to fight. All of these and more are options for characters to shift the outcome of war without ever drawing a sword (or rolling a die on the Mass Battle Table).

Mechanical Suggestions

Based on the above suggestions, the following section offers specific mechanical options for GMs who want to give non-bushi more influence in Mass Battle. Of course, it should be remembered that these options are also changing the underlying balance of the Mass Battle system. Some GMs may be fine with this – "balance" is not always important in a story-driven RPG – but if it is a concern, the GM can counterbalance these bonuses by imposing penalties for failure, allowing opponents to make Contested Rolls to try to negate the PCs' efforts, or allowing the other side to use the same effects against the PCs' army.

Inspiration: A PC may attempt to inspire a commander's troops by telling stories of victory, manipulating their emotions, or spreading gossip and rumors about the weakness of the enemy or the certainty of victory. The PC should roll either Courtier (Rhetoric or Manipulation), Perform: Storytelling, Perform: Oratory, or Sincerity – the specific Skill based on how the inspiration is being attempted – at a base TN of 25. With a success, the GM awards a +1k0 bonus to the commander for his Opposed Battle Rolls. An additional +1k0 bonus is awarded for every successful Raise on the Skill Roll.

Negative Inspiration: A PC may instead attempt to weaken the dedication or morale of the opposing side. A Yoritomo Courtier might send a message before the battle boasting of the brutality of his commander and his lack of mercy. An Ikoma might discuss the actions of the enemy's ancestors in a similar battle, sowing uncertainty by citing their failures. A Bayushi might spread lies and slander about the opposing commander to make his troops doubt his commands. These actions are resolved in the same manner as positive inspiration, although they may require different Skills such as Intimidation (Bullying/Control), Lore: History, or Courtier (Gossip). Instead of awarding +1k0 bonuses to one's own side, this option inflicts -1k0 penalties on the enemy general's Opposed Battle Rolls.

Treachery: A truly ruthless PC might try to bribe, blackmail, or seduce an opposing officer into "throwing" the outcome of a battle or even switching sides. Such a gambit will require both skillful role-play and a Skill Roll, most likely Temptation (Bribery, Seduction). Success will typically be very powerful, awarding one or more +1k1 bonuses to the player's side.

Religious Influence: Shugenja and monks are full of lore and wise advice. A good general will consult the ancestors, the will of the Celestial Heavens, and the kami before undertaking a battle. The GM can allow shugenja or monks to roll Lore: Theology or Divination at a TN of 25 to award a +1k0 bonus to their general's Opposed Battle Roll, perhaps with Raises for additional bonuses as above.

Knowledge: An Asako Loremaster might dredge up secret lore about the opposing side, allowing the general to incorporate that information into an effective strategy. An Ikoma Bard might recall the story of prior battles fought on the same field, remembering how those commanders were able to attain victory. Various types of Lore Skill would be used for these efforts, with the same basic mechanics as above.

Supply: The ability to deny supplies to the opposing side, or call on additional resources for your own army, is a powerful but often overlooked tactic. Yasuki merchants, Ide emissaries, and Doji courtiers are especially notable for their talents at this sort of resource manipulation. PCs with expertise in Commerce may use the Skill to grant bonuses or inflict penalties as above.

"Face Me!" or, Winning Before the Battle Starts

There are an infinite number of tactics that a general might employ in a battle in order to achieve victory. However, it is also possible to achieve victory without deploying even a single squadron, and the most widely-used tactic in this regard is to call out an opposing general for a duel. This is especially effective when the battle is being waged over a matter of honor. The tactic has been employed by all clans throughout the history of the Empire, but perhaps by none more than the Crane. If properly issued, such a challenge can be very difficult to refuse without losing face before one's army. Wise generals understand this threat, and many of them either train as duelists or learn the skills of rhetoric required to turn back a challenge without losing honor. On the flip side, some commanders – especially in clans like the Crane, Dragon, and Phoenix – relish the opportunity to save the lives of thousands by pitting their own personal skill and life-blood against that of their enemy.

Many clans who rely on this tactic to overcome their opponents also supplement it with political preparation before the armies march. A skilled courtier or advisor will learn the personal weaknesses of the enemy commander, the chinks in his personality that can be exploited to goad or force him into a duel he might otherwise refuse. Such operatives will also spread gossip in the courts and through the enemy ranks before the war begins, weakening the general's position and making it that much harder for him to risk the loss of face involved in refusing a challenge. Some duelists will even enlist artisans to compose especially eloquent and well-worded challenges that are that much harder to reject.

In game terms, this sort of preparation may be handled in the same way as other non-bushi interactions with Mass Battle, e.g. the PCs make Courtier (Gossip) or similar Skill Rolls to supplement their role-played efforts to manipulate the court, spread gossip, squeeze allies for information, and offer favors in return for knowledge. The result can be to simply force the opposing commander to accept the duel, but it may be more interesting to represent the challenge as a Contested Social Roll (most likely Courtier against Etiquette) with the earlier preparations awarding +1k0 bonuses or -1k0 penalties to the rolls. An enemy who refuses a duel after losing the Contested Social Roll will suffer a significant loss of Honor and Glory, and at the GM's option this may also impact the morale of his side, imposing penalties on the later Contested Battle Rolls.

If the commander accepts the duel and then loses, that imposes an obvious penalty of its own – he is no longer alive to command his army, and a presumably less-experienced subordinate must step into the breach. Of course, there may be circumstances where this is not truly a penalty at all! A clever GM can create a situation in which the death of the commander in a pre-battle duel forces the PCs to "step up" and lead their side to victory without him.

Shifting Perspective: Battle as Backdrop

"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."
– The Book of Sun Tao

As an alternate means of involving battle and war in the game, the GM can consider the idea of shifting the perspective of the conflict away from generalized battle and toward a more immediate or specialized goal. In lieu of just personalizing a Mass Battle in the ways described above, the GM can simply use the engagement as a backdrop for a more specific or intimate story, with the battle serving to enhance the tone of the tale. Any sort of story that can be told against the backdrop of a court or a tournament can instead be told against the backdrop of a battle. A murder mystery and ensuing investigation, the pursuit of a criminal or a sworn enemy, any such storyline can take place on the battlefield. In these situations, it hardly matters which side of the battle the PCs are on (or even if they are on a side at all) – their concern will not be for which side may claim victory but for their own storyline and goal.

To do this, the GM will need to run the PCs through the battle outside of the normal bounds of the Mass Battle rules. Perhaps they only experience Heroic Opportunities and/or Duels, without the generic damage dice generated by the Mass Battle Table. Alternatively, the GM can have the PCs' general, daimyo, or immediate superior officer assign them a very specific task such as "Eliminate the Shugenja Advisor," "Duel the Enemy General's Yojimbo," or something else along these lines. The final outcome of the battle can be scripted or it can be determined by the PCs' success or failure. Finally, the GM can utilize the battle as a sort of dangerous "scenery" through which the PCs must navigate to achieve an unrelated goal. This could incorporate their reputation (Infamy and Glory), their skills with disguise and stealth, eloquence or political maneuvering in calmer regions of the field, and outright combat when no other option will prevail. There are a variety of ways in which this approach could be used – perhaps the site of the battle holds some location or relic which the PCs must recover, perhaps they are from a neutral party which must deliver a message across the lines, or perhaps they must find some critically important NPC and retrieve him from the field before it is too late. For extra challenge, perhaps the PCs are on a religious pilgrimage or political mission that forbids them from shedding blood, making the battlefield that much more challenging to navigate successfully. Ultimately, just because the GM decides to include Mass Battle in the game does not mean it has to dominate all aspects of the play-session – it is simply another tool to control the flow of the story.

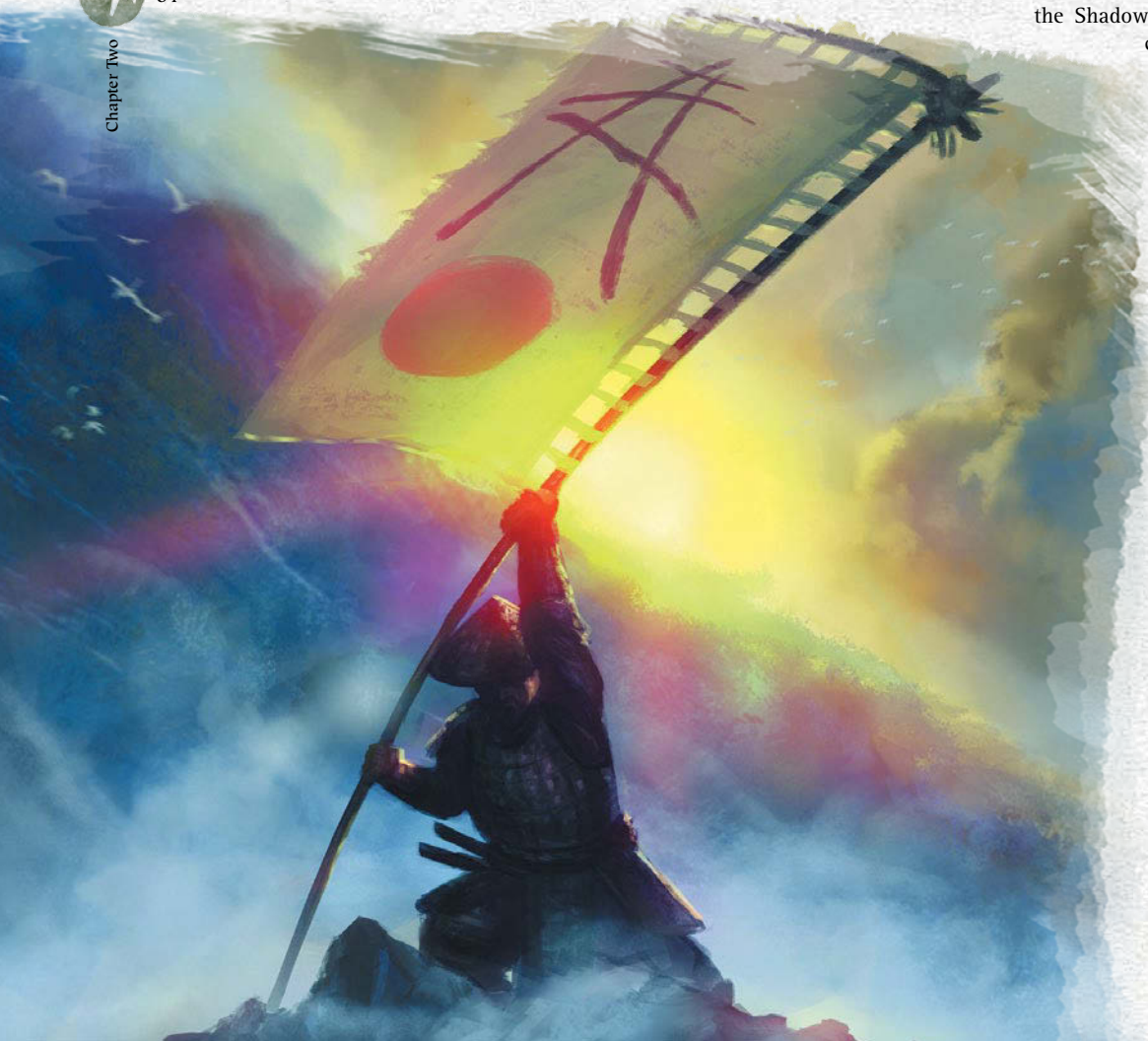
Additions and Options for Mass Battle Rules

"It is a matter of regret to allow the moment when one should die to pass by." *– Akodo's Leadership*

Aside from manipulation of thematic aspects or including roles for non-bushi, there are a number of other ways to alter the normal rules for Mass Battle. A quick glance at the Book of Void in the L5R RPG 4th Edition Core rulebook can offer inspiration for GMs who wish to shift their depiction of battle toward a more realistic or more cinematic approach. For example, to add an increased level of brutality to the game, have the players roll for their Wounds prior to engaging in any Duels or Heroic Opportunities, or do not allow anyone to spend Void to reduce Mass Battle damage. To shift towards a more cinematic style, wait to roll for Wounds until the very end of each Battle Turn, or increase the Reduction value of armor against Mass Battle wounds. Another way to allow for less dangerous Mass Battle Rounds is to only keep one die for Wounds, with the additional dice being unkept – thus, a result of "4 dice of Wounds" would become 4k1 Wounds. The GM can also choose to not allow dice to explode on Mass Battle Wounds.

The basic rules for Mass Battle Wounds, Heroic Opportunities, and Duels assume that each result on the Mass Battle Table will be applied individually to the PC who rolled it. However, the GM can also opt to have the PCs experience the battle as a group, especially if they are all serving in the same unit. This works especially well with a large group of players or with a "mixed" group of bushi and non-bushi, since the GM can let the senior bushi make the Battle roll to determine the group's status and thereby shield the less-capable PCs somewhat. This approach is also helpful if the GM wants the Mass Battle to resolve faster, since it greatly reduces the amount of die-rolling. Of course, some of the Heroic Opportunities will have to be re-worked or adjusted to allow for the presence of multiple PCs, but in most cases a simple increase in the numbers or Insight Rank of the opponents will resolve the problem. Duels are more difficult, but it should be noted that not all battlefield duels are formal contests of Iaijutsu – there can also be straightforward challenges of combat prowess, and in this case the GM can easily have a high-ranking foe take on the entire group. If necessary, the GM can grant him some extra Wounds, an extra Attack, or some other benefit outside the normal rules in order to make him suitable challenging to a large party of samurai.

Another option is to make Mass Battle more epic in scope and content by expanding it into a full campaign. Instead of simply running a single battle, with a certain number of Mass Battle Rounds and victory given to the side that wins more Rounds, the GM can depict a campaign via several successive sets of Mass Battle Rounds, with the results from one set feeding into the next. This represents the armies fighting a series of separate engagements with brief respites between the action, respites as short as an hour or as long as a week or more. The losing side could retreat to a fallback position and fight again, or mount a counterattack to try to turn the tide of the campaign. Of course, resolving a large scale conflict in this manner creates far bloodier results overall, but also builds a grand epic worthy of being written into the Empire's histories. A perfect example within the canonical setting would be the battles on the Second Day of Thunder in and around Otosan Uchi. PCs participating in these battles might fight an initial engagement leading up to the city, receive a break of a few hours, and then assault the outer walls. After another brief respite, they might be thrown against the heart of the Shadowlands Horde, perhaps even battling Yogo Junzo or another Lost commander. The GM can also use this process to draw out a campaign over a very long timeline, months or even years, though in this case the GM should probably also employ the rules for Warlord Combat in the Way of the Daimyo section of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*.



New Heroic Opportunities

The following is a list of new Heroic Opportunities for the GM to utilize in Mass Battle. A few of them are specific to a certain style of warfare, such as against the Shadowlands or in city fighting, but most can easily be adapted to whatever situation arises.

Wedge

You are sent to be the spear-head of a wedge formation driving deep into enemy forces.

For the duration of this Opportunity you are considered Heavily Engaged no matter your actual level of Engagement. You drive forward each Round towards the enemy Reserves. If you make it through (GM's choice of how many Rounds this takes), the opposing general receives a -2k2 penalty to his next Battle roll and you gain 5 points of Glory.

Follow the Commander

Your commander (or an elite unit specific to your clan) charges forward. As they do, a few of their number fall and one turns to you, beckoning you to join them.

You become Heavily Engaged for the remainder of the battle. If

you survive alongside the elite unit or commander, you double all Glory gains for the battle. In addition, you gain the recognition of the leader of the unit and may be invited to permanently join.

Escort Mission

A high profile ally of your clan is trapped amid desperate fighting and her yojimbo has fallen.

You may choose to offer protection to the ally and escort them from Heavily Engaged to Reserves. If successful, you gain Glory points equal to the target's Status Rank, and also gain the Ally advantage with that NPC, with at least 2 points of Devotion.

Friendly Fire

The battlefield is fraught with distraction. Perhaps you are fighting at night, in a dense fog, amid heavy rain, or some other obscuring condition. In the middle of a skirmish you realize you are engaged in heated combat with soldiers of your own army.

You are fighting a skirmish with samurai on your side, and the others are in a desperate rage, unable to tell you are an ally. The foes Full Attack every Round of the skirmish. If you end up killing them, you lose 4 points of Honor and must explain your actions or live with the disgrace. Alternatively, you can withdraw (opening yourself up to accusations of cowardice) or try to get through to them with rolls of Sincerity to convince them to stop before they kill you.

Save a Sacred Site [City Fighting]

A site, item, or individual sacred to the city is in danger of destruction or looting. You must defend it.

A sacred shrine or temple, famous holding, or an item of specific note to the city is being assaulted by the enemy forces – or, perhaps, being looted by your own side. If it is lost or destroyed your army's morale will suffer and your general will suffer a -1k1 penalty to his Battle rolls for the rest of the engagement. If you are able to defend the site, item, or person, you gain a full Rank of Glory. While attempting to defend, you are Heavily Engaged and must fight 3-6 enemies of your Insight Rank or higher. Note that this Opportunity works best when it is personalized to the battle. Also, note that this Opportunity can easily be switched to serve as "Unheroic" (see below).

Fighting Street to Street [City Fighting]

You find yourself in a tight alley, buildings crumbling or burning all around, facing off against a full contingent of enemy soldiers.

This Opportunity functions similarly to Hold This Ground, but is more dangerous. You must face three times your number (or your unit's number) of enemy opponents of equal Insight Rank or higher (+4 opponents if Heavily Engaged). If successful, your general receives a +1k1 bonus to his Battle Roll and you gain 8 points of Glory.

Stop the Summoning [Shadowlands]

A group of Maho-Tsukai is summoning an oni or casting some other powerful and dangerous Maho spell. You must stop them or all is lost.

The Maho-Tsukai will finish their ritual at the end of the next Battle Round. If any one of them is still alive, terrible devastation will be brought upon your army. You must become Heavily Engaged and face a number of Maho-Tsukai (each of Insight Rank 3 or 4) equal to your unit's size +2 (this number may also include bodyguards or monsters protecting the Maho-Tsukai). If successful, you gain 6 points of Glory and the opposing general has a penalty of -1k1 to his next Battle Roll. If you fail, your commander suffers a -3k3 penalty to all his remaining Battle Rolls. (Note that this Heroic Opportunity can also work in a non-Shadowlands battle if the GM substitutes a powerful Elemental spell for the Maho.)

Corrupted Brothers [Shadowlands]

A damning power of the Shadowlands has corrupted an entire unit of your allies. They have turned upon their

own side and are wreaking havoc, advancing toward your army's Command Staff and reserves.

This is the opposite of an Escort Mission. If you pursue the corrupted soldiers, you must stop them before they reach your Reserves (they will start at Heavily Engaged and move back one Engagement Level each Battle Round). Until you manage to kill them all, each ally on your side of the battle moves up one Engagement Level each Battle Round as the enemy pushes into the lines. If you do succeed in defeating them before they reach the Reserves, you gain one point of Glory for each soldier defeated. If you fail, your commander suffers a -3k3 penalty to all later Battle Rolls. The GM chooses how many and how strong to make the corrupted soldiers, depending on how intense he wants this challenge to be.

"Unheroic" Opportunities

The Heroic Opportunities presented in the L5R rules usually assume that characters are trying to fight honorably. However, some clans focus on pragmatism and results over honor. Accordingly, the GM may wish to substitute "Unheroic" Opportunities for these characters. Typically, these will cause an Honor loss and perhaps an increase to the character's Infamy, in return for improving the prospects for the character's side in the battle. The GM can use these as templates for additional "Unheroic" Opportunities, or modify the existing Heroic Opportunities to fit this model.

Feign Death

You slip and fall in the blood and mud, landing amid a pile of the dead. You must make a choice between pragmatism and honor.

You must choose either to immediately stand and continue fighting... or to hide among the dead. If you stand, the battle continues normally – and you might gain a small amount of Honor if your current Honor Rank is low. If you hide, for every Battle Round that you feign death

you take no damage but lose half the amount of Honor you would lose for "Fleeing from Battle." Alternatively, you may choose to use your feigning to ambush the enemy – if you do so, this creates an automatic Duel with an opposing officer. (The GM may substitute some other result for the Duel if it seems more appropriate.) If you are discovered using this tactic, you gain 5 points of Infamy.

Gaijin Warfare

A member of the Command Staff has entrusted with you a secret stash of gaijin pepper and commanded you to use it "when the time is right."

If you choose to activate the special package you will immediately lose Honor as though "Being an accomplice to a heinous crime." However, the ensuing explosion and chaos will cause the opposing general a -2k2 penalty on his next Battle Roll and -1k1 on the Round after that. If you are found out, the most likely result will be execution or, at best, reduction to ronin.

Liar's Tactic [Shugenja only]

An enemy officer demands your surrender on the field. You may offer it... and then betray the surrender at an opportune moment.

If you surrender and then renege, you are immediately attacked by the officer (who is Insight Rank 2 or 3) and his escort. However, your treason allows you use your magic to disrupt the enemy ranks – the enemy general gets a -1k1 penalty on his next Battle Roll, and your commander gets a +1k0 bonus. You lose honor as if committing a Major Breach of Etiquette, and gain 3 points of Infamy.

The Way of Deception

An officer on the opposing side dies in front of you, leaving her tessen, helm, and jinbaori (surcoat). You could easily put them on and give false orders to the enemy.

If you choose to put on the enemy's gear in order to disrupt their strategy, you immediately lose Honor as if "Being an accomplice to a minor crime." You must make a Sincerity (Deceit) / Awareness or Acting / Awareness Roll at a TN of 20 to inflict a -1k0 penalty on the opposing general's next Battle Roll. Each Raise you call inflicts another -1k0 penalty. You may continue this action every Battle Round, taking the Honor loss each time and increasing the TN by +10 each time. Once you fail the roll, you gain 3 points of Infamy and become the immediate target for an enemy duelist 1 Insight Rank higher than you.

Defilement

A favored servant of the opposing general falls in battle in full view of the enemy army. You may choose to defile his body, his banner, or his sword in order to outrage and humiliate the enemy, perhaps driving them into an uncontrolled frenzy.

If you engage in such despicable behavior, you will immediately suffer an Honor loss as if performing a "Major Breach of Etiquette" and gain 5 points of Infamy. Moreover, enemy forces will automatically single you out for a skirmish with superior opponents on the next Battle Round. The enemy's rage grants their commander a +1k0 bonus to his next Battle Roll (only), but their out-of-control rampage grants your commander a +1k1 bonus for the remainder of the battle.

Warlord Battle Rules

The rules for Mass Battle in the Way of the Daimyo section of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* (pages 290-293) suggest they be used with a single roll to resolve the entire battle. However, the GM can use the option described above for multiple Rounds to showcase an ongoing war that takes place over months or even years. Below are a few additional options for the Warlord Features section:

Extra Random Events

Way of the Land: Possessor of the Advantage gains a +5 bonus for Terrain on Stage Two

Target the Officers: Must make an additional raise on Stage Three: Tactics; reduce the opponent's Resolution Roll by 3.

Warlord Features

Level 1:

Personnel: Expendable Conscripts (1 point): These are expendable *heimin* placed at strategic locations to soak up the enemy's assaults. They must be chosen first to destroy by the enemy general during the Casualties stage.

Strength: 0 **Defense**: 1

Support: Battlefield Criers (1-5 points): Criers are the heralds of the battle, reporting the results to the eager courts waiting for the news. For each Duty Point spent, increase the effects of gaining Glory for Warfare by 3.

Level 2:

Personnel: Veteran Soldiers (2 points): Veterans are survivors of previous battles. If not destroyed during the Casualties Stage of the battle, they increase their Defense or Strength by 1 permanently, to a maximum of 5. This occurs every battle.

Strength: 3 **Defense**: 2

Support: Battlefield Shugenja (2–6 points): Shugenja add devastating effect to any battle with their magic. During the Casualties Stage, increase the Casualties of the opposing side by 1 for every 2 Duty Points spent on this feature.

Level 3:

Personnel: Glorious Hero (4 points): A Glorious Hero is assigned to your army under your service. When you purchase this feature you may divide 7 points between the Hero's Strength and Defense as you see fit.

Strength: X **Defense**: X

Support: Divination and Prophecy (2–6 points): You have access to an advisor with considerable skill in Divination. You may reroll the Resolution Roll – once per battle for every 2 Duty Points spent on this Feature. Once used, this Feature is lost permanently, but may be repurchased.

Chapter Three

Cavalry Warfare

"Incompetent." Ikoma Jidai spat out the words, a sneer upon his lips. He had known the boy would fail him. He had known his son Jun, that mewling whelp of a child, was cursed. It did not matter that the Kitsu absolved him. Every day he practiced with a sword he used that insufferable left hand. The cowardly hand, the peace-loving hand. Eventually Jidai had given up and sent the boy to train with the Bards, but what good had that done? His failure in the courts was now obvious.

The Scorpion were winning. An Akodo general, months of preparation, overwhelming numbers, and yet the Bayushi were winning! Perhaps it was because of the commander. Jun had chosen him, and Jidai knew the boy's bad luck rubbed off.

"No matter. We control the field now. We have cut off their supply train. If Akodo Unmei and the boy cannot win this war, I will do it for them. What do you have there?"

His bannerman, a ji-samurai fresh from gempukku, prostrated himself. To his credit, he did not flinch. A good child. "Correspondence from Abbot Ayushen, my lord! He has blessed our unit and wishes for you to know that Shinsei's wisdom has foreseen our victory in this battle!" Akodo Unmei's last order had been for Jidai to even the odds. Open the field to the unexpected.

"We are the right way." Jidai whispered, just under his breath. "I am the right way."

On the field before him, Ikoma riders raced back and forth in shocking surprise raids. The Scorpion veterans were being drawn out, their most skilled troops led into a deadly pincer maneuver. Now the twin Matsu claws collapsed inward with crushing force.

Bayushi Kiwadoi should have expected that... it was their trick, after all. Jidai smiled to himself. Use their talents against them, *he thought.* Make them understand that Deception was Akodo's trick before it was ever theirs.

A guntai *of Deathseekers, newly minted from the last engagement, surged in to fill the center and the Bayushi were consumed by their ferocious honor.*

Jidai watched the Scorpion respond to the assault. The expected note of worry issued from his anxious subordinates. "My lord, won't the Scorpion overwhelm our center? We have left ourselves open!"

"Be still. As Akodo says, charging one's army into battle without foreknowledge of an opponent's capabilities and weaknesses brings no glory. It brands the leader a coward. Blind death is swift death." Jidai stood up and made three sharp gestures. It was time for the next phase to begin.

"But, my lord, we have done exactly that!"

"No. Remember the rest and understanding will come." Jidai waited as his shireikan *searched his mind for the completion of Akodo's passage.*

"'When facing the enemy, a leader lets him see what he wants the Enemy to see.'" The younger man still did not understand, but then, how could he? The Scorpion did not expect it and even the Lion general did not know what Jidai had planned. But revelation would come. And even Jidai's pathetic son would not be able to ruin this.

"There." Jidai pointed and then mounted his steed. He waved a fan and his men followed suit. A formation gathered around the commander.

All was in readiness. The Scorpion commander could see riders on the front and both flanks, their movements vastly overinflating the size of the Lion force. The Scorpion army hesitated and then began to fall back, uncertain what it was facing or where the next assault would come from. And their front was suddenly weakened, vulnerable to a concentrated blow.

"All according to plan." Ikoma Jidai tied on his fearsome battle-mempo. After this battle there would not be a single survivor. Let the enemy be swept away with the autumn leaves.

It would be glorious.

Cavalry Tactics

At the dawn of the Empire, organized warfare could barely be called "organized" at all. While the Children of the Sun and Moon sought to bring order and civilization to the land that became Rokugan, none of them were experienced generals, nor had they ever before led others. They were, however, awe-inspiring beings of divine insight and power, and they set about using their various talents in ways that shaped Rokugani warfare for its entire future history. At this time even Akodo's most basic innovations were great strides forward in the art of war.

Though the Kami were quite different from one another in both demeanor and purpose, none of them put great stock in the notion of mounted warfare – in truth, not even the Lady Shinjo. This was due to a great many circumstances, but chief among them was the fact that actual trained warhorses were all but nonexistent in the Empire. Rare was the tribe that had the wealth or discipline to attain such a lofty goal. Horses themselves – at least in the form of the Rokugani pony – were not actually rare, and indeed many of the ancient tribes were nomadic. But these mounts were only trained and used for simple riding and other such menial tasks. Ownership of an actual trained war mount was as scarce as any other wealth in those primitive days, and was usually reserved to chieftains and war-leaders. Even then, while a veteran commander might sit astride his mount when issuing orders or marching, it was rare for the horse to be risked in combat. Such valuable horses were often taken as trophies by warring factions, and the death of a prized warhorse brought shame on whoever was responsible. A warrior who allowed his mount to die by exposing it to needless risk was often punished, demoted, or otherwise cast deep into his ruler's disfavor. Likewise, an enemy was expected to try to capture such a prize – killing it made the warrior seem sloppy and undisciplined.

With war mounts being in rare supply and elevated to such high value and status, it was all but unheard of for any tribe to field actual units of mounted combatants. Unsurprisingly, the Clan of the Ki-Rin was the first group in Rokugan's early history to successfully form such units, but even theirs were small in number. The continued life of the mounts was almost important as victory itself, so the horse's natural advantages of speed and movement were almost exclusively employed in hit-and-run harassment tactics rather than in heavy combat. In some ways, this decision still holds true in the modern use of mounted soldiers in Rokugan.

After the fight against Fu Leng subsided and the Ki-Rin left to explore beyond the mountains, there was no clan with any notable cavalry forces or even any notable population of warhorses. However, the Crab and Lion

immediately began to explore the possibilities of breeding warhorses and using them against foot soldiers in the same way samurai were used against peasant soldiers – intensely trained, expensively equipped, and able to cut through their foes by the handful. Sadly, the physical limits of the ponies and other small horses available to the Empire at the time soon became apparent. These mounts had difficulty enduring the strain of battle and were easily rendered useless due to injuries or sickness. Moreover, the ponies' small size and the difficulty of their riders staying balanced while they struck made cavalry charges of only limited use – in fact, the clans found that armored foot-soldiers often delivered better shock charges than mounted troops. Given also how expensive it was to raise and train horses, it is hardly surprising that the use of mounts in battle remained rare for some time.

The Crab found an additional roadblock to the concept of cavalry warfare: the Shadowlands Taint. In the early Empire the Taint was not fully understood, and Crab warriors would suddenly find themselves astride mounts caught in the grip of Fu Leng's madness. Even worse, sometimes the Tainted mounts would show no signs of their malady until they had contaminated all the others in their stable. Tenacious as always, the Crab pressed on with their efforts, believing their campaigns to drive back the corrupted minions of the Dark Kami would be eased greatly if they could strike and retreat with the speed of cavalry. An unfortunate artifact of this particular stubbornness lives on in various horse-like beasts that roam the Shadowlands to this day (their numbers later swelled by the unfortunate creation of the Dark Moto). Crab warriors who are knowledgeable about their clan's history often find a personal stake in hunting down and exterminating such Tainted creatures, feeling they are a shameful reminder of an early failure.

The only clan that had any true success with the notion of cavalry warfare during the Empire's first eight centuries was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the Lion. Akodo's followers were talented and dedicated to both the practice and the philosophy of war, and for them figuring out how to effectively exploit the limited advantages of mounted soldiers was simply a matter of solving logistical problems. To the Lion, the small number of possible uses for warhorses was not a hurdle but a simple fact to be included in their plans. Unlike other clans who tried to make entire armies of mounted warriors, the Akodo simply took the basic principle – a mobile combatant – to its logical conclusion. The Lion began by fielding single mounted warriors who were used to shock and disrupt enemy battle lines with archery. The cavalry warrior would charge the enemy lines, firing from a great bow slowly, and then withdraw again.

The fact that such warriors were so rare made the tactic quite effective, since no other army had a realistic counter for it. Attempts to swarm the horseman failed almost every time, since conscripted ashigaru were simply too frightened to make a real attempt, and samurai not only had no experience in dealing with the height and momentum of a mounted warrior but could not even keep pace with the horse. The mounted soldier was almost always able to withdraw before he could be overcome.

After a generation in which these solo mounted samurai were iconic figures on the battlefield, other clans learned to mimic the tactic, although the Lion usually remained a step ahead on the path of innovation. Over time, a single mounted Lion became a charging line of six, which in turn became a full squadron of mounted Lion. Still, despite this success, the mounted samurai remained a rare thing and the honor of being selected for such training was often the pinnacle of a warrior's entire career. A daimyo who employed a well-known cavalry warrior was considered fortunate, and a daimyo with a dozen such samurai was feared, the names of his warriors revered throughout the land.

Of course, this form of cavalry warfare only lasted until the descendents of Shinjo returned... upsetting the entire balance of not just mounted warfare but all forms of warfare in Rokugan.

Cavalry Tactics of the Unicorn Clan

The return of the Ki-Rin Clan – now styling itself the Clan of the Unicorn – sent immense shockwaves through the military and political landscape of Rokugan, shockwaves still felt three hundred years later.

Early on in their eight centuries outside of the Empire, the Unicorn learned the value of strong, fearless, and fast mounts with high endurance. Their early encounter with the Moto nomads and that tribe's powerful warhorses strongly reinforced this notion. Over the course of centuries, roaming away from the Empire and then back to it, the nomadic Unicorn carefully bred, trained, and improved their horses. Over time, fewer and fewer of the clan walked on foot, and riding became a fact of everyday life. Many children were born into the world and then carried on a mount the same day, growing up spending much of their waking hours on horseback.

When they returned to Rokugan, an Empire that had spent countless generations where powerful mounted warriors were a rare military asset, they instantly had a huge advantage. Not only did the Unicorn have a deep and widespread familiarity with life in the saddle, but their horses themselves were much larger and stronger than even the finest existing Rokugani warhorse. In addition, Shinjo's clan had spent their time outside the Empire developing tactics and military formations the other clans had never witnessed or even dreamed about. Even the most brilliant Lion general tends to think in terms of strategies and movements familiar to other samurai. The Unicorn fought in a way the Empire had never seen before.

Modern Cavalry Warfare

While the tactics and unit structures of Rokugani cavalry warfare vary from clan to clan and even from family to family, the basic principles and troop types used in the "modern" Empire – from roughly the tenth century onward – are all adapted in whole or part from the standard practices of the Unicorn Clan.

Light Cavalry

The use of lightly-armored fast moving cavalry units is the most obvious and basic use of mounted warriors, one that originated at the start of Rokugani organized warfare. However, as noted previously, the rarity of acceptable mounts made it more important to keep them alive, resulting in hit-and-run tactics from small units that met with limited success. The Unicorn had no such problem, since they could call on large numbers of quick, strong mounts and had no hesitation in sending lightly-protected or unarmored horses into combat.

Using light cavalry as harassing units can be devastating to those unprepared for it. Armed with both swords and bows, they can switch from melee to ranged tactics quickly, resulting in a unit that is difficult to counter and can disrupt any number of opposing efforts. Light cavalry also has the advantage of being able to retreat from poor odds quickly, picking favorable engagements and evading dangerous opponents at a moment's notice.

The Unicorn also use light cavalry units as decoys, since those not familiar with the clan's forces are almost always surprised by the sheer number of mounts the Unicorn can field. To the unlearned, a lightly armored unit of Unicorn warriors can easily seem like a heavier squad, drawing enemy fire and attention while other, heavier units move to better positions to strike the enemy. (The Unicorn are also adept at concealing cavalry deployments behind terrain features such as hills, ridges, and trees.)

Light cavalry is a staple of any Rokugani army, even if it otherwise has little in the way of mounted warriors. Relative to other mounted units, they are cheap to arm and train, although clearly not optimal for front-line combat. Heavy infantry can cause problems for such units, since their armor reduces the effectiveness of the cavalry's archery fire and makes them difficult to seriously damage with melee skirmishing. When faced with such an enemy, light cavalry usually keeps strictly to ranged harassment tactics, rendering them essentially useless in defeating a truly focused advance by heavy infantry.

The other clans would spend generations grappling with the fact that they simply had no concept of how the Unicorn waged war. Though the so-called Thousand Years of Peace was far bloodier than the name let on, major armed conflict between the clans was still relatively rare and the Unicorn fought few wars with the other clans. Consequently, for many decades after their return, every tactic the Unicorn used on the battlefield was completely new to the Empire. The Unicorn, meanwhile, could study, witness, and understand "traditional" warfare simply by living in Rokugan once again – reading the contents of libraries, talking with historians and other scholars, and merely observing clashes between the other clans allowed the Children of the Wind to learn a great deal. The Unicorn quickly realized they needed to guard their secrets closely. For their part, many of the other clans – the Lion especially – were simply too proud, too traditionalist, or too honorable to pry into the Unicorn methods.

Over time, canny samurai from the other clans began to grasp the basics of the Unicorn's tactics, either through facing them in combat or by making logical assessments of the capabilities of their mounts, armor, and weapons. However, the best these others could do was to prepare against the Unicorn tactics, since mimicking them was not an option unless they could somehow gain possession of Unicorn warhorses.

Medium Cavalry

Perhaps the most versatile and universally useful type of cavalry, these warriors wear lighter armor (both for themselves and for their mounts), and carry an array of weapons for different situations, including their swords, a polearm, and a dai-kyu. Though they do not have the sheer speed of light cavalry units, they also lack many of that unit type's weaknesses: the mounts are better protected to be able to deal with infantry skirmishes, they carry a polearm to deal with enemy anti-cavalry forces such as pikemen, and the dai-kyu bow is far more powerful than a yumi, allowing arrows to penetrate enemy armor with greater success.

Medium cavalry units are often called "horse archers," since the availability of the dai-kyu combined with the maneuverability of cavalry is the unit's greatest advantage on the battlefield. Horse archers are trained not only to fire from their moving mount but also to deliver their fire in relatively precise volleys, allowing them to arc their fire into the enemy ranks, avoid friendly infantry, and circumvent heavy enemy infantry (or physical barriers) providing cover to the softer targets behind.

Polearms, typically yari, are used when medium cavalry must engage in a frontal attack, although this usage of this particular type of unit is unusual. Often the cavalry will use their yari to drive a charge through an enemy's ranks – most commonly to break those ranks or to reach a key position that can turn the course of the battle. Prolonged melee engagement is not unheard of, but it is usually not the most advantageous use of these soldiers, especially given the value of their mounts. While they are more armored than light cavalry, they lack the full protection and barding of a heavy cavalry unit, making it comparatively easy for enemy infantry to bring them down in a sustained engagement. Additionally, there are few infantry opponents that cannot be better defeated through coordinated and constant pressure from dai-kyu fire.

The main weakness of this unit type actually comes from its basic advantage – it is not particularly heavily armored or armed. If medium cavalry are unable to maintain the mobility they need for their mixture of bow fire and charge-and-retreat tactics, a more heavily equipped enemy can make quick work of them. Fortified positions, even light field barricades, are also a problem for medium cavalry since they lack the shock-power to overcome them and the effectiveness of their archery is blunted. However, despite these weaknesses, medium cavalry is a popular component of any sizable army, and the Unicorn have great numbers of medium cavalry units. Their flexibility and strengths are too great to be ignored.

Heavy Cavalry

Heavy cavalry is a fearsome force on the battlefield in any situation that allows it to use its capabilities to the fullest. However, such forces are quite rare outside of the Unicorn Clan. As noted earlier, one of the first versions of the Rokugani cavalry soldier was an expensive, heavily armored warrior who was a nearly invincible force of death on the battlefield. As time passed, both in Rokugan and with the Unicorn Clan in its journeys, familiarity with the idea of cavalry and advances in armorsmithing made the concept of squadrons of heavy cavalry warriors at least feasible. However, in Rokugan, the limitations of the available mounts were just too severe to allow for these sorts of troops to be used in great numbers – even with Kaiu ingenuity and Akodo wisdom constantly searching for ways around the problem.

The Unicorn, however, faced no such barrier. To the contrary, the huge Moto warhorses and the other steeds later found by the Shinjo and Otaku families were bred over time into reliable and powerful bloodlines. These mounts could bear the stress and weight of heavy armor with little penalty other than a slower pace. And while the Ki-Rin had become the Unicorn, they never let go of the idea that they were the Children of the Wind – the galloping, pounding hooves of heavily armored steeds, like the sound of a thunderous storm-wind, became their essential signature.

Regardless of the clan involved, heavy cavalry is expensive, in both resources and training time. Horse barding is often just as difficult to make and maintain as a samurai's armor, and is much larger besides. The steeds themselves require a great deal of food and care just to keep in acceptable condition and ensure that minor wounds or strains do not escalate and spell the end of the horse's usefulness... if not their very lives. Additionally, many heavy cavalry soldiers use heavy armor adapted specifically for use on horseback, armor which must also be maintained alongside the samurai's normal infantry armor. Indeed, at first glance the energy, manpower, wealth, and raw materials required to make use of heavy cavalry units seem prohibitive.

However, the advantages are soon evident as well. A charging heavy cavalry force literally shakes the ground in all directions, and very few enemies can withstand such an assault. Given suitably open terrain, heavy cavalry at the charge can literally trample enemy infantry into the ground with hardly a pause, while ignoring the arrows and deflecting weapons that glance uselessly off their armor. Those not immediately destroyed by the initial collision are cut down like so much wheat as the samurai slowly wade through the battle, striking down foes from horseback, their steed also kicking and striking at nearby enemies. Unlike other forms of cavalry, where the horse may put up a fight but can be overcome fairly readily by well-equipped infantry, a heavy cavalry mount is itself a combatant that samurai must respect.

As mentioned, only the Unicorn can afford to employ heavy cavalry in great numbers, and they often use them both as offensive weapons against infantry foes and as a crushing counter to enemy cavalry forces. Some commanders from other clans who faced the Unicorn on the battlefield believed they could negate their enemy's advantage by fielding their own mounted warriors, only to look on as the Unicorn heavy cavalry runs down their own cavalry units and tramples them into the dust... before making similarly short work of the infantry.

Heavy cavalry almost always employs heavy melee weapons, including spears or polearms of some sort, but will often also carry a bow as well. However, due to their heavy armor – including a full mempo face mask, arm guards, and shoulder guards which interfere with firing any kind of bow – archery fire from these units is usually little more than a cursory opening measure rather than a constant assault.

It is difficult to find a counter to enemy heavy cavalry once they are brought into the fight. The mighty no-dachi was developed partly as a way to counter heavy cavalry tactics – the massive curved blade is able to carve through barding and strike down the enemy mounts. However, this and other such anti-cavalry weapons have only limited effectiveness against a true heavy cavalry charge, and the best defense is the canny use of terrain, fortifications, and maneuvering rather than opposing force with force. Canny generals often rely on rugged or marshy ground to rob enemy cavalry of mobility. The key weakness of heavy cavalry is that its main weapon is physical momentum, and finding some way to sap that – harsh terrain, scattered targets who cannot be charged all at once, or hidden threats – can blunt its effectiveness. But even then, the mere presence of heavy cavalry on the battlefield can be enough

to make enemy commanders reconsider fighting at all.

Lancers

A uniquely Unicorn unit, mounted lancers employ an unusual weapon, similar to a yari but much longer and heavier, specifically built to take advantage of the strength and momentum of charging heavy cavalry. Lancers are key to the Unicorn Clan's supremacy in mounted combat, since the lance is equally devastating against both ground foes and enemy mounted units.

The lance extends a great distance ahead of the rider, allowing the lancer to strike and knock down enemy troops long before they can strike at him, regardless of how well armored they might be. Even enemy pikemen usually cannot match this range, making the lance an effective weapon against nearly any kind of enemy. In a pinch a lance can even be thrown, although this is hardly an optimal use of the weapon, and is typically a last-ditch effort when the lancers are unable to reach their enemy due to terrain or fortifications.

In contrast to normal heavy cavalry, lancer units are not usually armored very heavily, and sometimes employ a special kind of armor that reinforces the grip of the lance and the posture of the rider – helping to make sure the lancer does not end up getting thrown from his own mount by the force of the impact. Due to these factors, lancers are actually rather ineffective at ongoing skirmishes, as they are unable to make strikes with their lances anywhere but to their front. Additionally, the lance itself is not the most sturdy weapon – because it must extend so far but still be relatively narrow to deliver its deadly force, many lances break upon striking an enemy. Lancer units often have a detachment of support ashigaru who carry extra lances, allowing them to cycle out of action and claim new lances before returning to the fray.

Because of the specialized nature of lancers and the extremely non-traditional styles of their arms and armor, lancer units are all but unknown outside of the Unicorn Clan. For that matter, even Shinjo's clan employs relatively few lancers as standing units, since they are highly specialized and only useful in major army-on-army engagements.

Mounted Infantry

While cavalry has its advantages, the biggest drawback of mounted soldiers is tied to their largest advantage: mobility. When cavalry is able to move and charge freely, it can create devastating problems for a less-mobile enemy. However, unlike infantry soldiers, mounted troops are poor at holding a specific position. It is not impossible to engage in a prolonged melee from horseback, but unless a mounted warrior overmatches his opponents with both skill and equipment, drawbacks soon become evident. A mount, for example, is a potent combatant so long as it can move freely but becomes almost helpless if it is hemmed in and surrounded. Once that happens, the cavalryman himself is pinned in place, greatly increasing his vulnerability.

Both the Unicorn during their long journey and the clans in the Empire hit on a similar innovation to resolve this issue: mounted infantry. These units would place normal armored samurai on mounts with little to no armor, riding their horses into position and then quickly dismounting to fight. A few soldiers stay out of action to watch over the mounts, trying to stay close to the fight without being pulled into it, while the bulk of the troops become a normal infantry detachment – one which has arrived at its destination much faster than simple foot troops could ever have hoped.

This is one of the rare instances in Rokugani culture where those who do not participate in the fight are honored just as much, if not more, than those in the battle. Soldiers assigned to protect the mounts are key to maintaining the mounted infantry's advantage. In fact, mounted infantry are rarely sent to a single position for the entire length of a battle. Instead, it is more common for mounted infantry to be used to establish a foothold ahead of other infantry, or to conduct hit-and-run tactics such as overrunning a position the enemy feels is safe, then withdrawing on horseback before the area can be reached by a counterattack. Once their mission is complete or their initial gains are reinforced by traditional foot soldiers, they are redeployed elsewhere. Should the mounted infantry lose their horses, their advantages are ruined, so protecting their mobility is considered a vital and honorable task.

Mounted infantry tend to be somewhat lighter-armored compared to regular foot soldiers, but they carry an array of different weapons, since they are used for many different tasks in battle and their mounts make it easy for them to bring extra gear. This flexibility brings an array of benefits but means they are not expected to fare well in protracted combat against heavily-armed enemies. Thus, their basic usage in combat is ultimately not much different than most other cavalry, though they accomplish their tasks in a different way, outmaneuvering their enemies rather than simply beating them down with superior force.

Shiotome (Battle Maidens)

Completely unique to the Unicorn Clan, the Shiotome warrior is considered a paragon of the Unicorn fighting ideal. Battle Maidens are fast and strong, compassionate and fierce, relentless and canny. Though the Unicorn employ other units that are well-known aspects of their clan, the Battle Maidens embody a purity, honesty, ferocity, and honor that is theirs alone – a strength which cannot be refuted even by those who call the Unicorn "barbarians."

Though the Shiotome units share many similarities with heavy cavalry, they are actually very different: an elite breed of troops that share a powerful spiritual bond with their steeds. Battle Maidens have a connection to their horses that few outside the family can fathom and none outside the Unicorn can grasp at all. An Utaku rider and her mount are practically of one mind, creating a dangerous hybrid warrior that can perform maneuvers and feats that seem impossible. The famous Utaku steeds themselves act with an almost human intelligence, moving in combat to keep their masters safe and striking enemies without any need for direction from their riders. Indeed, the Utaku steeds are the unquestioned apex of warhorses in the Empire. Daimyo have traded staggering amounts of influence and favor simply for the possibility of acquiring such a horse. Even when such a special favor is granted to those outside the Unicorn, an Utaku horse without a properly trained Shiotome warrior to master it is simply not the same. Many samurai have schemed and plotted (through means both honorable and not) to gain such a prize for their own, only to find that some vital spark is missing from the steed and its later children. Without a Shiotome rider, an Utaku steed is simply an exceptionally large, powerful, swift, and enduring horse. But with a Shiotome, it is all of these things... plus something else that is hard to describe. The mount becomes more powerful and intimidating, somehow aware and active in battle. This bond between an Utaku warhorse and its Battle Maiden is legendary, and the death of a cherished mount can cause the same devastation as the loss of an honored parent or a precious child. An Utaku will do anything she can to save her horse's life, and the histories of the family are full of instances where a Battle Maiden has sacrificed her own existence to save her steed. In cases where the horse does outlive its master, the steed is usually allowed to spend its remaining life in a sort of honorable retirement, breeding the next generation of mounts. Like the riders, Utaku horses which lose their masters are clearly stricken with grief, something that even those unused to dealing with horses can see. (It is possible, though rare, for a survivor of such a partnership to find another to bond with. Even then, however, the scars from the earlier loss never truly heal.)

Other clans have made a few attempts to imitate the Shiotome, either in method or in philosophy, but thus far all have failed. Those outside the Unicorn speculate as to whether this is due to the unique spirit of the Utaku family, to secret mystical rituals performed by the Unicorn, to something within the steeds' own bloodline, or perhaps to a combination of any or all of these factors. Naturally, the Utaku never reply to those crass enough to ask directly.

Cavalry Tactics

Although the Unicorn are the unquestioned masters of cavalry warfare, every clan is acquainted with at least the basics of mounted warfare, and the essential tactics which such warfare makes possible.

Harassment

As noted, among the earliest and most obvious uses of cavalry soldiers was hit-and-run tactics aimed at disrupting the enemy army or throwing off their balance and discipline. Even as more complex tactics became available through study and development, this principle was never abandoned. It is both effective and difficult to counter, since it is quite simple and makes use of the greatest advantage of cavalry: mobility.

Harassing tactics take several forms, with the choice usually driven by exactly what is being harassed: soldiers, movement, or formation. Harassing enemy soldiers themselves is the most basic and obvious use of this tactic. Cavalry bushi are able to sweep in from great distances, striking either with archery or with long melee weapons such as polearms, and then retreat before extended fighting takes too many lives. Ranged combat conducted in this fashion is extremely low risk, though it often has a similarly low rate of success against the enemy. After all, even the most skilled archers have a difficult time accounting for the myriad variables of firing an arrow from the back of a galloping mount. Jarring terrain can cause an arrow's path to be disrupted at the moment of release, or sudden changes in course by the mount might throw off the archer's shot. In general, mounted archers are exceptionally inaccurate compared to infantry archers, but make up for this through their ability to fire off many more volleys without being threatened by the enemy. After all, unless the enemy has cavalry of their own, they are unlikely to be able to chase down the harassing horse-archers.

Harassing tactics that use melee attacks are less reliably safe, but can cause more damage to the foe. Charging cavalry spearmen or lancers can cause great damage in the brief moments of two lines meeting, then can extract themselves much more easily than foot soldiers and withdraw for further action. While it is rare for such attacks to be executed without losses, when they are successful the harasser tends to lose far fewer soldiers in the brief exchange.

Another use of the cavalry's speed is the ability to strike an enemy force from multiple angles rapidly. When two infantry units meet in combat, it is almost impossible for one to fully disengage from the other, as their ranks dissolve into a great churning mass. Cavalry, however, have the speed and agility to pull back and strike again repeatedly when facing foot troops. Striking an enemy in this manner usually has one of two desired results – either it restricts the enemy's maneuverability, preventing them from marching where they wish to go, or it simply keeps their ranks in perpetual disarray as they fight off repeated attacks from different directions. While such tactical goals are common for any fight, the ability of cavalry to retreat and strike again, over and over, effectively allows a single unit to maintain multiple fronts of attack, a considerable advantage.

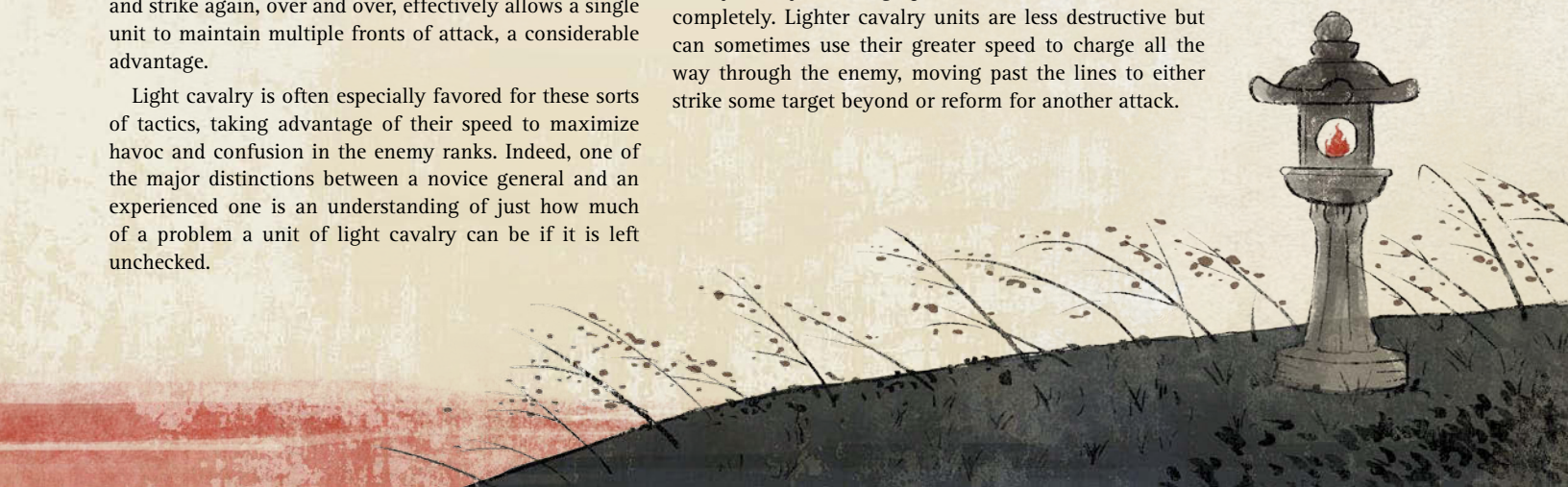
Light cavalry is often especially favored for these sorts of tactics, taking advantage of their speed to maximize havoc and confusion in the enemy ranks. Indeed, one of the major distinctions between a novice general and an experienced one is an understanding of just how much of a problem a unit of light cavalry can be if it is left unchecked.

Overpower

While heavy cavalry units carry an extreme advantage in protracted combat compared to other cavalry soldiers, the ability to charge an enemy line and send it into chaos is a trait shared by nearly all cavalry units. This particular tactic is used in equal measure both as a premeditated move and as a response to a sudden battlefield opportunity. (Though cavalry does not allow a guarantee of victory against an infantry army, minor breaches or momentary weaknesses in an enemy force can be exploited much more easily by mounted troops.)

The basic attempt to overpower an enemy line is straightforward and often brutally effective: a tight-ranked line of cavalry bushi charges the enemy front. If possible, when the cavalry strike home they do not stop to fight but instead keep moving forward, bulling through the lines, knocking soldiers aside and out of position. Though Rokugani bushi can be extremely strong and courageous, it is all too often impossible for them to hold their positions where there are armored warhorses crashing into them.

Cavalry charges try to maintain their momentum for as long as possible, driving as deep as they can into the enemy position to maximize the disruption. This is why heavy cavalry units are the favored tool for this tactic, since they can often wade right into the center of an enemy's army, breaking up its structure and coordination completely. Lighter cavalry units are less destructive but can sometimes use their greater speed to charge all the way through the enemy, moving past the lines to either strike some target beyond or reform for another attack.



As simple and obvious as this tactic is, it remains effective due to the fact that even veteran soldiers often have little to no experience facing charging cavalry, and it is difficult to train them in how to deal with the chaos, terror, and sheer overwhelming noise of charging cavalry. Instructions can be given, to be sure, but practical exercises are unfeasible for a number of reasons. Such men thus find themselves in an unfamiliar situation, cut off from the discipline and order of their unit, and all too often they are either unable to react effectively or succumb to the frenzy and terror suddenly engulfing them. Either way, the desired result is achieved.

Counter-cavalry tactics usually focus specifically on warding off this kind of attack. Braced pikes, entrenched bushi, and rugged or marshy terrain are all utilized to avert or blunt an overpowering charge. Elite cavalry are often trained in how to deal with things like walls of pikes or poor terrain, but the required adjustments reduce the effect of this tactic considerably.

Strike and Retreat

Though the tactic of light cavalry harassment has already been described, there are times when a small unit of cavalry is practically the entire force at a commander's disposal. Nearly any soldier will tell you that a simple numerical advantage over cavalry is not necessarily an advantage at all... but even so, some underestimate just how devastating a small cavalry force can be to a larger infantry opponent.

By performing quick and precise charges at key points in the enemy line and then retreating before they can get bogged down, cavalry warriors can kill dozens of enemies for each loss on their own side. This is different from merely attempting to harass the enemy, for the goal of this tactic is not merely to disrupt the opposing force but to actually wear it down to the point of collapse – after which the cavalry can rampage through the fleeing survivors. Obviously, a skilled general will realize what the cavalry is doing soon enough, but knowing what is happening and being able to stop it are two different things.

This tactic is most effective against an enemy who lacks skilled leadership and has too much confidence in its size advantage. In many cases such a foe will just try to ignore the cavalry attackers, believing that a few casualties are no great matter. However, as it becomes clear the enemy cavalry is taking many more lives than anticipated, the situation may change.

Execution of this tactic requires both experienced soldiers and a perceptive commander. It is difficult to judge just how long the cavalry should remain engaged with the enemy before retreating. Pull back too soon and the advantage is given up too quickly and too few enemies are slain. Retreat too late and losses in the mounted unit become too high for the exchange to be worth it. And a skilled foe will react to such tactics by taking up defensive positions that render the strike-and-retreat tactic ineffective.

Scatter and Pursuit

If a cavalry force manages to break an enemy line, they will often attempt to keep that line broken in order to achieve a complete victory. The basic purpose of most Rokugani army deployments is for the soldiers to be able to act in concert in some way: infantry covering archers, multiple pikemen creating a wall of spears, a line of heavy soldiers acting as shock troops, and so on. If a cavalry charge succeeds in disrupting this coordination, the commander will want to make the disruption permanent, reducing the enemy force to scattered individuals who can be easily cut down.

Scattering an enemy unit is difficult, even with the advantages cavalry have over foot soldiers. If the mounted warriors stay in an ongoing melee with their infantry opponents, they risk losing the momentum and mobility that let them break the enemy lines in the first place. To scatter an opposing force thus requires the mounted units to effectively breach the enemy's position and then re-form their own ranks in order to deliver decisive follow-up charges. Unfortunately, this also frequently means the cavalry are re-forming inside the enemy position, effectively surrounded. However, so long as they re-form quickly and continue to strike, maintaining their momentum, the enemy is unlikely to be able to rally and crush them.

Some cavalry commanders prefer to make a more diffused follow-up attack, pushing outward in several directions to continue disrupting the enemy ranks. Others choose to continue making focused charges, splitting the enemy in half over and over. Both approaches have

advantages and drawbacks. Pushing outward allows the cavalry unit to claim more ground and disrupt the enemy further, but reduces coordination between the cavalry soldiers and can result in their effort dissolving into scattered, fruitless individual melees. Wedging the enemy in half keeps the cavalry under better control but damages only a portion of the enemy force at a time, allowing the rest of the foes to rally.

Although those who are experienced in cavalry tactics are aware of this tactic, coping with it when the time comes is a whole other matter, since by the time the cavalry are using a scattering tactic they have already broken the lines at least once. Organizing a retreat and rally is usually the best response, since this denies the cavalry an easy target and can potentially restore the lines completely; however, executing a rally in the chaos of battle is no easy task. Alternately, a bold commander who has good control of his army can order his broken lines to pull apart and rally into two (or more) separate units, trapping the cavalry between the re-formed lines and potentially creating a chance to trap and destroy them.

If such responses fail, the scattered army will eventually dissolve completely, freeing the cavalry to chase down and slaughter the individual soldiers who are fleeing the defeat.

Encirclement

One of the basic ways of winning a battle is striking an opponent from multiple fronts, and the ultimate form of this method is to partially or completely surround them. Naturally, this is very difficult to achieve in infantry combat without either an extremely favorable battlefield or a huge numerical advantage. Cavalry, however, is a different matter.

Most unit formations are aligned to confront foes in one direction and have difficulty facing attacks from unexpected angles. Some of the more complex formations discussed earlier can fight briefly on two or more fronts, but this is never an ideal situation. Units can potentially be re-formed to deal with an attack from the "wrong" direction, but this takes precious time and if it is not completed in time can leave the unit in worse circumstances than before. Cavalry troops can take advantage of all of these facts, since their speed allows them to not only strike from unexpected directions but also to spread out and engulf an enemy or ride around the enemy flank before they can redeploy.

The basic ways to encircle an enemy depend on just how many fronts the cavalry wish to strike. A simple tactic is to have a cavalry unit conduct a charge but then split its ranks in half just before impact, peeling off to left and right, riding around to strike the enemy line from the sides. This can cause an extreme amount of damage if executed successfully, since most of an infantry unit's combat capability is arrayed to its front. Hemmed in from the sides, the enemy's ranks break down as they turn to face the threat as best they can.

A somewhat riskier gambit is to attempt to encircle an enemy unit completely. While an enemy force might be able to re-orient itself to create two combat fronts, few soldiers have experience with having to meet attacks from the front and sides at the same time. Of course, this sort of maneuver robs the cavalry of much of their momentum and shock impact – it relies on the disruption of the enemy rather than the impact of galloping horses. Consequently, if the surrounded force is too large, the cavalry may not be able to overwhelm it and indeed may find themselves overwhelmed in turn.

In either form, this tactic is dependent on the terrain. There must be room for the cavalry unit to perform these extensive maneuvers – both open physical space and an absence of nearby enemy units. While it can be devastating to split up and assault a single force from multiple angles, the tactic can turn into disaster if a nearby unit rushes to assist their comrades, taking advantage of the spread-out cavalry and destroying them.

As noted, the cavalry unit also must have sufficient numbers to surround and then overwhelm the enemy. This is relatively rare, since infantry soldiers are far easier to recruit, train, and arm than cavalry. While a handful of cavalry can take down a larger force of infantry, such as by using the strike-and-retreat tactic described earlier, an envelopment attack is used only with large forces.

Cavalry War After the Return of the Unicorn

Kaiu Juri looked at the plans in front of him. Under the open tent that kept the heat of Lady Sun off his head, everything felt calm and focused. The table in the center held several diagrams of the valley where his men fought. Around him, his finest officers made comments to one another and minor adjustments to the maps as reports came from the fighting not far away.

War was something he was bred for, and Juri was glad to finally have the honor of facing an honorable foe instead of the slobbering nightmares from the Shadowlands. Though his clan's duty to contain the threat of Fu Leng's realm was no shameful task, he had always dreamed of matching forces against such an opponent. Juri had finally received his wish when the Unicorn Clan had overstepped itself and attempted to annex lands too close to the Crab borders. Relations between the Crab and Unicorn were usually friendly, but the insult could not be borne. When the Ide diplomats refused to agree to a retreat of their forces, Juri was ordered to show the Unicorn exactly what their mistake would cost them. Within weeks, Hida warriors, Kaiu war machines, and Hiruma skirmishers had assembled and marched north.

Now the wonderful sight of honorable combat greeted the Kaiu noble from his tent.

"Lord Juri," one of the gunso called, pulling Juri's attention away from his view. "The Unicorn are making the assault you predicted." He indicated a purple-colored marker on the map with his finger, pushing it slightly toward the west flank of one of the Hida heavy legions. "They attempt to catch the Fifth Legion off of its guard, and they move swiftly."

"Indeed," Juri said, a slight smile on his lips. "The Unicorn are dangerous enemies. The speed and power of their cavalry cannot be overestimated... but it can be countered." The Crab commander gave a slight nod to one of the signalmen, who ran forward and waved two banners that had not yet been seen in the battle.

A dull thundering sound rolled across the field, growing louder as a squadron of heavily equipped mounted Crab emerged from behind an embankment in the valley. As the Unicorn cavalry charged into the Hida warriors, the Crab cavalry counter-charged from the Unicorn's southern flank. The Hida infantry halted their own forward march and swung toward the Unicorn, offering a closed front against their attackers.

Juri noted the standards of the Unicorn troops. "Moto," he grunted. Juri knew of the Moto family and nodded respectfully to the symbol of their house. A victory over Moto warriors would be hard won, but would bring great glory as well.

Even as the Crab commander saw the banners, however, he realized something was wrong. The Moto did not seem concerned by the sudden arrival of the Crab cavalry. Instead they altered their course and moved to charge the Crab cavalry head on. Although their movements were quick and precise, they did not seem pre-planned – they were simply adapting immediately to the new threat.

The anticipation of victory and glory turned to ash in Juri's mouth. He did not have to watch to know what would happen next, but he could not take his eyes away.

The Moto horses were at the gallop now, and as they closed with his men they split into three distinct units. The middle group smashed into the front rank of the Hida cavalry while the other two swung out to either side, then curved back in to strike the flanks of the Crab column. In a matter of seconds, Juri's surprise advantage had been reduced to wounded, dying, and dead men and ponies.

The Moto did not linger to finish off their ruined foes. Instead they regrouped quickly and charged back toward the Hida infantry which had been their original target. The Crab warriors hastened to re-position themselves once again, but it was clearly a futile gesture.

"As I said," Juri spoke, his stoney expression betraying almost none of his rage. "They cannot be overestimated. Ready the pitch and fire... and perhaps a few prayers."

The return of the Ki-Rin Clan – now calling themselves the Unicorn Clan – had an immediate impact on a great many facets of Rokugani life. Political and military positions shifted wildly as the other clans reacted in various ways to the new clan. The Empire had spent nine centuries in a balance of power, a balance that was considered a permanent feature of Rokugan, and now that balance was thrown into complete chaos. In addition to their many strange customs and philosophies, the Unicorn brought with them a new manner of warfare the other clans had never seen. This had largely to do with their prolific use of cavalry, but also with how they engaged in war at all: with equipment, tactics, training, and even their most basic general philosophy of warfare.

Tack and Saddle

The most glaring change the Unicorn brought back to the Empire was the widespread use of horses in warfare, but a significant (if sometimes overlooked) part of that change was the bizarre array of equipment the clan used on its mounts. Chief among these were the saddle and stirrup. Formerly, Rokugani saddles had been extremely simple affairs, little more than a blanket to protect the rider from abrasion. The lack of stirrups meant that mounted

soldiers had to stabilize themselves with their thighs. They could easily lose their balance from striking or receiving a hard blow – one more reason why early cavalry favored the bow instead.

The Unicorn saddle was a thick, complex, sophisticated seat for the warrior, with attached stirrups -- dangling footstraps – that helped further stabilize the rider and allowed him to swing and strike with his full strength. These pieces of equipment singlehandedly overturned every existing Rokugani convention in regards to mounted combat.

With the full saddle and stirrups, a mounted warrior had much greater stability and range of motion. Riders could lean far to one side or the other, swing with all their might, deliver spear-strikes with the full weight of their horse behind them, or even stand up straight in the saddle. To the Rokugani, as the Unicorn tore through their armies with dazzling displays of mounted strength and agility, it first seemed as though some strange magic was at work, perhaps even maho. However, canny observers soon noted that while the Unicorn bushi training was remarkable, it was their strange saddle and stirrups that allowed them to perform such extraordinary maneuvers – leaning forward far enough to slash enemies low to the ground, spearing opponents far to the side, standing full in the saddle to fire dai-kyu bows, and so forth.

The saddle took time to catch on with other clans, especially since Unicorn saddles were made with leather – which the Rokugani saw as disgusting dead flesh. However, eventually they figured out how to get around this problem. Some clans learned to make similar tools with other materials, while others adopted traditions of ritually purifying leather to make it acceptable to use for a samurai.

The various instruments the Unicorn used to care for their horses did not gain the same high profile as their saddles, but also spread to the rest of the Empire much more swiftly. Brushes, cleaning tools, blankets, instruments for caring for a horse's hooves and teeth all gained a great deal of popularity. The concept of using special tools to keep one's weapon of war in prime condition was universally acceptable, and a warhorse was nothing if not a weapon. This allowed greater health and lifespan for the native Rokugani pony, which in turn led to more steeds for breeding and a gradual increase in the Empire's cavalry forces.

Indirect Combat

Though the samurai caste is not uncreative when it comes to making war, only two clans – the Crab and Lion – make a point of studying mass warfare constantly and seeking to innovate on existing practices. The Crab, of course, are pragmatists, driven by the intense demands of their constant struggle with the Shadowlands. When they find a practice that works, they keep it and then find ways to improve upon it. The Lion, on the other hand, are unquestionably traditionalists, and while they do find ways to innovate in war they are also reverent of the ways of their ancestors. They rarely make great or sweeping changes to what the Empire sees as the proper practice of war, especially after the first century.

Up until the ninth century, what Rokugan accepts as the basic tenets of war are almost completely defined by these two clans. While the other clans take their own philosophies to the battlefield, they are largely working with variants on something created long before by an Akodo or Hida general. This mostly consists of a large army divided into smaller groups – the legions – which each have smaller sub-groups within them, down to the squadrons that form the basic building blocks of an army. These different groups are arranged and deployed by armament and purpose, positioned in various ways before the battle is joined. Generals engage in a complex game, moving units toward or away from each other, putting them into different formations, or leaving them in reserve based on the needs of the moment. Although there are a few special types of units, for the most part these armies consist of soldiers focused on melee fighting and those focused on archery attacks. The units trade attacks against each other, the casualties mount, and the victorious general is usually the one who either brought the most troops or the best-disciplined troops, or some combination of both.

While indirect attacks – harassment, hit-and-run strikes, and engagement from multiple angles – are certainly not unheard of, they are considered minor parts of a conflict. It is the single great battle between the main forces which decides things.

The Unicorn change all of this, for they seem to fight almost exclusively using these sorts of indirect strikes. At first the other clans call foul: these tactics are seen as inherently dishonorable and cowardly. When the Unicorn point out that the other clans engage in such tactics as well, the argument becomes one of scale... an argument that lingers on in the courts, eventually becoming just another in a long line of philosophical questions about the nature of honor.

