



Legend of the Five Rings

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The Merchant's Guide to Rokugan

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The Merchant's Guide to Rokugan



"Forget everything you have been told."

– Yasuki Taka



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And here it is.

Special Thanks go out to Bennett Marco, Harry Caul and David Kujan, who didn't know when to stop asking questions.

DEDICATION

To the late Nigel Findley, and all of his fellow conspirators at Steve Jackson Games. A hearty fnord to you all.

- Rob

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Introduction

Welcome to the *Merchant's Guide to Rokugan*, the definitive sourcebook on the money and economy of the Emerald Empire. Within these pages, you'll find information on the rise of the peddler class, the nefarious Yasuki family, the secrets of the Unicorn caravans beyond the Burning Sands, and other useful tidbits on money and the way it changes hands. The merchant class has only recently become a powerful force in Rokugan, but its members have the potential to turn the Empire's staid culture on its ear.

To understand how Rokugan's economy works, we must understand the model of the feudal social system. Our modern society operates on a system of supply and demand, where consumer needs and wishes are met by an industrialized and competitive business arrangement. The Emerald Empire is a bit different. Its society is divided into distinct tiers and castes, each of which has a dictated relationship to the other. The Emperor owns all the land, which he parcels out to the samurai caste for governing. The peasants below them work the land in exchange for protection, and hand over what they produce in the form of taxes. The Emperor (through his appointed magistrates) then distributes the taxes as he sees fit. This follows the basic feudal paradigm set forth by Japanese culture during its comparable period, and by the European model most gamers are familiar with.

That being said, the concepts of production and consumption figure more prominently in Rokugan's economy than might otherwise be expected. Production specifically implies division of labor, and therefore necessitates that men exchange the goods they produce to acquire other goods which they did not produce, but may need.

The blacksmith cannot eat the katana he forges, nor can the rice farmer defend himself with his crop. Nominally, the noble caste – in the name of the Emperor – performs the task of exchange and distribution, while reserving certain products for itself (peasants may not use katana, for example).

Such a task is not without controversy, however. The nobility is divided between clans, which must sometimes exchange products with each other to ensure mutual prosperity and survival. They therefore require agents to conduct such an exchange – merchants – and a place to determine the details – a market. Further exchange occurs when a surplus of a given product – whether rice, silks or weapons – is created. With more product than they need, trade with others is necessary to capitalize on the resources a surplus provides. The market again becomes necessary, allowing product to pass through a narrow channel into the hands of others.

The peasantry, too, requires such entities, for they engage in trade amongst themselves for products their daimyo might be unable to provide. Survival might depend upon receiving a new type of tool, or an occasional cup of saki to relieve the tedium of life. They may wish to exchange things amongst themselves, or acquire items for tribute to their lord. Thus, the lower classes need merchants as well. While against the tenets of Rokugani feudalism, and not nearly as prominent as in a capitalist society like ours, it becomes a de facto necessity of life. As long as their commitments to their lords and Emperor are met, the nobility do not care if the peasants engage in the exchange of what few resources they have.

So the very existence of production, even in a stratified society like Rokugan, means that merchants and markets must exist. And the more they conduct their business, the larger and more important their roles grow.

The merchant's purpose in Rokugan is to facilitate trade and ensure that the process of production and consumption continues smoothly. The market – be it a dusty stall in a tiny village or the opulent palaces of clan daimyo – is his dominion, where he creates connections between supplier and supplied that permits the economy to function. Markets are trading zones, areas where exchange is facilitated. They can be separated by great distances or as close together as the village square. Whatever the distance, the



merchant had to traverse them in order for exchange to take place. He therefore needs to embrace a twofold model: a journey to a market to exchange goods, and a return journey. In order to make the best use of the time and resources for such a trip, he must put both of them to use.

The appropriate model has two different phases, both dictated by supply and demand. As the merchant travels from point A to point B and back again, he must ensure that point A needs the products that point B has, and vice versa. Exchange by definition means reciprocity. The product must be given to those who need it, and reciprocal product – be it koku or some simpler bartering agreement – needs to be returned. Take a product to a market which desires it, sell it, purchase new product desired by the market at his starting point, return and sell *that*. Sale governs purchase and the more he sells, the more he is able to exchange. So a Crab merchant taking weapons to the Unicorn Clan to sell can purchase an amount of silk dictated by the number of weapons the Unicorn buy. But the trip won't be worth it unless the Crab needs that silk, so he must ensure that demand on both sides remains high.

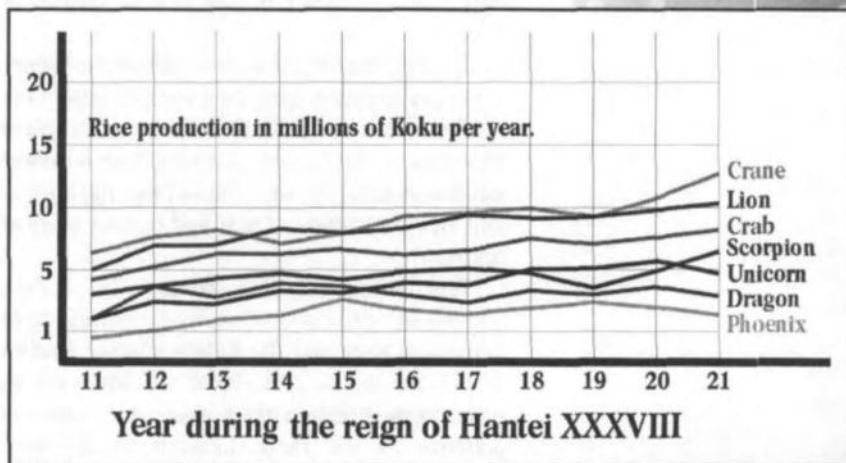
He will not know for sure if he has performed his duties successfully until the round-trip is complete. He will tabulate his liabilities against his assets, convert the time and cost into a common currency – in this case, koku – and compare that figure with the amount his daimyo required him to procure. If he has met it, then the mission was successful and he can report favorably to his lord. If not, then he has failed and must explain what happened, and commence reparations if possible. And, of course, any surplus koku can go directly into his pocket.

That's the basic model; reality is rarely that simple, however. Supply and demand fluctuate as wars, crop returns and other contingencies affect the market. Then the merchant might add a third leg to his journey (say, to the Scorpion lands), and another branch of product exchange must be factored in to the final formula. Each successive layer adds new elements to the merchant's calculations and requires a keen understanding of which products are demanded in which locations. As a simple shorthand, however, GMs can use the above model to determine how and why a given merchant may trade in the products he receives.

Getting back to the idea of surplus for a moment, we come upon the concept of *net*

capital. Supply and demand has its own paradigm, which by and large doesn't include surplus – at least theoretically. Each year a society produces a certain amount of resources, called *gross capital*, part of which is consumed in the normal maintenance of a healthy economic system. Net capital is what remains, to wit: gross capital minus the amount used in the process of production, consumption and exchange. In ancient societies such as Rokugan's, the difference between gross capital formation and net capital formation was much greater than in modern ones like ours. The basic equipment of production in Rokugan has certain fundamental weaknesses, giving rise to shortcomings which much be met by a greater expenditure of labor. Fertile land (the fundamental form of capital in Rokugan) is very delicate and must be handled carefully so as not to reduce its fecundity. Hence the need for fertilizers, crop rotation and the necessity of the peasant to plough a given field many times. Hence the need for a large number of peasants to work the field in order for it to be productive.

Add to that the fact that the distribution of wealth in Rokugan is very lopsided. Samurai compose some ten percent of the population, yet receive a vast amount of the produced wealth (perhaps thirty or forty percent). The use of net capital, then, rarely reaches the peasant caste, who must labor far below their noble lords in terms of per capita income. Therefore the merchant, who in part must handle the precepts of net capital, must focus more upon the consumption of a daimyo than on the *heimin* working under him. All of this goes to show that surplus, when it arises, is not necessarily distributed according to the axioms of



...Okay, that'll be just enough of *that*. I think we've laid down plenty of cover text to hide the real purpose of this book. For those of you expecting more on the tariff rates between Crane and Unicorn lands, or the estimated opportunity cost of another box of scroll sheets from the Phoenix, you're going to be disappointed. There won't be any more of that here. We have no more interest in writing such material than you do in reading it. Oh, we'll still be talking about the Yasuki family, the Unicorn journeys beyond the sands, and all of the rest of that, but not quite in the way you'd expect. This isn't *The Merchant's Guide to Rokugan*, you see.

It's the Kolat book.

For a thousand years, this sinister secret organization has infiltrated Rokugani society, and they wouldn't appreciate knowing that all of their secrets have been revealed. The *Merchant's Guide to Rokugan* tells you everything you need to know about this sinister conspiracy – their origins, their methodology and their membership for the last thousand years. The Kolat have been around for a long time, and their influence stretches across the length of the Emerald Empire. They defend their secrets to the death, and few who know of them live long enough to tell anyone else.

Needless to say, a book about them requires subtlety. We can't just trumpet KOLAT in 120 point letters on the cover; that runs against everything they stand for. Moreover, it might attract attention from certain quarters that we'd rather not disturb. So a little deception was necessary, both to preserve the atmosphere of this book and the organization which it entails. The economics of Rokugan formed the perfect front to hide it. We hope you'll forgive us if we led you on a bit.

The first chapter of the book details the history of the organization, from their earliest days in the shadow of the fallen Kami to their current plans for future of the Empire. It covers their insidious infiltration amid the squabbles of warring houses, and their acquisition of new and terrible types of magic.

The second chapter covers the Kolat's philosophy and organization. No conspiracy exists without a plan, and the Kolat's scheme reaches across the cosmos itself. Kolat are driven by an unwavering belief in their goals, and have the patience to see them through to the end. Understanding them is the key to understanding

the conspiracy. In addition, the structure of their operations, from the secretive Ten Masters down to the lowliest informant is carefully detailed.

The third chapter discusses the *modus operandi* of the conspiracy, the means by which they move through Rokugan. No clan is safe from their tendrils and they move with the practiced ease of centuries of deception. They have countless tools and techniques they use to fulfill their ends, many of which are detailed here.

The fourth chapter covers ways to run a Kolat campaign with your players. For all their power, the Kolat are not absolute rulers of Rokugan, not by a long shot. This section provides ways of balancing the conspiracy with other elements in your campaign, with ways to keep your party on the edge of their seats hunting them... and even with ways to play a Kolat yourself.

Finally, we've provided a list of the most prominent and powerful members of the conspiracy, and a description of their schemes within Rokugan's power structure. It covers the entirety of the Kolat leadership – the Ten Masters who pull the conspiracy's strings from their Hidden Temple. It includes the infamous Akodo Kage, plus a few other faces you might find familiar.

It goes without saying that players with characters in an *L5R* campaign should not read this book. It contains secrets that could ruin any campaign containing the Kolat, and spoil the atmosphere that GMs work so hard to create. Players hoping to enjoy all the twists and turns that the Kolat can provide should stop now and save the surprises for the gaming table. But if you've started, as you have, and mean to read it all, don't hesitate. You've already seen too much as it is, but the more you know, the better chance you'll have of staying alive. Thousands have died for the information between these covers. You might be next.

Welcome through the looking glass.





Chapter One



History

ALL GOOD
THINGS TO THOSE
WHO WAIT

"We do not need men of honor or ability, or even power. Those are plentiful and can be had for the taking. We need men of patience. Men who understand the vastness of eternity and how to make use of it. Honor, ability and power will all come in time. We need only wait."

— Akodo Kage

Chapter One: History

The Beginning

The inception of the Kolat was a bizarre combination of philosophy and powermongering — an effort to attain strength that transcended the merely physical. When the Children of Sun and Moon fell from the sky, they found the race of man waiting for them. The newborn humans were scattered and fractious, divided into simple tribes and struggling with the beginnings of civilization. The first Hantei, along with his brothers and sisters, gathered them all under his rule and created the Emerald Empire. They built palaces, paved roads, and rose far above their simple beginnings. From these disparate bands of ordinary humans came a nation of culture and sophistication.

But there were a few who were dissatisfied with the Hantei's rule. They were the early leaders of the human tribes, men who had their own ideas about the nature of the universe and their place in it. They were deposed by the arrival of Hantei and his siblings, cast aside when the fallen Kami united humanity. The Children of Sun and Moon organized Rokugan around their own leadership, and had no place for these former rulers. Once the lords of all they surveyed, they quickly found themselves alone and anonymous, outcasts in a world which had quickly passed them by. They were a disparate lot. Some wished only to take back the power they had lost — by force if necessary. Others grappled with the sudden truths the Hantei had revealed about the universe. A few even chose to exile themselves, traveling beyond Rokugan's borders to the lands of the Burning Sands. But none of them were

satisfied with the turn of events that had deposed them, and all believed that the Fallen Kami would lead humanity to ruin. They were idealists and had worked hard to achieve their status. They would not let a band of fallen gods, no matter how powerful, usurp the destiny they fervently wished for.

A few plotted directly against the newfound Empire. They were quickly uncovered and destroyed, their planned rebellions coming to naught. The less rash among them were content to sit back and wait, arguing among themselves about how to be rid of their new rulers. They met in secret and never revealed themselves to others; the fates of their hot-headed compatriots had taught them that much.

Whenever they met, the status of the Kami was always at the center of conversation. The vast bulk of humanity adored them, that much was clear, and the advances they brought to the world were certainly beneficial. But they were petty as well; squabbling over what they had made and turning their human followers against each other. While they were all united under Hantei, the Seven "Clans" they had formed were anything but harmonious. Even as the Emerald Empire grew, the conspirators could see the cracks in its foundation and were certain it would all lead to disaster. (This, of course, fit in well with their initial conceit that the Kami were not suitable rulers, but in their minds, the logic was perfectly sound).

So what could they do to stop this disaster from happening? That question hung heavy in their minds for years; they debated it ceaselessly among themselves, but could never arrive at a satisfying conclusion. They were a philosophical bunch, and fancied themselves superior to the ruling Kami. Their debates were not just simple powermongering, but also a search for truth and meaning in their lives. Because of that, they wanted more than just the *ability* to overthrow the Hantei. They wanted the *moral authority*, the ethical justification that their actions were in the right. Otherwise, they could not in good conscience impose themselves on Rokugan's flourishing civilization. It proved a tricky dilemma, and they remained awake countless nights arguing about it. For a while, they couldn't find a agreeable solution to it.

Then, one day, the conspirators received word of Shinsei's appearance. The little old man did not come from the stars, nor did he wish to rule over

other men. He was not a god, not even a fallen one. But he spoke words of wisdom, and a philosophy that encompassed the entire universe. And more importantly, Hantei listened to him; even more, he risked his entire empire on the man's ability to stop Fu Leng. Such a man was everything the conspirators wanted to be. When the *Tao of Shinsei* became available, they pored over it as they would a holy scripture, searching for ways his thoughts could help their plight. Knowing how deeply it had affected Hantei and the heads of the Seven Clans, they were certain it would.

Shinsei's words provided fuel for their endless argument. By this time, some of them had become quite prominent in Rokugani society and held a large amount of personal power – though not nearly as much as the Clan *daimyo* or their followers. Again, the debates raged, and again,

they took years to arrive at any kind of consensus. But finally, after nearly two and a half decades of talk, they reached a conclusion which stunned even the most jaded of them.

All things, the conspirators believed, are fleeting and temporary; Shinsei spoke as much in his *Tao*. Life, power, even the gods themselves, were all part of an endless cycle of endings and beginnings. If they could overthrow the Hantei, then someday they themselves could be overthrown. Nothing was permanent. This constant shift between the ending and beginnings, as manifested in the five Elements and all their forms, shaped the core of the Celestial Pattern, which wheeled and turned throughout eternity.

But what would happen if some sort of permanence *could* be established? If something unchanging could be imposed upon the world?



PHILOSOPHERS OR LUNATICS?

If the foundation of the Kolat seems a bit strange, it's because it comes from a strange set of circumstances.

The original conspirators were heavily steeped in philosophy, but were also self-serving. They didn't like being cast out of power; they wanted to be leaders and rulers again. But with Hantei and his brethren in place, they knew that that couldn't happen. How could they challenge the fallen Kami, who were powerful and wise? So rather than accept the inevitable, they turned to abstract thoughts for a solution. They used high-minded ideals and majestic goals to cover-up a simple case of envy. If they couldn't topple the Hantei, then they'd go over his head – and change the fabric of the world itself.

Unfortunately for the rest of Rokugan, they were very good at what they did.

The plans they set in motion were such that their selfish need for fulfillment mattered not a whit. While they may have been petty and flawed, those who followed them most certainly were not...

That, the conspirators decided, was the ultimate purpose of the Celestial Pattern – to produce a real and unchanging notion or object that would exist for all of eternity. Such an object would permanently define the world and justify its endless pattern of changing and unchanging. The creation of a final meaning – *that* was what the Celestial Pattern sought to produce.

The question then, was what portion of the universe would stamp this final meaning upon it. Who would seize the reins and determine the shape of permanence? Not the gods, certainly; they were a fickle and easily fallible bunch, unable to master the powers they had been given. (If they were capable of achieving permanence, would they have fallen from the sky in the first place?) The elder races which had come before man were incapable as well; they had all either abandoned their duties (as the Naga) or been reduced to petty barbarism (as the Nezumi). That left only the race of man – created from a god's blood, bound to the common earth, capable of transcending even the loftiest ideal of divine thought. Humanity was the means by which the Celestial Pattern would fulfill its destiny. Whether it would be a thing of beauty or eternal ugliness had yet to be seen, but the conspirators all believed that they could influence the result. If they engineered the placement of a perfect man – physically, spiritually, ethically – into the right circumstances at precisely the right time, then he could leave something wondrous and awe-inspiring at the universe's end. They would have to orchestrate the universe's final meaning. Not the Fallen Kami, not the hordes who followed them, but those precious few who understood the true meaning of the Celestial Pattern. If they could do that, then they could attain a victory unreachable by any other method.

The conspirators knew that this would take hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. They would need to control every aspect of Rokugani life, and leave a system in place whereby those that followed them could manipulate it. Those in the position to take the reins of the world when it approached oblivion would have to be perfect – incapable of making an error or succumbing to selfish temptations. The conspirators themselves would not live to see the conclusion of such a plan, nor would their children or grandchildren. But when it finally came – and if undying perfection could be stamped upon the mold of the universe – it would overshadow the power of

time itself. Overwhelmed by the thought of it, humbled by the selfish circumstances that had brought it about, the conspirators resolved to lay the foundations for it as well and truly as they could.

Thus, the Kolat was born.

The First Tendrils

The early days of the cult were quiet ones, dominated by secrecy and the first tentative incursions into the fabric of Rokugan. The conspirators needed to seize control of as much of human society as they could, to better prepare them for their destiny. But they needed to do it in such a way that none would be aware of it. If others learned of their plans before they were ready, they might oppose them, or worse: undo them entirely. So they chose their moves very carefully, waiting and moving only when necessary.

They began by planting those loyal to them in key positions – advisors, gunsos, people who would be privy to pertinent information. Many of these spies believed they were serving "legitimate" interests and had no idea of their masters' true motivations. The conspirators rarely acted on the information they received; at this stage they were more concerned with the means of acquiring it rather than the ways they could use it. Therefore, they asked little of their underlings beyond remembering what they saw and recounting it to their superiors. Slowly, their cache of knowledge began to grow.

The early Kolat knew that they would eventually have to be replaced by others who believed in their cause. Without an apparatus to continue the conspirators' work, they knew it would wither and die. At first, they passed their philosophies onto their sons and daughters, but after several generations, the weakness in that system began to show. Hereditary ties might not be strong enough to ensure that their plan was followed. They needed leaders who would embrace their duties unquestionably, and be prepared for the rigors it would subject them to. Choosing one solely on bloodline risked placing an incompetent and/or potential rebel in control – a disaster in the making.

Instead, they began grooming promising candidates from outside the conspiracy for leadership – approaching them in childhood and

quietly ensuring that they would be exposed to the "proper" philosophical arguments. The promise of power was often enough for them; they were usually second sons, petty nobles or others denied a chance at greatness by an accident of birth. Once their loyalty had been secured, they could then be taught the Kolat's higher philosophical ideals. (Those who didn't accept the philosophy could easily be dispatched before they took control.) To that end, the Kolat began approaching sensei, tutors and other instructors, hoping to use their positions to reveal potential recruits and leave them open to Kolat influence. Again, they took care to ensure that these teachers had no idea whose interests they were really serving.

It was awkward and only sporadically effective at first. But as the Kolat's ability to influence people grew, it became indispensable to their cause. In time, it served as the sole means of selecting membership to the Kolat's inner council – called the Ten Masters – and an assured means of continuing the great plan.

The Oni's Eye

The Kolat remained small and relatively ineffective throughout their early years. They lacked the manpower to exert any real control over Rokugani society, and most of their efforts were spent keeping the conspiracy alive and ensuring that no one learned of its existence. They had a few powerful shugenja on their side and the beginnings of an information network in the Emperor's court, but little else. Then a discovery was made which transformed them forever – an object which allowed them to stop covering their tracks and start making real progress towards achieving their goal.

They called it the Oni's Eye, a gigantic crystal that had been uncovered by Crab miners deep within the Twilight Mountains. It was clear and bright, carved into a circular shape by unknown hands. The image of what could have been an eye had been chiseled into one side. It weighed as much as four horses and took almost twenty men to lift and move. Where it had come from, no one



could say. Some speculated that the ancient Naga created it. Others claimed it belonged to Fu Leng and his ilk. But whatever its origins, it represented an invaluable resource that the Kolat wished to exploit.

Its magical nature was unquestioned, for the thing glowed with power. The carved eye flashed with constant bursts of light, and the Kuni magicians who came to study it claimed to be able to see visions of far-away places within it. They also said that the eye cried tears of diamonds, and that those tears could be used to speak to people thousands of miles away. They begged their daimyo (the original Hida) to return it to the Kuni lands where they could examine it at length. Although highly distrustful of the object

(he was convinced it was a construct of Fu Leng's), Hida reluctantly agreed.

Before the Eye could be moved, however, the Kolat acted. They learned of it through a well-placed contact in the Kuni family, and sent a band of mercenaries to seize the object as the Crab prepared to transport it from the mine. The attack caught Hida's men completely unaware. All those present were killed, and the shaft was collapsed under tons of rock. The Crab assumed that the Oni's Eye had been buried, and Hida did not wish to spend any more resources trying to recover the cursed thing (for all he knew, it caused the mineshaft to collapse). He considered the matter closed.



THE CONSPIRACY AND THE UNICORN

The fact that the Unicorn are largely controlled by the Kolat does not mean they are mindless pawns. Far from it. One does not need the entire clan in one's pocket to be able to manipulate it; only a few select members in key positions. A handful of daimyo and a few of their servants is more than they need to manipulate the clan when they wish. The rest – some 95% of the Unicorn – have no knowing contact with the conspiracy and act solely according to the dictates of their clan.

In most cases, the Kolat never exercised the control they worked so hard to gain. The Unicorn's overt philosophy never changed, and its leadership continued to act as they had since Shinjo's day. Most of the clan had no idea that they were the tools of a conspiracy, and indeed have stayed untouched by the Kolat throughout their lives. Entire generations would go by while the conspiracy did nothing. But at certain times, in certain key periods of history, the Ten Masters have needed to achieve certain specific ends. And with a slight nudge or the activation of a single agent, the Unicorn has done exactly that. A few unwitting Unicorn samurai are "sleepers" agents, brainwashed subjects who have no idea they serve another master. Together with the loyal Kolat already in place, they are enough to make the clan serve the Kolat perfectly when the need arises.

Meanwhile, the Kolat's mercenaries spirited it away to their employers' hideout – a fortress being constructed in a hidden vale within the Phoenix Mountains. This was still in the early days of the Empire, and the roads were not regularly patrolled, so they were not troubled by authorities on their journey. Those few who saw them assumed that the well-wrapped artifact was merely a large statue or some similar object, and did not inquire further. The mercenaries disappeared into the Phoenix Mountains and their mysterious cargo vanished with them. None of them – neither the men nor the artifact they carried – were seen by non-Kolat again.

Once the conspiracy had it, they set about unlocking the secrets to its power. The Oni's Eye exceeded their loftiest expectations. Through it, they could look into any corner of the globe, seeing and hearing anything that happened as if they were there. From the Emperor's Palace in Otosan Uchi to the furthest reaches of the Burning Sands, there was no place the Eye could not show them. The diamond tears it cried had powers too. Anyone who carried them could speak to the Eye's user no matter how far away they were. The Kolat could now give instructions to their followers without ever leaving their fortress. Spies were suddenly unnecessary, as was the need to receive information second-hand. From now on, the Kolat could directly observe any person or event they wished.

Once they learned the secrets of the Eye, the Kolat Masters wasted no time in consolidating its power. Those outside their circle who knew how to use it were put to death, including the loyal shugenja who first examined it. The artifact was moved to a hidden room deep within the heart of the incomplete fortress, sealed with glyphs and inaccessible to any save the Ten Masters and a few trusted servitors. They distributed the Eye's diamonds to their agents in the field, granting them instant access to the conspiracy's expanding tendrils. That accomplished, the Kolat were now in a position to achieve some real power.

The first thing they did with their new toy was to locate their brethren in exile – those early members of their order who had traveled to the Burning Sands. They found them enmeshed in the Byzantine politics of that strange land, struggling to exert some sort of influence amongst its desert tribes and ancient cities. Through a long and arduous process which cost the lives of over a dozen men, they managed to

get a few of the Eye's diamonds into their distant brethren's hands. When the exiles learned what their compatriots had been up to, they were ecstatic; here was a means to achieve what they had been fighting for since leaving Rokugan. They eagerly pledged themselves to the Kolat cause, and vowed to one day control the Burning Sands as their fellows would one day control Rokugan. They called themselves "Qolat", to differentiate themselves from their brethren, but in spirit, they were the same. In the span of a few months, the Oni's Eye allowed the conspirators to stretch their tendrils farther than anyone could have dreamed.

The Infiltration of the Ki-Rin

All of this took place within the first one hundred years of the Emerald Empire, and was guided by the Kolat's original founders. With the apparatus now in place to continue their plans, they could proceed faithfully, assured that what they had done would not end with their own passing. When they died, successors took their places, moving the plan a little farther. A few more agents were placed in key positions, allowing certain events to be swayed and influenced. Thus it continued, as the Kolat plotted, developed their resources, and waited for opportunities to strike.

Then the Ki-Rin Clan left Rokugan to explore the dangers beyond its border. The clan founder, Shinjo, cited a need to discover any new threats that might arise against the Empire and perhaps find allies to help Hantei's cause. She and her followers vanished north into the mountains and would not be seen in Rokugan again for over seven hundred years; more than enough time for the conspiracy to shape them to their needs.

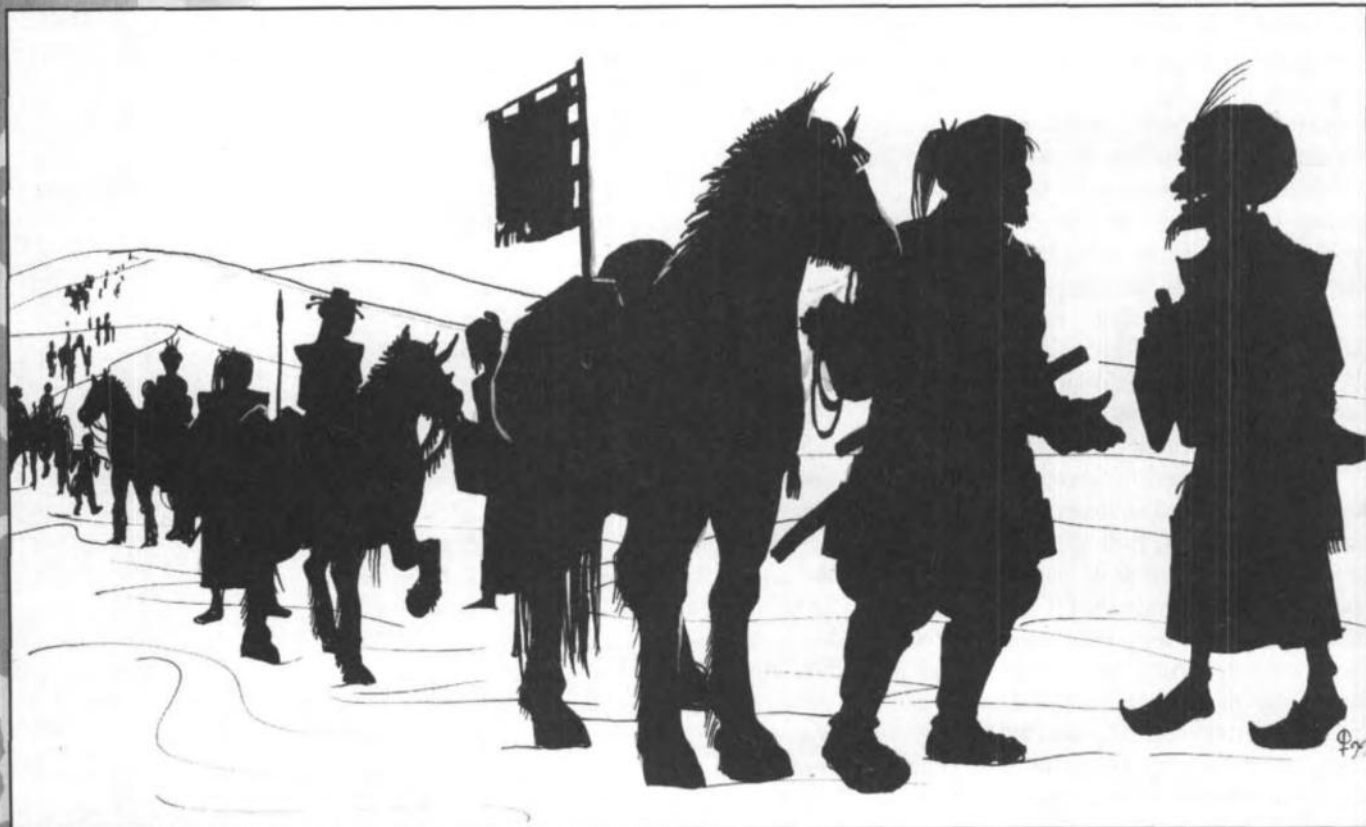
The Ten Masters had watched Shinjo throughout the war with Fu Leng, and suspected that she might leave soon thereafter. The Oni's Eye told them of her conversations with Hantei, and of her wish to see and explore. They knew that she would follow the same path their exiles had many years before. While she and her followers prepared for their journey, they contacted their agents on the other side of the mountains, and told them to be ready. Shinjo was a mighty warrior and a canny observer of human

nature; she could not be tricked easily. But she would also be alone and in need of allies, and that left her vulnerable.

The Qolat (as they called themselves in the Burning Sands) came to the clan as the Rokugani emerged from the wastes. They had loyal spies within a nomadic tribe called the "Ujik-hai," operating near the western edge of the desert. They convinced its greedy leader that a group of foreigners would appear from the wastes – easy pickings for his warriors. The Ki-Rin indeed showed themselves as the spies predicted. They were exhausted after months of travel, and the Ujik-hai greeted them with false promises and deceiving smiles. The tribesmen launched an

They approached the Ki-Rin that night, while the foolish Ujik-hai leadership fled for their lives, and pleaded for Shinjo's mercy. They claimed that their "leader" had acted foolishly, and that they wished to learn the skill she and her people had so aptly demonstrated. After a night of listening to their arguments, Shinjo agreed to allow them into her clan – which is what they wanted all along.

Thus integrated, the Qolat moved slowly and noiselessly to gain influence over the clan. They rallied behind Shinjo's banner, and allowed the Kami's power to speak for itself. They also taught the Rokugani survival skills and showed them how to thrive in the Burning Sands. Shinjo grew to depend upon them for advice and counsel, and



attack as soon as the Ki-Rin's guard was down, hoping to overwhelm them in one fell swoop.

The Ki-Rin, however, were made of stronger stuff, as the Qolat well knew. They fell upon the Ujik-hai with the power of gods, and the treacherous ambush quickly fell apart beneath Rokugani steel. With the battle turning, the Qolat launched the next phase of their plan – and convinced the Ujik-hai noncombatants to defect.

often sent the clan's children into the desert with them to learn their ways. Children born of the union between Ki-Rin and Ujik-hai were wild and strong, with the best traits of both peoples. They also harbored the Qolat philosophy deep within their hearts, and when they came of age taught them to their own children. The integration of the two was quite potent and the Ki-Rin soon became



EXCERPTS FROM WAY OF THE UNICORN

Throughout the *Merchant's Guide* sidebars we'll be quoting bits from the History section of *Way of the Unicorn*. These sidebars can refresh your memory about the trials the Ki-Rin went through while becoming the Unicorn. You may also see some of the described events in a new light after reading this chapter.

the mightiest tribe on the steppes – thanks in part to the Qolat's subtle influence.

Among the Qolat's deepest agents was a woman named Martazera, who became one of Shinjo's closest advisors. She dispensed wisdom to the fallen Kami, and told her how to strengthen the bonds of her clan. She also suggested other courses of action, ones designed to ensure a Qolat presence inside the clan. She suggested taking the clan's heirs apparent into the desert alone for "training," which lasted many long nights. It mostly involved survival skills and other elements of desert culture, but also included subtle brain-washing techniques and instruction about the Qolat's greater purpose. Not everyone was subjected to this treatment – perhaps one in one hundred. Most were simply trained in the Ujik-hai's ways, as promised, with no ulterior motives in their instruction. But that one percent of trainees would be thoroughly indoctrinated into the Qolat conspiracy. They would return as just one more Ki-Rin now prepared for survival in the desert. But beneath the surface, they were run through with the conspiracy's influence – the perfect agents to perpetuate the Qolats' plans. Through this and countless other methods, Martazera ensured that her masters would have a hold on the Ki-Rin for some time to come. The clan was often strengthened by her advice – Shinjo would not have trusted her if she weren't so wise – but at a price. Slowly and invisibly, the Qolat had taken control.

When the Ki-Rin left the Ujik-hai, they were quite powerful, but the Qolat wished them to be even more so. When their scouts arrived at the cities of the sorcerers, the conspiracy arranged for an artifact to fall into their hands – a book of magic spells. The knowledge contained within its pages was not meant of the Children of Sun and Moon. Only mortal men could use it, and in doing so, they would move away from the influence of Rokugan's gods. It was based on the concept of names and words of power, rather than entreaties to the spirits. Thus, its magic came not for other beings, but from the mouths of men themselves – something the Qolat believed was imperative to the great plan.

Shinjo's follower Iuchi took the book and studied its lessons. He then taught what he had learned to his children, who taught it to their children, and so on. In time, it formed the basis of the Clan's magic system, and gave them powers and abilities they scarcely could have conceived

of. By gaining such knowledge the Ki-Rin took a step closer to the Qolat's vision of who and what they ought to be.

The Qolat's next order of business was to remove Shinjo. The conspiracy's philosophy embraced the strength of men, not gods, and as long as an immortal (even a fallen one) held the leadership of the clan, they would not be able to move forward. Shinjo would not be easy to get rid of. The Kami was perceptive and powerful; if she discovered their influence, she could destroy them all. They knew she would eventually leave the clan, despite her promise to the contrary, but needed to ensure that she could not destroy all their work before she did so. So, as always, they moved with stealth and caution, taking their time before engineering a plan.

They directed the clan slowly west, towards the mountains where the Sun vanished into the Underworld. A few months later, Shinjo was drawn into a haunted oasis, which took her away from her followers for a period of seven days. This was just what the conspiracy had hoped for. When she returned, she was heavy with child – the union of her power and the unknown creature which had lured her in. She had also shattered the clan's trust in her, for she had broken her vow never to leave them. The act created a new source of strength for the clan in the five children she bore, but also drove a wedge between her and her followers – a wedge which the Qolat would widen over time.

Eventually, they were proven correct. The clan split into four groups to search for a way back to Rokugan. After two hundred years, they were called back together by Shinjo to battle against an evil and unknown foe. The Qolat watched as the Ki-Rin were outflanked and began to fall to their enemies' ranks, and then waited to see what their leader would do. Faced with the choice of sacrificing herself or losing her entire clan, Shinjo never looked back. She ordered her followers to retreat and charged alone against the darkness. Hardened by two centuries away from their founder, the Ki-Rin accepted her sacrifice. They fought their way free of the battlefield and left Shinjo to her fate. The fight and subsequent retreat drained the clan considerably, but they survived. And with Shinjo out of the way, the Qolat now could move without fear of the Kami's retribution.

The time had come to return the clan to Rokugan. Their forces were fractious and in

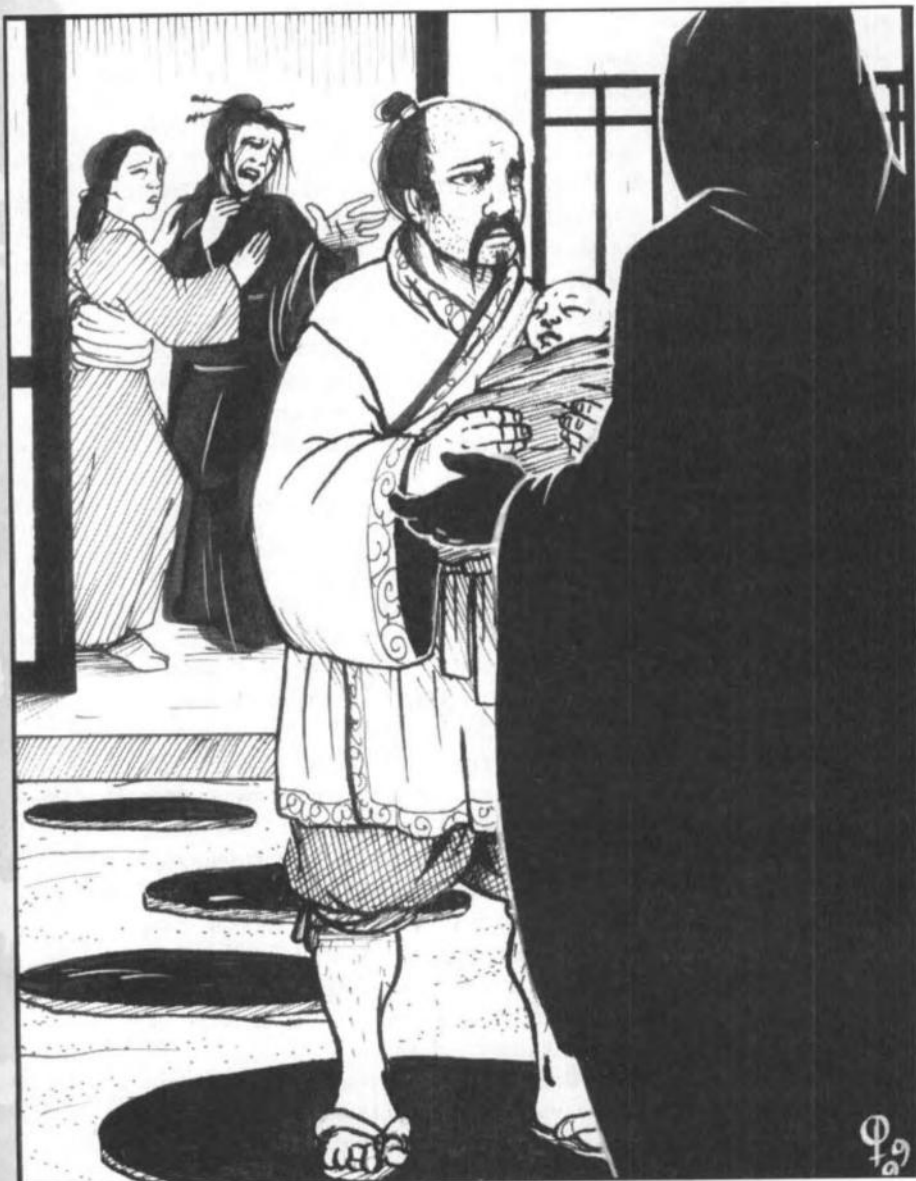
disarray, but their spirit remained intact and within it lay the seeds of their former dominance. For the next two centuries, as they struggled to find a way home, the Qolat worked to keep those seeds alive and rebuild what they had lost. They knew that the Ki-Rin – now renamed the Unicorn – would be distrusted and ostracized in their distant homeland, but also respected as a force to be reckoned with. With their powerful warhorses, their mysterious magic, and select members of their nobility completely under Qolat dominance, they would be the most potent tool the Ten Masters had ever seen. A fitting prize for seven centuries of hard work.

The Crane-Yasuki War

While the Qolat infiltrated the distant Ki-Rin, their brethren in Rokugan were hard at work as well. The Kolat had slowly made inroads into most of the remaining six clans (although not to the extent they had subordinated the Ki-Rin/Unicorn) and after three hundred years felt it was time to take a risk. The Ten Masters had become intrigued by the potential of economic power, and felt it could give them an edge against the clans' entrenched nobility and martial prowess. Rokugan's feudal system had little use

for the unrestricted flow of supply and demand. A samurai's needs were provided by his lord; those beneath him were obligated to provide goods and services at the magistrate's demands. Therefore, the ruling class had few uses for currency. Money had existed in Rokugan since the early days, but the concept of koku had not moved past the most rudimentary stage. It was used as an accounting measure in interclan trading, where it served as common ground for bartering merchants. The Kolat hoped to change that. If the Rokugani could assign a monetary value to objects, land, even people, then they could be manipulated all the more easily. (See Chapter Three for more details.)

A golden opportunity arose during the first war





between the Crane and the Crab. The two clans had come to blows after squabbling over their mutual border, and left the door open for a new and potent tool to enter Rokugani politics. The Crane used their economic and political might to counter the Crab's powerful military, bringing the idea of commerce as a weapon to the forefront. For the first time, bushi skills and noble philosophy had to compete with the strength of merchants and their wares. Operatives from the Ten Masters had watched the tensions between the Yasuki family and their Crane masters and decided that it would make the perfect fulcrum for controlling the economy. One clan depending upon its merchants was good, but if a second could be added...

The key, the Kolat decided, was the Yasuki family. The Crane's dealers in the shadowy and quasi-legal had always chafed against their superiors' restrictions; the war brought the tension to the breaking point. The Kolat, through their agents, suggested that the Crane reorient the Yasuki's interests to curry favor with the Emperor – a suggestion which the Yasuki would never acquiesce to. The Crane saw wisdom in the idea and ordered the Yasuki to cease their illegal activities. The Yasuki, predictably, left the clan. Alone and without prospects, they found shelter with the Crab Clan... and suddenly, both sides of the war now had a vested interest in economic power.

Unlike physical combat, conflict on an economic front meant development. In their race to outdo each other, the two sides would search for new resources, new marketplaces, and new ways to encourage trade. Therefore, the Kolat decided that after the Crane-Crab war ended, the conflict must continue on a more sedate front. The conspiracy's servants – most of whom believed they acted for the Scorpion, the Hantei and others – whispered into the ears of the Crane and Yasuki leaders, inciting them against each other. The two sides were all too eager to resume hostilities; their merchants quickly tore into each other's hides. As the conflict spread, so too did commerce. New markets were opened, employment rose, and koku suddenly became a real commodity instead of just an accounting short-hand. Both sides were too canny to let their battles become noticeable, and neither wanted the rest of Rokugan prying in their affairs. So the war stayed secret – a perfect hidden front for the Kolat to maneuver in.

By the time the conspiracy's direct influence ended, the face of society had changed. The merchant class was now a prominent part of the culture, and businesses were present in every town and village. Koku changed hands freely, and gained prominence with every exchange. While not approaching the power of their feudal lords, Rokugan's merchants had abilities of great use to the Kolat – acquiring supplies, moving freely between provinces, and the lack of visibility that came with being *heimin*. They also held prominent positions in two of the six major clans, and could count upon their noble cousins for support in Rokugan's courts. In response to their growing power, the other four clans began to support their own merchant class, and the value of economic clout increased further. The Kolat now had a new weapon to use against their enemies... and another means of controlling the fate of the Empire.

The conflict between the Crane and the Yasuki continued unabated, and remains active to this day. The Kolat have maintained agents on both sides, and keep a considerable presence both in the Yasuki family and in the more prosperous Crane merchants. Very little happens in Rokugan's wharves and marketplaces that they do not know about, and they now have considerable financial assets to further their cause. Even in the face of bushido, money can buy far more than a few bags of rice...

Moves and Countermoves

Following the war came a long "sleep" period for the conspiracy. These large thrusts had achieved much for them, but they did not wish to overextend themselves, lest their plots become exposed. They maneuvered their agents into favorable positions, engineered the outcome of certain events, and removed those who might be an impediment to the plan. Thousands of tiny plots were hatched and put into motion, each designed to move things forward a little more. But these took many long years, and the history of Rokugan continued on its way. The Kolat did not mind. They could wait.

Their efforts were not perfect, and not every scheme went off as planned. Sometimes, their plots were uncovered. Spies who had been

THE RISE OF THE KOLAT

Those few Rokugani who know of the Kolat (and aren't a part of the conspiracy themselves) believe that the order began in the economic wars between the Crane and the Yasuki. As we have seen, this is not the case; the Kolat began long before, in the mists of the Empire's founding. But the Crane-Yasuki war was the first time they played a significant role in Rokugani politics – and thus the first time they could be spotted by outsiders. As careful as the Kolat were, the merchants' battles were large and somewhat messy. A few times, their servants tipped their hands – not enough to be noticed by the casual observer, but a red flag to those who knew what to look for. With no evidence extending back any further, the Kolat's hunters are forced to conclude that the conspiracy did not exist before the war. Therefore, it must have sprung from that conflict. (And considering the covert nature of the Crane-Yasuki war, it seems a perfectly logical conclusion.) See *Way of the Crab*, pp. 24-25, and *Way of the Crane*, pp. 46-47, for more information.

conditioned for years fell in a single evening. Brainwashed servants would revert or go mad. Incidents they had counted on would spiral out of their control. The Dragon, in particular, had become an impediment to their plans, and the Kolat's efforts to infiltrate them invariably ended in failure. The Ten Masters attributed this to their mysterious daimyo, whom they believed was one of the original fallen Kami. Togashi knew a great deal about the conspiracy, and wanted them out of his affairs. No Kolat agent, however cunningly placed, had ever penetrated the Dragon Mountains.

When they could not infiltrate them, the conspiracy sought to discredit them, casting doubt and suspicion on their motives. This proved an equally fruitless endeavor, since the Dragon never did anything save watch and wait. Nobody felt threatened by them, so they were never considered real threats. The best the Kolat could do was paint them as strange and a little different – hardly the vilification they were aiming for.

Through this and numerous other plots, the Ten Masters came up short. But they were patient, and did not let these setbacks deter them. The

conspiracy founders, in their wisdom, had stressed secrecy above all and created a system by which their descendants could melt into the shadows. The Kolat always moved with care and forethought, which ensured that they never lost more than they could afford. Missed opportunities would come around again. One loyal informant could be replaced with another. The few agents caught went to their graves blaming other, more overt forces; in some cases, they actually believed they worked for the Hantei, the Dragon, or anyone except their real masters. It ensured that the organization never suffered any permanent damage, and remained hidden at all times.

The Ten Masters quickly learned that the Scorpion made excellent scapegoats, and redirected all investigative efforts against them toward the Bayushi. No one trusted the Scorpion anyway, and with the convoluted plots spun by their members, they became another smokescreen behind which the Kolat could hide. Whenever exposure threatened, whenever their plots came to light, whenever someone stumbled across some damning piece of information, their agents would simply point to the Hidden Clan. It





was far easier to believe that the Scorpion were at fault than some hidden conspiracy behind the scenes; and a visible devil will always be pursued over an invisible one. The Kolat's would-be pursuers chased down the Scorpion with fervor, proud that they had uncovered a "dangerous plot," while the real culprits walked away unscathed. The Scorpion themselves never suspected either, since they were blamed for nearly every plot (real or imagined) in Rokugan. What difference did a few more make? Thus, the Kolat could continue to evade detection – even when their plans went awry.

The Lion

After the Crane and the Crab, the Lion became the next focus of the conspiracy's attention. The Emperor's Right Hand was closer to the heart of the Empire than any other clan, and the Kolat wanted to place themselves within striking distance of the Imperial family. They also paid close attention to Togashi's prediction that "When the last Akodo falls, so falls the last Hantei." One way or another, the Lion would be pivotal in any effort to overthrow the Emperor.

Unfortunately, the clan proved much more tenacious than any of the Kolat's previous targets. Fanatical devotees to the code of bushido with wills of unbreakable steel, the Lion could resist infiltration as strongly as the Dragon. Spies were discovered, kidnapped subjects fought their way free. The creation of sleeper agents within their ranks rarely held, and more than once, a carefully groomed agent ended up twitching on the end of a spear. For decades, the conspiracy tried to maneuver their way into the heart of the Lion families. They never got far.

The few agents they did manage to place within the clan were sensei and other teachers, whose instruction and training groomed future samurai for life on the battlefield. While they could help steer clan children towards certain philosophies, they held very little actual control. Their young charges were often as stubborn as their elders when it came to listening to "outside influences". The sensei, however, did become privy to the Lion's training techniques, as well as to the temperament and disposition of the clan's future leaders. They could often predict how the Lion would act in the face of adversity, and could determine how a particular daimyo would react

to a given situation. It wasn't much – certainly not compared to the masterful manipulation of the Unicorn – but it did have one subtle, long-term benefit.