Over time, the Unicorn's overt and widespread use of these tactics creates room for the other clans to follow suit without feeling like they are losing face. The Emperor never admonishes them, after all, and even the Lion eventually learn to appreciate the intricacies of such methods.

Mixed Units

While the Unicorn often seem to have an endless stream of cavalry warriors, the reality is that they employ foot soldiers in great numbers as well. Shinjo archers, Otaku infantry, and Moto pikemen are effective units, especially when combined with the swiftness of cavalry working in tandem with them. Before the Unicorn's return, if two forces met with any sort of cavalry in their ranks, these units would generally engage each other, leaving the infantry to fight each other separately. Just coordinating infantry and archery generally taxes most generals to their limits.

Making use of cavalry and infantry together opened up a host of possibilities. Learning to coordinate troops with such different speeds and capabilities was difficult at first, but bore great fruit for those generals canny enough to do so. Naturally, the Akodo family soon excelled at making use of this new philosophy, and the Unicorn sometimes found themselves stymied by surprising maneuvers and combinations of Lion units.

Anti-Cavalry Tactics

The natural consequence of cavalry becoming more widespread after the return of the Unicorn was the development and proliferation of anti-cavalry tactics. Previously, cavalry warriors were so rare that soldiers or fortifications aimed at them specifically were considered unnecessary. But with the Unicorn deploying thousands of mounted bushi, and as more and more other armies expanded their own cavalry arms, these measures became vital.

The most basic defense against a horse and rider is the yari, sometimes called a pike. All clans soon found ways to brace the spear to more effectively meet a cavalry charge. Changes in how the pike itself was constructed allowed for more effective use, such as bracing cross-bars and a thicker haft.

The no-dachi existed before the Unicorn's return, but the weapon saw a surge in popularity afterward, as infantry sought a blade heavy enough to defeat armored horses.

Crab engineers, Crane defenders, and Scorpion saboteurs led the way in devising other methods of discouraging cavalry attackers. Fortifications were made that could release rolling logs – hampering to infantry, but able to break the legs of horses easily. Ramps and access ways were designed in such a way that cavalry could not ascend them at any decent speed. Pit traps, ditches, and other such obstacles were developed, all built around the same idea – restricting the movement and speed of the horse, thereby blunting its impact in war.

Naturally, most of these tactics were only effective as defensive measures at fixed positions such as castles. In the field of open battle, far from a friendly holding, other measures had to be taken. Attacks based on fire and noise were developed, designed to strike fear into the enemy horses, but these met with limited success. Infantry made offensive use of pikes and no-dachi, trying to take the fight to the enemy, and the obscure chain and entangling weapons found new respect as methods of unseating riders or binding the legs of horses.

Striking at the mount's legs or the rider's seat worked best against light and medium cavalry. Heavy armored warriors whose mounts had barding could often ignore such attacks unless they were employed vary accurately. To that end, tactics of movement and positioning were drilled into the minds of soldiers – methods of surrounding mounted enemies, cutting off their movement and bringing them down while they are immobilized. This philosophy spread not only in personal combat but also in unit tactics, as infantry sought ways to gain the advantage against cavalry.

Over time, the Unicorn Clan's main initial advantages – surprise and fear – were blunted considerably but never fully mitigated. For all of these anti-cavalry measures, the speed and power of mounted bushi is never faced lightly.

Cavalry Units and Tactics In Other Clans

Though the Unicorn Clan has unquestioned dominance in the field of cavalry warfare, the children of Shinjo are not the only clan to employ specialized training or to have revered traditions in this field. Cavalry warriors are expensive to maintain and difficult to train properly, but few samurai are so foolish as to discount their worth. The other clans have developed their own unique tactics and elite cavalry units, for use both on the battlefield and beyond.

The Crab Clan

As mentioned previously, the Crab and the Lion were the two main powers in Rokugan that truly explored the possibilities of cavalry combat before the Unicorn's return. The pragmatic leaders of the Hida, Kaiu, and Hiruma researched it both individually and in collaboration with each other. Unfortunately, the discovery that animals were quite susceptible to the Taint (and were often far less communicative about its effects) became a small disaster for the Crab. Dozens of Rokugani horses fell to the Taint

in the Empire's early history, becoming the source from which many Shadowlands beasts later spawned.

Though this failure enraged the Crab, it did not stop them. Cavalry scouts and lone mounted warriors became a specialty of the Hiruma family, and the Hida and Kaiu collaborated to eventually outfit some of the fiercest, most heavily armored heavy cavalry in the Empire (until the Unicorn's return, at least). Unsurprisingly, the numbers of these heavy cavalry warriors remained low, and their use was usually relegated to action against the rest of the Empire rather than the Shadowlands.

After the Unicorn's return to the Empire, and especially as a bond of friendship developed between the Crab and Unicorn over time, the Crab became one of the few clans regularly gifted with the warhorses of their Unicorn allies. From this alliance the Crab bred a stronger, more enduring line of their own warhorses, and the numbers of their cavalry legion – known officially as the Second Legion in the Crab Clan's reserve army – grew steadily.

Tsuru's Legion

Several years prior to the Clan War, the younger brother of the Crab Clan Champion – a man named Hida Tsuru – took it upon himself to turn the Second Legion into an elite fighting force. At the time, the legion was considered only a marginally useful part of the Crab army, since few of the clan's tactics even considered the use of cavalry in offense, while Crab defensive strategies employed fixed-point defensive measures which made the maneuverability of horses seem pointless to most battles.

Tsuru, however, saw the potential in a highly trained force of Crab able to strike quickly, sweeping out from the fortifications of the clan and then returning just as quickly. Though the Kaiu Wall was a marvel of engineering, it was not a perfect defense. Enemies from the Shadowlands did slip by the Wall occasionally, albeit not in great numbers – not to mention the problem of dark spirits and demons being summoned within the Empire's borders. Moreover, in fights against neighboring clans the mobility of cavalry could provide a potent supplement to the more typical Crab tactics of standing on the defense and waiting for their foes to exhaust themselves.

With the defense of both the Empire and the Crab in mind, Hida Tsuru took command of the Second Legion and expanded both their numbers and their training, drilling them in the art of melding speed and power into irresistible force. They would strike not just swiftly, but overpoweringly, breaking enemy lines and bringing a battle to a quick end. Drawing on the clan's friendship with the Moto, Tsuru trained his recruits in shock tactics and pruned those he felt unworthy from the ranks. Over time, the Second Legion came to be known instead as Tsuru's Legion, and transformed into a large and fearsome fighting force. Appointment to the legion became a matter of pride rather than scorn, and eventually Tsuru's Legion became a semi-independent organization, a strike force used by Clan Champions whenever needed, standing outside of the structure of the Crab reserve army. It proved itself many times in battles against other clans, notably in the Clan Wars and the Destroyer War.

The Crane Clan

The Crane, with their deep coffers and endless political and cultural influence, actually had a greater raw ability to arm and train cavalry warriors than the other clans in the first few centuries of the Empire's history. Indeed, the fledgling Daidoji family took a great interest in the possibility of warriors who could cover long distances in a short time, assault supply lines, and otherwise hit "soft" targets in an enemy army. However, the Crane Clan's overall lack of focus on military supremacy meant that while they could afford such a force, they spent little time actually building one, ignoring the advantage they might have otherwise garnered.

For the majority of the Crane's history, their cavalry forces were generally represented by individual bushi who carried fearsome reputations, names known across the whole Empire. Much like the clan's duelists, Crane cavalry warriors were respected and feared in single combat, but they did not represent a numerous threat on the battlefield. One Crane mounted warrior could certainly turn the tide of a small conflict, such as by bringing down handfuls of lesser foes while his comrades took advantage of the opening he created. But in the face of the greater military powers of the Empire this was hardly a noteworthy force.

The Daidoji, of course, developed different tactics and even made advances in the concepts of harassment and other indirect cavalry tactics that the Lion spurned. But, again, the limited number of such warriors meant that they remained a small strike force, one that could certainly cripple enemies if used right, but not able to simply overpower enemies in a direct conflict of strength.

Doji's Fan

Like many of the other clans, the Crane cavalry operations were changed drastically by the Unicorn Clan's return to Rokugan. However, unlike those other clans, the Crane embraced the Unicorn almost immediately, due to the wayward children of Shinjo presenting the Emperor with the item known as Doji's Fan. This simple sandalwood fan bore an original copy of Doji's personal mon, and the Crane knew it could not have been faked. In the face of such proof the Doji family welcomed the Unicorn back to their home and soon began to support them in the courts. And as a gesture of friendship and gratitude, the Unicorn gifted the Crane with a generous number of their steeds.

These horses became the mounts used in the Crane's first dedicated cavalry legion, a force they named Doji's Fan – obviously in honor of the gift that brought the clans together, but also in reference to the speed with which the warhorses could go into action. Unlike the Daidoji units with their indirect attacks, Doji's Fan was trained and equipped to wade into the thick of battle and strike at high priority targets. The legion was often used to threaten command groups, attack from reserve at critical moments, or to strike archer and siege weapon units that thought themselves safe from infantry.

Doji's Fan seldom operates as a single force – it is often split throughout several regions of the Crane lands, ready to respond to threats in multiple areas. Only rarely is the full legion mustered together, but at such a time they can have a powerful impact on the battlefield, crippling an unprepared enemy with quick, powerful strikes.

The Dragon Clan

The inquisitive and individualistic nature of Dragon Clan samurai meant that the concept of mounted warfare did get taken up by more than one samurai, despite the inhospitable terrain of the clan's home. The Dragon lands often faced cold and bitter weather, and the majority of their lands were rugged or outright mountainous; these factors meant that even if the Dragon had possessed the vast resources of the Lion, Crab, or Crane, they would never develop a sizable force of cavalry or a strong tradition of mounted soldiers.

Of course, things with the Dragon Clan are seldom quite so simple. Despite the terrain and climate, there were many Mirumoto who understood and pursued the use of cavalry, and many others who found a form of meditation in the freedom of riding on horseback. This, in turn, led to some Mirumoto who sought serenity in the practice of archery to take such a idea to another level by shooting from horseback. These Mirumoto archers would calm their senses, let themselves becoming one with both the bow and their steed, and then strike seemingly impossible targets while riding through their clan's difficult landscape.

Though the Dragon Clan's number of cavalry warriors never became very large, they were always noted for their precision, skill, and discipline. This is partly due to the Dragon mindset of serenity and balance, but also to the simple fact that riding a horse in the hostile environment of Dragon lands is a powerful training exercise, teaching precise control and focus. A simple mistake in such a place, one that would only be a minor problem elsewhere, could easily lead to the death of both horse and rider.

The Dragon's Wind

The Dragon cavalry archers eventually came to be known as the Dragon's Wind, for several reasons. Chief among them was the great volleys of arcing fire they would unleash upon an enemy, filling the air with the whirring sound of flying arrows as they put constant pressure on their targets. Secondly, the Dragon maintained a habit of avoiding the political and military conflicts of the Empire for the most part... only to occasionally intervene for their own reasons, arriving suddenly and as if out of nowhere. When the Dragon chose to enter into battle for whatever reason, they would often be represented by the swift Dragon's Wind units, arriving, making their presence known on the field, and then withdrawing as soon as the conflict was over.

While the Dragon's Wind were well known for their skill at mounted archery, many opponents overlooked the fact that they were also well-trained Mirumoto bushi, some of the deadliest combatants in the Empire. The Dragon's Wind were hardly at risk if they were forced into melee combat, and indeed their heavy armor and daisho meant they often did so when the situation called for it. In many ways, the Dragon's Wind represented the Dragon Clan itself to the rest of the Empire: inscrutable, possessed of surprisingly few weaknesses, and able to confound enemies with a variety of skills and tactics.

Of course, the number of bushi within the Dragon's Wind remains low throughout the Empire's history, both before and after the return of the Unicorn. The Dragon are the poorest of the Great Clans, and the realities of a cavalry warrior's expense cannot be ignored. Additionally, caring for mounts in their hostile territory creates more problems than it would elsewhere, from the constant risk of broken limbs to the health hazards of the bitter winter months. Finally, despite their physical proximity to the Unicorn, the Dragon are mostly indifferent to the children of Shinjo. The number of times the Dragon have been gifted with Unicorn steeds is extremely low, even when compared to the rare times such gifts have been given to the other clans.

The Lion Clan

If there is one clan that is constantly chafed by the fact of the Unicorn Clan's cavalry supremacy, it is the Lion. For centuries the Lion believed themselves the unquestioned masters of warfare in all its aspects, for they were the Right Hand of the Emperor, the army of Rokugan. Akodo generals were the unquestioned masters of strategy and tactics, while Matsu legions outstripped the forces of every other noble family in both their number and their sheer battle-fury. While the Crane and Scorpion could blunt the Lion Clan's power by outmaneuvering them in the courts, if and when open warfare came, the sight of Lion war standards usually meant only one thing: defeat to their enemy.

The Lion spent considerable time in the early years of the Empire attempting to find the best use for horses on the battlefield. They saw great potential in the mounted warrior and took many different approaches to balancing the difficulties of a mounted force against the advantages to be gained from it. Over time the Lion developed the Empire's largest military force of mounted bushi – although this number was only impressive when compared with the limited forces of the other clans in the Empire.

The Unicorn's return threw the Lion Clan's entire concept of war – especially of cavalry warfare – into chaos. As they attempted to reconcile the old ways with what the Unicorn had introduced into the Empire, a man named Matsu Ikeda was sent to serve as an ambassador to the Unicorn Clan. He studied the clan's ways and eventually brought his knowledge back to the Lion Clan, where he was granted the right to found his own vassal family. He trained his followers in the new and more effective methods of cavalry warfare. Although the Lion intensely disliked the "barbarian" cultural traditions of the Unicorn, Matsu Ikeda was able to find ways for the clan to use what he learned without having to embrace the more distasteful aspects of the Unicorn Clan. Since then, the Ikeda vassal family has earned a modest but respected place in the Lion armies as elite cavalry warriors, serving in many different ways.

The Lion Wardens

Akodo himself began the Lion tradition of using mounted patrolmen to guard the lands of his clan. These warriors became known as Wardens – sometimes called the Ikoma Wardens due to the tendency of Ikoma samurai to join their ranks in disproportionate numbers. The Wardens began as small patrols of lightly-armored horsemen who had standing orders to deal with minor problems such as bandits or solitary beasts. When facing larger threats such as enemy invasions they were expected to send messages for help. Thanks to the swift and wide-ranging patrols of the Wardens, entering and leaving the Lion lands unnoticed is never a simple matter.

Appointment to the Wardens is not a matter of mere combat skill. A Warden is expected to be able to survive in the wilderness, at least for a short period of time, and to handle diplomatic issues when encountering and escorting visitors to the Lion territories. Naturally, this particular set of skills is commonly found in the Ikoma family, who often take after their founder – a man who was a brawler and a poet, a braggart and a diplomat. Though the Ikeda family represents the bulk of the military cavalry in the Lion Clan in modern times, the Wardens are a more diverse force.

Wardens serve the Lion in a wide range of roles, as patrolmen, magistrates, diplomats, and warriors, whatever is needed by the clan.

The Mantis Clan

Even during their centuries as a Minor Clan, the Mantis were able to use the rare and exotic resources of their home islands to acquire wealth greatly disproportionate to their size. This allowed them some freedom to explore the expensive options of cavalry warfare, but their lands and their emphasis on sea-power made such an effort not worth their while. The Islands of Spice and Silk were dangerous for horses and, in any case, travel between settlements was more easily accomplished by sea than by land. Some horses were used as pack animals, and of course the more influential lords within the Mantis had their own personal riding steeds, but horses were never given much regard by the clan overall.

Even after the Mantis finally ascended to the status of Great Clan and gained some holdings on the mainland Empire, the idea of cavalry warfare simply never caught on within the clan. Among the Tsuruchi the use of horsemanship is common, since the Wasp Clan often served as trackers and bounty hunters who needed to cross great distances, but they never pursued any specific practice of mounted combat (though some individual Tsuruchi enjoy practicing the art of the bow from horseback as well as on foot).

This is not to say the Mantis have a complete and total absence of mounted troops, but rather that they have no tradition of specialized or elite cavalry units in the manner of other clans. They see no need for cavalry when their navy grants them a mobility no other clan can match. In the years since the return of the Unicorn, Mantis commanders have made themselves at least moderately familiar with cavalry tactics in order to be able to oppose them, but the clan's own mounted warriors are few in number, generally unremarkable, and carry no particular reputation.

The Orochi Riders

The closest thing the Mantis have to a noteworthy cavalry tradition is the Orochi Riders, shugenja who ride and command the fierce orochi sea-serpents. An orochi can move more swiftly than any ship, bringing a cavalry-like advantage to naval warfare. Though Mantis ships are generally considered the most advanced, and Mantis naval commanders are the most experienced, other clans such as the Crane and Crab do field navies of substantial size and power – but none of them have anything that approaches the speed and power of the Orochi Riders.

The Phoenix Clan

To outsiders, the Phoenix are something of a paradox when it comes to warfare – they are dedicated pacifists, but command magic and supernatural power that can bring wars to swift and deadly conclusions. The Shiba family controls the vast majority of the clan's martial power, but they are themselves under the command of the Isawa pacifists. Despite the clan's bent towards magical power and martial pacifism, the Shiba are stalwart warriors and constantly look for ways to improve their ability to protect the clan.

With that in mind, it is somewhat surprising how completely the Shiba have rejected the notion of cavalry. While they do have a few minor cavalry units to use when necessity demands, they do not put any stock in the use of cavalry as a decisive martial force. This may be partly because of expense, but seems to be driven more by the clan's pacifistic traditions. Phoenix attacks on other clans are practically unheard of, and the Shiba view cavalry as a predominantly offensive force. Therefore, developing cavalry is a waste of time and effort that could be better spent in other ways.

The Tsunami Legion

While the Phoenix place little value in mounted warfare, they are still the masters of supernatural power – and this may be another reason why they have no cavalry tradition. The Tsunami Legion, technically known as the Seventh Legion in the clan's single army, was developed by the Isawa early in the clan's history. The Isawa and Shiba may bitterly disagree on when to apply military force, but the Isawa understood the Shiba are correct in how it should be applied: with overwhelming strength. The Phoenix as a whole regard using a shugenja's gift for battle as a necessary evil at best, but they do not deny that such necessity may arise. This led to the creation of the various Elemental Legions and their associated bushi forces.

It is the duty and purpose of the Tsunami Legion to use elemental Water magic to attain both speed and maneuverability. They are probably dispatched more often than the other Elemental Guards, since their swiftness allows them to respond quickly to threats. In the use of this force, the Phoenix took a lesson from their friends and allies in the Crane: a quick, precise attack against a specific target can bring a life-wasting conflict to a conclusion. While Fire and Earth magic might be more devastating on the battlefield, the power of the Tsunami Legion can end a war with little loss of life.

The Legion is similar to cavalry in that its speed and maneuverability are much greater than normal infantry. However, this advantage obviously comes from the strength of the shugenja supporting the Legion, which means it faces few of the typical problems of cavalry but carries its own drawbacks. Priests are rarely trained for warfare, after all, and even in the Phoenix Clan a powerful shugenja is rare – making this unit far more valuable and irreplaceable than any cavalry legion.

The Scorpion Clan

Cavalry was something that appealed from the beginning to both Bayushi and Shosuro. They both clearly saw the many ways in which a mounted combatant could gain advantages. Thus, while the Lion spent decades perfecting the lone heavy cavalry warrior, the leaders of the Scorpion puzzled out all the different scenarios in which a single low-key rider could sabotage and confuse an opposing army, disabling an enemy before the battle even began. Where the other clans saw problems with a Rokugani horse's inability to carry a heavy rider or wear armor, the Scorpion saw opportunity.

Though the Scorpion pursued cavalry warfare along much the same lines as the other clans, they took special care to train single riders who would specialize in covert activities. These riders would use out-of-the-way roads or unseen routes to get behind the enemy and perform precision attacks (the Scorpion, of course, insisted these were certainly not "assassinations") on key personnel before or during battle. When other clans complained about these techniques, the Scorpion would often cite passages from Akodo's *Leadership*, passages which supported the tactics either directly or indirectly.

Beyond such methods, however, the Scorpion have no notable cavalry units, even after the return of the Unicorn and the introduction of their marvelous steeds. In fact, the Scorpion led the effort to discredit the Unicorn Clan's identity as Shinjo's lost clan, and thus felt that embracing the Empire's sudden interest in cavalry warfare was not a good public policy. Still, the Scorpion do make some use of mounted warriors. They use almost exclusively mounted units as archers, enjoying the frustrating and disruptive nature of cavalry archers on the battlefield. Scorpion cavalry are thus among the Empire's best at performing hit-and-run ranged attacks and harassing enemies endlessly while minimizing their own casualties.

The Minor Clans

As noted, cavalry units are expensive to create and maintain. In the Minor Clans, where both wealth and other resources are in short supply, cavalry are practically impossible to field in any significant number. The few cavalry soldiers found in the Minor Clans, both before and after the Unicorn's return, are usually used as honor guards or, very rarely, as small elite strike teams. The Fox and Mantis, the two oldest Minor Clans, never developed any manner of cavalry tradition at all – the Mantis for the reasons noted previously, and the Fox due to both their history and their location. While the Fox originally inherited the Ki-Rin Clan's love of horses, their original army was almost entirely wiped out by the Lion and when they were relocated to new lands they found themselves in forested terrain which did not allow for raising or maintaining horses in meaningful numbers.

Most other Minor Clans have followed the precedent of these two clans, albeit mainly due to a lack of resources. Some clans, such as the Hare, also believe raising a cavalry force only invites challenges from the Great Clans.

The major exception to this pattern is the Ox Clan, founded by a former Unicorn during the War of Spirits. The Ox Clan carries many of the Unicorn Clan's traditions, but focuses even more strongly on heavy mounted combat. While their total numbers are a pittance compared to any given Great Clan's strength, they do have a great deal of cavalry, more than some Great Clan armies and certainly far more than any other Minor Clan. Due to this, the Ox are often sought out as allies by Great Clans who lack their own cavalry forces.

Imperial Factions

The Miya have served as the heralds of the Emperor since their founding, and consequently have some of the finest stables in the Empire, as well as some of the swiftest mounts Rokugan has ever seen. However, Miya warriors are relatively rare; their mounts are trained for use by messengers, not soldiers. While the Unicorn gifted the Imperial houses with a great many of their impressive steeds upon their return, the Miya still bred them for speed rather than warfare.

The Seppun, on the other hand, made great use of these new Unicorn mounts. The Shinjo family's gifts earned them the Seppun family's high regard, as they found their cavalry units were now able to fight harder, patrol faster, and needed less rest. Before the Unicorn's return, the Seppun did sometimes conduct patrols on horseback, but had few mounts and usually kept their steeds in reserve for times they needed to mobilize to protect the Throne

or otherwise serve the Emperor's command. While they could easily conscript help from any of the Great Clans, the Seppun's pride often required they rely on their own strengths.

The Rising Sun

After the Unicorn Clan's return, the leaders of the Seppun military forces set out to create an elite cavalry unit that could traverse the Empire in short order, bringing the wrath of the Emperor to wherever he saw fit. While the Seppun have always been charged with protecting the Imperial City and the Child of Heaven, they have also frequently served as a firm and swift reminder that the Throne does not rely wholly on the Great Clans for its strength. To be sure, it is rare for Seppun troops, some of the most elite soldiers in the whole Empire, to march on those who have earned the Emperor's disfavor – but on those occasions when this has come to pass, the offending party has been reduced to ruin.

The Rising Sun was created as a unit which would serve this purpose with even greater swiftness and strength than before. Only the most elite members of the already legendary Seppun military were allowed to seek admission to the Rising Sun. These men and women receive endless training, not only from their own sensei but also from the finest mounted combatants to be found in the rest of the Empire – making them masters of tactics the Great Clans do not share with one another. While the Unicorn are the undisputed masters of cavalry warfare, even they hold the Rising Sun legion in extremely high regard.

The Shadowlands

Through most of history, the various beasts and demons of the Shadowlands do not organize into normal military forces. While the Taint sometimes claims the soul of a skilled soldier, a commander, or even entire squadrons of bushi, the numbers of such tragic cases are usually low. Several times during the Empire's history, a powerful leader falls to the Taint or emerges from Jigoku, leading huge armies of undead, oni, and beasts, but these forces lack the cohesive order of Rokugani armies and, in any case, cavalry units are extremely rare within them.

It may be noted that while the supernatural beasts of the Shadowlands do not have the same maintenance requirements as conventional horses, there are many other considerations that lessen their utility. Undead mounts will eventually rot away if not tended to by knowledgeable maho-tsukai. Free-willed Shadowlands beasts do not take well to breaking and training, and more than one Lost warrior has perished from underestimating the danger of the task. Thus, for most of history the numbers of Shadowlands mounted warriors has been low – fortunately for the Empire.

The major exception to this pattern is, fittingly, brought about by the return of the Unicorn Clan. The daimyo Moto Tsume leads the vast Moto legions into the Shadowlands, determined to prove that his family can do what the Crab could not. Tsume and the majority of his followers are taken by the Taint, becoming the terrible Dark Moto. Tsume's arrogance cost the Moto family dearly, and gave Fu Leng's forces a powerful new asset. The three centuries in which the Dark Moto roamed through the Shadowlands were a time of exceptional strife and suffering for both the Unicorn and the Crab. Where before the Shadowlands had little to nothing in the way of organized cavalry, now Tsume and his immortal kin rode against the Empire with ruthless efficiency. The Dark Moto would even launch sorties around the end of the Great Wall to raid the Empire's nearby lands, retreating before anyone – even the Unicorn – could hope to catch them.

The Dark Moto served as a key force during Fu Leng's attempt to conquer the Empire in the Clan War era. With the Crab abandoning the Kaiu Wall and forging an alliance of convenience with the Shadowlands, the Dark Moto were able to enter Rokugan and move freely against any target they wished. No one was safe from the free-ranging Moto on their nightmarish onikage steeds, as they struck all across the Empire, even into the Phoenix lands. Heavily armored, strengthened by the Taint, and riding tireless undead steeds, they were all but unstoppable. Not until the end of the Hidden Emperor era were the Dark Moto finally wiped out, and the legacy of terror they created still lives on.

The Hellbeasts

Though the Tainted and often undead horses known as onikage are suitable mounts for many Shadowlands denizens, the rare creatures known as Hellbeasts are considered superior for a number of reasons. Hellbeasts have a rudimentary intellect surpassing that of a typical horse, which makes them a better steed in some ways and also more dangerous, to both rider and foe. Breaking a Hellbeast's will often requires either massive effort and patience (the latter a quality which is lacking in most Tainted beings) or some way to coax loyalty out of the thing – perhaps through the promise of regular meals of human flesh.

In battle, Hellbeasts have a great many advantages over horses, since they are tremendously strong, resilient, and ferocious. They can use their boar-like size and bulk to charge and crash into enemy lines with much more force than a horse, and they also have razor-sharp claws, teeth, and tusks, which they use to shred and even devour their enemies in the thick of combat. Once the Hellbeasts began appearing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Crab swiftly learned to fear them, especially since any foe who could use them as mounts was bound to be powerful, canny, or both.

While organized units of Hellbeast riders are rare, even after the ascension of Daigotsu to lead the Lost, the appearance of a dozen or more such beasts at once is considered a major crisis by the Crab. Even a handful of Hellbeasts can carve through a hundred foot troops with ease, and they also enjoy taking out mortal cavalry – a Hellbeast charge inspires terror and hysteria in all but the most disciplined horses.

The Spider Clan and Cavalry

The greatly increased numbers of Lost who appeared after the Hidden Emperor era included many soldiers of the Unicorn, as well as troops from various other cavalry orders in the Empire. When Daigotsu organized the Lost into the dark society which eventually became the so-called "Spider Clan," he took advantage of this to create his own cavalry forces. Skeletal warhorses were dredged up from the depths of the Shadowlands, other Tainted quadrupeds were captured and trained as mounts, and from these resources Daigotsu built twisted reflections of the Empire's mounted forces. Heavy cavalry rode on Hellbeasts, armored with the bones of their victims. Mounted archers fired blackened arrows tipped with corrupted metal and obsidian into the ranks of Rokugan's defenders. Lightly mounted, fast moving bushi sowed fear and chaos wherever they rode.

Many of these forces were eventually destroyed, either in conflict with the Empire or, later, fighting the legions of Kali-Ma in the Destroyer War. But some of them survived to become part of the Imperially-recognized Spider Clan, serving in the jungles of the Colonies.

The Care and Training of Warhorses

Like all other aspects of samurai culture in Rokugan, the training and care of a warhorse shows common elements across all the clans, but those elements are colored by the particular attitudes and traditions of each noble house. What is understood by all is that training, caring for, and using a warhorse requires the rider and stablehands to earn the trust and respect of the mount. How that respect is established varies, of course. For example, to the Unicorn, the respect is built through friendship and shared strength... but to the Scorpion, "respect" is often just another word for "fear."

No clan fully shares the Unicorn attitude toward horses, though individual exceptions do appear from time to time. Whereas the Unicorn Clan spends a great deal of its considerable resources on housing and caring for its steeds, other clans tend to see the animals as simply another tool of war, so the amount of koku and manpower put into maintaining them is directionally proportional to the value they have to the clan's army. While there are accepted minimum levels of care and training, additional effort is often simply not worth the cost, in time or money.

Care of Horses

Like any animal, horses require certain basic resources for their continued health – shelter, food, and regular cleaning. Even the samurai families least emotionally attached to their steeds understand that their horses show how they care for their property, so it is extremely unlikely to find any stable or horse in outright poor condition.

Depending on the clan in question, stables can be anything from a simple shelter – a thatched roof, partitioned areas for each individual mount, and a pile of hay – to a large and elaborate building constructed with the same care and complexity as a Kaiu fortification. All horses require at least a minimal field nearby for exercise and training, though some clans prefer to let their horses roam free for philosophical reasons. Leaving the horses out in this manner requires much more land dedicated to their use, as well as sturdy and well-maintained fences to ensure the horses do not wander too far. Regardless of size, these fields must be carefully tended for problems such as rocks and holes (which can result in a broken leg) and guarded against predators.

The diet of a horse varies by its type. Small Rokugani ponies eat the least out of the different types of horses found in the Empire, and even after the return of the Unicorn they remain by far the most common type as well. Indeed, these mounts can subsist on surprisingly little food and water given their size, though they benefit considerably from larger and more carefully administered diets. The Crab are fond of figuring out ideal diets for the work horses that help transport the clan's heavy armaments and building materials across its lands. More frugal (or uncaring) daimyo often prefer these mounts because they can be maintained relatively cheaply, especially in lean times.

Larger horses, both the Unicorn breeds of warhorses and the legendarily massive Utaku steeds, require not only more food but also specific types of nourishment to maintain their powerful muscles and endurance. The Utaku stablemasters jealously guard the secrets of the

food they give their mounts, treating such knowledge as reverently as any family dojo's technique or temple's mystical secrets. Outside the Unicorn Clan, others have hit upon several different balances of food that can help their larger horses maintain strength through the winter or during times of sickness. Naturally, these methods are not as effective as the Unicorn blends, but for the most part they work well enough.

Unlike the smaller ponies, large warhorses cannot be short-fed or ignored for long periods of time. Their massive muscles must be maintained through abundant food and regular exercise, and will atrophy at surprisingly quick rates if not properly tended. Foolish daimyo who do not understand the commitment entailed in caring for such magnificent hoses are often surprised – and not in a good way.

The overall cleanliness and health of a horse is similar to that of a human being – when all is going well, a simple routine of healthy eating and daily grooming is enough. However, when sickness or injury occur, all aspects of care must be tended more carefully or swift disaster will follow. Moreover, without specific training it is difficult to properly diagnose a horse's injury or sickness. Whereas human beings can explain their pain and symptoms, a horse cannot, and many steeds have perished because their owners did not even realize they were unwell. Those tasked with maintaining a horse's health must learn the subtle ways in which horses communicate such information.

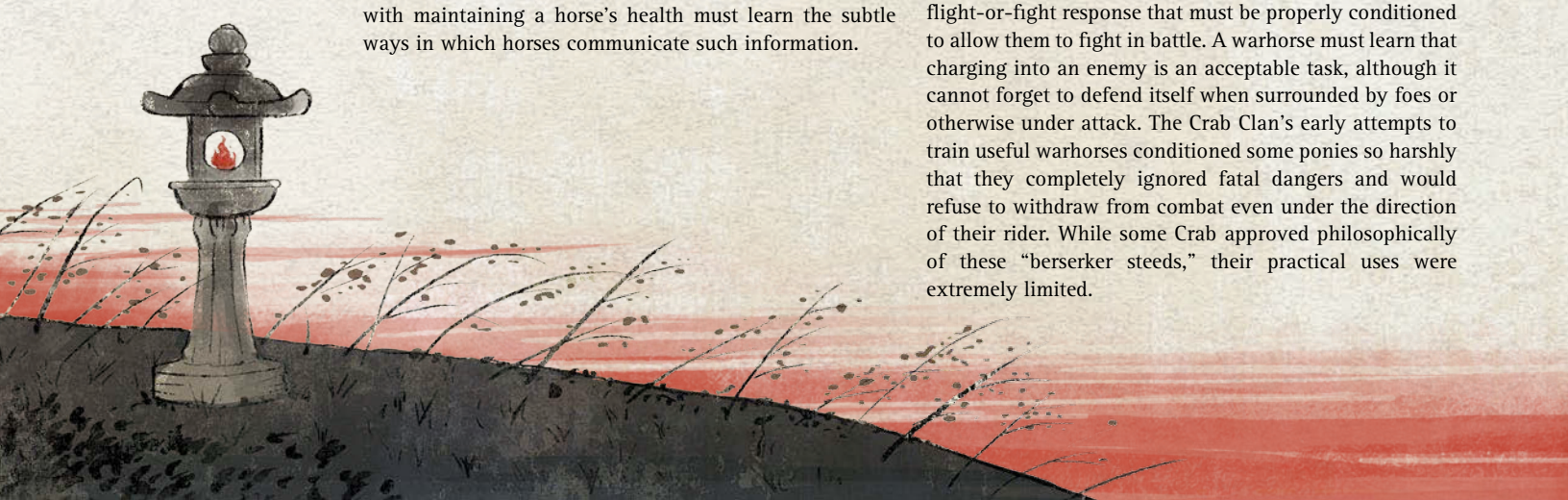
The sad reality is that while some illnesses and injuries can be treated, a great many of them are eventually fatal to the animal – either due to being incurable or because they reduce the horse to little more than a useless mouth. Indeed, this is one of the reasons horses were so rarely risked in battle during the Empire's early history. Injuries were difficult to treat and often led to death. The wear and fatigue of campaigning made the horses far more susceptible to disease. After the Unicorn returned to Rokugan and shared their knowledge of animal husbandry, the treatment of such conditions advanced considerably, but even so there are still many problems which even Shinjo's children cannot cure. All too often, the only course of action is to kill the horse and bring a swift and honorable end to its suffering. Interestingly, because the Unicorn are far more attuned to the emotional needs of their horses, they are also far more likely to simply put down a horse when it cannot live any longer with dignity.

The use of supernatural resources to heal and care for horses is relatively rare, and varies widely from family to family. The Scorpion, Crab, and Lion see such acts as not only wasteful but also possibly even insulting to the Celestial Heavens. The Dragon, true to their individualistic nature, have many different attitudes on the matter. The Phoenix and Crane generally believe the mercy and compassion of healing a trusted animal companion is an acceptable use of the blessings of the kami. The Unicorn, oddly, are the most likely to consider each case on an individual basis, because they view horses almost as they do fellow samurai – and there are times when a warrior must be allowed a quick end rather than prolonging his pain or condemning him to a half-life of infirm living.

Training of Horses

Though warhorses comprise the most visible use of horses in warfare, the Rokugani also use horses extensively as labor or simple conveyance. Training horses for use in moving cargo or carrying riders is a relatively simple task. Though breaking a horse and preparing it for these tasks is not something just anyone can do, it is considered the most basic and simplest job of a trainer. Apprentice stablehands are often assigned to such tasks.

Preparing horses for war, however, is an altogether different matter. Like most animals, horses have a strong flight-or-fight response that must be properly conditioned to allow them to fight in battle. A warhorse must learn that charging into an enemy is an acceptable task, although it cannot forget to defend itself when surrounded by foes or otherwise under attack. The Crab Clan's early attempts to train useful warhorses conditioned some ponies so harshly that they completely ignored fatal dangers and would refuse to withdraw from combat even under the direction of their rider. While some Crab approved philosophically of these "berserker steeds," their practical uses were extremely limited.



Just as with care and feeding, different noble houses put varying levels of emphasis on training their horses properly. The Crane, for example, are usually content with a disciplined horse that will not cower in battle; most of their tactics have little need for complex or difficult cavalry maneuvers, so they do not see a need to train their horses to jump great heights or move between narrow openings. The Scorpion, on the other hand, seek out horses that can move swiftly and gracefully through pathless terrain. The Bayushi and Shosuro take great care in training horses at a young age to navigate through unsteady terrain, often putting no clear path between their stables and the training fields.

This being said, the training of warhorses does share certain basic aspects across all clans. Horses are taught fear discipline, to stand and respond to commands despite frightening environments. Most are also trained to strike with their hooves in some fashion, either on command or based on certain positioning. Wild horses strike almost exclusively with their powerful back legs, war mounts are trained to rear up and strike forward with relative precision, making them powerful comrades to their riders. More pragmatic trainers (ones the Unicorn would describe as "cruel" trainers) are known to use starvation techniques to teach their horses to bite foes as well.

Horses have limited color vision, and can generally discern between two different colors. Since all the noble houses of Rokugan adorn their samurai proudly in the colors of their clan, trainers typically use color recognition training to ensure their warhorses can tell friend from foe – or at least who is friend and who is unknown. Among the Lion and Unicorn it is common for horses to flatly refuse to obey a rider who is not in the correct colors. In fact, for most of their history the Lion trained many of their horses to react quite violently to shades of blue on the human form.

The Dragon undertake perhaps the most rigorous training of horses (though not the most complex), due to the extremely dangerous environment of their mountainous home. Horses from this clan are taught to find sure footing on loose, steep, and rocky ground. While they are certainly not the fastest horses in the Empire, the ability of Dragon-trained warhorses to pass through seemingly impossible terrain is impressive even to the Shinjo and Utaku.

Chapter Four

ENEMIES

The darkened halls of the Imperial palace were oppressive, dangerous, haunted with broken treaties and failed maneuvering. Hiruma Renzo stalked among the shadows as if he were on the wrong side of the Great Kaiu Wall. One never knew when a shadowed alcove would spit forth a hidden diplomat or a wrong turn would lead into total disaster. The court was just as dangerous as the Shadowlands, if only because the risks here were magnified a thousandfold.

Failure in the corrupted lands meant death merely for himself, or at worst for a squadron. In here, a single failure would haunt his clan for decades.

At last Renzo turned a corner into a night-shrouded garden. The sweet smell of flowers assailed his nostrils, along with the sounds of a tiny waterfall set in motion by the kami – or perhaps by Kaiu mechanisms. He closed his eyes and stopped under the moonlight, allowing himself to briefly enjoy the sensual assault.

"Ever-dramatic, as always, my brother." Renzo's eyes snapped open and his body went taut. Across the koi pond his sister, Hiruma Iniko, sat quietly on a stone bench. Two servants followed her. Chaperones: one from the Crab and one from the clan of her betrothed, Ikoma Jun.

"You requested my presence here, sister. What do you want?"After a moment Renzo sat at her side. As the elder she required respect, but Renzo deferred only as much as decorum required.

"The Scorpion seem to have developed a flair for the dramatic, Renzo-kun. Atamatenji, displaying heads." Iniko's strange smile was disturbing. "Some not quite as honorably displayed as others, I fear. It seems to have enraged the Lion." Renzo nearly flinched as her hand suddenly gripped his arm. "Did you know, that dastardly Konitsu even used a bamboo saw against one of the wounded Lion taisa? He let the local populace remove a samurai's head... but the Scorpion claim it is all rumor and speculation, of course!"

"You should not pay so much attention to the bloodshed, Iniko. It is unbecoming."

"Does it bother you so much, brother? Do you have the soul of an artisan, as mother would used to say? Of course, how could she know anything about being a samurai? She was a Crane!" Iniko tittered behind her trademark fan, a metal piece with razor-sharp tines. "It is surprising, really, that the Imperial Observers thought they could contain the carnage. Such a pity the restrictions on warfare cannot be relaxed. If the Emperor were to allow the Great Clans free rein... the size of both armies would grow exponentially, and war would unleash true terror."

Renzo had heard all this before, though it was no less disturbing each time. "Is there a point to this conversation, sister?"

Iniko continued as if he had said nothing. "The dishonor is spreading. Kiwadoi let loose her brother, and now the Akodo respond in kind. Reports from the front say the Lion are no longer even accepting the surrender of Scorpion shugenja. How delightful!" Renzo looked at her chaperones, but each kept his head bowed, seemingly ignoring her comments. "Doubtless Akodo Unmei will face repercussions for those actions when the Crane and Phoenix enter the debate..."

"Iniko!" Renzo stood abruptly. "You dishonor our mother, our clan, and yourself with this disgraceful prattle. Let the Lion and Scorpion have their war. Akodo Unmei seems to have things well enough in hand. It will all end soon and then you will be married."

Iniko's features darkened with anger, and she rose as well. Her voice grew dangerously soft. "Yes, Unmei will face repercussions, but he is the least of the Lion's worries, my brother. I doubt the Akodo will regain control of the field anytime soon. The Scorpion, it appears, have a direct line to the Lion's strategy and are being fed secrets from a source close to the heart of the true Lion leader, Ikoma Jun." Iniko abruptly spat in the koi pond. The two chaperones flinched. "That one-armed fool..." Her voice trailed off and her smile grew, white in the moonlight.

Renzo needed a moment to truly comprehend what his older sister had just said. She was admitting she spied for the Scorpion, feeding them information from her betrothed. And she wanted Ikoma Jun to know she had done it, or she would not speak so brazenly in front of her chaperones.

Renzo knew the betrothal had never been blessed with acceptance, but this was another matter. "You go too far, sister," he whispered. "You dishonor us all."

Iniko's lips formed a thin line and she reached down to yank out a night-flower by its roots. "You who should be on the Wall will not lecture me about honor, dear brother. I wanted you to know because you have always been so... delicate." She strolled out of the garden, her entourage silently following. "At least one of us is willing to engage in war."

Hiruma Renzo could only stare. His sister's actions were beyond redemption. While the war remained between the Lion and Scorpion it was at least contained. Now her actions would force Ikoma Jun to respond and the Crab might be forced to enter the fray. The Crane and Phoenix would have their say as well, and who knew what other forces might be added to the conflict. Imperial authority was the only thing that contained the bloodshed, but even the Emperor's will might not hold back this rising tide.

She had to be stopped, countered. The Crab artisan shuddered inwardly and closed his eyes once more, allowing the sounds of the garden to fill him. The space between sounds, the scents and sights he could not see. Finally, calm again, he opened his eyes and knew what he must do. It was time to send correspondence to a long-time ally in the Crane. It was time the Doji joined this fight, and in the proper way.

A Brief History of Clan-on-Clan Warfare

"War is inevitable. It rises and falls like the tide, and the shore is ever changed by it." – Akodo

Due to a combination of factors, including geography, xenophobia, and the demands of Bushido, the vast majority of wars Rokugan has fought since its inception have been waged between the various Great Clans. For a time after the First War, in which the fledgling Empire had fought together against Fu Leng, the clans were at a relative peace. But the Kami had created a society of warriors, and even before those divine founders passed away tensions between the increasingly individualistic clans began to rise. Early wars were small and limited in scope, fought as much for honor and reputation as anything else. However, at the dawn of the fourth century the first unconstrained total war between clans erupted: the First Yasuki War. The Crab and the Crane Clan fought each other for twelve years, in the process unleashing losses and destruction on a scale which the Empire had not seen since the first century.

After the First Yasuki War finally ground to its end, the Emperor issued an edict prohibiting full-scale war between the Great Clans. The devastation of open conflict between two of the Empire's six clans had greatly weakened the Empire in many ways, and while everyone understood the need for conflicts to be resolved through strength of arms, the Emperor had no desire to lose so many of his servants without great need. After this landmark event, conflict in Rokugan was limited to smaller-scale battles, often with only a few hundred men on a side. Large-scale conflicts were confined to periods of internal crisis (such as the Great Famine) and occasional clashes with external enemies, such as the gaijin at White Stag or the periodic Shadowlands assaults.

The most warlike clans, especially the Lion, were frustrated at this state of affairs, which made it difficult for them to exploit their military superiority. Although they were occasionally able to overcome the Imperial constraints and fight all-out, these were rare events. Thus, despite many crises and clashes, the modern Empire remembers this time as the so-called "thousand years of peace." The title would acquire greater significance once the Empire entered the twelfth century, one of the most violent in its history.

The Scorpion Clan Coup and the Clan Wars that followed put an end to this period of limited warfare. Nor did the defeat of Fu Leng at the Second Day of Thunder bring an end to this violent era. Perhaps due to the weaker control exercised by the Toturi Dynasty, or perhaps due to the ongoing influence of supernatural evils such as Daigotsu or the Lying Darkness, the samurai of Rokugan seemed unable to give up their new-found path of total warfare, and it often seemed that many warriors were heedless of the consequences for the future generations, unwilling to see peace come back to a damaged Empire. The Clan Wars were followed by the many clashes of the Hidden Emperor era, then by the War of Spirits, and then by the Four Winds era and the many inter-clan wars that followed. Although none of those conflicts could compare to the absolute scale of the Clan Wars, they were still much larger than most conflicts in the preceding thousand years. The strength of all the clans declined significantly over this period, as relentless war killed off samurai faster than their children could mature. Only with the ascent of the Iweko Dynasty did inter-clan peace truly return to Rokugan; in the first generation after she claimed the Throne, the Empress Iweko I only allowed a single war to take place, the so-called War of the Twins between the Phoenix Clan and the Scorpion Clan. This conflict was widely seen as showing that although Iweko I was dedicated to peace, she also understood the clans still needed to sometimes face one another on the battlefield and resolve matters of honor.

Reasons for Clan Conflict

"Men always begin wars for honorable purposes. The endings are less clean." – Yoritomo Kitao

The reasons for clans to wage war on each other are as many and varied as there are samurai, but usually fall into three broad categories: honor, glory, and resources.

Honor is the most common motive by far. Many of the Empire's bloodiest wars have started over individual insults, either real or perceived. The innumerable wars between Lion and Crane can all be traced back to Kakita's insult of Matsu at the first Emerald Tournament. Moreover, the code of the Blood Feud specifically allows for military

engagements to resolve the feud, and numerous smaller-scale military conflicts take place every year due to such feuds. In theory, any samurai can pursue a Blood Feud against a samurai from another clan, though in practice only those feuds proclaimed by those with significant status lead to outright war – after all, it is difficult to pursue a war without some amount of support from the rest of one's clan.

Some samurai will on occasion wage war solely for the glory involved, with no more at stake than the pride of being victorious. Many young Lion samurai in particular often seek any excuse to start a war with a neighboring clan in order to prove their mettle and match the deeds of their ancestors, and the Lion's neighbors have learned to keep their borders well defended at all times.

War can also be simply be a matter of trying to acquire better lands or resources. This is relatively rare, but has been known to occur from time to time, especially during periods of bad harvest or natural disaster. Few clans will openly admit to fighting for something so crass as wealth or food, preferring to create a façade of fighting for honor or glory, but the Crab have often felt no qualms at raiding nearby villages to fill their army's bellies. The Crane have more than once fought a war whose true motivation was their commercial interests and clashes with mercantile rivals. The Lion, for their part, will sometimes claim that lightly defended towns are at risk of being invaded by enemies of the Emperor, and take control of them – without mentioning that these same towns are quite prosperous. And the Mantis Clan, descended from ronin mercenaries, has few reservations about waging war for money, and indeed has done so more than all other clans put together.

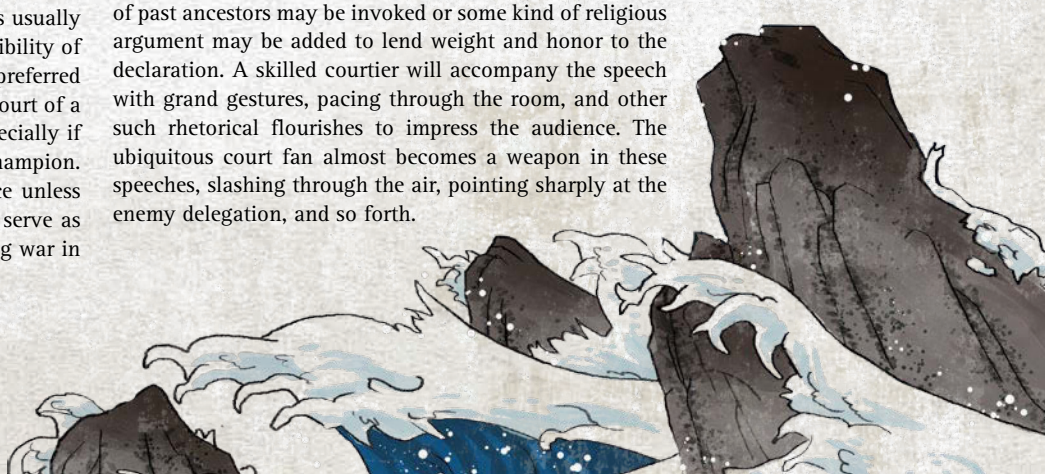
Declaring War

Rokugan is a land of warriors, but also of civility. Therefore, there are customs and protocols surrounding every step of warfare between the clans, starting with the declaration of war itself. As mentioned above, after the fourth century the most common military engagements are not all-out total wars but more limited conflicts with smaller forces. Nevertheless, Rokugani culture expects the clans to follow the proper channels to declare war against their enemies, even if that war is waged on a limited scale. The ideal method is for whoever is leading the army to declare the onset of hostilities, but this is not always possible, especially since many generals prefer to be in the field ready to march as soon as the war is announced. Thus, in most cases a diplomat is sent instead, bearing full authority to declare war on his or her lord's behalf. This usually takes place in a neutral setting to avoid any possibility of unseemly violence, and the Imperial Court is the preferred venue for any major conflict. However, the clan court of a third party can also serve the same function, especially if it is a high-status court such as that of a Clan Champion. The status of the host is seen as important, since unless he objects to the war, his tacit endorsement can serve as powerful backing for the future conflict. Declaring war in one's own home court is generally seen as a sort of surprise attack on whichever enemy dignitaries are present (who may be taken as hostages), and is thus frowned on as dishonorable. More ruthless clans will still occasionally do so, perhaps to ensure they do gain hostages.

The declaration itself will usually be given with the permission of the host and in front of the largest audience available. It will include at least include three elements: the name of the commander leading the assault, the reason for the declaration, and the name of whichever enemy lord is expected to defend the target of the war. Conflicts in Rokugan are usually intensely personal affairs, and even if the war has a pragmatic objective – such as the acquisition of lands or resources – the name of the enemy lord is important and is always proclaimed. The boldest declarations will simply name the opposing Clan Champion, although doing so risks the escalation of the hostilities. The style of a declaration speech is usually boastful to the utmost, promising swift victory for the assailant and a quick defeat and death for the enemy. The supposed virtues of the commander are exalted, while the putative flaws of the defender are decried. Depending on the style and preferences of the clan involved, the names of past ancestors may be invoked or some kind of religious argument may be added to lend weight and honor to the declaration. A skilled courtier will accompany the speech with grand gestures, pacing through the room, and other such rhetorical flourishes to impress the audience. The ubiquitous court fan almost becomes a weapon in these speeches, slashing through the air, pointing sharply at the enemy delegation, and so forth.

A Sample War Declaration

"Esteemed samurai of the Imperial Court, it is with the blessing of our host the divine Emperor that I address you today. My lord Matsu Hachigoro, heir to the Heigen Province, son of Matsu Sujiko and Matsu Hachita, and former Topaz Champion, has taken arms and will lead five hundred warriors into the lands of the Crane. There, he will strike at the lands of Kakita Oniichi, who insulted my lord's honor during the Winter Court, just as Kakita insulted Lady Matsu at the Dawn of the Empire. Samurai of the Crane Clan should fall on their blades immediately rather than face my lord, for their death will come with equal certainty. He will prove to the Empire that the Crane have no worth on the battlefield and there is no might to back their slanderous words. The Empire will grow stronger from their death, as the Lion will cull the weak from the Emperor's land. Glory to the Emperor, glory to the Lion, and death to the Crane!"



It is expected for the dignitaries of the attacked clan to offer a rebuttal, since failure to do would be seen as an immediate admission of defeat. Due to the rules of status and the structures of political life, it is usually clear who is supposed to represent the clan in such situations, but on occasion brash junior samurai cannot restrain themselves and jump at the chance to argue on their clan's behalf. Regardless, the rebuttal is performed in a similar style to the declaration and the names of the designated attacking and defending lords must remain the same – unless the samurai making the rebuttal wishes to substitute himself or another lord as the defender, a dangerous tactic that risks accusations of cowardice against the original defender. The war declaration is almost universally accepted, since samurai are a proud warrior caste and to refuse a war is to be publicly marked as a coward. The Phoenix Clan is the only clan which has been known to actually refuse war outright, sometimes negotiating peace immediately rather than allowing a clash on the battlefield (to the disgust of many other clans). This is not to say that all clans go to war happily or without hesitation; rather, they accept the declaration to maintain face. Clans which do not wish for war will then immediately begin trying to figure a way out of the hostilities. Many wars are thus concluded within days or even hours of their inception, without a single drop of blood shed, yet while still maintaining public appearances. The Crane and Scorpion in particular are experts at finding (or forcing) a peaceful solution before the hostilities truly begin.

Of course, should the war be a major conflict that involves entire Great Clans, the process changes somewhat. Only Clan Champions carry sufficient authority to declare war on behalf of the entire clan, and even then only with Imperial assent. Therefore, clan-on-clan war almost always involves a Champion traveling to the Emperor's court and asking permission from the Emperor to wage the war. It is considered ideal to issue the proclamation in the presence of the opposing Clan Champion, but such is not always possible – Clan Champions have many demands on their time and cannot always attend the Imperial Court. Also, during periods of weak Imperial control (such as the Clan Wars or the reign of Toturi III) the clans sometimes bypass Imperial authority altogether, declaring war in other courts or simply attacking each other. Thankfully, these occasions have been rare in the history of the Empire, and even during some of the darkest times the forms have been maintained.

Given the massive armies of the Great Clans and the extensive information networks which every clan maintains, it is rare for a clan to be caught truly unaware by a declaration of war. Usually, an impending war is clearly visible; the defender will have a court rebuttal prepared and military defenses ready when the declaration takes place.

On rare occasions, a war will escalate to involve more than two clans, but most Emperors frown upon endangering so many of their vassals at a single time More frequently, other clans will declare their support for one side or the other and contribute a limited amount of troops, supplies, or Advisors. This can still complicate the situation, and what starts as a simple war between two sides can easily become a convoluted political, military, and economic conflict involving most of the Empire.

Surprise Attacks

Sometimes samurai from one clan will attack another without warning. This act is particularly common among the more pragmatic clans such as the Crab, Mantis, and Scorpion. The Crab Clan is notably infamous for ignoring the rules of etiquette at any time, simply striking whenever and wherever it sees fit. Doing so causes quite a lot of uproar in the courts and almost invariably turns general opinion against the assailant – though as noted above, during periods of Imperial instability the protocols of declaring war can often be bypassed altogether.

A subtler – if no less dishonorable – tactic is to trick the enemy clan into attacking first or into committing some minor breach that can be interpreted as an attack (such as samurai crossing the border without travel papers), thereby creating a pretense for war without an actual declaration of war in the courts. Such loopholes are also frowned upon, but can allow a clan to maintain face while still gaining the ability to launch a sudden attack against an unprepared foe.

When using such methods, samurai usually attempt to achieve their objectives quickly enough for the war to end before the enemy can respond, perhaps even before it attracts public attention. Scouts will be deployed to intercept enemy messengers and courtiers will attempt to deflect inquiries. Since the shame of defeat is often too much for a samurai to bear, winning the war before it is officially declared can often shield the victors from any political backlash.

Great Clans against Minor Clans

Although the samurai of the Great Clans form the vast majority of samurai in Rokugan, they are not the only ones serving the Emperor. By the Imperial edict issued at the creation of the Fox Clan, Great Clans are forbidden to wage war against Minor Clans. While this could be expected to offer them absolute protection, the truth is more complex. In practice, the edict means the Great Clans must find proper excuses when they wish to confront a Minor Clan rather than simply declaring war outright. The best excuse, of course, is to blame the Minor Clan for initiating hostilities. More than once through the Empire's history, an insult or minor clash with a Minor Clan has been interpreted in the courts as an attack, resulting in hostilities.

Some bellicose commanders see Minor Clans as the perfect practice target, since they are an honorable foe but lack the influence of the Great Clans. Such wars are usually quite limited in scope, lasting only until the Great Clan has obtained satisfaction or seized the resources it wanted. However, even the most limited conflict can seriously threaten a Minor Clan, since a tiny fraction of a Great Clan's forces is enough to match a Minor Clan's entire army. Should a Great Clan ever bring its entire force to bear, the very existence of a Minor Clan can be ended, but the Imperial edict makes this quite unlikely.

Very rarely, Minor Clans may emerge victorious from such conflicts – most famously at the origins of the Three Man Alliance, when the combined forces of the Sparrow, Fox, and Wasp defeated a Scorpion army. When such a defeat occurs, the Great Clan is greatly shamed before the Empire, especially given the edict forbidding war against Minor Clans, and this can result in a tremendous amount of political backlash.

Needless to say, for a Minor Clan to voluntarily declare war against a Great Clan is suicidal, and there is no known instance of such a thing ever happening in the history of the Empire. If it ever happened, the unfortunate clan's fate was probably erased from all records. Somewhat less improbable – though still extremely rare – is for a Minor Clan to declare war on another; this is not considered to infringe on the Emperor's edict, and rarely attracts more than idle curiosity from the Great Clans.

Imperial Forces against Clans

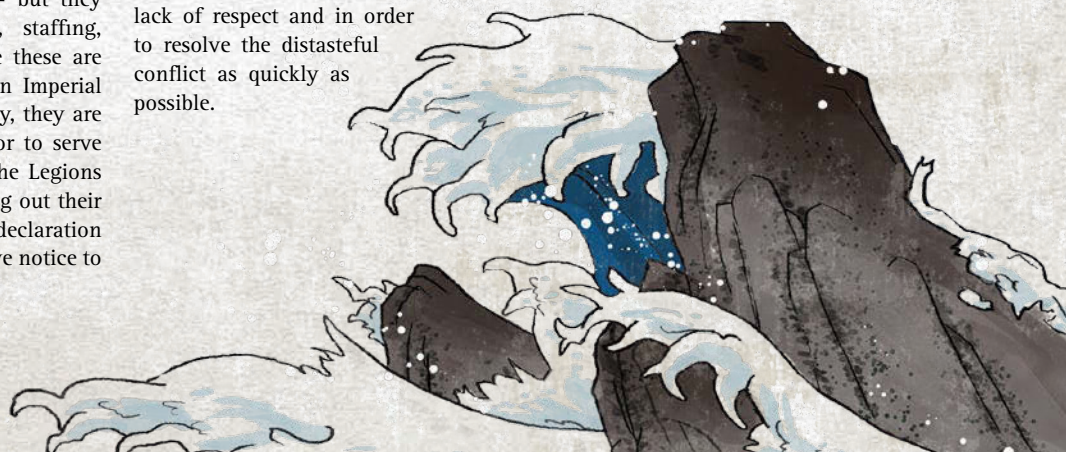
Imperial samurai do not field an army of their own as such – they lack the numbers to do so – but they are heavily involved in the organization, staffing, and leadership of the Imperial Legions. Since these are an element of Imperial authority, to attack an Imperial Legion is seen as an act of treason; accordingly, they are frequently deployed to protect key locations or to serve as a buffer between rival clans. Conversely, the Legions are authorized to attack any clan while carrying out their mandate, and can do so without an official war declaration – although an Emerald Magistrate will often give notice to the involved clan. Conflicts between the Imperial Legions and one or more Great Clans have occurred, albeit rarely, and usually involve treason against the throne (e.g. the Scorpion Clan Coup, or the various attempts of Hida Kisada and Moto Chagatai to take the Imperal Throne by force). The Legions may also get involved during legal disputes, such as if a regional lord is suspected of a crime and refuses to surrender, especially if his parent clan is unable or unwilling to bring him to justice. Such conflicts are usually brief, for the Legions are both well trained and well supplied. However, they lack the numbers to prevail in large-scale conflicts – during the Clan Wars, for example, the Legions were largely destroyed and had to be rebuilt afterward.

Clans against Ronin/Peasants

While ronin are still technically samurai, they rarely attract the same level of consideration as the other members of the caste, and war is no exception. Even if ronin form a group large enough to be involved in a war, they have no access to the courts and thus no way to formally declare war. Any act of aggression by a ronin band against a clan is considered dishonorable and probably illegal in the eyes of the Empire.

Much more commonly a ronin band will be attacked by a clan. Indeed, large groups of unaligned samurai tend to worry the clans, and cautious lords prefer to strike first rather than take any risks. A formal declaration is rarely issued, since ronin are generally seen as little more than criminal rabble unworthy of such consideration. At best, an honorable lord might send a message to the ronin ahead of the fight – typically via an unfortunate servant, since few lords will risk having one of their samurai captured or murdered by ronin.

Of course, even this minimal courtesy is better than the fate imposed on peasant revolts. Most such revolts are crushed before they become militarily significant, but on a few occasions major revolts have managed to take control of large portions of the countryside. A conflict with a peasant rebellion is not considered "war" in any legal sense – the samurai are merely crushing a criminal uprising. In fact, the conflict will often be minimized even in public discussion lest the shameful topic embarrass everyone involved. Consequently, all protocols fall to the wayside when peasant revolts are involved, and many commanders will show a complete lack of mercy toward such enemies, both out of lack of respect and in order to resolve the distasteful conflict as quickly as possible.



Wartime Diplomacy

Diplomacy remains an important part of samurai relations even during war. In fact, it is often expected for diplomats from enemy clans to meet frequently to discuss the progress of the war, negotiate the terms of the next engagement, or eventually to pursue a peace treaty. Such meetings are often striking for their overt civility, with representatives chatting politely over tea while they discuss their clans' conflict. The tone of the meeting, of course, can be anything from icy cold to outright friendly, but the majority of samurai will always attempt to maintain a veneer of basic courtesy. Clever diplomats will cater to the clan they are talking to – while a meeting with a Crane or Phoenix counterpart is almost guaranteed to go pleasantly, Crab diplomats have been known to reach for their weapons in the middle of a sentence, while every diplomat is advised to bring his own teacup to a meeting with the Scorpion.

Samurai are normally expected to maintain a cool and composed exterior at all times, so even outside of diplomatic meetings it is not uncommon for parties of samurai from opposed clans to meet as politely as they would during more peaceful times, exchange small talk and having friendly dinners. However, it is worth noting that during a war all samurai are considered to have permission to fight duels to the death in the event of an insult. A court season can thus turn quite bloody if wars between participants are ongoing. Likewise, outside of court small confrontations can occur if the opposing samurai lose their tempers, something especially likely to happen when alcohol is involved. The normal drunken brawls of samurai can turn into bloody skirmishes when the drinkers are from clans at war. In fact, samurai of clans at war tend to travel in larger groups if they believe their enemies are in the area.

The situation is often markedly different for those bushi staying in the lands of their enemy, since such people often find themselves serving as hostages. Hostages of the attacking clan in the lands of the defender are often executed outright, since it is usually understood their lives are to be forfeited in case of conflict and they accept this as the price of serving their clan in hostile territory. Hostages of the defender in the lands of the assailant are in a different position depending on the reasons behind the war. If the war is due to a grave insult or unlawful acts on part of the defender, they may well be executed. However, if the war is being fought merely for glory or to acquire more resources, they may be offered the opportunity to commit seppuku or even be allowed to continue living within the lands of the assailant. All of this depends heavily on the attitude of the respective clans involved, of course. For example, few clans take any risk with Scorpion hostages, and

the Clan of Secrets likewise rarely allows its hostages to live. The Lion can rarely bear the shame of being trapped in the enemy's lands and assume their hostages should feel the same, while the Phoenix will try to avoid loss of life whenever possible. The Crane would rather negotiate with and influence their hostages rather than kill them outright.

Other bushi who happen to be in the lands of a clan they are at war with will usually suffer a similar fate to official hostages, although leniency might be given depending on their status. Members of the *kuge* are usually allowed safe passage outside the clan's lands unless the war involves the highest echelons of both sides. Samurai who serve as Emerald or Jade Magistrates or who are enlisted as Imperial Legionnaires are in a safer position, since their status as Imperial servants is considered to rank before their clan fealty – however, they are still likely to be treated with suspicion and escorted to the nearest border unless they are on official duty.

Shugenja, regardless of whether they are considered hostages or not, are often spared execution out of respect to their roles and value as priests of the kami. However, they will be kept under heavy guard due to their dangerous abilities. Courtiers, by contrast, are nearly always treated with consideration, since they represent no martial threat of their own but are the diplomatic voices of their clans. They are rarely executed unless circumstances demand it or the war has turned exceptionally bitter and cruel. Even if kept as hostages, they are usually still allowed to speak for their clan and negotiate for peace.

Monks who are aligned to a clan (such as the Togashi "family") present something of a quandary, since all the clans maintain a respectful attitude toward the Brotherhood of Shinsei and some also remember how the Gozoku were weakened by their brutality toward holy men. Thus, such persons are usually either kept alive as hostages or allowed to leave the lands of the hostile clan, provided they have not engaged in violence of their own.

Campaign Seed: Behind Enemy Doors

There are many situations in which characters may be held against their will in the territory of a clan with which they are at war. This can actually be a very interesting campaign setting, in which the PCs are "guests" in an entirely hostile environment and must walk a fine line between speaking for the interests of their clan and avoiding provoking their enemy enough to get executed. A few sample plot ideas:

- The characters are covertly contacted by members of their own clan's military, soldiers who are trapped behind enemy lines. They require assistance and information, but the very process of communication puts the PCs at risk.
- A member of the host clan claims to sympathize with the PCs and offers to help them escape. Do they trust what could be a trap? Will their honor allow them to implicitly betray their host by leaving without permission?
- Romance at court can be a dangerous game – even more so when hostages are involved. What happens if a hostage PC falls in love with a samurai from the enemy clan? What happens if the PC is offered a chance to escape?

War and Intelligence Work

To most Rokugani samurai, "spying" is a dirty word. They will readily acknowledge the Scorpion sully themselves with such activities; if speaking in confidence, they may also express dark suspicions about the Yasuki, the Kasuga, or even the Daidoji. But suggesting that more honorable families engage in such work is a swift way to invite a duel.

And indeed, honorable samurai do not spy... not in the strict sense of the term, at least.

The truth is that no clan – not even the famously reclusive Dragon – can afford to ignore what happens in other parts of the Empire. The greatest fool in Rokugan would know better than to walk into the Imperial Winter Court with no advance knowledge of his rivals' goals or the resources they have on hand. Even in minor courts, engaging in diplomacy without such information amounts to fighting blind. Likewise, no clan will go to war without knowing about its enemy's generals, troops, and goals.

Thus, all clans pursue a task that goes by various names, depending on the clan in question: "outside affairs," "communication," or even just "paying attention." More formally, it is intelligence work, and without it the Empire could not function.

Intelligence Agents

"You would be astounded at what a merchant sees in the course of his day." - *Yasuki Chue*

The people who gather information are rarely "spies" in the usual sense of the word. They do not break into houses or eavesdrop through shoji screens. They do not interrogate captives. Indeed, very little of what they do is in any way dishonorable – which is why so many of them would be offended to hear anyone suggest they are "spies" at all.

These agents simply pay attention to the world around them and communicate what they see to their superiors. When an interesting visitor comes to town, or a merchant patron strikes a deal, or two samurai have a falling-out, or a military unit undergoes extra training, the agent takes note of it. Simple observation and ordinary gossip are the tools with which these individuals work. Individually, each piece amounts to little. It is in the aggregate that the truth becomes clear.

Masters of Intelligence

"I had never taken notice of Wakkamu-san until the day I inherited my father's position. And that is as it should be."
– Yoritomo Daiki

Somewhere in virtually every Great Clan family – even in some of the Minor Clan families as well – there is someone responsible for taking all the information sifted out of the daily affairs of the Empire and seeing what patterns emerge.

In the more well-developed intelligence networks an entire section of the clan's government may be devoted to this task. The courtiers of the Crane sit at the center of a vast tapestry of informants, ranging from the genuine spies of the Daidoji to sharp-eyed *heimin* merchants to gossipy friends in other clans, so no single individual could possibly sort through every report sent to Kyuden Doji, much less make sense of the results. A Minor Clan like the Hare, by contrast, has few resources to devote to basic intelligence work, and must make do as best it can – in such cases the central gathering-point for information may be the Clan Champion himself.

Most of the time, reports pass first through the hands of low-level clerks who sort them into categories. These may be geographical (all news from the coast), social (every report having to do with the Unicorn), or topical (all matters of trade), depending on the preferences and priorities of the family. If the ministry for these affairs is large enough, each category may have a dedicated overseer responsible for monitoring those events. Specializing in this fashion allows for in-depth knowledge; the samurai who pays attention to the trade and troop movements of the Crab cannot be expected to also know about the politics of who is enrolling with the Elemental Guard in Phoenix lands. These overseers usually consult regularly with one another, as few events occur in total isolation. Together they report to whoever is in charge, whether that is a minister or their daimyo.