Over the centuries, the Ikoma family have slowly shifted their focus away from the warrior's prowess of their founder and towards the gentler arts of writing and poetry. (This was the work of Kolat agents, mostly sensei, who influenced Ikoma children over the course of generations.) As a result, the Ikoma have distanced themselves from the Akodo family, who continue to follow the bushi's path with fervor and dedication. Where once the two families stood side by side, they now tread different paths, and can no longer communicate with each other the way they once could. The split has left the Akodo alone and isolated, even amongst the other Lion families; the Matsu have always been their bitter rivals, and the Kitsu are too immersed in their studies to pay them much mind. Without the Ikoma to support them, the Akodo have had no one to turn to but themselves. By slowly cutting them off, the Kolat have destabilized the family and helped engender their eventual decline.

Today, the few Kolat agents within the Lion are valued for their position and ability to gather information. Most of what the conspiracy knows about the Emperor's Right Hand comes from them, and their continuing presence is imperative if the Kolat are ever to unseat the Hantei. The Kolat spend a great deal of time and resources ensuring that their positions remain firm and that their true loyalties are never discovered by the rest of the clan (one shudders to think what the Matsu would do to a Lion spy). Agents within the Lion are thus highly prized and afforded a great deal of respect among the Kolat's inner circle. Indeed, one has become a member of the Ten Masters.

The Structure of the Law

Along with the feudal power of the clans, the laws and statutes governing society have been the most powerful elements of Rokugani life. They have been extensions of the Emperor's will, the highest and most prominent symbol of his power. Yet they are fluid and easily adjustable. It seemed only natural that in their long period of hidden

movement, the Kolat would gravitate towards them as another tool to take control of.

Law in the Emerald Empire can come only from the Emperor, for only he has the authority to decide it. The Son of Heaven has the divine right to govern his people as he sees fit, and his orders are infallible. The Kolat could do nothing to change this, not without overthrowing the Hantei completely. When the word of the law comes from a single voice, it becomes immune to outside influence. However, the interpretation of that word was a different matter. The magistrates and samurai charged with enforcing the Emperor's decrees were far away from Otosan Uchi, and had to depend upon their own common sense to decide what the Son of Heaven intended. And unlike the Hantei, they were vulnerable to the Kolat's tendrils.

As with everything else, the conspiracy moved slowly. They could not seize control of every court in the Empire, and their numbers among the Imperial Magistrates were small. Instead, they worked to gradually shape the interpretation of the law, concentrating on specific cases that

would have an impact over a wide area. The judges in their control learned to watch for important or meaningful incidents in their jurisdiction – incidents which could be used to change the meaning of the law. Through them, the Kolat have pushed interpretation of the Emperor's edicts to reflect *their* philosophy, not his.

They have made their biggest gains in the realm of testimony and how the word of different classes affects the rulings of the courts. A samurai's testimony had always carried weight due to the code of bushido, but it could still be discounted if enough physical evidence appeared to the contrary. The Kolat worked to change that. Slowly, the presence of damning facts – clothing at a murder scene, coinage in a bribery case, and other such evidence – became less important than the words and the honor of those involved. If a bushi swore that he was not at a geisha house the night its owner was killed – despite his ceremonial robe being found there – then he wasn't there. Period. Unless the magistrate could



WAY OF THE UNICORN: LOYALTY AND FEALTY

When Lady Shinjo released her followers from their obligations she inadvertently began a custom that would prove invaluable to the Unicorn in their wanderings. Unlike the other clans, with whom heredity is everything, a vital element of Unicorn loyalty lies in choice.

On her journey, Shinjo recognized a fundamental truth that would remain with her followers, even after their return to Rokugan. A man who is born into a Clan is not necessarily one with that Clan. Early dealings with the Scorpion have reminded them of this lesson time and time again: Devotion does not come from blood, but from the heart.

Because of this, the Unicorn *gempukku* is a very important and ritualized process. To participate in the Unicorn *gempukku* ceremony, a child must proclaim their intention to become a Unicorn. Each family member who chooses to become an active member of the clan undergoes an examination to test their honor, loyalty, and faith in his or her ideals. If the candidate's belief is found to be strong and to conform to the Unicorn's the candidate undergoes a grueling ceremony that inducts them into the clan.

produce a social equal who could refute such testimony, he would have to let the samurai go.

The shift took place over hundreds of years, and was not total by any means. The Kolat did not create this trend, they merely encouraged it to develop faster than it might have. The Otomo family of the Hantei had themselves pushed for a testimony-based system of law, and gained much favor for it in the first few centuries of the Hantei's rule (see the *Winter Court* sourcebook for more information on the Otomo). Without the Kolat's participation, Rokugani courts would appear much different than they are today.

The shift assisted the conspiracy primarily by moving the Emperor's laws away from fact and towards perception. This had several effects. First, it eliminated the need for physical proof of a given deed; now, a man's word would be enough and as the Kolat knew, words could be changed if necessary. That gave them the leeway to alter what people would think and see – a social way to overcome cold hard facts. Second, it provided them with another smokescreen behind which to hide. The appearance of one of their agents or evidence of their plans could be discounted by the timely words of an "honorable man". Similar words could condemn someone who stood in their way, even if there were nothing else to support them. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it gave the Kolat an opening to one day drive doubt into the Hantei's voice. If the Emperor's word ever ran consistently against the precepts of honor and common sense, his subjects might be tempted to turn against him.

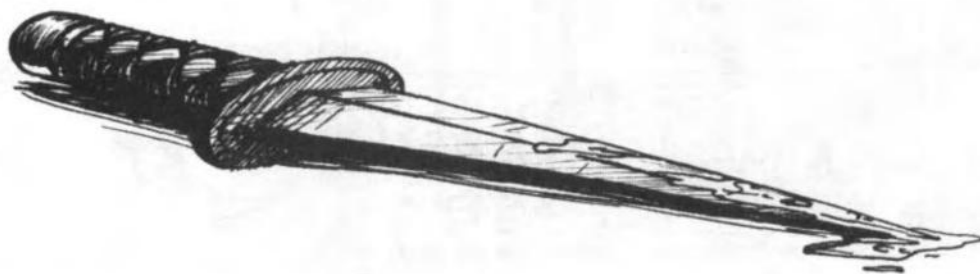
The Present Day

The plots and schemes listed above are only a few of the more prominent Kolat movements. Countless others existed, most so minor and insignificant they could hardly be noticed. A bushi given a certain post, a magistrate moved to

another portion of the Empire... each move carefully planned and cunningly executed by minions of the Ten Masters. Few noticed them and those who did thought the Kolat's actions were merely the whims of fate – certainly nothing to be concerned over. In and of themselves they had little, if any, recognizable effect. But each event brought the Kolat a little closer to its goal – each one ensured that their fingers reached a little farther.

After a thousand years, the conspiracy continues to thrive in the shadows of the Emerald Empire. Their goals are still far off, but grow closer every day. Through the Eye of the Oni, they peer into every open window. Through the movements of their pawns, they grasp every hidden heart. Their instruments have touched every soul in Rokugan at one point or another, and while true power continues to elude their grasp, they have never wavered in their commitment to their founders' plan.

Now, after nearly seven hundred years, they are prepared to take a great risk once again. Like the seduction of the Ki-Rin and the schism of the Crane, the Ten Masters see an opportunity approaching – one which may increase their power in ways they can scarcely conceive. Storm clouds have begun to gather in the Empire; the friction between the clans grows daily, and it is only a matter of time before they begin to split. The Kolat suspect that a war – one involving every faction in the Emerald Empire – might allow them to achieve one of their highest goals. The Crab overlord openly voices his contempt of the old man on the throne. The Scorpion daimyo suspects that the Emperor may doom Rokugan. And the Akodo family has dwindled to a tiny handful of members – one of which sits on the Kolat's inner circle. The thousand-year rule of the Hantei is drawing to a close, giving rise to the question: "who will take their place?" Deep within their hidden stronghold, the Kolat intend to be ready with the answer.





Chapter Two



Purpose and Organization

**CONTROL
SECRECY
PATIENCE**

These are the watchwords of the Kolat.

The Kolat follow a strange set of beliefs, based on a combination of Shinsei's wisdom and the bitter musings of their own founders. These beliefs have stayed with them over the course of history, and form the underlying principle to every action they take. The conspiracy is convinced that it remains the only philosophy of real meaning in the universe, and they will do anything – anything – to see its truths come to pass. But how much damage will they do in pursuit of their goals? And what happens if, by twisting the universe to fit their perceptions, they end up destroying the very thing they seek to preserve?

Chapter Two: Purpose and Organization

Philosophy and Goals

The guiding philosophy of the Kolat began with the fevered debates of its founders ten centuries ago. Unlike most Rokugani, they believed that the Celestial Pattern was temporary and would one day come to a close. To all things, there comes a time to rest. Eventually, the universe will rest as well – a great sleep that may well last to the end of time. But before then, it must complete its purpose – whatever ultimate goal the Pattern has set out to achieve. The Kolat believe they have discovered this purpose, this reason for the Celestial Pattern to come into being. They believe the universe is trying to create something of absolute and lasting permanence – a final truth which would define all existence in the dark void after the stars fall. Will it be something fickle, empty, meaningless? Or will it be something pure and beautiful, a reflection of everything the world was and could have been? The Kolat have taken it upon themselves to make sure it turns out right.

While others think the world is eternal, they know better. There will only be one chance to stamp a final truth upon the universe, to complete its purpose and allow it to finally rest. They don't trust anyone else – man, oni or god – with that awesome responsibility. The gods are fickle: for all their power, they whiled away their lives on petty things, and eventually fell from the sky in their incompetence. The elder races have tried to impose order upon the world and failed. The Naga are asleep, the Ratlings scattered to the four winds, and the others so rare as to be insignificant. Spirits are flighty and obsessed with

their own natures. They cannot encompass the world's totality. That leaves men, simple men, to complete the Celestial Pattern. Men who have bled and died for the world's sins. Men who can see the gods for the frauds that they are and have the courage to seize their power from them. Men who understand the nature of failure as well as success, and have the discipline to overcome them both. Men such as these are destined to control the universe – men such as the Kolat.

In order to fulfill their destiny, the conspiracy will first need to control every aspect of Rokugan, the world beyond, and the heavens themselves if they can manage it. Everything must be in their hands, nothing must be left to chance. Otherwise, the Pattern will continue, birthing and dying in endless repetition until something comes along to change it. They need to ensure that every portion of the universe can be altered at their whim – to exert control for the sake of exerting control. Therein rests the final end to the Celestial Pattern, the goal towards which its endless cycle struggles. With everyone in their proper place, and everything capable of being manipulated at will, the apparatus will be in place for the creation of something real and permanent.

When that happens – assuming the right person or persons have been placed at the head of it all – the universe's final meaning will be achieved and creation may finally be able to rest. No more of the endless parade of birthing and dying, no more struggle with pain and perfection throughout a thousand different lifetimes. Fulfillment, totality... the completion of purpose – the state that every being strives for will finally be granted to the Pattern which encapsulates them all.

"The right person" is the second aspect to the Kolat's plan. Not only must they stretch their tentacles into every conceivable aspect of society, but they must also place someone in charge of it all who will be ready for the responsibility. Power is a grave burden, and will destroy those who cannot use it properly. Preparing the table will not be enough if the wrong person is permitted to dine at it. By the time the Kolat's power stretches across the world – by the time it has engulfed the heavens themselves in its grip – then the last true leader must be prepared to emerge. They call this hypothetical ruler "the Final Emperor," and maintain that he must be as close to perfection as humanity can get. He must be skilled, canny beyond any previous incarnation of man. He



must be wise, knowledgeable and compassionate, full of the very best of mankind's spirit. And he must be ready, prepared by the struggle of centuries to assume the mantle of power. With such a person in place – one so far advanced as to overshadow the gods themselves – then the Kolat's control can safely be placed in the proper hands. They will give him the tool to complete the universe, and by his extraordinary hand, the Celestial Pattern will finally be finished.

Like the task of seizing control, this will not happened overnight. It will take centuries, or even millennia, and society will evolve in ways that no one can predict. But the Ten Masters believe that their efforts will someday produce the Final

Emperor, who will know what to do with the grand apparatus their predecessors have labored so hard to produce. They can then achieve the legacy for which generations of Kolat have fought and died. For now, the purpose is to direct the course of history towards such ends. Put the right people in charge, ensure that the right events happen in the right order... and remove those who might be an impediment to the Plan. There is chaos in the world, a different facets which must be controlled. For now, they must concentrate on what they currently can achieve, not what they one day *will* achieve. Once that is accomplished, then the rest of their plans will follow in order.



RANK AND FILE BELIEFS

Every samurai knows the power of serving some greater purpose: the Emperor, their clan, the code of bushido, etc. With the strength of tradition and honor running through their veins, they can achieve almost anything, and will cheerfully die to defend what they know is right. That's what gives a samurai his power. The Kolat are much the same way; they embrace the vision of the Plan unhesitatingly and know that their own lives are insignificant. This makes them as strong as any samurai – stronger, in fact, for they must hold onto their ideals while being constantly buffeted by opposing notions of clan, duty, and bushido. This makes them unswervingly dedicated to the fulfillment of their cause.

Secrecy above all is the watchword of Kolat membership. No one must suspect who they really are or what their goals are.

Only when mankind is ready and/or dominance is assured can the conspiracy show itself – and possibly not even then. The conspiracy is safe only in total anonymity, hidden so deep that no one even suspects its existence. They are too weak to resist if discovered; a single regiment could reduce their Hidden Temple to ashes if they knew where to look, and the conspiracy's knowing members are but a small fraction of the total population of Rokugan.

THE OVERTHROW OF THE HANTEI

The Kolat philosophy speaks of ideals and events that will occur far in the future. For now, however, their goals are fairly straightforward (at least from a Kolat point of view). One, in particular, has remained in their minds throughout their history. Before they can produce a Final Emperor, or even begin to lay the groundwork for it, they must first dispose of the one they have – and the rest of his family in the bargain. The descendants of gods cannot be entrusted to lead mankind in the last days; they are petty, and will seek to maintain their corrupt rule at all costs. If the Hantei are still on the throne in the last days, disaster will surely follow. Therefore, the Kolat must overthrow them before that happens. Not control, *overthrow*. The current line of Emperors have been ordained by Heaven to rule the world; with them in the way, men will never be able to take the reins of their own destiny. The ability to manipulate them wouldn't be enough. They must be gone, removed without a trace. A line of men – ordinary men, without the Mandate of Heaven and the name of a long-forgotten demigod to hold them up – can then begin to rule. This will clear the way for the Final Emperor.

Unfortunately, overthrowing the Emperor is easier said than done. The line of Hantei is deeply ingrained into Rokugan's culture, and cannot be extracted without tremendous upheaval. The Kolat can't simply kill all of the Hantei and insert a proxy in their place. The people would not stand for it; any leader who usurps the Emerald Throne runs the risk of a popular revolt, which would be disastrous for the conspiracy. When the time comes for the



Hantei to fall, they must fall with Rokugan's consent. The people must be ready to accept someone new on the throne – or else too terrified of the Hantei to let their rule continue.

There are plenty of ways achieve this, of course, but they all take time. Rokugani perceptions do not change on a whim, and must be carefully managed, lest they suspect some hidden hand turning them against their rulers. So progress against the Emerald Throne has been slow. For a time, the conspiracy concentrated on the realm of the law, trying to open doubts in the Emperor's words (see Chapter One). If the Son of Heaven can be proved fallible, through his words or edicts, it will be easier to turn the populace against him.

Lately, a few of the Great Clans have shown promise as potential regicides. The Scorpion daimyo, Bayushi Shōju, has begun to plot against the Hantei. He suspects the dynasty may be hiding dark forces, and fears that their continued rule may doom the Empire. On a less subtle note, the Crab Clan Champion has nothing but scorn for the current ruler. Hida Kisada has openly condemned "the old man on the throne", and the Crab's militaristic bent suggests that he might try to force the Hantei out if he thought he could get away with it. What both men consider would have been unthinkable just a short time ago, and have created the first large cracks in the Emperor's support.

But more than any legal manipulation or internecine plotting, the Kolat are interested in the Lion Clan. The Lion are the Emperor's best and last defense, and their fates have been intertwined since the earliest days. As mentioned earlier, Togashi's prediction that "when the last Akodo falls, so falls the last Hantei," has hung heavy in the minds of the Ten Masters for centuries; and they feel it is the key to removing the Emperor once and for all. They believe the Akodo are the fulcrum which will begin the rule of man.

The Lion have proven a tough nut to crack, and numerous efforts to place a high-ranking agent in their midst have failed. At best, they have been able to isolate the Akodo from the rest of the clan (see Chapter One for more details), and allow time to slowly whittle their numbers down. This took hundreds of years and cost a great deal of effort. It has only now begun to bear fruit... but what fruit it is.

Cut off as they are, the Akodo have come to trust only themselves and their own opinions. They have put more and more weight on their learned advisors, (many of whom had served as sensei in their earlier days), and listen less and less to the words of others. They continue to stand proud, but their footing has become shaky and more easily disrupted. And now, through a combination of influence, perseverance and luck, one of the Kolat's own has come into a position of prominence. The man's name is Akodo Kage, a revered instructor and the most respected man in the family. He has taught dozens of the family's children, and served as an advisor to the highest levels of clan leadership. He's also one of the Ten Masters. In these days of isolation, there is no one the Akodo trust more.

The Kolat consider Kage the best chance they have had in centuries to finally bring the Akodo down and place a non-Hantei on the throne. In the past few years, his star has risen to the point where he can exert significant influence over the path of the family. The current clan daimyo, Akodo Toturi, is his protege, and listens intently to what his former master says. As the clouds of war begin to gather, Kage prepares to make use of that influence. He will lead the Akodos off the precipice, decimate their numbers, and seal the Hantei's doom along with them. When the smoke clears, he plans to have one of his own students on the throne – a fitting beginning to the rule of man.

For centuries, the Hantei's overthrow has dominated the Kolat's plans. Through inhuman patience and deadly cunning, they finally stand poised to execute those plans. The next ten years will bring unheralded strife to the face of Rokugan, and the conspiracy plans to take advantage of it. One way or another, the last Hantei will fall... and they will be there to pick up the pieces.

Organization

The Kolat are organized around a pyramid scheme, beginning with the Ten Masters and working its way down through a vast network of pawns, followers, and contacts. One way or another, the organization touches every person in the Empire, but only the tiniest handful ever know it. Most members of the conspiracy are unaware, or only partially aware, of the forces

RANK AND FILE BELIEFS (CONTINUED)

If an outsider learns too much, he must either be eliminated or convinced that his fears are unfounded.

Because of this, Kolat members must take care to maintain the outward appearance of normality. They all have positions in the "real" world, identities which they cannot let slip. Akodo Kage, for example, is a sensei in the Lion Clan; he must maintain that facade at all costs. So he trains students, advises the daimyo, and engages in diplomacy, all part of the normal outward expectations of his standing in society. It is only in absolute secrecy – alone at night, or during his "pilgrimages" to the Phoenix lands – that his true motives become known. Almost no agents act for the Kolat without another identity to deter suspicion away from them.

After secrecy is assured, a member must then establish control over the apparatus of power. Operatives must work to gain influence over those around them, through superior rank, trust, or outright friendship. The more people a given Kolat can influence, the greater heights the conspiracy can reach and the closer they have come to attaining absolute power.

(Continued on p. 30)

RANK AND FILE BELIEFS (CONTINUED)

Consequently, most agents have a large network of friends and contacts in their outward lives. They serve as teachers, advisors and in a few cases outright rulers; their words always carry great weight with those around them, and they can often set events into motion with but a few well-placed phrases.

Life does not matter to the Kolat, for their goals lie far beyond the span of human years. If a member must die to further the great plan, then he will embrace his death unhesitatingly. Similarly, the lives of others hold little value and can be eliminated if they stand in the way of progress. The Kolat must not allow fear of death to disrupt their clarity; only by keeping their eye on the ultimate goal can their mission move forward.

Deception and lies are invaluable tools in the perpetuation of the conspiracy; honor has no place if it betrays the plan. An agent must be willing to condemn friends and family, betray trusting superiors, and kill those under their protection if called upon.

they serve. The roles they play and the amount they consequently learn about the Kolat explain a great deal about how the conspiracy operates.

Kolat organization is one of individuals rather than of groups. Rokugan is not socially developed enough to have many controllable organizations beyond clan and family. Because of the great distances between communities, and the difficulty which most groups (besides the Kolat) have communicating across those distances, they can achieve their objectives with a relatively small amount of manpower. It also limits the damage to the organization should one of them be discovered. Controlling every member of an entire family – and from there an entire clan – is an eventual goal, but one they haven't reached yet. It would require consolidating huge amounts of power in a large number of agents – highly conspicuous in the feudal society of Rokugan. Unless they can seize a clan daimyo or some other high-placed official, it just isn't possible. So they stick with a web of individuals – men placed in key positions, with the ear of important dupes, able to affect large scale events.

The structure of the Kolat organization, and the role each one plays, also illustrates how the conspiracy goes about attaining its goals. Knowing which brick in the pyramid performs which duty can show how great changes come about through seemingly insignificant acts.

THE TEN MASTERS

At the top of the Kolat pyramid are the Ten Masters, who control the entire organization. They are the only ones truly aware of the conspiracy's plans and the only ones who can act with absolute impunity. They must keep tabs on all that develops, know when and where to make a move, and ensure that the Plan is moving forward. Through them, the Kolat have moved relentlessly towards their destiny for almost ten centuries. They meet in secret, and are answerable only to each other. All of them have keen intellects, ruthless personalities and the ability to hide them both behind harmless facades. They keep track of all of the Kolat's actions without tipping their hand – or blowing their facades as "ordinary" samurai. Needless to say, they are all fervently dedicated to the Kolat cause. Nothing else holds meaning for them.

Selection to the Ten Masters is a matter of circumstance and luck. Most of them are noticed in early childhood, where they exhibit tendencies

the group deems necessary for a Master – intelligence, ruthlessness, a willingness to follow unorthodox philosophies. From there, they are exposed to a rigorous series of tests and other conditions – usually under the guise of ordinary samurai training. Each test is designed to heighten certain desirable characteristics, and prove the subject's worthiness to be one of the Ten. If he proves qualified enough, they indoctrinate him further into the conspiracy: train him in manipulation and shadow warfare, purge him of any conflicting loyalties, and psychologically prepare him for the burden of leadership.

Not all candidates prove worthy; those who don't are disposed of or placed in lower ranks within the pyramid. Any number of factors can lead to the dismissal of a candidate, including a proclivity for personal power, or an unwillingness to wait for the great plan to take effect. The Kolat will often have several potential Masters "waiting in the wings" at any given time. Only one will be chosen for a seat, inducted into the group when a standing member dies. The rest will be consigned to lesser duties until another Master dies – which may leave them outside the governing circle for their entire lives.

Once within the Ten, the new Master is expected to carry out all the duties his predecessor did. He will keep track of all the agents under him and move various plots forward at their duly designated times. He will undertake the removal of impediments to the great plan, and orchestrate assassinations and power coups within his sphere of influence. He must attend to countless labyrinthine threads in the Kolat's ever-expanding web. He must not waver in these duties in the slightest. In exchange, every secret of the organization becomes available to him... as well as the thrill that only sheer power can provide.

Politics between the Masters remain surprisingly limited. As the truest believers in the Kolat ideology, they are joined by bonds of faith and recognize the value of their fellows. They have far more in common with each other than with anyone else in Rokugan. They often argue over policy and occasionally experience personality clashes, but power blocs within their ranks or outright splits in policy are unheard of. If a courtier from Otosan Uchi were to watch them debate, he would be chilled by the unity they all express.

RANK AND FILE BELIEFS (CONTINUED)

Such dedication is difficult to come by, especially since it goes against every precept of Rokugani society. Few are those who will ignore bushido at the drop of a hat, and rare is the man who can quell all emotions for friends or loved ones at the behest of a greater purpose. Because of this, only a tiny handful of Kolat are actually aware of the conspiracy they serve; the rest are brainwashed sleepers or unknowing dupes who believe they are working for some other cause. The true Kolat – the Ten Masters and those directly beneath them – are among the most hardened and cold-blooded people in the Empire. They need to be: their positions demand nothing less, and the cause they fight for purges all other beliefs from their souls.

With a few exceptions, most of the Ten Masters hold positions in normal Rokugani society. Few of them abandoned their conventional training while being prepared for life in the Kolat; they could therefore maintain their outward facade and keep their true loyalties hidden. By holding on to their old identity, they can make use of its assets, and move about external society unmolested. It allows them to stay close to particularly relevant schemes and to watch for those who may prove useful to their cause. It also ensures that they exercise the greatest possible control over the conspiracy's progress; after all, if you want a job done right, you have to do it yourself.

Those few Masters without an adequate "cover" remain in the Hidden Temple (see below) their entire lives. They never see the outside world, save through the Oni's Eye and other forms of clairvoyance. Many of them become somewhat unbalanced over time and tend to be more extremist than their worldly compatriots.

The Masters rarely meet outside of the Hidden Temple, and then only in ones and twos. Being seen together can be risky, and might lead outsiders to suspect their involvement with each other. By staying apart outside of their protective fortress, they ensure that they cannot all be destroyed by some unforeseen calamity. If a few fall, their fellows will remain to continue the plan... and avenge them if their deaths warrant it.

THE ACTIVE AGENTS

Below the Ten Masters are their direct servants, those trained by the conspiracy to execute their dark plans. Like their masters, they have been conditioned from an early age to embrace the Kolat philosophy, and have learned the skills necessary to perform their Masters' will. They do not know everything about the cause they serve – its ultimate goals are often hidden from them, as are many of the webs designed to reach those goals. They are far too loyal to ask questions, however, and will follow orders exactly as they are given. Kolat conditioning has a way of doing that.

The active agents are grouped into cliques called hambatsu, which form an interconnected network. Each hambatsu contains about forty men, and is answerable to one of the Ten Masters. No agent knows more than one Master, and most assume that there is only one – the presumed

leader of the entire conspiracy. Their superiors don't want them to be aware of any more than is absolutely necessary. The agents are charged with executing the Kolat's plans: pulling the strings that will achieve the desired result. While the Masters control a hundred different threads in an effort to guide the entire conspiracy, their agents are each charged with only a few at a time.

When the Kolat decide the something needs to be done, the agent most suited to the task will be contacted by their respective Master – either directly or through the magic of the Oni's Eye. The Master will detail what needs to be done and how exactly the conspiracy wishes to do it. It can involve anything: kidnapping a particular nobleman, arranging for a certain building to burn down, stealing a message and replacing it with an almost identical one, etc. Sometimes, it's fairly subtle, such as befriending a particular magistrate, or keeping an eye on the son of the local daimyo. Often, it involves training or teaching techniques – singling out a given student who will eventually join the conspiracy. The reasons and justifications for these acts are unimportant to the agents – they just need to ensure that it happens.

Once they receive their orders, the agents will then conceive and execute the operation as they see fit – keeping in mind that failure most likely signs their death warrants. They observe the patterns of their targets, set aside one of their dojo students for "special attention", and do everything in their power to ensure that the operation goes off as planned. Thugs and mercenaries are hired if dirty work is called for. Spies and informants are bought for what they know. Agents often make use of "legitimate" followers for these missions – samurai and others who believe they are acting in the best interests of bushido, the Emperor or their clan. (Needless to say, such followers will have no idea whose work they are really doing.) Occasionally, members of the same hambatsu will pool their resources to achieve a particularly complicated goal. They do so at their own discretion and both parties are held accountable if something goes wrong.

Once the operation is complete (and it may last many years, if surveillance or currying friendship is the goal), then the agent will fade into the background again. He will go on about his normal life, maintain any ongoing plans in operation, and try to stay as unobtrusive as possible... until the Master calls again. The

servants are all good at what they do, and all conditioned to die before revealing anything. Even though they have little hope of advancement and are rarely rewarded for their work (although a well-laid plan could include social advancement for its administrator). For most agents, loyalty to the cause or a misplaced sense of bushido are enough to keep them performing the Kolat's work. The few who want more don't live long enough to complain.

THE UNKNOWING ACCOMPLICES

Below the active agents are the people or organizations they use for their work – contacts, networks of spies, merchants or clan samurai capable of being influenced. They perform the “blood and guts” of a Kolat operation – follow a given target, rifle through a magistrate's papers, kill those who need killing, etc. They are the tools by which Kolat policy is implemented, the instruments of the conspiracy's will.

Usually, they are kept completely in the dark as to who they are working for. They often believe they are serving their clan or some equally noble purpose, and that the Kolat agents commanding them have only the code of bushido at heart. Countless samurai have done the Kolat's work, following the orders of superiors whose loyalties lay elsewhere. When your

daimyo orders you to kill someone, you do not have the luxury of asking why.

Those accomplices who can't be swayed by honeyed words or the chain of command are simply bought. Ronin, heimin, or thugs looking for some quick money – all can be swayed with coins in their pouch and orders to follow. Because of their social standing, such tools never question the people who pay them, and since they lack the conspicuousness of the samurai caste, they can easily be eliminated if they have to.



Because they do the most dangerous work of the organization, accomplices like these are most likely to be caught. They stand on the front lines of the Kolat's war, ensuring that policies begun in the shadows have an impact by the cold light of day. Death, capture, or worse await them should they fail their mission. Like the agents above them, however, they are all well-paid and/or suitably loyal (at least to the cause they believe they are upholding), so they rarely balk at their duties. The Kolat leadership takes care to keep it that way. They also make sure that none of these accomplices realizes the implications of their actions. They are fed false stories, led to believe nonexistent orders, or simply told not to ask questions. That way, if they are caught, they cannot damage the rest of the conspiracy.

The accomplices are often the closest anyone gets to the Kolat. They have little valuable information and can rarely tell investigators anything of value. Samurai will often commit seppuku rather than betray their superiors, and less honorable men usually know nothing about those who hired them. The acting agent usually vanishes into the woodwork while his unknowing followers take the hit for him. Those higher up the pyramid are too good at concealing themselves.

In addition to those bought or deceived, the ranks of Kolat accomplices also include so-called "sleeper" agents – unknowing subjects brainwashed to perform specific duties when activated. Sleeper agents are usually kidnapped during lengthy trips, or other events where an extended absence will not be noticed by their family. They are then transported to a safe location (the Hidden Temple if possible, a prepared building if not) and subjected to a wide variety of magics, torture, and psychological manipulation. A chosen member of the Ten Masters usually oversees this process, designed to wipe the subject's free will away. (The Mind-Breaker Shimura is currently the inner circle's expert on sleeper creation.) It can take anywhere from a few days to many months, but once in place, can rarely be undone. When completed, the sleeper is left with a variety of deep-set unconscious instructions, which they will obey to the letter. These instructions remain beneath the mind's surface, to be activated only when and where the Kolat see fit.

Now fully conditioned to work the conspiracy's will, the sleepers are then returned to society as

unobtrusively as possible. False memories are implanted to cover up their time in captivity and a suitable cover story is created to ease their return to Rokugani life. They then go about their lives as they always have, completely unaware that they have been conditioned. They exhibit no outward signs of the commands now lying in their minds, and continue to believe that their wills are their own. Not even their closest relations can detect anything wrong with them, and they themselves certainly believe that nothing is amiss. Why would there be? They may exist for years this way, waiting in anonymity until the conspiracy decides they are needed.

When the Kolat activate them, however, all that changes. They move solely according to the dictate of their implants, acting without regard to any previous emotions or allegiances. If the Kolat wish a sleeper to strangle his wife, assassinate his daimyo, or sabotage a vital crossroads, he will do it without hesitation. Human life means nothing to him, and he will act without regard to his own safety. Many sleeper agents are created solely for suicide missions, those which even the most loyal followers would balk at.

Upon completion of his mission (assuming he is still alive), he will regain control of his facilities as if awakening from a pleasant sleep. He will have no idea what he has just done, and can justifiably protest his innocence if confronted with his deeds. Even if caught and convicted of his crimes, he will not be able to explain why he did it... or have any inkling that his strings were pulled. The conspiracy can then leave him to his fate, secure that their presence won't be found.

Because of the time and expense involved in creating sleepers, the Kolat only use them for missions of utmost importance. They are often chosen for their proximity to high-level officials, or their ability to enter restricted places with ease. Only a handful have ever been caught before completing their instructions, and none of them have lived long enough to reveal the Kolat's instructions. (The conditioning always includes an order to commit suicide if their mission fails – an impressive demonstration of the Kolat's suggestive power.) A rare few are used for multiple missions – mostly nonlethal – and can operate for decades without ever becoming aware of the acts they perform. They rank among the conspiracy's most prized and valuable assets.

CONTROL DOES NOT MEAN ORDER

One would think that, if the Kolat are concerned with absolute control, they would desire to eliminate anything that would threaten that – randomness, chance happenings, the disastrous dictates of chaos. This is not quite the case. The Kolat know that they cannot possibly eliminate every random fluctuation of fate. It is part of the universe and as such, an integral section of the final meaning they are working to achieve. Instead, they hope eventually to contain it, to limit it to small and insignificant outbursts rather than total upheaval. Their modus operandi often reflects this. When in control of a certain group, for example, they will allow fate to take its course – letting outside forces dictate who gains which position, how well one element performs and so on. Randomness is thus allowed to run about at will... until it threatens their carefully-laid plans. Then they move swiftly and certainly, crushing it before it has a chance to develop further. By only acting when necessary, they ensure they have the resources to deal with it when the time comes, and they provide openings where it can continue to act unabated. Thus, they maintain the vital element of chance within their labyrinthine schemes.

FANATICS

The Kolat are not fanatics, at least not in the typical sense. Fanatics are unreasonable, and therefore unthinking. They act according to their passions and engage in extreme activities for the sake of their beliefs. They pay little attention to cold hard facts, believing that the fervor of their ideology can overcome them. This is not what the Kolat are about.

The conspiracy is certain in its goals and ruthless about pursuing them. Its ideology does not allow for compromise, and its members will cheerfully die in its defense if called upon. But they never allow their fervor to get in the way of clear and objective reasoning. Their survival depends on ruthless pragmatism, and unvarnished knowledge of the facts. The minute they let passion cloud their judgment, they run the risk of exposure and annihilation. The Ten Masters are governed by cold logic and unbending reason... which has allowed them to survive and prosper.

THE DUPES

An endless array of contacts, informants and flunkies lie on the lowest rung of the Kolat ladder. They include people with peripheral connections to the places of power, distant relatives of public figures, even simple heimin or eta. The conspiracy mainly uses them as sources of information, or to help a minor aspect of a given operation proceed smoothly. Theoretically, anyone in Rokugan can fall into this category; as long as they know something the Kolat want, or have a connection to someone deemed important, they can be used.

Dupes are never given any information about who or what they are serving. They are always approached from a position of strength, by a superior or someone with a hold over them (such as a gambling debt). They are asked simple questions or ordered to perform a seemingly trivial deed – leave a door unlocked, delay the delivery of a message for one hour, etc. – and then never bothered again. Most of the time, the knowledge they reveal or acts they perform are so trivial, that they never think to question it. After all, how much damage can it do to put out a single street lamp in one dark alley? Or loan a fellow soldier a handful of arrows?

Through these tiny actions, the fine points of a Kolat plan can be completed, and the groundwork for “important” work laid. A killer cannot enter a home unless the door is unlocked; a minister will not depend on his advisor unless his notes have been misplaced. Individually, Kolat dupes do very little. But taken in totality, they form the details of the Kolat’s ever-widening web. Their connection with the conspiracy is tangential at best, so they lack even the most basic information on the Kolat. For all intents and purposes, they are the unknowing masses which the conspiracy wishes to control. Their connections are coincidental, at best; to anyone except the Kolat, it is as if it never happened at all.

While active agents and unknowing accomplices are used again and again, dupes are often “one-shot” tools. They will be contacted for one incident, or given a single order which furthers the conspiracy’s ends. After that, their usefulness ends and they are left to their own devices – never knowing the monstrosities they brushed against.

The Hidden Temple

In the early days of the conspiracy, its members were constantly in fear of being caught. They would meet at each other’s homes, or in predetermined secret locations, always with one eye on the door. It quickly became clear that they would need a permanent hideout if their cause was to persevere. It would have to be secure from all outside interference, and accessible only to those the Kolat deemed worthy. Such a place could not exist in civilized areas of the Empire. They would need a remote location, hidden from prying eyes, where they could meet and plan in peace. Scouts and followers were dispatched to all corners of the Empire, under the pretense of simple exploration.

They found what they were looking for in the heart of the Phoenix mountains: a hidden vale, surrounded by high peaks and accessible only through a near-impassable series of trails. A running spring provided a permanent water supply to the valley, and there were even a few acres of arable farmland. It was perfect for their needs. After securing directions to the spot, they arranged for a nasty accident to befall the scout who had found it, then set about building a “temple retreat” where they would retire when the time was right.

Construction took several years, hampered by the distant location and the need to ferry workers to the site. The site’s true purpose was kept hidden, and those who helped build it assumed it was just another temple. A few foremen and construction overseers were killed after asking too many questions, but beyond that, the lie held. When it was over, the Kolat had a new base of operations; the first in which they truly felt safe. After the Oni’s Eye arrived on the site, the conspirators no longer needed to leave the vale at all.

As the years and centuries went by, the Ten Masters began to isolate the temple even further. Anyone outside the inner council was forbidden from learning its location, and those who already knew were put to death. Three of the four passes leading to the vale were sealed up by rocks; the remaining entrance was (and still is) guarded night and day. Supplies which couldn’t be farmed on the valley floor were brought in by a secret caravan, led only by the Kolat’s most devoted servants. As time went by, the few who knew of

the place would pass on, and the "private temple" vanished from public knowledge.

Today, the Temple serves as a meeting place for the Ten Masters, a training ground for loyal agents, and an indoctrination center for the creation of sleepers. It also serves as the permanent home for at least half of the Ten Masters, as well as their most loyal and devoted followers. Only the Ten know the temple's exact location, and only they can navigate the entire pathway through the mountains. Those with reasons to visit the Temple are blindfolded before beginning the journey, hiding its landmarks from their sight. A few trusted servants know parts of the journey, bits and pieces which allow them to travel a certain distance of the way, but none can reach the Temple without the consent – and in some cases, direct guidance – of the Ten Masters. These stringent measures have kept the heart of the conspiracy safe from any potential enemies.

The Temple is guarded by an elite cadre of bushi who have lived in the vale all their lives. They are part of an extended family of peasants, which the Kolat brought here when the temple was first built. The family has since grown to number almost two hundred members, the size of a small village. They are all fanatically loyal to the Kolat, and obey any Master's order instantly. Approximately half of every generation is chosen to serve as warriors; the rest maintain the Temple grounds, cook and clean, and perform all the

other functions necessary to keep things running. None of them have ever left the valley, and most have no desire to. Their masters treat them well, and they are significantly safer here than elsewhere in Rokugan.

The Temple's defenders number approximately seventy-five and spend their time drilling, guarding the lone pass to the outside world, and escorting visitors/prisoners through the Temple. They are as good as any clan samurai, without the moral compunctions or devotion to bushido that their betters have.

The Temple is built of solid stone, more like a Crab's fortress than a monastic retreat. Grey and imposing, it stands in the middle of the vale like a blighted thundercloud. It has been built in the shape of a pyramid, a symbol of the organization which it houses. There are no windows in the temple; those who walk its halls do so without the guidance of natural light. A high brick wall surrounds the building on all sides, forming a courtyard where the Temple's defenders gather to drill. Several farms and outlying buildings are scattered nearby, all constructed of the same grey stone. They spread a pall of gloomy secrecy over the entire area; even the surrounding mountains seem to feel unwelcome.

The Ten Masters meet on the pyramid's highest floor, in a room which only they have access to. There, they discuss the progress of the great plan, various current plots and the best way

to move the conspiracy forward. None of them speak of what passes between them; the discussions held in their meeting room never leave its walls. They hold no regular schedule for their meetings, and never tell their servants when one is planned. It appears sometimes as if they meet at random... to better hide the secrecy of their dealings.

The rest of the Temple houses barracks, living



quarters and other areas where the Kolat further their plans. The Ten Masters each have a suite of rooms to themselves, located near the apex of the pyramid. Servants and visiting agents stay on the lower floors, in group living quarters or the occasional private room. Antechambers and planning rooms are scattered throughout the building, some holding information of interest to the Masters. Those who enter these areas without permission are killed as a matter of course; it is said that their spirits remain bound in torment by the Masters' whim.

Several stories of prison cells and torture chambers exist below ground. They hold prospective sleepers and other unfortunates in the midst of being "processed" by the conspiracy. No one is kept here permanently; the Kolat don't allow any of their prisoners to live once they have outlasted their usefulness. Nevertheless, stories of kidnapped subjects tortured here for years, or raving madmen created from failed psychological experiments circulate among the servants. The Kolat, of course, are too cautious to let such beings remain in their midst. And if a few screams do occasionally echo through the walls... well, they're probably caused by the wind.

Somewhere within the building, hidden behind countless layers of shadows and secrecy, lies a single large chamber. Only the Ten Masters know where it is, and how to reach it. It is

unadorned and completely bare; dust piles silently in the corner, for no servants are permitted inside to clean. In the exact center of the room stands its only furnishing – the ancient crystal called the Oni's Eye.

THE ONI'S EYE

No person, object or series of actions has allowed the Kolat to attain as much power as the Oni's Eye. Through it, they have moved with clarity and precision, overheard the plans of Emperors and directed their conspiracy as no others could. It is the most closely guarded secret in a movement built on nothing else; it is the glue which holds the Kolat together.

The Eye is a huge piece of crystal, big enough to fill almost a quarter of the chamber it occupies. The Kolat brought it here while the Temple was being built, and constructed the room around it. To move it now would require demolishing the entire structure – which the Kolat knew when they placed it there. It is now irretrievably bound to their organization; none can take it without destroying the Kolat first.

The Eye's power is not derived from communion with the spirits, the source of almost all magic in Rokugan. Rather, it involves the invocation of certain "words of power" and an elaborate series of hand gestures which activate its power. This strange methodology led Hida to



condemn the device as evil when it was first discovered; had it remained out of the Kolat's hands, it might have been destroyed. Only the Ten Masters know the exact ritual which activates the Eye; they teach it to new members only after they are inducted into the inner circle. After nine centuries of secrecy, the Eye is practically unusable to anyone else.

The Eye has the power to display any corner of the world which the user desires. From the deepest recesses of the Shinomen to the inner chambers of the Emperor, no location is denied its power. It provides sound as well as sight, and can pick up the quietest whispers of any subject it views. Through it, the Kolat have been able to sit in on the most secretive meetings, view the maneuverings of entire armies, and guide the destiny of countless unknowing pawns, all without leaving the confines of the Temple. The Eye's clairvoyance is undetectable to its subjects; none observed through its powers have ever known that anything is amiss. Even the walls of Otosan Uchi or the inner recesses of Isawa Castle – which are magically warded against potential scryers – can be seen through. As long as the Kolat know when and where an event will take place, they can view it with impunity.

In addition to its scrying abilities, the Eye provides its users with a second power. On nights of the full moon, it secretes tears of pure diamond, which are collected and stored elsewhere in the Temple. Those who carry the tears are attuned to the Eye, such that the Masters can communicate with them wherever they are. The tears provide instantaneous contact with the entire organization, allowing them to coordinate dozens of plots with perfect synchronization. They don't have to rely on cumbersome message relays or other fallible forms of communication. Now, they can speak to their agents directly, ensuring that their foes cannot exploit the distances between them. The tears provide accurate communication to the conspiracy on a level unheard of.

Contact occurs between the carrier of a tear and the user of the Eye. An agent has to carry one of the tears on his or her person for it to work. If the tear ever moves more than two yards away, then communication will cease. The two parties establish a mental link with each other during contact, allowing them to speak telepathically to one another. In effect, they can carry on a normal conversation, speaking and responding as if they were a few yards apart. The communication is

silent and cannot be heard by others, so a hiding agent can speak to his superior at the Temple without revealing his location.

This link does not allow any deep mind reading, only a transference of surface thoughts. The two communicators could lie to each other or conceal facts without fear of being discovered. Only the Eye's user can initiate contact; a tear carrier cannot make a link or communicate with a user unless the user so wills it. (The Eye's users can look in on their agents whenever they wish, of course.) Needless to say, the tears are exceptionally valuable to the Kolat, and they go to great lengths to retrieve them from dead or missing agents. The few tears that have fallen into others' hands have quickly been stolen back, or else remain "dead links", with the Masters refusing to exercise their power and draw unwanted attention.

With its tears and scrying powers, the Oni's Eye ranks among the most powerful artifacts in Rokugan. It comes with a price, however, one which the Kolat only gradually became aware of. The Eye's visions appear in a brilliant flash, and fill their viewer with a sense of power and control. The experience is addictive, and if a user spends too much time viewing the Eye, he will not wish to leave. Past Masters have starved to death down there, staying day and night to view as many corners of Rokugan as they can. This is one of the reasons why the Masters elect their successors so rigorously. Those without the will or discipline to resist the Eye's temptation may find themselves enslaved to its magic – and useless to the Kolat cause.

For those Masters such as Kage and Yokatsu, who spend most of their time outside the Temple, the threat of addiction doesn't pose a problem. The distance between them and the Temple dulls the desire, and they take care never to spend too much time gazing into the Eye. But for the Masters who remain at the Temple indefinitely, the temptation can be difficult to overcome. The ex-Phoenix Korekado and the Mind-Breaker Shimura – both of whom stay at the Temple full-time – have recently shown signs of addiction. They have spent an inordinate amount of time in the Eye's chamber, sometimes missing sleep in order to watch the outside world. At the behest of the other Masters, they have vowed to stay away from the Eye except in times of great emergency, a promise they intend to keep. They know their lives will be forfeit should it prove otherwise.

ROAD TO RUIN

The Kolat's philosophy is sound in many ways... but also perpetuates a grievous misunderstanding about the universe. The conspirators hope to finally end the cycle of death and rebirth by creating something of permanent meaning. What they do not realize is that the cycle of death and rebirth is a permanent meaning. The grand circle that the Celestial Pattern emulates in every aspect of life forms a complete image – an ongoing truth visible to anyone who bothers to look. Its unending dance in search of its own tail has continued since the dawn of time, and will continue until its end. That is the permanent truth the Kolat believe they are searching for.

Because they cannot see it, however, they travel down the road to disaster. They would disrupt the Celestial Pattern and hang their own in its place – an act which may spell the death knell for the universe, at least in this incarnation. Their stride for perfection will drain the world dry, leaving nothing left but an empty husk for the last beings to rule over. The irony is that if they ever achieve their ends, then the world will indeed die – only to be born again in a new and different form. They can never permanently harm the great circle... but they can destroy this incarnation of it if they are allowed to complete their plans. Because of this, they number among the most dangerous threats Rokugan has ever known.



Chapter Three



Tactics and Enemies

WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE FIRST MEETING

The Ki-Rin were to meet many foreign races and tribes during their Quest. These first foreigners were a nomadic culture, fierce warriors endlessly fighting over the few resources the steppes provided. The Ki-Rin called them "Ujik-hai." The first meeting was less than auspicious. Shinjo and her group had been seen making their way out of the desert.

Ujik-hai scouts surreptitiously watched the Rokugani for some time, and noticed that they were tired, hungry, and much the worse for their journey across the Burning Sands.

Upon hearing this, the chieftain of this particular tribe decided to attack and take their horses and equipment by force. They met the Unicorn under a false pretense of peace, luring the samurai and their small retinue into camp, where they would be surrounded and attacked without warning.

Chapter Three: Tactics and Enemies

Modus Operandi

Over the centuries, the Kolat have used countless measures to infiltrate society. Some have become outmoded while others continue to play a large role in the conspiracy's plans. All are insidious and calculating, however, tools used with ruthless efficiency. Understanding them is the key to understanding how the Kolat operate within Rokugani society.

A few of the Kolat's methods have been outlined above, such as the creation of sleeper agents and the power of the Oni's Eye. For the most part, however, their tactics tend to be quieter – and far more penetrating. They make use of social codes and ideas that have been around for centuries, such that no one stops to question their usage. They trap people in their own fallacies, manipulating their desires and coaxing them into seeing what they want to see. And they do it all behind the scenes, with nebulous concepts and philosophical beliefs rather than direct physical coercion. It keeps them invisible and allows them to thrive.

The key phrase to understanding the Kolat's methods is perception. They focus their attention on the way things seem as opposed to the way they actually are. If it appears as if a given magistrate killed himself, and enough people believe it, then it doesn't matter if he was actually murdered. If everyone thinks Akodo Kage is a harmless sensei, then he can commit the most terrible acts without raising suspicion. It all hinges on appearances, and on the onlooker's inability to see past them. To the Kolat, controlling the image is tantamount to controlling reality.

In that sense, the Kolat are much like other Rokugani. They concentrate on the surface image, on the concept of "face" or "on", and on what people think rather than what they know. Which is no different than any Scorpion spy or Crane diplomat. However, the Kolat's manipulation of the way people see things is far more insidious and destructive. They're not interested in political squabbling or concepts of honor; they want to control what people think and see. They seek to exploit the crack between light and shadow, and widen the gulf between truth and belief. They want everyone to accept what they are shown, and not to question what may be happening beneath it. Power lies not in physical strength or charismatic leadership; it lies in the perception of others. The Hantei rule Rokugan because people think that they do (and, more importantly, that they have the right to). If that were to change, the Emperor would quickly become just another man. That is the battlefield the Kolat seek to control.

With that in mind, here is a list of the conspiracy's more potent tools and techniques. Each of them plays a large role in furthering the Kolat's ends, and each has been refined to deadly efficiency over the course of many centuries. Through them, the Kolat's influence continues to grow.