At all levels of this enterprise the individuals involved win little recognition for their efforts. A title like "Minister of External Reports" confers little glory, and the samurai chosen for these positions are not the sort to flaunt themselves. The ideal master of an intelligence network is someone others take little notice of at all – someone with endless patience, a prodigious memory, a fine eye for seemingly insignificant details, and the ability to keep information close. Such samurai will never win acclaim on the battlefield or speak for the clan on important matters in court. They do not even enjoy the dubious excitement that comes with dishonorable activities. But the work they do may shift the balance of Rokugani politics or decide the outcomes of wars. One well-timed report may gain an ally, break an opposing coalition, win a crucial negotiation, or warn of a conflict others do not even see on the horizon.

Many of these agents are not even samurai. *Heimin* merchants travel widely under the authority of their samurai patrons, and many of them are literate. Doshin and ashigaru captains also keep an eye out as they fulfill their duties; if they lack the skill to communicate with a superior in writing, they instead pass their observations along when they report in person. Peasant innkeepers, especially those who serve a higher class of clientele, are often in a position to see who is coming and going and to glean interesting tidbits from the conversations around them.

Other agents are indeed samurai, and many of them are perfectly honorable. A yojimbo standing watch, a guard at a city gate, a yoriki walking a patrol... many duties involve long stretches of relative tedium where there is nothing to do but observe and think. Courtiers and bushi sent as emissaries to the lands of other clans have even more opportunity to see events of note. They would not be serving their lords well if they closed their eyes and ears to what happens around them. Paying attention is a part of their duty.

Of course, not all agents stay within the bounds of honor. Someone eager to ingratiate himself with his superiors might pursue leads further than he should; whether this wins him accolades or punishment depends on the superior in question. Some *heimin* agents have been known to serve more than one master; while some of them feel strong loyalty to their superiors as a samurai might, others covertly sell their information to a variety of buyers.

Suing for Peace

The Bigger Picture

"Patient watching allows a man to see the future."
– Bayushi Eijuro

A merchant in the town below the Castle of the Swift Sword notes that the wife of Ikoma Hachikomo, a renowned general, has come to visit. A guard on a caravan to Kyuden Hida mentions that there is less Kaiu steel available for trade than expected. A bored Lion courtier in Ninkatoshi writes to a friend in Shiro Ide that the governor of the city has unexpectedly reconciled with Matsu Toru after a three-year feud.

In an obscure set of offices in Kyuden Asako, a set of clerks sort through these reports and add notes. Ikoma Hachikomo's wife is an Akodo by birth, and her brother, who has also won glory as a general, lives at the Castle of the Swift Sword. The failure of a major iron mine in Lion lands the previous year has forced them to rely more heavily on imports for their weapons. Ninkatoshi is, of course, a vital base for any military effort the Lion might mount against the Crane, and Matsu Toru has been saying for three years that she hopes for another chance to take Kosaten Shiro after her previous failure.

An Asako courtier, laboring under an unimportant-sounding title, writes a letter to her family daimyo stating that the Lion are likely preparing to attack Kosaten Shiro in the spring.

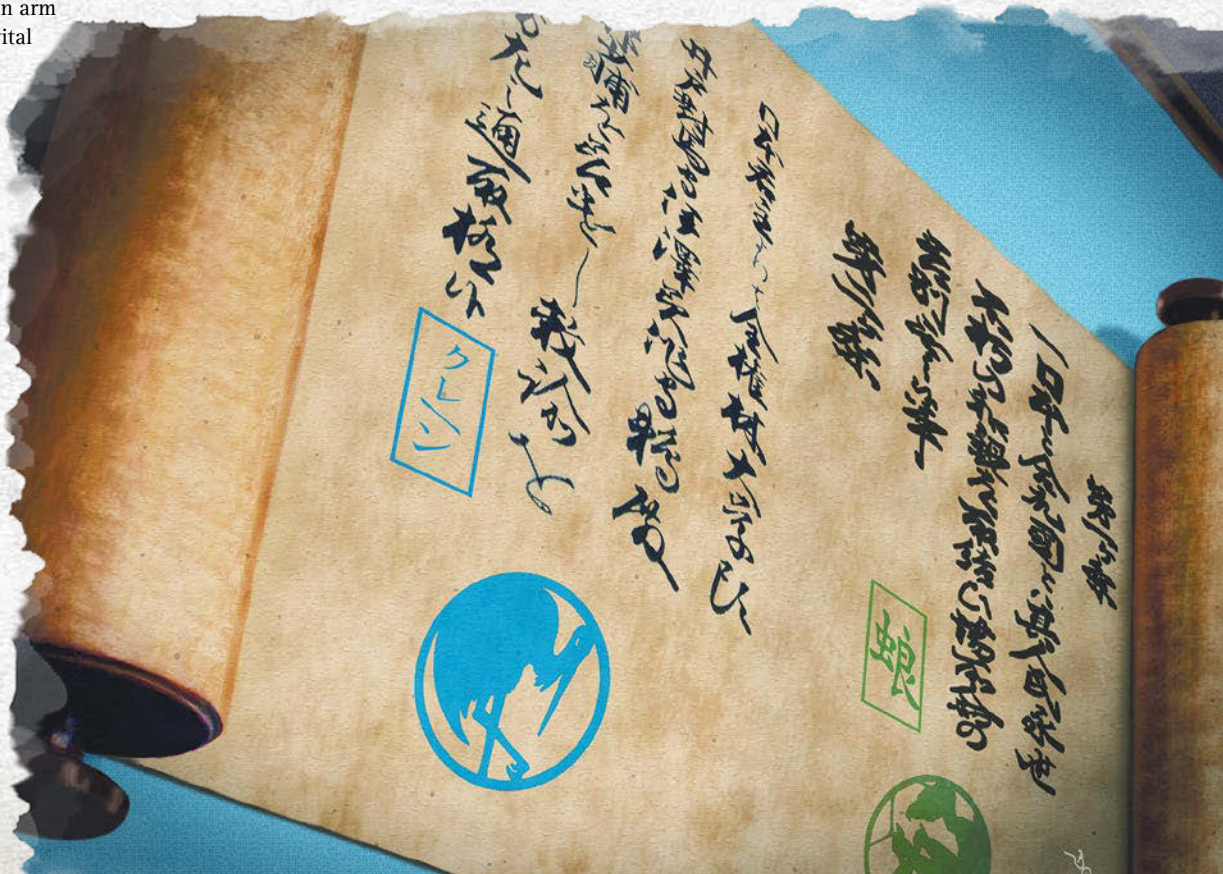
To those not involved in the process of producing these reports, the results often seem like magic – or guesswork. Though few would think to describe it this way, the procedure bears some resemblance to how the Kitsuki analyze evidence, or to how a diviner interprets a set of omens. Certainly it is not as obvious or reliable as eavesdropping on the Lion Clan Champion in his war councils. But by assembling seemingly insignificant facts in the proper order, these masters of intelligence can arm their lords with information vital to their political endeavors.

This is almost always the work of many. No single individual can hope to watch the entirety of the Empire at once. Even if one samurai had the capacity to observe all the affairs of the Great Clans, only a Fortune could hope to understand that whole. So when an ambassador walks into court or a general plans a campaign, he or she owes success to far more people than it may appear.

In Rokugan, where rulers are explicitly warriors and defeat is unacceptable, suing for peace can often be a difficult and delicate process. However, it is quite obvious that wars cannot go on forever – the Emperor does need his vassals alive, after all. Protocols for establishing peace between clans formed early in the Empire's history, and employ a very specific language. A diplomat negotiating on behalf of his clan will never plead or acknowledge defeat in front of witnesses, of course, but will rather say things like, "Enough glory has been won by both sides," or "With the coming of winter, we must put an end to this conflict." Negotiating peace while maintaining an appearance of strength is a delicate balance to maintain, and only the clan's finest diplomats are allowed to be involved in such discussions – especially in large-scale wars with major consequences.

A peace negotiation must never been seen as "haggling" over resources, territory, or other terms, lest samurai be accused of groveling like merchants. If concessions are offered, such as a redefinition of borders or political favors, they are presented as gestures of goodwill rather than as bargaining chips. Negotiators always address each other with respect while constantly painting their own clan as the superior side.

The most common methods of cementing a peace treaty are arranged marriages or exchanges of hostages. More commercial agreements such as gifts of rice or trade concessions are discussed casually and tangentially to avoid embarrassment. There may sometimes be additional meetings between lower-ranking diplomats to discuss such



commercial matters, making it appear they are not related to the treaty at all despite the reality of the situation. Some samurai, particularly in the Lion, will outright refuse to engage in such negotiations, preferring their material gains be obtained solely through honorable combat. Other, like the Mantis or the Crab, are much more forthright in their negotiations if the situation permits.

The timing of those negotiations is important. No samurai wants to ask for peace while a battle is raging, since this would undermine his side's perceived strength. Thankfully, the pace of Rokugani warfare is such that there is usually plenty of time in between battles for clans to discuss an end to the war. Typically, clans have their best chance for peace after a momentous event such as a significant victory or major defeat, but the coming of winter is also a powerful incentive; winter puts all conflicts on hold and is commonly seen as a proper time to end an ongoing conflict. Very large-scale wars between entire clans might still continue after winter begins, but this is rare, and even the Unicorn Clan's use of winter warfare in the late twelfth century is not considered to have truly changed the impact of the season.

Much like with the opening of hostilities, negotiations for peace are best held under the roof of a third party. Imperial holdings are seen as most auspicious, but other clans are often happy to host the negotiations, particularly the Crane and the Phoenix. If the two parties cannot agree on a place to hold negotiations, one side may send a small group of samurai to the other directly, usually a high-ranking courtier escorted by an honor guard. Such delegations are considered honored guests, and any harm coming to them is a stain on the host's honor. Should the negotiation fail to reach a successful result, the delegation will be safely escorted back to its own lands, and it is not uncommon for such groups to travel back and forth several times during a protracted war.

While negotiations at high levels are usually simple and civil enough, matters are quite different for the troops. The shame of defeat is unbearable for many samurai, and if a peace treaty is declared before enough glory can be won, many soldiers and officers will request the right to commit seppuku rather than let the shame of their defeat affect their family. Rokugani armies will admit defeat only when there is absolutely no point in continuing to fight. If the overall war is not yet over or if there is value in delaying or weakening the enemy, beaten samurai will fight to the last. But if the final battle is clearly over, they will either flee the field or kill themselves. Officers in particular will commonly usually commit seppuku, often with a second from the victorious army. Samurai who actually surrender on the field are considered disgraceful embarrassments by both sides and will usually suffer a quick execution. *Ashigaru* soldiers are less honorable than samurai, of course, but if captured they are still typically given a quick execution – although it is not unheard of for some impoverished clans, particularly after a long campaign, to instead disarm the *ashigaru* and relocate them to their own lands as laborers. While this is quite a traumatic process for the peasants, it is a convenient way for a victorious clan to rebuild or increase its work force... so long as the clan does not mind looking like a petty thief.

Clan-Specific Aspects of Clan-on-Clan Warfare

The Great Clans of Rokugan have been each other's main enemies for centuries, and for most of the Empire's history there were only six of them (the Unicorn were outside of the Empire and the Mantis were an obscure Minor Clan). It should be no surprise that they developed very specific strategies, tactics, and policies for dealing with each other, some of which are detailed below.

The Crab Clan

The Crab are unique in that their main enemy has never been the other clans of Rokugan but rather the Shadowlands Horde, a very different kind of adversary (detailed later in this chapter). However, this has not left the Crab powerless when facing other samurai – in fact, their continual defense of the Empire's southern border has turned the Crab into masters of siege warfare, whether on the defensive or the offensive. When the Crab are at war with another clan, they prefer to strike at their strongholds, using them as anchor points for their army. Only the Lion Clan can rival the Crab mastery of sieges, and if the Crab ever fought the Lion they might take a different approach – but in the history of the Empire these two clans have never fought.

In general, regardless of who he is fighting, a Crab soldier is not truly comfortable unless surrounded by strong stone walls. Crab armies often erect temporary wooden forts when no real strongholds are available. This is particularly true when facing the Unicorn, whose mobility makes them deadly on open ground and who maintain few castles of their own.

The raw power of Crab armies is often enough to crush most armies through grinding attrition. Though the best Crab generals are capable of taking a more subtle or indirect approach, they seldom do so unless forced to by their opponents, preferring to stick with tried-and-true methods. If the Crab ever had to face the Lion, who can match or exceed both their numbers and their ferocity, they would probably have to make significant adjustments to their normal methods.

The Crane Clan

The Crane have developed a strategy built around two aspects, a strategy which has worked countless times over the centuries. The first aspect is to use the troops of the Daidoji family and the courtiers of the Doji to conduct a defensive war, slowing down the enemy's progress and bleeding their troops while applying political pressure for

the enemy to cease hostilities. This is their favored approach when facing the Crab, although they can use it against any foe. The other aspect employs the elite duelists of the Kakita family, who are used to target and eliminate key officers of the opposite army and thus break down the chain of command. This method is especially useful against the Lion, whose fierce sense of honor makes it difficult for them to resist the duelists' challenges.

Historically, the two main enemies of the Crane have been the Crab and the Lion, both of whose armies vastly outnumber theirs. Thus the Crane have had to rely extensively on these two methods to compensate for their small numbers. Even when the Crane are on the offensive, their political machine does much to support their troops, using their networks of allies and favors to obtain supplies, gain safe passage through other clans' lands, or force the enemy to engage on the Crane Clan's terms. A noticeable difference occurs when the Crane face the Scorpion, who have roughly the same numbers and share many of the Crane strengths. Political manipulation, strong duelists, misdirection tactics – all of these are available to the Scorpion, forcing the Crane to approach them in a much more straightforward way, using their best rank-and-file troops rather than relying on their special strategies.

The Dragon Clan

The Dragon are known to give their individual samurai somewhat more leeway in many areas, and have many samurai with special or unique talents that can be useful (and surprising to opponents) in warfare. The Dragon are not famous for engineers, cavalry, or heavy infantry – yet when the need arises, it always seems like they have the necessary men for the task at hand. Clever Dragon commanders make use of their clan's flexibility to confuse enemy generals with individualized units and tactics.

Of course, the foundation of the Dragon armies is the Mirumoto bushi, talented and versatile enough to fill a large number of roles, including specialized sub-groups trained in archery or horsemanship. The Agasha (and later Tamori) shugenja are also a key element of the Dragon army and often fight alongside the bushi, bringing their magic to bear against opposing armies. Their impact is magnified against foes who do not employ shugenja in large numbers, such as the Crab, the Crane, or the Lion. They are less effective against the Phoenix, whose shugenja outnumber the Dragon, and in a conflict with the Phoenix the Dragon usually employ their shugenja for defensive purposes, protecting the troops from the Phoenix spells.

The powers of the Togashi tattooed monks are a mystery to all of the other clans, and while no Dragon commander can force a Togashi monk to participate in a battle, when they do offer their assistance it is often decisive.

The Lion Clan

"The Lion train for war even during decades of peace. I find them both great and terrible." – Asahina Michiru

More than any other clan, the Lion study their fellow samurai for the purpose of fighting and defeating them. Entire sections of the Lion War College library are dedicated to ways of fighting each specific clan, and some of the most decorated officers of the Lion armies spend their entire careers opposing the armies of a single clan. The Lion also make sure to use treaties to enroll pupils in the bushi schools of other Great Clans, and when a new war erupts these students are consulted for assistance in understanding the foe.

The vast armies of the Lion Clan contain all manner of different units, all of them trained to a very high standard, so a common tactic is to try to match the strength of the enemy clan and thereby blunt whatever advantage they might have. The Lion seek to field cavalry against the Unicorn, heavy infantry against the Crab, their best archers against the Mantis, and so forth. While they rarely can match the numbers and specialization of the other clans, the Lion units are usually strong enough to offset much of their opponents' edge, and Lion leadership is second to none. (Indeed, the Lion War College is famous for focusing its strongest studies on the clan's modest number of defeats, trying to learn from those painful lessons.) Even when this sort of direct off-setting is not possible, the skill of the Lion officer corps makes them a dangerous enemy for anyone to face.

The Mantis Clan

The Mantis as a Great Clan have only a short history, barely a century, and they have little experience in large-scale warfare. The main bushi family of the clan, the Yoritomo, spent most of its history as sailors and mercenaries, fighting in small skirmishes and avoiding major land engagements. The Tsuruchi, founded as the Wasp Clan before joining the Mantis, are not really "bushi" at all, but rather archers who specialize in hunting down criminals – while their skills are certainly effective on the battlefield, their numbers are low throughout their history, the entire family having only been founded at the very end of the eleventh century.

Even after becoming a Great Clan, the Mantis prefer to fight smaller engagements, using the mobility of their navy to conduct raids and hit-and-run campaigns, frustrating the larger clans by refusing to engage on a larger front. This tendency is only enhanced by the poor outcome of the clan's one major land-based campaign during the Hidden Emperor era.

The Mantis fare best when facing the Crab, Crane, and Phoenix Clans, all of whom have extensive coastal holdings and are thus quite vulnerable to Mantis naval raids. When facing the inland clans the Mantis rely on the Tsuruchi (and later also the Kitsune) as scouts, whittling the enemy down with archery strikes and using terrain to their advantage. The Mantis have also begun using their shugenja in larger battles, utilizing their powers over nature and the weather to influence the battlefield. Indeed, by the end of the twelfth century most Mantis commanders would never consider fighting a major battle, on land or at sea, without the support of shugenja from the Moshi, Yoritomo, or Kitsune families. Only the Phoenix and Dragon can boast of having integrated magic into their armies more extensively than the Mantis.

The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix have two main concerns when entering war – minimizing loss of life and ending the conflict as soon as possible. This is important not only for their own side but for the enemy as well, since the pacifistic Phoenix do not see their lives as more important than those of other samurai of the Empire. This being said, the Phoenix do have a huge advantage due to their exceptionally numerous and powerful shugenja. No major Phoenix army has ever gone into action without a significant contingent of shugenja.

Since the Phoenix have spell casters proficient in every Element, they often make sure to bring into action whichever group opposes the favored Element of their opponent, thereby ensuring they can counter the enemy spells. Thus Fire shugenja are fielded by preference against the Lion or Unicorn, while Earth shugenja are employed against the Scorpion or Crane. Regardless, the raw power of the Isawa usually ensures the impact of enemy shugenja is minimized or outright negated. The only clans which can really challenge the Phoenix dominance of battlefield magic are the Dragon and – in modern times – the Mantis, both of whom field significant numbers of shugenja in their ranks.

Even against these opponents, the Phoenix can always prevail if they bring their full strength to bear, epitomized by the four Elemental Legions. However, because (as noted) the clan approaches each war with the goals of both preserving life and bringing a swift end to the conflict, there is often an internal conflict as to how aggressively to employ this magical dominance. Bringing the Elemental Legions to the field all but guarantees victory, but also ensures that victory will be bloody and destructive. Thus, the Phoenix often fight in a more limited fashion, "with one hand behind the back" as it were, in order to limit the loss of life.

The Scorpion Clan

More than any other clan, the Scorpion prefer to fight in ways that take advantage of other clans' weaknesses. Accordingly, they always field units which are not in the opponent's army to give themselves the edge. Cavalry against the Mantis, heavy infantry against the Phoenix, or siege engineers against the Crane are some of the stratagems the Scorpion have been known to employ. Of course, this approach has its limits, particularly against the diversified and flexible armies of the Lion and, to a lesser extent, the Dragon. The Lion and Dragon are each in their own way shackled by the rules of honor, while the Scorpion have no such limitations. The Shosuro infiltrators are used most aggressively against those foes, even more so than in wars against other clans.

Much like the Crane, the Scorpion always back the military power of their armies with the "soft" power of political influence, although their politics are of a more sinister nature than the methods of the children of Doji. The Scorpion extensively research the history of their opponent and unearth any fear or secret they might have, exploiting each weakness to the fullest. The students of the Shosuro Acting Academy can even create seemingly impossible situations, such as the presence of a sibling or the nightly visit of an ancestor, in order to weaken an enemy general's will and even his sanity.

The Unicorn Clan

Most of the particulars of Unicorn warfare have been covered in detail in Chapter Three. Having more numerous and usually better-trained cavalry forces than the other clans, the Unicorn have a major advantage when facing any other clan, regardless of the balance of numbers on the field. However, this is not to say they do not customize their forces to the clan they are facing. The Unicorn have three major families with distinct bushi traditions – the Moto, the Shinjo, and the Utaku – and this allows them considerable flexibility in their specific troop deployments for particular wars. While all three families field heavy bushi forces, the Shinjo also have excellent archers and scouts to harass superior enemies, while the Utaku contribute mounted infantry to the clan armies and the Moto

train a number of elite shock troops such as the Fanatics and Vindicators. The Shinjo assets are useful in engagements with numerically superior enemies such as the Lion, the infantry are essential in campaigns where terrain limits the usefulness of cavalry (such as the mountainous lands of the Dragon), and the Moto elites are valuable for breaking the strong defenses of opponents like the Crab or the Daidoji. (The Moto are also unique in the clan in having experience and training for facing the Shadowlands.)

Nonhuman and Supernatural Enemies

While the Great Clans have fought each other countless times over the centuries, the very first war the Empire ever waged was against Fu Leng's legions of Shadowlands monsters, and the minions of Jigoku have threatened Rokugan countless times since. Rokugan has also faced a number of other inhuman opponents, from the strange minions of the Lying Darkness to ancient races like the Nezumi and the Naga. Each of these opponents has created unique challenges for Rokugan.

Fighting the Shadowlands

Akodo Kiyotaka stood atop the Kaiu Wall, his eyes taking in the dreadful yet spectacular proceedings of the battle in front of him. Beyond the great fortification, thousands of Shadowlands demons gathered to try to invade Rokugan. So far, however, the Sons of Hida – and a few Daughters as well – were containing the massive attack.

"Impressive, isn't it?"

Kiyotaka turned around the massive shape of Kaiu Juuzo behind him, wearing the heavy all-metal armor the Crab called tetsu-dou. Kiyotaka felt almost inadequate in his own normal yoroi. He bowed low. Between his status as a hostage, his own low military rank, and his much younger age, he knew he owed the man great respect. Besides, here in the Crab lands a lack of respect could earn a severe beating, something Kiyotaka had learned very quickly.

"It certainly is, Kaiu-sama," the Lion samurai replied as he turned back to observe the battle. "However, may I offer an observation?"

"Go ahead." The Crab took a position near the younger Lion.

"Forgive my impudence, but I was wondering if now wouldn't be the time for your warriors to advance from the Wall and envelop the enemy? It seems as if you have the upper hand, and this could help you achieve victory."

"A classic Lion maneuver." Kaiu Juuzo chuckled. "And fairly efficient against a samurai army, I'll give you that. But this is the Shadowlands Horde. See how none of them are fleeing? The madness of Jigoku drives out any honor or even common sense. Flanking them wouldn't create any confusion or panic – it would just divide our forces. No, it is better to stand strong on a single front where we have the advantage. It takes longer, but Crab do not tire easily."

Kiyotaka nodded in understanding, trying not to think too much about how it might feel to have one's mind filled with the madness of Jigoku. After a moment he said, "At least their absence of self-preservation seems to make siege weapons a success against them." He pointed at a massive rock as it fell from the top of the Wall, crushing dozens of goblins and undead under the impact. "Precisely." Juuzo nodded with satisfaction. "But it also means they never recognize defeat. This fight will only end once every one of them is destroyed, which will take hours."

Kiyotaka stood silent for a while, his mind working to calculate the reserves, supplies, and organization necessary to maintain a standing fight for so long. It helped that the Crab samurai were famously resilient, of course, trained for such situations... but their limits were still those of human beings.

He was brought out of his reverie by the sight of a group of strange furry creatures scurrying about at the base of the Wall. They seemed to be attacking the Shadowlands demons rather than siding with them. "What are these?" Kiyotaka asked in bewilderment.

"Oh, the nezumi?"Juuzo smirked. Sometimes Kiyotaka had the distinct feeling the older man took pleasure in his discomfort. "You would call them ratlings in Rokugan, but I advise against using that word around here. Those creatures have saved more Crab lives than you ever will. They rarely fight unless they have to, but this particular tribe considers the Wall its home. They are at their fiercest when defending their home."

Kiyotaka had heard a few stories about the nezumi, but they had not prepared him for the odd spectacle before him. "Are they... are they running on all fours?"

"Oh, yes, they're as comfortable on four limbs as they are on two. And they pack a mean bite. Never underestimate your enemy just because it isn't a samurai, Lion."

Kiyotaka nodded somberly, focused once more on the battle. As a hostage, it was his duty to learn and respect the ways of his host clan, no matter how questionable they might seem to him. And in truth... there was much here to be learned.

Going to war with the Shadowlands Horde involves very different challenges from facing a samurai army, even if Tainted human troops sometimes are present in the armies of Jigoku. The first difference is one of the simplest: fear. Samurai are trained from birth to reject Fear as a sin, using their Honor as a shield against it. Their bravery in battle is legendary. But most samurai only face human opponents, and Fear becomes a different matter when facing a twelve-foot-tall ogre, an animated corpse of a comrade-at-arms, or a demon which can immolate men with a single touch. Despite all their training and their code of honor, many samurai will panic and flee when facing the horrors of the Shadowlands. This sort of sudden panic is a shocking sight to any samurai, and single soldier breaking can often trigger a mass collapse of an entire line. This is why the Crab seldom use ashigaru against the Shadowlands, since peasant soldiers lack the courage and discipline of samurai and are thus even more likely to give in and flee from otherworldly horrors. Armies from other clans which are forced to confront the Shadowlands usually try to stiffen their ranks with veterans and well-respected officers to try to maintain their courage.

Unfortunately, the exact opposite is true of the Shadowlands armies themselves. Guided by the implacable will of Jigoku, the minds of Shadowlands creatures range from absolute madness to an utter lack of emotion, but almost never include fear in any form. Thus it is almost impossible to make them panic or retreat; most battles against Shadowlands armies go on until one side is completely destroyed (which is why the Crab prize endurance so highly). At best, the cleverest of the Shadowlands creatures may realize they have no chance of winning and retreat in hopes of returning another day. This means that even in a great victory against the Shadowlands, it is often necessary to send out scouting parties and pursuit details to exterminate the scattered remnants of the Tainted army lest it reorganize and come back later. Needless to say, surrendering is not in the nature of Shadowlands creatures either.

Conventional tactics are not always effective against Shadowlands forces, not least because they deserve the informal name of "Horde" – fighting with little sense or reason, advancing without order in a great mass of shambling undead, charging Lost, and bellowing ravenous beasts. This makes them predictable in a way, but it also invalidates many normal Rokugani strategies which presuppose the enemy will react to

the opposing army's moves. The Crab long ago realized the best way to combat the Shadowlands Horde was not through clever maneuvers but simply by digging in and inflicting the maximum amount of damage on the approaching creatures, first with archery and siege weapon barrages, then with strong and well-armored troops, preferably in a fortified position.

The inhuman nature of Shadowlands troops creates many unique challenges for those trying to defeat them. Reanimated corpses, for example, are completely immune to pain – and few outside the Crab lands know that they can be destroyed by cutting off their heads. Beasts and oni often have thick hides, shells, or other protection, requiring heavy weapons wielded by the strongest of soldiers to break through and inflict damage. Many of the most powerful creatures and Lost are outright immune to mundane weaponry, showing traits closer to spirits than to natural animals. Jade or crystal can usually overcome this invulnerability, and shugenja can usually overcome them with the power of the kami, but both of these resources are rare. Naturally, no experienced general will choose to face an army of Shadowlands creatures without magical support, but only the Crab armies have this level of experience. During the Clan Wars, when Shadowlands forces invaded the heart of the Empire for the first time in a thousand years, countless Rokugani perished due to a simple lack of knowledge about what could harm their foes.

Unfortunately, the forces of Jigoku can call on magic of their own: maho, a powerful and deadly force which is very difficult to counter. Moreover, many shugenja have succumbed to the temptation of maho, more than other samurai, perhaps due to their higher level of spiritual awareness and their interest in magical power. More generally, the Taint is present in every Shadowlands army and fighting against the forces of Jigoku creates the constant risk that fellow soldiers will succumb to it and turn against their comrades. This can have a horrible effect on an army's morale, not to mention the direct military consequences of friendly forces switching sides. Cutting down corrupted fellow samurai immediately is a difficult task, but saves many more lives than mistakenly allowing them to live.

As should be obvious by now, the traits which make samurai more capable against the Shadowlands – endurance, courage, willpower, a strong Earth – are most commonly found in the Crab Clan. This is not surprising, since any warrior will be changed by his opponent, and the eternal struggle against the armies of the Ninth Kami has deeply shaped the Clan of Hida. The rest of the Empire recognizes this, and it is part of the reason – along with the general disgust Rokugan expresses towards all Shadowlands-related issues – that the other clans almost always defer to the Crab for such duties. Even when they have no choice but to field their armies against the Shadowlands Horde, other samurai will usually defer to the wisdom of any nearby member of the Crab Clan – or suffer the consequences. The level of knowledge about these foes among the other clans varies according to era, but is usually quite low (exceptions include the period after the Clan Wars and the second and third comings of Iuchiban).

In the latter part of the twelfth century, one other clan finally developed significant knowledge and skill in opposing the Shadowlands: The Scorpion, who face the dire task of guarding a second Festering Pit in their lands. Thankfully, the Yogo had secretly amassed considerable knowledge on the creatures of the Shadowlands over the centuries, and thanks to an uneasy but pragmatic alliance with the Crab the troops of the Bayushi family proved up to the task.

The Shadow

While the Shadow – also known variously as the Living Darkness or the Lying Darkness – probably represents a danger to the Empire as great as if not greater than the Shadowlands, it rarely chooses to face samurai on the field of battle. Rather, its main tools are deception, manipulation, and corruption – though to be sure, these tools can have great effect when battle is joined. On the rare occasions when the Shadow waged war on a large scale, primarily during the Hidden Emperor era, it preferred to mislead Rokugani armies into fighting each other, rather than fielding its own troops. That epoch saw the Shadow lure the Mantis into conflict with both the Crane and the Phoenix, as well as concocting a Crane civil war. Some smaller conflicts during the earlier history of Rokugan were also triggered by the mysterious whims of the Shadow, or had their outcome altered by its minions. The true purposes behind this activity are difficult to comprehend, but in some cases the Shadow used a war as a cover-up to eliminate a particular individual or replace that person with a Ninube decoy. Defeating or shaming a samurai could make his mind more susceptible to Shadow corruption. Some conflicts were also staged to kill off enemies of the Shadow itself, such as members of the Kolat or the Scorpion Clan who had gained too much knowledge about it. The Darkness typically would place

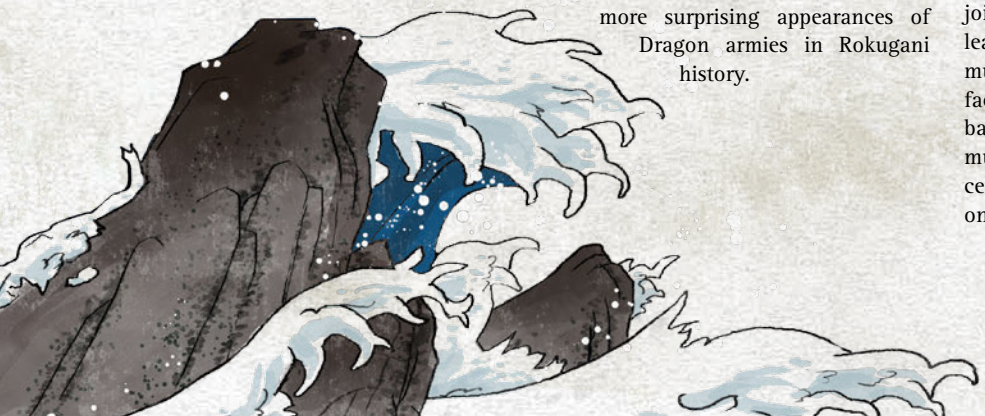
a few of its shapeshifting agents within the armies on each side and then use them to manipulate events towards the appropriate conclusion. The supernatural abilities of the Goju and the Ninube (detailed in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*) allow them to do this sort of thing with ease, and it is not uncommon for their influence to remain completely unnoticed even after the battle is over. One of the few signs of Shadow influence on a conflict is the extra confusion always present in battles where it was present – such as orders going inexplicably astray or being changed for unknown reasons, units getting lost on the battlefield, or inexplicable betrayals from once-trusted samurai.

Throughout the Empire's history, few samurai are even aware the Living Darkness exists, much less how to fight it. The notable exceptions are the Scorpion Clan, which has a covert alliance with the Shadow for much of its history and then turns against the Darkness in the twelfth century, and the Unicorn Clan, which briefly encountered minions of the Living Darkness while in the gaijin lands.

After the Scorpion learned the true nature of the Shadow during the Hidden Emperor era, they set out to fight fire with fire. Using similar tactics of supernatural and mundane infiltration and misdirection, the Scorpion placed special agents throughout their lands to watch for the forces of the Shadow. When they find proof of the Living Darkness' presence, these agents strike with crystal weapons – preferably with no one else the wiser, although the destruction of the creature is always the first priority. These "Shadow Hunters" are a secret even to the rest of the clan, often seemingly living a mundane life as a normal bushi until the moment comes to strike against their true enemy.

The Unicorn know less about the Shadow than the Scorpion, but learn the truth much earlier. For those in the clan who remember the stories, particularly in the Iuchi family, it is common to wear crystal pendants to ward themselves against the Darkness' influence. If the Unicorn become aware of Shadow activities in enemy ranks, they will retreat from battle until the situation can be more carefully investigated.

The Dragon Clan also has a connection to the Lying Darkness, albeit a more obscure one: their Clan Champion keeps the corrupted Shosuro in a crystal prison under Kyuden Togashi for centuries. Although the rest of the clan did not gain any knowledge about the Shadow until the time of Kitsuki Yasu and Kitsuki Kaagi in the twelfth century, Dragon samurai under the guidance of their Champion unknowingly defeated the Darkness on several occasions. Indeed, Togashi's knowledge of the Shadow may be the explanation for some of the more surprising appearances of Dragon armies in Rokugani history.



The Nezumi

Few in Rokugan would consider the Nezumi noteworthy enemies, or even enemies at all. Most regard them as little more than a clever sort of vermin, to be chased away or hunted down if they become too problematic. And since the Nezumi easily take to fleeing, this opinion remains prevalent. In truth, the Nezumi do have trained warriors, heirs of a tradition dating back to before the days when humans walked the Mortal Realm. In their modern form as small wandering and scavenging tribes, however, the Nezumi are too weak to do more than live on the fringes of human society, scrounging for whatever they can without attracting too much attention.

When faced with the prospect of a major military confrontation, the Nezumi will adopt a strategy largely alien to Rokugan: guerrilla warfare. The very concept of a field battle between opposing ranks is anathema to the Nezumi, who see the lives of their own people as far too valuable to squander in such a way. They much prefer striking from darkness or concealment, retreating before the opponent can retaliate. This can make them extremely frustrating opponents for samurai, since they never seek to hold ground or take it and never hesitate to run when there is a chance to do so.

Although most Nezumi tribes only number a handful of individuals, the largest ones can boast of several hundred able-bodied warriors, and are capable of causing tremendous chaos if they wish to do so. While the Nezumi are usually reluctant to enter into any form of conflict, they will certainly attack when no other option is available, such as when they are facing famine or – especially – when their young are in danger. Samurai who consider these creatures cowardly are in for a shocking and dangerous surprise if they ever corner them, since a nezumi with no chance to flee will suddenly fight with great ferocity. Moreover, the Nezumi warriors include a small number of formidable berserkers, the chitatachikkan, born without fear and able to withstand pain beyond human levels. These fury-crazed warriors are more than a match for any samurai, and usually either lead the vanguard of an attack or stay behind to delay an enemy while the rest of the tribe retreats. When the situation is truly dire, one of the rare nezumi shaman called Nameseekers may also take the field, bringing their strange and potent magic to bear against their foes. A single Nameseeker may be enough to tip the balance of a fight in the favor of the Nezumi.

Ironically, the greatest experts in fighting off Nezumi incursions are also considered the greatest friends of the Nezumi tribes: the samurai of the Hiruma family. Having fought alongside the rat-like creatures for centuries in the joint struggle against the Shadowlands, the Hiruma have learned much from the Nezumi and have taught them much in return. Indeed, while they do not advertise the fact outside their own ranks, many Hiruma tactics are based on Nezumi methods. This collaboration becomes much closer after the fall of the Hiruma lands in the eighth century and the change in the family's fighting style to one based almost entirely on stealth and ambush.

It has been rare for the Nezumi to conflict with the Crab Clan, but a few small confrontations have occurred over misunderstandings, limited resources, or territorial disputes. The Crab have thus learned that against the Nezumi, as against the Shadowlands, one must always be ready and alert. Rotating troops to make sure some of them are always rested, posting sentries to cover all possible directions of attack, and similar practices are recommended against the nocturnal Nezumi. The Crab are particularly wary of the ratlings' superior speed and agility, as well as their natural skills at climbing and burrowing. A cliff or other difficult terrain which might be seen as secure against human attack must still be kept under watch when facing Nezumi. Traps and fortifications, which the Crab always employ to great effect, are helpful to "channel" the Nezumi into the locations where the samurai prefer to fight, but the ratlings' superior movement ability and general cleverness, not to mention acute senses, makes traps only moderately effective. The best counter the Hiruma have found is ample archery fire. Since the Nezumi almost always attack at night, the Hiruma often fire burning arrows across the battle area and light torches throughout their positions to minimize the enemy's advantages.

Outside the Crab Clan, few samurai have enough conflicts with Nezumi to devise specific tactics against them. Indeed, few samurai in the rest of the Empire have ever met a Nezumi at all, let alone fought one. Minor Nezumi activities are often mistaken for other threats or simply ignored completely. Should another clan develop a serious problem with Nezumi attacks, those who can set pride aside will usually seek the help of the Crab, who are usually willing (if not exactly happy) to help their fellow Rokugani to solve the issue.

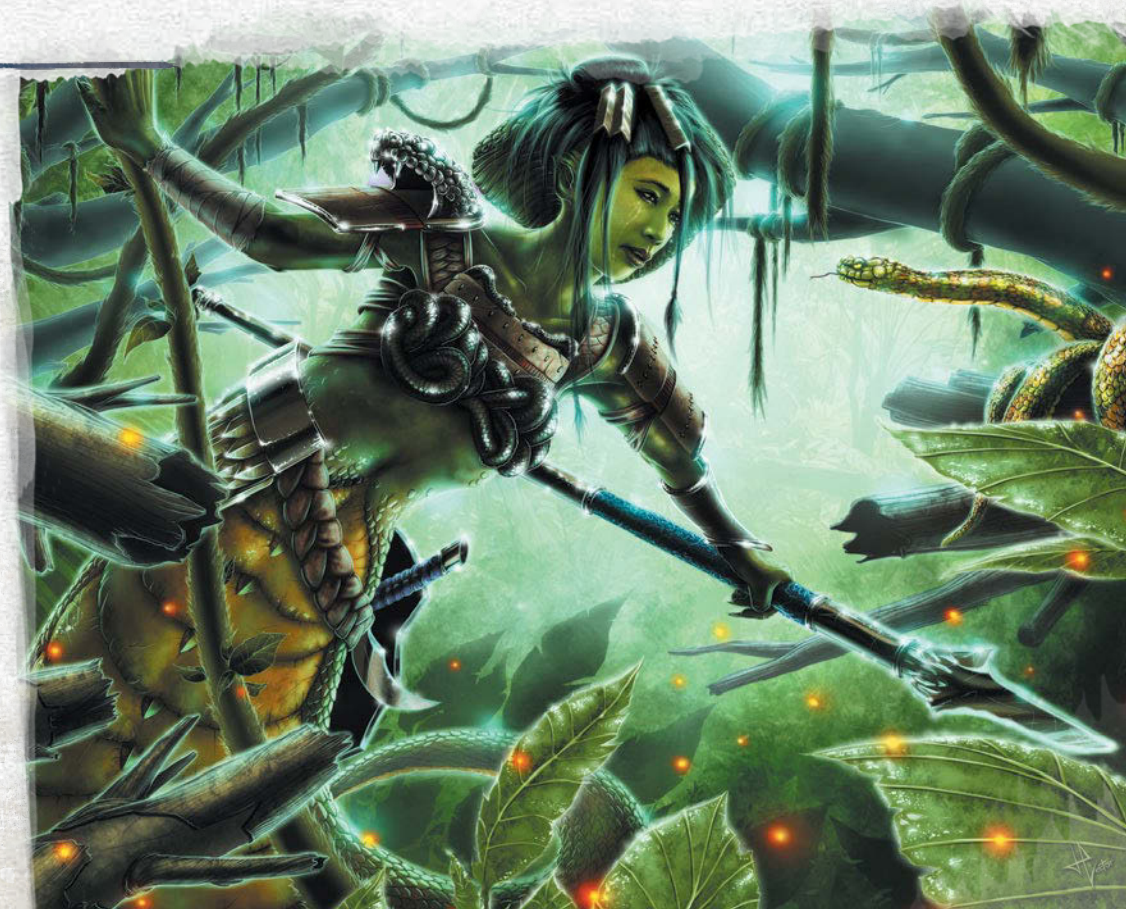
The Naga

For centuries the Naga were nothing but an obscure legend to most of Rokugan. The few encounters between Naga and Rokugani usually involved very small groups in the Shinomen forest – and usually ended with the destruction of one side or the other. However, all that changed when the Naga awoke in large numbers at the onset of the Clan War, bringing a new actor onto Rokugan's military stage. The Naga were numerous and had a strong warrior culture, having waged many battles in their past against their own people and many other races. They also had unique natural and supernatural advantages, most notably their strange collective soul known as the Akasha. While the bulk of the race eventually returned to their magical slumber, in the few years they were present in large numbers the Naga left a distinctive mark on Rokugani warfare.

The Naga's attitude toward war, while quite different from Rokugan's approach, was closer than that of other nonhuman opponents such as the Shadowlands or the Nezumi. The Naga formed large armies of warriors organized around a strict hierarchy and fighting in ranked units. Their warriors were known to be brave and honest. However, the Naga also had major physical and spiritual differences from humanity which affected their approach to warfare. Being snake-like from the waist down, each individual naga was much more massive than a human of similar proportions. The tail allowed them great balance and the ability to rear up above their foes, but also prevented them from developing any kind of cavalry force. Instead, the Naga excelled in their favorite environment – the forests. Able to easily maneuver between the trees or simply climb among them, the Naga made terrifying opponents within the bounds of their natural habitat. They favored archery even more than samurai, and combined with their skills in the forests this made them deadly indeed. Even in close combat the Naga preferred to use long polearms to keep their enemies at bay. And while they lacked cavalry, using horses against the Naga proved notoriously difficult, since the smell of the snake-men drove most horses into a panic.

Specific bloodlines of the Naga also had additional advantages. The majority of Naga warriors come from the Asp bloodline, many of whom produce a natural venom which they can use in close combat or even spit at their foes. Some Naga, particularly in the Chameleon bloodline, were amphibious and could wait indefinitely beneath the water to ambush the enemy.

Of course, the most defining trait of the Naga (beyond their inhuman appearance) was the Akasha, the great spirit which linked every single member of the race to



the rest, making all of them part of a single whole. While the Akasha had many spiritual and social aspects, on the battlefield it gave the Naga a cohesion and discipline so total as to make even the bravest samurai pause. Simple words or feelings could be communicated through the Akasha across a short distance, facilitating things like coordinating ambushes or giving quick commands on the battlefield. The Akasha was part of why the Naga were so brave, for they refused to leave the fight if doing so would endanger another of their kind.

The Naga also could field powerful spellcasters in their armies, the jakla of the Cobra bloodline, and unlike many human shugenja they felt no hesitation in unleashing their powers against their enemies. Although similar in their broad nature to shugenja spells, the alien source of the Naga magic made it all but impossible for Rokugani spellcasters to counter them. Thus, the jakla represented a significant danger to any Rokugani army.

Although they were only present in Rokugan for a few years, the Naga took part in several large-scale conflicts during the Clan Wars and the subsequent Hidden Emperor era. Several of the clan witnessed and at times fought against the Naga armies and devised ways to counter them. The Crab and Unicorn Clans in particular developed close ties of alliance with the Naga, while the Crab and Dragon both faced them on the battlefield as well.

Although the average samurai rider cannot convince a normal steed to get close to a Naga, the Unicorn are not average riders, nor do they breed common steeds. The best cavalry soldiers, such as the Utaku Battle Maidens, can still bring the fight to the Naga, in the process gaining a strong advantage in maneuverability. The horsebowmen of the Shinjo have also proven to be more than a match for the Naga archers.

The Crab have found that their Kuni shugenja, used to studying nonhuman creatures of all kinds, are at least somewhat effective against the Naga. When forced to fight Naga, the Crab also take a typically blunt approach by using siege weapons to bombard and burn down any forest where the Naga might find refuge, forcing the snake-men to fight in a more open location. Beyond this, the Crab also have the more basic advantage that they are not particularly alarmed at fighting eighteen-foot-long humanoid snakes who can spit poison – after all, the Shadowlands offers plenty of worse opponents.

The Dragon fought the Naga on a large scale only once, when the snake-men attacked their lands during the reign of Hitomi. They found the best defense to be one of exchanging archery fire against the Naga while using fortifications, since the Naga were poor climbers in the mountains.

The Empire Against the Outside: Gaijin Enemies

The Emerald Empire is for the most part an isolated kingdom with a hostile, often xenophobic, attitude toward foreigners. This stems in part from the Rokugani creation myth, which its citizens hold as absolute truth: humanity was born from the tears of Lady Sun and the blood of Lord Moon, giving humans a spark of divinity and a vital part to play in the Celestial Order. The gaijin, however, cannot make such a claim – indeed their very existence is unsettling to many Rokugani, since it raises a variety of theological questions. As best, the gaijin are seen as an oddity, an ultimately inconsequential accident of creation. At worst they are considered abominations, wretched imitations of the true human form which must surely have originated in some dark blasphemy. This attitude has limited contact between Rokugan and foreign civilization to a very few incidents, especially after the Battle of White Stag (described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*, Chapter Three). The initial opening of Rokugan to the foreign peoples called the Thrane and Merenae ended tragically and violently, with the Empress dead and the gaijin banned forever from the Empire. It is thus no surprise that almost all later interactions between samurai and gaijin have involved some form of conflict. The armies of Rokugan consider it to be one of their primary duties to protect the Empire from foreign dangers.

The main issue involved with clashes between samurai armies and gaijin ones is the absence of any concept of Bushido in foreigners. While different cultures might hold their own beliefs, the Rokugani consider Bushido the only true way of the warrior and expect all others to do likewise. Lacking this knowledge, foreign cultures also lack most common Rokugani practices associated with battle and war. One of the most obvious examples of this is the iaijutsu duel, which has no equivalent in gaijin culture. Even the impromptu personal challenges which are commonplace in Rokugani battles are usually ignored by foreign warriors – if they are even understood at all, given the language barrier. Gaijin typically have no qualms about ganging up on a single opponent to bring him down, and their officers show no more bravery than their rank-and-file, so the protocols of the duel mean nothing to them. Likewise, the lack of Bushido means many gaijin cultures have no compunctions about using ambushes, assassinations, poison, explosives, and other such dishonorable tactics, to the great disgust of samurai. Peace negotiations or offers of surrender may turn out to be traps, but at the same time the gaijin do not accept the honorable duty of warriors to fight to the death, and are outraged when the Rokugani execute any of them who throw down their arms on the field.

Differences in technology also create problems. Rokugani have refined the arts of crafting weapons for centuries, using only the finest steel, taking the quality

of their swords to a level which may seem supernatural to other cultures. But Rokugani weapons and armors are designed to work against one another and to reflect what the samurai consider elegant, honorable, and appropriate. Gaijin weapons that are just as powerful, such as broadswords or crossbows, are rejected for their apparent crudity or inelegance, despite their superior power in some situations. And of course the Rokugani consider muskets and cannons to be blasphemous, little better than maho. All this means that a Rokugani army equipped with the finest armor and weapons may nonetheless find itself at an unexpected and bewildering disadvantage when facing a gaijin army with strange weaponry, shaking the samurai's confidence in the superiority of their ways. Conversely, a less developed culture such as the Senpet might find its armies are outclassed, lacking any weapon that can stand up to a samurai's katana or pierce a samurai's heavy armor.

Similarly, while the formidable powers of shugenja can often lend a major advantage to a Rokugani army, many gaijin cultures have their own magic, strange and unpredictable magic that seems little different from maho to a samurai. Any involvement of supernatural forces tends to introduce chaos to warfare, since it completely changes the limits of what is possible on the battlefield. Of course, while such foreign magic can be disheartening to the vast majority of Rokugani, it has also been known to instead incite righteous fury in the samurai ranks.

One notable exception to this general attitude is the Unicorn Clan. Having lived outside Rokugan for centuries and maintained contacts with many different civilizations after returning to the Empire, the sons and daughters of Shinjo follow many traditions the rest of Rokugan considers gaijin, such as eating red meat and wearing fur. Consequently, the Unicorn do not have the same disdain for foreign cultures or the same ignorance of their capacities that the rest of Rokugan shares. In fact, many Unicorn see gaijin as simply human beings, not inherently inferior to Rokugani citizens. Unicorn samurai also know that lacking Bushido does not necessarily mean an utter lack of morality, and they have formed successful and trusting relationships with many different peoples over the years. While this might seem exceedingly foolish and naïve to the other clans, the Unicorn have always unleashed swift retribution against any form of deceit or betrayal – they may be open and trusting people, but they are neither fools nor victims.

In terms of warfare with gaijin, the Unicorn have actually adopted many gaijin technologies and tactics. Scimitars, heavy lances, and stirrups are all innovations which they brought back from foreign lands and some of which have later spread into the Empire as a whole. Smaller groups within the Unicorn train with even more exotic weapons and tools, such as katars or shields, and as such the Unicorn have a much greater degree of familiarity with gaijin weapons and tactics than any other clan. Coupled with the centuries of knowledge accumulated during their travel, this makes the Unicorn the Empire's strongest asset when facing a military conflict with a foreign force.

The Merenae and the Thrane

Rokugan only had one major conflict with those two civilizations when they came together to its shores in the era of White Stag. This clash defined Rokugani attitudes and policies toward gaijin for centuries after, and remains a painful memory in the minds of many modern samurai, kept alive by hundreds of stories and plays. The two main advantages these gaijin had over the troops of Rokugan were their gunpowder and their sailing vessels.

The effects of gunpowder weapons were a huge shock to Rokugan. Musket bullets pierced the best armors, and the muskets' combination of thundering noise, foul billowing smoke, and missiles invisible to the naked eye caused many samurai to view them as some form of magic. The gaijin also brought cannons which could shatter walls and kill soldiers by the dozen. During the Battle of the White Stag the cannonballs even broke through the magically warded walls of the Imperial Palace, lending credence to the Empire's belief that the weapons were somehow blasphemous in nature.

Moreover, these cannons were mounted aboard ships larger and faster than anything the Rokugani had ever seen before. Their ability to sail against the wind seemed, again, like some sort of foreign magic. Rokugan's naval capacity at the time was relatively modest – even the Mantis were a far cry from the great power they would become in the future – and thus the Empire was at a great disadvantage in the subsequent Battle of the Raging Seas.

However, the Empire ultimately triumphed, albeit at great expense. The Mantis, who had been foremost in championing the cause of the gaijin when they initially arrived in Rokugan, had closely studied them and had at least some idea how to disable their ships. During the Battle of the Raging Seas the Mantis played a key role, raiding the larger vessels, carving holes in the weak points of the hulls, and shooting at the elaborate rigging with rope cutters and fire arrows. The gaijin also underestimated the courage and loyalty of samurai, who kept hurling themselves into battle despite dying in huge numbers to the gaijin firearms. The gaijin reliance on their firearms meant most of the foreign soldiers were not especially skilled in close combat and wore much lighter armor than the Rokugani did; thus, most of the time they were no match for the handfuls of samurai who were able to close the distance and engage them hand-to-hand. Rokugani archery, while lacking the range of cannon, was able to match the range of the muskets and could be fired more quickly. (After the battle, the Lion Clan samurai Matsu Koritome became famous for using his bow to single-handedly defeat an ambush by a group of surviving gaijin.)

One other factor in the ultimate Rokugani victory is that the Merenae and Thrane seem to have lacked any kind of supernatural support beyond the strange powers of their firearms and ships. This weakness was exploited by the Empire's shugenja, who used every spell in their scroll-satchels to help lead their side to victory. Indeed, the kami seemed all too willing to help them.

The Yodotai Threat

Few in Rokugan know of the Yodotai Empire, a vast land far to the west and north, well past the deserts of the Burning Sands. However, those who do know about it consider it a great threat to the future of the Empire.

It is hard to correctly evaluate the true strength of the Yodotai, for their Empire is vast and their legions spread across the lands of many conquered nations. Their reputation is also bolstered by legends from both within and without, legends which often seem exaggerated to other civilizations – at least until they encounter the seemingly endless legions of Yodotai soldiers.

In the twelfth century, the Unicorn Clan becomes aware of the existence of the Yodotai and grasps their true strength. Although they keep their unease to themselves, in truth they are unsure if the Empire could be victorious against an all-out invasion by the Yodotai. In addition to incredible numbers and a long history of assimilation of any culture they encounter, the Yodotai also embrace militarism to a degree that makes even samurai seem peaceful. Their government and their army are almost indistinguishable from each other, and their chief god's name translates as "Conquest." Ever since the inception of the Yodotai Empire, its sole and single goal has been to conquer every nation it encounters, and it seems it will never stop unless it is defeated to the point of destruction. Yodotai equipment is not particularly advanced, consisting mostly of short swords, spears, simple armor, large heavy shields, and siege engines like ballistae and catapults. However, all the designs are sound and all the gear can be mass produced quite easily. More importantly, the Yodotai have a large and impressive array of strategies and tactics, honed over centuries of ceaseless war with countless enemies. All of their senior officers have been promoted through merit alone, and they maintain iron discipline within their ranks through a combination of religious fervor and severe punishment of any transgression.

The Unicorn are keenly aware of the danger the Yodotai represent, having encountered them during their travels through the gaijin lands. While they have carefully studied all the information they can get on the Yodotai, they have not yet been able to devise a strategy to defeat such a deadly and cunning opponent. Recently they have learned the disquieting fact that the ancestors of the Yodotai protect them during battle, shielding them from any form of hostile magic, and thus negating what could be a key Rokugani advantage.

If the Yodatai can be said to have any true weakness, it is sailing, since their religion makes them utterly terrified of the sea (in Yodotai belief the sea is the merciless incarnation of fear). Of course, the Unicorn are far from being great sailors themselves, but they have begun covertly working with the Mantis Clan to devise strategies making use of river attacks, which they hope will give them an edge over the Yodotai. The Unicorn would also like to seek the help of the Lion, especially the Kitsu family, in finding a way to counter the ancestral protection the Yodatai enjoy; unfortunately, between their oft-strained relations with the Lion and the Kitsu family's secretive nature, these efforts have come to nothing.

However, the Lion themselves are also becoming aware of the Yodotai threat. In the late twelfth century the Lion find a book called De Bellis Yoditorum which describes the fundamentals and tactics of Yodotai warfare. They eventually manage to translate it, and while they are disgusted by the lack of honor in these gaijin, they do not hesitate to integrate some of the tactics into their own repertoire, using them to great effect against both human and supernatural enemies. This also gives the Lion insight into the danger the Yodotai represent and into possible ways to counter the threat. Thus, should the gaijin empire ever set its eyes upon Rokugan, the Lion armies will be at the forefront of battle even more than in past wars.

The Yobanjin

"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

The warrior tribes living north of Rokugan proper, known collectively as Yobanjin, have conflicted with Rokugan many times on both small and large scales. On the rare occasions when several Yobanjin tribes have united, they have launched mass invasions into the lands of the Phoenix, Dragon, and Unicorn – most infamously during the War of Dark Fire. More frequently, however, the individual Yobanjin tribes are content to occasionally raid the border of the Empire for supplies, riches, slaves, or even just the glory of battle. At other times, they live in peace with the Empire and even engage in a small amount of cross-border trade.

The Yobanjin make heavy use of cavalry, much more so than any clan save the Unicorn (or the later Ox). Their swords are of a broadly similar design to Rokugani katana, but are often made of inferior steel and can shatter against a katana; on the other hand, they often include rings by the hilt which can entrap an opponent's sword, a trick many bushi are not prepared for. Yobanjin armor, made of metal plates stitched on a leather jacket, offers roughly similar protection to the lighter Rokugani armor, although samurai find the poorly-cured leather disgusting. The Yobanjin also employ crossbows, missile weapons which can pierce heavy armor and can be fired easily from horseback – although they are also heavy and slow to reload.

The most astonishing aspect of the Yobanjin from a military standpoint is that they are known to possess two types of flying cavalry. The first and more common are the hawk riders, who domesticate and ride huge birds found in a few mountain nests in the Yobanjin lands. Peasants in the north of Rokugan have learned to fear the hawks' cry, for these birds can snatch an ox in their claws and carry it away. The second and even more fearsome type are the so-called wyrm riders, who ride on strange creatures from the northern wastelands. The wyrms are believed to have been created through some kind of enslavement of Elemental kami, and are naturally resistant to magic as well as being able to fly. Although these two types of warriors are rare, they give the Yobanjin a unique advantage in mobility and render many Rokugani fortifications all but useless.

Finally, the Yobanjin have a few sorcerers who seem able to able to crudely replicate the effects of basic Rokugani spells, although they do not seem to invoke the kami in the normal ways.

The northern clans of Rokugan, especially the Phoenix and Dragon, have learned much about fighting the Yobanjin over the years. The Ox and some of the Unicorn have gone so far as to adopt some of their weapons, such as the ring sword, although they avoid mentioning this in polite company. During times of conflict with the Yobanjin, all samurai in the northern regions practice at hitting flying targets with their bows to counter the menace of flying cavalry. Strong defensive troops such as pikemen are also used to counter the attacks of Yobanjin horsemen. Since the tribes are rarely equipped or supplied for protracted fights, driving off their initial attack is usually enough to dissuade them. A standard tactic is to hold a defensive position, then counterattack when the Yobanjin attempt to flee, and this is usually sufficient to punish most raiding parties.

It is worth noting that on rare occasions groups of Yobanjin mercenaries have been employed within Rokugan. While they are considered entirely expendable by those who employ them, some of these Yobanjin do survive and bring back knowledge of Rokugani tactics to their tribes... as some Rokugani commanders have later discovered to their sorrow.

The Ivinda

Rokugan as a whole was unaware of the existence of the Ivory Kingdoms for most of its history, not surprising given that the land lay on the far side of the Shadowlands. The Unicorn did make limited contact with the Kingdoms and their inhabitants – a people called the Ivinda – and later the Mantis Clan established a covert naval trade with them. In the twelfth century the Ivinda actually sent diplomatic envoys to meet with the samurai of the Empire, and while these visitors faced the disdain all samurai offer to gaijin, their high level of civilization, peaceful demeanor, and their wealth of teas and silks caused them to be at least marginally tolerated. (Indeed, one such ambassador ended up swearing fealty to the Mantis Clan.)

The Ivinda had a formidable army of dedicated soldiers, members of a warrior caste called the *kshatriya* which in some ways resembled the samurai caste. They lacked any form of native magic, however, and in the Ivory Kingdoms supernatural forces were almost always of the malevolent kind. Still, they had great strengths of their own, such as the mystical scholar-warriors called guru and their legions of elephants trained for warfare. The Ivinda were not an externally aggressive people and rarely if ever warred with other nations; however, just like Rokugan itself, the Ivory Kingdoms were at times fractious and had to face many enemies from within. The Mantis Clan was actually dragged into a war within the Ivory Kingdoms (as recounted in Chapter One) and learned to respect the courage of the *kshatriya* as well as their exotic weapons and fighting styles.

In the late twelfth century, however, the Ivory Kingdoms are almost entirely wiped out by the Cult of Ruhmal, which unleashes massive inhuman armies to invade Rokugan. The course of the so-called Destroyer War is recounted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories* 2, Chapter Eleven. The Destroyer War represented the greatest external threat ever to assail Rokugan, and for most samurai this was the first time they ever had to fight against gaijin forces.

After the Empire's bloody and hard-fought victory, the former Ivory Kingdoms became the Colonies of Rokugan. Nine out of ten Ivinda had perished during the reign of the Cult of Ruhmal, leaving an empty and ruined land for the Rokugani to conquer. The remaining cultists and occasional angry survivors were scattered, nowhere close to being comparable to the Empire's forces in numbers or equipment, and mostly relied on ambushes and hit-and-run tactics, far from the glorious battles samurai preferred. Uprooting those groups also involved traveling into the deepest parts of the Ivory Kingdoms' dense jungles, an unusual environment for the typical samurai. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two clans which handled most of this effort were the Mantis and the Spider. The Mantis had been present in the Ivory Kingdoms since long before the Colonies ever existed and even allowed a few of the

survivors to join their ranks; being well used to tropical climates and unusual environments from their own islands, the Mantis were able to adapt quickly to the demands of jungle warfare. The Spider Clan lacked such insights and experience, but had advantages of its own – such as undead troops, Lost soldiers, and maho. These abilities made them even more intimidating foes to the Ivinda, and the Spider Clan's knowledge of sinister forces also made it effective at dealing with the many supernatural evils of the former Ivory Kingdoms.

The Senpet Empire

Far to the west of Rokugan, well past the deserts of the Burning Sands, lies the Senpet Empire, the land of the Ten Thousand Gods. A proud but relatively isolated people with an ancient history, the Senpet have interacted with Rokugan in only a few ways over the Emerald Empire's history. Probably their most infamous impact has been through their creation of khadi – heartless immortal sorcerers. The Bloodspeaker Iuchiban brought the secret of the khadi back to Rokugan, and since his time several other maho-tsukai have also employed this blasphemous ritual.

Militarily, the only notable contact between Senpet and Rokugani took place during the Hidden Emperor era, when the Scorpion Clan was exiled to the Burning Sands. The Scorpion encountered a Senpet army, battled it and were defeated, finding themselves made slaves for over a year – a bitter humiliation which they have carefully concealed from the rest of the Empire. The Scorpion learned the Senpet army was a formidable force, with simple weapons but highly trained and motivated soldiers – including charioteers, who combined great speed and impact with precision archery. The Senpet made heavy use of magic, including the disturbing ability to raise the dead (apparently without calling on the powers of the Taint), something deeply abhorrent to the Rokugani. They were also united in their faith in their so-called Ten Thousand Gods, and on the battlefield display a fanaticism which drove them to great deeds. The Scorpion carefully recorded their experiences in case they ever had to face these gaijin again.

In the late twelfth century, rumors reach the Scorpion and the Unicorn that the Senpet have been conquered by another people – the Yodotai. To the Scorpion it is pleasing to see their former enemies brought low, but the Unicorn regard the further encroachment of the Yodotai with quiet but deep alarm.

Chapter Five

Court and Civilization

"The artist explicitly endorsed my use of his style and you call it a mere copy? A failed one at that?" Doji Seiyami's lilting voice carried to all the prying ears around... as she meant it to. In contrast to her sharp tone, her fan wafted gently back and forth in front of her face, scenting the air with a lilac perfume. "Kiwadoi-sama, you insult not only my own skill at imitation, but also the wisdom of the original artist. If I did not know better I would say you are tempting me to anger."

The Scorpion general's smile was clearly visible below the mask that covered the upper half of her face. Her lips, full and inviting in their permanent pout, curled around her words. "Hiruma Renzo is skilled at showing what cannot be shown. Your work is... less skillful, not because you lack in ability, but because you try too hard to fill that void with beautiful lines. There is simply too much on the canvas, Seiyami. Too much for all to see."

The assembled courtiers watched the exchange between the Bayushi and the Doji with trepidation. The newer members of the court did not understand the second conversation occurring in the subtext of the words. The veterans recognized the argument as building to something more important, and they waited anxiously to see what might come.

Seiyami gestured expansively at the hall, as if her words were not meant for the Scorpion but for the court itself. "A lack of understanding on your part affirms the rumors, Bayushi-sama. You should not criticize that which you do not understand, my good general. Especially not while your own position in this war is in such jeopardy."

Kiwadoi stepped closer, her words suddenly quiet, though not quite meant to be concealed. "And you, Doji-san, should not meddle in the affairs of your betters. My war is well in hand. You sit here crafting mimicry while my officers devise new strategies for defeating the Lion. Play your silly games, Doji-san, and I will win the real battle."

Seiyami waited a full count of five while the Bayushi general turned to leave the court chamber. When she spoke, her fan rested just under her chin and her eyes looked meaningfully toward her own painting. "You have insulted my art. You disrespected my sensei in this style. You call into question my perception of your war and boldly suggest that my very occupation is... unnecessary, Bayushi-sama?"

Kiwadoi stopped and turned, suddenly very interested in what the Doji had to say.

Seiyami's tone rose in pure rhetorical fashion, each syllable designed to draw in the listener. "The Crane are willing to endure much. We are slow to offer aggression and quick to forgive. But you go too far, Kiwadoi-sama. To these insults I must respond. If the Scorpion were half as competent as you believe yourself to be, this war would be over!" She snapped her fan closed with a sharp sound and pointed it directly at the Scorpion general. "Rumor says you possess the Akodo's battle plans... and still you fail? Only the disgusting behavior of your brother keeps your army afloat." Seiyami sneered and turned her back, deliberately denying respect.

Bayushi Kiwadoi strode forward, her hand going to her obi in a vain attempt to draw the sword she did not carry within the court. Still she advanced, as if now intent on throttling the Crane with her bare hands.

"You disrespect your betters, Crane. Bushido demands that honor be avenged. Stand and fight, Seiyami-san. I challenge you before this court."

Seiyami turned back, the corners of her lips rising in the faintest smirk of satisfaction. "Of course, I accept. In fact, my cousin from the Kakita Academy is present for just such occasions." A deeper silence fell on the court as the most recent graduate of the Kenshinzen dojo stepped

into the room, moving to stand by the Crane courtier. "I must gain the approval of my daimyo, but fortunately for us both, he is present. Tomorrow, then? In the lilac garden?" Seiyami's voice was calm, pleasant, as if speaking about the beauty of the flowers instead of impending death.

Bayushi Kiwadoi was silent for a moment, offering only a brief look in the direction of the Lion ambassadors. Then she sighed and bowed her head. "Tomorrow, Doji-san."

By the following day, when Bayushi Kiwadoi's blood soaked the cultivated soil of the garden, rumors were already spreading that Doji Seiyami was a secret ally of the Lion ambassador, perhaps even that the two were lovers. Rumors spoke also of the war, and it was said that with Kiwadoi dead, her infamous brother would be forced to take command. Bayushi Konitsu might not have possessed her skills as a tactician, but no one could predict what he might do, or what the Crane had truly unleashed upon this war.

Civility and Etiquette

After the fall of the Kami at the dawn of the Empire, the founders of Rokugan sought to bring their new realm as close as they could to the divine court of the Celestial Heavens. Lady Doji in particular created a system of rituals and conventions that would bring harmony and elegance to the daily lives of the people. These systems formed the basis of nearly all Rokugani social traditions. The full extent of these traditions grew from this base, nourished by time, respect, and the needs of a warrior society. Modern Rokugan is a society which values politeness, civility, and etiquette. In a land where the warrior caste rules and nobility openly carry weapons, it is these rules of civility that keep order and separate the samurai from violent barbarity.

Knowing the social forces that shaped Rokugan's culture grants insight into what is considered proper behavior for its citizens. Indeed, from the standpoint of players and GMs, understanding these underlying forces is more important than knowing all of the detailed rituals of society, since this basic comprehension allows one to improvise successfully in any specific situation.

A Warrior Culture

Ultimately, Rokugan is a warrior's society. The nobility, the Fortunes, the priests, the diplomats, even the scholars are all considered warriors. Everything in the Empire is viewed through a martial lens, and the courts are no different. Courtiers are warriors on a battlefield – an altogether different battlefield from the ones where bushi clash, but no less important or deadly for that. The sword may be the most venerated weapon in Rokugan, but far more have been killed by the subtle weapons of court: the displeased frown, the exchanged glance, and the quiet whisper.

Most of Rokugan's customs directly result from this underlying warrior's culture, including the basic code of ethics (Honor and Bushido), most aspects of spirituality, and the emphasis on personal responsibility. This warrior culture encompasses every level of the samurai caste. Anything a samurai does, he does as a warrior. Thus, most aspects of Rokugani social convention can be understood both as ways of supporting the warrior culture and ways of keeping it in check. Social norms help ensure the samurai caste does not become corrupted or dangerous to the rest of society (and also provides acceptable outlets for aggression without endangering the stability of the Empire), while also ensuring the samurai remain formidable and respected combatants.

Observing and maintaining this social order is perhaps the single most important aspect of Rokugani culture, and most of the Empire's customs are based on this purpose. Bowing to a superior and showing respect to one's host, for example, are both variations on the basic custom of deference to authority, a principle that is central to the Rokugani way of thinking. After all, without such deference, samurai society will collapse back into the primitive chaos that prevailed before the fall of the Kami.

Harmony and Saving Face

Rokugan is a land concerned with appearances. Perception is everything; being considerate to others can win many favors, while being inconsiderate can cost a man his life. To condradict appearances is embarrassing to oneself and to everyone who witnesses it. It disrupts the harmony of the proceedings. Thus, many social customs are concerned with maintaining appearances and demonstrating sincerity rather than with being honest or blunt.

This is tied into the concept of *On*, or "face." *On* refers to concepts of dignity, prestige, self-control, and respect. *On* is the respectability and deference one can claim for oneself, a sense of worth and social status. It is the "face" one presents to the world, often likened to a mask that one constantly wears. To "lose one's face" is sometimes used to describe an embarrassment or a loss of prestige, but at the more basic level it means losing one's self-control and thus the dignity and respect of being a samurai. In a culture like Rokugan, personal dignity is prized even above one's own life, and to compromise that dignity is a grave offense. One worth dying over, or killing over. Shaming oneself

also means shaming one's ancestors, and a samurai with no *On* is a disgraced samurai with few avenues of redemption.