MONEY

The concept of currency has always been enticing to the Kolat, as has the potential it represents. The early conspirators hated Rokugan's nobility, who exercised power they felt was rightfully the Kolat's. The samurai caste gained their positions through an accident of birth, not through ability or any natural inclination. The blood of gods determined who ruled, however bungling or incompetent they might be. One man became a farmer, the other an Emperor, all because of their families. If the universe was to ever see completion, that would have to change.

With the rise of koku, a possible means of challenging hereditary rule came to light. The Kolat saw money as a great equalizer, and a means by which anyone could attain power. Strength can be bought, honor compromised, the weak incited to rebel against the strong – all from money and what money can buy. Koku could stir the dreams of the basest peasant; after all, who wants to feed his children gruel when a few coins

could give them rich food and a fine house to live in? Give a man hope, and he'll do whatever you ask.

That's the potential of money, potential the Kolat strive to bring out. As koku flourished, they worked to reap the benefits. With resources unattached to the nobility (and thus free from prying eyes and treacherous politics), the conspiracy has established a support system for their enterprises. They have purchased land for safehouses, trained criminals to serve their ends, and ensured that eyes turn blind at the right moments. A majority of Kolat agents are in the

merchant class, among the Yasuki and Crane businessmen and those who depend on them. Through them, all manner of influence can be achieved. Bribery, blackmail, even physical force, all require little more than the right amount of currency. Illegal activities useful to their cause – forgery, smuggling, corrupting vices – can be facilitated with ease. No one cares for your pedigree in the Rokugani underworld; all that matters is cash.

Their efforts have gone against Rokugan's entrenched feudalism, and they have been careful not to push it too far. They don't want to

WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE FIRST MEETING (CONTINUED)

Shinjo and her followers, being peaceful by nature and tired from their travels, fell for the trap, but when it was sprung, the attackers found it was they who were caught. While the Ujik-hai were fierce warriors, they had not the skill to match the divinely-born Shinjo and her heroic retinue. Shinjo alone fought as thirty men. Otaku Shiko, Iuchi, and Ide accounted for another fifty. The treacherous chieftain lost his head to Shinjo, who also clove it in half before it hit the ground. Upon seeing their leader's cleft skull, the tribe's morale quickly broke. The chieftain's son took up the tribe's banner and retreated, his people gathering their possessions as quickly as possible to get away from the reach of Rokugani steel.

During the night, many of the Ujik-hai deserted their comrades and came to beg Shinjo for her protection. They wished to follow a strong and capable leader, and they wished to learn the powerful techniques she had so ably demonstrated. Shinjo discussed the matter with them until dawn, and with the sunrise she and the Ujik-hai exchanged the vows of The Promise.



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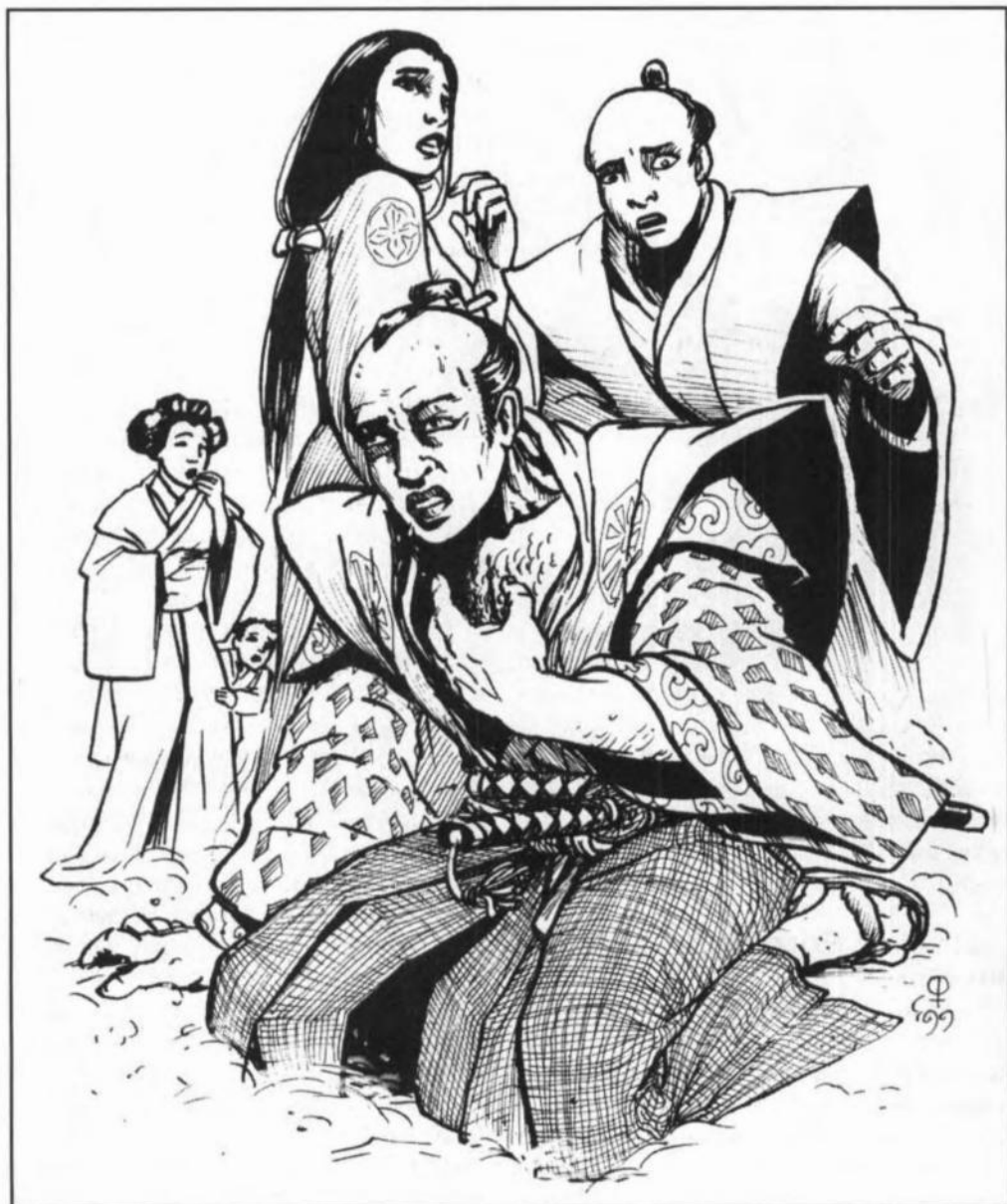
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overthrow the samurai caste – not yet at any rate. Instead, they have worked to slowly integrate money into Rokugan's economy, moving so slowly that they cannot be detected. They fostered the rise of the merchant class, giving a new outlet for koku to play a part. They have stressed the common links of the Rokugani economy, and formed connections between clans through the interactions of their traders. Their Yasuki businessmen and Unicorn caravans cause trade to flourish, increasing the prominence of the rich in Rokugan society.

Lest the reader get the wrong impression, we should emphasize that money is not the dominant power in Rokugan; far from it. For all

the Kolat's efforts, the caste system remains very much in place, and koku has done little to stymie the power of the Emperor. The Emerald Empire is not twentieth century America, and some institutions cannot be bought at any price. But nevertheless, the power of wealth exists, and it does have its uses. Because of the increased prominence of koku, and the existence of merchant-oriented noble families like the Yasuki, the Kolat have another tool for influencing Rokugan. Money can buy those of a less than honorable nature, loosen tongues, and create strength where none was before.

All conspiracy agents have access to large amounts of wealth through the Kolat presence in



WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE FIRST MEETING (CONTINUED)

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the merchant class. They can therefore summon hired muscle, snitches and back-door criminals if they need to. Raw manpower is never a problem as long as the conspiracy has a full purse. They can also offer favors to compromised officials ("We can make those gambling debts vanish, Ichisan.") or arrange for supplies to beleaguered villages, fostering good relations among the populace. The temptations of wealth can undo almost any moral reservations. (Ask yourself how much you'd be willing to kill a man for...)

Not even the ruling caste is free of currency's taint. Through the taxation of lands, nobility have learned to place a "koku value" on their ancestral property, laying the groundwork for all sorts of hidden mischief. Wars have begun over "valuable" provinces, where two sides both believe they need the wealth therein. Whether or not the province has any real value is irrelevant so long as the warring parties believe it to be so. Similarly, jealousy can be fostered against those samurai perceived to be worth more than his fellows. A daimyo who struggles to pay for his castle and support those beneath him naturally resents one whose fields are prosperous. The Kolat have learned to manipulate such emotions to devastating effect, and can create political feuds among the most complacent daimyo. Without seeming to endanger Rokugan's feudal rulers, the conspiracy has used economic concepts to undermine their power at every turn.

For game purposes, assume that active Kolat have as much money as they need. It won't allow them to purchase everything - katanas are effectively priceless, and all land remains in the Emperor's hands - but it can grease the wheels when they need it to. They can get their hands on anything available in the open market, from spears to sampans, and always have coinage to spare. Any area housing a Kolat agent is bound to be crawling with informants and have one or two stout safehouses nearby: facilities which the conspiracy's financial resources have made possible.

LEGITIMATE FOLLOWERS AND BUSHIDO

For those who will not obey the dictates of the market, there are other weapons. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Kolat have a large web of agents working to do their will. Many of them have positions in the samurai caste, and through

them, the conspiracy can reach those unaffected by the jingle of coins.

Ironically, the code of bushido makes an excellent Kolat tool - or at least significant parts of it do. Bushido teaches that one should obey those of a higher station. Loyalty to one's superior - and through him, to the Emperor - is one of the highest codes a warrior can adhere to. Honorable samurai do not question orders of their superiors. They simply obey. If a daimyo tells his bushi to kill a rival courtier, the bushi will do so without hesitation. The Kolat can use that chain of loyalty and devotion to accomplish just about anything. As long as the act is masked with sufficient trappings of "honor", the Kolat's influence will be completely unsuspected. If a given samurai feels that he is acting in the best interests of the clan or the Emperor, so much the better.

This illustrates the way Rokugani society is eminently suited to serving the Kolat's purposes. They don't need to control all the samurai of a given family. They only need to control one, who can then order those below him to serve his will. If a Kolat-controlled daimyo can act with subtlety and appear to behave in the best interests of bushido and his clan, then his samurai will kill themselves at his word. On a less extreme level, they will engage in court intrigue, challenge rivals to duels, and any other activities deemed "necessary" by their leader. With a few well-placed puppets, the conspiracy can gain control over a large number of people - all without disrupting societal apparatus in the slightest. Those who can resist the lure of money are actually easier to influence than those who can't.

Placement of agents in key positions is very tricky. The original conspirators believed that the best way to obtain good recruits is to train them. Therefore, the Kolat focus heavily on sensei, teachers and other such figures who can mold young minds. Many active Kolat serve in such position, using their eyes and ears to prepare for the conspiracy's future. They seek to single out potential Kolat at a very young age. Such "recruits" are chosen because of their position, their potential skills, or simply because the conspiracy takes a liking to them.

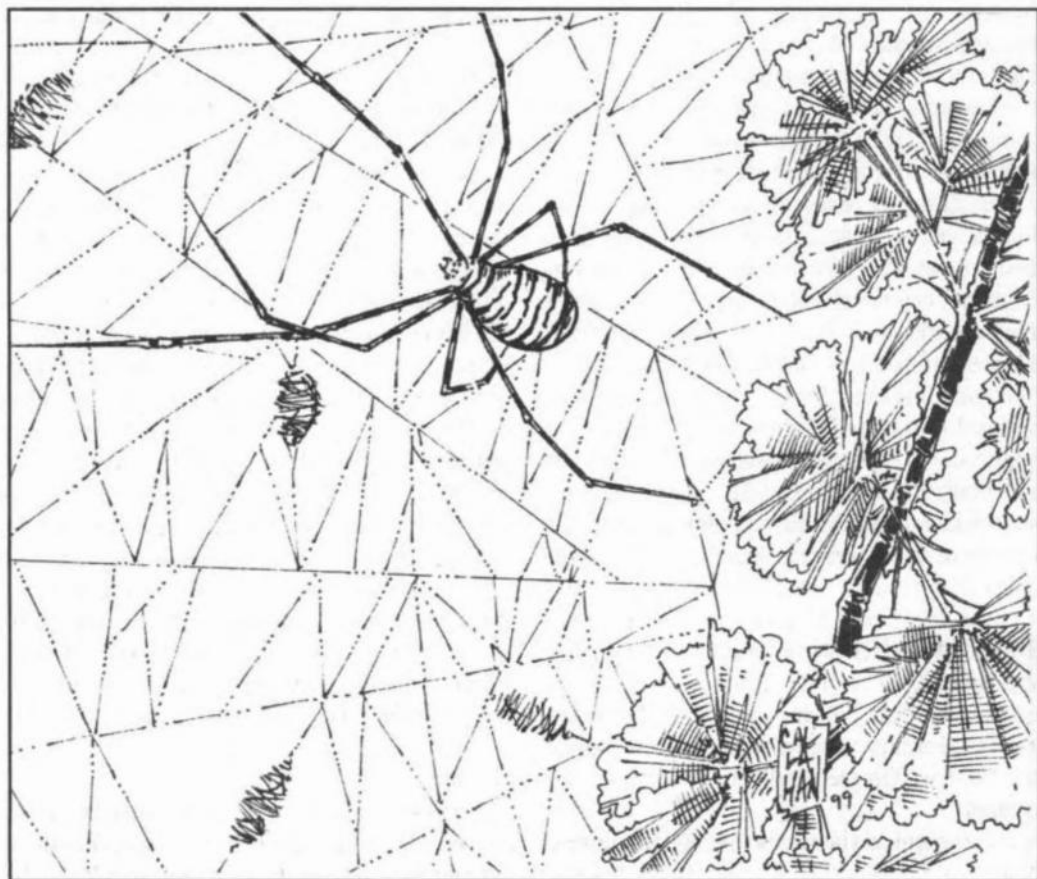
Once chosen, a recruit will then be subject to "special" training over the course of his early years, which indoctrinates him into the Kolat's philosophy. No one ever questions a sensei giving lessons to a particularly bright or promising student, so this attention is rarely noticed. The

teaching techniques are very subtle, such that the recruit is often unaware of who seeks to manipulate him. The teacher phrases things under the auspices of bushido, or directs instruction in such a seemingly logical way that the Kolat's beliefs will be the only ones that make sense. If the recruit questions the philosophy he receives, or appears unwilling to help further it, then training is abruptly abandoned with no one the wiser.

Those who embrace the Kolat way of life will receive further training, designed to make them effective agents. The ability to lie convincingly is already a staple of Rokugani life; it isn't difficult for the Kolat to take that to the next level. After a few years of instruction, a recruit can spin lies that the most cynical Scorpion would believe. Other skills, such as stealth, command, and ruthlessness are imparted, along with subtle brainwashing techniques designed to leave the subject unquestionably loyal. By the time a recruit undergoes his gempukku ceremony, he has everything he needs to do the Masters' bidding – and an unswerving loyalty to their cause. Keep in

mind that this does not mean that a recruit knows everything about the conspiracy he's prepared to serve. In most cases, he only knows enough to keep him devoted. The rest, he is told (as superiors often tell their subordinates), he needn't concern himself with.

Following their coming of age, the now-active Kolat agent sits back, performs his duties, and waits for a sign from above. This usually comes in the form of orders from a Master, although it can also come from the sensei who trained him (in a few cases, the two are one and the same). He then acts according to their dictates, setting in motion any plots and schemes they wish him to. As discussed earlier, it usually involves something subtle, or not immediately useful. Agents are often asked to befriend certain people, or angle for certain positions. Perhaps the Kolat want them to become an advisor to a particular daimyo, or command a military fort in a specific province. Why exactly? It does not matter. The agent must pursue that end to his utmost; that is all he needs to understand. Outsiders will write off the agent's



THE COMING WAR IN THE SPIRIT WORLD

In order for their great plan to be fulfilled, the Kolat will have to control the spirit world as completely as the human. Shugenja are the means to that end. They can summon beings of air and fire and compel them to do their bidding. Magic has allowed them to assert themselves – unequivocally at times – over a realm which most humans can barely perceive. As master shugenja, the Isawa personify mankind's ability to control the kami. Any efforts by the conspiracy to seize the spirit world must include them. When the battle for the kami begins – and they are certain that one day it will – the Kolat want the Phoenix to lead the way.

The Phoenix's other major family has been brought to heel without the Kolat taking a step. The Shiba serve as yojimbo supporters of the Isawa, junior partners in the clan's political structure. They lack the strength to form policy on their own, and despite countless heated arguments, back the Isawa when push comes to shove. If the conspiracy can take the Isawa, then the Shiba will surely follow. The Asako are even less contentious, and their aloof isolationism leaves them bereft of any help to turn to outside the clan. Like the Shiba, they can do little if the Isawa fall into the Kolat's control. And their goal is ominously similar to the Kolat's...

efforts as ordinary ambition, the sort almost every samurai have.

In addition to this sort of political jockeying, the agent is responsible for guiding those beneath him down certain paths, and advising his superiors to take others. He is charged with ensuring that his cover is solid and that, when the time comes, he can manipulate those around him without incurring suspicion. The Kolat are immensely skilled at working within the code of bushido to achieve their agenda. They can easily convince those around them to do "the honorable thing", while in fact they are doing anything but. After a time, it becomes impossible to tell where an agent's "legitimate" ideals end and the Kolat's begin. Thus, the conspiracy can move through those around him, and spread control to those who may not be aware of it.

On rare occasions, the Masters will command the agent to perform an overt action: the launch of a military attack, for example, or the removal of a specific messenger on his way to Otosan Uchi. They will give her only the information she needs, and she is expected to obey their dictates to the letter. When this occurs, the agent is invariably in a strong position to work without accruing much suspicion. She can order her subordinates to undertake the deed, or convince her superiors to act "in the interests of the Empire". If, for some reason, the agent doesn't wish to involve her samurai brethren, she can commit the act himself, although he leaves himself far more open to exposure if he does. Hiring ronin or criminals is another option, and as statde before, the Kolat have innumerable resources to facilitate that. How the agent does it is irrelevant. Success is all that matters.

A small group of Kolat agents have been groomed to act alone. They undertake hazardous missions and work outside society to achieve the conspiracy's ends. Covert assassinations, blackmail, framing... all of these fall into the purview of lone operatives. Kage's former disciple Matsu Hiroru numbered among these, until recent events forced him out (or did they? See Kage's entry in Chapter Five for details). In any case, these Kolat are few in number, and do not maintain much of an external facade. They move among Rokugan's criminal elements, or remain at the Hidden Temple until their services are required.

The agent orchestrates the Kolat's desires throughout his adult life. Whether small or large,

his actions invariably further the conspiracy's cause and strengthen their poisonous web of deceit. When the time comes for him to retire, he may opt to become a teacher – willing to impart his years of wisdom to a new passel of recruits. The Kolat have little interest in remote monasteries or estates, and do not wish to consign it hard-working members to such a useless location. So they opt to remain as instructors and sensei. They teach, they advise others on matters of life... and they keep an eye out for new recruits to the cause. When they find one, they begin indoctrinating him or her as they themselves were indoctrinated so long ago. The cycle is perpetuated and the Kolat ensured of keeping its plans alive for another generation.

Because of this, the Kolat ranks are in a state of flux as time goes by. When an agent dies, his position goes with him, and the control he represents might easily be lost. The Kolat tend to select members who will follow in active agents' footsteps, and gain the positions that they once held. In thousand years, the conspiracy has become very skilled at perpetuating itself. Despite the loss of agents to time and old age, it has continued to flourish beneath the surface of the Empire.

PRESENCE AMONG THE SEVEN CLANS

So who, exactly, is a Kolat, and where are they concentrated within Rokugani society? That's difficult to say. As described in Chapter Two, many people do the Kolat's bidding without being aware of it, and aren't true members of the conspiracy. Active Kolat cover their tracks very well, and often act in the best interests of their clan when not engaged in some nefarious plot. Tacking down exact numbers is a murky proposition at best. However, like many other aspects of Rokugan, the Kolat concentrate on clan life. Their approach towards each clan speaks volumes about who they recruit to their side and why. It also illustrates some general patterns of Kolat membership. Below is a list of the seven major clans of Rokugan, the Kolat's attitude towards them, and the level to which the conspiracy has infiltrated their ranks.

Crab

Strictly speaking, the Crab have little to interest the conspiracy. They are the antithesis of everything the Kolat represent: loud, crude,

THE CONSPIRACY ON THE WALL

The Kaiu Wall is no place for Machiavellian games. The Kolat understand this better than anyone. Subtlety may be their stock in trade, but sometimes, even they need to bow to pragmatism. The war against the Shadowlands cannot be compromised, for it ultimately serves the great plan. Therefore, serious Kolat operations against the forces on the Wall are all but nonexistent.

The conspiracy does, however, want information on the area: troop movements, the catacombs beneath the wall, and everything about Shadowlands creatures they can find. To facilitate this, they will influence scouts and engineers to reveal what they know to them. Contacts and dupes are the norm along the Wall, with just a few active agents to collate what they learn. Other than that, very little goes on there; the Kolat seem happy to leave well enough alone. It's ironic that the most dangerous place in Rokugan is on of the quietest as far as the conspiracy goes.

impatient and brutish. Manipulating them should be childishly simple and the Ten Masters anticipate having few problems when the time comes to seize the clan for good...

Strangely enough, however, they haven't had to do that yet. Without any pushing or prodding from the conspiracy, the Crab have performed everything the Kolat would wish of them. Simply put, they want the Crab right where they are. The clan's sacred duty to defend Rokugan against Fu Leng matches the Kolat's desires perfectly. Fu Leng is a fallen god just as his brothers and sisters are, and must be removed before the conspiracy can attain its goals. Indeed, he is the most powerful of Lady Sun's children, with an army of monstrosities and a great swath of corrupted land under his control. Who better to throw against him than the psychotic unthinking brutes who have held him in check for almost a thousand years? The Crab know his tactics, have the strength to beat him back, and embrace the responsibility as the definition of their existence. With the Hida and their allies on the Great Wall, the Kolat can go about taking over the rest of the Empire without worrying about the Shadowlands. They have thus concentrated their resources elsewhere, content that the Crab will keep until the conspiracy is ready for them.

Recently, the Crab's leadership has displayed additional tendencies that the Kolat hope to make use of. Hida Kisada has begun to openly question the Hantei's rule, an unthinkable act just years ago. Kisada believes that "the old man on the throne" is incapable of ruling, and plots his overthrow should the opportunity arise. The Great Bear's power and daring have impressed the Masters greatly; they feel he may be their best chance to finally remove the Hantei. They lack the spies to directly influence him (Yasuki Taka is the closest they have), but feel if they can set the right events into motion, he will act without any prodding...

None of this, of course, takes the Yasuki into account. The Crab's adopted brethren have always been different from the samurai on the Wall, focusing on money and commerce rather than swords and steel. As such, the Kolat need to utterly dominate them. While the Hida and Hiruma are left to their own devices, the Yasuki have been honed to the perfect weapon: calculating, subtle, and utterly, utterly corrupt. The family owes its current status to the Kolat, who engineered their break with the Crane (see

Chapter One for more details), and in the centuries since then, they have been thoroughly infiltrated by the conspiracy. The two have become almost inseparable; active agents among the family number in the dozens and past family daimyo have been members of the Ten Masters. The Yasuki's criminal contacts have become potent tools in the conspiracy's plans, and their aggressive bargaining tactics have raised the merchant class to prominence. Without their mastery of the Yasuki, the Kolat would not have progressed as far as they have.

The current *daimyo*, Yasuki Taka, has been a member of the conspiracy since he was old enough to walk. He numbers among the Kolat's most elite agents and, while not a member of the Ten Masters, has been counted on to carry out their most delicate operations. His loyalty to the cause is unquestioned and he has directed every ounce of his family's resources towards fulfilling the Kolat's goals. Or so his superiors believe. (See "Enemies," below, for more information on Taka.)

Crane

The Kolat consider the Crane some of their toughest opponents... and some of their strongest assets. The family's craftsmen and artisans form a powerful anti-Yasuki economic bloc, and their courtiers have unquestioned control over Rokugan's noble courts. Controlling both is essential to the Kolat's ultimate goals. The Crane also have the ear of the Emperor, and will need to be handled properly if the Hantei are ever removed. Their high profile makes them difficult to infiltrate, and their impeccable honor makes them even more difficult to corrupt. But with patience and perseverance, even the noble Crane can be twisted. And the Kolat have both.

The conspirators have focused most of their efforts on the Crane's mercantile powers. With the Yasuki in their pockets, they don't need to dominate Crane merchants the way they do their rivals; one half of the battle is sufficient to keep things moving in the right direction. All they need are enough provocateurs among the Crane to maintain the rivalry: enough angry merchants and bitter advisors to keep the memory of betrayal alive. As long as the daimyo of the Doji and Kakita believe the Yasuki are a stain on their honor, they will continue to fight them as hard as they can. The Kolat ensure that poisonous tongues speak of Yasuki backstabbing, Yasuki treachery, and Yasuki effrontery into the right

ears. Some of the Yasuki's fiercest critics in the Crane Clan are Kolat agents.

Other aspects of the clan are sporadically controlled at best. The Asahina are generally ignored, left to their pacifism and their artistic knick-knacks. The Daidoji's military might has always had few loyal Kolat within its ranks, but the Doji and Kakita courtiers have proven corruptible enough to make the effort worth it. The conspiracy has always moved with caution when approaching the "higher" aspects of Crane life. Membership rises and falls with each new generation, and at times, the Kolat have been unable to replace Crane agents who fall to age or intrigue. The Ten Masters have always justified their caution, however. The Crane's immense resources, if turned against them, could cause considerable damage, and exposure at their hands might prove disastrous. If the right people at court were to learn of the Kolat, then all might be undone. Like a dog on a chain, they can be used, but must be approached with caution lest they turn and bite their master's hand. The Masters are willing to wait. The Crane have tied their fortunes to the Emperor, and when he falls, so will they.

Dragon

The followers of Togashi have caused difficulties like no other. If any clan constitutes a threat to the Kolat, it's the Dragon. As discussed earlier, their efforts to infiltrate the Dragon's mountain retreat have all ended in abject failure. Knowing agents sent into the Togashi lands have disappeared without a trace, and unknowing dupes are always misdirected or channeled elsewhere. Even the all-seeing power of the Oni's Eye cannot penetrate the mountains; it is as if a fog surrounds the land, one which they can neither penetrate nor dispel. The *ise zumi* cannot be brainwashed or otherwise coerced; none but the most subtle efforts have even been attempted. No Kolat agent, active or inactive, currently exists in the Dragon lands; the best they have done is place a few low-level courtiers in Mirumoto castle, far away from the clan's base of power. The Kolat have no means of knowing what goes on in the Dragon lands, and what they don't know makes them nervous indeed.

It gets worse. The original Togashi, the first child of Heaven who fell from the sky with his brothers and sisters, still sits at the head of the clan, and the Kolat know it. Moreover, he appears to be aware of the conspiracy and their goals –

perhaps the only non-Kolat in existence who does. How he came by this knowledge, they do not know, but it constitutes a dangerous threat. With the power of a god and the knowledge to drag them from their hiding place, Togashi could end their centuries of work in an instant if he so desired.

Luckily (from the Kolat standpoint, anyway), he doesn't seem to wish it. For all his knowledge, Togashi appears curiously indifferent to their schemes, and rarely makes any active moves against them. The few times he has struck against them have been brief and baffling. He has appeared before certain agents on occasion and swept them up in a crushing grasp, leaving broken bodies and empty spirits in his wake. This has happened less than a dozen times in the history of the Empire. Sometimes, the agents were on the verge of a vital operation. Others times, they were insignificant sleepers with little or no value. The Dragon lord has dealt with each identically, and never given any explanation for his actions. The Kolat have been as powerless to stop him as they have to pierce his mountain abode, but they take comfort in the fact that he has only interfered with them on a handful of occasions.

Besides these isolated incidents, the clan has done nothing to halt or impede their conspiracy. The Dragon's reclusive tendencies keep them safely out of Kolat schemes, and their steadfast isolationism means that the conspiracy needs not actively worry for the time being. That doesn't mean they aren't concerned. Just because the Dragon *hasn't* acted doesn't mean that they *won't*, and with their power, they are always a danger. Togashi's bizarre strikes against them have punctuated that. But the Kolat also know that someday, he will pass as his brothers and sisters have. When that happens, his clan will be bereft of his power for the first time in history, and the Kolat plan to take full advantage of the vacuum.

Lion

The Lion are the Emperor's defenders, loyal to the Hantei dynasty beyond all. They ignore reason, spurn blackmail, and defy politics. They have wills of iron and cannot be deterred from their goals. Honor is everything to the Lion, but it means nothing to them without the blessings of the Hantei. As the Emperor's Right Hand, they will sacrifice their very essence to preserve him.

COMMON KOLAT SPELLS

The following are spells the Kolat commonly use to affect the human mind, listed with the L5R books they can be found in. They are used cautiously, but with great effectiveness; Kolat magicians learn to master them at a very early age.

Command the Mind
(L5R RPG)

Echoes on the Wind
(L5R RPG)

Know the Mind (L5R RPG)

Secrets on the Wind
(L5R RPG)

Whispering Winds (L5R RPG)

False Tongue (*Way of the Scorpion*)

Forget (*Way of the Scorpion*)

Cross the Veil of Sleep
(*Walking the Way*)

Karmic Vengeance
(*Walking the Way*)

Look into the Soul
(*Walking the Way*)

Wisdom the Wind Brings (*Walking the Way*)

Depth of the Void
(*Walking the Way*)

Essence of Void
(*Walking the Way*)

WAY OF THE UNICORN: MAGIC OF THE WEST

Iuchi discovered a magic that was never meant for the Children of Sun and Moon. Only mortal men could grasp its knowledge, for it was knowledge that owes nothing to the Celestial Order. And by gaining this knowledge, the Ki-Rin Clan took one step away from the Order.

The magic of names was a foreign understanding of the world, and by accepting its knowledge, Iuchi and his followers lost a little of their connection to Rokugan. The power they gained and brought back to Rokugan lingers in their souls, and because of that, they have always suffered a slight separation from their heritage.

The Kolat know they will need to deal with them before the Emerald Throne can fall.

Or, more strictly speaking, they will have to deal with the Matsu family. The Akodo have played into their hands, thanks to Kage and Togashi's enigmatic prophecy. The other families have become isolated from them, and have watched the Akodo slowly dwindle to nothing. They are unaware that a viper lurks in their midst, and appear incapable of stopping him should he decide to act. With Kage in place and ready to act at a moment's notice, the Kolat don't anticipate having any problems with the Akodo in the near future.

The Matsu are another story. While their fierce pride and unbending will have made it possible to ensure the Akodo's decline, those same qualities make it difficult for the Kolat to maneuver. Their devotion makes them predictable, but they cannot be influenced more than obliquely. Only a few active agents exist within the Matsu ranks, and those are all low-level samurai. If the Kolat hope to one day control the family, it will be far in the future. For now, they view the Matsu as an obstacle to be side-stepped, worked around like any other problem.

This approach, however, has proven more effective than a direct assault. Rather than infiltrate their numbers and manipulate them from the inside, they have orchestrated events outside the family to gain the desired effects. If they need the Matsu to dislike a given ambassador, they release rumors suggesting that he disapproves of women in combat. If they want the family allied to a samurai from another clan, they arrange for him to win a duel against high odds. Such tactics don't work as well as an operative within the Matsu would, but have provided a modicum of influence over a normally unassailable family. Kolat are nothing if not master manipulators, and can now push the right buttons to keep the Matsu out of their affairs if necessary.

The tactic has also provided them with a model for how the Matsu will act when the time comes to dethrone the Hantei. After watching them dance and pivot in response to countless external stimuli, they now believe they can predict the family's movements. When the last Akodo falls, they plan to keep the Matsu exactly where they need them to be.

The other Lion families are less important to controlling the Clan, and tend to follow their

superiors' leads. The Kolat have a fair number of plants within their ranks – mostly courtiers and diplomats – but haven't made any real efforts to control them. They know that the key to the clan lies elsewhere.

Phoenix

The conspiracy could not get where they are today without the use of magic, and the Phoenix are magicians like no other. The dark secrets of the Isawa family present the Kolat with tools of the highest potential. Even more than their magic, however, the Phoenix have provided an example of how the Kolat hope to transform Rokugan. The rule of man technically began with the Phoenix, when the Isawa founder declared his independence from the divine Shiba. Since that great day, the Shiba family has been beholden to their Isawa brethren, their god's blood subjugated to men's superior wisdom. The Phoenix are the living embodiment of the Kolat's plans for the whole of Rokugan. The conspiracy will therefore do everything within their power to ensure the Isawa's independence continues.

Magic has made the Isawa powerful, powerful enough to dominate an entire clan. They claim that all mystical power in Rokugan begins with them, and the Kolat would not dispute that. They have always kept a presence within the family, agents charged with gaining as much knowledge as they can. Through their contacts, they have learned techniques in magical scrying, mind control, and invisibility, which have allowed them to thrive. Without them, the Kolat would not have reached so far as they have, or maintained their anonymity so successfully. Only Isawa libraries contain such knowledge. Only Isawa insight could allow them to master it. Because of this, they have made sure that at least one active agent is in the family at all times.

The Kolat have also expressed interest in the Isawa's darker pursuits. Behind closed doors, far from the eyes of prying magistrates, selected family members have perused forbidden texts in the hopes of understanding the forces of evil. Fu Leng is a formidable adversary, and the Isawa wish to know as much as they can about him. The Black Scrolls, the works of Iuchiban, the mysteries of Void magic, all of these have been carefully uncovered by meticulous Isawa scholars. By understanding them, they feel they can learn the key to finally undoing the power of the Shadowlands. But their noble intentions have



come with a heavy price. Corrupted shugenja, driven mad by their studies, have cropped up from time to time, costing the family valued membership and years of study. The Isawa Elemental Council, however, feels that such sacrifices are necessary to protect the Empire.

The Kolat have done their best to quietly encourage this disturbing pursuit, but for an entirely different reason. The dark secrets hidden within lost texts can make the Isawa simultaneously more powerful and easier to control. Madness indicates a loss of will, a crack which the conspiracy can exploit. A shugenja driven insane by evil spirits – but possessing the strength those spirits grant – makes a tempting target. Vulnerable, confused... but devastating if properly molded. As far as the Kolat are concerned, the more Phoenix who reach this state, the better. An entire family of mad shugenja could be the most powerful weapon in Rokugan. It's a dangerous game, which risks much. The

Isawa are strong and immensely useful as it is; their studies, if taken too far, could destroy them. But the Phoenix continue to delve, and the Kolat feel that the benefits could be immeasurable if properly channeled. While the conspiracy is too smart to engage such dark materials themselves, they will gladly reap the rewards of the clan's recklessness.

Scorpion

The Scorpion might be considered more dangerous to the Kolat than any other clan, for none know how to sniff out conspiracies like they do. They are treacherous, underhanded, and can spot the angle on any conspiracy, no matter how well hidden. That makes them terrible enemies of the Kolat, right? Wrong. In fact, the Scorpion have proven far more malleable than other, more open clans. For all their manipulative powers, the Scorpion can be quite proud in certain areas, and unwilling to suspect things they cannot perceive.





Scorpion superiors for being so sloppy. Thus, countless threats to the conspiracy have been harmlessly deflected away with no one the wiser. Without the Deceivers to hide behind, the Kolat may not have been able to remain invisible for so long.

The Scorpion themselves have no idea that they are being used this way. Their obsession for secrets and with hiding their own identity plays right into the Kolat's hands. They are blamed for so much anyway, that a few more plots laid at their feet do not matter. A few more secrets raise no suspicion at all. If a Kolat agent is hiding a few things from his clanmates, what of it? The Scorpion know better than to pry into one another's affairs.

And the briar patch of schemes and plots they have woven around themselves makes a fine place for Kolat to hide.

As mentioned before, the conspiracy primarily uses the clan as whipping boys, deflecting blame and confusing opponents who might otherwise cause them harm. The Scorpion have such a reputation as underhanded puppetmasters, that people believe them capable of anything. Who better to deflect suspicion onto? If one of your advisors suddenly advocates a radical policy change, who would you think had gotten to him: a public clan of self-proclaimed sneaks or a secret conspiracy that no one has heard of and might not even exist? It's surprisingly easy to blame the Scorpion for any number of crimes.

Because of that, Kolat agents within the clan have been charged with directing investigations clearly and firmly into their midst. Those who might find signs of Kolat influence need to be drawn away, towards a more promising target. The operatives are very good at it; so good, in fact, that they have often been reprimanded by their

Furthermore, the clan displays an uncanny amount of arrogance with regards to their cloak and dagger skills. The idea that someone could trump them is inconceivable. 'Pull the wool over our eyes?!' they would explain. 'We're the Scorpion! No one can deceive us!' Were they to learn that they had been duped by the likes of Akodo Kage and Shinjo Yokatsu, they would perish of shame. In their pride, they have allowed the greatest secret of all time to move about unmolested while they shoulder all of the blame. The Kolat wouldn't have it any other way.

Besides playing the clan for scapegoats, the conspiracy has also made great use of the their spy network, for none are better at procuring information than the Scorpion. Even the Oni's Eye cannot be everywhere at once, and the Scorpion can easily fill the gap. Agents within the clan will learn all they can about given targets under the auspices of blackmail or some other "mundane" Scorpion activity. When they have secured what they need to know, they will alert their masters,

who can then peruse it through use of the Oni's Eye.

These operations are always performed with the utmost delicacy, and always engineered to ensure that the Scorpion suspect nothing. This allows the sect to obtain what they need from them and get out cleanly (and they respect the clan enough to make this a priority; it won't do to wake this slumbering giant, after all.)

Despite their immense versatility, the Kolat elements in the Scorpion are all considered disposable, and none have any information that might damage the conspiracy. A clan so universally distrusted is no place for a cult that wishes to remain hidden at all costs.

Unicorn

The Kolat's slow and absolute infiltration of the Unicorn was covered in the History section. Today, the clan remains deep within their clutches, carrying out the conspiracy's plans without the slightest clue who they really serve. The Clan Champion, Shinjo Yokatsu, is a member of the Ten Masters, and can direct those under him more or less at whim. Almost a dozen prominent daimyo are active agents, and numerous sleepers walk unknowing amongst their samurai. The Unicorn's habitual wanderlust means that lengthy disappearances are not uncommon. After eight hundred years, they have become the perfect Kolat tools.

Yokatsu has made it clear to the other Masters that he controls the Unicorn and will use them as he sees fit. Considering his commitment to the great plan, and the effectiveness with which he has manipulated the Unicorn Kolat, none see fit to dispute him. He has subtly played up his clan's outsider status, even as he pushes for increased trade with the rest of Rokugan.

This makes those under him defensive of their clan and suspicious of other Rokugani, such that they will close ranks against any non-Unicorn who threaten them. At the same time, he has increased his clan's visibility in the Empire through trade caravans, diplomatic activity, and other legitimate forms of communication. As a result, the Unicorn have been seen more and more frequently in Rokugan, even as they remain fiercely attached to their unique sense of identity. Prominent, yet invisible, a part of the Empire yet apart from it... the Kolat couldn't ask for better help.

Sleeper agents are a prized commodity among the Unicorn Clan, and the majority of the "fire-and-forget" Kolat operations utilize them. With their tremendous speed and mighty horses, they can strike at a foe and be gone before anyone is aware. Long hours in the saddle form the perfect cover-memory for such deeds, and a Battle Maiden can be quite forceful in protesting her innocence. They can range far, and their awkward prominence hides the deceptive stealth of a sleeper perfectly. And none of them ever suspect what they may have done. When the Kolat require



WAY OF THE UNICORN: KURICHITAI

Shinjo sat beside her companion and awaited the old woman's wisdom. Martazera was silent for a long time. When she spoke next it was to be the last tale that Shinjo heard from her lips.

"When you first came to us your ways were not ours. You knew not the ways of the steppes, the paths of the doe or the wiles of the wyrms. You looked upon our desolate land and saw only death - for you yourselves were dying."

"And you showed us life," replied Shinjo.

"But not life as you knew it," countered Martazera. "Our plains were not your plains. Our ways were not your ways. The Ujik-hai live sparsely, far from the opulence you have told me of your homeland.

And yet you chose to remain among us and not to return. You chose to adopt our ways and leave yours behind. You took our path and left your own."

an unknowing tool to perform a task, they prefer to use a Unicorn if at all possible.

The active agents in the clan all move with equal duplicity. They each answer to Yokatsu, adding clan loyalty to the responsibility they already feel for the conspiracy. Which makes for extremely effective underlings. Countless dupes serve as eyes and ears, reporting court developments or the movements of armies to the Kolat's waiting ears. If needs be, the entire clan can be placed at the Kolat's disposal at a moment's notice, acting as one to fulfill the conspiracy's need. Thanks to the high placement of their operatives, no one within the clan would question whose interests they serve.

As stated earlier, the Kolat rarely use the Unicorn on a large scale. That might draw suspicion on the clan, or worse, give the Unicorns themselves the impression that they are being used. Yokatsu takes care to keep the apparatus of the Kolat hidden at all times - so well that no one within the clan knows who they serve. The conspiracy rarely, if ever, pushes its control too hard; there is no need to. For now, they can be content in their dominance, and keep large operations to a minimum: using individual Unicorns at will and not garnering suspicion. They can also act with much more ease and fluidity than in other clans, giving direct orders which must be obeyed rather than discreet inferences through multiple proxies. Small movements within the Unicorn are practically invisible, and large movements - when and if they ever come - can be undertaken almost effortlessly. If the Kolat have their way, all of Rokugan will one day be as malleable.

COMMUNICATION

The Kolat have a tremendous advantage over the rest of the Empire in terms of getting and receiving messages. The Oni's Eye ensures that time and distance mean almost nothing to the conspiracy. They can communicate with their operatives instantly, and, provided they know when and where an event will take place, they can view it with perfect clarity and remain undetectable. They can then debate what they have seen and advise their followers on a course of action within a few hours. For the rest of the Empire, it may be weeks or months before they learn of it - if at all. In the grand scheme of things, such an advantage can be devastating. Imagine if a single nation on Earth today had

access to digital satellite technology, while the rest of the world had to make do with the Pony Express. That's the edge the Kolat have.

They've used it to good advantage, making sure things go off exactly as they wish and constantly staying ahead of those who might expose them. Agents can maneuver through darkened households with help from the Eye. Patrols can be dodged, army movements mapped to perfection, and the inner dealings of the court observed with impunity. Their superior scrying abilities permit them to coordinate movements among many operatives at once, ensuring that complicated schemes go off without a hitch. They can act faster than anyone in feudal Rokugan would dream possible. They also have the ability to react quickly in case things go wrong and adjust their overall plans within minutes of a failed mission. If a primary plan goes wrong, a secondary one can be put into play almost instantly. The entire organization can move with complete synchronization if it has to, while the rest of Rokugan acts in slow motion.

When they need to contact someone without one of the tears, or an operative needs to send information of a less-than-earth-shattering nature, the conspiracy uses a second level of communication. Much slower and more mundane than the Eye, it is nonetheless reasonably secure: an elaborate code, developed over generations, and practically unbreakable to those who do not know how to read it (Intelligence + Cipher, TN 35 to read). Messages are written in it, and transported by mundane means to those who know how to translate it. Active agents use it to relay developments, request instructions and other important but reasonably common transactions. The code prevents those outside the conspiracy from reading these messages; no one save proven operatives have been taught the proper techniques. (A few sleepers have been "activated" with it, however, which keeps the Kolat from having to do it in person.)

The code has baffled Kitsuki investigators and Scorpion codebreakers alike, both of whom assume it belongs to one of the other great clans. The Masters are satisfied that it will not threaten them if broken, and operatives take care to keep their names and true allegiance out of it. The contents of these messages, like everything else with the Kolat, reveals nothing that could seriously compromise them. A single act, a lone plot thread, maybe one or two disposable

**WAY OF THE
UNICORN:
KURICHITAI
(CONTINUED)**

"Such is the way of the river," Shinjo answered. "It flows continuously without any sense of hurry. It never chooses its own shape or path, but reflects that of its situation. Yet it stretches from its beginning as a trickle in the mountains to its end in the sea, and it is the same river, ever changing, yet always heading to sea."

Shinjo and her clan lived amongst the Ujik-hai for a hundred years. Upon the desolate plains of the steppes the Ki-Rin Clan grew to number over a thousand.

agents... that is all. The code is a slow and painful means of communicating – on a par with any other piece of espionage – but in the lower levels of the conspiracy, remains sadly necessary.

As you might have guessed, they prefer using the Eye.

The Ten Masters realize the tremendous advantage they have in their artifact, and work to ensure they keep it. They actively prey upon the communication shortcomings of the rest of Rokugan, which not only keeps them in the dark, but allows the conspiracy to dictate the information they receive. The Empire depends upon couriers and ground messengers to deliver information. Such messengers can be intercepted

in their journeys, changed while the couriers rest, or subjected to countless other forms of mischief. The Oni's Eye ensures that they can monitor traveling couriers and choose the right moment to strike. Because of the distance involved, few people can stop them from acting, or suspect that something is wrong. An announcement of war instead of peace, a proposal of marriage where none existed – such seeds can be easily planted merely by intercepting the right message at the right time.

By shaping such news to their advantage, the Kolat exercise another, more subtle form of control over the Empire. Rokugani society is dominated by perception, by hidden feelings and



WAY OF THE UNICORN: BATTLE WITH THE ROCS

...Over half the Ki-Rin were lost under tons of snow – including one of Shinjo's children – and the pass they had used to cross the mountains was buried. Within a matter of minutes, the Ki-Rin were completely cut off from their passage back to the Burning Sands, the Ujik-hai and Rokugan.

Shinjo pondered the problem for three days. Finally, she decided the Ki-Rin would have to divide their numbers to find a passage back to the Burning Sands. But before they could split up, she would have to find a way for them to communicate back and forth, so they would not become completely separated.

She spoke long with Iuchi, and the shugenja told her that there was a way to divide her magic mirror into four pieces. "The act will break our communication with Rokugan, but it will allow each of us to speak to each other as you have spoken to your brother," he said.

opinions of those who may be far away. Insults are not easily forgiven, and slights can cause tremendous damage even if they weren't intended. By changing people's perceptions through altered messages, the Kolat can further their own agenda with minimal efforts. The news of vital events and happenings, sensitive negotiations between clans, and other matters of state are often first presented by courier. Depending upon what it says, the message will have a profound effect on the person who hears it, shaping and altering his or her perception immediately. Even if it later proves to be false, it rarely changes those initial feelings; a daimyo who hears about a personal insult is likelier to be ill-disposed towards the offending party in the future – regardless of how true it is. Sometimes, a deliberately misleading message will be delivered with the assumption that the recipient will discover the ruse – and blame someone for it. Centuries of practice have made the conspiracy very good at manipulating people through well-placed communication.

This particular form of intrigue is far from perfect, and like all other Kolat operations must be handled with care. While long distance messages can be changed, face-to-face contact is still out of the Kolat's hands (or at least has to be

affected the old-fashioned way). A trusted samurai conducting face-to-face negotiations will tell his daimyo what occurred, and no number of altered messages will change that. Similarly, the conspiracy has yet to find a way of stopping carrier pigeons, a means of communication which grows more popular by the year. While not immune to Kolat machinations, these methods are more resistant to manipulation, and can cause problems if not dealt with. A poorly conceived operation can have one message delivered by hand while different one arrives by wing – disastrous if not accounted for. The Kolat are patient however, and rarely make such mistakes. As always, altering messages and intercepting couriers must be handled carefully, and the conspiracy always moves with a great deal of forethought. That way, the duplicity they engineer so well in this arena will remain undetected.

WETWORK

In addition to their various other resources, there are a few Kolat techniques that don't fall into any easy category. Money, politics, and even communication can be emulated by others. What follows are the Kolat's and the Kolat's alone. They represent a most personal and intimate invasion: the transformation of self and soul into something most suitable to the conspiracy's needs. These are the delicate "recalibrations" of innocent victims, the subtle control of thoughts and emotions, the direct shaping of the brain's patterns. Not even the most vicious Kuni or cold-hearted Shosuro can match the Kolat's mastery of the human mind. So accomplished are they that not even their victims are aware of their own presence – puppeteers pulling undetectable strings.

Brainwashing

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Kolat often make use of "sleeper" agents, unknowing accomplices who will follow orders without hesitation. They use sleepers for suicidal missions, or as perfect infiltrators who can wait years without losing their edge. If they need to make use of



WAY OF THE UNICORN: BATTLE WITH THE ROCS (CONTINUED)

Shinjo agreed, and with her katana and luchi's help, she split the mirror. Then, she split the Clan into four groups, giving each of them a separate piece of the mirror while keeping one for herself. Then, with luchi at the head of one group, Shiko at the head of another, Ide at the head of the third, and herself at the head of the last group, they said their farewells and began their search for a way to return to Rokugan.



someone, whether because of his proximity to some important element or because he is disposable in case something goes wrong, they kidnap him, place a look-alike in his position if necessary (see "Replacements" below) and take him to the Hidden Temple. There, the Mind Breaker or some similar expert breaks his will with magic, torture, and countless other methods. His mind in shambles, he receives a variety of subliminal triggers, memory implants, and orders to be obeyed at all costs. Thus "retrofitted", he then returns to his life unaware that anything has transpired – to await his new masters' commands.