Thus, much of Rokugani etiquette is about finding ways for oneself and others to "save face" and avoid shame, embarrassment, or a loss of control. This is why the Rokugani are respectful of one another – ally and enemy alike – and try to overlook accidental breaches of etiquette; causing a scene about a problem will mean even more loss of *On* to all parties involved, and is thus worse than doing nothing. An honorable and respectful samurai always gives others ample opportunity to "save face" by backing down from a mistaken action or apologizing for an unseemly outburst. Conversely, a samurai who wishes to criticize another must do so through the rules of etiquette, maintaining *On* and avoiding unseemly spectacle – and in this way, can point out the fallacies of another samurai's reasoning or even make a public accusation without breaching propriety. In Rokugan, what matters is often not what one is saying but rather how one is saying it. So long as one is respectful and everyone's *On* is preserved, much can be forgiven... or at least overlooked.

Along similar lines, to blatantly speak the truth is usually considered rude and uncouth. To blatantly unveil an unflattering truth makes it harder for everyone to maintain appearances, and threatens to disrupt *On* and unleash uncontrolled emotion. Thus, telling the truth often gains only derision, while lying to help keep up appearances will win allies and prestige.

Bushido and Civility

Bushido is the idealized code by which every samurai tries to live. It is integral to all aspects of the warrior's life, so much so that the more honorable samurai is often considered the better warrior, regardless of actual skill at fighting (although many Rokugani also believe that being honorable goes hand-in-hand with superior fighting talent). Bushido includes tenets of behavior that form the basis of much of Rokugani society's social rules. Sincerity and Courtesy are considered virtues of Bushido, so being civil is also considered being honorable. Conversely, a rude or offensive samurai is also, by default, a dishonorable samurai.

This is why most of Rokugan looks down so badly on the Crab and Mantis Clans. A crude, bellowing Crab or a strutting, bullying Mantis is dishonoring himself with every act and word, bringing shame not only on his own name but also on his family and clan. Moreover, because such a samurai is threatening the harmony of the event and offending everyone around him, he is threatening the On and the honor of everyone else, compounding his sin.

Civility and On also demand that a host offer the same courtesy to an enemy as to an ally. A host cannot order the arrest or death of an enemy guest without due cause. To violate such principles is barbaric and distasteful, showing a lack of respect to one's enemy. Even the most warlike clans will afford their guests hospitality and courtesy as proof that they are honorable warriors.

Humility

The word "samurai" literally means "to serve in close attendance to the Emperor." Ultimately, a samurai is merely a servant of a greater lord. Although pride in one's name and deeds is considered virtuous in samurai culture, hubris and disrespect are considered shameful. One must always be humble in the presence of one's superiors, and much Rokugani etiquette is concerned with the proper demonstration of this humility. A demanding or overbearing samurai brings shame to himself and his family, and showing a lack of humility is a good way to insult others badly enough to start an unwanted feud.

Samurai are expected to always be striving for excellence, and humility is seen as an integral part of this effort. A true samurai knows that no matter how skilled he may be, there is always much more to learn. This belief is echoed in Akodo's *Leadership: "A true samurai acts without claiming credit; he does not wish to appear superior to his lord."*

Humility is also championed by Rokugan's religious philosophy of Shinseism, which teaches that one must deny the self, surrender attachment to the material world, and bow before the Heavens. Shinsei's *Tao* claims that humility comes from an awareness of the lack of self; a person with no prideful attachments to a construct of self can thereby embrace temperance, self-awareness, and the ability to improve.

Small wonder that when samurai are unaccustomed to court, many courtiers give a simple piece of advice: "When in doubt, err towards humility." It is a rule of thumb that works far more often than it fails.

Samurai Etiquette: Character verses Player

Much of Rokugani custom and etiquette is derived from the customs of feudal Japan, which were themselves very complex and placed much emphasis on detail. The ideal Japanese noble was expected to be mindful, so following the details was important – it demonstrated his mindfulness. Even in the somewhat simplified world of Rokugan, the sheer amount of social rules and customs can be overwhelming to players, especially new players. The prospect of playing in or depicting a courtly setting can be very intimidating, especially since a single breach of etiquette can land a character in dire circumstances. For that matter, these rules of civility are expected to be followed outside of court as well, and tracking all the customs that are supposed to be kept up can be exhausting – and worse, can make L5R less than fun to play.

Fortunately, there is an answer to this. While the characters are expected to know the rules and customs of Rokugan, the players are not. GMs and players should assume the basic rules of etiquette are being followed by default instead of constantly checking on whether the characters are bowing properly or placing their swords in the right place. Use the amount of detail that makes the group comfortable, and if there is any doubt, the GM should allow the players to roll Etiquette rather than forcing them to remember the "rules" of society on their own. This way, what a character knows and what a player knows are kept separate; a player does not have to be a master of Japanese etiquette to role-play a skilled courtier, and players are not unfairly punished for what they do not know.

In situations where a social misstep might be dangerous, such as an audience in the Imperial Court, the GM can rule that anyone with sufficient ranks of Etiquette will follow all proper customs by default. PCs with a lower Etiquette Skill rank can make a Skill Roll to avoid a critical error. For instance, the GM might rule that the required Etiquette Rank to participate in the Imperial Court without appearing uncouth is at least 3. All characters with a lower Skill Rank would have to roll Etiquette / Awareness against an appropriate TN to avoid embarrassing themselves.

Of course, all of this assumes the players are not comfortable with the challenge of acting out the elaborate rules of Rokugani court etiquette. If the players do enjoy such role-play challenges, by all means be as detailed as possible! In fact, the GM should consider skipping Etiquette rolls altogether for a group that devotes the effort to learning and role-playing the "rules" on their own.

Samurai Etiquette: How not to be a Barbarian

"A rash word can damage a man more swiftly than the sharpest sword." – Kakita Yoshi, Imperial Chancellor

Samurai are expected to conduct themselves far differently than those of lower station. Indeed, the ways of the samurai are alien and strange to most *heimin*. To the lower castes, samurai have a reputation for unpredictability and eccentricity, but this is merely a result of how differently samurai conduct themselves and live their lives. A virtuous samurai adheres to proper ways, while a samurai who violates the rules shames himself and is treated accordingly.

Basic Rules of Conduct

The basic rules of samurai conduct are derived from many ancient sources, combining the standards and ideals of Akodo's *Leadership*, the writings of Lady Doji, the *Tao* of Shinsei, and various personal accounts of how the Kami conducted themselves while they walked among mortals. Essentially, a samurai is expected to emulate his ancestors by conducting himself in a generally honorable and dignified way. He distinguishes himself from the dirty masses of commoners by his manners and conduct, a standard he maintains in both peace and war.

When samurai meet, there are rules of address which must be observed. How samurai regard and address one another is dependent on their comparative ranks and social standing. Samurai refer to those above them in status with a respectful suffix (usually either "-sama" for generic high respect, or "-dono" for one's own direct superior) on the family name. Thus a lord might be addressed as "Kakita-sama" or "Matsu-sama." Those of equal or lower status are commonly greeted with the "-san" suffix (such as "Tsuruchi-san" or "Ide-san") which expresses a peer-to-peer relationship. A friend or relative may sometimes be addressed with no suffix at all. However, unless one is very close to the person, this is usually seen as insulting.

Samurai may also use their given names when addressing each other, but there are many implications and rules associated with this. A samurai's family name is considered to be more important than his given name, so referring to a samurai by the full name (such as "Shiba Iejiro-san") has many connotations. If a higher-ranked samurai addresses one of lower rank in this way, it is considered great praise – but the reverse is not true at all, for to use the given name of a superior is presumptuous and disrespectful. Calling a samurai by the given name alone (with no family name) is an act of great familiarity and should always be avoided in public. In relaxed settings such as a sake house or a private dinner, this constraint is relaxed, but in court one always uses the family name in addition to the given name, even when addressing a close friend or relative.

It is considered improper to use a samurai's given name without formal introduction, so samurai commonly need to address others without knowing their names. Avoiding accidental insult is always important in such scenarios, but Rokugani etiquette and society provide some tools for this situation. For example, samurai who are strangers can often still identify one another's clan, family, and rank through the heraldic mon worn on the samurai's outer garments. Normally, a samurai's outer kimono and kataginu (vest) will have four different mon: one on each shoulder, one on the back, and one on the chest close to the heart. Every clan and family has a mon, as do many dojo and other groups and organizations in the Empire. There are even individual personal mon, and often samurai will wear the mon of their distinguished ancestors. For this reason, a working knowledge of heraldry is very important when dealing with unfamiliar samurai.

As a general rule, a samurai refers to strangers by either their clan affiliation or their family name. The -sama suffix is always used unless one is certain the other is of lower station. It is considered proper to correct a mistaken use of "-sama" if one is of equal or lower station, thereby demonstrating humility.

Generally, the mon worn nearest to the heart shows what a samurai holds most dear. A samurai-ko with the mon of the Kakita over her heart is saying she holds her family closest; one with the mon of the Kitsuki Justicars is saying she holds her dojo in highest esteem. A samurai whose personal mon is on the chest is saying that he holds himself above all others. It is completely at the discretion of the samurai how he wishes to place the mon, and for the most part there is no inherent negative connotation with choosing one over another. Indeed, a samurai might even wear the mon of a school from another clan in this place, if he trained there due to a treaty or hostage-exchange.

The Etiquette of Swords

The sword is deeply venerated in samurai culture. The katana is referred to as representing a samurai's soul, while the wakizashi symbolizes his honor. Swords are passed down generation to generation, and the Rokugani believe continual usage of a blade leaves a spiritual echo, causing the sword to become just as much a part of them as their physical body. Thus, samurai are expected to treat their swords with great reverence and respect, honoring the skill that made the blade and the deeds of every warrior who has touched it since.

A bushi carries his katana virtually everywhere he goes. It is both his badge of station and his first line of defense. By carrying it, he is openly saying he is able to defend himself and proclaiming his willingness to accept any challenge. Thus, courtiers and shugenja will not usually carry katana; not only is it inappropriate for them to do so without the proper training, but they are not expected to defend themselves in a skirmish or a duel as a bushi would do. A bushi's death in combat is expected; he has been trained to die. But a shugenja's gifts or a courtier's influence are both very rare, and they are expected to avoid battles or allow their yojimbo to do the fighting. Killing a shugenja is often considered shameful, since they are holy priests of the kami, although exceptions are made for those shugenja who use their powers directly in battle.

However, shugenja and courtiers are still considered samurai, and they usually will at least carry or possess a wakizashi (instead of a full two-sword daisho set). Courtiers who carry their wakizashi with them are signaling they consider themselves capable in combat and thus remove any stigma against attacking them in a skirmish, although they still are not expected to fight duels on their own behalf.

The wakizashi is often not expected to be used regularly as a fighting weapon. It is the safeguard of a samurai's honor, used primarily to commit seppuku. This is why it is given to shugenja and courtiers, who are expected to take their own lives rather than suffer the shame of capture. However, most bushi also use the wakizashi as a secondary weapon for self-defense – or against disgraceful enemies whose blood is not fit to stain their grandfather's katana. The Dragon Clan's samurai utilize the wakizashi in tandem with the katana, and although this fighting style (called Niten) was once condemned as "the coward's way" by the Crane, in the modern Empire it is considered respectable and has influenced how other Rokugani samurai view and value their wakizashi.

Sheathed swords are always kept in the obi "blade down" so that the scabbard (the saya) does not rest against the edge of the blade. This prevents the sword from being dulled, but also makes it harder to draw effectively. When a samurai is insulted or readying himself for battle, he turns the katana "blade up" in his obi. This is a direct signal that the samurai is prepared to draw his blade... and when he does, the edge will be pointing at his enemy.

Samurai must spend a great deal of time maintaining their blades. A rusty, loose, or dull blade is a shameful personal failure, directly weakening a samurai's ability to defend his lord's interests. Samurai therefore must ensure their swords are always sharp and in proper condition.

A Complete Picture of Court

The world of the Rokugani court has been written about extensively across many different L5R 4th Edition supplements. To get a more complete picture of the courtly lifestyle of the samurai, along with general guidelines for conducting a court-based adventure, GMs and players may wish to consult the following resources:

Romance in Rokugan: How to conduct a courtly affair, the traditions surrounding romance, and general advice regarding love in the Emerald Empire are found in the 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans,* pages 68-69.

The Game of Letters: The courtly game of exchanging letters, and general advice regarding courtly correspondence, is found in the 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 61.

The Art of the Insult: How to insult an enemy effectively without appearing brutish is discussed in the 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 100.

Gift-Giving: For traditions and customs surrounding the giving and receiving of gifts, which is central to Rokugani etiquette, consult the 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, pages 42-43.

Privacy in the Home: Etiquette regarding shoji screens is provided in *Emerald Empire*, page 43.

Many samurai keep sheets of thick cleaning paper with them to wipe their blades after a duel or fight. Indeed, they will often cleanse their blades before cleansing themselves after a battle; better blood on your hands than blood on your soul.

Sword Etiquette in Home and Court

How a samurai carries and handles his while guesting in someone's home or court is a matter of considerable concern. Discussions in court can get heated, and it would not do for the disagreeing parties to draw swords before the host and disgrace the home or the lord with unseemly violence. There are strict guidelines to such things, and those who deviate from these rules risk great shame and dishonor. A samurai who does not conform to sword etiquette while visiting another may be denied courtesy by the host without a loss of face.

When visiting the home or court of an ally or friend, a samurai almost never brings his sword inside. The sword is always left at the door, often in the keeping of "sword-polishers" whose supposed care for the blade provides guests with a face-saving excuse to leave their swords behind. Of course, the polishers always do their jobs well, polishing and cleaning the swords and keeping them safe while the samurai visits. If a samurai does not wish to entrust his swords to another in this way, an alternative choice is to leave the blades in a private room, typically on a display stand.

A host may choose to permit a visiting samurai to carry his blade in the home or court, especially if the samurai is performing a duty that requires it – a yojimbo, for example, or a sensei who has been invited to court to demonstrate kata. This courtesy must be extended by the host explicitly; it can never be assumed. It should be noted that extending this offer to a guest without such a suitable cause is actually a subtle threat; the host is effectively telling the samurai that he is not safe. Likewise, carrying a sword into the Imperial Court or the court of one's daimyo or allies without prior permission is considered an insult, showing the samurai does not trust his host.

A samurai always almost carries his sword when in the court or home of his enemy. Indeed, if he chooses instead to leave the blade behind, this is an insult; the samurai is saying his enemies are not true threats.

When greeted by one's host, a samurai traditionally sits or kneels and removes his sword from his obi, placing it on the floor. This can be to the left or right. Placed to the left, the sword is easier to draw; this means the samurai does not trust his host, or perhaps is making a killer's intent known. Placed to the right, the blade is harder to reach, signifying trust in the host. Laying the sword so that the hilt points toward the host means the samurai does not think much of the host's sword skills.

In many cases, a samurai is permitted to carry a sword into court but it is still considered unacceptable to draw it (pretty much all swords within the Imperial Court fall into this category). In these cases, or in any other instance when a samurai wishes to publicly demonstrate that he has absolutely no violent intentions, he will demonstrate his sincerity by tying his blade into the sheath with a "peace knot." Essentially, the knot ties the tsuba and the saya together so that the blade cannot be drawn. These knots are very elaborate and take considerable time to undo, creating a great hindrance to drawing the blade. A samurai shows both trust to his host and obedience to social convention by tying his blade.

Bragging

It is common for samurai to brag about their exploits. This might be seen as haughty in other cultures, but not in Rokugan... so long as it is done properly. A samurai is expected to boast about the deeds he has accomplished in the name of his lord and clan. Samurai will boast in court to increase their prestige, or at the start of a battle or duel to gain a psychological advantage. It is common practice for samurai to introduce themselves by naming something significant from their past. "I am Matsu Nyoko, veteran of the Battle of Shiro Giji!"

Bragging is supposed to show a samurai's success at serving his clan and superiors. A samurai who brags about dishonorable acts, or who elevates his own deeds above his lord, is shaming himself and will be ignored or even disciplined for his improper words.

It may be noted that bragging is not a uniform custom across all clans. It is most common among the Lion, Crane, and Unicorn. The least boastful clan, ironically, is the Scorpion. A common Scorpion greeting, for instance, is for a samurai to introduce himself as "a man of no importance."

The Etiquette of Revenge

In a culture of honorable warriors, it is only logical that a portion of the culture's norms and customs are dedicated to the circumstances in which vengeance is acceptable. Rokugan generally views revenge as an acceptable and honorable response to a perceived wrong, and the conditions under which this is acceptable are explicitly codified in Imperial law. When a samurai's family member is slain by one of the same clan, any member of that family may go to the killer's daimyo and ask permission for revenge. (This includes one's own daimyo if the killer belonged to the same family.) If permission is given, any action taken against the killer is explicitly condoned by the family. Most commonly, the action will be a duel, although more extreme offenses can lead to an outright martial conflict between bloodlines (a so-called "Blood Feud").

Against a killer from a different clan, the procedure is different. The samurai seeking vengeance lobbies his own daimyo to ask the daimyo of the killer for permission to fight a duel. While one might think daimyo would always reject such challenges, it is actually more likely for permission to be granted – to do otherwise not only shows a lack of faith in one's own samurai, but also insults the one seeking vengeance, thereby threatening to escalate the offense into a blood feud or even a full-scale war.

Of course, vengeance can only be sought if the name of the killer is known. Witness testimony or personal confessions are both considered sufficient to justify seeking vengeance, and it has sometimes happened that when a samurai boasts of the enemies he has slain, a witness quietly takes note of the confession and later seeks a duel.

Once vengeance is authorized, a duel is considered legal (see the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 164, for discussions of the differences between legal and illegal duels). Magistrates do not intervene in a sanctioned duel except to make sure it is conducted properly, and once the duel is resolved the matter is considered officially closed. One cannot legally "avenge" a death resulting from a sanctioned duel; honor has been satisfied, one way or the other.

Blood Feud in Action: The Thirty-One Ronin

Bayushi Kira was a low-born servant in the court of Hantei XIII. He was a courtier who had amassed wealth and connections, trading his influence for an important position as a liaison of the Imperial Court. Visiting daimyo were required to report to Kira to be apprised of the court's ever-changing rules of etiquette and behavior. After all, a minor breach of etiquette in the presence of the Emperor could bring swift and terrible reprisals for one's clan, and many daimyo required to visit knew little or nothing of courtly decorum. Sadly, Kira became corrupted by his position. He demanded exorbitant bribes, refusing assistance to those who fail to pay.

One year, the time came for a Crab lord named Hiruma Asano to pay a visit to the Emperor. Asano was a proud man, daimyo of a minor province in Crab lands. He despised the decadence into which he believed the rest of Rokugan had fallen. His men were warriors, true samurai, living examples of Bushido, and their life at the edge of the Shadowlands had not dulled their wits or their prowess. Asano was disgusted by the state of the capital, yet remained a loyal subject of the Emperor and wished for nothing more than to make his required visit and then return home. Unfortunately, Asano refused to meet the bribery demands of Bayushi Kira.

Kira retaliated with rumor and innuendo, and the "backwoods Crab" – not once referred to by name – became the butt of countless jokes and a figure of constant mockery. Asano found himself alone in the court, emasculated by Kira's whispers. Asano grew angry and finally lost his temper, assaulting Kira with a dagger in open court. The Bayushi was saved by the Seppun, and in punishment for this gross flouting of law and protocol, Asano's lands were confiscated and his family disbanded. He was forced to commit seppuku, his wife was sent to a monastery, and the samurai who served him became ronin.

Among Asano's retainers was his hatamoto, a grizzled bushi named Oishi who had spent his life commanding scouting missions into the Shadowlands. Oishi was shattered by the news of his lord's disgrace and death, but he knew Bayushi Kira was unassailable, a political favorite ensconced in the safety of Otosan Uchi. Seemingly unable to bring justice to his master's enemy, Oishi closed out Asano's affairs and disbanded his followers.

For the next year Bayushi Kira stayed inside his home in Otosan Uchi, fearful of potential retaliation from Asano's former vassals. He commissioned spies to keep tabs on the ronin, but they found nothing of interest. One ronin founded an archery dojo. Another joined the crusade of the mad Crane named Doji Hotei. A third enrolled in a Kuni monastery, training as a Witch Hunter. Oishi himself surfaced in Ryoko Owari. He divorced his wife, turned to sake and geisha, and started a drunken duel in a kabuki theater. It seemed the ronin of Asano were no threat. Indeed, they were often called cowards or worse, examples of how far Bushido could fall, since samurai who would allow the murderer of their lord to go unpunished were truly worthless.

After a time Kira was no longer able to maintain his spies. The Emperor had exiled the Scorpion from the court in order to avoid controversy, and without his ability to extract bribes Kira's finances dwindled. He finally dismissed his spy network and contented himself with a small contingent of sixty loyal bushi. He felt confident that he would eventually regain his position in the courts.

He was wrong.

A year to the day after Hiruma Asano's death, thirty-one men gathered in the streets outside Bayushi Kira's home. They battered the doors of Kira's home, stormed the mansion, and slaughtered the surprised guards. While the fighting took place, a single elderly ronin stood in the road before Kira's gate and held a placard up to the passersby: We are the ronin of Shiro Asano. This night we come to avenge our master with the death of Bayushi Kira. We intend you no harm.

Spearheading the assault was Oishi, strangely sober and competent despite his year of carousing. He personally confronted Kira down and slew him, easily overcoming the courtier's feeble skills. Oishi claimed the Scorpion's head and took it to display at the tomb of his dead master.

When the Emperor's soldiers arrived, the ronin surrendered peacefully to Imperial justice. Their story spread like wildfire among the people: how they had plotted in secret despite the Scorpion Clan's best spies, how they had defied an unjust punishment in the name of honor, how they had fought against impossible odds and triumphed. They had demonstrated to all of Rokugan that Bushido was alive and well.

Emperor Hantei XIII was perplexed. The Scorpion were demanding blood for the "wanton murder" of their samurai by "lawless ronin." Certainly, Asano's men could not be excused from their criminal act, but to execute them would be a political disaster. To satisfy both justice and the people, the Emperor granted the thirty-one ronin the right of honorable *seppuku*. Kira's few surviving retainers were given the same punishment. The ashes of Hiruma Oishi and his followers were buried beside their lord, and Hiruma Asano's former holdings were reinstated to the Crab.

The Crab still tell this story and accept every word of it as true. However, the Ikoma histories reject some aspects of the tale, claiming they were added to defame the character of the Hantei Emperor. Whatever the case, once a year on the day of Kira's death the Hiruma family holds a festival in remembrance of the thirty-one ronin.

Private War: The Etiquette of Blood Feuds

"Blood demands blood." – attributed to Matsu

Blood feuds are more complex matters than mere duels, since they amount to a declaration of war between families. In this case, both daimyo involved agree that the only way to resolve the dispute is for the families to make war with one another. Normally, this "war" is fought under specifically agreed terms and is waged quietly, without drawing public attention, so as to maintain social order and save face for everyone involved. Blood feuds are generally tolerated by the Imperial families and are accepted by the law as a necessary practice to maintain order in a land of warriors.

In order to be considered both legal and socially acceptable, an official Blood Feud must always be recognized, and notice of the feud must be delivered to the target's lord. Otherwise, any violence committed is considered a violation of the Emperor's law. On the other hand, once a Blood Feud has become official no force short of the Emperor himself can interfere – otherwise, they too become subject to the feud.

If a blood feud is between two entire clans or is otherwise too large to avoid major public violence, the daimyo may approach the Emperor for permission to engage in a large-scale feud – essentially a full-fledged war. If Imperial permission is given, the war is conducted under the oversight of another party, typically a neutral clan or an official Imperial Observer, to ensure the Emperor's resources are not being wasted in a petty conflict. Such instances are usually considered very glorious by the samurai engaging in them.

Unfortunately for the populace of Rokugan, even if a Blood Feud is resolved, it is rare for all parties to be truly satisfied with the results, especially if the feud has endured for multiple generations or has expanded to include larger groups. Indeed, the results of a Blood Feud can often wind up setting the stage for more conflict and larger wars.

Guest and Host

Many of the customs regarding hosting and visiting samurai have been explained in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, pages 43-44. What follows here is an elaboration on the basic rules and points presented there.

The home is considered a sacred place in Rokugan. Every household is (or at least attempts to be) a reflection of the Imperial Court, with the homeowner at its head, the family as its court, and its own small army of servants. Home is a samurai's sanctuary. When a samurai comes home, he is leaving the world where he is a servant and entering a world where he is the master. It is his domain, his kingdom, a place where he can do as he pleases without the prying eyes or harsh judgment of others. To be allowed into this domain is a privilege and honor.

Guests visiting a home must treat it with respect and reverence. Indeed, the relationship between a guest and his host is the basis for almost all Rokugani social interaction. How a host treats his guests, and how a guest behaves under the roof of his host, often determines how that samurai is judged in the eyes of the Empire at large. For this reason, all samurai are taught from childhood how to be a gracious guest in someone else's home.

When a guest arrives at a samurai's home, he is expected to announce himself to a guard or servant at the gate. He does this by presenting his chop, identifying himself with a short speech, and stating what business he has with the host. Even if the guest is turned away or the host is not there, a servant will keep the chop so the host will know who came to visit.

Assuming there is no reason to bar entry, the samurai is allowed into the home. When entering, the samurai immediately removes his sandals and leaves them in a small room by the entry. He is given fresh tabi socks to wear while inside. If he is dirty, he is permitted to visit the shrine or bath to cleanse himself. The samurai is expected to leave his sword at the front door; carrying a sword inside is an insult to the host's ability to protect the guest.

Under normal circumstances, the visitor is ultimately taken to the common room, where he awaits the reception of the host. If the host is not home, or if the host cannot or will not meet with the guest, he is offered a cup of tea and then told the host is not available so he should try again tomorrow. "Try again tomorrow" is the standard reply, even if the host will be away for weeks or has no intention of ever meeting the guest at all. Experienced courtiers are trained to be able to tell whether or not the host is temporarily unavailable or is genuinely unwilling to meet them; less socially-adept visitors sometimes take

several attempts to get the hint. It should be noted that "try again tomorrow" is not an insult to the guest – rather, the host is saving face for the guest, allowing him to escape the dishonor of being outright rejected. It is very inappropriate to reject the promise, demand the host's whereabouts, or otherwise disrupt this custom.

If a host is willing and able to meet the samurai, he will eventually come into the common room and greet him in person. The guest will usually offer the host a gift; for more on this, consult Emerald Empire, pages 42-43. The host and the guest will drink tea and make light conversation. The guest almost never states his reason for visiting right away; to do so implies that he is eager to leave, an insult to the host. If the matter is urgent and requires quick resolution, the guest will be very apologetic for bringing the matter up so quickly; in these cases, the host is expected to be understanding and tolerant of the guest's hurry.

After conversation, the host will offer his home to the guest. He will do everything he can to make the guest comfortable and afford whatever luxuries possible. The guest will usually stay for a few days (or more if the business at hand requires it) before departing. It is rude to overstay one's welcome, but it is also rude to ask a guest to leave without a good reason. Guests who become leeches on one's hospitality are a risk for gracious hosts, and removing them in an honorable and face-saving manner can be a challenge. Usually, the host will find some sort of excuse that compels the guest to leave, such as the arrival of a more important samurai, or a summons home from the guest's lord.

It is important to note that just because a host or a guest might break social convention and behave poorly, this is not a valid excuse for replying in kind. A host is expected to rise above the poor manners of a guest, and a guest is expected to endure the eccentricities of a poor host. Breaking the rules of etiquette reflects poorly on all involved, and the more people break the rules, the worse the violation.

Seeking an Audience With One's Lord

Dropping by the home of one's daimyo unannounced is in poor taste at best. Even if the lord is seen in court on a daily basis, any important matters must be handled appropriately. If a samurai must speak with his lord, he makes an appointment with one of the daimyo's personal retainers to formally discuss the matter. The retainer will arrange the appointment; he knows the lord's schedule and can make sure there is adequate time for the meeting. The petitioning samurai has little to no say in when the meeting will happen. Usually, the retainer will arrange for the meeting to happen as soon as possible, since their lord's time is precious and important matters can rarely wait. However, if the lord is busy, the matter is considered less important, or the retainer (or the lord) is hostile to the samurai, the wait can be longer, perhaps much longer. An outrageously long wait for the appointment ("the honorable lord should be available in five month's time") is considered a strong hint that the samurai is in disfavor and is not welcome by his superior. Of course, the samurai must honor the assigned time of the meeting, no matter how inconvenient it might be.

Of course, if the retainer or the lord makes things too difficult, this carries risks. If a samurai patiently waits and finally arrives at the assigned time, the lord must honor the appointment – to do otherwise is to lose face for slighting his guest.

Usually, retainers wishing to deny appointments will simply say something vaguely neutral, such as "the appointment will be scheduled." A promise without a specific date for the meeting is a euphemism for "never." Most samurai count this as a slight and will remember it, perhaps turning against their lord in retaliation.

The Etiquette of Dealing with Peasants

Heimin are much lower in social rank than samurai, so a samurai is not required to extend the same courtesy to commoners that he would to another samurai. However, there are still things a samurai should observe when dealing with them so he may appear gracious and noble. *Heimin* may be like livestock, but they are still someone's property, as well as living beings deserving of some basic degree of dignity.

A samurai visiting or passing through a peasant village is a common occurrence in populated areas, but the more remote and rural the village, the more uncommon samurai will be. Many remote villages go all year without seeing a samurai. Regardless, all peasants are extremely wary of samurai. Samurai behavior is strange to them and they rarely understand it. They only know that samurai are very deadly, unpredictable, and often unreasonable, so they must be cautious and obedient toward them at all times. Most *heimin* prefer to give samurai a wide berth whenever possible.

When a samurai comes to a village, he will usually be spotted from a great distance away. The first thing the villagers do is fetch the village *chonin*, or "headman," to greet the samurai. Usually he is the only *heimin* with the experience to do this. If the village has doshin (armed peasant guardians), the *chonin* will gather them in case of trouble. He will try to greet the samurai in the center of the village if possible, or otherwise in his hut. He will always ask if the samurai has eaten, and offer food if necessary. It is generally expected that samurai will interact with the *chonin* almost exclusively. If the samurai has business in the village the *chonin* will address his concerns. It is rude for a samurai to avoid meeting the *chonin*, and a samurai who does so is probably an enemy.

Under normal circumstances, the *chonin* tells the samurai anything he needs or wants to know, holding nothing back. *Chonin* are charged with protecting their villages, and hiding information is likely to outrage the samurai and can lead to the village's destruction. In general, *heimin* believe the best policy is to give a samurai whatever he wants and then send him on his way – the sooner he is gone, the better. Thus, a visiting samurai is freely offered whatever he might want – bedding, food, drink, anything he requires. In most cases he need not even ask for such things, they are automatically offered out of courtesy. Even if the samurai is from an enemy clan, the response is the same – *heimin* have no higher allegiances except their obligation to pay taxes. However, whenever a samurai visits, the *chonin* keeps a record of the costs of the visit so the village can write off the expense on its yearly taxes.

Samurai who visit the village's sake-house or geisha house (if there is one) are likewise offered whatever they might wish. However, it is considered courteous for a samurai to leave something behind as payment if he has been too extravagant. This helps repay whatever lord is ultimately footing the samurai's bill.

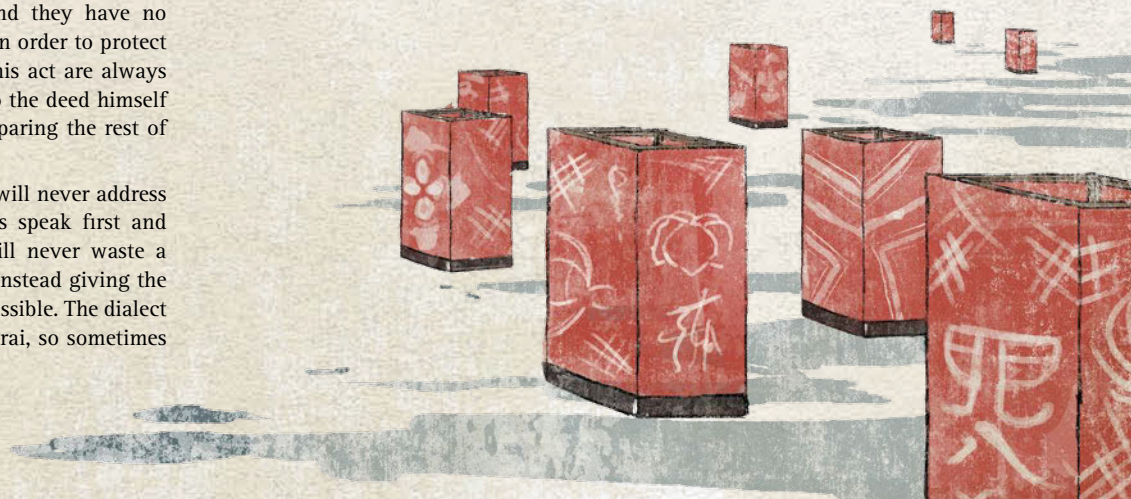
Chonin must also deal with samurai who are disruptive to a village, a much more difficult task. Usually, the *chonin* will try to appease the samurai by offering him as much food as he can eat and as much sake as he can drink. Then, when he is heavy and slow with food and drink, the doshin will subdue him and keep him tied up until the local yoriki or magistrate can deal with him. Typically, the lord of the misbehaving samurai will send reparations to the village's lord (not the village itself) as an apology for his vassal's rude behavior, and the samurai will be disciplined for embarrassing his lord.

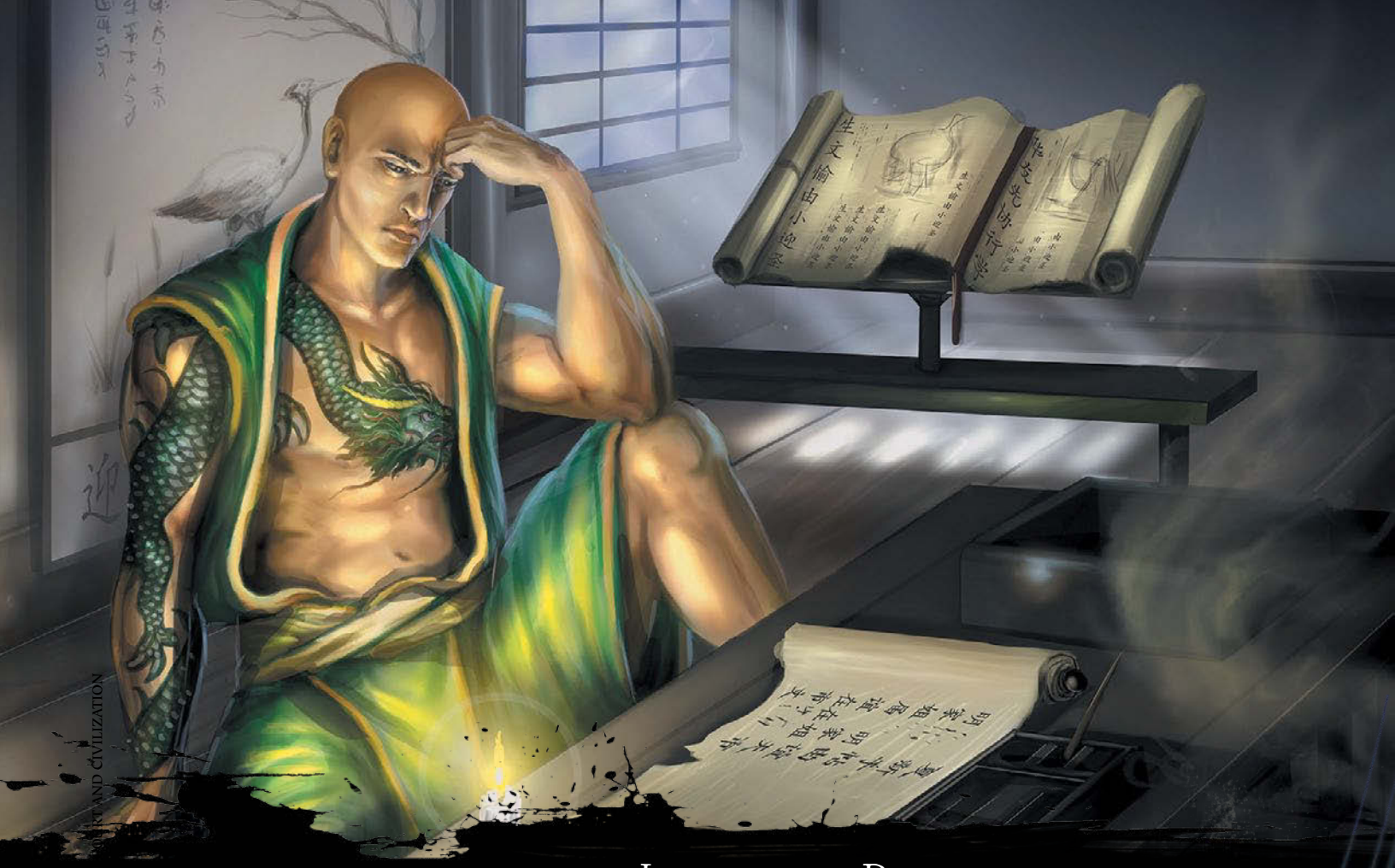
On rare occasions, villagers may find they have no choice but to kill a rampaging samurai in order to protect their own lives. The repercussions for this act are always grave; in many cases, the *chonin* will do the deed himself and take responsibility in the hope of sparing the rest of the village from the consequences.

It is important to note that a peasant will never address a samurai on his own. Samurai always speak first and the peasant replies. Also, a peasant will never waste a samurai's time in lengthy elaborations, instead giving the most direct, correct, and polite answer possible. The dialect of *heimin* is different from that of samurai, so sometimes peasants can be misunderstood (or vice versa), which further encourages the *heimin* to give the simplest answers they can. In general, peasants never volunteer information a samurai did not ask for. After all, samurai can cause a great deal of trouble and misfortune for peasant villages, so it is best to deal with them as briefly as possible, stay out of their way, and hope they move on soon.

Samurai who speak regularly with ordinary *heimin* are regarded strangely by their peers. It is a very unusual thing to do and is seen as lowering oneself. Even stranger would be to actually fraternize with *heimin*, behavior which most samurai would consider equivalent to eating off the floor alongside dogs. Urban samurai are especially horrified at such a prospect. This attitude is relaxed somewhat among samurai who live in remote rural areas, as well as some Minor Clan samurai, both of whom live in regular contact with peasants – however, even these samurai consider it improper to spend too much time with the lower castes.

Many samurai do feel that *heimin* are worthy of respect and praise for their labors, and believe it is virtuous to protect and value one's peasants. However, again, this is often likened to protecting and caring for horses or other livestock; the peasants may be living beings, but they are still "half-people," lower than samurai. They are worthy of compassion and a certain amount of respect, but a samurai's needs and concerns must always come first. Most samurai prefer to spend as little time as necessary with the peasantry, treating them politely but never as equals. Indeed, a samurai who treats a peasant as an equal is considered to be doing the peasant a disservice by confusing him and leading him into future mistakes when dealing with other samurai. Such behavior hinders the peasant's progress on the kharmic wheel and may even encourage revolts if taken too far.





Language and Dialect

While all Rokugani speak the same essential language, the day-to-day particulars of communication are more complex than may be thought. In fact, there are two main "languages" in Rokugan: the common tongue and the high language. Everyone within Rokugan speaks the common language, from farmer to samurai, but only samurai know High Rokugani.

However, the common tongue itself has many dialects, including localized differences in pronunciation and even in spelling (different combinations of kanji to create the same word or phrase). There are five main dialects throughout the Empire, roughly corresponding to the four cardinal directions and the land's heart. In addition to this general distinction, there are also different dialects between and within the social castes; the language spoken by farmers is different from the language spoken by merchants, which is different from the language spoken by samurai, and so forth. Urban samurai (*saigo*), speak a different dialect than samurai in the same region who hail from the country (*goshi*). Two cities on different sides of a province's border may have different prevailing dialects as well. It is possible to pass through several provinces and hear a different pronunciation for "rice" in each one.

High Rokugani is similar to the common tongue, in that it shares the same syntax and grammar. However, it is an almost entirely different vocabulary, with different pronunciations of the same kanji and a whole host of additional kanji, creating different words for the same concepts. The High Rokugani alphabet contains almost three times the kanji of the common tongue, and is capable of expressing much more subtle and nuanced concepts with its vast vocabulary. It is also far more regulated than the common tongue, so there is little variance over time or distance. It is spoken exclusively in a few locations: the Imperial Court, the "Forbidden City" of the Imperial capital, and in the schools and temples of shugenja. The common tongue is not permitted in these settings; anyone who speaks in a common dialect within the Imperial Court is committing a humiliating breech of etiquette. The high language is also occasionally spoken elsewhere, but only between high-ranking officials.

All official Imperial documents are written only in High Rokugani, which is explicitly not ever taught to *heimin* or *hinin*. This keeps the language untainted by the dirty masses, as well as making forgery more difficult. And besides, it is not important for peasants to understand the words on the page... they only have to obey them.

The dialect a samurai speaks will tell much about him, including his clan, the province of his upbringing, his social standing, and sometimes even his family, his dojo, or what people he associates with. Even certain professions, like sumai wrestlers or sailors, have their own distinctive jargon and dialect.

As with all things in Rokugan, dialect affects one's social standing. A samurai who speaks only the common tongue might be seen as "lower" than one who speaks High Rokugani. A Crab speaking the Crane dialect might find himself a social outcast; a Crane speaking the Crab dialect might be called a brute. A Hare visiting a city from the country would be immediately identified as a rural samurai by his accent; if he were to pick up that accent while visiting the city, then upon returning home he might be seen as an outsider. Appearances are everything in Rokugan, and the social pressure to conform to the ways of those around you is very strong.

Conduct in Court

A court is rarely open to everyone. A samurai must be invited, and invitations are earned through reputation, status, and social connections. Sometimes the purpose of a court will also determine the nature and identity of the guests. In some cases, like the Imperial Winter Court, every clan will receive a certain number of blank invitations which are distributed by the Clan Champion to his followers as he sees fit. A clan will almost never deliberately send a guest who might damage its reputation, and the importance and honor of the occasion are always stressed to every attendee.

The host of a court will greet each guest as they arrive, and a skilled host will distribute the invitations in such a way that every guest arrives at roughly the same time. Under normal circumstances, the guests will introduce themselves in the traditional manner of samurai; if the host offers his own greeting first, it considered is a great honor, for he is showing familiarity with the guest and his reputation.

A formal court is conducted primarily in a central chamber within the host's palace. Usually the chamber is open throughout the day, but court is officially conducted only during the morning, leaving the afternoon for the guests to meet with each other. Guests attending the court will present themselves to the dais and bow before the host, showing proper respect, before conducting their business. Sometimes the guests will give speeches addressing the court at large, especially when making important announcements such as declarations of war. More often, they will lobby for the attention of the dais in order to make formal presentations. Of course, the most common business is conducted in private conversations, with polite small-talk gradually snowballing into real negotiations.

The main chamber is not the only place for guests to assemble. Social events take place throughout the court, in the gardens, dining halls, and private rooms. Contests, exhibitions, plays, games, and all manner of entertainments are opportunities for courtiers to conduct business.

Yet even though the host provides these opportunities, the most important negotiations almost always take place in secret. Agreements and treaties are forged during private meetings, walks in secluded gardens, or meals taken alone with important ambassadors. Very few guests are privy to actual diplomatic sessions, and even fewer are aware of this fact. Seasoned courtiers who are approached publicly for important or serious negotiations are very skeptical of the other party's intentions.

The Bonge in Court

Ironically, while samurai are restricted in where they can go in a palace without drawing attention or suspicion, commoner servants are ubiquitous and can go virtually anywhere. No one gives a servant a second glance. They go everywhere, doing things others never notice, and they hear and see everything.

While befriending servants is beneath a samurai, those of a more pragmatic nature recognize the potential asset they represent. Less-honorable samurai often make use of servants as spy networks, gaining information on rivals in court.

For their part, most bonge are eager to participate in courtly duties. A winter spent in the palace is a guarantee of warmth, food, and some degree of safety for themselves and their families. Of course, this means servants are not willing to risk their positions without some manner of compensation in return.

Samurai who are empowered to speak for their clan are entrusted with the entire clan's welfare, destiny, and reputation. These individuals must be constantly mindful of the proper way to conduct themselves in court. In addition to observing proper etiquette, such samurai almost always use veiled language in their negotiations. In a society where blunt truths are considered violations of etiquette, forthrightness in diplomacy is likewise not seen as virtuous. Directness invites manipulation and suggests the speaker is too uncouth to be an efficient ally. A true courtier will suggest and imply, never saying anything outright. On the other side of this coin, a promise suggested is not a promise at all, and by implying rather than stating, a courtier gives himself room to maneuver and space to retreat from agreements should they turn sour – all while maintaining face and avoiding dishonor.

Ryorishi

Rokugani chefs are known as *ryorishi*. They are more than culinary specialists; most also have extensive knowledge of herbs, flora, and medicinal spices. They are skilled in cooking, food preparation, the creation of antidotes, and the detection of poisons.

Because of their knowledge and skill, the status of a *ryorishi* is often higher than that of other house servants. In fact, some *ryorishi* are samurai, although this not common. Many *ryorishi* are also known to be skilled herbalists, and when a samurai requires something to help him sleep, to aid in healing, to cure his cold, or to help with a hangover, his first thought will be to consult his household cook. Furthermore, a good *ryorishi* can recognize poisons and toxins, allowing the noble he serves to eat without fear of poisoning... as long as the cook is treated well.

Nobles will sometimes collaborate to host great banquets, pitting their prized *ryorishi* against one another to determine which is better. This custom is considered ostentatious and frivolous by most honorable samurai, but it has occasionally demonstrated some lasting value – for example, some of the Empire's finest dishes were originally spontaneously created at such events, winning great prestige for the *ryorishi's* lord.

Courtly Dining

Rokugani meals tend to be very seasonal, since many ingredients are only available at certain times of the year. For this reason, the types of meals consumed in court vary widely. Menus are often designed around what is available or what types of fish were caught that day. There are, of course, a few staples that are available year round, such as rice, tea, miso, mushrooms, and sake. Some manner of fish is almost always available as well.

A courtly meal is much grander than a home-cooked meal, even among the richest samurai. In court, a formal dinner will feature multiple courses served in a grand procession. Generally, small dishes are served first, followed by a grilled dish, a steamed dish, a simmered dish, and then a deep-fried dish. Every dish gets a separate plate. Sashimi is often served alongside throughout the meal, and a traditional dinner always ends with miso soup and pickled vegetables. The concept of "dessert" does not really exist in Rokugan – sweets such as rice candy are an indulgence for children, and are believed to disrupt the digestion.

Seating arrangements at dinner banquets require careful consideration. The "best" seat, known as the *kamiza*, goes to the guest of honor; it is usually the seat farthest from the door, since it is both the warmest during winter and the safest from attack. The host is seated to this guest's right. Guests are then seated according to rank, with the most important guests closest to the *kamiza*, and the least important closest to the door. Usually the guests are expected to seat themselves, which creates potential challenges of etiquette – if a guest seats himself or herself too close to the *kamiza*, it is considered presumptuous. Offering someone a seat far from the *kamiza* is usually considered insulting, since it is a direct statement that the person is unimportant. Sometimes rival samurai disagree as to where someone is permitted to sit, or try to get another guest to move to a different seat, and such seemingly trivial quarrels have occasionally led to duels or feuds.

It is customary for the lord's guest of honor to initially take a seat near the middle, far from the *kamiza* seat, as a gesture of humility; then the host approaches and encourages the guest to move to the *kamiza* instead. It is also a custom in some courts to give the *kamiza* seat to a Minor Clan samurai or someone else of lower status, offering them a moment of luxury in their otherwise unimportant lives. This is considered the mark of a very generous host, although no host will make this gesture if he has a truly distinguished guest at the court. Regardless, for a low-ranked samurai, being offered the *kamiza* seat in a court is a very significant event, one worthy of boasting about for a lifetime.

When receiving the meal each guest speaks a ritual phrase, "*itadakimasu*," which roughly means "I humbly receive." This acknowledges all of the work that went into the meal and also expresses gratitude for whichever living things died to provide it (in accordance with Shinseist belief). A guest may also complement the meal or even specific dishes, but he should not linger over it.

It is considered gluttonous to dwell too much on the taste of a meal or to heap too much praise upon it. At most, a guest might say that a meal is "adequate." Similarly, it is considered haughty and gluttonous to eagerly anticipate a meal, or to eat because one *wants* to instead of simply due to hunger. Instead one should always downplay the importance and quality of the meal. For example, instead of telling a guest, "enjoy your meal," a Rokugani will say, "I hope this is adequate," or "here is something to dirty your mouth." (A notable exception to this pattern is during festivals, where it is appropriate to anticipate the meal.)

One never begins eating until the host or honored guest does. The same pair of chopsticks is used throughout the entire meal, and every guest has a pair provided, although the guest may also supply his own. When not in use, the chopsticks are placed on a special wooden rest – never on the plate. How one holds the chopsticks designates a person's status: *heimin* hold their chopsticks closer to the tip, since they cannot afford to drop any food. Samurai hold their chopsticks closer to the end, which is more difficult but demonstrates a lack of gluttony. Because the instinct is always to hold the chopsticks closer to the tip, samurai must be taught from childhood not to do this. Some daimyo make a point of holding their chopsticks all the way from the end, but even without such extremes, it is considered embarrassing to hold the chopsticks as a *heimin* does.

Chopsticks should never be sunk into rice vertically, since this is resembles funeral incense and is thus bad luck. Similarly, food is never passed between guests via chopsticks, since this is too similar to the funeral practice of passing the pieces of the deceased's bones from one family member to the next. Either practice is considered "unclean" and to be avoided. If food must be passed to another diner, it is put on a plate and passed that way. It is also rude to skewer food with one's chopsticks, to break the servings into even smaller portions, or to lick one's chopsticks – the latter act is considered salacious, and is not appropriate for polite company.

Guests never pour their own drinks. Instead, it is custom to hold one's cup steady with both hands while another pours the drink, and one is expected to return the favor. A guest should be mindful of his neighbor's cup, always fill it when it is empty, and always thank those who fill his own cup. A guest who wishes no more to drink signals this by turning his cup over.

Eating, like everything else in a samurai's life, is to be done with dignity. Slurping is acceptable with noodles, but other food should be chewed slowly with the mouth shut. Spilling food on oneself is dirty and embarrassing. If a spicy dish causes a runny nose, the correct response is to sniffle – constant sniffling is far preferable to the spectacle of blowing one's nose.

At the end of a meal, the host will sometimes offer a traditional dish called *ocha-zuke*. This is essentially a soup made from second-brew tea, leftover rice, and grilled salmon or trout (considered the same animal in Rokugan). In most cities and among the wealthier clans, this is offered to guests as a polite way of signaling the meal is over and it is time to go. Guests are expected to decline the dish and leave immediately. However, among poorer clans or more practical clans such as the Crab or the Dragon, the purpose of the dish is to utilize leftovers to ensure precious food is not wasted. In this case, guests are expected to partake of a cup-sized serving, and declining the dish is considered rude.

Court Fashion

While it might seem frivolous, wearing the right ensemble of clothing can heavily influence a court, and in some cases can be as effective a weapon in politics as a sword is on the battlefield. Especially stunning outfits can influence the fashion of a hundred different courts and be emulated throughout the Empire during the season. Since extra outfits can be prohibitively expensive, it is important for samurai to pay close attention to the season's fashions. Being out of fashion is a source of shame and embarrassment, while placing one's own touch and variation on an established style can win considerable fame and prestige. Of course, boldly breaking the current fashion trend makes a statement of its own.

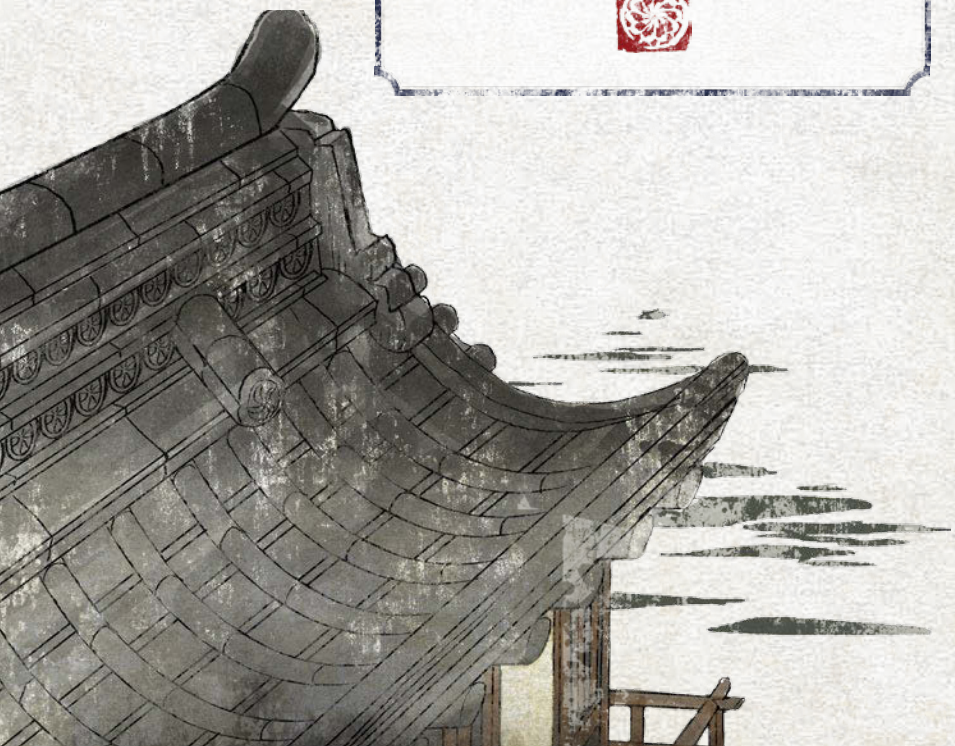
Traditionalist Rokugani dress speaks volumes about the wearer. Layering kimono is an art unto itself, and a courtier can effectively invoke any season, emotion, or topic by layering the right colors and patterns. Such an outfit can make a statement as surely as spoken words, yet remain as subtle as a master's poem.

It is common practice for a courtier to wear the most intricately-patterned kimono on the innermost layers. Ideally, this is the kimono that most closely reflects the courtier's personality or her mood that day. Every layer above it hides the outfit's core identity. Thus, the outfit becomes a metaphor for the courtier herself... protecting her true identity behind a carefully crafted *On*. Fashion games like this are quite common in the long months of a Winter Court.

Hanakotoba: The Language Of Flowers

Hanakotoba is the Language of Flowers, a secret code by which courtiers can communicate using ikebana arrangements. Specific messages are not normally conveyed, but the essence of the courtier's meaning is communicated using particular plants, flowers, and colors. Wise courtiers will attempt to influence guests by using *hanakotoba* to suggest a mood or emotion. Knowledge of the Flower Language is essential to the *ikebana* artist. Below are a few examples of flowers and their meanings, although this is by no means comprehensive.

- Amaryllis: Shy, bashful, hesitant
- Anemone: Sincerity, well-wishing
- Azelea: Modesty, patience, balance
- Red Camellia: Barely contained emotions, passion
- Yellow Camellia: Longing, impatient waiting
- Cherry Blossom: Gentleness, renewal, spring, innocence
- Forget-Me-Not: True love, inspiration
- Gardenia: Kind-hearted secrets, secret admiration, strength hiding gentleness
- Hydrangea: Pridefulness, brash thoughts
- Iris: Loyalty, friendship
- Jasmine: Grace, charm, peacefulness
- Lily: Purity
- Lily of the Valley, Tiger Lily: Hidden danger, danger within beauty, secret revenge
- Lotus: Wisdom
- Marigold: Unlucky, tragedy
- Poppy: Free-willed, free-spirited, lucky
- Primrose: Desperation
- Sagiso: Thoughtfulness, empathy.



Cleansing and Purity

Many Rokugani traditions are designed to ensure a samurai avoids becoming "unclean." Concepts of spiritual cleanliness and purity permeate not only Rokugani religion but also their daily lives and private actions. The Rokugani believe the body, mind, and soul can all become stained through contact with things that are considered "unclean," or *kegare*.

Kegare are sources of spiritual uncleanness. They are not to be confused with "sin" or divine punishment; rather, they are a natural consequence of natural defilement. Whether or not the defilement was done deliberately or with bad intentions does not matter. Specific *kegare* include disease, betrayal, eating red meat, or contact with blood, sweat, or dead bodies. For example, among the various types of animal flesh, only fish, poultry, and a few very specific forms of game are considered "clean" and thus suitable to eat.

Death, being an especially powerful form of *kegare*, is avoided by Rokugani society to the point that even gestures which resemble acts performed at funerals (like passing food with chopsticks or wearing white clothing) are avoided. The number four, *shi*, which sounds like the kanji for "death," is avoided and considered unlucky. Indeed, this rejection of death makes the concept of purity especially important to samurai, who must constantly deal in death. A samurai at war is constantly undergoing ritual purifications and avoiding activities that might attract forces of death to himself. Because sweat and blood are considered unclean, a samurai who undergoes strenuous activity or who has killed someone must undergo ritual cleansing as soon as possible. Correspondingly, a guest who goes out of his way to cleanse himself before entering a home or court is showing his host respect and honor.

One can make connections between the Rokugani view of "purity" and the hierarchy of the Empire's social order. Labor and toil produces sweat and dirties a person, and is thus inherently less "pure," beneath those higher up in the social ladder. Samurai tend to look upon farming, animal husbandry, mining, and other such grubby work with disdain in part because it is inherently dirty work that demands constant spiritual cleansing. A samurai therefore finds menial toil to be repulsive, both physically and spiritually. Even farther beneath mere labor are the activities of leatherworkers and morticians, who are always touching dead flesh – they are so impure from their professions that they are shunned even by farmers. This is also why those arts that can be performed in a physically leisurely manner, such as painting or calligraphy, are considered "higher" or more "pure" than those which require extensive labor to complete.

When things considered in this way, it is easy to understand why the Mantis Clan samurai, who make a living from the labor of seafaring, and the Sparrow Clan samurai, who lower themselves with manual labor and farming, suffer from a "dirty" reputation in the eyes of the Empire.

The worst *kegare*, however, is the Shadowlands Taint. Other forms of *kegare* may be cleansed by various practices, but the Taint is a spiritual uncleanness that cannot be absolved, that lasts forever. Some Rokugani actually believe that other unclean acts bring one's spirit closer to Jigoku and might even cause the Shadowlands Taint, further increasing the social pressure to avoid such activities.

All of this ties in with Rokugani etiquette. Following the rules of civility is believed to inherently protect against spiritual pollution from *kegare*. Individuals who conform to the social norms are seen as safeguarding the purity of their souls and the good fortunes of their family. Those who do not are dirtying themselves; they are to be avoided and are considered a blight to all around them.

Due to the fickle and ephemeral nature of the physical realm, it is possible for a samurai to become unclean through no fault of his own. Indeed, certain honorable samurai activities – especially war – almost always produce temporary uncleanness. This is why Rokugan has so many rituals of purification, and why shugenja learn so many spells and prayers for banishing spiritual corruption of even the most minor sort.

Ritual Cleansing

Given the fear of *kegare*, it is no surprise that ritual cleansing is extremely important to Rokugani society. A samurai never attends court without undergoing a physical and mental cleansing. The purpose of this is partly to heighten awareness of one's surroundings and clear the mind, but it also serves to clean the spirit. An earthly court is a reflection of the Celestial court, after all, and is therefore a sacred place. Furthermore, to attend a host's court without cleansing oneself first is to show great disrespect to the host. Even the most barbaric Crab samurai, a man who lives in his armor and reeks of sweat and death, will undergo a ritual cleansing at the first opportunity. Indeed, for the Crab it is even more important to remain as spiritually pure as possible, since their duties place them within close proximity to the Shadowlands.

Refusing to cleanse oneself is unthinkable in Rokugani culture. It does not matter how grave the situation or how imperative a matter might be... one always takes the time to cleanse oneself. In Rokugani culture, walking around while spiritually unclean is equivalent to someone in our own world walking around covered in dung and vomit. No one wants to go near such a person at all – he is repulsive and offensive, and others consider him strange, unhealthy, and possibly insane. Hence, the Rokugani cleanse themselves regularly, especially the moment they become sweaty or make contact with blood or dead flesh.

Cleansing at a Shrine

Any Rokugani can be cleansed at a shrine tended to by monks or shugenja. The ritual of cleansing is a complex and personal one, requiring prayers, passing through torii arches, and prostrations before sacred objects, as well as physical contact with at least one of the four purification substances. These substances are associated with the four Elements, which are considered inherently pure, and comprise pure water (Water), salt (Air), fire (Fire), and sand (Earth).

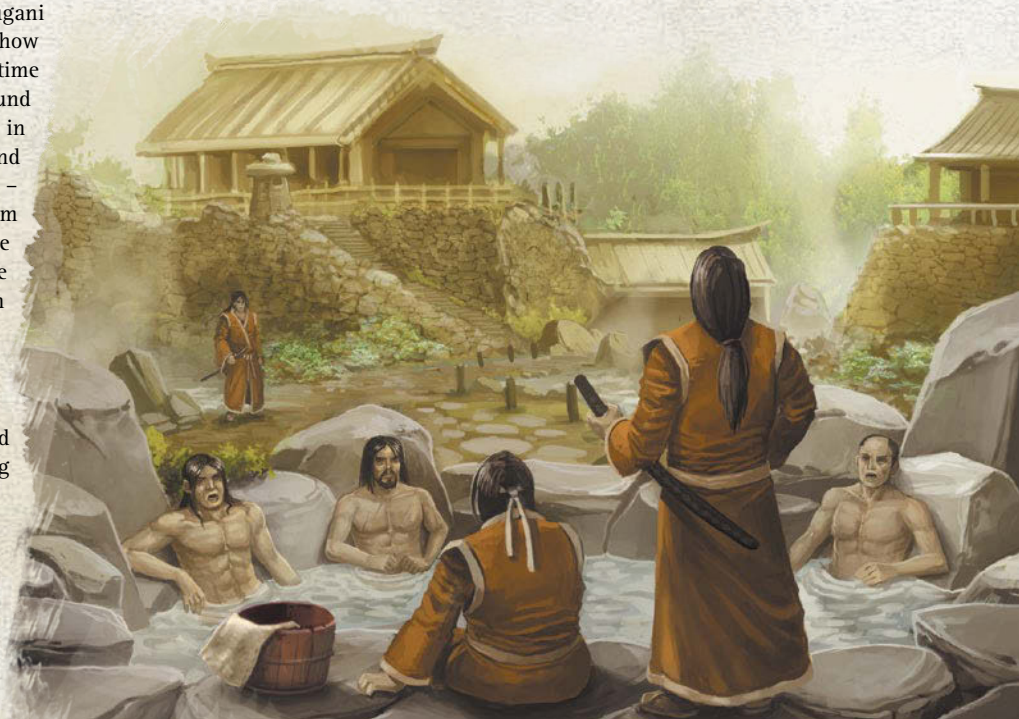
Every action taken in the cleansing ceremony is highly symbolic, so the ritual changes depending on the nature of the spiritual stain to be purified. The more severe the stain, the more elaborate and extensive are the rituals required to cleanse it. They can take anywhere from fifteen minutes for a simple ritual to over an hour for a major one.

Any shugenja knows how to enact these rituals, as do a great many monks, and virtually every significant castle or settlement will contain at least one temple or shrine for the purposes of spiritual cleansing.

Baths

Physical bathing is extremely important in Rokugan, and those who do not bathe or keep their clothing clean are treated as little more than peasants with a title. Thus, all Rokugani houses, inns, and castles contain bathing chambers. The largest chambers will be segregated by gender, but private houses and peasant villages have communal baths, and soldiers in the field must also bathe together with whatever facilities are available. Observing proper etiquette while bathing with members of the opposite sex is a delicate task, and co-ed bathing is usually a matter of necessity rather than being encouraged. Ideally, of course, the preference is to bathe separately, but this is not always possible.

The most prestigious baths are the onsen (hot springs). These are small springs heated by natural warmth from beneath the earth. When the Rokugani find such springs, they wall them in to create bath-houses. Sometimes the bathers will soak in the springs themselves, but the waters are also gathered and placed in tubs of cypress or granite. Hot springs are considered to be blessed places and their waters are believed to have healing powers. Many nobles have spent vast fortunes to try to replicate the effects of



a natural hot spring, employing engineers, architects, and even shugenja in their attempts. However, no one has been able to adequately duplicate the relaxing luxury and healing power of a true onsen.

Guests at an onsen are expected to wash themselves before they actually enter the hot water. The hot waters of the onsen are not only relaxing but are believed to purify both the mind and body. However, prolonged time in the onsen's hot water is dangerous, so visits are normally restricted to thirty minutes or less.

Misogi

Misogi is the practice of ritual purification through enduring physical discomfort, seeking to rise above the physical sensations of the body and achieve a heightened spiritual awareness. Such practices are believed to hone the spirit and cleanse the soul. *Misogi* can take any number of forms, but the most common include standing beneath cold waterfalls while only wearing fundoshi, fasting over a period of days, going without sleep for a night, or holding one's hand over a candle's flame. Ascetic folk such as monks and the more self-denying samurai are the ones most likely to practice misogi, and the most popular practice associated with it is the use of a waterfall to bludgeon the body. Monks in particular are often seen kneeling or standing beneath falling water.

The Essence of Civility: The Tea Ceremony

If the essence of Rokugani court culture could be distilled and condensed into a single example, it would be the art of the tea ceremony. In this ceremony, a host (the tea-master) makes and serves tea to anywhere from one to five distinguished guests. Like all courtly ceremonies, the tea ceremony is far more than the sum of its parts. Every movement and gesture has significance, and the event is both symbolic of the ideal courtly gathering and a philosophical contemplation of the Self and the rest of existence. It is influenced by the teachings of the Tao, and practitioners believe they can encapsulate the essence of life through the act. Participation requires great self-awareness and control, as well as a peaceful mind.

To receive an invitation to a tea ceremony is a significant honor. It is a gesture implying the host holds his guest in the highest regard. The ceremony itself is steeped in tradition and rich with history. Like any art, it is at once an expression of the human condition and a source of entertainment, enjoyed on either a deep philosophical level or at face value, a source of extended discussion or quiet contentment.

Only one kind of tea is appropriate for the ceremony, a type called matcha. It is essentially a powdered green tea, made from young leaves that are steamed, dried, and ground instead of crushed or roasted. The tea is made by whisking the matcha powder in hot water, instead of the more common method of brewing. The resulting tea is jade green, opaque, and bitter-tasting. Different kinds of matcha are identified by the tea plant used in their make, and most tea masters have a favorite blend (called a *konomi*) to serve to their guests. Because the ceremony is considered sacred, it is common for containers of matcha to be blessed by priests.

Of course, not every tea-drinking occasion requires a full-blown tea ceremony. Tea is served in every Rokugani household, after all, and is widely available throughout the social castes. It is consumed casually in social gatherings, drunk with meals, offered as a gesture of goodwill, and sipped for energy during long court sessions. In these many occasions the preference is for a simple tea, most often a type called sencha, which is served without fanfare. The tea ceremony, by contrast, is a high and lofty occasion, a formal event where the host honors his guests and demonstrates his diplomacy and social graces. In many ways it is a performance art, treated with the same gravity and respect as acting or song.

History of the Tea Ceremony

The tea ceremony (*shugo-no-chaji*) as it is known to the modern Empire originated in the time of the Kami. After the founding of the fledgling Empire, but before Fu Leng began to send his forces against Rokugan, the Kami and their children began establishing the practices that would become the basis of traditions for the next thousand years. During this time the eldest daughter of Lady Doji, Doji Konishiko, laid the foundations for the tea ceremony.

Konishiko, a delicate young woman who was destined to become one of Shinsei's Seven Thunders, often hosted guests at her mother's palace while they waited for audiences with either Lady Doji or Kakita. Wanting to adequately please her parents' guests, Konishiko began serving tea to the diplomats as they waited. However, merely serving the tea was not good enough for Konishiko; to her mind, even a simple gesture such as this should be special, a demonstration of civilization and art. In serving tea she should be able to display the sincerity of her family, the generosity of a proper host, the grace and civility of a diplomat, and put the minds of her guests at ease. She aspired to elevate the act of serving tea so it might accomplish all these goals.

What she developed became known as the *cha-no-yu* ("ritual for serving tea to honored guests"). Every aspect of this ceremony, from the kind of tea served, to where it was received, to the manner in which one lifted the ladle to serve the tea, was designed to exude elegance and simplicity. In fact, a host of the tea ceremony was expected to approach the act in the same state of "mind-no-mind" (*mushin*) as a samurai drawing his blade.

In developing this practice, Konishiko also wanted to create something that would unify this new Empire. She designed the *cha-no-yu* to be a single unified way to serve tea, intended for nobility and *heimin* alike. Once guests sat at the table of the ceremony, they were to be equal and free of all social rank, all segregations cast aside. While this aspect of the tea ceremony was embraced at first, in later years the egalitarian aspects of the ceremony were de-emphasized and eventually abandoned in favor of the philosophical aspects.

Konishiko's ceremony was very appealing to the visiting diplomats. It embodied a quiet, refined aesthetic that calmed the mind and body, and the natural profundity of the ceremony helped samurai to find their martial center. The ambassadors brought the ceremony back to their clans, and slowly the tradition of ritualized tea-serving spread throughout the land.

The tea ceremony did not become fully standardized until after the Day of Thunder. What Konishiko began was finished by her brother Doji Nio. Hoping to honor his late sister's work, Nio codified the tea ceremony in a written treatise and began teaching the *cha-no-yu* as an art in his clan's courtly dojo. In Nio's interpretation, the emphasis of the tea ceremony was on harmony, tranquility, and restraint; it was a demonstration of purity and the virtues of "emptiness." He demonstrated his revised version of the ceremony before the Imperial Court of Hantei Genji, and it was this ceremony, much more formal and refined than his sister's original idea, which became the official *shugo-no-chaji*.

Initially, the artistic and philosophical virtues of the tea ceremony were only truly recognized by the Crane. To the rest of the Empire, the ceremony was considered merely an extremely refined form of entertainment. However, the Brotherhood of Shinsei came to recognize the deeper aspects of the ceremony, finding it quite profound. Soon monks began practicing the tea ceremony as a form of meditation. The participants appreciated the quiet beauty that time and care imparted to even the simplest and humblest of acts. With their endorsement and influence, the tea ceremony became more associated with philosophy, and came to be seen as not mere entertainment, but as a contemplation of the Void.

The ceremony was influential to early Rokugan in many ways. Since it defined the idealized behavior and circumstances of a meeting, all diplomatic gatherings tried to emulate it in some way. Ritualized greetings became commonplace outside the tea ceremony, as did receiving guests in special chambers dedicated to the task. Offering tea to guests created immediate associations with the ceremony whether or not one was actually taking place. By the second century, whether or not a courtier could perform an adequate tea ceremony determined whether or not he had completed his training. By the third century, it was considered an essential skill to be an ideal spouse for a samurai.

In the modern Empire, the tea ceremony encompasses all of these social and philosophical connotations, while also serving as a means of communion between a host and his guests. It is a gesture of goodwill, of a sincere desire to sit beside one's guests as equals and a willingness to understand one another. No daimyo brings a diplomat into his home without offering a tea ceremony to demonstrate his good intentions.

Bad Times for Tea

Tea ceremonies are never performed at weddings, negotiations, or at the signing of treaties. The reason for this has its roots in the symbolism of tea and in the Rokugani language.

When green tea is added to water, it immediately begins to make the water cloudy. Thick tea can be nearly opaque. The term for this is "*ocha wo nigosu*" ("to cloud the tea"). This same expression, however, also means "to hide one's intentions," or "to avoid commitment." This is why the tea ceremony is never performed during occasions where such a sentiment would be unwelcome.

Some families even go so far as to never serve green tea at all during weddings or treaty-signings, considering it poor form and perhaps even bad luck. Clear teas such as *sakurayu* are served instead.

The Ceremony

The tea ceremony is a long and multi-faceted event, often taking hours to complete. Even the simplest impromptu versions of the ceremony can take thirty minutes from start to finish. GMs and players need not try to act out or describe every detail of the entire ceremony if they do not wish, but the following brief description can be used as an outline for role-play.

The ceremony changes slightly based on the season, and there are two seasons identified by the practitioners: the brazier season, in which the tea is prepared over a brazier, and the hearth season, where tea is prepared in a fiery hearth. The hearth season lasts from the month of the Boar until the month of the Serpent (the first day of winter until late spring), while the brazier season takes place during the rest of the year, when the weather is warmer. The differences between the ceremonies for the two seasons are slight but significant, and making a mistake in which one to perform is considered unharmonious – a significant embarrassment.

There are three distinct versions of the ceremony. The first is an impromptu version done by samurai to find their collective center, and takes about thirty minutes. The second, known as *cha-no-yu,* is the most common and takes about two hours. The most formal ceremony, the full *shugo-no-chaji*, is reserved for members of the Imperial Court and takes up to four hours to complete. Ideally, the ceremony includes one tea-maker/host and one to five guests.

Guests arrive slightly before the appointed time and are received in a special waiting room. There they are given clean kimono and tabi, and are served a mild tea, the purpose of which is to "open the palate." A tea of roasted barley is the usual choice during fall and winter, while a tisane (clear tea) made from pickled cherry blossoms, known as *sakurayu*, is preferred in spring and summer.

Guests remain in the room until met by their host, who they greet with silent bows, remaining wordless. After the greeting, the guests ritually cleanse their hands and mouths from a basin containing pure water blessed by the local temple. Then they are led into the tea chamber (most often a special hut located in a garden) in order of status. The entrance to the chamber is often very small, sometimes requiring each guest to crawl in order to enter. The purpose of this is to bring all the guests to their knees; they all bow before the ceremony, as equals.

Together the host and guests sit in seiza around the kettle or hearth and partake in a light meal, typically rice balls and sashimi. As they eat, they have the opportunity to admire the decorations of the chamber, normally consisting of calligraphy, poems on scrolls, paintings, or ikebana arrangements. Some time is also spent admiring the coals and how well they are burning. Usually, only the highest-ranking guests speak, while the others remain silent.

After the meal, the tea ceremony begins. The host ritually cleanses his tea-making utensils in full view of the guests, then cleans each cup. He lights incense in honor of the spirits and ancestors, then prepares a thick, opaque tea from powdered matcha using calm, ritualized motions. The tea is served in one bowl which is passed from guest to guest, accepted each time with polite bows. Each guest sips from the same bowl, then wipes the rim of the bowl clean before passing it to the next guest. Only the highest-ranking guest is allowed to speak during this portion of the ceremony.

The host then rekindles the fire and prepares a second serving of tea, this time much thinner. This tea is served in individual cups and each cup is offered and accepted with special rituals, such as turning the cup three times after receiving it. This portion

Temae

An aspect that unites all versions of the tea ceremony is the nature of each physical movement – deliberate and graceful, from beginning to end. Each action, from ladling the tea to extinguishing the coals, is performed in a specific way and at a slow pace to create a sense of control and serenity. These motions can be thought of as similar to kata in that they are practiced repeatedly and meditated upon until they can be performed without thought. They are known as *temae*.

There are *temae* for all aspects of the tea ceremony, including serving the tea, accepting one's cup, holding the ladle, and even sipping. There are *temae* for guests as well as hosts; thus even guests must have some degree of training in the tea ceremony to be able to participate without embarrassment. (Thankfully, the *temae* for guests are far less strict and taxing than those of the host.) It is shameful to be invited and then prove incapable of proper participation, and some daimyo will purposefully "forget" to invite less-cultured guests to tea in order to spare them the embarrassment of flubbing the event. Conversely, receiving an invitation to an important tea ceremony is a gesture of trust.

of the ceremony is a bit less formal than earlier; all the guests are permitted to converse, and the host may provide sitting cushions for the comfort of his guests.

After the tea is finished, the host cleans the utensils and puts them away, pausing in between so each guest may admire them (they are often family heirlooms and works of art in their own right). It is common for the host to tell a story about an ancestor who once owned them. During this time the guests are offered small rice cakes, which are eaten slowly to demonstrate control and gratefulness. Once finished, all the participants rise and bow. When the host also bows, the ceremony is over; the guests leave in the order they entered.

Variations of the Ceremony

The original intention of Doji Konishiko's tea ceremony was to create one unified way of serving *dan-cha* and thus to create something all clans and all castes would have in common. Konishiko believed if there was at least one thing all people observed the same way, one thing they held with equal veneration, it would create a foundation of unity between everyone in the Empire, a way for them to bridge all differences.

As centuries passed and the clans' traditions developed and changed, so too did their interpretation of the tea ceremony. Each clan accented different aspects of the ceremony based on the virtues that clan prioritized. Some changes were due to necessity, such as limits on what the clan could produce. These slight variations grew slowly larger over generations, and in modern Rokugan every courtier school teaches a slightly different version of the tea ceremony. In essence, every clan has its own tea ceremony tradition. Even individual samurai families sometimes boast their own interpretation, and the family's version of the ceremony is passed down from parent to child with the same reverence and care as handing down a katana.

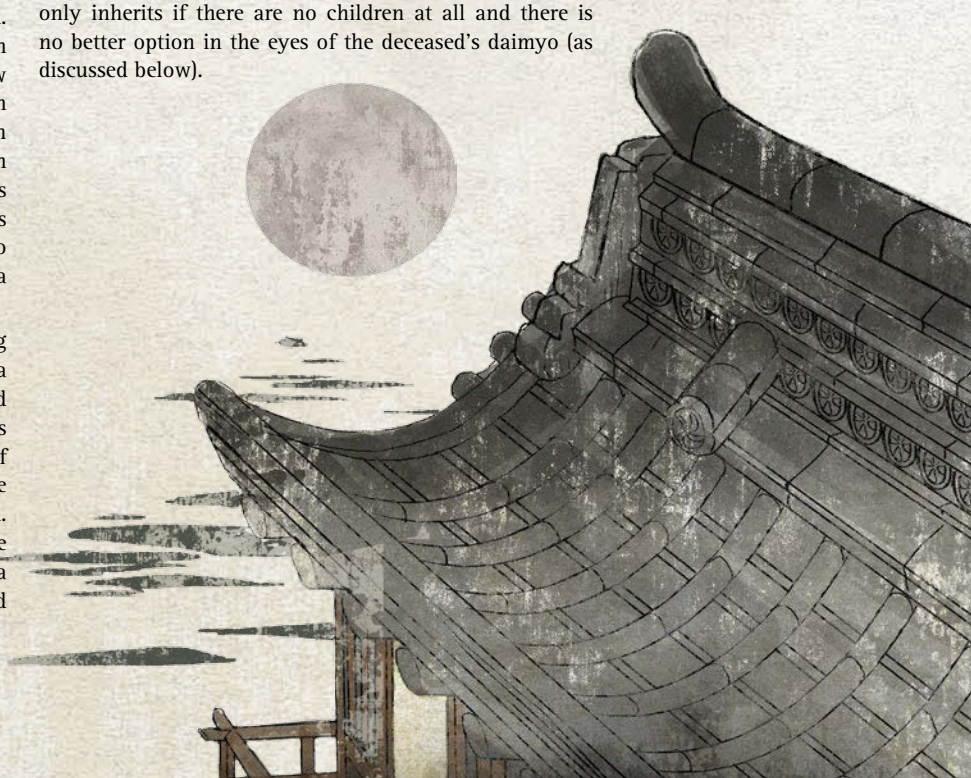
Yet in spite of these differences, there is still one thing in common: veneration for the art of serving tea. It is a manifestation of grace, beauty, and excellence, conveyed in a single act. A common goal among many courtiers is to experience every clan's unique interpretation of the tea ceremony, comparing and contrasting the subtle differences with that which has remained unchanged. Thus, while Konishiko's vision of unity did not quite come to fruition, on some level she did succeed in creating a foundation of unity between the clans of her beloved Empire.

Inheritance in Rokugan

No matters of family are ever simple, much less matters of wealth. It is no different in Rokugan, especially when both of those worlds collide.

Under normal circumstances, the Empire follows the laws of primogeniture. This means the eldest son inherits all of the deceased's holdings, the leadership of the family, and any inheritable positions such as the rule of a province. In some samurai families, however, this law is not followed, and instead the inheritance will be given to "the son with the greatest merit." The Kitsuki, Isawa, and Akodo families are among those who follow this method. The Matsu family generally gives inheritance to the eldest child, regardless of gender. The Utaku family gives inheritance to the eldest daughter, while the Moshi family gives it to "the daughter with the greatest merit."

One might notice the spouse is not mentioned in any of these laws. This is by design; married couples are supposed to be procreating, and arranging inheritance custom to favor the children is a means to force this. The spouse only inherits if there are no children at all and there is no better option in the eyes of the deceased's daimyo (as discussed below).



When a samurai dies and there is no first son or immediate heir, the deceased's wealth and position can fall into dispute, sometimes for years. In these cases, the daimyo of the deceased ultimately decides the official order of inheritance. He can split the inheritance multiple ways, he can give it completely to one individual, or he can even take it for himself – it is all at the daimyo's discretion. However, if there is some important land or precious artifacts in dispute, something important to the clan, the Clan Champion may send magistrates to "oversee" the division of the property. If the objects of inheritance are important to the Empire as a whole, the Emperor or Emerald Champion may send Emerald Magistrates to the area for the same purpose. This often causes friction between the different groups. If one particular outcome is better for the clan or the Empire, the deciding daimyo may feel pressure to decide in that direction, and such decisions can result in bitter grudges and enmities.

In addition, the promises and vows the deceased made in life can often complicate the division of the inheritance. If the samurai had promised property to another clan or family, or if he had outstanding debts, the associated parties may have legitimate claims that require mediation. They may lobby the daimyo for what they are owed, putting themselves at odds with the next-of-kin. This is especially common with holdings on clan borders, since they determine the total size of a clan's lands.

To solve this, many prominent samurai and daimyo attempt to write a will before their death, plainly stating who is due what pieces of the inheritance. This is effectively treated as a testimony of the deceased, and is given great weight in the considerations of the daimyo. Many times, however, it can create more problems than it solves; if it is not written explicitly enough, or if circumstances render portions invalid, the legitimacy and weight of the document become compromised. Skilled courtiers can often render even an adeptly-written will effectively meaningless.

The issue of legitimate children further complicates matters. When a child is born, the father must claim the child as his own before he is considered a legitimate heir. If the father testifies the child is not his, all evidence to

the contrary does not matter. The child is considered illegitimate and the mother is shamed for the attempted deception. Women cannot deny whether a child is their own, assuming there were witnesses to the birth. An illegitimate child defaults to the same allegiances of the mother. If the mother is a ronin or a *heimin*, then so is the child. Many ronin women have attempted to birth the children of samurai fathers in the hope that the resulting child would be recognized as an heir, granting them entry to the samurai's family. Many clan samurai fathers have shunned their children to cover up the shame of their affairs with other women. These are unfortunate happenstances, but to question this system is unthinkable. If a father's word cannot be believed about his own children, no samurai's word can be trusted in anything.

In matriarchal families such as the Utaku and Moshi, the word of the mother is given more weight than the word of the father. Samurai who claim to be the father must be confirmed by the mother before they are given any parental rights. Of course, if the woman is married, the father is obviously the husband... despite what anyone else might have to say.

If there is no will and the deceased has only daughters, under normal circumstances the eldest daughter will inherit the lands and inheritable titles of her father. During the era before the Clan Wars, the inheritance would ultimately go to the daughter's husband, but after the reign of Emperor Toturi I this fell out of practice and the inheritance was maintained by the daughter even after marriage.

Instances of adoption create a significant complication, since there is no standardized way to resolve such cases. If the deceased's will lists the adopted child as the preferred inheritor, that child is considered the "eldest." However, just as a daimyo may overrule a samurai in life, so too can he after death. A daimyo may contradict the testimony of the will, insisting the adopted child is not eligible. True-blooded children who are born after an adopted sibling often lobby for this outcome to ensure their wealth remains within their true family.

There are circumstances that can disqualify a child from an inheritance. Virtually every clan has specific circumstances that dictate this, but most the common constraint is that a highly disgraced heir will be considered ineligible. However, while daimyo can disown their samurai and make them ronin, a father cannot disown a legitimate child. Once recognized, the child has a legal claim to the father's lands and titles upon the father's death, a claim that cannot be taken away even if the child becomes ronin or is otherwise disgraced. A parent must resort to commanding his child to commit seppuku if he wishes to completely remove the child from the line of inheritance. This is why children who turn up later in life, children of forgotten mothers who may or may not have been geisha or *heimin*, can be quite problematic for a clan. Of course, as noted above, a disgraced heir can be denied by a higher authority, but this requires the intervention of a daimyo, Emerald Magistrates, the Clan Champion, or possibly even the Emperor for positions of extremely high status.

Courtesans and Concubines

It is the ultimate responsibility of a samurai to procreate for the clan; every samurai must produce an heir to keep the family line going, and preferably multiple heirs so the clan may grow. This responsibility is even greater for daimyo, since they are safeguarding the leadership of the clan. Consequently, it long ago became socially acceptable for a prestigious lord to take concubines.

Concubines are mates who are taken for the purpose of fostering an heir in return for compensation. They are cared for by their lord, but are not officially part of the family and hold no rights as spouses. Unlike many other cultures, concubines in Rokugan are often cultured, honorable, elegant ladies who are performing a duty for their lord. They are certainly not the same thing as prostitutes.

Concubines are most commonly geisha whose contracts are purchased by the lord, often after a lengthy period of courtship. Extremely high-ranking lords (especially the Emperor) may actually be given the daughters of samurai families as gifts, and the Hantei Emperors commonly received concubines from all the clans as a form of tribute. Alternatively, a samurai might directly purchase a daughter from a heimin family to be his concubine, or personally recruit a ronin or low-status samurai woman for the role (in the latter cases again requiring courtship).

Concubines are often chosen out of love (unlike spouses), but regardless of emotional attachments they are always expected to fulfill the duty of providing an heir. This can be especially important if the samurai's wife is barren, uncooperative, or only able to provide daughters. Concubines are almost never considered to be a part of the family, especially if they are from the lower castes, but do receive many of the same accolades and respect as the samurai's wife, especially if they can produce heirs. In some clans, the firstborn heir is all that counts for inheritance, regardless of parentage, but in others a son produced by the samurai's wife has a greater claim than an older son produced by a concubine.

To say that concubines are never taken for shallow or selfish reasons would be dishonest, but it is appearances that matter in Rokugan, not truth. As long as a lord has adequate reason to have many ladies bearing his children, his true motivations do not matter.

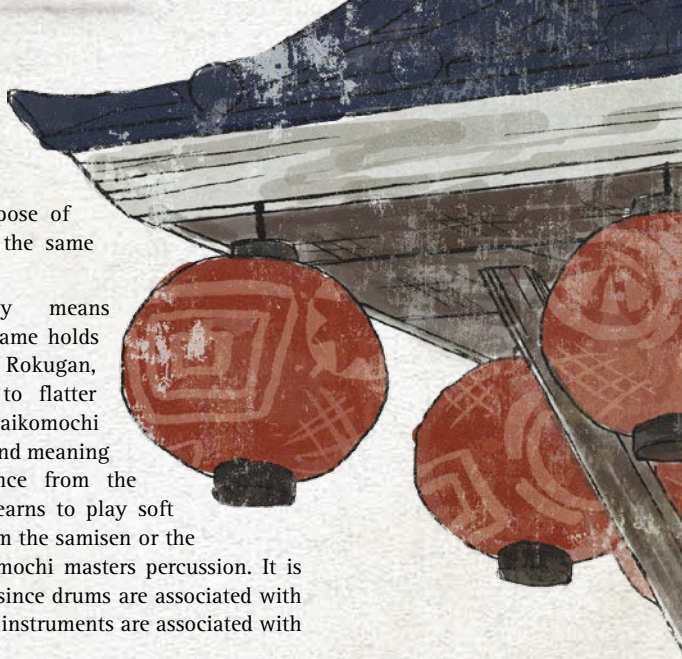
Geisha and the Karyūkai

One of the most iconic images in Rokugan is that of the geisha: a lone woman seated beneath a willow tree, in the beauty of her youth, playing the biwa and singing a song to the birds and fish around her. Indeed, the geisha is the ideal example of the Rokugani standard of feminine beauty. Her face is pale, her hair is dark, her body is young and graceful. She embodies all things that are lovely, peaceful, delicate, and elegant. She is witty, she is perceptive, she is trusting. One cannot help but place oneself at her feet. Even the heart of a samurai, normally so cold and unyielding, melts before her smile. Yet few truly understand the world in which she lives, a world set apart from the rest of Rokugan, a world floating in the red-light districts of towns and cities, cloaked in silken veils and behind shoji screens. The secret "floating world" of the geisha.

The Flowers, the Willows

The life of the geisha is an odd mixture of high-society pleasantries and low-born indentured servitude, filled with aspects both personally empowering and hopelessly enslaving. A geisha controls her life and at the same time does not; she is lower than a farmer, yet treasured by nobility. This causes geisha themselves to talk as though they are not really a part of the Empire's world, and in many ways this is true. They live in a sort of pocket reality, a realm of their own creation, a place of beauty and secrets, of teahouses and high courts. A world where gentleness is strength and the value of a bird is measured by its cage. Outsiders sometimes call this the "floating world," but the geisha have their own name: *karyūkai*, the "World of Flowers and Willows." The maiko, or apprentice geisha, are said to be the flowers, valued for their beauty but not much else. The geisha themselves are the willows: graceful, strong, and mysterious.

Samurai customers, especially the elegant nobles and courtiers who are the most valued clients, are sometimes referred to as "swallows" in this world. Swallows are associated with spring, symbolizing wealth and companionship, but the name is also the quiet reminder that while they may sometimes dwell in the willow's branches, ultimately they will always fly away.



The *karyukai* is a world totally alien to common-born men and women, and even for those samurai who partake of a geisha's services, it is very mysterious and secretive. Many places within an *okiya* (geisha house) are off-limits to even the most honored visitors. The living quarters of the geisha can be as secluded as a monastery, even if located within the center of a great city. (In some ways this is not unlike the Forbidden City within the Imperial capital.)

What is a Geisha?

At the simplest, a geisha is a highly specialized artisan entertainer. The name literally means "woman of the arts." A geisha is trained in all of the classical Rokugani artistic skills, performing them for the amusement and joy of others. Her purpose is to be beautiful, graceful, wise, and compassionate; to brighten the world and bring happiness to others through her arts. However, this also means geisha are considered *hinin* in the Rokugani social order – non-persons, lower even than farmers.

Geisha cultivate a specific and very distinct appearance, designed to evoke the Rokugani ideal of feminine beauty; light skin, rich black hair, brilliant and deep eyes. (While many associate a white-painted face with the look of the geisha, it is in fact only the maiko, the apprentice geisha, who do this normally.) They are always adorned in rich multi-layered kimono with vibrant colors and patterns. The obi is always brighter than the kimono, often chosen specifically for contrast. The hair is worn up in the shimada style, a specific style that varies with the geisha's rank and can take hours to prepare.

A geisha is trained from a very young age, and the curriculum is very demanding; the ideal geisha must be hostess, entertainer, and confidant, all in one. A proper geisha can serve tea, play an instrument, dance, sing, tell stories... and most of all, listen to her clients. There are few things a samurai appreciates more than a sympathetic ear, especially if that ear belongs to a beautiful girl.

Almost as important, a geisha must be able to read her clients. An experienced geisha can spend just a few minutes in conversation with clients and successfully deduce their interests, favorite forms of entertainment, preferred food, and the proper way to emotionally "handle" them. Mastering this art of reading a client can be challenging, since the customers are almost always samurai, trained to maintain their "face" at all times and never reveal their true feelings. However, a skilled geisha has many things in her favor to disarm her clients' emotional defenses, especially her charming non-threatening demeanor and her innocent beauty.

Male Geisha: Taikomochi

Male geisha, called taikomochi, are considerably rarer than female ones – but they do exist. While a conventional female geisha evokes the ideal Rokugani woman, the taikomochi often emulate the ideal Rokugani male: loud, boisterous, and good-humored, they tell jokes, perform outrageous stories, and flatter their guests. In a sense, they are the jesters of the Flower and Willow World. The purpose of a standard geisha is to make one feel at peace through beauty; the purpose of the taikomochi is to do the same through laughter.

"Taikomochi" literally means "drum-bearer," and the name holds a double meaning. In Rokugan, to "beat the drum" is to flatter someone, something the taikomochi are trained to do. The second meaning symbolizes their difference from the geisha: where a geisha learns to play soft beautiful music, often from the samisen or the shakuhachi flute, a taikomochi masters percussion. It is an important distinction, since drums are associated with the battlefield while other instruments are associated with the courts.

Aside from these differences, taikomochi are fundamentally the same as geisha. Their purpose is to entertain their guests and brighten their lives. They are trained in a similar manner as geisha and held to the same standards. They must do all the things a geisha can do, including winning the trust and confidence of their clients. And like geisha, they too are at the beck and call of their clients, living in the Flower and Willow World.

Social Order Among the Willows

The *karyūkai* contains its own strict social order, maintained by a council of elderly "madams" located in the Imperial City (Otosan Uchi up until the Four Winds era, and Toshi Ranbo thereafter).

At the bottom of this ranking system are the maiko, the young apprentices being trained in the ways of geisha. Above them are the geisha proper, but there are ten ranks of mastery within those geisha. Novices are ranked from one to three, while masters are ranked from four to ten. These rankings have nothing to do with wealth, inheritance, or lineage; instead, they correspond directly to the capabilities and skills of the geisha in question. There are only ever five geisha in the world at the tenth and highest rank; these are the masters of the *karyūkai*, the equivalent to daimyo in the samurai world. It is sometimes said their artistic skills can rival those of Master Sensei at the Kakita Academy, although such a thing is normally only whispered in suitable company.

It is worth noting that in the history of the Empire, no taikomochi has never attained a rank higher than four.

The okaasan or "madam" of an *okiya* (geisha house) is a position that exists independently of these rankings. The okaasan is the undisputed mistress of the *okiya*. She owns the contracts of every geisha beneath her, and may even own the geisha house itself. Normally, the okaasan was once a geisha herself, but retired after either purchasing her own contract or winning the support of a wealthy patron. It is her job to manage the house, to look after and care for all of the geisha who work there, and indeed to behave toward them rather like a mother toward her children. In fact, the word okaasan means "mother" in the Rokugani tongue.

The okaasan is part merchant, part sensei, and even part courtier. She may not have been a particularly skilled geisha in her former life, but she understands how to run an *okiya*, something which is often beyond the talent of a far higher-ranked geisha. She manages all aspects of the *okiya*'s affairs, such as making business contacts, purchasing supplies, recruiting clients, and arranging meetings between them and her geisha. She trains maiko in the ways of the geisha and helps her established geisha to further master their craft. She takes gifted women under her wing and mentors them, advising them throughout their entire lives. And she is the public face for her *okiya*, welcoming visitors and conducting all public correspondence and diplomacy on behalf of both herself and all those beneath her.

Being an okaasan is an extremely powerful position, at least for a commoner. To be entertained by an okaasan, instead of one of her geisha, is a rare and great honor. It is not wholly unheard of for an okaasan to be samurai (albeit usually a low-born one). However, the okaasan is almost never a man.

The Maiko

The "popular" image of the geisha is actually that of the maiko, recognized by her distinctive facial make-up: her skin white with rice powder, with bright red lips and black eyebrows. Often the make-up of a maiko can be quite elaborate, similar to that of kabuki actors. The word "maiko" means "dance child," referring to the first art the girl must master.

Maiko are the apprentices of geisha. As such, they are essentially indentured servants of the *okiya* in which they are trained. Traditionally, maiko are sold to geisha houses at a very young age, since the training of a geisha is best undertaken early. Normally they are not members of the samurai caste, although the daughters of samurai or ronin may occasionally meet this fate. It may be noted that in the eyes of commoners, the life of a geisha is very desirable. The geisha lives in safety and comfort, and is able to learn and perform arts that are normally associated with the aristocracy. *Heimin* and *hinin* thus feel little to no guilt at selling their daughters to the madams of the *okiya*, especially since the alternative is usually starvation. To a samurai, however, becoming a geisha is a massive step downward in the Celestial Order, and in many ways a fate worse than death. Typically, samurai will only sell their daughters to a geisha house if they have deeply shamed the family. Also, on some occasions a victorious commander who has defeated and slaughtered an enemy samurai family may sell the enemy's surviving daughters to an *okiya* to complete their defeat.

Maiko are bonded to their okaasan, who hold their contracts until someone else buys them. The contract binds a geisha into service, and she serves whoever holds the contract. This is usually not a mere physical piece of paperwork but rather a social bond and promise that brings deep disgrace to anyone who breaks it. A maiko does earn a wage, but it is only half that of a beginning geisha.

The maiko is essentially a servant of the okaasan during the entire time of her training. The training is expensive, after all, requiring many resources like tea, paints, paper, and silks, and is time-consuming for the okaasan. To help lessen this burden on the house, the maiko are required to perform simple services for clients, such as serving meals or filling drink cups. They are also supposed to be taken under the wing of experienced geisha, who mentor them in the manner of older sisters and lessen the training burden on the okaasan. (However, in some cases a geisha may be jealous of a maiko's promise and try to sabotage her training instead.) The maiko is expected to forget about her old life and family, becoming a member of the *okiya*'s "family" instead.

There are three different ranks of maiko, representing how far she has progressed in her training, and each one is designated by a different hairstyle. A new girl begins her training as a *shikomi*, literally a "servant." She must do all the house chores of a typical servant: cleaning, cooking, and helping the geisha to dress and prepare themselves. It is grueling work, often deliberately hard to test the child's patience and break her of willfulness. Assuming she is not thrown out for laziness or excessive misbehavior, the shikomi eventually becomes a *minarai*, a word meaning "learn by watching." She is now excused from the servant's chores, and is expected to show her gratitude by being obedient and quiet. She dresses in subdued clothing that does not draw attention, and follows the trained geisha around to watch their examples. Typically she is assigned a single geisha as patron and becomes her shadow, following her everywhere she goes but saying nothing. In a properly-functioning *okiya*, it is common for her to form a bond with her patron, a relationship similar to sisterhood – though as noted, this relationship can also sour into antagonism or jealousy.

During this time the minarai will also take lessons from her okaasan. The madam teaches her the many arts which geisha are expected to master. She learns how to serve tea and food, how to play music, how to tell stories, how to dance. She is taught to speak the dialect of the samurai caste and learns all of the skills befitting a courtly hostess. In many ways, this training is similar to the education of a courtier.

But there is more to this training than merely acquiring skills. These things must become second-nature to her; she must be a living example of beauty and grace, a mysterious and gentle creature that even a Scorpion would trust. A samurai must be willing to confide everything to a geisha, so it follows that a geisha must be easy to confide in. Thus, a maiko is taught to be mysterious and alluring, beautiful and gentle, nonjudgmental and empathic. A good geisha can see through a samurai's *On* as well as any trained courtier, but a truly great geisha never needs to do this, for in her presence the samurai will drop his *On* willingly.

A geisha must also be approachable; a samurai should want to seek her attentions. In this regard a geisha's training differs greatly from that of a samurai courtier. A courtier is, after all, expected to hold in his feelings and maintain decorum at all times. A geisha, however, is encouraged to smile, to let her feelings shine in her eyes, to express herself with every subtle gesture. A samurai is not allowed to be human; a geisha is expected to be supremely human.

After a period of several years, the minarai will graduate and attain the third ranking, becoming an official maiko. She will take a new name, usually something simple and pleasing such as "Jewel" or "Orchid." This is the official apprenticeship stage, and it can last for many years. At this point in her training, she has all the knowledge and skills she needs to be a geisha, but must still acquire a support network – the complex web of gifts, favors, and friends that is required to survive in the *karyūkai*. This is the ultimate test of the maiko. If she fails, she will have no reputation to build upon and thus will probably gain no clients as a geisha; her life will be a difficult uphill struggle. If she succeeds, she will begin her life as a geisha with many clients already waiting, and may perhaps even have her contract immediately purchased by a wealthy patron.

When the maiko turns twenty, she becomes a full-fledged geisha. She exchanges the red-collar kimono of the apprentice for the white-collar kimono of the geisha, a ceremony known as *erikae*. She also finally earns the full wage of a true geisha, though the okaasan always keeps the majority of what she brings into the *okiya*.

Visiting the Okiya

A benefit of attending a major court is that it is easier to obtain the company of a geisha. Court hosts will pay for geisha to entertain their guests and host large gatherings; for many of those attending court, it is the only opportunity they will have to enjoy a geisha's services. See "Geisha and the Courts" below for more details about this.

Outside of court, obtaining the services of a geisha is more difficult, requiring a delicate social dance and following strict rituals. A samurai is, after all, a "swallow" – merely a visitor to the world of the willows.

Geisha houses are marked by red lanterns outside their doors, and in larger cities there will be several such houses near each other in the same neighborhood (hence the term "red-light district"). A samurai visiting a geisha house will often leave his or her sword at home, and indeed anyone carrying weapons will not be admitted to any *okiya*. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the samurai is symbolically leaving behind his social station when he enters. Everyone within a geisha house is considered equal beneath the roof, and thus it is the only place a samurai can put aside his On and be "just a man." Second, geisha houses are places where sake flows freely, men and women from different stations, clans, and castes rub elbows, and beautiful geisha and taikomochi bestow their attentions on jealous samurai. Adding weapons to this charged environment is not wise.

Visiting a geisha house is not a matter of simply walking in. The okaasan greets each guest at the door, and new clients must gain an invitation before she will allow them to enter. This can be an invitation from the okaasan herself (a gift, of money or other valuables, will smooth the way), or it can be arranged by another client – indeed, an invitation to high-end geisha house is one of the more treasured favors which a courtier can offer.

Inside, there is a common room where clients sit and enjoy tea, sake, music, dance, and other entertainments from the geisha. Those geisha who work in the common room act as hosts to entire tables of clients, sharing their skills between multiple guests. The okaasan will usually remain in the common room to watch over things and make sure no clients behave improperly. She does not host, of course; as the one running the establishment, such work is beneath her.

To simply visit the common room, to be one of many to enjoy an evening of entertainment without the pressures of society, is an expensive endeavor. Most okaasan will charge at least 3 bu simply to enter the common room, and this does not include the price of food or drink. At a top-tier *okiya* the price will be even higher. Yet for many samurai, this is the only opportunity they have to let go of the pressures of their station for a few hours.

However nice this entertainment may be, it is nothing compared to what samurai really seek: to enjoy the entertainment and company of a geisha all to themselves. In most geisha houses, maiko and low-ranking geisha will work the common room, while the most expert, beautiful, and talented geisha serve clients individually. The best geisha have multiple clients vying for their attentions at all times, paying hefty sums by the hour just to have such a beautiful and refined woman serve them drink and listen to their troubles.

The process of obtaining a private audience is a strict one. Much as with a general invitation, a samurai seeking a personal meeting with a specific geisha must be sponsored by an existing client of the geisha house. The okaasan will speak with the samurai and try to ensure he is of appropriate status and behavior to be acceptable, as well as taking stock of his demeanor and interests so she can pair him with the right geisha (or recommend a better choice if he is specifically asking for a geisha she thinks ill-matched for him). If the okaasan decides the man is unsuitable, she will reject his request, and there is no option of appeal. Needless to say, it is embarrassing to sponsor a fellow samurai who is then rejected; the okaasan will remember that her customer spoke well of an unsuitable person.

Once a samurai is accepted as a personal client, he is usually expected to ask for the same geisha each time he visits. To do otherwise is an insult to the original geisha, and by extension the okaasan; however, when two or more famous geisha are in the same *okiya*, rivalries over clients can develop, and some okaasans will encourage such rivalries for the greater income they bring to the house.

Whenever a personal client visits, he is expected to send word ahead of time. When he arrives, the okaasan greets him and leads him away from the common area and into one of the private meeting rooms where he awaits the arrival of his geisha. While he waits he typically receives a full meal. Eventually the geisha arrives and spends the rest of the evening entertaining him. She will play music for him, tell him stories, or dance for him, whatever he finds most pleasing. But the most important thing she will do is listen to him.

Indeed, it is this art of conversation that the client is really paying for. A samurai can open his heart to a geisha. To the rest of the world he cannot show fear, sadness, regret, loneliness, or any other sign of weakness. He cannot complain about his troubles or confide his ambitions, even within his own home. If he lowers his On, if he forgets his face, he shames himself and his family. Only before a geisha can a samurai be himself. Most clients will tell their geisha all of their troubles, reveal their weaknesses and expose their true selves. And she will listen to every word, offering sympathy and consolation. She will soothe her client's anxieties, offer him friendly advice, and be interested in the details of his life. She will be a true friend to him, an ally and confidant.

For this service, the samurai will pay anywhere from one to five or more koku per visit. Especially skilled and beautiful geisha can earn more, with the most famous earning as much as ten koku per visit. The prices for a geisha's services are set by the okaasan, and usually correspond with how well the geisha is trained, her beauty and age, and of course the demand for her services. Most samurai also bring gifts when they visit, and geisha with wealthy clients can boast of silk kimono, masterworks of art, rich teas, heavenly incense, and other things that would normally be far out of reach from their station.

Geisha and the Courts

It is common for wealthy daimyo to hire the services of geisha for their courts. They will approach the okaasan through an intermediary; the agent meets her to discuss the lord's needs and they negotiate a price. Most commonly, such geisha are hired simply to entertain the guests for an evening, playing music, telling stories, or hosting private parties. Typically the daimyo will hire one geisha and one to four maiko, paying a significant price even for a short-term visit. However, sometimes a lord will hire these geisha to remain in his palace for an extended time, or "rent" them to see to the needs of especially honored guests. This is a gesture of goodwill and graciousness to the guests, as well as an impressive display of wealth and influence.

Within a court a visiting geisha will have contact with many samurai. She is ultimately a servant, indeed as a *hinin* she is technically lower than a normal servant, but at the same time she is offered great distinction and honor. In many ways she defies social convention, walking freely among the samurai, smiling and laughing to brighten the mood. However, she must still observe the standards

demanded by samurai society. She does not speak unless addressed. She follows the orders of those above her.

On the other hand, a geisha is permitted and in some ways expected to be witty and clever, in sharp contrast to a normal servant. After all, most geisha are intelligent and well-educated women, able to read and write, knowledgeable in art and literature. Samurai expect them to demonstrate these qualities, and this grants them a certain privilege, allowing them to exist both within and outside social conventions.

Geisha, Social Status, and Romance

As noted above, geisha are an anomaly in Rokugani society, similar in some ways to monks. While technically *hinin* they are in some ways completely outside the normal social rankings of the Empire. They are permitted things commoners could never have, allowed entry into places commoners can never see, granted knowledge commoners cannot even understand. A geisha can read and write, something rare even among the wealthiest *heimin*, and may do so in full view of samurai. A geisha is showered with gifts: exquisite silks and finery, master-crafted musical instruments, delicious foods. In many ways a talented geisha can live as well as the nobility. She is permitted into courts and other such places where normally only samurai may walk. She even receives wages, and although the lion's share goes to the okaasan a skilled geisha earns more in a month than a farmer might see in a year. Geisha usually want for nothing... except their own freedom.

In some ways a geisha holds great power over samurai. Without the geisha, many samurai would forget what it is to be human, and the stress and demands of their lives would eventually break them. A geisha gives a samurai release from his inner demons, offers him a trustworthy confidant to tell all his secrets. A samurai would never give any other person such power over him (at least not without great consideration), and the geisha know that to betray such trust will mean their doom – but even so, they are very aware of the power they wield. Especially savvy geisha have been known to use what they learn from the clients to gain leverage for their okaasan... or for themselves.

A geisha cannot marry while her contract is owned by another, and is forbidden from romantic liaisons without the permission of her okaasan. Typically, if a client falls in love with a geisha (not uncommon, given the admiration which so many geisha inspire in love-starved samurai), he is expected to "romance" her by presenting gifts to the okaasan in her name. A skilled geisha will string along many romantic admirers, encouraging them to compete with each other and thereby bringing more gifts and wealth into the *okiya*. However, she is expected to reject any actual romantic affair with any of her clients until and unless one of them buys her contract, thereby offering her a secure place as a concubine. To become the honored concubine of a great samurai lord is the life-goal of most geisha.

Of course, geisha are as human as any other woman, and their intensely emotional lives make romantic affairs not uncommon. A geisha whose okaasan catches her in a love affair will be punished severely, perhaps even expelled from her *okiya* and doomed to a wretched life as a beggar in the streets. Many Rokugani plays and songs recount the tales of tragic geisha who ruin themselves by falling in love with a penniless ronin or a grubby farmer's son.

It is rare for a geisha to actually marry. This requires either the geisha herself to pay off her contract, or the prospective husband to purchase the contract from the okaasan. Wealthy merchants who crave a wife with the beauty and talent of a geisha are the most likely husbands, although lower-ranking commoners or ronin occasionally manage to scrounge up enough money as well. Okaasan are usually hesitant to sell a geisha's contract because of the money she can continue to earn them, and they will be even more resistant if the offer comes from someone of low social status (a daimyo can hardly be refused). Still, sometimes a desire to make money quickly can encourage an okaasan to sell. The purchase price of a geisha's contract can run anywhere from one hundred to one thousand koku, depending on her beauty and skill.

Needless to say, it is almost unheard of for a samurai to marry a geisha – doing so essentially amounts to forsaking the clan's needs in favor of selfish personal love, a serious violation of Bushido. Slightly more common is for a geisha to be taken by a samurai as a concubine, then later raised to the status of an official wife, usually due to having successfully borne children. Even this requires the blessing of the samurai's lord, and most lords are reluctant to lose the value of marrying their vassal to another samurai line. Still, it does occasionally happen.

Geisha and the Clans

The services and training of a geisha can vary somewhat depending on region. Some clans have less need for certain aspects of a typical geisha's services. Among the Unicorn, for example, the need for personal confidantes is significantly diminished, since samurai of that clan are more likely to confide in one another. The Crab have a stronger need for geisha to assist with courtly arts during diplomatic meetings, since their own courtiers sometimes are lacking in such skills. In the lands of certain poorer or more remote Minor Clans, such as the Sparrow and the Badger, there may be few to no geisha. Below are some of the more significant examples of how geisha may be different based on their clan of origin.

The Kolat Silken Sect

The Silken Sect of the Kolat is charged with gathering information useful to the conspiracy. For this purpose they operate within okiya throughout the Empire, making use of geisha to gather secrets, much like the Scorpion.

Most of the geisha who provide these secrets are unaware the information is being collected by Kolat. Indeed, they often have no idea their *okiya* has Kolat ties, and the conspiracy makes sure not to concentrate its agents solely in the houses it controls directly.

The Kolat usually sees to it that one of the Empire's five tenth-rank geisha masters is aligned with it. This person is rarely Master Silk herself, but often reports to the Master in person.

The Crane Clan

Of all the clans, the Crane have the least need to hire a geisha's services for court. After all, the Crane are themselves masters of the arts, and their skills as hosts are beyond reproach. Even the lowest Crane samurai has at least a rudimentary grasp of the arts for which one might otherwise seek geisha, so in Crane courts the duties for which a lord might hire geisha are instead performed by Crane courtiers and artisans. In addition, because the Crane lands are wealthy, the Crane *hinin* and *heimin* are less likely to have to sell their children to geisha houses.

On the other hand, some could argue the need for geisha is actually greater within Crane lands. The high standards to which Crane samurai hold themselves allow little room for compromise, and their duties can be extremely stressful. Very few of these samurai are willing to open themselves up to their friends and allies, and the Crane – even more than other samurai – believe appearances are everything. Thus, it is geisha who can allow Crane samurai a moment's respite from their inflexible lives. This is why there are still plenty of *okiya* in the lands of the Crane despite the clan's mastery over the arts.

The Mantis Clan

If any clan can give the Scorpion a run for having the most geisha, that clan would be the Mantis. One of the clan's many sources of wealth is a large number of geisha houses along the coasts of the Empire. These *okiya* are not always run by the Mantis as such, but a Mantis Clan samurai always proves to be the patron behind these establishments.

The Mantis are fond of exploiting this resource by flooding their courts with geisha, providing an air of merriment, hospitality, and safety – as well as openly displaying their wealth. Even though they have their own courtiers and artisans, the Mantis have no hesitation in using all resources at their disposal to control a court. Sometimes they will even provide privileged guests with personal geisha to ensure their courts receive glowing reviews.

The Scorpion Clan

Every clan's samurai participate in the world of the geisha, but the Scorpion Clan has a far larger role in that world than any other clan. A samurai-caste okaasan is almost certainly a Scorpion, and the clan maintains extensive contacts within the floating world. Indeed, some daughters among the Scorpion become geisha not because their fathers sell them into service but because they seek the influence that comes with the profession. Among the Scorpion, for a young woman who is the last-born into a family of many siblings, the choice to live as a geisha may actually be the best way she can serve her clan. (Of course, even in Scorpion lands the vast majority of geisha are from commoner backgrounds. A common tale in these provinces is the farmer who gambles away his daughters in a high-stakes dice game.)

The most famous geisha school in the Scorpion lands is the "House of Little Hands," *Chiisate no Uchi*. The founder was a former samurai-ko; unable to join the clan's courtier school as she had hoped, she sold herself into service at a young age, mastered the trade, and bought back her contract before founding her own *okiya*. Her house often recruits the youngest-born daughters of ji-samurai families, offering them a chance to achieve prestige that would be unattainable in the lives they were born into. The geisha from this *okiya* are some of the most famous in the Empire, and have even entertained at Imperial Winter Courts.

The Scorpion Clan finds many uses for geisha beyond mere entertainment. After all, samurai will admit things to geisha they would never tell their peers. It is impossible to tell how many of the Scorpion Clan's vaunted secrets came from a geisha, how many ruined reputations have been forged by such women. Indeed, it was a Scorpion-trained geisha, Hatsuko, who brought down Akodo Toturi just before the Clan Wars.

Role-Playing Rokugan: Why Civility Matters

L5R is a game which depicts a world of strict and intensely restrictive social rules. For some players this can create a temptation to play the "rebel" character, the lone anti-hero who flouts convention, rejects any need for a social network of allies, and stands only on his own two feet. Even without embracing this extreme, it is easy enough to play L5R characters who cast aside social norms and customs and yet survive or even are somewhat praised for it. This is especially so with Crab, Unicorn, or Mantis characters, who to a certain extent are expected to act like barbarians and succeed on their physical prowess and cunning alone. In their view, courtiers and their honeyed words are inherently "weak," not *real* samurai. Forthright, bold, against-the-grain samurai are seen as more virtuous than those who rely on politics and tradition to achieve their goals. However, from a roleplaying viewpoint this sort of approach can become a trap that distorts the entire depiction of social activity in Rokugan. Players and GMs can sometimes forget why it is important to the Rokugani to follow their social conventions, why they believe doing so actually exemplifies the Code of Bushido and truly defines a samurai as someone better than a mere peasant.

In truth, the Rokugani overwhelmingly believe it is the one who properly observes social customs who is the true samurai, not the brute who flouts tradition. Mere brutes are blights on the Empire's social order, unlikely to last very long.

It is very easy for players and GMs alike to cast aside the traditional social conventions during their role-playing, either for comedic effect or simply because the players see an inherent appeal in playing rebellious, go-it-alone characters who do not care for tradition, who scoff at the courts and want little or nothing to do with politics. It can be tempting for the GM to let these sorts of characters go free of repercussions – and this is fine if that is the sort of game all of the players wish to play. However, a lot of the charm, drama, and aesthetic appeal of L5R is dependent on following the social rules of the setting. The game's richness and flavor are lost when these aspects are cast aside or ignored.

Players are sometimes resistant when a GM tells them it may not be a good idea to wear armor while traveling in another clan's lands, or to bring a sword into court, or to search a dead body for loot. In part this is because many other RPGs do not have any sort of social repercussions for such behavior, so the transition to a setting where social codes and public morals have actual repercussions can be jarring and difficult. (Of course, for some players this is actually one of the primary appeals of Rokugan as a setting.)

But all of this is dancing around the issue. Ultimately, the problem boils down to one question: why does civility matter? Why should a samurai not be a jerk?

There are many spiritual and social reasons why the Rokugani believe civility matters, but for this section, let us focus on the more personal and practical reasons. Reasons a gruff loner character might actually care about.

To put it simply: a samurai strives to maintain his reputation because his survival, and the survival of the clan, depend on it.

In Rokugan, a samurai is only as powerful and influential as his reputation. He is also only as useful to his lord as his reputation permits. The reputation of the entire clan is reflected in his actions. After all, for a samurai, word and deed are as one. A samurai who shows little regard for his position will suffer in reputation, and that in turn makes him less useful to his clan. His bad behavior reflects poorly on his family and his lord. This is why civility matters – because an uncivil samurai, one who disregards social conventions, causes trouble for his clan. And the world, in turn, causes trouble for him.

To elaborate further: a samurai may seem to be a warrior unto himself, but in reality he is dependent on everyone above and below him. Everything he has, everything he is, he owes to his lord, his family, and the clan. And everything the clan has is owed to its reputation. Even the Crab, for all their lack of social niceties, owe their position to their humble service to the Empire and the system of favors that allows them to conduct their duties. Everything a Crab samurai does reflects on his lord, and if the Crab ever need the support of the other clans, their reputation will determine who – if anyone – comes to their aid. In essence, the survival of the clan depends on the clan's reputation.

So what happens when a samurai risks that?

Let us observe a hypothetical situation. Mirumoto Tanshi, a Dragon Clan samurai, has no respect for politics or any other matters of social convention. To him, anything that does not contribute to his fighting prowess is a waste of time. It should come as no surprise that he has absolutely no respect for the Crane Clan. He believes they are fops and their ways are weak and meaningless. Tanshi takes every opportunity to say this, even in court. Furthermore, he insists on carrying his sword with him at every opportunity. He wears his armor in court, and when advised that others may regard him as an ill-mannered brute, he replies (at length) that he does not care what others think. He has chosen to follow his own way.

Now, let us suppose the Dragon Clan Champion, Mirumoto Shikei – entrusted with the well-being of the thousands of people who make up his clan – receives word of the worst harvest in decades. The Dragon Clan's mountainous lands already have difficulty supporting the clan, and with a poor harvest there is now only enough rice to feed one-fifth of his people. Mass starvation is only a season away. Some farmers are talking about abandoning their lands for the Unicorn provinces, where food is more plentiful. A loss of peasants will mean a loss of military strength and influence at a time when the Dragon may need them. Shikei knows he must turn to the other clans to feed his own people, and fortunately the Dragon have

Civility and Low-Honor Characters

It is easy to assume that low-Honor characters do not care about their reputation, that they are unconstrained by social convention and therefore easier to play. However, characters with low Honor actually do care about their reputation... albeit for different reasons. The consequences for a bad reputation are just as dire for a low-Honor character as for a high-Honor one, so such characters must watch their own behavior carefully lest their dishonorable tendencies lead them into dangerous acts. After all, a selfish low-Honor character is a selfish character, and thus likely more attached to his own life than a high-Honor one would be. Such a character has no wish to be killed in a duel or forced to commit seppuku. Thus, for example, a low-Honor character will tend to avoid giving his word on anything, since he finds it difficult to keep it.

In many ways, a low-Honor character is actually more likely to suffer setbacks and bad consequences for his choices. Low-honor characters are easily tempted or bribed, whereas high-Honor characters can often shrug such things off. Also, low-Honor characters who act according to their nature are seen as untrustworthy, so other samurai are less likely to stick their necks out for them.

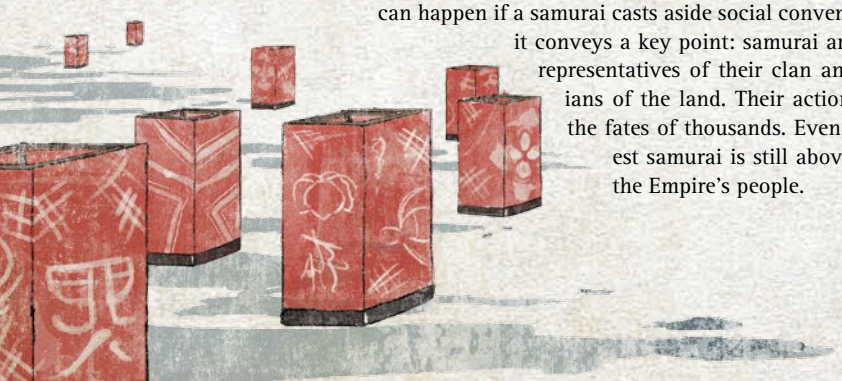
things to barter with. Knowing the Crane have a surplus of rice, he turns to Crane Champion Doji Makoto. But he is immediately rebuffed. He soon discovers that none of the wealthy clans will trade with him at all. Why?

Because they have no interest in trading with a clan of brutes.

Mirumoto Shikei learns one of his men, Mirumoto Tanshi, represented the Dragon to the rest of the Empire through rudeness and incivility. Now his clan might starve as a result of Tanshi's actions. He immediately orders the man's seppuku to demonstrate he is not representative of the clan. In respect for this demonstration, the Crane agree to a gift of rice, but it is too late to fully replace the clan's missing harvest. Huge numbers of Dragon starve that winter, thousands of *heimin* and hundreds of samurai, their corpses littering the frozen terrain of the Mirumoto provinces.

All due to one man's pride, one man's refusal to behave with civility.

This is of course a deliberately extreme example of what can happen if a samurai casts aside social convention. But it conveys a key point: samurai are nobles, representatives of their clan and guardians of the land. Their actions decide the fates of thousands. Even the lowest samurai is still above 90% of the Empire's people.



More generally, one must always remember that Rokugan is a warrior culture whose nobles are masters of the weapons they carry. A warrior culture without rules of civility soon falls into discord and chaos. Is it any wonder the Rokugani so value harmony? Anyone who threatens that harmony is treated as a social pariah.

A samurai who does not conform to social pressures may find he is not welcome in his dojo. A sensei may refuse to teach school techniques to a samurai whose behavior reflects poorly on the school. A shugenja may refuse to cleanse a samurai whose behavior constantly requires cleansing. A daimyo who disapproves of his vassal's behavior may ensure the vassal no longer embarrasses him – ordering his death or expelling him from the clan. "If you do not need the clan, then may you live without it!"

Of course, a player is perfectly welcome to play a rebellious devil-may-care character... as long as the player is willing to accept the consequences for those choices. A player who is okay with this sort of character needs to also be okay with the sorts of obstacles these characters will inevitably encounter. Actions are seeds and consequences are fruit, and every character is destined to reap what he sows. Nowhere is this more true than in Rokugan.

An important distinction in regards to role-playing is whether or not a player is being deliberately obtuse or antagonistic, or is merely assuming his character is observing all social customs automatically. Typically, it is better to assume characters are conforming to etiquette until and unless a player says otherwise or deliberately acts against the social grain. Even in these cases, it is better to ask, "Are you sure you want to do that?" A GM should never "ambush" a player who makes an honest mistake in role-playing the character – rather, it is only the deliberate and willful breach of etiquette which should be punished.

Of course, some GMs may hesitate to enact any "punishments" at all. Many RPGs advocate the view that players should not be punished for their choices, especially since the purpose of the game is to have fun... and punishment is usually not fun. But in the same vein, players who do not encounter any consequences for their choices have no opportunity for their characters to grow, to way to engage with the setting. This is not fun either. When a player is faced with the direct consequence of the character's conduct, it should not be because the GM is angry or wishes to "teach a lesson." It should be because these are the natural repercussions of the character's actions.

Above all, punishment enacted on a character should never be the same as punishment enacted on a player. If the player makes a knowing choice, acceptance of the consequences is implicit, but if the player simply does not understand the social conventions the L5R setting explores, the GM should offer advice instead of imposing penalties. It is a good idea with inexperienced players to tell them, "That might cause you some honor loss," or, "That might not be acceptable to your clan," which most players can take as a fair warning. And if the player goes ahead anyway, he may well have a good reason and he will be prepared for the results. After all, the GM is helping the players tell the story of their characters, and

sometimes their story includes making difficult choices between saving face or doing what is right. This sort of choice is what samurai role-playing is all about.

So When Can I Be a Jerk?

At this point, the players are doubtless asking: when can my samurai get away with breaking from social norms? The short and simple answer is this: when you outrank everyone else present. In a feudal society it is the highest-ranking people who decide policy and set custom. Sufficient power and status can make nearly anything permissible... though truly grievous acts have a way of coming back against even the highest-ranking samurai. Everyone answers to someone, and in Rokugan kharma is a real cosmic force. Not even Emperor Hantei XVI could escape the consequences of his vile acts forever. Leaders must retain some degree of integrity lest they squander the loyalty of their followers.

Sometimes an influential leader will break a social norm as a test for his followers. Sensei are notorious for this (and for being eccentric in general). In one case, a well-known and influential courtier served extremely poor-quality tea to her student as though it were the finest sort, and praised the blend before the student. The test was to see whether the student would agree or disagree. In another example, a Togashi sensei had the livers of a goose cooked and served to his followers, something horrifying to a typical Rokugani. When the sensei revealed the truth, his followers were adequately horrified – except for one, who began to lick the bowl. That student alone passed the test.

Reacting to a Spectacle

The Rokugani have a specific attitude toward public spectacle. It is called *mokusatsu*, meaning "to kill with quiet contempt."

In other words, they ignore it.

If a samurai is acting out, those around him will ignore the scene, relying on someone of sufficient rank to put a stop to it. Drunkenness is often used as an excuse for such behavior, since a drunk samurai is incapable of maintaining his "face" and thus his words and actions are generally forgivable.

Similarly, if a samurai receives a threat or insult he feels is beneath him, he will simply ignore it. *Mokusatsu* is the proper response: simply say nothing at all. The act is too ridiculous to even require a reply, and the samurai appears to be the bigger man for giving his insulter the courtesy of saving face.

For those of lower status and influence, it is still possible to break social norms, but the circumstances must be right or the violation must be subtle. In Rokugan, it is usually not what is being said that matters so much as how it is being said. A clever courtier can word an insult as though it is a compliment, paying no price. Indeed, this is one reason why the Rokugani value subtlety – it gives them an outlet for things they can never otherwise say. In some cases they can even impress their superiors with their wit.

Chapter Six

Politics Through the Year

From the Battlefield Journal of Asako Fujiko:

Otomo Hokan's death was treason of the highest regard. Scandal and rumor point to the new Bayushi commander, Bayushi Konitsu, as the culprit, but what has been done? Nothing.

I have been assigned as the new head of the Imperial Observers. The clan of peace is now entrusted with the sacred duty of tending this terrible war. I have been in this province less than a week and already a new atrocity rears its head, hidden among the goings-on of the Imperial court.

It seems that Bayushi Konitsu's posting combines control of the army and stewardship of the province as its new daimyo. What the Scorpion Champion can be is thinking is beyond me, but that is to be expected. The Bayushi keep the court busy with matchmakers scrambling to find a suitable wife for the suddenly prominent Konitsu. The man chose a most unusual option in the form of the Doji maiden responsible for his sister's death... and the Crane respond favorably! How could they not know that she will be treated harshly? Or is the political gain simply too great for them to care?

What is worse, the court seems to grow bored with what is now termed a "small border skirmish" – a skirmish in which thousands have already been slain! They talk instead of a new Topaz Championship, of the impending marriage of the Crane Champion, of a new Imperial tax levy, anything but the war! The twisting road of politics confuses thought until only a thin veneer of sanity remains.

*However, there is one thing to be said for these proceedings. The festivities surrounding the Bayushi lord's inception have forestalled the bloodshed for now. Weeks of Imperially-mandated celebration stymie the Lion attempts to r*etal*iate on the field. Honestly, if I did not know of Konitsu's love for his dead twin, I would say the Scorpion planned this entire maneuver in order to buy time.*

But I distract myself. The atrocity – there is simply no other word for it. The new Scorpion commander has lowered himself to the level of the hinin*, stepped outside the realm of Bushido altogether. The sacred home of the Four Temples monks, a Taoist temple located in a strategic site, is no longer sacrosanct. If my eyes-and-ears are right, the Bayushi command staff seized Abbot Ayushen's temple two days ago as their new headquarters for this war. Konitsu has placed his officer corps in the monastery and sent the peaceful monks to live in the peasant villages for the duration of his stay. Even the Abbot's personal quarters have been commandeered. It is unthinkable... yet brilliant. The Lion would have an easy time cutting off the head of the Scorpion army if they were but willing to lower themselves to the Scorpion's level. But even Unmei's sinister "Shadow" – the one called Ikoma Jidai – is a pious man. The Lion cannot attack such a virtuous target.*

With the weeks the celebration buys, the Scorpion army will become entrenched around this invulnerable center. I cannot imagine what the Akodo will do.

I only know the bloodshed will continue. Emma-O is the only winner upon this field. His realm shall doubtless receive thousands more mortal souls to judge by the end of this war.

May the Wisdom of Shinsei offer us solace in these times of trouble.

Asako Fujiko, Imperial Observer

"Blasphemy! You plan to assault a sanctified home of Shinsei's wisdom, Unmei-sama." The repetitive words from Kitsu Domen had grown old hours prior. Akodo Unmei let the man continue out of respect for the Kitsu family's position, but he had stopped listening a long time ago.

Akodo Unmei walked through the Lion encampment with the purposeful stride of a man going to his own funeral. Behind him Kitsu Domen and his other chief advisor, Ikoma Jidai, struggled to keep pace.

"My lord, I implore you. You may as well attack the Emperor himself. He is the head of the Brotherhood--" Domen broke off as he tripped on a stone. Jidai quickly grabbed the older man's arm and stabilized him. Domen did not offer a word of thanks before he went on: "And we are in the middle of the Chrysanthemum Festival – the celebration will mean that the peasants and monks will all be unaware of our attack!"

"So will the Scorpion." Unmei felt his throat tighten. He knew his On *was close to breaking.*

"That is not important, Unmei-sama! I have...you must... my lord! I cannot bear this stain upon my soul. You are about to butcher men in the halls of enlightenment. Please, reconsider this tactic."

"Enough, Kitsu-san. Your disagreement will be noted in my journal. You are dismissed."

Unmei glared at the shugenja's retreating back before he turned to the Ikoma. "Jidai-san, you will lead the assault."

"No, my lord. I cannot do that." Unmei's cheek twitched. "There are many things I will do for the Lion. Things other samurai would hesitate to consider. But I will not do this. It is as Domen-san says: to attack here would be blasphemous."

The two veteran warriors held one another's gaze for what seemed an eternity. It was Unmei who cracked first.

"Then shave your head and be done with it, Jidai-san! Akodo had no use for the Tao and neither do I. This temple has already been desecrated by the Scorpion! We will be returning it to its proper state. You have always understood necessity before. Where does this weakness come from now?"

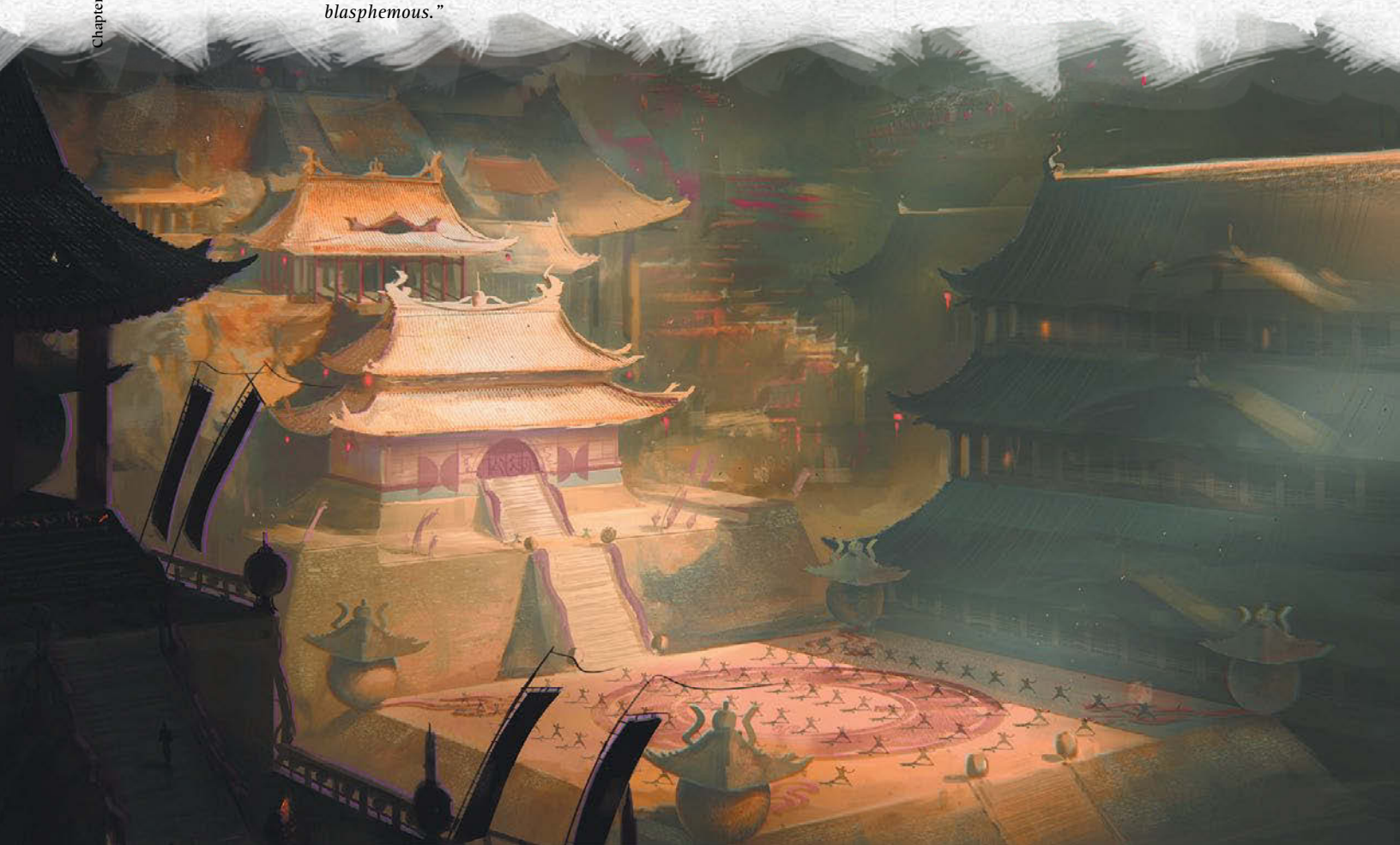
Jidai's reply was soft. "Even I cannot see this as the path to such a victory, my lord. You will anger the kami and alienate the Brotherhood. Wait and the Scorpion will be ousted for their impious act."

Unmei could stand it no longer. Everything was planned, every single detail *accounted for, yet somehow this war had slipped beyond his control. No more.*

"No more." His voice was ice. "Shave your head or commit seppuku if you must. I will lead the assault myself."

The two Lion advisors watched as their general issued his orders. After a few minutes Kitsu Domen shook his head in disgust and walked away. Jidai remained, however, rooted to the spot. As the Lion attack began, he found himself thinking back to all he had done to help the Lion reach this single point. Each dishonorable act had been acceptable when he had believed it would all lead to victory. But this... even if Unmei succeeded, this act would ruin the Lion's claim to triumph. This was just what the Kitsu had said: blasphemy.

It took hours before the last Scorpion head was accounted for. By then, the man known as Ikoma Jidai was no more, and a monk named Omeiyo was beginning his new life.



Spring, the Season of the Plow

The thawing of the winter snow brings with it the new year and the first day of spring, the traditional time of rebirth. During this time, the people of Rokugan celebrate their birthdays, bringing in the new year with hope. Samurai returning from the winter season's courts bring with them news, stories, and treaties, as well as the return of hostages whose time living among others has ended. It is a joyous time, albeit one that soon gives way to labor, for the Emperor's land must be tended, rice planted, stores checked and restocked, and the armies made ready... for while winter is when war is declared, it is always fought in the summer.

The Words of the Emperor

The first duty of every courtier in spring is to heed the words of the Emperor sent forth at the beginning of the year. Some of these are simple commands, made by the Emperor during the Winter Court, while others are more subtle or complex statements which the Throne sends forth to offer guidance to the land. Over Rokugan's thousand-year history, the Emperors have learned that the words of the Throne will motivate men but can also rebound to ill effect if they are not carefully considered. Since the honor and wisdom of the Emperor is supposed to be beyond reproach, a foolish command may be quite damaging. Hantei Genji learned in the first century of his reign to use the power of Imperial decree wisely and cautiously, and his successors for the most part emulated him. Most Emperors rarely issue a direct command, doing so only when circumstances leave no other choice. Instead, they issue statements suggesting a possible course of action, couched in careful wording and often with multiple or layered meanings.

This, of course, means the Emperor's words must be interpreted by his subjects. Typically it falls to Rokugan's courtiers, especially those who attended the Imperial Winter Court, to advise their lords on the manner in which the Emperor's words should be followed. Courtiers often spend many hours reading through historical and philosophical documents to gain a better understanding of the Emperor's will. While this would seem to promote confusion throughout the Empire, it also serves an important purpose: it places responsibility for any failure on those who fail in their own understanding, not on the one who sits above them.

The Naming of Daimyo

As powerful as Clan Champions and family daimyo may be, it cannot be forgotten that each serves at the Emperor's will and convenience. Indeed, the Emperor can choose to dismiss any samurai from service to the Throne, removing their name, reclaiming their lands, and punishing them as he sees fit. (In practice, this is a power the Emperor is loathe to overuse, since doing so can cause great dissension and disharmony in the Empire.) Likewise, when a new Clan Champion or family daimyo ascends to claim office, he or she does so only with the Emperor's approval.

When a Clan Champion or daimyo dies or retires, the clan petitions the Emperor to affirm the replacement. Ordinarily, the clan submits the name of the new ruler during the Winter Court, and the acceptance of the name is just a formality. Indeed, the heir usually takes over the duties of his or her office immediately so that the clan's leadership is not disrupted while waiting for the Emperor's official sanction – this is especially important if the previous ruler fell in battle. The ruler is considered a regent, technically a *sozokunin* ('heir to the throne'), until formally accepted by the Throne.

On rare occasions, the Emperor refuses to affirm the nominated heir, forcing the clan to submit a new choice or even naming someone else on his own initiative. Some Emperors have used this power to limit the actions of the clans or force an end to wars. Others have abused this authority in various ways, such as when Hantei XIII refused the service of a Shosuro daimyo and instead selected his "more capable" second brother as family daimyo. However, there is one unconventional usage of this power which does not cause disharmony: the Emperor often names himself the head of the Tortoise Clan, reinforcing the protected status of that otherwise disdained Minor Clan (and helping explain why it continues to exist at all).

It falls to the courtiers of the Great Clans to arrange the celebrations and announcements whenever a new family daimyo or Clan Champion is named. These events are usually combined with the Cherry Blossom Festival, and feature feasts, artistic displays, and martial demonstrations as the clan's samurai pledge their allegiance to their new ruler. Prominent vassals jockey for position, bringing gifts to their new lord and trying to out-do each other in their proclamations of allegiance and loyal service.

Summer, the Season of the Sword

In the spring the crops must be planted, in the autumn all hands are needed to harvest those crops, and in the winter troops cannot be moved. Thus, only in summer can war take place without constraint, and the season is dominated by bushi and all matters martial. In addition to actual wars, it is also a season full of tournaments and competitions that showcase the bushi skills with blade, bow, and steed. Most courtiers have little training with these skills, and know nothing of war beyond the most basic lessons expected of all samurai. So what do they do in the summer?

Everything.

When the bushi march to war, the courtiers manage the lands. It is they who maintain the laws and handle whatever problems might arise while the lord and his soldiers are away. Summer can see increased bandit activity, the heat can cause drought leading to water shortages, peasant disputes must be mediated, festivals must be planned and hosted, and so forth. In addition, when a clan is at war its representatives must plead their lord's case to allies and neutral parties – court politics may not be as all-encompassing during the summer as they are in winter, but they certainly do not come to a stop.

It should also be noted that most lords and generals will bring a small number of courtiers with them on campaign. These courtiers handle negotiations for their masters, offering and rejecting surrender, identifying heraldry, composing letters to send to the Imperial court, and so forth. One of their most important duties can be the mollification of allies, such as soothing wounded pride when one commander is given a position of honor over another, or making agreements over the distribution of land to the victors. Courtiers may also be needed after a battle to claim credit for victory, shift the blame of defeat, or forge new alliances for the next conflict.