The benefit of all that work comes when the Kolat needs him. Obedience in sleepers is instantaneous: the Kolat simply snap their fingers or give whatever the proper trigger is, and the subject does exactly what he's programmed to. Instantly, unhesitatingly and without question. Not only is this an effective tool, it also allows the conspiracy to cover its tracks perfectly. Assassinations, thefts, and countless other crimes are ascribed to "fits of madness", even by the sleepers who instigate them. The Kolat can accomplish their goals without ever once revealing themselves.

Sleepers also give them an inroad into the human psyche, and the means of controlling it if they have to. Through countless experiments over the centuries, the Kolat have learned just what buttons to push, what techniques and stimuli can create the ideal response. When the rule of man has gone far enough and Kolat control of society is ensured, they will have to turn their attention to the inner self, and the way humanity thinks and feels. They hope someday to use what they have learned less viciously – that they can make their subjects willing believers instead of forced puppets. By that time (and it is still far in the future, for there is much to do between now and then) their creation techniques will be subtle enough to be applied on a wide scale, and accomplished enough to mold thoughts without the trauma of painful torture. For now, however, they will what they have to accomplish what they

can. A sleeper is a useful tool to build upon, not an end unto itself. Or so the Masters say.

Replacements

Sleepers are costly and difficult to produce. Sometimes, it's easier to simply... remove someone for a period and replace him or her with a duplicate. A being who looks and acts exactly like him or her can then work the Kolat's will without anyone the wiser. Or, if a sleeper is being created, a look-alike can assuage his family's concerns until he reappears. These replacements are never active long: they only perform a specific action and then vanish. But if executed properly, they can achieve in a short time which might take years with more passive methods.

The Kolat select targets for replacement the same way they select any other targets: for their power, expediency, or proximity to something believed important. The conspiracy doesn't need them permanently, just for a certain specific time period: during the signing of a marriage contract, for example, or delicate negotiations between two Clans. It's imperative during these occasions that the targets say and do the right things.

Replacements are the best and most expedient means of doing that.

A replacement is usually an active agent, fanatically devoted and possessing the skills necessary to imitate someone else exactly. When a target is selected, the agent studies him or her exhaustively, using the Oni's Eye and other scrying devices to view him or her at all times. The agent learns their speech patterns, pet names for loved ones and anything else required to fool the closest observer. This usually takes many months, although a skilled operative can learn what she needs to know within weeks. By the time the Kolat are ready to insert her, she can imitate the target to perfection, right down to the last tic and mannerism.

Just before insertion, the prepared agent is subjected to a spell called The Mirror's Smile, which shapes his or her features to look exactly like the target (see sidebar for details on the spell). The final illusion is close to seamless, and the Kolat can now act as the target without fear of discovery. Insertion itself is fairly simple; the target is abducted during a moment when he or she is alone, and the duplicate immediately steps

into his or her place. No one will be aware that a switch has been made.

Once in position, the agent does his or her best to blend in with the target's lifestyle. They will follow standard habits, engage in predicted conversation, and anything else required to assuage any suspicion. Thus ensconced, he will wait until the event or incident the Kolat need "adjusted", then acts according to their instructions. The right papers will be signed, the right samurai insulted, or the right war started, depending upon what the conspiracy wishes. Usually, the Kolat will be canny enough to pull it off smoothly; while people may be surprised with their replaced friend's "change of heart" on a given issue, no one should believe that he has actually been switched.

Once the operation is concluded, the hapless original is returned, if possible, usually with little or no idea what happened to him. The imitating agent falls into a feigned "illness," during which time he swaps back with the target. The original then awakens back in his or her place with no memory of the previous few weeks – amnesia brought about by the sickness. This is difficult to arrange, however, and can be risky if not handled



well. For times when the original can't be reinserted smoothly (far more the rule than the exception), the Kolat employ a nastier tactic: the target meets with a terrible accident and is removed from the picture. The imitating agent engineers the circumstances of the accident, leaving the body of the original in place at the scene. The Mirror's Smile will then be dropped, the agent free to escape with no one the wiser. Dead men don't raise any questions the way live ones do...

Spells and Spirits

The Phoenix Clan is important to the Kolat's long-term interests, and they have always kept an eye on the powerful Isawa shugenja. Magic can do things that dwarf even the gods... and the conspiracy is well-aware of that. In addition to the raw power of spellcraft and the control it exhibits over the kami, they also hope to use magic to influence the human mind. Through loyal shugenja and other agents, they seek to reach those who cannot be indoctrinated during their formative years or subjected to the brutal process of sleeper creation. Scrying, clairvoyance, dreams and visions, all of these can be used to manipulate people as powerfully as words or money – and without the risk of exposure that comes with them.

If the Kolat wish to convince someone to follow a particular course of action, or shape their long-term policies and attitudes, they have two choices: they can arrange for an agent to appear close to them, or they can attempt to reach them through magic. Agents are preferred, for magic is tricky, time-consuming, and lacks the immediacy of a close advisor. But given the ebb and flow of Rokugan's politics, and the difficulty in reaching the right person at the right time, it is occasionally necessary to use alternate means of persuasion. And the studies of the Phoenix have provided them with the very thing.

Through shugenja among the Ten Masters or trusted agents, the Kolat assert themselves into their target's dreams. They appear as gods, ancestors, living family – anyone who might make an impression upon them – and urge them to follow particular courses of action. If dreams will not work, they use waking visions or more subtle forms of suggestion to make their points. Sometimes, their influence is absolutely subliminal: occurring over the course of many nights in images so quiet as to escape conscious

notice. The victim's final mental state is all that truly matters. See the sidebar, above, for a list of spells the Kolat use to achieve these effects.

The Kolat time these appearances to have the maximum impact upon their subjects: as they wrestle with a delicate decision, for example, or have just prayed to their ancestors for advice. This leaves them open to "portents and visions", which they presumably believe come from benign sources. The conspiracy makes efforts to see that the subject prospers from obeying their edicts: that following the advice of a given dream leads to good fortune, while disobeying it leads to misery and woe. If properly executed, the subject believes that the vision serves her interest, and will seek to obey it at all costs. By then, of course, the Kolat has her.

The effects are subtle, yet profound. Kolat shugenja, with enough undisturbed time, can guide entire philosophies of their victims, making them follow any manner of schemes and agendas. Even better, the mystical nature of the technique ensures that the victim believes he himself is responsible for his thoughts: or at worst, is being guided by a superior and presumably benevolent power. There are no advisors to mistrust, no delicate political dances to ensure specific outcomes, just the target and his willingness to accept the message. They make their dupes *think* it's in their best interest to act, not force them into doing something they don't want to do. Without the presence of external sources, the dreams and visions of Kolat magic make that infinitely easier.

The only real problem with this method is the time and care it takes to perform. Only the most powerful shugenja can reach people in this fashion and not reveal themselves. The Kolat only have a few such magicians, and often keep them too busy to worry about influencing a single man. But where the tentacles of agents and innuendo cannot reach, the power of magic can. And when the need arises, the Kolat will use it as they do any other tool.

Foes

With all of that firepower, with all the meticulous secrecy and inexorable plans surrounding the conspiracy, who stands against them? Who blocks the progression of their schemes and keeps the Empire safe from them? Who dares to point a finger at the shadows and

THE MIRROR'S SMILE

Base TN: 15

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Duration: Permanent until removed.

Mastery: 7

Concentration: None (fails if the casting shugenja is killed)

Raises: None

Effect: The Mirror's Smile allows its target to assume the face and features of another person; he or she will look exactly like that person; normal Awareness rolls cannot see through it. Even close family members will be fooled by the resemblance. It is used almost exclusively by the Kolat, who guard the scroll jealously. Only a scant handful of people outside the conspiracy (mostly Phoenix and Scorpion) are aware that it exists.

The spellcaster must know the complete name of the person imitated, and have seen him or her at least once. The Mirror's Smile only affects the face and hands of the target, nothing else. Hair will need to be cut (and dyed, if necessary), and such things as scars and birthmarks (if not located on the head or hands) will not appear. Kolat agents under the spell take care never to remove their clothing while in the presence of others. The effects last until a proper counterspell is cast by the same shugenja who placed it in the first place. Unlike many illusion spells, it will not dispel if touched.

LOYALTY AND FRIENDSHIP

Just because Kolat members have devoted themselves to the conspiracy doesn't mean that they are devoid of human emotions, or that they don't have loyalties to other people and institutions. Being a Kolat means maintaining a mundane identity, with friends, relatives, and superiors to obey.

Despite the obvious need for deception, Kolat agents can and often do feel affinity for these people. Just because they are involved in a secret conspiracy doesn't mean they don't care about the people around them.

They just have higher priorities, that's all.

In many ways, it's no different than the relationship of a samurai to his Clan. A Lion bushi, for example, may be close friends with a Scorpion. But if his daimyo orders him to sever all relations with the Scorpion, then he'll do it. He won't like it, and he'll probably regret the friendship lost, but some things are more important.

Kolat are the same way.

They have companions, obey their lords and show love to their families just like everyone else. In most case, they genuinely like and/or respect these people.

There's nothing false or misleading about their feelings towards them.

And when one of them cuts her mother's throat, you can be sure she feels terrible about it...

accuse what might not even exist? Frankly, not many. And those who do are often worse than the Kolat themselves.

Thanks to their patience and foresight, the conspiracy has very few legitimate enemies – at least, few who know of their existence. In theory, everyone in Rokugan stands against them; their dreams will never come to fruition if the general populace ever learns of them, and a wide-spread action against them would extinguish their cause forever. But because they are so good at staying hidden, few citizens of the Empire present any real threat. No one knows who they are, what their motives are, or even that they exist. They are truly a shadow conspiracy, invisibility personified. No history records their names and no individual can recall their actions. The Kolat rarely tolerate anyone who learns of them, and because such people are usually isolated and alone, they have no problems dispatching or discrediting them. Their campaigns of disinformation have been remarkably effective as well, leaving potential foes attacking the Scorpion or other dupes instead of their real enemy. The result has left the Kolat relatively free to pursue their dreams of domination without concern for any serious threats.

There are however, a few factions who have proven damaging to the conspiracy in the past. Some are individuals, lonely samurai who spend their lives madly seeking someone to believe their cries. Others have proven more potent, however, and fight the conspiracy in ways single men can't. Like the Kolat, they are secretive, moving through the shadows without being seen. They strike in the dark and vanish without a trace, leaving nothing for the Ten Masters to retaliate against. More than any Hantei ruler or Emerald magistrate, they represent a threat to the conspiracy's ultimate goal. None of them have yet posed a serious danger, but they are all on the minds of the Kolat leadership – impediments which will eventually have be removed. A list of them, and their relation to the Kolat follows:

THE DRAGON

As discussed in the previous section, the Dragon are a legitimate problem. Any being as powerful as Togashi is an impediment to their plans, and indeed, their overall philosophy necessitates his downfall. Togashi can see the "big picture" better than any of them, and knows what bends lie along history's road. If he chose, he

could probably stop them cold. He seems to believe that the Kolat serve a purpose, however, and has been willing to let them alone as long as they adhere to it. But he has also stopped them from doing what they want every now and again, which makes them angry.

Furthermore, he has minions. The ise zumi don't appear to know much about the conspiracy, but they obey their daimyo's words to the letter and cannot be deterred the way conventional samurai can. They are immune to suggestion and brainwashing, and notice things that no one else would be aware of. At times, they have caused considerable problems for the Kolat's schemes; if they were ever unleashed en masse against them, they could destroy the conspiracy. As long as Togashi exists, he will be a threat. Only when he is eliminated, and his followers rendered inert can the great plan go forward.

Like all things, they believe that time is on their side in this matter. The Ten Masters assume that he will fall eventually, just as the other gods have. Sooner or later, he will pass from this world, and leave his clan open to attack. The question that concerns the Masters is whether he will destroy them first. So they watch and wait, hoping for an opportunity to arise where they can expedite his departure. They already have a few ideas on the subject. They know he must be brought out of his mountain retreat; only away from the protective shroud of his mountains will he be vulnerable. They also know he must stay out of the mountains for some time. The enormity of such a task – indeed, of pinpointing a being who can come and go like the wind – staggers them, but they continue to plot. At the moment, they know that it will take something huge, something which threatens the Empire itself, to gain his attention. Something like, say, an invasion from the Shadowlands...

FU LENG

It's a common misconception among those few who know about them that the Kolat are evil, as corrupt as the Shadowlands. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are beholden to no dark god, call no sinister spirit their master. And they're smart enough not to tamper with forces that might make them so. In their own strange way, they feel they're working for the good of all of Rokugan. And like everyone else, they see the Shadowlands as a terrible threat.

Of all the children of Sun and Moon, Fu Leng has amassed the most power by far. He has struck bargains with indescribable spirits, forcing them under his yoke by sheer will. He commands a ravenous army of oni, each the match of a dozen men. The elements themselves fall under his corruptive sway, and those killed in his lands rise again to fight for his cause. He holds a reach of territory whose size can only be guessed at. And his only purpose seems to be the destruction of Rokugan.

Fortunately for the conspiracy, they don't have to fight him alone. Everyone in Rokugan knows

vital time to mount a defense. (All such efforts have been disguised as scouting reports or other mundane correspondence.) They have even done research into the nature of jade, hoping to find some means of destroying Fu Leng permanently.

North of the Kaiu Wall, the conspiracy concentrates mainly on keeping itself free of the Dark Lord's influence. Any Kolat agent showing signs of the Shadowlands Taint is immediately destroyed. Those in touch with potentially corrupting creatures are monitored very carefully. Puppets of a god have no place in the conspiracy, and the Masters have been diligent in wiping out



the dangers of the Shadowlands, and an entire clan has been charged with stopping him. As loud and crass as they are, the ferocious Crab have done an admirable job of keeping the Dark One in check. The Kolat's efforts within the Crab – outside the Yasuki family, of course – have served to enforce the clan's dedication, and ensure that their purpose is not blunted. They have surreptitiously used their contacts within the clan to warn of coming attacks, providing the Hida

all trace of the Taint among their ranks. No one directly associated with the Kolat studies dark texts, makes bargains with oni, or does anything that might compromise the organization. Monitoring the Phoenix will produce the fruits of that labor; at least that's what the Masters believe. And what happens to those Kolat who fall to the Dark Lord is ugly in the extreme.

Recently, the Kolat's attitude regarding Fu Leng has shifted slightly. The ancient prophecies

of the fall of Hantei loom large on the horizon. The Ten Masters have become increasingly convinced the Fu Leng holds the key to that somehow. Debates have begun among them as to whether to "allow" the Shadowlands to gain a foothold in Rokugan. Assuming such a thing were possible, of course (detering the Crab is easier said than done), it might leave Fu Leng vulnerable to attack. The prophecies promise as much, the Masters say. Can we trust them? It may be that they can lose a battle only to win the war, and as Hida Kisada looks eagerly towards the

throne, they wonder if his distraction will be a detriment... or an opportunity.

THE SHADOW

Ironically, the Kolat may be humanity's best defense against the danger this entity represents. Like the conspiracy itself, the Shadow moves in secret, and none save a few scholars are aware of it. It is essentially a piece of preanimate matter, the stuff the universe was formed of before the coming of Sun and Moon. When Lady Amateratsu and her husband arose, they walked among the



WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE HAUNTED OASIS

After their escape from the cities of the sorcerers, the Ki-Rin moved further west, following Lady Sun's nightly descent into the Underworld. It was a harsh journey, but far in the distance a stretch of mountains beckoned to them. Shinjo claimed that she heard a quiet song singing in her ears that called to her, told her to continue her travels, as if something was waiting for them at the foothills of those mountains.

After many weeks, they finally reached the foothills, and the desert seemed to fall away into lush green grasslands. Shinjo looked upon the oasis and saw a silvery shape shifting amongst the grasses and waters. Like a ghost, it moved without touching the ground, and Shinjo heard it calling her name as it danced through the oasis. She ordered her people to stay outside the oasis and wait for her return. Otaku Shiko moved to object, but then kept silent. And as Shinjo stepped into the shimmering oasis, they watched and waited from afar. Soon, the sun set behind the mountains and Shiko set herself to watch for Shinjo's return. Despite herself, she fell asleep sometime during the night's darkest hours. When she and the rest of the Ki-Rin awoke the next morning, the oasis was gone ... and so was Shinjo.

Earth giving names to the things they saw. Once named, these objects were bound in a set form and limited to what they could do. This created the universe.

But there was a little piece of nothing that did not want a name. It hid in the shadows as Sun and Moon passed and they missed it in their naming. It stayed there and grew, absorbing what it could to learn about the new world it had inhabited. But being unbound, it could change shape at will, and was not limited in the forms it could take. By absorbing other creatures, it created servitors, who obeyed its edicts even as it undid their essences. Those taken by it gradually lost their identity and their souls, until they were as formless and blank as their master. It was called the Shadow, after the darkness which hid it, and it remains in Rokugan to this day.

The Shadow's overall goal is to undo the universe, to return everything to its original formless state. It does this by absorbing the essence of things it finds - people, animals, objects, etc. It learns what they know and grants them strange powers. Simultaneously, however, it strips them of their identity, gradually returning them to the formless mass the universe began as. It eventually hopes to absorb the entire universe in this manner, to literally undo all of creation, until everything is once again like the Shadow. (For more information on this unique entity, consult *The Way of Shadow* sourcebook).

The Shadow directly conflicts with the Kolat philosophy. Their goal is to complete the cosmos, to grant a final structure to it. The Shadow wants to destroy it all, to unmake it until nothing remains. It undoes the work they wish to finalize. The Kolat realize that for the Shadow to succeed, they will have to be destroyed, and that if they wish to succeed, they will need to dispatch it permanently. Conflict between them is as fierce as it is inevitable.

The Kolat have only occasional contact with the Shadow, however, as each side is only haphazardly aware of the other. Both of them have hidden deeply within Rokugan's underbelly: so deeply that almost no one knows that either exists. Information between them is therefore difficult to come by, and the Kolat must rely on instinct to track and confront their foe. Similarly, the Shadow has yet to absorb anyone with any meaningful knowledge of the Kolat. What it doesn't absorb, it cannot know; it remains aware

of the conspiracy's existence and it's basic intentions, but nothing more.

On the other side, the Kolat have had more success. The Kitsuki magistrates have the most concrete knowledge of the Shadow, hidden deep within their fortress and unavailable except to a select few researchers. The conspiracy has not been able to reach them through conventional means (their troubles with the Dragon are well-documented), but the Oni's Eye has allowed them to peruse them from a distance. With such knowledge in hand, they have been given a clear idea of what the Shadow is and developed a vague strategy for how to deal with it.

They tend to keep what they've learned on a need to know basis. Apparently, too much information about the Shadow can be dangerous. Those few who learn about it become somehow vulnerable to its will and in almost every case have been absorbed into it. The Kolat Masters are made of stern stuff, however, and can resist its call as no others (a lifetime of indoctrination has its benefits). That doesn't mean they wish to expose their underlings to it. They sometimes lack the willpower of their superiors, and the less opportunities the Shadow has to sink its hooks into them, the better.

With both sides aware of the other, but unsure of their proximity or current whereabouts, the conflict between them has taken on odd shape. They fight a quiet war, lying beneath the surface of society and disguised by a thousand layers of distraction and lies. The soldiers at the forefront have no idea that they are fighting at all, let alone who or what they are fighting against. None save the highest levels of the Kolat are aware of the true nature of this foe; the rest believe they are eliminating lone enemies or merely following orders. The Shadow has even less deception to do. It sends its minions because it can; that's all.

The Kolat's standard tactic is to perpetuate an act which draws the Shadow's attention, then destroy it when it moves to investigate. The Shadow has a curious nature, and can be lured if the right bait is provided. Its followers - shadow-branded ninja and other pawns on the way to absorption - converge upon the proper site, inquire into the right affair, or otherwise announce themselves to the conspiracy. Then the Kolat strike, swiftly and without mercy. If performed correctly, they identify and eliminate the Shadow's minions, leaving nothing for it to grasp onto. It doesn't always work that way, of

WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE LIVING DARKNESS

Nearly two hundred years after their separation, the mirrors of Shinjo began to glow with a furious fire.

The leaders of each group picked up their mirrors and watched as the immortal beauty of Shinjo was ravaged by talons of darkness. She called for their aid, begging them to return to her with the speed of the wind.

Then, the communication ceased.

The three groups rode day and night to reach their beloved Lady, and as they grew closer, they began to notice a familiarity to the land that surrounded them. The trees grew thinner, and the grasses were brown and stiff. The pure blue waters turned fetid and foul and fires burned with less brilliance with every night they rode deeper into the dark lands. The children of Iuchi and Otaku knew where they were. They had somehow stumbled across a distant outcropping of the Shadowlands.

When the three groups finally reached the remainder of Shinjo's assemblage, they realized just what kind of power she was up against. It has been forbidden to record exactly what happened to Shinjo and her followers when they stood against the Living Darkness, but this much is known.

course, but it seems the most effective means of drawing the enemy into an open conflict.

This dangerous game of baiting has gone on for centuries, costing both sides men and resources. It fuels stories of the mystic ninja and leaves unsettling corpses for the unknowing to discover. It also prevents both sides from focusing their entire attention on their respective goal: fighting each other leaves less men to infiltrate society or entice new victims. The Kolat consider the war necessary, and devote what they can to carrying it out. The Shadow has yet to interfere with their other operations, but that may change if their enemy becomes more of a threat. As for the Shadow... what man or god can say what it thinks?

A few members of the conspiracy have begun researching a ceremony that may destroy the Shadow once and for all. They have found fragments of scrolls, within the Isawa libraries and the closed vaults of the Kitsuki family, which mention a means of imprisoning such a nameless entity. The spell involves summoning the essences of Sun and Moon to come down from their perch and give a name to the Living Darkness. Thus bound in a limited form, its powers will vanish and the threat vanish with it. Such a spell would require staggering amounts of power and may result in a permanent unbalancing of the universe. Apocalyptic upheavals, the Elements colliding and destroying each other... the researchers paint a staggering image of destruction when they describe the spell. Should any such ceremony be created, the conspiracy will probably use it as a last resort; they would not wield such power casually. If the Shadow should progress too far, however – if the threat of undoing the universe becomes unstoppable – then the Masters may cast it to prevent total oblivion.

TAKA

Surprisingly enough, one of the Kolat's most dangerous enemies is one they aren't even aware of. In fact, he's one of their own. He's a wizened little old man with a knack for bargaining who's been a part of their schemes for a long time. And knowing what they're up to, he plans to stop it.

Yasuki Taka was indoctrinated into the Kolat from an early age, drawn in by his father who was a member of the Ten Masters. He grew up learning of the great plan, and was taught to believe that man, not gods, held the power of

eternity. When he came of age, he went to work for the conspiracy, orchestrating schemes of breathtaking audacity and deceit. He soon had the respect of his superiors and unquestioned mastery of temporal power. As a merchant, he was second to none. As a daimyo, he increased the conspiracy's resources twofold. And as a Kolat, he has the entire merchant class dancing on a string.

He was considered for a position within the Masters, but the others were uneasy with a hereditary succession. The son inheriting his father's position smacked of noble privilege, something the Kolat have always frowned upon. Besides, Taka was doing such a good job where he was that moving him to other duties seemed wasteful. He remained an operative of the highest level for them, but never quite entered the sacred circle at the top of the pyramid.

Somewhere along the line, however, something went awry. It may have been a wayward streak of rebellion, or perhaps a realization of truths beyond the Kolat philosophy. Whatever the reason, Taka became disillusioned with the conspiracy's plans, and secretly decided to try and undo them. He knew the resources they could bring to bear, and so was clever enough to hide his feelings from everyone. Not even his father suspected his disloyalty; by the time he died, he had given Taka everything he needed to fight back against the conspiracy. Under the façade of diligent service, Taka has begun to plant the seeds which he hopes will one day undo the Kolat.

It's dangerous business, and he can't afford a misstep. He knows that he lacks the resources to confront his masters directly, and he knows that they will kill him if they learn of his treachery. So he seeks to delay their plans, disrupt them through a series of underlings. He acts only when he feels he can escape detection – trying to delay or harass rather than completely destroy. If he succeeds too spectacularly, they'll notice him; too quietly, and he becomes irrelevant. It's a delicate balance, trying to be effective yet avoid detection. Fortunately for him, he's very good at it.

As the Yasuki daimyo, Taka has access to resources which can help him immensely. He has a huge web of proxies and pawns, more than even the Kolat can keep track of. For each one he uses to aid the conspiracy, he has two more working against them. He contacts them through minions or underlings, those the conspiracy

doesn't bother with. Through money, blackmail or loyalty to the Empire, he convinces them to act. Their tasks are simple and rarely explained fully: stop a courier, prevent the assassination of a diplomat, prevent a samurai from going to war. He never reveals who he is (he knows the Oni's Eye may be watching) and remains as enigmatic as his would-be masters. Over the years, he has amassed quite a network. And they've managed to put a crimp in no small number of the Kolat's schemes. It hasn't stopped them or done more to slow their progress, but it has kept from form extending as far as they would like, and set their overall plans back by generations or more.