Choyo no Sekku, the Chrysanthemum Festival

The Chrysanthemum Festival is one of the most sacred holidays in the Empire, celebrating the day the Kami came to Rokugan and the reign of the Hantei Emperors. For seven days, no work is done by samurai or *heimin*, and all time and effort is given over to joyous celebration. This celebration is universal across the Empire, and all samurai houses are expected to show each other hospitality and courtesy. Of course, organizing and running this festival is a great task in itself, and one usually undertaken by courtiers. Indeed, the momentary pause in summer warfare created by the Chrysanthemum Festival is often used by courtiers as an ideal setting for diplomacy. Key alliances can be reinforced or torn apart at the Festival, changing the course of the Empire's wars.

Fall, the Season of the Harvest

Fall is the time of greatest activity for the peasantry of Rokugan, harvesting the rice and grain which feed the Empire. Nothing is so important as the harvest, and for weeks the entire *heimin* population is occupied by this single activity. While the peasants are free to keep their own vegetables for the most part (and sometimes millet as well), the precious rice and wheat are brought to central towns where they are tallied by samurai and the tax share – typically 60% to 70% of the total – is shipped off to the provincial governors. After the governors take their own taxation share, their clans are allowed to count the remainder, coin an appropriate number of koku, and ship the bulk of those koku on to the Imperial Bureaucracy to pay for the Emperor's taxes. The Bureaucracy then sends koku back out to the clans to try to ensure a proper distribution of resources, and the clans likewise trade koku between each other for the same purpose.

Transportation of the harvest from farmer to town is by foot, then by cart or wagon to the nearest castle. Large shipments of food are moved across the Empire by barge or ship.

It should be noted that Rokugani tax levies are not based on a specific percentage of the harvest. Instead, each village or region is assigned a total production level which must be met regardless of how much of the total it comprises. Crops beyond this level are kept by the farmers for their own benefit... but crop shortages can have terrible consequences, since the quota must still be met regardless of the price to the farmers. Thus, while in an average year the Empire's taxes comprise around 60-70% of the harvest, in a famine year it may approach 100%. In such years the peasants may revolt, turn to banditry, or simply hide their harvest to avoid paying too much. Compassionate lords will sometimes return some of their taxes to their peasants to mitigate a famine, but a daimyo who is too generous to his farmers risks being unable to pay upkeep on his samurai vassals – potentially a far more dangerous situation than if the *heimin* are restless.

How Many Courtiers?

How many courtiers are there in the Empire? The short answer is: not many... but quite a few more than there are shugenja.

In the "average" Great Clan, there are roughly twenty bushi for each courtier. Every lord needs bushi, no matter if that lord rules over a small town, a large city, or an entire family. Courtiers, however, are an extravagance that only the greater and wealthier lords can afford. In great castles and palaces the courtiers make up a larger percentage of the household, helping to organize the lands and holdings, deal with politicking supplicants, and give advice on legal matters. A Clan Champion will often be surrounded by as many courtiers as bushi. Wise lords realize that courtiers are essential for all manner of activities, even military operations – which, after all, require political and organizational support.

Certain clans have far fewer courtiers than the norm – notably the Crab and the Dragon. (In fact, the Dragon did not even have a school dedicated to social training until the founding of the Kitsuki family, many hundreds of years after the clan was formed.) The Phoenix, Scorpion, and above all the Crane have more courtiers than average, while most Minor Clans can count their numbers of courtiers on a single hand.

The Crane consider fully half of all their samurai to be trained as courtiers (although this number includes artisans and many others who serve in the courts but do not actually attend the Doji Courtier School). This is a staggering number, made possible only due to their great wealth and their relative neglect of military matters. (Indeed, it is sometimes noted that if the Crane ever mobilized their entire samurai population for war, they could rival the armies of the Lion and Crab.) It is often said there is a Crane at every court, and this is only the mildest exaggeration. The Crane Clan's vast number of non-military samurai allows it to extend its presence throughout the Empire in a way no other clan can match. Indeed, the refined manners and soft words of the Crane make them the very definition of a good guest, reflecting the hospitality they offer to any who rest under their own roof. This omnipresence plays a major role in the massive network of connections, alliances, favors, and friendships which give the Crane such wide influence on matters of trade, war, politics, art, and the culture as a whole. In the Crane Clan, being appointed to notable and refined courts in the lands of the Phoenix or Scorpion is seen as a desirable posting, while being sent to the Crab courts – or worse, the courts of the Minor Clans – is a sure sign that a courtier has given grave insult to higher authority or has been judged incompetent in his duties.

The Scorpion Clan is nearly as widespread in other courts as the Crane, but has far fewer trained courtiers and thus relies on its bushi to serve in a similar capacity. The menacing nature of Scorpion diplomacy doubtless owes at least part of its nature to the fact that it is more likely to be conducted by warriors than by courtiers.

The Otomo family reverses the ratio found in the Great Clans, sporting ten courtiers for every bushi, but the family's total numbers are quite small and fully half reside within the Imperial City, serving mainly in the vast Imperial Bureaucracy. They usually leave the capital only to visit Clan Champions' courts, and only very rarely does an Otomo deign to stay at the court of a "mere" family daimyo or Minor Clan Champion. Those courts are more often visited by the Miya, whose ratio of courtiers to bushi is similar to that of the Otomo, and who are known as gracious guests no matter where they stay.

It should be noted that for most of the Empire's twelve-century history, the Imperial Legions were used as a 'dumping grounds' for poorly performing courtiers and embarrassing relatives, shunting them off to an area where they could do little damage to their clan. Legionnaire courtiers were sometimes forced to serve as mere line soldiers, or they might be given largely mundane organizational tasks, such as ensuring the banners were kept clean, counting the arrow stocks, and advising the unit leaders on matters of heraldry and history. Those who were found to have some martial talent could eventually be moved higher in the ranks, serving as officers or putting their education to use as advisors to the commanders. With the creation of the office of Shogun in the twelfth century, the Legions were reorganized and this custom was largely abandoned in favor of greater military efficiency. Fortunately, the office of Imperial Treasurer was created soon after, and lackluster courtiers soon found themselves instead "banished" to serve there, practicing commerce for the good of the Empire, ensuring the coins are counted properly, and advising the bureaucrats on matters of personal chops and local tax codes.

Taxes and Life: A Typical Village

To see how the Empire's taxation system impacts the lives of ordinary Rokugani, consider the village of Ningen-Mura. It is home to around 100 adult peasants. In a typical year, they might produce 160 koku in rice and 60 koku in millet and vegetables. The village has been designated as producing 110 koku in taxes, and may keep everything beyond this. The villagers normally have a slight surplus of food – about 10 koku per year, which they use for things like buying goods, making repairs on their buildings, or hiring a ronin to protect them from bandits.

When the weather is suboptimal and the harvest is a bit short, Ningen-Mura only brings in 150 koku in rice and 50 in other food. They still must give up 110 koku to taxes, at which point they have only about 90 koku to feed themselves. Everyone will go hungry, but no one will outright starve. It will be a hard year, but they will emerge intact.

However, should the harvest be truly bad – due to drought, flood, or other such disaster – the village may produce only 100 koku in rice and a mere 40 koku in other food. The farmers must still meet their 110 koku obligation, leaving them only 30 koku for the year. This will mean starvation, and the village headman begs their lord for mercy, hoping he will reduce his demands or use some koku saved from previous years to feed them. If not, a sizable portion of Ningen-Mura's population is likely to die within the next year.

Imperial taxes were highly disorganized in the early years of the Empire, especially before the invention of the koku eliminated the need to literally ship every year's harvest to the Imperial Capital. Even after that development, the productive value of most land was not yet fully known, so tax levies were often set at an inappropriately high or low level, creating disturbance and hardship. It was not until after the year 300 that Emperor Hantei Bosai managed to fulfill his father Hantei Ningi's wishes and establish a fully organized tax assessment of the entire Empire. These numbers have been used ever since, albeit with slight adjustments in response to major events such as the Unicorn Clan's return or the creation (or eradication) of a Minor Clan.

Of course, not all taxes are set by the Imperial Bureaucracy – local lords demand their share as well, and may adjust the taxation levels to fund a war effort or to give relief during a bad harvest. However, the largest share always goes to the Emperor, and only the Emperor can allow a clan's pledge to the Throne to be lowered. This is a rare happenstance indeed.

Samurai Duties in the Fall

Shugenja are kept busy with prayers in the harvest season, asking the kami to drive away blights and pestilence, thanking the Fortunes for the blessings they have bestowed. Bushi are kept busy patrolling the lands, making sure bandits do not steal the harvest or raid the tax shipments. In fact, if the harvest is poor the bandits are likely to be even more active, driven by desperation. Courtiers are likewise kept busy with tallying the harvest and making sure their lords' supplies and resources are kept up. If there was a war in the summer, stocks will be low and need refilling, ronin mercenaries will have to be paid off from taxes gathered, and weapons and armor will have to be repaired or replaced. Resources like silk and oil for the upkeep of weapons, iron for the crafting of new weapons, and horses for breeding must be purchased from other lords whose lands produce such things. This is where the courtier's extensive network of favors and contacts can come into its own, since knowing that a lord with ample supplies of maplewood favors a particular rare Crab tea can make it easier to negotiate a trade of resources.

Of course, the courtiers must also prepare for the vital winter court season that is fast approaching. Letters fly back and forth across the Empire as diplomats make plans and gather information, looking for every possible advantage.

Winter, the Season of the Fan

"When you lift your katana, one man will die. But when I lift my fan, I can kill thousands." – Bayushi Eiji

While the bushi dominates in summer, the courtier does so in winter, taking control of his clan's fate. The winter snows of Rokugan are thick and heavy, generally preventing war and forcing samurai to huddle inside for months at a time. Indeed, at these times Bushido can be tested to the utmost, since the close quarters of winter can challenge even the most self-controlled samurai's courtesy. There is no way to avoid one another, so ways to effectively embrace social invisibility are vital. Customs such as averting one's eyes from an embarrassing spectacle generally originated in winter.

Small Courts

The lowest-ranking lords rarely hold much in the way of courts, lacking the influence to invite prominent courtiers to their modest domains. Such "courts" usually consist of the lord's own vassals and low-ranking samurai from the local area. Historically, when a small lord grows bold enough to try to hold a major court and invite his neighbors to reside with him for the winter, he is probably hatching some sort of plot and wants to gain the backing

of his fellow low-ranking lords. A common scheme is an attempt to usurp a neighboring lord's control over his lands. This is rare in Rokugan, but it does sometimes happen, and the response of higher authority to such a scheme can vary depending on the lord and the clan. In some instances the higher lord will elect to not take sides, allowing his underlings to fight out their conflict, waiting for the strongest to emerge victorious. This sort of approach is especially popular among the daimyo of the Scorpion Clan, but at various times in the Empire's history it has been embraced by other clans – even the Lion Clan, which in some periods of its history saw such local conflicts as a useful way to test and strengthen its leaders.

Some daimyo, of course, will not allow their subordinates to engage in needless warfare. They may support the more loyal and trusted of their vassals against their rivals, or they may simply announce that any conflict will be punished with force. In all but the rarest of cases, these actions are enough to shut down a local conflict before it truly begins.

Given these incidents, most small lords avoid trying to hold significant courts lest they arouse the suspicions of their superiors. Nonetheless, the more ambitious small lords do undertake these courts from time to time, hoping the prestige they bring will be sufficient to risk any seeds of doubt sown in their lords' minds.

The Provincial Courts

While the Imperial Winter Court is by far the most prestigious, it is in the provincial courts that the most diplomatic work gets done. Each provincial daimyo and each governor of a major city holds such a court, inviting courtiers from both their own territory and from neighboring lands. In these courts the provincial governor sits in judgment of his vassals, assigning new duties and offices, bestowing favors and punishing failures, discussing taxation for the coming year, assigning soldiers to troubled regions, arranging marriages, and all other such matters of rule. By keeping his vassals close throughout the winter, the governor knows they cannot easily conspire against him, ensuring there can be no rebellions or other such unpleasantness.

Provincial courts held in the province of a family's ruling line are generally of greater prestige and are usually hosted by the family daimyo himself (or by a trusted vassal if the daimyo has been called to a higher-status court). Such courts are usually referred to by the family name, such as the Kakita court or the Matsu court. In the early years of the Empire it was common for these courts to be hosted by the family daimyo, but in later centuries it became more typical for most of these daimyo to attend higher courts (either the Clan Champion's court or the Imperial Winter Court).

While all of Rokugan's major cities lie within provinces ruled by other lords, their economic and cultural significance is such that most city Governors host their own courts as well. This can cause some friction between the city and the provincial lord who technically rules it, especially in those cases where the city produces more wealth than the rest of the province.

It may be noted that most samurai at provincial courts are bushi, not courtiers. A handful of trained courtiers will be present, representing the interests of the local vassal families or nearby foreign interests, as well as some from the Crane (who try to send their courtiers to every possible court they can). However, the vast majority are bushi, giving such courts a certain severity and martial edge lacking in higher-status courts. Tempers flare more easily and challenges are hurled more readily without courtiers to smooth over such incidents. A prudent host will keep a couple of his own clan's courtiers on hand to serve as mediators and reduce the risk of unseemly outbursts.

The Great Courts

Above the provincial courts are the courts held in the seats of the Clan Champions, attended by the lords of his provinces and representatives of all his notable vassals, as well as numerous guests from other clans. A Clan Champion has the authority to demand any or all of his vassals attend his court, but most Champions rarely require their family daimyo to attend, instead allowing them to either host their own courts or attend courts in other lands. Of course, all the family daimyo are given an invitation (to fail to offer an invitation would be a serious insult to a major vassal), and they usually answer by sending trusted representatives to speak in their place.

A lord's children may be sent as personal representatives once they are adults. Typically, the eldest child will stay in the parent's court, while the second child will be sent to other courts as an ambassador. In those cases where a lord feels the children are not yet ready for such authority, senior advisors are sent along to keep them properly guided.

The Gentry

While all samurai are "nobles" in a sense, only a tiny fraction of them are gentry – landed nobility. The *kuge* are of course the highest ranking of the nobility, but most of the gentry are found among the higher ranks of the *buke*. Provincial governors, also called provincial daimyo, are at the top of the *buke*, overseeing entire provinces or large cities. Typically, each major family within a Great Clan will control one to five provinces, each needing its own governor, and any major city within those provinces will need a governor as well.

Beneath this level are the lesser lords known as *shugo*, who rule over smaller portions of territory in the provincial daimyo's name. The size of the lands they oversee can vary greatly. The *shugo* are the lowest-ranking lords, and do not have the right to call themselves "daimyo" – but they are also among the most politically active lords, since they have many diverse and conflicting needs, and often find themselves quarrelling with their neighbors. Keeping tabs on these often selfish low-ranking officials is a matter of great concern to most daimyo, and often a source of considerable stress.

Jito are local landholders, also sometimes called *gokenin*. Each has their own manor house, typically located in or near one or more villages which are the *jito's* responsibility. A *jito* may be responsible for only a single village or as many as twenty, depending on how favored he is by the *shugo*. A *jito* with responsibility for multiple villages may sometimes assign his family members or personal vassals to watch over the individual towns. Although watching over a single peasant village may seem demeaning, even the lowest *gokenin* is considered part of the gentry, and thus is higher in status than a mere ji-samurai guarding a castle wall or patrolling a remote border.

The Imperial Court

The Imperial Court is in some ways an exception to the principle that winter is the season of court. The Imperial Court is actually held almost year-round. During the spring, summer, and autumn, the court resides in the capital city (Otosan Uchi for most of Rokugan's history, Toshi Ranbo after the Four Winds era). The Emperor presides over the court for brief periods each day, but most of the time the court is run by the Otomo and the Imperial Bureaucracy. Regardless of who is presiding, the court is the most important in the land, and every clan and family maintains a large diplomatic force there. While appointment to the Imperial Court during the year is not quite as prestigious as an invitation to its Winter Court incarnation, it is still hugely important. When a weak Emperor sits on the throne, such as during the Gozuku period, this court becomes even more important as the place where the 'real' business of running the Empire is done.

The Hosting Clan

The clan and castle which will host each year's Imperial Winter Court is decided by the Emperor, with advice from the Imperial Chancellor (who is in turn usually lobbied by representatives of the Great Clans and the major samurai families). The Emperor may theoretically choose any stronghold to host the court, although he most often selects one which the hosting clan has suggested to the Chancellor. Any palace that has held an Imperial Winter Court gains the title of Kyuden, which can be a considerable honor if it is a minor or obscure castle. A castle that has the potential to host a Winter Court may also be called a Kyuden, even if this capacity has never actually been put to the test; the Sparrow Clan's Kyuden Suzume is perhaps the most famous instance of a stronghold which could supposedly host an Emperor but has never done so. The hosting clan is expected to make the chosen stronghold ready for hundreds of guests, including plentiful food and drink, ample space and housing, and suitable entertainment to keep such a crowd amused for months on end; needless to say, a clan like the Sparrow can hardly afford such an effort.

As noted, the choice of who gets to host the Winter Court may be used as a reward or a punishment – not just to the clan involved but to other clans as well. (The Crane, for example, consider themselves lessened any time they are not the Emperor's hosts for the winter.) The spartan lifestyles and intense military expenses of the Lion and the Crab can cause those two clans to need years to recover from a single visit of the Imperial Winter Court, and the Emperor seldom chooses either clan unless he is angry with them or sees the need to raise their status within the Empire.

The Emperor does not always choose the host for specific political reasons. He may instead do so on a more casual or frivolous basis, such as a desire to relax and enjoy himself in a castle known for its luxuries. Cynical Rokugani would suggest this is why the Crane have hosted the Winter Court far more often than anyone else, with almost half of all Winter Courts in recorded history taking place in the Crane lands. The Crane Clan's great political rival, the Scorpion Clan, boasts the next-highest total, followed by the Otomo family and the Phoenix Clan. Combined with the Crane, these four factions have hosted nine out of ten Imperial Winter Courts in history. When hosting duties fall to any clan other than these four factions, it is a noteworthy event. The Unicorn, however, certainly would have a higher total if they had not been gone from the Empire for so long. Indeed, when the Ki-Rin finally returned, reclaimed their old lands, and built Shiro Ide, they hosted three Winter Courts in a row. Since then, however, strong political resistance from the rest of the Empire means they only host the Emperor once every generation or so.

The Mantis were only a Minor Clan for most of the Empire's history, but did host the Emperor on at least one occasion (making them one of only two Minor Clans to do so, the other being the Fox). As a Great Clan in the twelfth century, they have managed to host the Imperial Winter

Court a handful of times, and given their immense wealth and the luxurious accommodations they can offer, this number will doubtless increase in the future.

Of all the Great Clans, none so rarely host the Emperor as the Dragon Clan. Generally, the Dragon are all too happy to avoid such a burden on their thin resources. Indeed, during the Great Famine the Dragon Clan lost hundreds of samurai and thousands of peasants to starvation from the cost of hosting the Imperial Winter Court.

The Guests

The total guests invited to the Winter Court is a variable and uncertain number, changing with the year and the Emperor's whim. Representatives are always invited from every clan, Great and Minor, along with the Imperial families. The Emperor and his family always attend, of course, along with all of the Emperor's Chosen and the Jeweled Champions. In the early centuries of the Empire, the total created by this system was manageable, but as Rokugan grew more populous and prosperous, the Winter Court's attendance spiraled ever-higher until only the Crane could host such massive events. Although the Crane themselves found this quite acceptable, pressure from the rest of the Empire grew intense. Thus, rather than let the Crane monopolize the right to host the Winter Court, the Emperor and Imperial Chancellor agreed to set a strict limit on how many guests could be invited.

Typically, this number is set at two hundred, although some Emperors have reduced it to as little as one hundred, and in peaceful times it can climb as high as three hundred. Originally the Emperor would personally choose who would attend, but due to the many demands on the Emperor's time this power was soon delegated to the Chancellor. Some choices are "fixed" by custom – as noted, all of the Emperor's Chosen and Jeweled Champions are expected to attend, and invitations are likewise automatically issued to all Clan Champions and family daimyo (whether or not they are able to attend). The rest of the list, however, is much more flexible, and most Chancellors take advantage of their position to favor their clan and allies. Of course, the Chancellor must be careful not to let his manipulation of the guest list become too blatant – there is at least one instance in which a Chancellor was dismissed by the Emperor after the court was held in Lion lands and it was found that not a single Lion diplomat had been invited. A Chancellor who wishes to avoid controversy generally issues the invitations in equal numbers for each of the Great Clans and the Imperial families.

For the most part, invitations below the level of family daimyo are given out by the Chancellor "unassigned" – that is, a clan will be invited to send the Clan Champion, the various family daimyo, and a certain number of suitable samurai. The specific samurai who get to accept these invitations are chosen by the clan authorities, and the distribution of these invitations is an excellent chance to build alliances, win favors, and expand influence. Indeed, some clans will bargain away some of their invitations in return for other benefits, accepting a smaller delegation at Winter Court as the price of greater success elsewhere. Still, every clan always tries to have a delegation of sufficient size and prominence to maintain its face and repute.

By tradition, the hosting clan is permitted to issue some invitations independently of the Emperor's control – this is part of the reward for hosting the Son of Heaven. The Chancellor also issues invitations directly, as do the other Imperial authorities. (The Emerald Champion, for example, usually invites a handful of Emerald Magistrates to reward them for faithful service.) The Chancellor is known for inviting persons of note from across the Empire, such as recent war heroes, well-known philosophers, or those who placed highly at that year's Topaz Championship. Of course, the Chancellor can also bargain his invitations for favors in the manner of any other lord, and this usage of invitations as political "currency" helps explain the sometimes eccentric mix of old hands, rookies, and quirky curiosities found at every Winter Court.

Although all Clan Champions are invited, they cannot always attend – especially since they are often needed to host their own lesser winter court. Whichever clan is serving as host will always make sure its Champion is present, of course – to do otherwise is to insult the Emperor. (The exception through most of history is the Dragon Clan – Togashi, in all his myriad false identities, never attends the court even when he is officially the host.) If the Emperor is naming a new Champion for a clan, that person will also attend, but the rest of the Clan Champions rarely do so. (The Phoenix Champion usually attends as the voice of the Elemental Council, but it is rare for more than one member of the Council itself to do so.) Family daimyo are somewhat more common, but it is still rare for a majority of them to attend since, once again, the affairs of their own lands keep them busy. Thus, it is typical for a clan's delegation at the Winter Court to be led by a lesser member of the ruling family, such as an adult

Directions in the Court

Whenever directions are noted, they are from the Emperor's view, not the majority of court. Thus, when a banner is hung on the right wall, it is to the Emperor's right as he faces the assembly, not on the right hand wall as the assembled would see it. Movement toward the dais is "up" while movement away from the dais is "down". That these terms are similar to stage directions should come as no surprise to Scorpion courtiers, who were key in designing the skeleton upon which the Crane set the pattern.

heir, a spouse or sibling, or a hatamoto (personal vassal to a daimyo). The delegation will usually also include at least one seasoned diplomat (more than one in the case of politically-oriented clans like the Crane and Scorpion) and at least one shugenja, the latter needed more to attend to the spiritual needs of the delegation than any use of magic. Wise lords will make sure to send plenty of lower-ranking but well-trained courtiers along as part of the delegation, and to leave hot-headed bushi and other such troublemakers behind. Usually, each clan will also send a few younger and less-experienced samurai – usually because they are considered promising, or because they have influential families.

Some clans choose delegates more on merit, others select for specifically mercantile or political skills, and others use their own methods. Of particular note are the Crab and their "lottery" method. Each year, one Crab bushi from the front lines is chosen at random to attend the Winter Court and represent the clan's eternal struggle against the Shadowlands. This selection is often seen as painful, since no true Crab wants to abandon unit and comrades. However, the winner is given no option to refuse, since he is being granted a great honor and a great responsibility, to speak for all his brothers and sisters in the ranks. Surrounded by opulence, worried for their comrades still in battle, these Crab face a different foe than they have ever trained to fight, but nonetheless do their best to represent their people.

Finally, there are a handful of invitations sent out to specific people and groups which exist completely outside the structure of the clans. For example, the grand abbots of the Brotherhood of Shinsei are usually invited (though they seldom attend), as are the commanders of the Imperial Legions. Very occasionally, a ronin band may also be able to win an invitation for one of its members, or a prominent individual ronin may draw the attention of a high authority who "rewards" the wave-man with an invitation to Winter Court.

Dressing the Court

While each Winter Court is unique to its location, there are certain features that are traditionally present regardless of the setting. Certain events such as the Winding Water Banquet fall into this category, but the simple act of presenting the court's chambers for the use of guests is a matter of concern as well. Over the centuries, largely through the work of Crane, Scorpion, and Otomo, a "proper" layout has come to be generally known and accepted by all hosts.

The court chambers themselves need to be large enough to allow two hundred or more samurai to gather for the largest events. However, few palaces can boast a single room quite so large, and areas are needed for people to meet in smaller groups. The traditional solution to this problem is to build a two-story chamber, leaving the main floor large enough for most of the courtiers to assemble but with a second-floor balcony with ample space for the rest when everyone must gather at once. A two-story chamber gives a more open feeling to the chambers and also allows the hanging of large banners and paintings on the walls. While the main floor is left largely empty and unfurnished to allow for maximum ease in moving around the room, a small number of tables are usually placed around the edges to encourage gatherings to talk, take tea, and write letters or jot down notes. The second floor has a railed balcony that overlooks the main floor and is mostly open as well, though there are often small tables with Go sets (or Shogi sets, after the return of the Unicorn). Social convention frowns upon shouting from the floor to the balcony or vice-versa, and it is generally understood that those on the balcony are safe from involvement in any speeches or debates on the main floor, so it is quite common when court is in session for the less socially-inclined attendees to fill up the balcony while the more eloquent and politically-savvy guests – especially the courtiers – dominate the lower chamber.

In some palaces there are smaller rooms off the sides of both the upper and lower chambers, used for private meetings; however, taken as a whole this design feature is rare. (Interestingly, most Scorpion palaces do have such side rooms, although the legitimacy of their privacy is always in question.) More typically, those needing privacy will agree to meet later in the gardens, in the training fields, or in someone's private chambers. Court is a public place, after all, a place for ostentation and presentation, for art and oratory.

The Dais

The one feature standard in any Winter Court main chamber is the dais, a raised platform where the Emperor's Throne is placed. Usually this is large enough to also have a smaller throne for the Empress and places for the Chosen and the Jeweled Champions to stand in service. Traditionally there are five levels of the dais, with the top two reserved exclusively for the Emperor's family and the

Emperor's personal advisors (the Chosen and the Jeweled Champions). Occasionally a favored Clan Champion may be allowed to stand on these top levels as well. Those of lesser status are simply not permitted, stopped by Emperor's personal Seppun guards and, if necessary, the Emerald Champion himself. The fourth step is thus informally known as "the step of death," for to set foot upon it is to lose one's head.

The Emperor's Throne is set in the center of the dais, with the Empress' lesser throne to the left. To the Emperor's immediate right stands the Emerald Champion, ever-vigilant and always clad in full regalia. To the Empress' left stands the Imperial Chancellor, who often moves to the front of the dais to issue proclamations to the court, while the Imperial Advisor typically stands (or lurks) behind and between the Emperor and Empress, sometimes personally attending their needs for information... or tea. The Imperial Herald stands on the third step of the dais, and thus serves as a bridge between the upper level and the rest of the chamber. For example, it is the Herald who receives gifts or letters from the court and presents them to the Emperor for inspection. The Emperor rarely touches such things, instead looking them over and then directing the Herald to set them aside for later.

When an attendee wishes to address the Throne, he must request a time to speak from the Chancellor – speaking to the Emperor without such permission is a major breach of etiquette. With proper permission, the courtier is allowed to stand on the third step in the place of the Herald, then speak either to the Emperor or to the assembled crowd. (The Emperor may also call guests to speak with him, in which case they likewise ascend the dais to the third step where the Son of Heaven may fully regard them.) A less formal speech to the assemblage may be made from the first step. The Emperor may also choose to make small variations in these customs, such as choosing two persons to conduct a public debate, in which case both are allowed to ascend to the third stair at the same time so that all may witness their discussion. It is highly irregular for anyone from the court to stand atop the dais with the Emperor, although the Son of Heaven may allow this grace to Great Clan Champions who wish to address the entire court. Minor Clan Champions and the family daimyo of the Great Clans are traditionally restricted to the third step no matter how important their words might be. However, just as with other traditions, these constraints may be changed by the Emperor's personal invitation – on a few occasions, an ordinary samurai who has done something truly great or otherwise attained great favor may be allowed to step upon the top of the dais for a short time (which never fails to cause the Emerald Champion and the Seppun *miharu* great discomfort). Such incidents are quite unusual, and most Emperors live through their entire reigns without issuing such an invitation.

The Emperor always enters and departs the court chamber through the main door, advancing processionally to and from the dais and his Throne. However, there is usually a small door behind the dais to allow the Chosen, Jeweled Champions, and other high functionaries to come and go as needed without drawing attention.

Court Banners

By tradition, the ancient and revered Imperial Banner is always the largest banner present at the Imperial Winter Court, and it is hung directly behind the Emperor's dais. To its right hangs the Seppun family banner, and to its left the Otomo family banner. The Miya banner, a tiny thing by comparison, hangs beneath the Imperial Banner virtually unseen.

Banners with the mon of the Great Clans are usually hung along the left and right walls, and the order in which they hang is used to show which clans are in the Emperor's favor. The Lion and Crane are usually first on the right and left, respectively, showing their favored status as the Right and Left Hands of the Emperor, but even this can change when the Emperor is displeased with one of those clans. Traditionally the mon of the Dragon, whose Kami did not participate in the ancient challenge between siblings at the foundation of the Empire, is set directly opposite the Imperial dais and is flanked by the slender banners of the Minor Clans.

The Ki-Rin banner was hung during the early years of the Empire, holding their place for the day of their return, but after the Empire came to believe the clan had perished the banner was removed. The new Unicorn Clan's banner was added (albeit reluctantly) after they returned to Rokugan, and many clans deliberately slight the Clan of Shinjo by placing the Unicorn banner far from the throne. By the time the Mantis Clan was elevated to Great Clan status, the banners had to be redesigned at a slightly smaller size to allow eight to be hung where once there were six.

Decorations and Distractions

Beyond the basic physical layout that is almost the same in every court, the hosts decorate as they see fit, and it is said there are as many varieties of decoration as there are castles in the Empire. The wealthier factions such as the Crane, Otomo, Unicorn, and Mantis always make their courts into lavish affairs, with all manner of art on display for discussion, the finest of cushions for seating, the best and most exotic tea, and so forth. Often the lords of these clans will commission new artwork for the Winter Court, typically paintings depicting the splendid history and great victories of the clan. Those clans with less wealth or a more spartan attitude toward a samurai's life tend to favor simpler and more traditional court decoration, although they will still display works they consider important. As one might expect, the finery of the wealthy clans is a factor in their being able to host the Winter Court more often, since even the Emperor will balk at the prospect of a winter sharing the rugged comforts of the Crab lands.

Similarly, the visual distractions and entertainments of the court chambers will vary from one host to another. Many courts have music being played softly by musicians on the balconies, or place bonsai trees or ikebana arrangements strategically around the chambers. The wealthier clans will sometimes offer more ambitious displays such as a rock-lined pond of koi in one corner of the room or a flower-bed containing live flowers that bloom in winter. In the courts of the northernmost clans, such as the Dragon and the Phoenix, small braziers will be placed in the court chambers to let courtiers warm their hands.

These assorted displays serve as common gathering points in the court, allowing neutral conversations about them to break the social ice (or to graciously avoid uncomfortable topics). Of course, a more combative courtier can also use them to embarrass someone; for example, a Scorpion might ask a Crane maiden to give her thoughts on a painting that depicts a Lion victory over the Crane... while a notoriously temperamental Lion stands nearby.

Dressing the Grounds

Beyond the relative uniformity of the court chambers themselves, the layout of a palace is left to the design of its owners. However, there are some elements present at most Kyuden that have hosted a Winter Court or aspire to do so. Chief of these is the simple need for enough housing to satisfy all the guests, their guards and hangers-on, and their servants. Typically, each major delegation will be afforded a section of living quarters, protected by the guards they brought with them and staffed with their own servants, where they can operate largely as they choose. These private areas allow each delegation to prepare for the day's challenges, to hold private meetings, and to speak openly among one's own clan-mates. Of course, these areas are rarely as spacious as might be desired, and certainly less fine than what nobles would enjoy in

their own home, but they are sufficient to what is needed. A host clan will often show favor to its allies, giving them better accommodations than those which go to rivals, but this is not always the case; the Crane famously give the best rooms to the Lion, thereby demonstrating their superior courtesy and their wealth and culture to their rivals. Some hosts use the location of the quarters as a snub, such as by intentionally placing a delegation near the stables, or – more subtly – placing two rival factions in adjacent locations, such as the Scorpion placing Lion and Crane delegations side-by-side.

Some of the largest Kyuden-level castles include delegation quarters in the design of the castle itself, but it is more common for these quarters to be located in the sprawling complex of smaller buildings that surround the main keep. This allows the delegates to actually have their own buildings that are completely separate from their host's stronghold.

The Emperor is always given the best quarters, of course, better even than those of the hosting Clan Champion. The Imperial family daimyo, the Chosen, and the Jeweled Champions are likewise given very high quality quarters – they can expect treatment at least on par with the host's Clan Champion. In many cases, the Clan Champion who is hosting the Winter Court will move out of his own quarters, providing them to the Emperor. However, the Crane Clan has a different approach: their main palace, Kyuden Doji, has an entire separate complex which is specifically built for the purpose of housing the Emperor and his entourage every time they come to the Crane lands.

At the other end of the status spectrum, representatives of Minor Clans and other such folk are given small and remote quarters befitting their station. This is a standard and accepted snub that the Minor Clans have long since learned to accept.

In all cases, the host will have guards on hand to show the guests are safe, and the guests will have their own guards posted as well, clearly marking when someone travels from the host's hospitality to the private areas of the delegations. The duty of these delegation guards is primarily symbolic and ritualistic (for example, they will attend to a visitor's katana), since the host is expected to deal with any true danger to the Winter Court.

On those rare occasions when the Emperor proclaims a new Great Clan, it sets off a flurry of activity in each Kyuden as the owners make room for additional guests in future courts. This first occurred with the return of the Unicorn (Ki-Rin) Clan, and when they attended their first Winter Court in Scorpion lands, Kyuden Bayushi was not yet prepared for them. Supposedly, when the Scorpion apologized for the lack of space, the Unicorn Clan Champion replied with a smile, "No worry, we have brought our own" – and introduced Rokugan to the tents which the clan used for living space. (In fact, even in the twelfth century the Unicorn still use their tents to dwell in on those rare occasions when Winter Court is held in the Dragon lands, in order not to impose on the Dragon Clan's modest housing.) A similar scramble occurred when the Mantis were named a Great Clan, but due to hostility to the Mantis from many other factions, they were often still assigned to the area reserved for Minor Clans. It was many years before the Mantis gained enough respect for all the clans to offer them proper housing at Winter Court.

Other Officials Allowed on the Emperor's Dais

In most eras of the Empire's history, the ranks of the Emperor's Chosen are limited to the Imperial Advisor, the Imperial Herald, and the Chancellor. When the offices of Treasurer, Voice of the Emperor, and Shogun are added to the ranks of the Chosen in the mid-twelfth century, they are placed on the side of the dais most applicable to their role; the Voice to the left, the Shogun and the Treasurer to the right (the latter by virtue of his office having been spun off from the Emerald Champion's office).

The daimyo of the Seppun, Otomo, and Miya families all have the right to stand atop the dais, with the Seppun behind the Emperor's right and the Otomo behind the Empress' left, but since they have no official role to play in the court, most choose to do this only on days when they wish to assert their authority by their presence near the Son of Heaven. The rest of the time they mingle with the normal attendees. The Miya daimyo has the right to stand behind the Imperial Advisor, but in almost every era the Miya daimyo is also the Imperial Herald and chooses to serve that more humble role instead of standing atop the top step of the dais.

The Walking Gardens

Almost as important as the court chamber itself, any proper palace needs a large garden where the guests can walk together and talk while admiring the scenery. A true walking garden features multiple winding trails, allowing guests the ability to talk without crossing paths. There are plenty of small benches to rest on while admiring flowers, orchards, raked gravel, and small ponds. Due to the curling nature of the paths, guests can sometimes overhear others without actually seeing them, so conversations tend to be cautious and filled with double- or triple-meanings, hiding key points behind casual words lest a vital bit of information fall into the hands of enemies.

Aside from the omnipresent flowers, trees, and paths, every walking garden features several artistic placements of water. These range from small ponds to near-lakes, connected with a running creek and perhaps one or more waterfalls. Typically the creek will be crossed by small arched bridges along the garden's paths, and there will be shaded areas and benches around the lowest pond, serving as an area to gather, hold tea parties, and so forth. A well-designed and properly maintained garden is of great importance to a host who wishes to show proper respect to guests, and even the poorer and more pragmatic clans

The Throne in the Iweko Dynasty

When Empress Iweko I ascends to the rule of Rokugan, she chooses to assert a greater distance between herself and her subjects than was customary with the previous two dynasties – doubtless in part because of her status representing the Celestial Heavens' assertion of greater control over mortal affairs. During her reign, the Throne is surrounded by a translucent silk curtain, leaving the Empress visible only as a silhouette. Moreover, she never speaks directly to any of her subjects, instead issuing all statements and requests through the Voice of the Emperor. During both the normal Imperial courts and all the Winter Courts held in her reign, the Voice always stands front and center on the dais, usurping many aspects of the Herald's and Chancellor's public court activity.

strive to maintain a minimal garden in their castles. Of course, the usage of a garden – regardless of its size – is far more limited in winter than in spring or summer, but even in the depths of midwinter snowfall a proper garden as a significant asset. Most clans plant winter-blooming flowers in their gardens specifically to maximize their value in the court season, and clans in the southern Empire such as the Crab and Mantis take advantage of milder winters to show their gardens to advantage.

The Scholar's Garden

In most palaces, the so-called Scholar's Garden is a subsection of the main walking garden, but in the castles of the Dragon or the Phoenix it may be the sole garden in the stronghold. A Scholar's Garden primarily features stones, perhaps supplemented with moss or vines, while flowers and water are far more minimal than in a walking garden – no pools or ponds, merely a small stream or spring. Scholar's Gardens are generally seen as places for serene meditation or for intellectual or theological debate, rather than the politicking of court. Discussions of philosophy, speculations about nature, or lectures on scholarly topics are common activities, and these gardens are also favored as places for artists to show their works. Many Scholar's Gardens include pedestals and scroll stands where such works may be displayed, and some gardens also have small cabinets containing scrolls – both blank scrolls for writing, and written works of poetry or philosophy.

The Phoenix are famous for the debates which occur in their Scholar's Gardens, and the Dragon are likewise famous (or perhaps infamous) for placing scrolls with puzzling koans and riddles in their gardens. However, it is (oddly enough) the Scorpion who have long regarded the Scholar's Garden as a highpoint of any court, happily testing the thoughts of others with their own words and writings.

Perhaps the most revered Scholar's Garden in the Empire is found in the humble castle of Kyuden Miya. It includes a shrine to Tengen, the Fortune of Writing and Literature, and has been host to discussions of the most compelling and troubling philosophical debates the Empire has ever seen. Setting aside that unique fame, however, nearly every Scholar's Garden features high levels of intellectual and theological discussion that cannot be found in the politicking of the rest of the court.

The Parade Grounds

Every Imperial Winter Court is held at a palace, and every palace is a castle; as such, each will have a barracks for soldiers and a parade ground for their training. These grounds are used for a variety of court functions and entertainments, such as fireworks displays and sumai contests. They also are frequently used as a place for bushi to train and practice martial arts. Every castle has a dojo, of course, but these are usually too small to host more than the castle's own garrison, so bushi guests usually practice outdoors. Many bushi find the winter cold to be refreshing and invigorating, and even if the winter is especially harsh, they often accept the discomfort to be temporarily free of courtiers and their silken words. Here a warrior can focus on the truth of the blade, escaping politics into the purity of a kata. Few courtiers will presume to disrupt this activity.

Most training here is simply the performance of kata, keeping the body strong and the mind sharp, but sparring is also common, at least between members of the same clan. Sparring between bushi of different clans is often discouraged, due to the risk of injury and the possibility that courtiers will turn any unfortunate incident to their advantage. Still, samurai who respect each other (or hate each other) will sometimes insist on testing their skills against each other.

The parade grounds are also where any formal duels take place, whether they to the blood or to the death. This allows the attendees to watch the duels without disrupting the sanctity of peace inside the palace itself. Formal duels at Winter Court are traditionally held in the morning, just before the

The Sword Polishers

As we have noted elsewhere, samurai are often expected to leave their swords behind when they enter a peaceful place like a court chamber. Moreover, it is considered a violation of etiquette for a samurai below the highest rank to enter the presence of the Emperor while wearing swords. Thus, any Imperial Winter Court will always have a pair of armored Seppun guards at the entrance, ensuring the safety of all within. These guards will be accompanied by a group of younger samurai who are tasked to watch over the swords of anyone who enters the court. Much like the euphemistic "sword polishers" found at geisha houses and other such establishments, these youths (usually both Seppun and samurai from the host clan) maintain the fiction that they are merely helping maintain the guests' swords and not forcing them to be disarmed. In this case, of course, any court attendee already knows it is a massive breach of etiquette to bring a sword into the Emperor's presence without permission, so everyone is happy to hand over their swords to be polished and cleaned – why else would they have brought their swords along in the first place?

court itself is convened, and the duel is likely to be the topic of gossip throughout the day. Of course, since the duel's outcome settles whatever affair provoked it, the discussions of the duel will avoid raising any possibility that the losing side could have been correct – directly, at least. (Skilled courtiers are adept at sowing doubt about a duel's outcome without ever openly violating social convention.) Of course, a wise clan delegation will always include at least one skilled duelist to defend the clan's position should it be necessary.

Lethal duels are generally rare at the Imperial Winter Court, not least because any courtier who is championed by a duelist must share the duelist's fate, committing seppuku if his champion falls. Losing both a duelist and a courtier in one moment can be devastating to a clan's efforts in Winter Court, so most delegation heads are loath to allow a lethal duel for any but the most serious matters.

Winter Court: Things to See and Do

Travel through Rokugan is never an easy thing, between bad weather, primitive roads, bandit activity, and many other potential threats and delays. Traveling to Winter Court is made even more challenging by the fact that it happens at the beginning of winter, easily the most treacherous time for travel in Rokugan. Thus, while the Imperial Winter Court officially begins on the first day of winter (and lasts until the new year), the court does not actually open until a week into the season, allowing time for stragglers to arrive. During this first week, the main court chamber remains closed and little political business gets done. The delegations are shown their quarters, introductions are made for those who are new, and each group of samurai begins "feeling out" the court and learning who they will be sharing the next three months with. In the second week, the court formally opens and the court truly begins.

Each day's formal court starts when the Sun is at its highest point, the Hour of the Horse, and rarely lasts longer than a few hours. Thus, samurai need other activities to occupy the many hours of the three winter months. There are a number of traditional entertainments and events which take place at every Winter Court.

Throughout the winter, the hosts keep *heimin* entertainers and artisans on hand, and other clans – especially the Crane and Scorpion – usually make sure to bring their own skilled commoner entertainers along. These entertainers often perform in the main chambers when court is not in session, as well as traveling around the palace as needed. Commoner artisans spend their days painting in the gardens, performing music during dinners and other social gatherings, and putting on performances of dance or puppet-theater in the evenings. Also, the hosts usually hire a few geisha to attend the Winter Court, since every lord knows even the most dignified courtiers need to unwind now and then.

The attending samurai are often artisans themselves, of course – though they would be insulted to be named as "entertainers." Winter Court is the ideal time for them to display their latest art and to seek patrons for their work. Even in the Crab lands, the hosts try to give at least minimal consideration to the expectations of cultured samurai. Ikebana arrangements are placed daily, paintings are hung in the castle and gardens to be admired, hand-held sumi-e prints are exchanged as gifts between guests, and origami and poetry are created constantly by every samurai with the slightest claim to civilized behavior. Indeed, the gathering of so many famous and powerful samurai in one splendid and beautiful location can be an inspiration to all but the crudest of men and women.

In addition to art, every host will set forth a variety of specific entertainments to amuse and distract the guests. Although these events are unique, usually designed to showcase the strengths of the hosting clan, there are also events which are considered traditional and take place in every Winter Court, usually around the same time. (Although the exact length of deep winter in Rokugan is variable, the timing for these events is based on when they are held in Crane lands, yet another subtle example of how the clan of Doji dominates Rokugani culture.)

The Kakita Artisans

The master sensei of the Kakita Artisan School are often given special invitations to attend each Winter Court. They do not participate in politics or diplomacy, but rather are there to share their magnificent art with the rest of the guests. Each of them presents a masterpiece of their own design to celebrate the season, usually in the first week of winter; those masters who prefer tangible art, such as painting, leave their work on display for the duration of the winter. During the course of the court, other samurai artisans often request the masters to review their own work and judge their skill and effort. This can lead to

praise, criticism, or ridicule depending on the quality of the work – though the masters will not give their thoughts without being asked. Those who win praise are the talk of the court for days afterward, and can often look forward to continued success after the season is over. Conversely, those called out for failure will be pursued by gossip and whispers for just as long.

Those who are truly confident in their artistic skill can choose to openly challenge one of the Kakita masters. Traditionally, the masters view this challenge in a manner rather like a gift, offering the challenger two opportunities to retract the challenge, but accepting if it is repeated a third time. Such challenges are rare and are always talked about for weeks or months afterward; the consequences can follow a samurai for years after, whether he wins or loses. Since the Kakita are the acknowledged masters of all the Rokugani arts, they seldom lose these challenges, but an opponent who displays skill and honor in defeat can still win considerable fame. And should a challenger step forth and actually be victorious, the resulting work will be put on display in the place of the master's piece. In most cases the victor is also granted an invitation to attend the Kakita Artisan School (if he is not already a student) to hone his impressive talent even higher.

The Kakita masters also host discussions on art, both as scheduled events and as impromptu gatherings, where they discuss artistic theory, review famous works, and offer immediate criticism to any other artwork on display at the court. Their words are often taken down by scribes, becoming scrolls of shared wisdom which go home with those who attended the court. Indeed, by the end of Winter Court, even the crudest bushi may find himself gaining knowledge of a new art form, perhaps even learning a new path to follow for life.

The Winding Water Banquet

The first "big" event of every Winter Court is the so-called Winding Water Banquet, which traditionally takes place at the end of the first two weeks – before the snowfall has become regular and the streams in the palace gardens have frozen. Unlike many events, attendance at and participation in the Water Banquet is considered mandatory for all guests. After all, an understanding and appreciation of poetry is expected of any samurai who does not wish to be considered a brute.

The banquet itself is a relatively simple affair. The guests are seated along a stream in the garden, with the Emperor and retinue placed at the very end of the stream – usually at the pond the stream empties into. Those who consider themselves lacking in skill with poetry usually try to sit near the headwaters, while those who place themselves near the Emperor are claiming they possess great skill in the art. The guests are initially expected simply to enjoy the dinner and the natural beauty around them, but when the Emperor is ready, servants at the head of the stream begin the event. The servants fill small cups with sake and then float them downstream, usually placing them atop small flat pieces of wood. As the cups pass by, the guests are expected to pick them up, drink, and then share a haiku. Once this is done, the guest may either hold the cup in his lap, indicating he is retiring from the contest, or return it to the stream, indicating he will continue the challenge. A guest need not pick up every cup that comes his way, and indeed is expected to let plenty of cups drift downstream so others may take them up. It should be noted that very few of these poems are original compositions, nor is there any expectation they should be, given the presence of alcohol in the contest. It is considered perfectly appropriate to recite ancestral or famous poems, so long as they are well-presented. Those who take a more daring path and compose their own poems can win high praise... or scorn, if their work is of poor quality.

As the event continues, the number of guests without their own cup gradually shrinks as more and more samurai retire from the game. Eventually only a handful are left, most often those who sat close to the Emperor due to being confident in their ability. Each samurai tries to out-recite the others, flirting with inebriation and social disaster as the cups come faster and faster. When only two contestants are left the game enters its final stage, with each samurai challenging his rival with more and more elaborate poems, each proceeded by a full cup of rice wine, until one finally concedes. The final poem of the banquet's "winner" is recorded for posterity and is often repeated through the rest of the Winter Court. The victor may be asked to compose more poems when other memorable situations occur during the rest of the winter. There is no shame on the samurai who finishes in second place; shame is reserved for any samurai so brutish as to bumble his one and only poem at the beginning of the

banquet. Samurai so lacking in culture will be scorned at every turn for the remaining duration of the court, having shown themselves unworthy of their title.

The Bowman's Wager

The Bowman's Wager is traditionally considered the single greatest archery tournament in Rokugan (although in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Wasp Clan disputes that claim and puts forward its own tournament at Kyuden Ashinagabachi as the greater contest). The Bowman's Wager is a weeklong event held at each Winter Court, pitting highly-skilled samurai against one another for the title of the Empire's finest archer. Naturally, political games crackle away underneath the superficial contests of skill.

Each of the Great Clans is given three invitations to the Wager, while each Imperial family and Minor Clan receives one. Much like the invitations to the Winter Court itself, these invitations are answered as the delegation heads see fit, since while the personal glory goes to the bowman, his faction also benefits. By tradition, the invitations are given out on the first day of formal court, allowing everyone ample time to select competitors as they see fit. As one might imagine, this instigates a flurry of activity after the court ends for the day, as samurai offer and claim favors to try to win one of the invitations for themselves.

When court opens the next day, each delegation is expected to name its competitors. Each bowman steps forth, offers his invitation, and declares his name and intent to compete. The Imperial Herald accepts the invitation, determines if it is legitimate, and then signals the Chancellor, who publicly recognizes the invitation's validity and asks who sponsors the contestant. The sponsor steps forth and offers up a prize to the eventual winner.

These prizes are a key part of the competition, since a faction which offers a miserly or inappropriate prize will be shaming itself. They range from straightforward things like masterfully crafted bows, quivers, or arrows to unusual items or privileges, such as a Unicorn riding horse, entry into the Kakita Artisan school, or even a promise of a spouse from the sponsor's ruling family. The Chancellor may choose to decree the prize is unworthy of the contest or even to refuse the sponsorship of the contestant, but such actions are quite rare, since they carry significant political implications and can easily inflict enough shame to spawn permanent enmity.

Once all the contestants have been named, the invitations are tallied and any outstanding ones are called forth. At this time the owners of these invitations may choose to ask anyone to step forward and take up the invitation in their name, a humiliating act (and one made even worse if no one accepts). Still, it is preferable to leaving some invitations unfilled, a great embarrassment before the Emperor which will haunt that faction for the remainder of the season. A courtier who was unable to convince any guest to stand forth in the clan's name can expect his career to be finished and will most likely retire to a monastery once the Winter Court has ended.

The Bowman's Wager and Out-of-Clan Contestants

It is acceptable – if a bit unusual – for a delegation to sponsor a samurai not of its own clan. This is usually avoided mainly for reasons of reputation – selecting outside champions inevitably gives rise to whispers that the clan's martial skills are so poor it cannot find even three archers to fight for its name. However, victory can be a roar that drowns out such words. The Scorpion are known both for having a sharp eye for talent and for sending delegations to Winter Court that lack martial skills, so they sometimes find overlooked or ambitious samurai to take their place in the contest. The Otomo and Miya struggle to find even a single member of their family to step up, and thus must seek assistance elsewhere. The Minor Clans also struggle to send delegations that can compete, and often ask for others to stand in their place – though they are usually unable to offer much reward in return.

Regardless of the reason for competing, an outside contestant will be given a token of his sponsor, usually a band in the sponsor's colors worn as a headband or around the left arm. Should he win, the sponsor's clan is praised as having a fine eye for talent.

For contestants who are sponsored by another clan, a certain amount of conflict will arise when they must face their own cousins on the bowman's field. Indeed, clans never allow their samurai to shoot for another clan without sufficient inducement to off-set the potential embarrassment of being defeated by one of their own. Such conflicts are also popular themes for pillow-books, with stories about contestants who must face a sibling, a romantic rival, or even a true love in the final round and must choose between their clan's reputation and their own desire. There are also tales of samurai who have been prevented from accepting their own delegation's invitation by trickery or betrayal, only to have a different clan offer them a place in the contest – sometimes offering the invitation in a very public way. Does the samurai accept the gift, or refuse it and earn himself (and perhaps his clan) an enemy?

Finally, outside sponsorship for the Bowman's Wager is perhaps the single most common way for a ronin to be given an invitation to Winter Court – although even that is rare, sometimes occurring as seldom as once a generation.

The Bowman's Wager and the Wasp

Tsuruchi, the founder of the Wasp Clan, is quite possibly the greatest archer in the history of Rokugan. He entered the Bowman's Wager only once, and in the final round he faced a Lion archer named Matsu Agetoki, defeating him handily. Tsuruchi was offered many more chances to compete, but his reply was always to say simply: "I have already won my prize."

For years it was common for Wasp samurai to be sponsored in the Bowman's Wager by other clans, enriching the small minor clan greatly – indeed, it was not uncommon for many rounds to pit Wasp against Wasp under different sponsors. Even after the Wasp joined the Mantis Clan, archers of the Tsuruchi family still sometimes shoot for the highest bidder rather than simply representing the Mantis. The Yoritomo grudgingly accept this, since it does bring in more wealth and favor for the clan.

That night a grand feast is held in honor of the contestants, attended by the majority of the guests. There is much discussion of whose prizes are the most impressive and of which samurai are seen as the most likely winners, and no small degree of bragging is expected. Typically some small bets are also made (although these are seldom actual monetary bets, rather being wagers of favors, gifts, or similar things). If passions are running hot, such as when some of the clans are at war with each other, the boasting and betting can become quite intense as the evening runs on. Although the contestants all attend, they are also expected to leave early to rest up for the next day's contest.

On the third day the contestants are not expected to attend court, instead taking the time to practice and prepare for the competition. This is an opportunity for them to take stock of each other, and those who are clearly outmatched may actually be offered advice by the better archers, supposedly so as not to shame themselves when all eyes are watching. (Of course, this is also a chance for the better archers to subtly insult and demean their lessers.) When court ends for the day, the guests assemble at the archery range (usually placed in the main parade ground of the palace) to watch the contest unfold.

Each contestant is offered a bow (although they are permitted to politely refuse if they favor their own) and a quiver of ten arrows, each arrow of a color specific to that contestant. The first event is a simple one, firing arrows at a straw target at a reasonable distance. For each arrow that strikes the target true, the contestant is awarded one point, and the sixteen competitors with the most points proceed to the next round of the contest. The Imperial Herald acts as a neutral judge of the contest, tallying the scores and announcing who advances. As contestants are eliminated their invitations are removed from the board displaying all the names.

The contest continues into a fourth, fifth, and sixth day. During the fourth day, the same archery range is used but the targets are more distant. There are five targets, each further away than the previous one, and once a target is struck it may not be fired at again. If all five targets are struck and the contestant has arrows remaining, he scores an additional point for each arrow left unfired. These points are added to the total from the previous day, and the eight highest-scoring samurai advance to the next round.

During the fifth day, the contest becomes far more difficult. In this round ten arrows are again provided, but the archers are mounted on horseback and fire at ten different targets set along a course they must ride through at top speed. This evocation of the classic "way of the horse and bow" requires both good horsemanship and steady nerves to score well, and is often the point where contestants from smaller or poorer factions are eliminated (due to a lack of riding experience). The four contestants with the highest tally progress to the next round.

On the sixth day the contest finally leaves the confines of the palace grounds, moving to an empty field or wooded area nearby. The four remaining contestants stand in line abreast as caged animals are brought forth and released. Rabbits, flightless fowl, and birds are most commonly used, but deer, wild dogs, and cats are not unheard of. (On the extremely rare occasions that a Winter Court is held in Crab lands, the Crab use captured goblins for this round, an act of considerable scandal.) The archers must stay in place and bring down as many creatures as they can before the rest escape. Since the animals are generally fleeing as swiftly as they can, and their numbers are being reduced by the other competitors, it can be quite difficult to score many points here. Only a shot which brings an animal down scores a point – "winging" a target has no value. The two who score the most points advance to the final round.

The final two contestants and their sponsors are invited to a private dinner that night with the Emperor's highest ranking servants – the Jeweled Champions and the Emperor's Chosen. Some of the animals brought down in the contest may be served at the meal, if they are of appropriate type (e.g. birds). This is a rare opportunity for ordinary samurai to share the company of some of the most prestigious and powerful men and women in the land. The skills of the two finalists are praised, there is discussion of the competition thus far, and a certain level of politicking is expected between the sponsors and the Imperials. After all, an opportunity to speak directly with the Chosen and the Jeweled Champions is rare indeed, and no courtier of skill will turn down the chance to exert influence at this level.

It is customary for the final two sponsors to make a wager between themselves at this time, raising the stakes for the final contest. This will involve truly magnificent prizes, such as an invitation to study at the Kakita Dueling Academy, the gift of a famous *nemuranai*, or a marriage into the Clan Champion's bloodline. These wagers are of course witnessed by the Imperial authorities but are seldom even mentioned to anyone else.

On the seventh and final day, the contestants meet at the closing of court – thus, while other guests might miss the earlier rounds due to the demands of politics, all are able to witness the finale. This contest consists of each contestant taking it in turn to issue a specific challenge to the other – for example, asking the opponent to strike a specific leaf on a tree in the garden. The first challenge is issued by the contestant who had the highest point total when the round began. The Imperial Herald has the right to decide if a particular challenge is valid or not, and will dismiss inappropriate or impossible challenges (shaming the one who tried to issue them). If the Herald deems the challenge valid, the opponent must either perform it or decline. If he declines, the one who issued the challenge must perform it instead, showing he was able to pass his own challenge. Regardless of the outcome, the second contestant may now make a challenge to the first. This process continues, alternating challenges back and forth, until either someone accepts a challenge and fails to hit the target, or until someone declines two consecutive shots, at which point the winner is known.

To the winner go the spoils – or more accurately, to the sponsors of the winner go the spoils, though the sponsors typically leave most of the prizes to the contestant and take control only of those with political value, such as a marriage or invitation to a school. Some sponsors leave all the public wagers to the contestant, collecting for themselves only the private wager made on the sixth night.

The loser of the contest must take a drink of water from the Cup of Defeat. This cup, an ancient wooden bowl, is rumored to have been an offering from a man who tried to win the heart of Lady Doji and who filled it with his tears when Kakita won her hand. According to the legend, whoever drinks from the cup is afflicted with ill fortune for a year. Of course, to refuse to drink is a severe violation of etiquette. It may also be noted that while the contestant must drink, the sponsor does not.

The winner and his sponsor are given one final prize: a private dinner with the Emperor and his family, an opportunity whose value cannot be overstated. The Emperor sometimes grants a personal boon to a contestant who showed particular nobility above and beyond mere skill, a boon which no sponsor would ever dare take from the contestant's hand.

The Devil Chase

One of the last events during any Imperial Winter Court is the ritual of the Devil Chase, held on the final night of the court as winter turns to spring. All attending shugenja are invited to join the senior Seppun priests (including the family daimyo if he is a shugenja) for a communal meditation in the host's temples, gathering their strength and praying for the kami to grant them purity. During the Hour of the Ox, each shugenja puts on a display of magical power, showing their mastery of the kami to best advantage. Whichever shugenja most impresses the Seppun is granted the right to be the Devil Chaser.

When the morning sun rises, it is greeted by the Devil Chaser, who wears a golden mask, a bright red skirt, and carries an ancient bow and shield, artifacts of the Phoenix Clan said to have been owned by Asako herself. The Devil Chaser cavorts through the halls of the palace, singing, dancing, plucking the bow string, and slapping the bow against the shield to make a terrible racket. While some find the entire ceremony amusing or even degrading, the Phoenix treat it very seriously indeed, believing that the Devil Chaser gains great powers on this one day. The Phoenix claim the Devil Chaser drives out all Tainted creatures from the palace, be they spirit, oni, or beast, overwhelming them with pain and fear. The same power cleanses the roads leading away from the palace, allowing the Emperor to travel safely back to his home. The Phoenix believe these blessings last for months afterward, making it impossible for Tainted creatures and evil spirits to enter the palace or disturb the roads. They also believe the shugenja who wears the Devil Chaser's attire is protected from evil for a year, granting him resistance to fear and *maho* alike.

Dueling in Winter

In a gathering of at least a hundred samurai of differing clans and factions, often trapped indoors for days or weeks at a time, it is little surprise that tempers flare. Dueling might not be truly commonplace in Winter Court, but it is hardly uncommon either. In the early days of the court, demonstration duels are a frequent source of both entertainment and honorable competition. Later, as the winter wears on, the politics grown more intense, tempers become frayed, duels of honor become more frequent and are more likely to be dangerous or lethal. Although most delegation heads prefer these duels to be to the first blood, they are empowered to authorize duels to the death if they

Does the Devil Chase Really Work?

It is up to the GM whether or not the Devil Chase has any genuine effect or is merely a long-standing custom/superstition. The artifacts used by the Devil Chase shugenja likewise may be merely ancient items of art or actual *nemuranai* relics with great power. Much of this depends on how "magical" the GM wants Rokugan to be. If the GM is running a campaign in which relics and magical powers are widespread, it will be appropriate not only to let the Devil Chase itself take effect but also to imbue the relics with a variety of powers.

For example, perhaps the relics react to the presence of the Taint, burning to death any person holding them who has the touch of Jigoku. This could allow a very dramatic conclusion to an adventure in which the PCs have been trying to ferret out a corrupted infiltrator within the Winter Court.

see fit. In most years, the Winter Court will see one or two duels to the death, often just past midway in the season, when tensions have built to the breaking point. Once a samurai dies, it tends to drain much of the stress away; unlike their bushi counterparts, courtiers usually have little stomach for witnessing death. However, in years of war or intense political conflict, or when samurai with blood feuds come to court together, there can be several duels to the death in a single season – not to mention new blood feuds starting.

Due to the relative commonness of non-lethal duels at Winter Court and the high political stakes often involved with them, every delegation tries to bring at least one duelist to the Winter Court. There is always a certain amount of competitive interplay between these duelists, even when their clans are allied, and the courtiers strive to keep this aggression in check until the time is right. Sparring does happen, but is discouraged due to the risk that the duelists may get carried away and injure or even kill each other in "training accidents." Of course, it is dangerous to openly suggest a duelist has so little control as to cause injury in sparring, but the problem is acknowledged without ever speaking of it aloud. Instead, dueling techniques are showcased in the form of challenges. How many cuts can a samurai make in a single leaf before it falls to the ground? Can he cut open a peapod without nicking the peas within? How many tatami mats might a samurai cleave in a single blow? This allows competitive comparisons between samurai without the risk of injury (or embarrassing losses of control).

Illegal duels have been known to occur at Winter Court, although this is rare due to the intense pressure to avoid ruinous dishonor or public embarrassment. A samurai who puts his own desire for vengeance over his lord's political goals is of no use to anyone, and should an illegal duel result in death the victor will find himself in truly dire straits – in some ways worse than the fate of the slain. (Of course, there are also circumstances when an "illegal" duel is the only proper response to an event, such as when a samurai commits a crime in public view and must be immediately called out to preserve societal standards. But such incidents are truly exceptional, and cannot be considered normal in any way.) To be sure, if the loser of an illegal lethal duel simply disappears, there has been no crime... but the killer had best hope the body is not discovered before the end of the Winter Court.

Philosophy, the Duel of Ideas

Philosophical debate is an often overlooked aspect of Winter Court, and is not present in every court. These talks rarely happen in the main chambers of court, since they are matters of logic and scholarly knowledge, not politics, and scholars are loathe to see their lessons twisted for political gain. When such a debate does happen, it is most often in the gardens (the Scholar's Garden if the palace has one), in the main court chambers after hours, in private quarters, or in an inn or geisha house outside the palace itself. Topics may be as wide-ranging as the nature of life, the origin of the kami, the history of the Empire, the nature and role of the law, the superiority of one Bushido Virtue over another, or the obscure details of color patterns on a butterfly. Ideas are advanced, dismantled, and rebuilt, explored from every angle the participants choose. Some of these talks can verge upon blasphemy (a problem partially evaded by describing them as 'mere mental exercises'), but most are of a less controversial nature. Those known for presenting strong arguments and deflecting others' positions in these discussions can garner quite a reputation, and their thoughts may even be inscribed and passed down for generations of future scholars to study. The Imperial Advisor himself sometimes visits these debates, even if he does not participate directly, instead casually browsing the garden or reading old scrolls while debate rages nearby.

Many attribute the origins of philosophical debate to the Phoenix and Scorpion, whose twin founders were known for their love of intellectual pursuits, and they remain the primary intellectuals of the modern Empire. Still, every clan has a few great philosophers in its halls, and on certain topics the strengths of the other clans can come to the fore. Few can best a Crane in a discussion of artistic theory, or a Lion in a discussion of Bushido.

Duels of Strategy

The love of Go among Rokugani cannot be exaggerated. It is the one game played by Emperors and peasants alike, used by monks to describe the spiritual world and by bushi to describe the mundane realm. Young and old, rich

and poor, all are united by Go. For this reason, *Goban* (Go playing boards) are found at every court, allowing samurai to enjoy simple entertainment and intellectual competition regardless of clan. Discussions during and around these games can range from the simple to the sublime, from genuine compliments to threats to romantic flirtations, all couched in the language of the game. Just as knowledge of poetry separates a samurai from a common brute, so too does knowledge of Go separate the brilliant samurai from the dullard. Every Winter Court features a Go tournament between the guests, an event not only of prestige but also of opportunity – the participants are given much time in one another's presence, allowing for unusual negotiations to be held over the table when meetings might otherwise be inconvenient or controversial. Should two samurai be from clans at war with each other, it might be inappropriate or suspicious for them to meet in private, but if they instead meet over a game of Go, they can speak readily enough – indeed it would be rude to not speak while playing. Similarly, there have been many nights where samurai and samurai-ko of different clans play Go in the moonlight, an honorable recreation that could never give rise to rumors of tawdry romance.

Materials used in a Go set – the board, the stones, and the containers to store the stones – signify both one's wealth and one's dedication to the great game, so every host is proud to bring the best sets out for the tournament and indeed for any game against a skilled opponent. It may be noted that while a skilled guest is expected to try to win, it is unseemly to embarrass one's host with a brutal defeat. Conversely, of course, it is also insulting to clearly play below one's skill level to let the host win, so a Go player must tread a fine line to avoid giving insult.

It should be noted here that every Emperor plays Go, some of them being quite good at it. However, it is extremely rare for a samurai to be asked to play the Emperor in public. The social repercussions of playing too well (or not well enough) against the Son of Heaven are greater by orders of magnitude. Thankfully, few Emperors are thoughtless or cruel enough to call for a game in the full view of others. Private games are another matter entirely, and players who show themselves skilled in the Winter Court tournament may be invited to meet the Emperor for such a game – a great honor indeed.

Sometimes the Emperor asks a low-ranking samurai to join him for a game, perhaps suggesting that a particular move caught his eye irrespective of the samurai's skill (or lack of it). The Emperor uses this opportunity to question this minor vassal, a rare opportunity to speak with a "normal" samurai rather than the Imperials and other high-ranking figures who normally surround and ensconce the Son of Heaven. A samurai so chosen can expect to be the talk of the court for days, if not weeks. Of course, since the samurai has been invited for an honest discussion over a friendly game – and since most Emperors are quite good at Go – it is expected that the invited samurai will lose the match.

Kemari

Perhaps the single most unusual contest at Winter Court is the game of Kemari. This highly athletic contest is a game where several participants gather in a rough circle, kicking and striking a large ball between them, with the goal of keeping the ball from striking the ground. They can hit the ball with any part of the body but the hands. Since Kemari is considered a court game, the participants are expected to play in full court finery, with kimono and peaked cap. Maintaining one's dignity in such garb while performing the athletic moves required to play the game is considered no less difficult – perhaps more so – than

Shogi and the Court

In contrast with the enduring and near-universal popularity of Go, the strategic game of Shogi has never been a popular court game. In part this is because it does not come to the Empire until the Unicorn bring it back with them in the early ninth century. However, it is also because the game's nature makes it inherently more limited in its appeal. It is favored by the Lion, of course, which has likely also made it less popular as a court tradition – though when the Lion host Winter Court, it can be expected that many tables will be set with Shogi boards, indeed as many as are for Go. For most non-Lion, the response to the game is simple: If one wants to command armies, then one simply does so, rather than trying to imitate them on a board. The Lion dismiss this arrogance, fully aware that a general must practice strategy just as much as a samurai must practice the swing of his sword. Only the Unicorn, who brought the game to Rokugan in the first place, commonly share the Lion belief in the game's value, while the Miya tend to pick up the basics for the sake of politeness.

the game itself. It should be noted that there is no special tournament for Kemari, nor is there any real function of the game save simple entertainment. Sometimes even the most focused courtiers need to unwind.

Sumai

The Sumai wrestling contest that takes place during Winter Court are both entertainment and ritual, watched by the guests but seldom participated in by them. All regular activity of Winter Court ceases for the week of the tournament, giving full respect to the sumai wrestlers and their noble sport. The sumai are formed into two teams, East and West, and by tradition all of the wrestlers at Winter Court are yokuzuna, the highest rank of sumai wrestler. Seventeen bouts are fought in all; each actual fight is brief, sometimes measured in mere seconds, but the rituals and blessings before and after can last for hours. It is said these long rituals call forth spirits, both friendly and foul, who are either driven out if they are evil or inspired by the battle if they are pure. Should the East win, it is believed the next year will be one of great bounty and success, while a year that follows a Western win will be one of conflict and strife... but also of opportunity.

It is far more common for the East to win, although the score is usually close (typically 9-8 or 10-7). Some cynical courtiers have been known to suggest the outcome is pre-arranged, although no one would directly insult a sumai master by suggesting such a thing to his face. The West does win roughly once per decade, and on extremely rare occasions the West has been known to win twice in a row (this actually happened on two separate occasions during the reign of Hantei XXXVIII, and the last time was in the two winters before the Scorpion Clan Coup).

The winner of the deciding contest is traditionally awarded an ornate bow of the highest quality, after which he performs the *Bugaku*, a complex song and dance that celebrates the win and promises the spirits evoked by the tournament that those who bless the Empire will be rewarded by Heaven, while those who seek to harm it must face the wrath of the divine realm.

The Winter Court Sumai tournament takes place in a special *dohyo*, a clay ring created specifically for the event. This is usually located near the largest temple in the area, but may be placed in the training grounds if no other land is available. (This option requires more purification rituals and is believed to result in the West winning more often, so is avoided when possible.) The tournament is always held outdoors and at the end of the month of Hida, just as it gives way to Togashi, a cold and inhospitable season for the audience – but not for the Sumai wrestlers themselves, protected as they are by their size. The matches are watched avidly and are discussed for many days before and after the event itself.

The Theater of Politics and the Art of Diplomacy

The primary purpose of Winter Court is to conduct diplomacy, winning through negotiation rather than through war, but there are also many, many other political activities during the winter. Economic agreements, alliances and pledges of support, marriage arrangements, shaming and eliminating rivals, exchanging hostages, winning prestige for both one's lord and one's self... the list goes on. Not to mention religious activities such as veneration of the ancestors, building new temples and shrines, and interpreting the latest set of omens and astrological signs.

When most Rokugani think of the Imperial Winter Court, they think of political theater: courtiers strutting about in fancy kimono like peacocks, making thinly veiled insults while fluttering their fans, delivering impassioned speeches while standing on the dais. Like many things in Rokugani life, this is at once both true and false. Public posturing and fiery diatribes are far less common than one would expect, but they do occur. A courtier may wish to call another guest's poor behavior out, forcing them to speak for their actions or to find another to step up and claim responsibility. A samurai may feel his honor has been slighted in some way and wish to ask for a public apology, or a samurai may wish to publicly embarrass someone else over a slight – real or imagined. Since the Emperor is usually attending the court, a public display can draw the Throne's attention to the matter, setting forth a case and seeking the Emperor's intervention and wisdom. These sorts of posturing are easy to dismiss as pure theater, but – as the Crab and Lion have found more than once – the image and opinions they form in the court can matter a great deal. Allowing accusations to go by without a reply, especially in the eyes of the Emperor, can result in a decline in reputation, to the point where diplomats who were once friendly now are hostile and inaccessible.

During the Winter Court, every delegation is expected – at the very least – to publicly thank the host, praise the Emperor, and present gifts to friends and allies, all of which require the services of a skilled public speaker. However, a public speaker is also required to answer the various sorts of political theater which may take place in the Emperor's court. Besides the machinations of rival clans, the Otomo also have a tendency to raise topics publicly before the Imperial dais, often couching their remarks in terms of seeking to expose or suppress rumors, e.g. an announcement of "I have heard that..." followed by an invitation for the members of the court to respond. In some cases, the Emperor himself may wish to hear a discussion of a topic without directly saying so and thus uses an Otomo as a proxy, while on other occasions the Otomo themselves may wish to stir up the court or sow dissent. On a lighter note, the Otomo might simply wish to explore a particular topic in greater detail, such as having been moved by a poem the previous day and encouraging further discussion of it.

Such public debates and displays of rhetoric also allow clans to bring a point of contention before the Emperor, either to seek redress or to clearly establish that if no settlement is reached there will be war. Responsibility for a failed marriage negotiation, land and border disputes, and personal matters of honor can all fall into this category, with one side showing injury and demanding restitution while the other dismisses the claims or insists that previous arrangements were sufficient. The Emperor may or may not be drawn into such conflicts – typically, the Son of Heaven merely watches while these matters are settled by the parties in question, but sometimes he will intervene personally, potentially bringing the conflict to an immediate end. If the Emperor avoids the matter (as is more common), the arguments and speeches set forth before the court can help persuade potential allies or intimidate those who might support the opposing side.

It can be easy to dismiss the theatrics of court as little more than meaningless showmanship, but in truth these posturing and speeches can have a tremendous impact in a society where appearances often trump reality. A samurai who is unable to effectively defend himself from a courtier's wrathful attack in the full view of the assembled court may find himself ruined in an instant. Conversely, a courtier may improve a samurai's standing by deliberately starting an argument that is favorable to the samurai, putting up a valiant battle and then conceding defeat publicly, sacrificing his own repute in order to enhance another's standing. (This is a favored tactic by the most subtle of courtiers, especially the Crane and Scorpion.)

Private Diplomacy

While political theater is important, it is in private diplomacy that most of the real work at the court gets done. Matters of commerce and trade are negotiated, resources are "bought" and "sold," military support is pledged or withheld, and marriages and hostages are promised. This is especially important for clans and families which are heavily involved in commerce, such as the Crab Clan's Yasuki family or the Mantis Clan, since commerce is a topic which samurai try to avoid in public. Moreover, it is in private that courtiers can speak without the need to maintain public postures of enmity or alliance. Indeed, samurai who are bitter enemies on the floor of the court chamber may actually be the best of friends behind closed doors, laughing together over a meal and making important deals, fully aware that the next day they will once again insult one another's intelligence and honesty in the court's public eye.

To be sure, there is a degree of political theater even in private meetings, depending on how well the participants know one another and how many samurai are gathered in one place. The larger the meeting, the more "public" it will

The Process of Private Diplomacy

A Crane and Phoenix samurai each have each been chosen by the respective delegations to make private diplomatic contact. They meet a half-dozen times, sharing dinner, taking strolls through the gardens, talking obliquely of matters philosophical, gossiping of the day's events, and generally building rapport. Finally, with a connection well established and each side confident of the other's honor, the Crane mentions his clan is facing a shortage of paper. The Phoenix notes that his clan has a bountiful supply of trees but is cursed with a lack of buyers. Since most samurai are loathe to directly oversee matters of lowly commerce, the proper response is a simple statement: "I'll send a servant over to deal with such matters." This may seem a casual result from weeks of meetings, but both samurai understand the importance of what has been agreed. Commoner agents can hammer out the details of numbers and budgets while the samurai resume their talk of more refined matters.

become in mannerisms and behavior. A meeting between two full clan delegations will be filled with ostentatiously sincere talk and inflected meaning, while one between one samurai from each delegation will be shorn of distractions and focused more tightly on the deal under discussion.

Of course, one does not simply walk up to a delegation head and ask for a private meeting. When two groups wish to arrange private meetings for sincere negotiation, the delegation head will pass his thoughts and ideas on to his lieutenants, who will in turn select useful lesser agents and send them forth to make contact with the other side. As in many things in Rokugani society, speed is not essential, and matters are allowed to unfold naturally as trust and understanding are slowly built up between the parties.

At first, meetings between the clans go slowly as these low-level guest mingle with one another, making small political gains (and perhaps committing a few small errors), getting a general feel for what the other side is seeking. Eventually a meeting will be arranged between two of the more senior samurai, often with their lower-status minions attending as well. If this meeting goes poorly, it will be assumed to be the fault of these junior members of the entourage, while if it goes well, the senior samurai take credit – but the junior members will be trusted with more duties thereafter. If further meetings between these higher-status "lieutenants" continue to go well, eventually the senior members of each delegation will come in to meet directly with each other, making general decisions but leaving the particulars to their seconds. In this way future diplomats are forged or cast aside as needed.

In general, the delegation head is empowered to have final word on any important matter, but lower-ranking samurai can sometimes have final say over a matter which falls entirely within their purview. In theory a Clan Champion can overrule any decision made at Winter Court, but most are loathe to do so, since this shames their followers and causes the clan a major loss of face. Unfortunate promises made by junior members of a delegation can be dismissed in various ways, such as claiming an ignorant samurai 'misspoke' or was 'unaware of the particulars.' This is of course greatly damaging to the junior samurai's reputation, and thus most samurai strive to never make promises that cannot be delivered on. Conversely, the senior samurai must pay attention to what their juniors are discussing, since those low-ranking members of the delegation do the majority of the diplomatic work and if they fail it can damage the entire clan. A popular parable speaks of a slothful Ikoma who never bothered overseeing his delegation's meeting with the Yasuki, then later saw his family cut down in war by Daidoji arrows because his clan lacked steel to make proper armor.

The Places in Between

Hammered into the heads of all diplomats attending Winter Court is that they are there to serve their clan and their family... but such times also allow many chances for personal glory. Few samurai ever get to show their skills in front of so many high-ranking members of their own clan, let alone the other clans and the Emperor. To excel under such conditions can bring great reward (while a spectacular failure can bring ruin), and the Fortunes smile

on the bold. A bushi who wins numerous games of Go on the court chamber's balcony might gain enough of a reputation to be asked to play a game before the Emperor so all might learn from his skill. If his game was truly impressive, he might even be asked to play against a member of the Emperor's Chosen, or even the Emperor himself. Of course, this is a most stressful situation, a high-stakes display of talent in front of the entire court, and a poor choice may lead to seppuku.

Both in contests before the assembled guests and in semi-private displays open to a select few, samurai can make their own personal claim to fame. This can be especially appealing for bushi, trapped for months with viper-tongued courtiers and their fluttering fans, longing for a simple chance to display his talents. Similarly, scholars with little patience for political theater can seek fame through debates over philosophy, the Tao, or law, displaying their erudition before the court and building a reputation of their own.

With so much time spent in each other's company, in private rooms or under starlit skies, samurai may also pursue another type of fame: courtly romance. Rumors of such romances are one of the favorite types of gossip. Actual dalliances are not so widespread as the rumors about them, but they are still widespread. In some cases, a courtier may actively pursue a romance in order to smooth negotiations with another faction.

Rarer than romances – but considerably more valuable – are personal friendships built up over the course of the winter or several winters in a row. These friendships can endure for years, maintained with letters during the other seasons, becoming linchpins for long-term successful relations between the clans involved. Of course, for every real friendship there are also those samurai whose smiling faces hide vicious hearts and who happily spend time with those they hate so they can gather vital information and serve the clan. Such is the risk of taking those outside the clan into your trust.

Exchanges of Hostages

One of the often-overlooked aspects of Winter Court is the exchange of hostages between the clans. While most such exchanges happen in the spring when courtiers return from Winter Court with new agreements, hostages of higher status (such as the children of Clan Champions or family daimyo) are exchanged at the end of Winter Court itself. While the shugenja prepare for the Devil Chase, a courtier from each family will quietly attend the other delegation, the two delegations will meet in the court chamber one final time, and the hostages walk past each other to stand beside the delegation of the clan which will now host them. The hostages are expected to dress in the colors of their host clan, symbolizing their submission and acceptance of their role. This exchange method is used both to present new hostages and to return them to their family later, and the Miya always watch over such events to ensure no blood is spilled.

Trade and Commerce at Winter Court

One of the most important but least-discussed aspects of Winter Court is the establishment, expansion, and facilitation of trade, usually via deals made quietly behind closed doors. Negotiations are usually conducted by low-ranking samurai of the clans, quietly working their way through the particulars, often with the assistance of one or more commoner vassals who are active merchants. If these underlings produce deals which seem prudent, the more senior members of their delegation will hold a formal meeting with each other to judge the deal's value and effectiveness. Eventually, if negotiations proceed successfully, the deal will be presented to the heads of the two delegations for approval or rejection.

Of course, Rokugani culture views such matters of commerce as beneath the dignity of a proper samurai. This is why the haggling and bargaining is done by the lowest-ranking samurai and their merchant proxies, with the more dignified and influential senior samurai merely passing judgment on the results. The leader's contribution is usually on the political level, such as knowing who else is making offers, which clans are facing shortages or enjoying surpluses for the year, and which vassals in the other clans are ambitious or greedy enough to be bought.

Matchmaking

"Kakita Shigero? Yes, I know the boy. His mother was a cousin of Doji Hayahime, and her father was Doji Gennu – you know, the one who commanded the fleet against that pirate wako. Well-connected, certainly, but there's ill health in the family. I wouldn't recommend him." – Doji Korakami, NAKODO

Marriage alliances are the lifeblood of Rokugani politics and one of the most important matters to discuss at every Winter Court. When armies move on the field, when merchant patrons strike deals, the friendships and obligations that bind alliances together often have their roots in an earlier wedding. By marrying the son of one lineage to the daughter of another, samurai can create solidarity within a family, within a clan, and within the Empire as a whole.

Loyalty is the iron from which these connections are forged. A woman who marries into another household does not forget where she came from, and a husband will not be quick to offend his wife's parents, siblings, and cousins. If the wife's father calls for support in a skirmish against a neighbor, duty may oblige the husband to comply. If he negotiates with his mother's brother for a piece of land, respect may encourage him to accept a weaker bargain than otherwise. If he hosts a gathering, what boor would not invite those to whom he is bound by marriage and blood? Nor do such forces flow only one way: by marrying well, a man puts himself into a position to call on his new kin for favors and aid.

Little wonder, then, that courtiers place such a premium on marriage arrangements, and that samurai families put so much effort into arranging beneficial marriages for their children rather than leaving such matters to chance. Quite apart from the suspicion with which the Rokugani view romantic love, carelessness in betrothals can leave a family without the support it needs at vital moments. The outcome of an entire war might be determined by the presence (or lack) of an advantageous marriage. Even for those samurai whose lives will not change the course of history, the small effects of a good marriage alliance or a bad one can mean the difference between social success and shameful failure.

The Role of the Nakodo

"When crossing a river, make certain you choose a well-constructed bridge." – Ikoma Tachi

Because politeness often means being indirect, many families employ a go-between known as a *nakodo* to aid them in arranging marriages. The *nakodo* can potentially lend assistance at many stages of the process – choosing prospective candidates, making the necessary introductions, and negotiating the terms of the marriage itself.

For families with few resources the *nakodo* may simply be a well-connected friend or even a family member. In such cases the marital net is rarely thrown far; the prospective husband or wife may be a cousin by marriage, a relative's neighbor, or the child of another family in town. Those who are ambitious to better their position, however, or who possess enough influence for their marriages to matter, employ the services of a dedicated matchmaker.

Which *nakodo* are the best depends heavily on the circumstances. After all, it does no good to consult a matchmaker whose realm of expertise is with the Kakita family if one is looking for a marriage with the Matsu. However, there are certain families whose *nakodo* have won particular repute across the Empire. For the forging of political alliances outside their clan the Doji matchmakers are unparalleled. The Ikoma know more about lineages than any other, while the Bayushi excel at uncovering the liabilities of any prospective match. It is extremely rare for samurai to engage the services of matchmakers outside their own clan, no matter how skilled they may be. The Doji sometimes broker the services of their famous matchmakers via political favors; those who cannot afford such help and wish to marry into another clan must search for a *nakodo* within their own clan who knows the family in question.

Most dedicated matchmakers are courtiers, intricately bound into the web of political connections, and many of them are women. They possess extensive knowledge of eligible samurai and can easily gather more as needed. Moreover, they know what their clients can offer to potential spouses – often better than the clients themselves know. A Doji girl of low status might seem to have little to recommend her to those in positions of power, but the *nakodo* might be aware of a prominent Asahina lineage whose connection to the kami seems to be waning. The girl herself is not a shugenja, but her mother was an Isawa; perhaps an alliance with her would help to revitalize the bloodline. Or perhaps the *nakodo* has been approached in confidence

by a Bayushi widower whose poor decisions have put him badly in debt to some of his fellow Scorpion. He would never be so crass as to say outright that he needs a wealthy wife to rescue him, but the *nakodo* knows which potential brides want to trade their koku for greater respectability, and puts them in touch.

When it comes to weighing potential matches, the list of factors a *nakodo* may consider is all but endless. Apart from obvious criteria such as age and status, the families may be in the market for more specific targets. They may want a son-in-law or daughter-in-law who has been trained in a particular school, or who lives in a particular city, both of which requirements can open up many opportunities for political advantage. The prospective spouse's own familial relationships are a key factor, since they may bring further connections... or risk chaining the client to someone undesirable. Some lineages exhibit desirable characteristics (often manifested in game terms as particular Advantages) that might be passed on to children. The parents may want someone with artistic accomplishments, wealth, or a glorious reputation. Some seek a candidate with great beauty or an honorable nature; others quietly admit they would rather have a plainer face or a greater degree of moral flexibility. Skilled *nakodo* can even dig up dark secrets before they become a problem, weed out lecherous or dishonorable prospects, or identify those afflicted with hereditary ailments.

Conscientious parents, especially among the Phoenix, also consider spiritual matters. Not all *nakodo* practice divination, but they can discreetly inquire after the year, month, day, and hour of a child's birth, then pass this information on to an astrologer who will calculate whether a potential match is auspicious or otherwise. (Unscrupulous or desperate families will sometimes attempt to conceal the true date of birth if it is so ill-omened as to drive interested parties away.) Even the kanji used to write a person's name may become a factor, if the number of brush-strokes combines poorly with those of the intended partner. More than one samurai youngster has taken a more auspiciously-written name at gempukku in order for a marriage to go through.

Not all families engage a *nakodo*, of course. Some prefer to assemble a list of candidates themselves, sorting them into order of desirability. When the time comes to approach the first choice, however, almost all samurai still rely on a go-between, in a process known as *omiai*.

Omiai: "Meet and Look"

"Look three times, and then decide." – Asako Reiko

The proper arrangement of a marriage is not simply a matter of offering and being accepted. To conduct it gracefully requires many steps, with opportunities along the way for either party to back out without giving insult or losing face. Here, even more than in the initial choice of candidates, the *nakodo*'s services show their true value.

First she approaches the parents of the top candidate and presents her clients' interest. If the family is amenable to further inquiry, she arranges for each family to see the other's prospective spouse. This may be done with paintings, especially when long distances are involved, but the Crane in particular enjoy the practice of a "hidden look." In these instances, the *nakodo* engineers a chance for the man to observe his proposed wife without the two formally meeting. He may see her from a discreet distance as she strolls through a public garden, or he may even be hidden behind a shoji screen when she visits the house of a friend. Such incidents have been the inspiration for countless plays and poems – not only in the expected romantic manner, but also for comedic effect when the hapless suitor mistakes another woman for his prospective bride.

Presuming the "first look" is a success, the *nakodo* will then schedule a formal meeting between both families, giving the parents on each side a chance to evaluate their child's future spouse for themselves. It is this meeting which gives rise to the term *omiai*, or "meet and look." The would-be bride and groom often speak very little during such encounters, though if the process goes well they may be sent into the garden or to the other side of the room to walk together and converse a bit.

This first meeting is followed by a series of others, usually at least three in total. (If the process drags on for too long, however, this is considered a sign of trouble.) The formal structure of *omiai* and the role of the *nakodo* mean a family may withdraw interest without giving offense; however, if they have neither made an offer nor backed away completely, some other factor is at work that must be resolved before it leads to embarrassment for all.

Should the *omiai* process end in success, the *nakodo*'s final assistance is negotiating the terms of the marriage itself. This includes both the gifts exchanged during the *yuino* (the betrothal ceremony) and any specific issues that must be settled between the two families. Here the matchmaker provides little direct input; her duty is to ease negotiations by saving each side from having to make direct demands or refusals. This promotes harmony between the two families and helps ensure a successful marriage.

Although this is the ideal form of the *omiai* process (and for many Rokugani is considered the ideal way to arrange a match), not all Rokugani marriages follow the pattern. In truly influential families, parents may arrange betrothals before their children are even old enough to walk, rendering the personal evaluations of a *nakodo* irrelevant. The qualities of the families rather than the spouses themselves take supreme precedence. By contrast, adult samurai whose parents have failed to arrange their marriage may go through an *omiai* on their own, relying heavily on the assistance of the *nakodo*. The same is often true of widows and widowers seeking a new spouse (a common occurrence in times of war or plague). Finally, not every samurai family insists on arranging marriages for its children. The Dragon in particular are noted for allowing samurai to choose their own partners, perhaps even on the basis of love; the Crab, Mantis, and Phoenix also frequently take a more relaxed attitude, especially toward the disposition of younger children if their older siblings have made advantageous matches.

Marriage Gifts

"Your generosity is too much, Tamori-san. I could not possibly accept." – *Mirumoto Hirami*

No important endeavor in Rokugani society is complete without gifts, and the process of betrothal and marriage is no exception. Parents would never dream of paying a *nakodo* for her services, but it would be rude in the extreme for them not to present her with a gift to show their gratitude. Families likewise exchange small gifts during the first *omiai* meeting, as do the prospective bride and groom; these are often culinary delicacies or other ephemeral things.

Once the marriage has been agreed upon, the exchange of gifts during the yuino formalizes the promise. Each clan has its own traditions for suitable betrothal gifts, typically chosen for their symbolic meaning. Some of the more common ones include clam shells to represent longevity, dried kelp to show a wish for healthy children, or dried cuttlefish to express a wish for a long marriage. Dried bonito indicates virility, while a fan indicates a happy future, with its spread symbolizing growth. A thread of white hemp stands for the hope that the couple will grow old and white-haired together.

For wedding gifts, the guests likewise pay attention to the symbolic weight of their presentations. The choice of aesthetic motif often means more than the form of the gift itself. The Crane make extensive use of images of their namesake bird, which is associated with long and healthy life, while the rest of the clans are more inclined to use images of the turtle, whose associations are similar. Bonsai pine trees are especially popular among the Dragon, to whom they represent fidelity and patience (the word for "pine" is a homophone for the verb "to wait"). Others give gifts made from bamboo – another symbol of longevity – or from plums or the wood of the plum tree (these are the first to bloom in spring, and therefore represent new hope). Regardless of the item, Rokugani always give them in odd numbers. Even numbers can be easily divided and represent completion, so are thought to doom the marriage to a swift ending.

The two families also exchange gifts at the wedding, along with a dowry – traditionally, paid to the family which has the upper hand in the marriage alliance. Whichever family is bestowing the dowry, this "gift" is rarely a physical item given during the wedding celebration, instead taking the form of land, holdings, koku, or other substantial investments. The dowry is in many ways the true symbol of the political bonds formed by the marriage, far more so than anything that can be put on display.

After Marriage

"The planting of the seed is the easy part. Cultivation takes effort." - *Ide Aetsu*

Marriage usually entails a name change (as when Shosuro Kachiko became Bayushi Kachiko), and which spouse takes which name is often a point of negotiation during the matchmaking process. If one spouse has higher social status, the other will almost always take that family name. If status is roughly equal, a samurai who has been trained in a dojo run by the family into which he is marrying is more likely to take that name. Specific traditions may also apply, such as the Matsu convention of always insisting on keeping their names when they marry others. Regardless of nomenclature, however, samurai generally maintain a strong loyalty to their own kin. An Ide bride who marries into the Shiba will henceforth serve a Shiba lord, and honor demands she do so with complete sincerity – but such service does not make her a Phoenix. To herself – and to a lesser extent to those around her – she is and always will be a Unicorn.

The nature of the couple's relationship after marriage varies widely, depending not only on their individual circumstances but also their clan and on other traditions. For example, many samurai families allow men to keep official concubines in order to ensure they perpetuate their bloodlines. Such women often maintain their own households, paid for by their lovers – indeed, this is seen as a means of displaying one's wealth and influence. Alternatively, a man may also take a concubine if his wife proves barren. An official concubine's children are considered legitimate and can even be placed ahead of children borne by the wife – although this is quite likely to produce bitter enmity with both the wife and her family. Regardless, keeping concubines is not considered dishonorable so long as it is done properly, in accordance with social convention and without creating public incident or scandal. (Women, unfortunately, have much less leeway owing to the necessity of ensuring their children are legitimate.)

It may be noted that not all marriages last. The Rokugani do not believe a wedding makes a husband and wife into one soul and one flesh; a marriage is an alliance between two families,

and sometimes alliances fail. Personal strife alone is not considered grounds for divorce (unless one or both spouses have considerable political leverage); whatever personal difficulty a married couple may suffer, they are expected to bear it stoically and betray no hint of their troubles to the outside world. However, a political falling-out between their families may end their marriage regardless of their personal feelings. This most often happens in the first year or two after the wedding as the families attempt to settle into partnership... and sometimes find they cannot.

Whatever the reason, divorce usually requires only the permission of the relevant lords and the return of the dowry. Once a couple has children, however, separation becomes all but unheard of.

Masters of the Court

Over the history of Rokugan, numerous individuals have distinguished themselves in Rokugan's political world. Some of these notables have been described in previous L5R 4th Edition supplements such as *The Great Clans* and *Imperial Histories*. This section describes several other great courtiers, politicians, and social trend-setters in the Empire's twelve-century history.

Bayushi Kaukatsu

"Kaukatsu is a predator, and the court is his hunting ground." – *Kakita Munemori*

Bayushi Kaukatsu was proof that a courtier's power, wielded through influence and cunning, can oftentimes best any skill of arms. He overcame all manner of adversity over the course of his life, and his dogged tenacity and gift for manipulation finally elevated him to the position of Imperial Chancellor, one of the most powerful of the Emperor's Chosen. He used that position to shape Rokugan in a way no bushi could.

Kaukatsu was the son and favored student of Bayushi Goshiu, whose own court career was all but ruined by the Scorpion's Clan dissolution after the failed coup in the year 1123. However, Goshiu was able to remain in the courts as a sort of "tame Scorpion," manipulating those who believed him helpless and alone. Kaukatsu watched and learned as his father destroyed enemies who never even realized he was a threat. Later, after the Scorpion were reinstated, Kaukatsu himself entered the courts with a thorough understanding of how dangerous secrets and influence could be. He developed a personal spy network and became a master of blackmail, rumor, and coercion.

Over the course of many years in the court, Kaukatsu acquired a reputation as one of the most dangerous men in Rokugani politics, ranked alongside masterminds such as Ide Tadaji and Ikoma Sume. These three engaged in many entertaining political games, pitting various pawns and resources against one another. Other players came and went, but no one else could touch the abilities of these three.

After the death of Emperor Toturi I, the Otomo family arranged for the appointment of Kaukatsu to the position of Imperial Chancellor, hoping such a capable politician would be able to maintain the strength and respect of the Imperial Court in the absence of an Emperor. His intensive influence and spy network did much to maintain respect for the power of the Throne. Kaukatsu was personally responsible for the Scorpion domination of the Imperial Court during the Four Winds era, and supported Toturi Naseru while also frequently acting as an emissary between all four feuding heirs. He personally moved to the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari, effectively relocating a large portion of the Imperial court there as well and making the City of Lies one of the centers of Imperial authority. He also blunted Unicorn influence in the city, reducing their control from tenuous to nonexistent within the span of a few months.

During this time the Scorpion clan faced the internal threat of Bayushi Atsuki's Shadowed Tower. Kaukatsu had a personal interest in seeing the Tower expunged, for his son Bayushi Ogura was one of its leaders. During the eventual destruction of the Shadowed Tower, Kaukatsu and his yojimbo Bayushi Kwanchai confronted and subdued Ogura, who was banished to Traitor's Grove. Having consigned his own heir to the clan's harshest punishment, Kaukatsu had proven himself a truly loyal Scorpion and emerged as a personal confidant of the new Clan Champion, Bayushi Paneki.

When Toturi Naseru ascended to the Throne as Toturi III, he reaffirmed Kaukatsu as Imperial Chancellor in reward for his support. Kaukatsu worked with the new Emperor to rebuild the Imperial authority that had diminished during the feuding of the Four Winds era. He also played a role in the War of the Rich Frog, where he manipulated the false Matsu Nimuro into joining the battle and going to his death at the hands of Moto Chagatai. In return, Moto Chagatai returned full control of Ryoko Owari to the Scorpion.

When Toturi III departed the Imperial capital to look for Enlightenment, Kaukatsu remained in the city and maintained the Imperial Court. However, while Kaukatsu was loyal to Toturi III, the Chancellor had little respect for the Emperor's wife, Akodo Kurako. He considered her out of her depth and a threat to Rokugan if she were to rule. He attempted to control her by giving her a distracting enemy in the form of Naseru's half-brother Kaneka, the Shogun. Kaukatsu manipulated the two into a feud, keeping the Empress busy so he could manage Imperial affairs without her interference. Unfortunately, Toturi III perished on his quest, and his wife succeeded to the Steel Throne. The seeds planted by Kaukatsu continued to grow and she became fearful that Kaneka had his own designs on the Emperor's position. In response, she renewed the position of Protector of the Imperial City and assigned the title to Bayushi Norachai. She also forced Kaneka to withdraw his troops from protecting Toshi Ranbo, scattering them across Rokugan.

Kaukatsu secretly allied with the Unicorn Clan Khan, Moto Chagatai, supporting the Khan's intention to either seize the Throne himself or force Kaneka to do so. To Kaukatsu, either option was preferable to leaving Kunako in power. Along the way he made considerable effort to protect the Unicorn Clan's plans, even going to far as to arrange a false seppuku for a Unicorn diplomat named Ide Jiao who had accidentally revealed the Khan's plans. Secure in his alliance with the Khan, Kaukatsu had no fear of Chagatai's assault on Toshi Ranbo and brazenly sipped tea while watching the battle from a balcony of the Imperial palace. Unfortunately, the balcony was not as strongly warded against evil spirits as the interior of the palace, and Spider infiltrators were able to open a gateway to Gaki-do and unleash the hungry dead. Kaukatsu perished, caught by surprise for perhaps the first time in his long life.

Bayushi Kaukatsu, Imperial Manipulator

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 5

Awareness: 6 Intelligence: 4 Perception: 5

Honor: 2.3 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 6.0*

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 5

Skills: Acting 3, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 5, Courtier (Manipulation) (Gossip) 8, Temptation 3, Defense 3, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Courtesy) 7, Forgery 4, Horsemanship 2, Intimidation 6, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 2, Knives 3, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 3, Lore: Underworld 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 8, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 3

Advantages: Read Lips, Prodigy, Social Position (Imperial Chancellor)

Disadvantages: Failure of Bushido (Compassion), Sworn Enemies (many)

Kakita Yoshi, Advisor to Many Emperors

"I live to serve the Emperor, in this life and the next."
– Kakita Yoshi

Kakita Yoshi was daimyo of the Kakita family and one of the greatest courtiers in the history of the Crane Clan. A handsome, slender man with quick and precise movements, he always dyed his long hair white in the traditional Crane style, and his ice-blue eyes were sharp and cold. However, it was his deep and resonant voice that gained him the most attention; some said he could entice stones to sing. In fact, his voice was so enthralling that he was often called upon to compose impromptu poetry to amuse the Emperor and his court. But Yoshi was far more than his face and voice. He led his family through the terrible crises of the early twelfth century, including the Clan War, the War Against the Darkness, and the War of Spirits. He served as Imperial Chancellor, was an advisor to three Emperors, and was one of the most powerful men in Rokugan in his day. His influence was found in the Imperial court, where he controlled favors and debts of honor from daimyo of every clan. He had allies in every house in the Empire and could obtain anything his friends might need, be it goods, appointments, or secrets. Of course, Yoshi's assistance could have a price, since those he helped were always expected to return the favor when he needed them to.

Unlike most daimyo of his family, Yoshi was not trained in swordsmanship. This was not through preference but rather due to a curse laid upon his family's stronghold, Shiro sano Kakita, long before his birth. Centuries before, a wandering ronin shugenja who claimed the title of Grandmaster of Elements announced he would visit the Kakita palace. The Kakita left the front gate open for nearly six years, awaiting the famed shugenja's arrival. Finally the Grandmaster arrived, only to have a sudden gust of wind blow the gates shut in his face. Enraged and insulted, he cursed the castle, saying that if any child born surrounded by the walls of the castle ever drew steel the Crane would turn against the Kakita and the castle would fall. To circumvent the curse, the Kakita left the doors to the castle open whenever a child was due to be born. However, when Yoshi was born four centuries later, the castle was under siege by the Lion Clan and the gates were closed out of necessity. To avoid triggering the curse, Yoshi was forbidden from ever drawing a weapon, a custom he kept all his days.

Yoshi first entered Imperial service under Hantei XXXVIII, where he became the Emperor's aide and political liaison. Yoshi's influence quickly expanded until he was one of the most well-known and respected names in Rokugan, eventually earning appointment as Imperial Chancellor. Interestingly, Yoshi considered himself a spy of sorts, since he reported all he saw and heard to the Emperor, even the movements of the Crane. The Crane Clan Champion, Doji Satsume (and later his son Hoturi) knew about this and tacitly approved, considering it well worth the price to have a Crane as Chancellor.

Kakita Yoshi was not actually the eldest heir to the Kakita line. That honor belonged to his elder brother Kakita Toshimoko, a master of iaijutsu, but Toshimoko declined the honor of becoming daimyo of the Kakita family and the office passed to Yoshi. However, despite serving in this role Yoshi never married. He often claimed his many duties left him no time for a wife and family, though he did not hesitate to use the offer of a marriage as a tool in negotiations. He always managed to elude any firm commitments and his marriage remained a theoretical bargaining chip throughout his life.

Yoshi had a prolonged rivalry with Bayushi Kachiko for influence in the Imperial court and the Empire as a whole. Their political dance spanned decades, leaving many reputations in ruins and even causing more than a few deaths. After the Scorpion Coup, the new Emperor Hantei XXXIX re-affirmed Yoshi's appointment as Imperial Chancellor, but also intensified Yoshi's rivalry with Kachiko by marrying her and making her Empress of Rokugan. Kachiko sought to secretly punish and ruin all the clans for the defeat of the Coup and the deaths of her husband and son. Her machinations helped cause the Clan Wars, which wreaked terrible damage on the Crane Clan. Shiro sano Kakita was sacked by the Crab armies while Lion forces ravaged the Crane northern border. Yoshi and his vassals used their hoarded favors and alliances to call for allies from the Phoenix and the Unicorn, and later hired the Mantis as mercenaries to help defend their lands. It was also Yoshi who first sensed something was amiss with the Clan Champion, Doji Hoturi, when he was replaced by a doppelganger created from the Egg of P'an Ku.

In the aftermath of the Clan Wars and the Second Day of Thunder, the new Emperor Toturi I replaced Yoshi as Imperial Chancellor with one of his trusted ronin companions, Takuan, believing this would show his neutrality toward all of the clans. However, during the Emperor's later disappearance, Takuan asked Yoshi for help managing the Imperial court, and in many ways Yoshi became the true power behind the throne. He also took advantage of the exile of the Scorpion Clan to build additional networks of alliances, protecting the clan's children while they were outside the Empire.

Throughout his life Yoshi lived by Imperial favor... and in the end he also died by it. In the year 1132 the Mantis Clan invaded Phoenix lands; Yoshi, whose clan had recently fought its own war against the Mantis, lobbied Toturi to stop the Mantis acts of butchery in the Asako lands, but the Emerald Champion Seppun Toshiken took the opposing view. Toturi was being driven mad by the Lying Darkness, and demanded Toshiken silence the Imperial Court forever. Hundreds died that day at Toshiken's hand... including Kakita Yoshi. His successor as Chancellor, Takuan, had already committed seppuku at the command of Toturi.

However, Yoshi did not stay dead long. The next year his spirit returned to Rokugan through Oblivion's Gate at the final battle against the Lying Darkness, and he quickly resumed his place as a central player in Crane diplomacy. Emperor Toturi I, likewise restored after a visit to the afterlife, again appointed him Imperial Chancellor, and Yoshi later helped negotiate the end of the War of Spirits. Having finally restored the Empire to peace, Yoshi voluntarily stepped off the Leaping Place and returned to Yomi. He left behind his fan as an heirloom for the courtiers of his clan.

Kakita Yoshi, Advisor to Many Emperors

Air: 5	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 4	Void: 4
			Perception: 6	

Honor: 6.2 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 6.0*

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 5 / Children of Doji 1

Skills: Artisan: Origami 3, Calligraphy 3, Commerce 4, Courtier (manipulation) 6, Defense 3, Etiquette (bureaucracy) (courtesy) 6, Games: Letters 3, Games: Sadane 3, Investigation 4, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: Law 4, Lore: History 5, Lore: Shintao 4, Perform: Oratory 5, Perform: Storytelling 5, Sincerity 5, Tea Ceremony 4

Advantages: Allies (many), Benten's Blessing, Social Position (Imperial Chancellor), Voice

Disadvantages: Bad Fortune: Kakita Curse

Otomo Madoka, Influential Matchmaker

"The bonds we make through marriage hold the Empire together." – *Otomo Madoka*

Otomo Madoka was an Imperial *nakodo* (matchmaker) of incredible skill and influence. She arranged marriages for the greatest of families, acting as the go-between for Clan Champions and their most powerful daimyo. Her experiences in her brother's court and her adroit handling of the desires of the most powerful samurai in the Empire gave her unmatched skills. Born in the year 640, Madoka was a younger daughter of Hantei XIX. She was 10 years old when her brother ascended to the throne and became Emperor Hantei XX. As tradition demanded, she joined the Otomo family, ensuring her brother and his family were the only Hantei.

During the many decades of Hantei XX's reign, he showed extreme favoritism to the Crane. He routinely stripped the Otomo of many court positions, giving them to his beloved Crane instead. While the diminishing power and influence of the Otomo infuriated the family, Madoka used her position as a *nakodo* to maintain Otomo relevance in the Imperial courts. She was the most prominent matchmaker who was not a Crane, which made her an attractive option for clans who did not want to be indebted to the children of Doji. The Scorpion Clan in particular used her almost exclusively during this era.

Madoka was 20 years old when the Great Famine began. For the next eight years she watched as the Famine and the subsequent peasant rebellion tore Rokugan apart. She watched as communication failed and wars plunged the Empire into widespread suffering. She began to question whether the Otomo family's traditional drive to put the clans at each other's throats had gone too far. By opening lines of communication between families, she argued, the disagreements between the Lion and the Dragon and later the Crane and the Crab could have been contained before

they erupted into disaster. To help end the suffering of the Great Famine, she offered her services to Isawa Michikata, the Master of the Earth, asking him to help restore the Empire's croplands in return for prestigious marriage arrangements for all his children. Michikata agreed and his assistance was vital to Rokugan enjoying its first normal harvest in six years. Three more good harvests followed, bringing the Great Famine to an end.

Throughout her life Madoka wrote many books on the workings of the Imperial court, guides to newly wedded couples on how to be good spouses, and treatises on how to seek a betrothal for one's offspring. However, her greatest work by far is *The Subtlety of the Court*, considered an essential guide to courtly life centuries after her death of old age in 690.

Otomo Madoka, Influential Matchmaker

Air: 4 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 4
Willpower: 3 Perception: 4

Honor: 7.2 *Status: 4.0* *Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 4

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Commerce 3, Courtier (Manipulation) (Gossip) 5, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Games: Letters 4, Investigation 4, Lore: Heraldry 2, Perform: Flute 1, Sincerity 5, Tea Ceremony 4, Defense 1, Intimidation (Control) 1.

Advantages: Allies (many), Darling of the Court (Otosan Uchi), Social Position (Imperial Nakado)

Disadvantages: Soft-Hearted

Seppun Hanako, Legal Reformer

"What I could not guard with my blade, I will protect with the law." – *Seppun Hanako*

Seppun Hanako is renowned as the reformer of Rokugan's legal code in the wake of Emperor Hantei XVI's shameful reign. Although the Steel Chrysanthemum's own vile deeds were largely erased from the history books, Hanako's reforms are still followed and revered centuries later. She is considered one of the most virtuous Seppun to have ever lived, particularly loved by the bonge since her reforms made their lives more tolerable. For her service to the Empire, her name lives on in the Hanako vassal family of the Seppun.

Hanako achieved her gempukku during the time of Hantei XVI, the ruthless and paranoid emperor who was also known as the Steel Chrysanthemum. As an Imperial guard, she personally witnessed Hantei XVI's depravity and grotesque misuse of the Mandate of Heaven. Against all odds, Hanako survived Hantei's reign with her life and honor intact. Bound by loyalty, she could not move against the Emperor. She even stayed her hand during the uprising by the Emperor's brother Otomo Tanaka and the Imperial Guard, which deposed Hantei XVI and placed his son Hantei XVII on the throne.

Hanako was originally a member of the Seppun miharu, the Imperial Guard, but was thankfully spared from directly serving the Steel Chrysanthemum. After his death, she was promoted through the ranks until she was one of the personal guards for his successor, the young man who became Hantei XVII. Hanako felt a deep need to reform the Empire's laws, having seen the abuse brought about by the previous Emperor, and wrote extensively about her ideas in her off hours; however, these thoughts might have remained her private musings but for a chance question by the young Emperor. While she stood watch over him, Hantei XVII asked for her thoughts on a minor legal matter. Her answer surprised the Son of Heaven with its wisdom and depth. He asked her further questions and found her answers to these equally impressive. Soon the Emperor learned of her writings and asked to see them. Though Hanako was shy by nature and believed her work unworthy of his attention, she could not refuse his command. He was so inspired by her treatises that he called them the *Articles of Heaven* and ordered a series of legal reforms based upon her work. Hanako herself was placed in charge of instituting the changes.

Hanako seized the opportunity not only to undo some of the damage done by the Steel Chrysanthemum but to enact a variety of other legal reforms she had long envisioned. The reforms in the *Articles of Heaven* touched on every aspect of the Empire's legal system and effectively became a new foundation for law in Rokugan. Notable changes included regulations on the use of torture, constraints on the rights of samurai to abuse the *heimin* class, and strict requirements on the treatment of prisoners and hostages.

Hantei XVII commanded her to serve as his chief magistrate and arbiter of the new legal reforms, and eventually appointed her Imperial Chancellor. She lost her earlier shyness and became an outspoken advocate for fair and just enforcement of all laws in the Empire. However, her reforms infuriated many samurai, who resented even the most minor constraints on the privileges of their station. They found her reforms meddlesome and contrary to their ancestral rights, but the protection of the Emperor ultimately made it impossible for any of her foes to harm her. Conversely, her reforms made her incredibly popular with the *bonge*, who celebrated her name and work. In recognition of her service, Hantei XVII gave her the honor of founding her own vassal family and made her its first daimyo.

Seppun Hanako, Legal Reformer

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 3
Awareness: 4

Honor: 8.7 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 6.0*

School/Rank: Seppun Guardsman 3

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 3, Courtier 3, Defense 5, Etiquette 5, Games: Go 3, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation (Notice) 5, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: Law 7, Sincerity 3

Advantages: Great Potential (Lore: Law), Hero of the People, Higher Purpose, Irreproachable, Social Position (Imperial Chancellor), Virtuous

Disadvantages: Member of the Chrysanthemum Court (during the reign of Hantei XVI), Sworn Enemies (those opposed to her legal reforms)

Susumu Kuroko, Dark Fortune's Daughter

"The rest of the Empire may hate us, but they cannot refuse us. Our family will be the very soul of courtesy and sincerity."

Born in 1172, Susumu Kuroko was but two years old when the Susumu family was founded. She is the daughter of Daigotsu Susumu (the former Imperial Advisor who became the Dark Fortune of Deception) and Kakita Shizuka (a Crane maiden possessed of incredible beauty). Kuroko was destined to become the first daimyo of the Susumu family after the Spider Clan was recognized by Iweko I.

Like her mother, Kuroko was a beautiful woman with pristine features and pleasing mannerisms. She dressed conservatively, but always in a way that flattered her looks. Her eyes held a fierce brilliance, which revealed her formidable intellect and cunning. She dyed a single lock of her hair white over her right temple as a tribute to her mother's clan.

Kuroko was trained in the sinister social techniques created by the Daigotsu family, with much of her instruction coming from the regent of her new family, Susumu Maisha. Kuroko soon became skilled at reading people to understand their weaknesses, as well as at creating weaknesses where none existed. She presented a charming and affable face to the world, but like all Spider samurai she truly respected only strength, regardless of its form.

Before she assumed her duties as Susumu family daimyo in the year 1188, Kuroko spent several years traveling across Rokugan, ingratiating herself among the political elite of the Empire. She was surprisingly successful, her friendly and sincere attitude earning her many allies despite her lack of wealth or connections. When she assumed the leadership of her small family, she continued the Spider public stance of showing an air of good humor and disinterest, staying aloof from most of the games and maneuvers of court. Somewhat like her father, however, she felt torn between loyalty to the Empire and loyalty to her lord Daigotsu Kanpeki.

The Susumu family at the end of the twelfth century was incredibly small, numbering just over a score. Thus, while her administrative duties do not take up much time, the Spider Clan expected her to be able to represent the clan in all major diplomatic matters in the Empire. Since most of the clan resided in the Colonies, they did not concern themselves with many of the schemes and debates among the other clans, but they still needed a presence in the courts and a constant dialogue with their Imperial masters. Kuroko was expected to fulfill these duties, regardless of the difficulty. For the most part she was successful, putting on a benign, smiling face that other courtiers found difficult to turn away. She also secured a marriage to Otomo Takuan, the second son of the Otomo daimyo, who joined the Spider and took her family name. Their marriage caused a scandal, but both samurai benefitted personally from the union. Takuan found his own family insufferable and wanted out, while Kuroko needed his Imperial ties for her political efforts. Ironically, the two found kindred spirits in each other, and love blossomed in a marriage that had originally been made solely for personal convenience.

Kuroko's greatest triumph was winning the right to host the Imperial Winter Court in the year 1197. Since the Spider did not have a suitable location for the court, she had to seek an alternate venue, and ultimately persuaded the Unicorn to let her host the court at Shiro Ide. This achievement showed the rest of the clans that the Spider still had at least some Imperial favor and legitimacy, disrupting the efforts by other clans – notably the Lion and the Crab – to undermine their still-fragile position.

At the twelfth century came to a close, Kuroko had many plans to build upon this success. Most of these plans focused on Iweko Shibatsu, the younger son of the Empress, whom she also found personally fascinating. At the behest of her Clan Champion, she covertly offered the support of the Spider Clan to Shibatsu in case of conflict with his older brother Seiken. Where such support might lead remained to be seen, but her own plans were certainly vast and intricate, befitting the daughter of the Dark Fortune of Deception.

Susumu Kuroko, Fortune's Daughter

Air: 4	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 3
			Perception: 3	

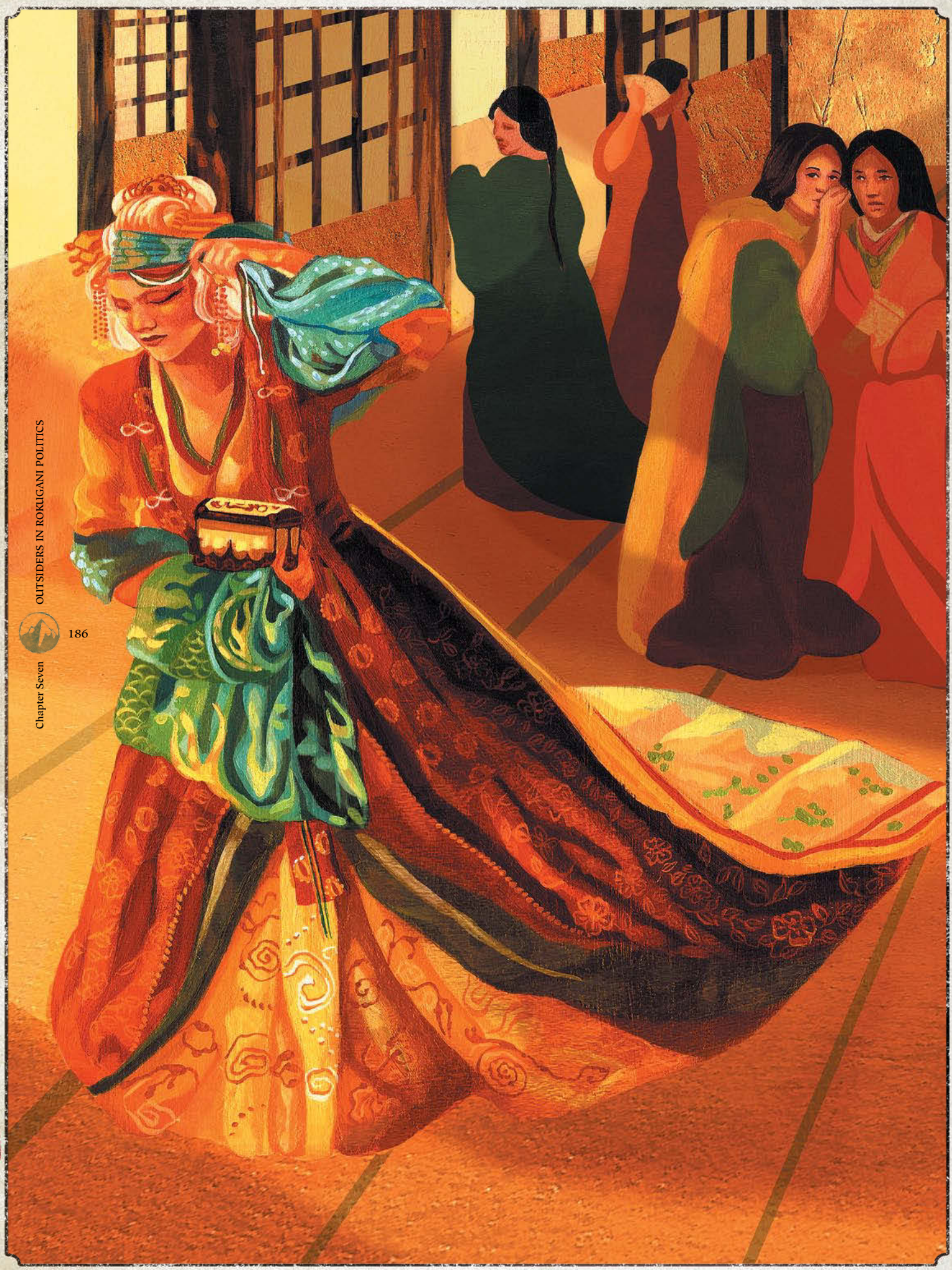
Honor: 2.4 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 6.0* *Infamy: 4.0*

School/Rank: Daigotsu Courtier 3

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 5, Games: Go 3, Games: Letters 3, Investigation 4, Knives 3, Lore: Heraldry 3, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 2, Tea Ceremony 2, Temptation 4, Acting 1, Meditation 2.

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Dark Paragon (Insight), Imperial Spouse, Social Position (Susumu family daimyo)

Disadvantages: Infamous (daughter of a Dark Fortune), Sworn Enemies (many), True Love (Takuan)



Chapter Seven

Outsiders in Rokugani Politics

The physical fighting was long over, but true victory did not come from the simplicity of a raised blade.

"What kills the enemy is anger." Asako Fujiko forced down the rising pressure, the raw unfettered hatred he felt toward both sides of this war. The Lion had marched to war with the full expectation of taking the Gakka province. The Scorpion had responded in kind. Both sides had resorted to the most vile of means to achieve their ends. And for what?

Bayushi Kiwadoi had fallen at the hands of a Crane duelist, assassinated as surely as if poison had been dripped in her ear. A great temple had been torn apart by the Lion assault. Thousands of samurai and ashigaru had perished... and nothing had been resolved.

"The superior general attacks his enemy's alliances." The Crane could be turned – indeed were already being turned – from the Lion by the machinations of Imperial matchmakers. The Lion's vaunted honor was bruised by Akodo Unmei's defamation and his subsequent refusal to commit seppuku for his actions. The Clan of Akodo would have no friends in the near future, and Asako Fujiko was certain the Scorpion would capitalize upon that soon enough.

"Victory is never repetitious." Simple retaliation would not work. The wound was too fresh, too raw in the mind of the court. Akodo Unmei might seek a blood feud in addled vengeance, but he would not have men at his back. Fujiko remembered the Bayushi courtiers mocking the Lion, but he could not help but feel their words were justified.

"The Lion have tainted themselves with dishonor in order to achieve mere temporal victory on the field. The Akodo general has revealed their Kami's treatise on Leadership *holds to no higher standard for of Bushido than does Bayushi Tangen's* Lies. *At least Tangen-sama was honest in his duplicity." So they said, and so others whispered.*

Fujiko knew what had to be done. He had advised the other Imperial Observers to side with the Lion and declare them the victors, for the Scorpion army was wrecked and its command structure was no more. Only Bayushi Konitsu himself, mysteriously absent from the temple when it was attacked, had survived. In the face of the Imperial ruling the Scorpion had no choice but to surrender the province.

Yet no sooner was the proclamation of victory uttered than Ikoma Jun, the political leader of the Lion efforts, gave up all rights to the captured domain. "The Lion withdraw our claim. That which was won without honor may not be kept with honor."

And that was that. Ikoma Jun departed. The Scorpion retained their holdings. As if the war had never been fought.

"If you can go no further, change. You will get through." The Scorpion would not let this matter rest, and neither could the Lion. Adherence to Bushido had been compromised. The Bayushi would seize upon the opportunity and the Akodo would have to find a way to regain lost honor. Fujiko could already see how things might play out as he watched the Scorpion general walk through the court in his blood-stained mask. The man had stared, openly stared, at the retreating Ikoma Jun and then had shifted his gaze to the grieving monks of the Four Temples. The Scorpion would not use a blunt weapon. Anyone who knew the chief lesson of Otomo Madoka's Subtlety of the Court *could see the next stage. Scorpion allies would open a path, and the Lion would have to come to them of their own volition.*

Asako Fujiko lifted the necklace with the symbol of his office of Observer from around his neck and stared hard at its spinning form. "Victory can be seen, but never forced," the Phoenix whispered, and closed his fist around the device. Would that samurai could use their philosophy for a greater purpose than this crude bloodshed.

A new painting occupied the balcony. The work was remarkably similar to the first. Hiruma Renzo's style was supremely subtle, but Ikoma Jun had come to understand how to perceive such art. The field might be the same. Those lines could be trees. And a less experienced critic might see the dots and slashes as stone on the bank of a river.

For Jun, however, everything was twisted. Instead of an open field of possibility the Lion ambassador now saw only the devastation of war.

Jun gripped the folded letter in his hand. His clan did not need him in court for the concession, but a letter from Doji Seiyami could not be ignored.

"I am betrothed, Jun-san. It will be announced before the court that Bayushi Konitsu has won my hand. However, there is something more important you should see. The new Abbot of the Taoist Temple will speak and you need to hear his words."

Doji Seiyami did not seem suited to life as a Bayushi, but she would persevere, of that the Ikoma was certain.

A sudden sound broke the Ikoma's reverie. A bell rang out three times, the sonorous tone echoing throughout the palace. A religious call to court could only mean that Abbot Omeiyo was about to speak. Jun felt no sense of urgency. He took a slow, meandering path to the court chamber.

The deep and unsettlingly familiar voice of the Abbot could be heard even from the hallway. "...and for the forthright defense of the Bayushi general, the ronin known as Komaru shall be elevated from his lowly birth to join the ranks of the servants of the Kami. Rise, Bayushi Komaru, and know that your defeat of the vengeance-bound Unmei paves the way for greatness!"

Jun frowned inwardly. Akodo Unmei had been a weak man, but to honor his killer in open court was a grave insult to the Lion. And why should the Abbot of a temple preside over the court? What game was his father playing? For some reason Jun's mind flashed back to the tiny fractured statue Bayushi Kiwadoi had placed on the balcony the year before.

"Now that I have the attention of the assembly, I regret that I must speak on matters most dire." Jun watched suspiciously as his father's voice dropped lower, pulling in the listeners. The man once called Ikoma Jidai had taken to his new role with a fervor not unlike his former devotion to victory.

"I will not waste time with unnecessary words, my friends." The Abbot paused dramatically, making Jun shake his head. "The dead haunt the halls of our Temple!" Jidai – no, he was Omeiyo now – lifted his hands high into the air as if to speak to the Heavens above. "They roam freely! It is my belief they will not rest until honor is satisfied. Therefore, my brothers and I in the Four Temples

Order have decided upon a course of action." The man smiled beatifically, and Jun braced himself. He knew that expression all too well. "Religious and political advisors from the Four Temples will regretfully resign from their posts as of this moment. Until such time as the samurai can answer for what has been done... until the situation is resolved, we will retire into contemplation."

For a moment no one spoke. Abbot Omeiyo stepped down from the dais and walked calmly from the room, heading toward an outer garden. The court did not yet understand the implications of what had been said, what had been done. But Jun knew. His mouth was set in a firm line, anger rising in his eyes.

The daimyo would not tolerate a lack of religious approval and would seek to find an answer to the problem. There were many ways to appease ghosts, but Jun was certain his father had already spoken to the Scorpion about one method in particular. Now the Clan of Secrets would have a reason to retaliate against the Lion incursion into Gakka province. After all, it could be argued the Lion's assault on the temple was the source of the angry spirits, and Scorpion vengeance might set their spirits to rest. The Abbot had paved the way for restitution for this upheaval of the Celestial Order... restitution through vengeance and further bloodshed.

If there even were spirits to be set to rest.

As Jun followed his father into the garden, he thought back on the war. It made sense now that Bayushi Konitsu would take the temple and be willing to lose his command staff. Yes, he lost the battle, but the court had sided with the Scorpion and they came out ahead in the stalemate that followed.

Now the Scorpion could unleash the full might of their armies against the Lion and it would not be aggression, but honor and enlightenment that guided their hands!

"What are you doing, monk?" Jun could feel the rising tide of anger overwhelming him. His lone fist clenched.

Abbot Omeiyo, the former Ikoma Jidai, smiled. He did not look to his son, but instead up at the high walls of the Forbidden City that loomed over them.

"The Lion failed, my son. They failed because of a lack of conviction. A lack of proper leadership. Shameful leadership, to be certain." The older man ran a hand over his bald pate and closed his eyes. "Now there is a curse upon the temple and it can only be cleansed with the purity of battle. The Scorpion will retaliate... but the Lion are up to the challenge. You will not be placed in command this time, and the skill and honor of the Akodo will prevail."

"You...you miserable excuse..." Jun stopped, unable to continue. He remembered his mother and her pleading eyes. The man before him was as devious as any Bayushi courtier, but he was still Jun's father. "You have ripped away the scab and poured salt in the wound, old man. The war was over!"

Abbot Omeiyo opened his eyes and the smile fell from his face. He leaned forward and whispered so only his son could hear.

"The war is never over."

Rokugan's political world is dominated by the samurai caste and especially by the samurai of the Great Clans and the Imperial families. For those who are not part of those elite groups, the world of the courts is a deeply hostile and dangerous place, but not one they can ignore. From time to time, outsiders such as ronin or monks have no choice but to enter the realm of politics in order to protect their interests or head off a threat. Gaijin have sometimes sought to establish ambassadors in Rokugan. The forces of the Shadowlands have infiltrated courts since the end of the First War, and in the twelfth century the Spider Clan does likewise. How do these disparate groups fit into court life?

Ronin in Court

What use does a masterless samurai serve in the ordered confines of court? A ronin bears a daisho, a sign of his station and his willingness to fight, but what does he know of the intricacies of politics, the dangers of etiquette, the art of sincerity? More importantly, how does such an individual find himself in the halls of a clan lord in the first place?

As an outsider, a ronin must be invited into the court of clan samurai. Any wave-man who shows up uninvited, expecting to be extended the courtesy of a guest, is foolish at best, and perhaps suicidal. Few lords indeed are willing to share their homes with a ronin. In fact, those daimyo who do grant easy invitations are probably the most dangerous to a wave-man, since they usually have sinister agendas of their own and plan to exploit the ronin for their own ends. This is not to say there are not a few honorable and compassionate daimyo willing to show hospitality to the ronin within their domains, but even such rare lords are reluctant to host strangers for any length of time, much less sponsor them in the deadly games of politics.

As a general rule, when a ronin is encountered in the courts – especially the higher courts such as those of the Clan Champions or the Emperor – he is almost certainly serving one of a few select roles, most likely as a yojimbo or other such hired guard. After all, not every courtier or shugenja is of sufficient status to be afforded a formal yojimbo from the clan; innumerable low-ranking courtiers, scholars, and priests are given minor but necessary assignments but otherwise left to fend for themselves. Some of these samurai hire a ronin guard, a tough-looking bushi who can stand behind them (and perhaps loom threateningly over their shoulder). More commonly, ronin may be hired as supplements to the clan's guards at the castle or palace hosting the court, to ensure proper security (and to provide some expendable troops who can be used up in the event of a surprise assault). Ronin additions to the guard also free up clan samurai for more important work.

More rarely, ronin may be invited to court as specialists or even to serve as a sort of "wild card" or rogue element in the court's social mix. Duelists are the most likely specialists to be invited to a court; an oft-used (perhaps overused) but highly effective tactic is for a courtier to seek out a ronin duelist of notable skill and serve as his patron in the halls of the court. This causes the rest of the court to view the patron as a dangerous threat, intent on using such an expensive and well-honed weapon. The patron's enemies will tread lightly, avoiding giving offense and thereby magnifying his influence in the court.

Other specialists may include shugenja hired to provide magical assistance (open or covert) to a clan samurai, or advisors hired for the use of their specialized knowledge. Such ronin advisors can include masters of forgotten lore, tacticians of great renown, artists, craftsmen, musicians, or even a wave-man who happens to be a master of fashion and style. Such specialists may even attain special appointments within a court, temporary positions of power where their word in their area of expertise is considered final, backed by the lord of the court. Such specialist ronin rarely have difficulty finding a master to employ them, and are the most likely wave-men to eventually swear fealty to a clan. (On the other hand, with a skill in high demand, such a ronin may find it more profitable to remain masterless, moving from court to court attaining glory and earning koku.) Such ronin also are the most likely to be treated with relative respect in the courts and to avoid the mockery and hostility which other wave-men face.

The "wild card" ronin often overlaps in skills with the specialist, but his nature is more mysterious. There are plenty of reasons for a patron to keep his agents' exact skills hidden. After all, mystery itself is a useful tool in the courts, creating uncertainty in the minds of one's opponents. The rest of the court will waste immense effort trying to discern the true nature of the ronin. Simply bringing an unknown wave-man into the court and insinuating he is to be used for some grand scheme can create immense confusion and distraction. If the ronin is an artisan, does the patron intend for him to be a "ringer" in a contest? If the ronin is a duelist, does the courtier intend to draw his opponents into lethal challenges? Even if the patron's ultimate purpose with the ronin is different, the mysterious element is always useful. It adds interest to the court proceedings and reduces the boredom of long winter days and nights. Indeed, in some cases a samurai will invite an odd or eccentric ronin to the court purely for the entertainment value of his presence (and regardless of what the ronin's fate may be).

This, of course, relates to a quality of ronin rarely discussed openly (except perhaps by the Scorpion): their expendable nature. No matter what other purpose the wave-men serve, they are not bound to a clan, they have no family or lord to speak for them, and their word is only as powerful as their patrons' support. Ronin are thus useful for the most dangerous court tactics, ploys which could cause an honorable clan samurai to lose face or even be forced to commit seppuku. Ronin can be disowned if discovered, allowing their patrons to avoid any responsibility for a scandalous deed. Ultimately, a masterless samurai is at the court merely by the whim of others, and can be tossed out into the harsh winter cold without a spare thought.

What's In It for the Ronin?

The answer to this question is as varied as the ronin themselves. Perhaps a better question would be: "What is NOT in it for the ronin?" The average wave-man cannot afford to be picky about employment even in the best of times, and is outright desperate on a regular basis. With rare exceptions, a ronin will be exceedingly grateful just for the opportunity to spend a few weeks in a pleasant court, and many wave-men will literally fight and die for such a privilege. Even without the chance to earn koku, being in a warm court hall listening to the boring speeches of a local daimyo is far preferable to sleeping out-of-doors, especially in the freezing weather of winter. Food, a warm place to sleep, regular baths, and exotic entertainment... only a rare wealthy wave-man would pass up the opportunity.

Aside from the amenities of a court, there are plenty of other rewards depending on the patron's wishes and resources. Koku is the most prized reward, of course; despite what Bushido and idealism might claim, there is little of practical value that wealth cannot purchase. Glory, fame, and the chance to shine are also useful, however, especially since they can lead to future employment and reliable payment. Some ronin seek personal alliances amid the dangerous waters of the court, knowing a single well-placed contact earned in the winter may pay off exponentially in the future. Others spend their leisure time in court speaking to others of their own kind, networking with the servants or the local guards, or otherwise developing connections. Finally, some ronin of a more dishonorable nature (a category that sadly includes many of them) see the court as a chance to betray others for their own advantage. It is not unheard of for a ronin to take on a job for a low-level patron, only to shift allegiance later to a wealthier or more powerful lord.

The pinnacle of achievement for a masterless samurai is an elevation of status into the Buke caste. Joining a clan is an unlikely dream for most ronin, but those who excel and impress the samurai above their station have been known to achieve it. For skilled and idealistic wave-men, this is the primary reason to seek service in a court setting. What better place to spread the glory of one's name? Where else can a wave-man find those who might see his true worth? Even if he cannot earn this rarest of prizes, the ronin may still be able to win an invitation to a higher court. Sponsorship into a contest held at the Imperial Winter Court, or even into one of the Jeweled Championships, is not unheard of. After all, for the patron little is lost if the ronin fails, but if he is successful all will remember the samurai who granted him the right to compete in the first place.

Of course, there are some ronin who believe no reward is worth the risk of attending a court. Such ronin sometimes attend anyway, not because they are invited or paid for their visit, but rather because a patron deems them useful and has found some way to coerce them into

being unwilling participants. This is most common if the wave-man is a skilled specialist or a well-known authority on some topic, as discussed above. Clan samurai have limitless reasons to want skilled and expendable ronin at their command, and just as many methods with which to draw them in.

Worse yet, in some cases an unfortunate ronin may draw the ire or the sadistic interest of a particularly wicked courtier. Dishonorable samurai may find perverse amusement in forcing a hapless ronin to swim in the shark-infested waters of the courts. Moreover, the resulting chaos as the desperate man tries to survive can serve to cover the true purposes of a ruthless manipulator.

Who Uses Ronin in the Courts?

Every clan utilizes ronin in battle to at least some degree, but the usage of ronin in court varies widely between the Empire's different factions. On the whole, the Imperial families are the least interested in exploiting ronin for any purpose other than as guards, and indeed it is rare for any Imperial to condescend to even speak with the lowest echelons of society. However, the Miya family does somewhat empathize with ronin and may occasionally use them as intermediaries with the lower castes. Because the protocols associated with Imperial status create such a huge gap with the *heimin*, the Miya find ronin to be useful go-betweens when they must engage with the peasantry (such as during the administration of Miya's Blessing).

The Crab, nothing if not pragmatic, prefer to use ronin in their war against the Shadowlands. However, since the Crab are not noted for their skills in politics, they are also willing to use any ronin in the courts who actually have talent for that world. The Yasuki in particular are always on the lookout for a ronin willing to take on political tasks, especially the ones the Hida may find distasteful. In some ways, the Crab are similar to the Scorpion in this regard (though it would be unwise to tell them so), willing to use ronin as expendable pieces in dangerous court ploys. However, the Crab are also the most likely to offer allegiance to those ronin courtiers who prove to be exceptional.

The Crane have a healthy disdain for masterless samurai in all domains. Propriety demands only the best be allowed into the halls of power, and ronin by their very nature cannot be considered to qualify. The Kakita do make rare exceptions for ronin artisans of renown, and there are some tales of ronin artisans adding their skill to the Kakita Artisan Academy. The merchant patrons of the Daidoji Trading Council also make occasional use of ronin in their activities – the presence of wave-men is just one more pill to swallow when dealing with the distasteful world of commerce.

The Dragon Clan has only modest involvement in politics and thus also seldom utilizes ronin for such a role. However, the Kitsuki do sometimes find use for ronin as personal bodyguards or investigators, and they are practical enough to reach outside their clan for such assistance when necessary. Indeed, the Kitsuki are known as some of the more reliable and honorable employers of ronin yojimbo and specialists, offering patronage as long as the wave-man is loyal and willing to serve.

The Lion, like the Crane, have a restrictive view of what is proper that prevents the use of ronin in most court situations. The Ikoma Bards do sometimes offer employment to ronin of high renown and glory, but even so, Lion honor demands that the clan's face in the courts always be from within the clan, and few ronin are capable of living up to their near-impossible standards.

In contrast to the Crane and Lion, the Mantis Clan – itself the product of a rise from ronin to Minor Clan to Great Clan – is more than willing to use ronin (and also to abuse and discard them when necessary). The Mantis use ronin in countless ways, including all of the options listed earlier in this chapter. Their most popular single usage is hiring duelists, since their own samurai are often lacking skill in the art of iaijutsu.

The Phoenix Clan's ruling Isawa family has too high standards for itself (or is too arrogant, to hear others say it) to use ronin in the courts at all, but the Asako family is less constrained. The Loremasters in particular often seek out ronin specialists to employ. Interestingly, while the Phoenix in certain eras have been known to recruit ronin shugenja of sufficient skill into their clan, they never utilize ronin priests in the courts – to do so would be to insult the Isawa, an unthinkable error.

The Scorpion Clan often finds use for ronin, employing them in devilish plots, sometimes even disguising them as members of the Scorpion. However, all such assets are always carefully monitored and the Scorpion are perfectly willing to cut their losses when necessary. Of course, the clan's reputation is well-known and most ronin are cautious about accepting employment from the Bayushi – especially for duties in the court.

The Unicorn Clan's Ide diplomats are accomplished at finding political uses for ronin; perhaps due to their own gaijin heritage, the Unicorn see little harm in allowing wave-men into their courts. Also, like the Miya, they find ronin quite useful when it comes to dealing with the "lower world" of the peasants.

Members of the Minor Clans find much use for ronin because of their own lack of resources. Ronin work cheaply – sometimes for nothing more than food and a place to sleep – and often possess skills which a Minor Clan's own men may lack. Clan allegiance is a common reward for those ronin who prove useful and loyal, allowing the Minor Clans to bolster their own modest numbers. The Tortoise may use expendable ronin both in the courts and for dangerous trip to gaijin lands, while the Monkey Clan may actually seek out ronin of skill because of the clan's own history with Toturi's Army and its founder's rise from *heimin* to the Buke. The financially deficient Sparrow cannot offer much in the way of koku, but are among the most likely to offer allegiance to a ronin of honorable nature. It may be noted that almost all Minor Clans carefully avoid association with ronin known to be infamous or dishonorable; due to their own low status, even a single "bad apple" can cause them great loss of face.

Monks in the Court

If typical Rokugani are asked where to find a monk, they will likely suggest a monastery, a shrine, a temple, maybe even the top of a mountain – but not the court of a samurai lord. For the most part, this belief is justified. Most members of the Brotherhood of Shinsei never set foot in the halls of samurai power (unless they did so in their former lives, before shaving their heads). By far the majority spend their entire lives far away from such profane concerns, and they generally prefer it that way. But despite this, a surprising number of monks can be found in the courts in a variety of different roles.

Monastic Advisors

"The eyes that see most clearly are those that watch from a distance." – *Shiba Machitoru*

The most prominent and enduring role a monk can play at court is that of monastic advisor. This term is generally applied to any monk who has a lord's ear; in practice, the actual role varies widely from one lord to another. Among more religiously-inclined samurai, a monastic advisor is there to educate the lord on spiritual matters. This type of activity is particularly associated with the Dragon and Phoenix Clans (where having a spiritual advisor is nearly as common as having a steward to oversee household affairs). Many high-ranking shugenja in other clans keep a monk on hand for theological discussions, as do pious samurai in many other walks of life. In fact, in some parts of the Empire the presence of a truly enlightened monk can confer considerable prestige on the lord he advises. The duties of such advisors may include anything from educating the lord's young children to preparing the lord himself for his eventual retirement. Such monks spend much of their time in religious debate, explicating the meaning of a sutra or urging the abandonment of distracting worldly cares.

The monks who take on this role are customarily those of significant spiritual advancement (in game terms, School Rank 3 or higher), although sometimes a less experienced member of the Brotherhood will acquire a position in a minor household. Of the major Brotherhood sects, the Four Temples provides more advisors than any other order; indeed, this is the courtly role for which they are best suited. Monks from the Temple of Kaimetsu-Uo may sometimes be found in more pacifistic courts (such as those of the Phoenix or the Asahina). From the smaller sects, the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom, the Order of the Wind, and the Pure Song Shrine often seek to spread their ways to receptive ears. Ultimately, though, any monk may serve as a spiritual advisor if the path he follows is congenial to the lord in question. Such advisors most commonly hail from the more worldly monastic traditions rather than the ascetic and hermetic ones, but exceptions do occur; even monks from the controversial Shinmaki sect have sometimes found a place at court.

Other advisors serve in a different capacity than spiritual guidance. Although samurai who shave their heads and retire to a monastery are expected to forsake their previous lives, not all sever their ties so completely as they might. Retired Lion generals sometimes return to give their successors the benefit of their experience. (Few remember it in later centuries, but a monk named Rojin – formerly Akodo Akihisa – played a pivotal role during the Great Famine and the rebellion of the People's Legion in the seventh century.) The Autumn Leaf Temple is almost entirely composed of former courtiers, who often find more scope for their political abilities when they are able to speak with the voice of monastic authority. Nor are they the only ones to explore such paths. Typically, even if these monks return to the castle where they once ruled, a fiction of separation from their former lives is maintained – no one addresses them by their former secular names or makes overt reference to their previous lives.

The assistance a monastic advisor can render is limited only by his own capabilities and the propriety of the court. A monk from the Order of Jurojin's Blessing may provide medical aid, while one from the Temple of the Fivefold Balance could oversee the kitchens; a sohei of Osano-Wo or Tengoku's Fist may lend the strength of his arm to suitable causes. Members of the Order of Heroes have been known to integrate themselves in many places where there are candidates worthy of encouragement. Thus, although such monks remain the exception rather than the rule, they are common enough that it is no great surprise to find one at court.

Petitioners

"Enlightenment does not keep the rain out."
- Hashu, minor abbot

After a courtly advisor, the next most common reason for monks to be present at court is because politics have driven them there. The ideal of most Brotherhood sects, of course, is to remain wholly separate from such worldly affairs, but in truth even the most ascetic monk still lives in the material world and must sometimes deal with its demands.

The upkeep of a monastery, temple, or shrine frequently depends on funds granted by the local lord. *Heimin* can and do contribute materials and labor, but it is a rare monastic establishment that can get by entirely without petitioning samurai for assistance. If the main building needs a new roof, if bandits have been troubling the area, if a novice monk has gone astray and cannot be found... the monastery must send a representative to court and hope he gains an audience.

For routine matters or in areas where religious sensibilities are strong, this may not be a difficult assignment. However, a monk from an out-of-favor sect or who is visiting a samurai with little care for piety may find his trip to court an unpleasant one. Few orders maintain much in the way of political connections; the hapless monk may not even know who to speak with in order to be put on the schedule for later attention. Even a simple request for supplies or skilled labor may take days to present, if not weeks. One unsympathetic bureaucrat can stall a petition the lord would grant without a second thought if he knew the monk was there.

In such situations, more than a few monks have turned to dramatic gestures in order to attract the attention they need. Hunger strikes are a common tactic, with the monk sitting in meditation before the gates of a manor or castle until someone takes notice of his plight. If this brings the wrath of the guards (as it sometimes does), the sight of an unresisting monk getting beaten bloody by angry samurai often creates sympathy. Other monks try more extreme tactics, such as public self-mortification, using flashy Kiho to draw attention, or even committing suicide.

The petitions which bring a monk to court, however, are not always so small or local in their scope. At more than one point in Rokugan's history, the Brotherhood has sent official representatives to the Clan Champions or even to the Imperial Court itself in order to speak on an issue of great importance. This may happen when they wish for a new sect to gain Imperial recognition, or conversely when they have decided to disband an existing sect for being a False Path. On these occasions the delegation rarely consists of a single monk; a large group is usually sent, typically including one or more members of the specialized group known as the Defenders of the Brotherhood who are specially trained in matters of courtly etiquette.

Although these delegations are usually referred to as "petitioners," there have been times when the monks' purpose is not so much to request something as to command it. (A notable historical example is when the Brotherhood declared the Heresy of the Five Rings to be a False Path.) Samurai are accustomed to thinking of the Brotherhood of Shinsei as a relatively harmless group, and most of the time it is... but between the martial might of the sohei, the persuasive voices of more socially-inclined orders, and the mysterious powers of Kiho, the Brotherhood is capable of bringing substantial force to bear in Rokugani political affairs. To oppose that force can bring serious repercussions, and wise samurai bear this fact in mind.

Wanderers

"She has been here three months, and I still do not know her purpose." – *Shosuro Oikaji*

The final common role which explains a monk's presence at court is one which can be as diverse as the individuals who fill it. Although the duties and ascetic vows of many monastic orders mean the average monk has little time to travel, there are plenty of individuals who explore the larger Empire due to pilgrimages, the quest for enlightenment, or simple curiosity.

Some orders are far more inclined to wander than others. Although few take it to the same extreme as the Way of the Wandering Seed, whose followers spend their lives on the road, there are a number of other worldly sects whose members find value in experience over isolation. The Order of Rebirth explicitly teaches its adherents to change their routines, seeking out ways of renewing their bodies, minds, and spirits. Monks of the Order of the Nameless Gift sometimes travel in search of libraries or to meet with renowned thinkers. Sohei of Tengoku's Fist will go to the ends of the Empire in pursuit of offenders against the Celestial Order. The Barefoot Brethren are often on the move, carrying messages on behalf of others. Representatives from the Rising Earth Temple may travel to spread the word of their efforts and recruit new teachers.

Although Rokugani theology recognizes there are many paths to enlightenment, and the path which suits one person may not be appropriate for another, this does not mean the Brotherhood's various sects never attempt to proselytize. Also, like in any large group, some factions do not wholly approve of others and see value in weakening the influence of their rivals by preaching an alternate message. Even without such conflicts, an enthusiastic monk may believe so strongly in the merits of his way that he feels compelled to tell others about it. Because of this, some of the wanderers on Rokugan's roads come from even the most reclusive sects, trying to spread their messages to those with ears to hear.

What acceptance these individuals find at court varies widely, depending on their nature and circumstances. A scholarly wanderer may flatter the samurai he has come to speak with, while a hunter from Tengoku's Fist threatens unwelcomed disruption. A proselytizer may be an entertaining curiosity or a persistent annoyance. However, for samurai whose duties are often the same for weeks or months on end, even the less pleasant visitors can be a refreshing source of interest and gossip.

Responses to Monks at Court

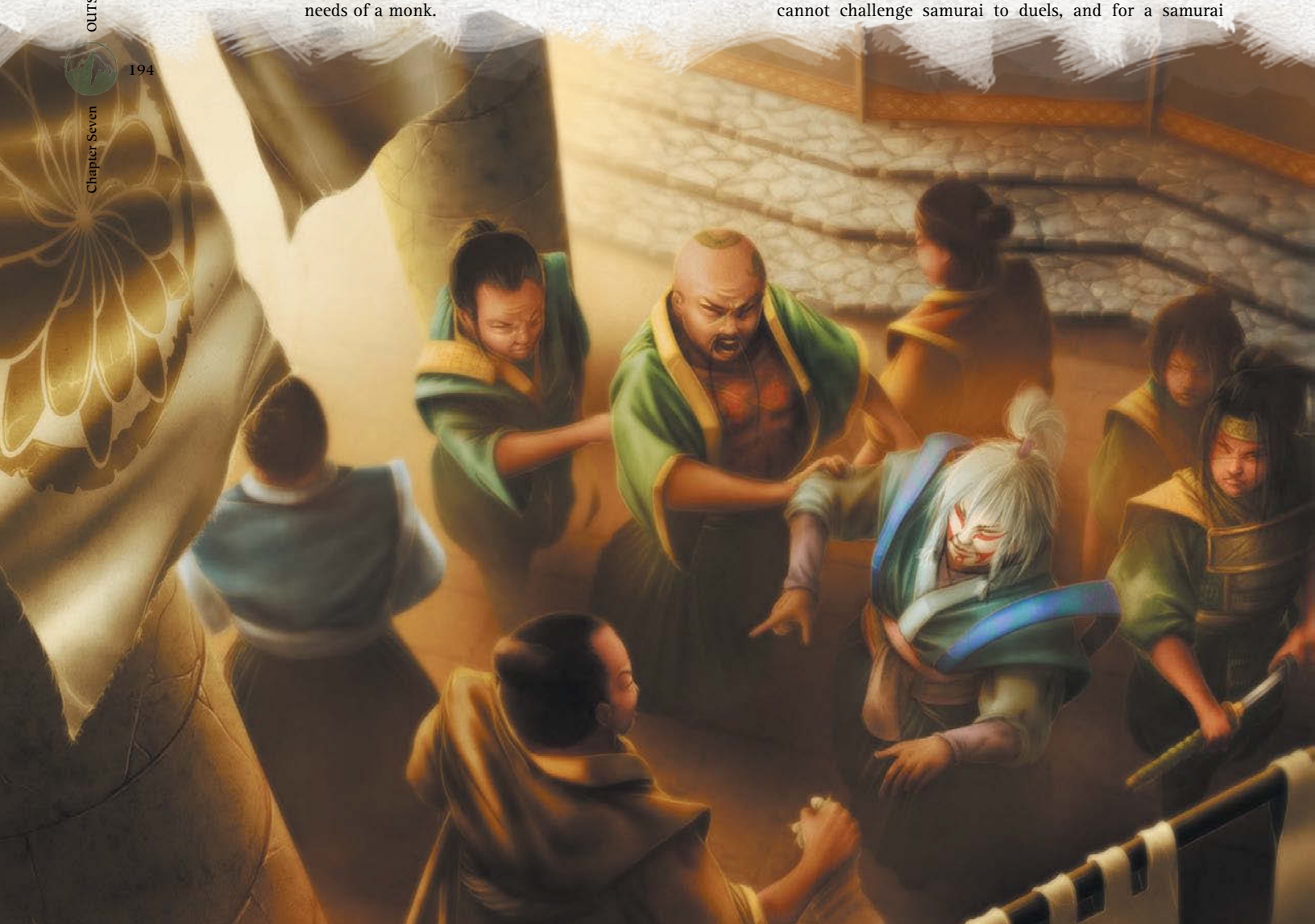
"Welcome them when they come, treat them politely while they are present, and breathe a sigh of relief when they are gone." – *Akodo Tsukitomo*

Long-term advisors to a samurai lord will usually lodge somewhere in his manor or castle. If there is a separate building for a temple or shrine on the grounds, the monk will commonly sleep in a room there if one is available. Otherwise he will be given a room somewhere in the regular guest quarters, perhaps at the lower end of those given to samurai retainers. It would be an insult to house the lord's own advisor with servants, but normal samurai guest quarters are – or should be – too palatial for the needs of a monk.

Courteous lords will offer similar hospitality to temporary visitors such as petitioners or wanderers. In such cases, though, the monk is more likely to lodge at the nearest religious establishment (unless it belongs to a rival sect) so as to avoid embroilment in samurai affairs. In truth, most monks find comfort in familiar surroundings and prefer to avoid the secular atmosphere of a samurai residence.

The ambiguous social position of the Brotherhood means interactions with samurai are somewhat uncertain. The expectation is for samurai to treat monks with respect, as if they are dealing with a low-ranking samurai from elsewhere in Rokugan – though of course they are not expected to invite monks to participate in the usual social activities of samurai. However, this rule is not universally followed. Lion samurai, for example, often show much less respect to Shintao monks than they do to Fortunists. Impatient Crab rarely bother to hide their contempt for the more esoteric sects, who they see as spending their lives in useless meditation. Orthodox Phoenix may shudder in disgust to find themselves in a room with someone from the Shinmaki Order. In short, all the personal and political friction that might occur with another samurai is also possible with a monk.

When conflict does occur, however, the methods of resolution are much less clear than with samurai. Monks cannot challenge samurai to duels, and for a samurai



to challenge a monk would make him a disgrace or a laughingstock. This does not mean the two never fight; more than one hotheaded Hida has chosen to test his strength against a follower of Osano-Wo. Their confrontations, however, do not and cannot carry the social or legal implications of a duel. Only if a samurai chooses to stake his own honor in defense of a monk can there be a formal duel – and even then, the question at stake is not the monk's innocence or reputation, but the reputation of the samurai who has chosen to take up his cause.

In truth, most conflicts are resolved by the monk simply ignoring, enduring, or departing from the situation. It is difficult to have an argument with someone who will not participate, and most monks are capable of defending themselves without ever striking back. When they take more concrete action, it often ends with the samurai looking embarrassed as he is led into a verbal maze or made to trip over his own feet. Still, while the ideal is for all monks to be wise and unflappable, not everyone achieves that goal. Some orders (such as that of Osano-Wo) see much less value in restraint, but a monk found brawling poses a thorny problem for the magistrate or lord who wishes to reprimand him. Whenever possible the offender is remanded to his own superiors for judgment and possible punishment, but in the absence of that option, samurai must figure out how to impose consequences without crossing the line of a monk's theoretical sanctity.

Gaijin in Court

The immediate samurai reaction upon hearing the term gaijin is disgust, fear, and often hatred. However, despite this, there have been times when diplomatic and courtly interaction with foreigners was unavoidable. This has happened on several occasions in Rokugan's history and may well happen again in the future. Gaijin from any land with even the barest knowledge of Rokugan realize they travel into that realm at risk of their own life and limb. A Senpet trader, a Yodotai spy, or a simple stranded sailor from Merenae all understand they must do something to forestall a three-foot blade of sharpened steel from cleaving their head from their shoulders.

The most common purpose for gaijin presence is, of course, trade. Money is the great equalizer and trade in exotic goods bypasses many cultural restrictions. Each gaijin land possesses unique items, wares, technology, and other such forbidden fare in abundance... and there is often someone in the Empire looking to make a deal. It was the attraction of such trade that led the Empire to allow the Merenae into Rokugan during the age of White Stag, and it was a similar lure that later led the Mantis to develop ties with the Ivory Kingdoms. Such trade can also take place on a more local and covert level. Perhaps a local daimyo extends a welcoming hand toward faraway strangers because they possess items of unique appeal. Perhaps his wife is sick and the gaijin possess a rare medicine that can keep her alive. Or perhaps they have access to great quantities of something that is rare within the Empire, like jade or crystal. Gaijin traders also possess knowledge of different crafting methods, new technologies, and unusual ways of thought that interest the Empire's less scrupulous artisans, loremasters, and philosophers.

A less common purpose for gaijin courtiers, yet more potent for that rarity, are those requesting help or seeking to foment war. A favored tactic of the Yodotai is to send emissaries into foreign lands, pretending to be mercenaries for hire while seeking out intelligence and identifying weakness. In the mid-twelfth century, emissaries from the Ivory Kingdoms came to Rokugan to warn of the danger from the Cult of Ruhmal. The Thrane and Meranae are rivals and their conflict helped drive the events of White Stag. Other such events may take place, with gaijin diplomats bringing offers of parlay, trade, or news from afar while allies or looking for holes in the Empire's defense.

GM's Toolbox: Adding Gaijin to the Game

If the GM and players wish to add the exotic flavor of gaijin to an L5R campaign, it will be necessary to find a way to mitigate the official Imperial policy of "kill on sight" toward foreigners. Of course, there are a multitude of exceptions to this policy throughout Rokugani history. The Unicorn Clan as a whole are a living example of foreigners in the Empire, the Scorpion brought back gaijin from their exile in the Burning Sands, the Mantis even housed gaijin ambassadors within their gilded halls in order to facilitate trade. The Dragon, Phoenix, and even the Crane have all allied with the Yobanjin tribes to the far north. Given these examples, tolerance of foreign influence can be as easy or as difficult as desired in a specific L5R game.

It should always be understood that temporary acceptance of the strange does not always equal permanent influence. Many GMs worry about allowing oddities like gaijin or Naga into their game, fearing that to do so will lead to a fundamental change in the world and a loss of the unique flavor of Rokugan. However, Rokugan's official history is rife with examples of how this is not so. Alhundro Cornejo possessed unparalleled knowledge of gunpowder and even facilitated its use while he was present in Rokugan, but he did not change how the Empire waged war. The Mantis and Unicorn make frequent contact with foreign lands, but neither clan allows this to alter their own social structure or their loyalty to the Empire. If the GM wants a huge cultural shift in the game toward gunpowder weapons or new ideology, this can certainly be done – the "Iron Rokugan" setting in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2* is an excellent example of this – but there is no requirement that such a thing *must* happen. Ultimately, gaijin are just another part of the game and are the GM's to control.

Gaijin Themes

Each of the major gaijin cultures surrounding the Empire shows a theme in its relations to Rokugan.

The Ivory Kingdoms – prior to the Kali-Ma Invasion and the destruction of the entire land – displays a theme of inclusion. While the Ivinda people are quite different from Rokugan, they also show a great deal in common with the Emerald Empire. They have a caste society, a ruling warrior elite, and even a monastic tradition in the form of the ascetics called guru. The Ivory Kingdoms has ties with the Mantis for centuries and even sends ambassadors to Rokugan in the mid-twelfth century. The Mantis, for their part, intervene in the Kingdoms to fight the Cult of Ruhmal, and this could potentially have led to a formal alliance had the Empire not become distracted by events like the Four Winds conflict. After the Kali-Ma Invasion, of course, there was not much left of the Ivory Kingdoms, whose vacant lands became the Empire's Colonies and whose surviving people were forced to accept Rokugani dominion.

Themes common to the Merenae and the Thrane are those of greed and of potential hostility. Both kingdoms view Rokugan as little more than a source of potential wealth, and both come from radically different "European" cultures that are deeply alien to Rokugan's society and values. They value the individual rather than the whole, and have little conception of what a samurai really is or does.

The Senpet Empire, by contrast, has a theme of alien religious fanaticism. The Senpet do nothing without consulting their gods and have a very different view of the dead. Their ranks include sorcerers and the magic of the Khadi – the sorcerers who remove their hearts in order to attain immortality – comes from their lands. Moreover, the Senpet keep slaves, a concept the Rokugani see as very strange indeed – why would it be necessary to "own" individuals in order to get them to work? In the twelfth century, however, the Senpet are conquered by the Yodotai, and their contact with Rokugan becomes dominated instead by a theme of flight and oppression.

The Yobanjin tribes have themes of survival and of distant kinship with certain aspects of Rokugan – after all, many of them are descended from tribes that did not accept the rule of the Kami, and they have specific kinship to the Phoenix Clan. Of all the gaijin peoples, the Yobanjin are the least cohesive, lacking any single ruler or unified kingdom. This, in fact, is one of the reasons for the frequent contact between the Yobanjin and the Empire's northern border – there are always different tribes going in different directions, some of them raiding while others seek trade or allies.

The Yodotai Empire's theme is a simple one: threat. Yodotai spies and diplomats alike seek to understand the culture and ways of other cultures, not because they wish to share in them, but to probe for weaknesses and exploit future advantages. To the Yodotai, eventual conquest and control of the Empire is inevitable, and they have a patience born out of a thousand years of success.

Finally, the city-state of Medinaat al-Salaam displays themes of neutrality and friendship. As a cosmopolitan society which survives primarily by serving as a nexus of trade, the people of Medinaat al-Salaam – sometimes called the Mekham after the philosopher who founded their culture – welcome contact with all other peoples. Even during the long reign of the city's notorious Immortal Caliph, trade and commerce with foreigners is constant, and the great merchant houses are always seeking new markets. Of course, a society so intent on trade is disturbing to the Rokugani, but the Empire nonetheless forms contacts with the city-state during the twelfth century; the Unicorn, Dragon, and Scorpion all send emissaries to the legendary Jewel of the Desert.

Clans With Gaijin Contacts

"They are crude, inelegant, smelly ... and completely trustworthy. When the whole Empire falls to war, any ally is a valued ally." – *Kakita Munemori*

Each clan and faction of the Empire has encountered gaijin to some degree, some more often than others. The Unicorn are unsurpassed in their interactions with foreigners, of course, having spent nearly eight centuries wandering the lands of the gaijin. They are the foremost experts on the various nations and cultures of the Burning Sands, including the Senpet and Medinaat al-Salaam. In general, the Unicorn have a working knowledge of nearly every gaijin culture that shares the continent with Rokugan, and their histories are filled with gaijin facts which most in the Empire would not deign to recognize even as fiction.

The Minor Clan of the Tortoise has almost as much knowledge of gaijin culture as the Unicorn. However, the Tortoise's strongest understanding is confined to those kingdoms which lie over the sea, especially the Thrane, the Merenae, and the other kingdoms found on the same distant shores.

The Mantis know the most about the Ivory Kingdoms, trading with them secretly for centuries, and also have some knowledge of the Merenae due to their intermittent contacts with that kingdom's Cornejo family. In addition, the Mantis are by far the most likely to allow foreign

merchants and traders into their courts, and have even granted fealty to a gaijin-born emissary.

The Phoenix and the Dragon (and in one unique circumstance, the Crane) have relationships with the various Yobanjin tribes. Since the Yobanjin lands border upon the northern clans of the Empire, there is often a significant interplay of both war and diplomacy between these factions. In fact the Phoenix created a city, Yobanjin Mura, where these gaijin tribes might trade and exist in harmony with citizens under the clan's protection. To be sure, the Phoenix try to keep the existence of this city secret from the rest of the Empire.

Other clans have had some interactions with gaijin as well, though usually to a much lesser extent or only in specific instances. The Scorpion encountered some of the Burning Sands cultures, notably the Senpet, during their twelfth-century exile. The Crab have fought on several occasions with Taint-corrupted gaijin. In the late twelfth century, even the intensely traditional Lion encountered a work on gaijin warfare, *De Bellis Yoditorum*, and incorporated it into their studies.

The Shadowlands and the Courts

Those uninitiated in the ways of the Taint could easily believe the forces of Jigoku have little to no interest in politics, being nothing more than mad brutes bend on mere destruction. Sadly, this is far from the truth. While many creatures of the Shadowlands are little more than animals, some of them have a sinister cunning which is only bolstered by the power of the Taint. Having long realized the power which politics can offer, these monsters have found ways to infiltrate the courts and manipulate the samurai of Rokugan, causing more harm and chaos than any simple ogre or rampaging oni. Moreover, while Rokugani courtiers always have to balance their objectives with their own self-preservation and the honor and repute of their clan or faction, creatures of the Shadowlands rarely fear for their lives and have no higher motive or loyalty... beyond corrupting and destroying everything Rokugan holds dear. They will stop at nothing to make sure peace agreements fail, to drive clans into war with each other, and to cut off support for their enemies in the Crab Clan. Ironically, this makes them perversely similar to the Otomo, who also make sure the Great Clans stay divided and distracted rather than allied and strong, although their personal motives for this are quite different. It is no coincidence that one of the greatest and most successful Shadowlands offensives against the Empire happened during the Clan Wars, a time where the samurai of Rokugan were more divided than ever before.

The courts are also an ideal place in which to spread corruption. Jigoku loves nothing more than drawing the powerful and the beautiful to its dark embrace, both to sow more mischief and to satisfy its innate urge to corrupt and destroy. Some of the greatest servants of darkness, such as the Demon Bride of Fu Leng, began their lives as courtiers.

One of the main weapons Jigoku uses in the courts are the various infiltrator creatures it has at its command. As previously noted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth* (pages 84-86), the Shadowlands harbor a number of creatures which have the ability to pass themselves off as humans, such as bog hags, pennaggolans, Pekkle no Oni, and many others. These creatures are usually consummate liars and very hard to unmask. Although some of the more important palaces

GM's Toolbox: Gaijin Terms in the Court

GMs who wish to have their PCs interact regularly with gaijin may choose to add more flavor by sprinkling in gaijin words and terms. The following is a basic list of terminology that can be added to the game to enhance the gaijin flavor.

Medinaat al-Salaam:

Courtier: *Safeer/Safeera*

Spellcaster: *Sahir*

Ivory Kingdoms:

Warrior: *Kshatriya*

Priest/Scholar: *Brahmin*

Courtier: *Dalala*

Diplomat: *Rajanayika*

Ambassador: *Rajaduta*

Mystic: *Guru*

Senpet Empire:

Courtier: *Tjatey*

Advisor/Diplomat: *Vezir/Vezira*

Merenae Kingdom:

Courtier: *Cortesano/Cortesana* (male/female)

Swordsman: *Espada*

Advisor: *Consejero*

Yodotai Empire:

Courtier: *Sectorem*

Envoy: *Nuncio*

Ambassador: *Legatus*

Yobanjin Tribes:

Guard: *Kesig*

Steward: *Bavorchi*

Judge: *Yarguchi*

Scribe: *Bitikhan.*

in Rokugan are warded against the Taint (including anywhere the Emperor is likely to hold his Winter Court), these wards are not universally effective, and most other places do not have the luxury of such protection.

Depending on their objectives, infiltrators may take the guise of a servant or another particularly innocuous member of Rokugani society (such as children or elders), or they may take the form of a samurai to use their social status as a shield against accusations. Many of them infiltrate human society purely to satiate their unholy appetites, and their involvement in politics is merely a side-effect of their pursuit of other ghastly deeds. Of course, a string of gruesome murders during a court is likely to be blamed on a supernatural threat, particularly the longer the culprit cannot be found. (Interestingly, this tendency to blame the supernatural has occasionally been used by ruthless killers to mask their own activities, making it even harder to figure out when Jigoku is involved and when it is not.) Considering the most important courts take place during the winter, when the days are shorter and samurai and commoners alike mostly stay inside and do not travel, a single Shadowlands infiltrator can wreak terrible havoc.

The most powerful infiltrators are able to fully conceal their Taint. This includes the rare but powerful demons known as Pekkle no Oni, as well as some of the Lost which possess the ability to temporarily hide the outward signs of the Taint. These are the most dangerous such enemies, for they are able to reach the highest courts of Rokugan and have the cunning to carry out elaborate schemes. Often posing as high-ranking members of the Great Clans or the Imperial families, these creatures take part in the Empire's politics in very much the same way as any other courtier... but with motives altogether different. They always make sure to stay beyond public reproach, knowing their position is too important to jeopardize, while subtly influencing the samurai around them to bring about the greatest possible amount of bloodshed and conflict. A single well-placed infiltrator at the Imperial Court is more than enough to start an Empire-wrecking war, and in truth one must wonder how many such conflicts have actually been caused by them. (Doji Nashiko, who later became the Demon Bride of Fu Leng, was responsible for starting a terrible war that nearly wrecked the Empire.) Beyond this objective of general destruction and the weakening of Rokugan, these infiltrators also work to protect the Shadowlands, both by minimizing the realm's threat and by weakening the Crab Clan at every opportunity.

The Crab themselves often point at their own lack of political clout and the ways the other clans dismiss the Shadowlands threat as proof of the dangerous influence the Ninth Kami has over the courts of Rokugan. Of course, their rude ways and contempt for the world of politics might be at least as much to blame, but there is at least a shred of truth to their viewpoint. This lack of Crab political acumen also makes it easier for Shadowlands infiltrators at court to remain hidden for long periods of time, since the Crab are the foremost experts on unmasking such creatures. Many Kuni Witch Hunters spend months tracking down a bog hag or one of the Lost, only to be obstructed at a crucial moment because of political enmities. (Of course, some Crab will take matters into their own hands regardless of jurisdiction or etiquette... which, in turn, further hurts their standing with the other clans and makes their job even more difficult.) The Witch Hunters have acquired such a dire reputation other clans will call on their services only when absolutely forced to do so, when Shadowlands involvement is already almost certain. Even then, the distasteful topic of the Taint and the shame at having a traitor in the ranks pushes many clans to hide such incidents once they are resolved. This limits the spread of knowledge about Shadowlands infiltrators, making it easy for later creatures to replicate the same strategy once again. Only in the Crab courts are Shadowlands infiltrators guaranteed to have a hard time – but little of importance ever happens in Crab courts. The rest of Rokugan is left open to predation from the forces of Jigoku.

The final weapon in the political arsenal of the Shadowlands is the Taint itself. When an infiltrator is not available, infecting a high-ranking samurai with the Taint is a very efficient way to acquire a useful pawn. Maho is a useful lure in many cases, since the right spells can allow a jealous or unsuccessful courtier to curse his enemies or gain unprecedented powers. However, sometimes just a small amount of Taint is all the Shadowlands needs; if a courtier is found to be Tainted, his career is over, so many samurai will hide their infection rather than reporting it. The symptoms of the Taint can be particularly horrifying to courtiers, many of whom care a great deal about their appearance and are wholly unfamiliar with physical danger. The

minions of the Shadowlands can infect an individual and then offer assistance in hiding the symptoms, creating a pawn immediately rather than going through the long process of complete corruption. The infiltrators are in a perfect position in which to infect others in this way, since it can take only a drop of blood in a tea cup, a single night of misguided passion, or even just access to the wrong kind of information to cause an individual to become Tainted. Thus, there are almost always a few individuals harboring the Taint in the courts – furthering the disdain the Crab hold for politicians of all sorts.

The Spider Clan and the Courts

In the twelfth century, the legalization of the Spider Clan through the bargain made between Daigotsu and Empress Iweko I adds a new element to Rokugan's courts. Although the majority of the Spider Clan is comprised of warriors, all of whom are immediately sent to the Colonies to battle the enemies of Rokugan, the clan's foremost figure in the Empress's court was the man named Susumu, who held the position of Imperial Advisor until his death and ascension to become a Dark Fortune. His daughter (described in Chapter Eight) was granted the right to create a new samurai family bearing his name, and although the Susumu family was still a tiny one a generation later, it became a key element of the new clan. Most of the Susumu remain in Rokugan proper rather than the Colonies where the rest of the Spider are based, and are often the only members of the clan which other Rokugani will interact with. Each Susumu courtier is trained to rely on himself or herself alone, since they lack the extensive network of support other clan diplomats enjoy. Taking a cue from their founder, the Susumu will often offer their services to a local lord in exchange for small favors towards their clan. This strategy has proven its efficacy time and time again, as the protection from the lord shields the Susumu from the enmity most of the other clans harbor towards the Spider. Their political tactics, however, remain rather similar to the ones employed by infiltrators; the Susumu will stop at nothing to pit one enemy clan against another. However, no Susumu has ever received the Shadowlands Taint, since this would ruin the family's ability to attend the courts of the Empire.

Other members of the Spider Clan occasionally attend Rokugani courts. Since almost no lord will allow Tainted samurai in his presence even after Daigotsu's supposed promise to prevent its spread, the Spider only send those of their ranks who have remained pure, such as monks from the Order of the Spider and the Order of Venom, as well the occasional members of the Daigotsu family who are not Tainted. Even more than the Susumu, however, these Spider encounter tremendous hostility and scorn heaped upon them at almost any opportunity. While Spider samurai must by Imperial decree be given the minimum respect accorded to any samurai, the other clans have not forgotten how Daigotsu almost destroyed the Empire on several occasions and they refuse to accept that the Spider are truly a part of Rokugan. Even in courts where they have allies, such as in the lands of the Unicorn, the Spider receive a lukewarm reception at best, and face constant opposition to any of their endeavors. The lords of the Spider are careful only to send their best and brightest to the courts, since they know they will have to deal with extensive abuse from other samurai. The only thing which stops the other Great Clans from openly acting against the Spider are the constant presence of the Empress' command and constant reminders of the Spider Clan's menacing reputation... though to be sure, after the Destroyer War that repute is more difficult to back up with reality.

The assistance of the Unicorn is a vital asset in the limited political repertoire of the Spider Clan. Although the Unicorn remain somewhat wary of Daigotsu's clan, many of them see the Spider much as Shinjo once saw Fu Leng: a younger sibling who erred but should not be abandoned completely. The one time that the Spider are permitted to serve as hosts of the Imperial Winter Court, it is the Unicorn who supply them with a suitable venue. Thus, when all else fails, the Spider will often rely on the assistance of the Unicorn to shelter them from the worst of the political storms.

The creation of the Spider Clan, however, has not brought an end to the Shadowlands' own infiltration of the courts. In fact, since the Taint in that era can no longer affect the unwilling, the forces of Jigoku have actually redoubled their efforts at infiltration and seduction. The Crab have noticed a sharp increase in sightings of pennaggolan, bog hags, and similar creatures, who now use promises of power and acceptance to lure samurai into welcoming the Taint. The fact that Jigoku has adapted to the new situation and continues to try to undermine the Empire at every turn is a telltale sign that the Spider Clan's status has not brought an end to the great struggle between the Realm of Evil and the mortal world.

Appendix

New Advantages

Sage of the Sword and Fan [Mental] (7 Points)

This Advantage may be purchased (with the GM's permission) after reading an original copy of the *Book of Sun Tao* or the original copy of *The Subtlety of the Court*. Reading this work allows the character to realize that war and politics are fundamentally one and the same. You gain the Mastery benefits of both the Battle and Courtier Skills, based on whichever of the two skills you have at a higher Rank. A number of times per day equal to your Insight Rank, you may use the higher Rank in those Skills when making a Contested Skill Roll with either of them.

This Advantage costs 1 less point for courtiers.

Strategist [Mental] (5 Points)

You have studied the key strategic treatises such as *The Book of Sun Tao* and Akodo's *Leadership* and gained an instinctive grasp of their philosophies regarding strategy in war. You understand the necessity of maintaining focus on the larger picture, of seeing each battle as part of a greater campaign, and how these will contribute to achieving your strategic objectives. If your character is the commander of an army or one of its senior subordinate commanders (for example, the commander of the Vanguard, or of an entire wing of the Main Body), or is part of the commander's staff, then your side receives a +2k0 bonus to the Battle (Mass Combat)/Perception Roll made to determine who is Winning each Battle Turn. You also receive a +1k0 bonus to any other Battle Skill Roll you make during a Mass Battle Turn.

Lion characters may purchase this Advantage for 4 Points.

The Crab Clan

Tsuru's Legion

Created a few years prior to the Clan War, this unit was founded by Hida Tsuru, younger brother of Clan Champion Hida Kisada. He created a legion of cavalry trained to combine speed and power, delivering overpowering strikes to enemy lines. Over time this force became known as Tsuru's Legion, a name it retained after the death of its founder. In modern times the Legion is a semi-independent strike force used by the Clan Champion, and stands outside the normal structure of the Crab armies.

New Alternate Path: Tsuru's Legion [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 2
- **Replaces**: Hida Bushi 2, Hiruma Bushi 2
- **Requirement**: Horsemanship 3
- **Special**: Admission to Tsuru's Legion adds a steed (Rokugani pony) to your outfit if you do not already possess one.

Technique: Overrun

The cavalry of Tsuru's Legion are trained to deliver decisive attacks at the critical moment of a battle. When you are mounted, you may perform the Knockdown maneuver for one less Raise and you may spend a Void Point to add +Xk0 to an attack roll with a weapon, where X is your mount's Strength.

The Yasuki Taskmasters

Although the Yasuki family as a whole is known for its mercantile and political role, many individual Yasuki serve in the Crab armies, with such members of the family often gravitating toward logistical and organizational duties. As a result of this role, Yasuki bushi often found themselves in charge of organizing, training, and leading the Crab army's limited ashigaru forces. Eventually, this led to the establishment of a specific organization dedicated to that role: the Taskmasters. The dojo of the Taskmasters, located in Sunda Mizu Mura, admits students from any family but still tends to attract a disproportionate number of Yasuki, and the sensei is usually a Yasuki as well.

It may be noted that while the Taskmasters were originally oriented toward the command of ashigaru, over time their training and role expanded into a more general aspect of supervising lower-ranking soldiers. During the Clan Wars, when the Crab Clan forms a misguided alliance with the Shadowlands, some Taskmasters also find themselves saddled with the unpleasant duty of commanding units of goblin troops.

New Alternate Path: Yasuki Taskmaster [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 4 or 3
- Replaces: Hida Bushi 4, Hida Pragmatist 4, Yasuki Courtier 3
- Requires: Willpower 4, Intimidation 5, Battle 3

Technique: Fear is a Gift

The Yasuki long ago concluded the best method to get peasant soldiers to face the horrors of the Shadowlands was to make the ashigaru more frightened of their officers than of their enemies. The Taskmasters embrace Intimidation as a Skill with many more applications than others might expect. You treat Intimidation as a Bugei Skill rather than a Low Skill. You may use Willpower as your Trait on any Battle Skill roll, and may use your Intimidation Rank in place of your Battle Rank when rolling for Step 2: Determination on the Mass Battle Table. Finally, any soldiers (samurai, peasant, or otherwise) under your military command may add your Intimidation Skill Rank to the total of any rolls they make to resist Fear effects.

The Crane Clan

Doji Apologist

Even the most honorable samurai may occasionally commit an error of etiquette or make a misstep in a conversation. The Apologists are a group within the Doji Courtier School who are trained specifically to cover for the errors of less-polished comrades and allies, both within and without the clan. After all, a samurai who has been saved from embarrassment is one who may listen with a friendly ear to other things the Doji have to say.

New Alternate Path: Doji Apologist [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank**: 4
- Replaces: Doji Courtier 4
- Requirements: Etiquette (Courtesy) 5

Technique: All Is Forgiven

The Apologists can smooth over incidents that would ordinarily disgrace other samurai. You can erase the damage done by a Minor Breach of Etiquette (including any associated Glory or Status loss) with a Social Skill Roll of Etiquette (Courtesy) / Awareness at TN 25. You may reduce a Major Breach of Etiquette to a Minor Breach by successfully calling 2 Raises on this roll. With 5 Raises, you can reduce a Blasphemous Breach of Etiquette to a Major Breach – subject to the GM's permission (some violations are simply too severe to be mitigated).

The Apologist must act promptly in order to resolve an incident before its consequences become set in stone. In general, a Minor Breach can only be repaired within a number of hours equal to twice your Insight Rank, while a Major Breach must be repaired within that many minutes, and a Blasphemous Breach must be mitigated immediately after it takes place. (The GM may adjust these times if it seems appropriate to the specific circumstances.)

GM's Note: The Apologist can only cover for the errors of others, not for himself. The GM may choose to reduce the Honor loss for a breach of etiquette that has been mitigated, to represent the character recovering a sense of moral worth through the mitigation of the error, but the character should always lose at least 1 point of Honor.

The Children of Doji

The Doji Courtier School thrives on alliances, maintaining a vast network of friends and favors. The elite order known as the Children of Doji claims absolute dominance over the Crane system of allies and favors. Each of these elite courtiers is trained to understand that nothing is beyond one's reach... so long as one has the aid of a few dozen friends. The Children of Doji know everyone desires something and all samurai below the Emperor must bow to the will of another. Know the correct favor to offer, know the right ear in which to speak, and an entire court will dance to one's tune. Even a war's course can be changed by such influence with sufficient skill and artistry.

New Advanced School: Children of Doji [Courtier]

Requirements:

- **Rings/Traits:** Awareness 5, Void 4
- **Skills:** Courtier 6, Etiquette 6, Sincerity 5, any one Perform/Artisan skill 4
- **Advantages:** Ally (with at least four different individuals, one of which must be Devotion 4)
- **Other:** Honor Rank 5.0 or higher

Techniques

Rank One: Social Butterfly

A Child of Doji makes friends like others breathe and is able to call upon them with the mere mention of a name. When making any Contested Social Skill roll, you gain a bonus of +Xk0, where X equals the number of Allies you possess in this court with a Devotion of 2 or greater (this bonus cannot exceed your Insight Rank in dice). Also, if you have at least three such Allies in this court, you may expend (lose) one of those Allies to gain the Darling of the Court Advantage for the remainder of this season (spring, winter, etc).

Rank 2: All is Fair

A key skill of the Children of Doji is the ability to reach beyond the courts to control the field of battle through their political influence. A rikugunshokan who is leading his army against the Crane may suddenly find that favorable terrain has been deemed sacrosanct and the war must be fought on less advantageous ground, or that a key supply shipment has been diverted elsewhere. Conversely, an ally of the Crane may find a legion of Imperial troops arriving to aid his cause, or a duelist cutting down the opposing commander for a personal slight.

You may manipulate a neutral or friendly court to favor or oppose a military conflict happening elsewhere (you cannot, obviously, manipulate the court of your enemy). You must have at least five Allies of Devotion 2 or higher in the court, and must spend a week speaking and maneuvering in the court, after which you may make a roll of Courtier (Manipulation) / Awareness at TN 40. A successful roll awards a Free Raise on Battle Skill Rolls to the commander of the side you favor, with an additional such award granted for each Raise you make on the Courtier roll.

If your activities are being opposed by a representative of the other side in the conflict, your Courtier roll becomes a Contested Roll against that opponent.

You may only influence each military campaign with this Technique once (GM's discretion), and each Free Raise is expended once the commander uses it. If the commander does not use the Free Raises by the end of the campaign, they are lost.

Rank 3: Gild the Lily

The Crane comprehend that the easiest way to maintain a strong network of allies is to regularly offer them favor. Conversely, the best way to flex your political muscle against an obstinate enemy is the denial of favor. You may grant any of your Allies a boon, which takes the form of any Social or Material Advantage with an Experience Point value of up to your Honor Rank. (The GM may veto any Advantage that seems inappropriate.) This is done by spending an hour in court speaking with the ally, then spending a Void Point and making a Courtier (Manipulation)/Awareness roll at a TN of 20 + (5x Experience Point value of Advantage). The effects of the boon last one month.

You may use the same method to deny an enemy the effects of a Social Advantage they possess (limited to the same Experience Point cost). You converse with the court at large for an hour, then spend a Void Point and make a Contested Social Skill Roll of your Courtier (Manipulation) / Awareness versus the enemy's Etiquette (Courtesy) / Awareness. With a success, the enemy cannot use that Advantage for one month.

You may not target the same individual with this technique more than once a month.

The Dragon Clan

The Dragon's Wind

The Dragon Clan maintains a small force of cavalry archers known as the Dragon's Wind, a force known for suddenly arriving on the battlefield, striking with powerful arcing volleys of fire, and then withdrawing just as suddenly. Unlike many specialized cavalry and archery forces, the bushi of the Dragon's Wind are also quite capable on foot or when fighting with other weapons, exhibiting the flexibility and lethality which always characterize Dragon soldiers. The unit is small, due to the clan's poverty and its difficulty in acquiring strong horses, but its battlefield impact is often well out of proportion to its size.

New Alternate Path: The Dragon's Wind [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 3 or 4
- **Replaces**: Mirumoto Taoist Swordsman 3, Mirumoto Bushi 4
- **Requires**: Horsemanship 5, Kyujutsu (Dai-Kyu) 5
- **Special Note**: Joining this Path adds a steed (Rokugani pony) and a bow (Dai-Kyu) to your Outfit if you did not already possess them.

Technique: Way of the Horse and Bow

The Mirumoto horse archers train with their mounts in the rugged lands of the Dragon, allowing them to ride through territory where other cavalry forces do not dare to tread. While you are mounted, your steed treats Moderate terrain as Basic terrain, and Difficult terrain as Moderate terrain. You may attack with a bow as a Simple Action while you are mounted.

The Lion Clan

The Lion Tacticians (Ikoma Tacticians)

The Lion Clan's famous War College is best known for training the brilliant *shireikan* and generals known as the Akodo Tactical Masters. However, the school also offers specialized training to the most promising lower-ranking officers, such as gunso and chui, to enhance the performance of smaller units in the Lion armies. Through most of the Empire's history these men are known simply as Lion Tacticians, but in the twelfth century the generation-long disbandment of the Akodo family results in a large number of Ikoma samurai training in this technique, and many Lion take to calling them the Ikoma Tacticians.

New Alternate Path: Lion Tactician (Ikoma Tactician) [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 4
- **Replaces**: Any Lion bushi 4, Ikoma Bard 4
- **Requires**: Battle 4, Warfan 4, must be at least a Gunso in rank.

Technique: The Commander's Fan

Lion officers usually carry a war-fan in order to use it for conveying orders on the battlefield. Early on, they discovered the fan could also be used to protect themselves when they came under attack on the battlefield. You gain a +1k1 bonus to Battle (Mass Battle) rolls in any situation where your war-fan makes it easier for you to convey orders (GM's discretion). While you are carrying a war-fan (regardless of which hand you are using), you may add half your Warfans Skill Rank (rounded up) to your Armor TN. If you are in the Defense or Full Defense Stance, or you are ONLY carrying a war-fan, you may add your full Skill Rank instead. (These do not stack, and carrying two war-fans does not double the bonus.)

The Ikoma Orators

Although all traditional Ikoma are trained as battle-criers, inspiring their fellow Lion on the field by recounting the deeds of their ancestors, some in the clan have found ways to adapt such methods for the courts. The Lion historians credit the first Orator as Ikoma Tasuki, a skilled courtier from the time of the Gozoku, whose intense speeches on behalf of the Empress Yugozohime were instrumental in cementing her power and convincing many former Gozoku from the Crane and Phoenix to retire or commit seppuku. After his fortieth birthday, Tasuki was permitted to start a dojo and teach his speech-making methods to other Ikoma.

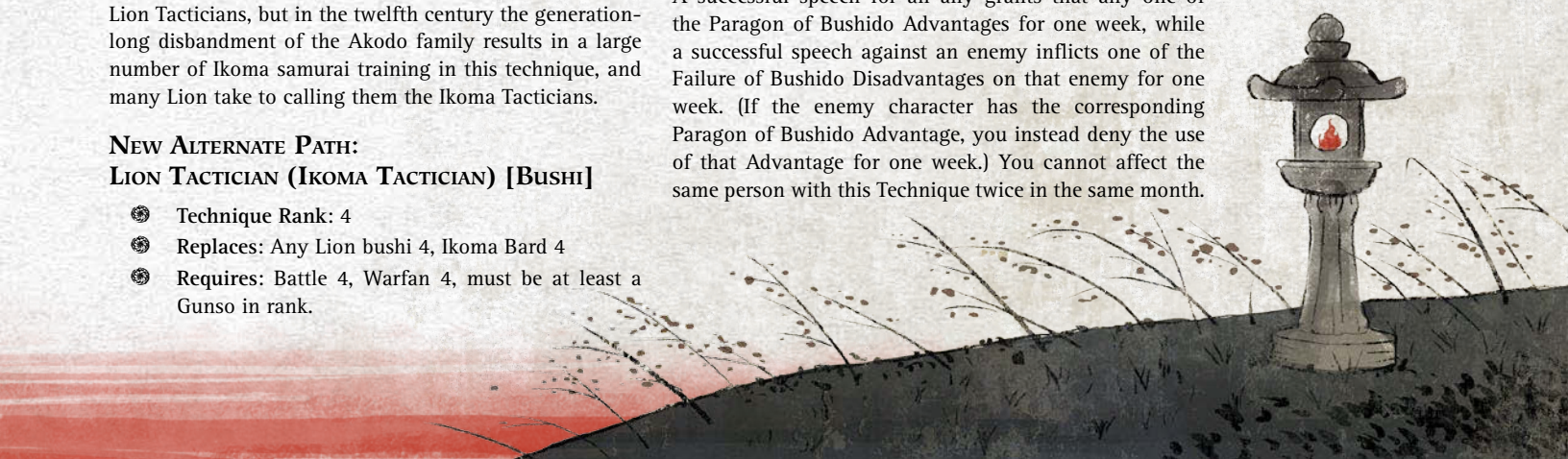
New Alternate Path: Ikoma Orator [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank**: 3
- Replaces: Ikoma Bard 3
- Requires: Sincerity 4, Lore: Bushido 3, Perform: Oratory 4

Technique: The Voice of Bushido

The Orators use their speechmaking powers to draw attention to the honor of their side and the dishonor of their foes. You must give a speech (suggested of at least five minutes' length) before a court or similar audience to activate this Technique. If you are targeting an ally with the speech, you roll Perform: Oratory / Awareness at TN 30. If you are targeting an enemy, you either make the same roll (if the enemy does not respond), or make a Contested Social Roll of your Perform: Oratory / Awareness against his Sincerity / Awareness (if he does respond).

A successful speech for an ally grants that ally one of the Paragon of Bushido Advantages for one week, while a successful speech against an enemy inflicts one of the Failure of Bushido Disadvantages on that enemy for one week. (If the enemy character has the corresponding Paragon of Bushido Advantage, you instead deny the use of that Advantage for one week.) You cannot affect the same person with this Technique twice in the same month.



GM's Options: GMs who wish to add more depth to the Ikoma Orator's abilities may choose to let the target's Honor, Glory, and Infamy affect the rolls required to use the Voice of Bushido technique. When targeting an ally, the TN to bestow the Advantage is reduced by the target's Honor Rank and Glory Rank, but increased by his Infamy Rank (if any). When targeting an enemy, the reverse applies – Honor and Glory increase the TN, while Infamy reduces it.

The Ikoma Scrappers

It is sometimes forgotten that Ikoma was not only a storyteller but also a rather vicious hand-to-hand fighter. In modern times, much of Ikoma's less-reputable legacy is found in the obscure Lion's Shadow school, but the Lion Clan also maintains a more public and honorable dojo which teaches a simple hand-to-hand technique inspired by Ikoma's legacy.

New Alternate Path: Ikoma Scrapper [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 4
- **Replaces**: Akodo Bushi 4, Matsu Berserker 4, Ikoma Lion's Shadow 4, Ikoma Bard 4
- **Requires**: Strength 4, Jiujutsu 5

Technique: Every Scar Has a Name

The Scrapper learns that so long as he can call on the same courage and ruthlessness as Ikoma himself, he is never truly unarmed. You may attack as a Simple Action with unarmed strikes and improvised weapons (if you did not already have the ability to do so). Your vicious attacks can disorient and terrify your opponents. Once per skirmish, if you strike unarmed or with an improvised weapon, you may call two Raises to make your attack inflict a Fear effect on the target, with a Rank equal to your Insight Rank.

The Mantis Clan

The Mantis Orochi Riders

The strange origins and history of the special groups known as the Orochi Riders are explained in the L5R 4th Edition supplements *Enemies of the Empire* (the Spirits chapter) and *The Great Clans* (Mantis chapter). In the latter half of the twelfth century, the Orochi Riders are a small but extremely powerful element of the Mantis Clan military, and the closest thing the clan has to a cavalry tradition.

New Alternate Path: Mantis Orochi Rider

- **Technique Rank**: 6 (or 5, see below)
- **Replaces**: The Orochi Rider Path can replace any Mantis Basic/Advanced School Technique at Insight Rank 6, or replace a "blank" Insight Rank for a character who has attained Rank 5 in any Mantis Basic School. If you are trained entirely in one of the Mantis Shugenja Schools, you may take this Technique at Rank 5 instead; in that case, this is considered a Shugenja Path.
- **Requires**: Water 4, Athletics 5, Lore: Spirit Realms 5
- **Special**: The character must be specially chosen to become an Orochi Rider and must successfully form a bond with an Orochi.

Technique: The Orochi Pact

The Orochi Riders are taught to form and maintain a spiritual bond with one of the Orochi sea-serpents, and to ride them into battle using the Athletics Skill. You gain an Orochi (*Enemies of the Empire*, page 252) as a mount; the Orochi is an NPC (controlled by the GM) but will generally obey your commands and fight at your side so long as you do not demand anything suicidal of it. You gain a +2k0 bonus to Athletics rolls, and your bond with the Orochi grants you two special abilities:

You are considered to have two Ranks of Magic Resistance against hostile Water Magic.

While riding the Orochi, you may hold your breath underwater for twice the normal amount of time.

The Phoenix Clan

The Shiba Advisors

Some Shiba choose to train with the Asako in order to become scholarly historians of war and conflict, a path of study which the Asako family normally frowns upon. These Shiba are able to view contemporary battles and campaigns through the dispassionate eye of history, allowing them to offer potent counsel to their fellow Shiba during times of war. When the Phoenix must fight, every Shiba general makes sure he has an Advisor on his command staff.

New Alternate Path: Shiba Advisor [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank**: 3
- **Replaces**: Asako Loremaster 3
- **Requires**: Lore: History 3, Lore: War 3
- **Special Requirement:** This path is only open to characters from the Shiba family.

Technique: Lessons Never Forgotten

The Advisors have the ability to call on their scholarly knowledge of war to enhance their army's chances of success. Prior to your side undertaking a military task or duty (such as a patrol, a scouting mission, an attack on an enemy, or a hunt for bandits), you may review the plans for the task and apply the wisdom of history. You make either a Lore: War / Intelligence roll at TN 25 or a Lore: History / Intelligence roll at TN 35. With a success, you are able to give advice which increases the chances of success on the mission. One allied bushi on the mission gains a single Rank of Luck for the duration of the mission (if unused it disappears at the end of the mission). You may Raise to bestow the Luck on additional allies (but not on yourself), to a maximum number of allies equal to your School Rank.

The Asako Mediators

Few among the Phoenix champion the cause of pacifism as devoutly as the specially-trained Mediators, a near-monastic order dedicated to the cause of peace above all. They believe that few if any conflicts are beyond peaceful resolution, and seek to bring opposing parties to a harmonious accord whenever possible.

New Alternate Path: Asako Mediator [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank**: 2
- **Replaces**: Asako Loremaster 2, Shiba Bushi 2, Isawa Shugenja 2
- **Requirements**: Sincerity (Honesty) 3
- **Special**: Members of the Mediators must swear an oath never to initiate violence against their fellow Rokugani. Violating this oath should entail a major loss of both Glory and Honor (roughly equivalent to a Blasphemous Breach of Etiquette) and will also result in expulsion from the Mediators organization.

Technique: Stand Down

Any time you are in a situation where samurai are preparing to enter into formal hostilities (examples would include a challenge to a duel, a declaration of Blood Feud, or even a declaration of war), you may approach either or both parties and attempt to persuade them not to follow through. This is a Contested Roll of your Sincerity (Honesty) / Awareness against their Etiquette (Courtesy) / Willpower. With a success, that party in the conflict will agree to back down, and your mediation prevents them from suffering any loss of Glory for doing so.

Special GM Considerations for the Asako Mediator Technique: If the parties in a conflict are deeply or honorably committed to their quarrel, the GM may require the Mediator to call Raises on the roll (anywhere from 1 to 5 Raises, depending on the depth of their anger or the strength of their Honor). Note that this may result in the Mediator being unable to impose a solution due to being unable to call enough Raises – quite likely when trying to mediate the highly honorable and easily-angered Lion, for example.

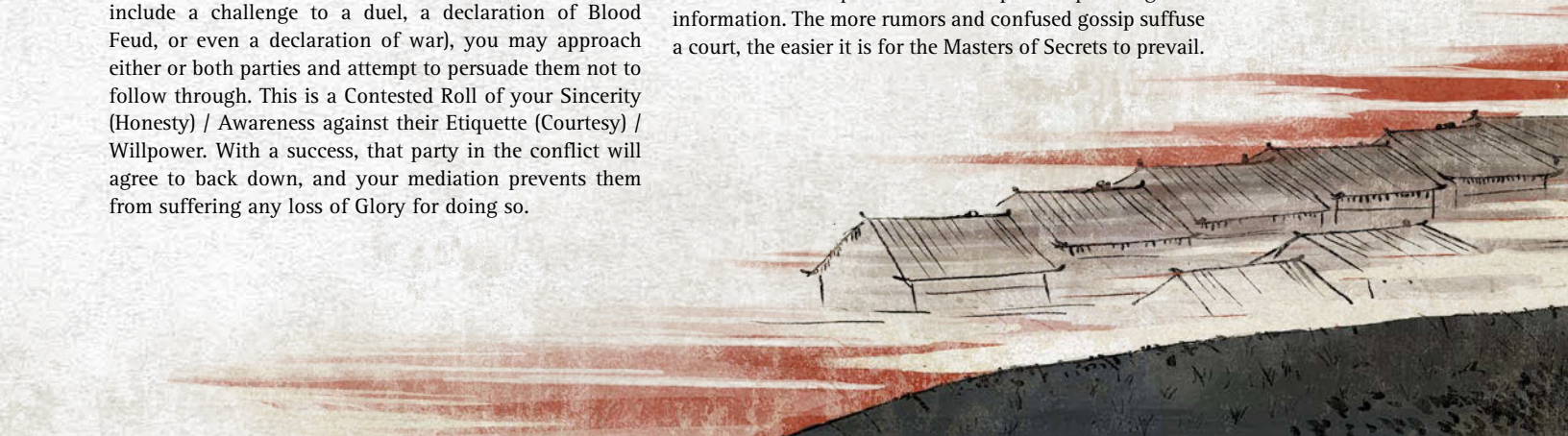
However, if the Mediator is able to propose an honorable and reasonable solution to the quarrel, the GM may also choose to award a bonus to the roll, ranging from +1k0 to +5k0, depending on the GM's judgment of how appealing the solution seems to the parties involved.

In some cases, the scope or severity of a quarrel will be such that it is not possible for a Mediator to actually prevent the conflict. In this case, a successful roll will merely delay the onset of hostilities by a reasonable amount of time (as determined by the GM). In general, the larger the scale of the conflict, the longer the delay – thus a duel might only be delayed for a day or two, while a war might be delayed as much as a month.

The Scorpion Clan

The Bayushi Distracters

The Scorpion Clan often approaches court, like war, as a domain where misdirection and confusion are its most potent allies. Although the Bayushi Courtier School focuses primarily on blackmail as its favored weapon, the school's sensei also teach specialized techniques in spreading false information. The more rumors and confused gossip suffuse a court, the easier it is for the Masters of Secrets to prevail.



New Alternate Path: Bayushi Distracter [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank**: 3
- Replaces: Bayushi Courtier 3
- Requirements: Sincerity (Deceit) 3

Technique: Smoke Screen

The Distracter specializes in spreading false information in order to confuse and disrupt his opponents. When in conversation with another individual, you may roll Sincerity (Deceit) / Awareness against the target's Investigation / Awareness to inflict misinformation on a specific topic. (If the target possesses a directly relevant Lore skill, he may substitute Lore / Intelligence for the Investigation roll.) If successful, the target's future discussions of that topic are weakened by his false information; he must call a Raise for no effect any time he makes a Social Roll involving that topic. You may call Raises on the Contested Roll to increase the number of non-effect Raises the target must call.

If the target fails to call the Raises (or is unable to call them due to insufficient Void Rank) he is considered to automatically fail the Social Skill Roll. At the GM's option, a character who calls the Raises and then fails his Social Skill Roll due solely to those Raises may embarrass himself in public due to his display of false information, resulting in a loss of 1-5 points of Glory (depending on the importance of the topic).

The effects of this Technique last one week, and it cannot target the same person within the same week.

The Scorpion Elite Guard

Most clans and families maintain a highly skilled force known as an Elite Guard or House Guard, usually tasked with protection of the Clan Champion and/or of key clan holdings. Appointment to such a force is a privilege and reward, a mark of great trust from the clan's rulers.

The Scorpion Elite Guard, however, is a very different sort of force. Each member of the Scorpion Clan's Elite Guard trains to adapt his fighting style to that of a specific enemy clan, becoming an intimidating opponent to any members of that clan – and also gaining the ability to pose as one of that clan's samurai if necessary. Of course, this is a secret largely unknown outside of the Scorpion Clan, and most opponents believe the Scorpion Elite Guard is merely a highly proficient bushi unit like the comparable force of other families and clans. Within the ranks of the Scorpion Clan itself, the warriors of the Elite Guard are sometimes called "Violators."

New Alternate Path: The Scorpion Elite Guard [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 3
- Replaces: Bayushi Bushi 3, Shosuro Actor 3
- Requires: Lore (selected clan) 3, Kenjutsu 5. At the GM's option, characters may substitute "Heart of Vengeance [Selected Clan]" for the Lore requirement.

Technique: The Eyes of My Enemy

You select a specific Great Clan when you learn this Technique (this choice cannot be changed). You may attack as a Simple Action when targeting a samurai from this clan. When fighting a Skirmish against a samurai from this clan, as a Simple Action you may spend a Void Point to prevent that samurai from using his School Techniques for his next two Turns. (This Technique cannot be used in iaijutsu duels.)

Historical Note: In the twelfth century, the Scorpion Clan is exiled for a time in the Burning Sands. During that period, a warrior named Bayushi Eiyo encounters one of the legendary Ashalan and learns a fighting technique that also disrupts the enemy's fighting style; Eiyo later teaches this technique to a number of successors, and the members of this group also call themselves "Violators." Mechanically, the GM can use this Path to represent both the Elite Guard and Eiyo's later group.

The Unicorn Clan

The Shinjo Magistrates

Even since its return to the Empire, the Unicorn Clan has established a tradition of upholding the law and protecting the common folk, a tradition which often puts it into conflict with groups like the Scorpion Clan and the Empire's various criminal groups. The Shinjo family dominate this tradition and develop a Technique in support of it – somewhat ironic given that the Shinjo family was also heavily infiltrated by the Kolat. After the exposure and purging of the Kolat by Lady Shinjo herself, the Shinjo Magistrates remade themselves to be especially skillful at rooting out and purging the Kolat influence, later assisting the Ox Clan in establishing the order known as the Vigilant.

New Alternate Path: Shinjo Magistrate [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 2
- **Replaces**: Shinjo Bushi 2, Utaku Battle Maiden 2, Moto Bushi 2, Moto Vindicator 2
- **Requires**: Investigation 3, Lore: Law 3

Technique: Eyes of the Vigilant

The Magistrates are charged with rooting out and destroying criminals, traitors, and law-breakers of all sorts. When using Investigation to try to locate clues or to test another person's truthfulness, you gain a +1k0 bonus. When tracking known criminals or traitors you gain a +1k0 to Hunting Skill rolls, and when attacking such persons you gain a +1k0 to all Weapon Skill Rolls.

GM's Option: The Unicorn Vigilant – In games set after the Hidden Emperor era, the GM can reflect the Unicorn Clan's efforts to purge Kolat influence by increasing the Investigation bonus to +1k1 when opposing Kolat activities or agents.

The Unicorn War-Dog Masters

During their time wandering the gaijin lands, the Unicorn tame and train a breed of dog unknown within Rokugan, eventually bringing it back with them to the Empire. These fierce and loyal animals are capable of fighting alongside their human masters, and the Unicorn maintain a small dojo which specifically trains bushi in the art of commanding and mastering their war-dogs.

New Alternate Path: Unicorn War-Dog Master [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 4
- **Replaces**: Shinjo Bushi 4, Utaku Mounted Infantry 4, Moto Bushi 4
- **Requires**: Awareness 3, Willpower 4, Animal Handling (War-Dogs) 5
- **Special**: Enrolling in this Path grants you a pack of Unicorn War-Dogs (core rulebook, page 321). The total number of war-dogs you can have in your pack is equal to your Awareness

Technique: Ferocity of the Ki-Rin

The War-Dog Masters learn how to train an entire pack of war-dogs and how to control and direct the pack in combat. As a Complex Action, you can roll Animal Handling (War Dogs) / Willpower at TN 20 to give your entire pack of War-Dogs a simple command (such as "Attack" or "Track" or "Hold Position"). You can Raise on this roll to convey more sophisticated commands, subject to the GM's judgment and limitations. Also, when your War-Dogs carry out attacks which you have ordered them to make, they gain a +1k0 bonus to their attack and damage rolls.

The Imperial Families

The Rising Sun

After the Unicorn Clan's return, the Seppun family began aggressively training cavalry forces of its own. Only the most elite members of the already legendary Imperial military are allowed to seek admission to the unit known as the Rising Sun. These men and women receive endless training from the finest mounted combatants to be found in the rest of the Empire – making them masters of tactics the Great Clans do not share with one another. While the Unicorn are the undisputed masters of cavalry warfare, even they hold the Rising Sun legion in extremely high regard.

New Alternate Path: The Rising Sun [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 5
- **Replaces**: Seppun Guardsman 5 (with the GM's permission, any bushi Basic School 5 if the character is enrolled in the Imperial Legions)
- **Requirements**: Strength 4, Horsemanship 5, Spears 5
- **Note**: Joining this Path adds a steed (Rokugani pony or Unicorn riding horse, GM's choice) to your outfit if you do not already possess one.

Technique: The Storm of Heaven's Wrath

The bushi of the Rising Sun are trained in the true mastery of cavalry tactics and call on their devotion to their Imperial duty to make them a terrifying force on the battlefield. While you are mounted and in the Attack Stance, you may add your Honor Rank to your Armor TN and may spend a Void Point to add half your Honor Rank (rounded up) in kept dice to your attack roll.

The Imperial Influencers

The Imperial families exert control over the Empire in many ways both obvious and subtle. Although the Otomo family is best known for its ability to overawe and crush rivals through the sheer weight of Imperial favor, some of the family's greatest masters follow a subtler path, shaping entire courts through things as deceptively simple as hosting dinner parties. The Influencer Technique is sometimes credited to Otomo Madoka, the author of *The Subtlety of the Court*, but whether it was devised by her or by some more ancient Otomo master courtier, its subtle but relentless power cannot be denied.

New Alternate Path: Imperial Influencer [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank**: 3
- **Replaces**: Otomo Courtier 3
- **Requires**: Awareness 4, Etiquette 5, Sincerity 5
- **Special Requirement**: You must have at least Status 4.0 to be admitted to this elite dojo.

Technique: Follow My Lead

At any courtly event you are hosting (such as a moon-viewing party, a musical performance, or a dinner party), you may roll Courtier (Manipulation) / Awareness at TN 30 to set the dominant tone of the event. This tone may be broadly positive or negative and can also have a specific flavor such as friendly, hostile, hedonistic, suspicious, conciliatory, competitive, or anything else which suits your needs. Anyone who makes a Social Skill Roll during this event while acting against the tone of the event must call two Raises to no effect – if they fail the roll due to those Raises, they are considered to have committed a Minor Breach of Etiquette. Conversely, anyone who makes a Social Skill Roll while acting in concert with the flavor of the event (including yourself) gains a +2k0 bonus to their rolls. These effects last until the end of the event.

If you are not the host of the event, you may still attempt to set the tone, but your Courtier (Manipulation) rolls is now a Contested Roll against the host. Also, whether you are the host or not, other guests at the event may opt to oppose your setting of tone by making Contested Rolls of Courtier (Manipulation) against you. For all such Contested Rolls, the character with the higher Status Rank gains a +1k0 bonus for every such Rank of Status.

If you lose the Contested Roll, you are unable to set the tone for this event. However, if lower-Status characters fail such a Contested Roll against you, they have committed a Minor Breach of Etiquette. Likewise, if you fail to overcome the host with this Technique, you have committed a Minor Breach of Etiquette.

The Imperial Observers

Observers are assigned by the Imperial Bureaucracy to oversee the honorable conduct of war. It is an Observer's duty to monitor the strategies of each side, reporting both honorable and shameful activity back to the Imperial Court. (The Great Clans assign their own battlefield observers, of course, but only those with Imperial authority are empowered to deliver unquestioned reports to the Throne.) The Technique of the Observers is an Imperial secret and is taught in the Ruby Dojo (best known for training the Emerald Magistrates).

New Alternate Path: Imperial Observer [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank**: 4
- Replaces: Otomo Courtier 4, Miya Courtier 4. Optionally, any Courtier 4 (see Special Note below)
- Requirements: Battle 4 or Lore: War 4, Sincerity 4, Status Rank 3.0 or higher.

Technique: Pierce the Fog of War

The Imperial Observer is trusted to deliver news of the battlefield to the Imperial Court. When reporting on the events or conduct of a war, you are considered to have the Sacrosanct Advantage. In your report you may choose to praise or damn a commander on either side. This is a Sincerity / Awareness Roll at a TN of 5 x the Glory Rank of the commander. With a success, you may increase or decrease that commander's Glory by 1 Rank. By calling Raises on this roll, you may instead inflict or remove Infamy on the commander, at the rate of a half-Rank plus an additional half-Rank per Raise. No individual may be affected by this Technique more than once for each battle you report.

Special Note: At the GM's option, this Path may be made available to courtiers from the clans, provided they gain the sponsorship of the Imperial families.

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"It is said that court is a battleground. If that is so, why should a courtier not study the ways of martial strategy?"

– Otomo Madoka

The samurai of Rokugan are both warriors and diplomats, serving their clans on the battlefields and in the courts. No true samurai can afford to neglect either field, lest they be found wanting at the critical moment. The Empire's most famous works of strategy -- the Book of Sun Tao and Otomo Madoka's Subtlety of the Court -- are studied by countless samurai who seek the crucial edge that will mean victory.

Sword & Fan presents a detailed examination of the two vital worlds of samurai endeavor: war and politics. From the details of military strategy and tactics to the customs of Winter Court, from battlefield formations to the subtleties of etiquette, this book brings new depth to every player's understanding of Rokugan. Within these pages you will find:

- In-depth discussion of Rokugani warfare at all levels, from strategic planning to the specific customs of battle and victory.
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