The secret, Taka has discovered, is beating the Kolat at their own game. When he sets out to break up one of their operations, he makes sure to eliminate signs of deliberate interference. His operatives appear like quirks of fate: accidents that cannot be helped rather than a focused effort against them. That way, they do not search for the culprit when something goes wrong. They merely chalk it up to bad fortune and move on to the next plan. Like the Kolat, he often lies to those working for him; they believe they are striking against the Crane, the Scorpion, or other legitimate targets. Again, this allows him to deflect and defer Kolat suspicions. The Masters believe those acting against them are following

mundane political agendas, not a vendetta against them. If need be, he cuts his minions loose and leaves them to their fate; when an operation goes south, he needs to limit the damage as much as possible. Again, it keeps him clear of Kolat suspicion and allows him to continue the campaign against them.

While all of this goes on, he continues to fulfill his duties as a "loyal" Kolat. He considers them vital to covering up his true agenda. He conducts criminal operations on a wide scale, oversees numerous Kolat plans, and continues to increase the value of koku wherever he goes. He puts a great deal of effort into this, and always appears as the loyal underling. He even arranges for the odd failure to be laid at his feet, just so the Masters don't start thinking he's too perfect to be trusted. He's gotten so good at lying about it, he can deceive the best of them. Combined with his success, it makes him a mole like no other – a double agent amid an organization full of them. And thus, he can continue to undermine them with impunity. It really shouldn't come as a surprise that he can pull something like this off. After all, he was trained by the best.

For more information on Yasuki Taka, see *The Way of the Crab*.



WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE LIVING DARKNESS (CONTINUED)

Shinjo and her followers assaulted the stronghold of the Darkness, but even their great skills and magic was not enough to challenge its might. Furthermore, they found that the Darkness had trapped them. In their effort to face the Darkness, they had left their flank open, and found themselves surrounded by the servants of evil.

Shinjo took one look at the situation and commanded her followers to flee at once, to charge the surrounding armies and to never look back. Otaku Fujiko and Iuchi Suasan agreed and they charged against the shadowy, formless armies. The Living Darkness pressed to their retreating flank, and suddenly Shinjo and three of her remaining children turned about and charged the Darkness.

"Go!" she called to Fujiko and Suasan. "Go and never look back!"

Otaku tried to follow her Lady, but Suasan would not allow it. "She will return to us. That was her promise. Now, we must flee!"

They broke through the flanking lines of the Darkness' army and fled across the Shadowlands, but all the while, Otaku watched the horizon as shafts of shining white light flashed against the tendrils of the Darkness, until finally, the Darkness devoured even the golden rays of twilight.



Chapter Four



Your Campaign

WAY OF THE UNICORN: SHINJO'S FAN

Long ago, when the clan of the Ki-Rin decided to leave the lands of the Emerald Empire and seek out the world over the mountains, there was much sadness at their departure. Lady Doji was opposed to her sister Shinjo leaving Rokugan, for the two were very close. However, she saw the wisdom of learning the knowledge of the wide world, and she knew that her sister would never be happy unless she was wandering new lands. So she went to Shinjo and spoke to her once more before her Clan set off on their travels. Bowing before her, Doji held in her hands a small sandalwood fan. With a delicate hand, she offered it to her sister, for luck on her journey. "Let this always travel with you, my sister, and you will always know that a part of your family is by your side." The two embraced, and their parting was filled with tears.

Chapter Four: Campaign Ideas

Now that you have an idea of who the Kolat are and how they operate, the time has come to insert them into your L5R campaign. Conspiracies can be difficult to run at times, especially in a fantasy setting like this one. It requires thought and planning to pull it off properly; otherwise, you end up with a bunch of silly spy clichés showing up where they don't belong. This chapter is intended to help you make the Kolat as mysterious and sinister as they should be.

There are essentially two ways of approaching a Kolat-based campaign. The first and most obvious casts the players against the conspiracy. They are charged with hunting down this evil and destroying it, or at least preventing it from attaining its most immediate goals. The second, and trickier option is to make the players a part of the conspiracy. Knowingly or unknowingly, they work to further the Kolat's agenda and strengthen their grip on the hearts and minds of Rokugan. Both of these options can make for rewarding role-playing, but they require different of approaches. We'll start with the first option.

Hunting the Conspiracy

Fighting the Kolat isn't easy, but there are ways you can do it. Once they learn that such an organization exists, what noble samurai wouldn't battle tirelessly for their undoing? They threaten the Empire more than any foreign invader or Shadowlands menace, and must be stopped! Give your players a glimpse of Kolat power and they'll be eager to undo them any way they can.

In order to make a campaign like this work, you'll have to beat that eagerness out of them. Take away their resolve and determination and replace it with fear. Make them feel forced to act, under the threat of terrible consequences. After all, these foes are much more powerful than anything they have seen. The Kolat have been around since the founding of the Empire, and they know how to dodge pursuers. They have access to vast wealth and resources, and they don't like people knowing who they are. And they won't even have to kill the party to render them helpless. After all, no one in Rokugan knows that they exist. They're nonexistent myths, shadows that no one's seen enough of to discount. The only people who know are the Kolat themselves, one or two powerful figures like Togashi... and the characters. That's going to make it almost impossible to rally support. If the players go around talking of secret conspiracies and centuries-old plots, people are apt to think they're insane. And while they do that, the Kolat will cheerfully go about their business unmolested. As eager as they are, the players are going to have an uphill battle if they want to take on the conspiracy – even before the Masters take notice of them.

The Kolat are fearsome figures, sources of mystery and confusion. A campaign based around them should emphasize the paranoia and unease that comes with stalking a conspiracy. Players should be frightened of the Kolat and what they might do. *Anyone could be a pawn; their closest friends could turn on them in a moment.*

The first step to creating a Kolat-hunting campaign should be a peek behind the curtain. The players won't be able to fight the conspiracy until they know it exists – and more importantly, believe it is a threat. This shouldn't happen right away; run a few "normal" adventures first. Let them get into the rhythm of Rokugan and establish a friendly comfort-zone for them to enjoy. Then, without warning, hit them with a few clues. Perhaps they see a close friend awaken one evening and swap an important document with

WAY OF THE UNICORN: SHINJO'S FAN (CONTINUED)

Hundreds of years later, when the Unicorn returned to Rokugan, Shinjo Nishijin came to the court of the Emperor. When he announced that his clan had returned to the lands of their birth, there was much argument. "The clan of the Ki-Rin is dead!" some cried, and the Lion were especially quick to judge. "Their ways are not the ways of our people; how can they be the descendants of the Lady Shinjo?" Then the Champion of the Unicorn stepped forward, and approached the Emerald Champion, Doji Ryobu. When they were introduced, Nishijin reached within his *haori* and pulled forth a small jade box. "There is an ancient legend among us," he said, "that we were to return this to your family if we ever returned to our homeland. Take it now, as a gift in remembrance of the past." He handed the box to Ryobu, who opened it to reveal a very small and very ancient sandalwood fan. Ryobu lifted the fan from its enclosure and spread it gently to reveal the personal mon of the Lady Doji. "It is true," he said, placing his hand on Nishijin's shoulder. "He is the son of our sister Shinjo. The Clan of the Ki-Rin has returned to Rokugan at last."

another. (In the morning, he will hotly deny ever performing such an act, and seem genuinely unaware that he had done anything amiss.) Or maybe they overhear two courtiers talking about a random event, like an earthquake or a storm, which will happen at a precise point in the future. When that point arrives, the event occurs exactly as described. An indecipherable message could be discovered – indecipherable but producing fear and anxiety in the man it was meant for. As incidents like these begin piling up, the players should become aware that they are in the midst of something vast: something that goes far beyond what they have previously understood.

You should make clear to the players that these clues come from an unknown source. It's not another Scorpion trick or small cult of mahotsukai. The participants cross clan and class lines, and obey allegiances that would normally appear impossible (such as a Crane and Yasuki merchant working together). As the characters investigate these incidents, in the hopes of shedding some light on them, they should be met with denial and derision. All roads seem to lead nowhere, and the conspiracy, while definitely present, shows no signs of revealing itself any further. The

characters should begin to feel frustrated here; something's happening, but they can't for the life of them figure out what.

With the stage set, it's now time to hit the players with the scope of what they're up against. They need to get a sudden, sharp look at exactly who the conspiracy is... then left in the dark again, unsure of how to proceed. Most players know something about the Kolat (even if their characters don't). It might be enough just to drop the name on them and watch them squirm. A obsolete agent on the run can work well here if you like. He's threatened with elimination and seeks out the characters as the only people who might believe him. He fearfully reveals some general details of the conspiracy (who they are, how powerful they might be) before begging them for help. If a Kolat on the run doesn't appeal to you, you can use a different plot device – an ancient scroll written by an old foe of the conspiracy, or a vision sent by an ancestor who was once slain by the Kolat, perhaps.

Then, when you've shown enough to give them a broad idea, slam the door shut. The agent speaking to them could suddenly drop dead. Or the scroll they're reading could suddenly burst into flames. Either way, it should be a brutal display of long-distance power which instantly cuts the characters off from their information source. It should provide enough evidence to convince them that the Kolat are involved, while denying them use of that evidence for any practical purposes.

Paranoia

Once the characters are aware of their foes, their naturally suspicious instincts should begin to take over. They'll begin seeing the conspiracy behind every shadow, hidden in every smiling face. Encourage that. Make it seem as if the Kolat are everywhere. Make them believe that attacks can come from any direction at any time. Nowhere is safe, anyone can be the enemy, and nothing they do can hope to



WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE IUCHI I

Iuchi was one of the three samurai who volunteered to accompany Shinjo on her epic quest into the unknown. His understanding of the mystical arts proved invaluable to the Unicorn clan in their long wanderings.

At the start of their epic journey, Iuchi had only a passing knowledge of magic. He knew the rituals of the Seven Fortunes, and knew that it was possible to invoke their aid. He had also learned a few basic spells from Isawa before he left with Otaku and Shinjo. He practiced these regularly, so as to be of the greatest skill he could manage with his tricks.

Once outside of Rokugan, though, Iuchi was mystified to discover other shugenja working in foreign lands. They called themselves "sorcerers," "warlocks," "magicians," and "wizards." Some, he was able to tell, were charlatans and con artists, using their charisma and knowledge to deceive their people, but others, Iuchi realized, were working actual miracles.

change that. The characters should constantly feel like they're out of their league. The conspiracy is strong, resourceful and capable of inflicting terrible damage. What can a few measly samurai do against them? They may push forward against them – and as samurai, have the courage to accept their possible deaths – but should always do so knowing that their enemies have an unfathomable edge against them.

The trick to running the Kolat in this style is making less mean more. Not every adventure should center on them; space their appearances between more "mundane" occurrences. Just don't tell the players which ones are which. Let them engage in clan rivalries, fight the Shadowlands, and conduct themselves as they always have. If the Kolat do get involved, make them hidden – one of their plots can seem Scorpion-related, or the death of a daimyo made to look like disease instead of poison. The payoff comes not in knowing that the Kolat are involved, but suspecting that they might be. Their conspicuous absence can make players a hundred times more paranoid than their prominent appearance. Just knowing they're out there – and probably watching the characters right now – will be enough to set your players' nerves on edge.

With an atmosphere of mistrust and betrayal, the GM can then orchestrate legitimate Kolat plots and give the characters an opportunity to stop them. Amid the background of countless other unrelated schemes, one more won't draw much attention (which is what the Kolat want, of course). And the players should be too unsettled to initially tell the difference. If they're intent on discovering this hidden enemy, on exposing them and stopping their plots, then they'll be inclined to pursue this thread as they would every other. Only this time, they'll be right.

Stopping an Operation

Kolat plots don't always make sense. They're based on long-term plans and a web of countless other schemes. The Kolat won't go after a powerful daimyo; they'll go after the clerk who processes his paperwork. Only they know the reason, and only they understand that, in the grand scheme of the universe, the clerk may be a thousand times more important than he seems. In

and of themselves, these can follow pointless or even contradictory goals. Only by looking at the big picture through the right eyes will their logic become clear. When running one of them by your characters, they don't necessarily need to understand it. They just need to know its immediate goals, and believe that they have to stop it.

Over time (and assuming the characters are successful enough), they will begin to discern which schemes are Kolat-based and which aren't. The illogical agendas, the not-quite-ordinary thinking, the emphasis on long-term results rather than short-term gain... these form distinctive calling cards that canny players will begin to pick up on. While the fear and confusion will never go away, experienced Kolat hunters should slowly develop an instinct for sniffing the conspiracy out.

The exact nature of a given Kolat plot, and how the characters enter into it, is up to you. It will vary from campaign to campaign and can follow any pattern you wish them to. Some may involve the characters' most intimate friends. Others might take them to the farthest reaches of the Empire. They can be as ambitious or obscure as you'd like; all they have to do is benefit the conspiracy. A short listing of several different types of Kolat actions, and suggestions on how the players can stop them, follows:

1) KIDNAPPING

Someone near the characters has been abducted, either to keep him or her out of commission, or perhaps to transform him or her into a sleeper. The Kolat will either take him or her to a nearby safe-house for processing, or the Hidden Temple itself. If the former, the players will have to follow leads and hunt down contacts in an effort to find their hiding hole. If the latter, it will be a reckless chase across the country-side in an effort to catch the kidnappers before they vanish (the Masters won't let the players get close to the Temple). And even if they succeed in stopping them, will the rescued victim be the same person? Or will the conspiracy have already sunk their claws in too deeply?

2) ASSASSINATION

Certain people stand in the way of the Kolat's plans. They have to be removed permanently. If possible, they will try to make it seem like an accident, or an indirect death (a duel or some



such). If they have to (the target is too high-ranking or too well-protected), they'll use a sleeper. Either way, the characters intercept a few cryptic instructions to the orchestrating agent, suggesting that the target's life may be in danger. It's up to them to warn those in power, find out who the Kolat's tools are, or otherwise prevent the assassination. If the assassin isn't aware of what's he's about to do, they'll have their work cut out for them.

3) REPLACEMENT

Similar to kidnapping, this involves removing someone and replacing them with an almost identical duplicate. The Kolat tend to keep such operations short, because of the risk of discovery, but a well-trained duplicate can cause immeasurable damage during his or her time in

someone else's shoes. The characters may notice little tics and inconsistencies revealing the *doppelgänger's* presence, but can they get anyone else to believe them? And if they can't, can they stop the replacement from reaching his goals without raising the ire of those close to him?

4) FORGERY

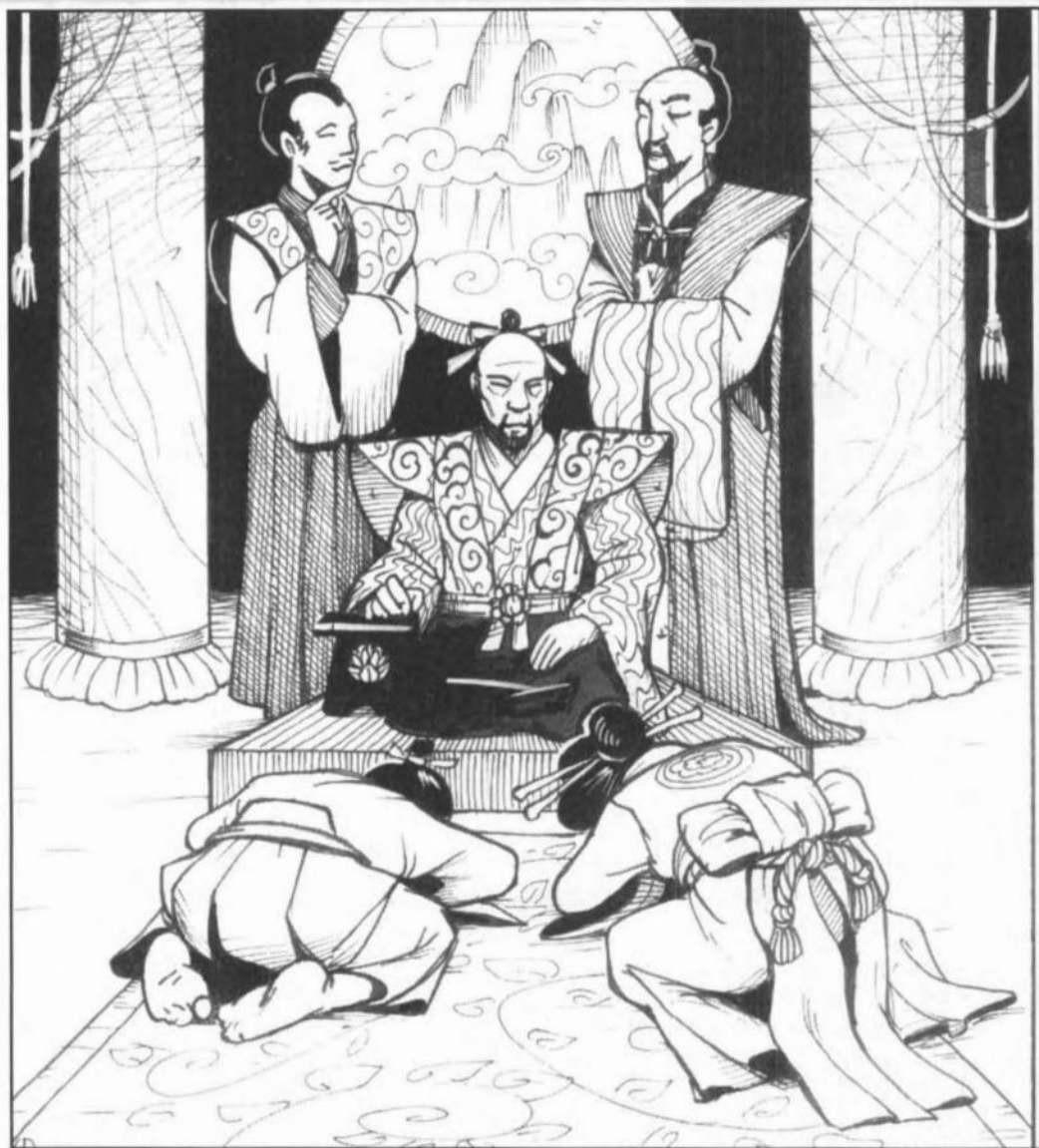
The above three operations are all directed against particular people. This kind involves changing paperwork and messages – and through them, people's perceptions. Perhaps one of the Kolat has placed contradictory orders in a position to do some harm (ordering a general away from an army post, inciting a perceived insult between formerly friendly families, etc.) Or maybe she plans to alter official records to reflect a different version of past events. The characters

WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE LUCHI I (CONTINUED)

This caused Luchi great confusion; how was it possible that a shugenja – by whatever name – could work magic without invoking the aid of the Seven Fortunes? He himself had difficulty working his spells in lands too distant from Rokugan, for the influence of the Seven Fortunes (so he learned) does not stretch everywhere.

Luchi studied with these workers of magic, trying to understand how they were able to exercise their powers. In exchange for their teaching, he traded knowledge he had gleaned from other mages (thereby setting an example for his good friend Ide on how to seal friendships through trade). Between his studies, Luchi rode his horse with a copy of the *Tao of Shinsei* in his hands. Surely, he thought, the wise little man has an explanation for this...





may have seen the original documents and know that the new ones are false, or might have heard that a forgery is afoot from an ordinary criminal associated with its production. They'll need to intercept the forgery before it does any damage, or work to undo the damage it's already caused. Learning who planted the document may be a priority as well.

5) DISCOVERY OF AN OPERATIVE

This doesn't involve any active operation by the Kolat, but rather the characters flushing out an active agent. They may develop suspicions over time about someone close to them, or might catch him communicating through the Oni's Eye or some other clandestine means. In any case, they're on to him now, and need to make sure he

doesn't cause any more mischief. But should they confront him directly with what they know, or wait and see what his plans are? Taking him on could cause problems; in addition to his Kolat allies, there will be many people who don't know his true allegiance and believe him a brave and honorable man. They won't like the characters throwing vague accusations at him. If the PCs keep quiet, things may get even more interesting. Is he aware of their scrutiny? If not, the PCs will have a serious edge over him, and can step in to stop him with time and place on their side. But they'll never really be sure if he's really ignorant, or just pretending – in which case he could lead them into a trap. And the longer they wait, the more likely it is that he'll notice them...

While conducting stories like these, it's important to never let the players know too much. The Kolat have the advantage over them in the information department, and probably always will. The PCs have to feel this as they go through these stories. They're always in the dark, grasping at shadows, striking back and things which might not be there. Kolat operatives are hard to spot, and can go for years without doing anything suspicious. Are they sure they have the right man? If they don't, then who is true culprit? Always leave the players wondering if they're doing any good, and fearful that the conspiracy may have them right where they want. If they get too cocky, have the Kolat bloody their noses a bit. Let them watch helplessly while an operation goes off without a hitch, or accuse an innocent man while the real agent gets away. Maybe one of the characters becomes the target of assassination – and the killer is his own brainwashed wife.

The PCs should never become a serious threat to the Kolat. If they were, the Masters would snuff them out immediately and there would be very little the characters could do to stop them. People the Kolat want dead tend to end up dead. Period. The characters have got to stay an insignificant annoyance at best: setting the conspiracy back a bit, perhaps, but never something the Masters need to truly worry about.

That being said, you should also make sure the players don't get too frustrated. Being outsmarted by the conspiracy all the time can be maddening and an unrewarding role-playing experience to boot. They shouldn't run roughshod over the Kolat by any means, but throw them a bone every now and then. Let them foil a moderate-to-big scheme, or send an active agent packing. If they feel that they're making some difference, then they'll be more likely to stay after them, which will sustain the campaign over the long run. Maintaining the balance between the Kolat's superiority and the characters' abilities to inflict harm on them keeps the players paranoid without trying their patience.

A good means of pulling off this balance is to give the Kolat a reason to keep the PCs around. If they need them for some future scheme, they'll be more willing to cut them some slack. They might even want them hunting the conspiracy for strange reasons known only to themselves. If they can "direct" the PCs towards less important plots, give them a few fall guys to kill every now and then, and make them believe they've got the Kolat

on the run, then they'll be less likely to stumble on a scheme that really matters.

Getting Help

Against such daunting odds, the PCs may feel the need to even the playing field a bit. They'll want allies, friends, people they can convince of the Kolat's threat. But finding someone to help them against the conspiracy won't be easy. After all, the Kolat don't exist, do they? Why should any daimyo or samurai worry about some phantom enemy when there are Scorpion plots or Shadowlands raids requiring immediate attention? Why should they suspect advisors or superiors they've known for years just because some crackpot PC says they're evil? Concrete evidence will be even harder to procure; the Kolat are very good at plugging their leaks and have left almost no sign of their existence in nearly a thousand years. It will be nearly impossible for the characters to change that.

Does this mean that that they will be forever alone in their fight? Not necessarily. There are one or two very powerful personalities who know about the conspiracy, and may be willing to help the characters put a dent in it. The best and most obvious source is Togashi, a huge thorn in the Kolat's side. Togashi understands that the Kolat serve a purpose, but has also shown a willingness to keep them in line on rare occasions. Knowing characters would serve as a good tool for furthering that – a means of stopping the Kolat without having to leave his mountain retreat.

If you wish to use Togashi to help your players, use him sparingly. He should serve primarily as a source of information: a Deep Throat to the characters' Scully and Mulder. He will appear to them like a thunderclap, dropping hints and clues in his typically cryptic manner. He should provide them with enough to get started – the name of a victim, the location of a secret message – but not any more than that. (The Dragon remains enigmatic, even to those he helps.) He won't be willing to provide the resources of his clan, and he certainly won't accompany them on any missions they undertake. He'll appear, drop whatever he feels they need to know, and leave. If they need more than a push from him, they're obviously not the people for the job.

On the other hand, information is everything when fighting the Kolat. Knowing when and

WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE LUCHI II

It was, in fact, by watching these outlandish magicians through the eyes of Shinsei that Luchi at last understood. He saw that these strange people had an instinctive understanding of the Shinsei truism that all is one. While many Rokugani spent their lives in all humility trying to become one with the elements, these brazen people assumed it was the case from the very start. Luchi found this at once very arrogant and very powerful.

Once he understood the secret of their power, he was able to teach this ability to his own students. To be sure, Luchi was not as arrogant as were those of the exotic countries he had visited. Instead of adopting their methods straightaway, he rewrote the spells he had learned, replacing the traditional shugenja supplication to the Seven Fortunes with a request to the Elements themselves, a petition born of the unity of all things. While effectively the same as the traditional method, the Luchi consider it to be more direct.

This new style of casting spells helped the Unicorn greatly in their travels, and made it possible for the Luchi family to acquire many new spells by trading with foreign spellweavers. Although many lack the delicacy of the other clans' magics, none can deny their efficacy in battle.

where they will strike can give the characters an immense advantage, and allow them to fight where they couldn't before. Togashi knows this, and uses his kami's insight to put the characters on the right track. Of course, the players will have to unravel his cryptic references themselves, but if they do, they'll have a sharp weapon to use against their elusive foes.

When Togashi appears to the PCs, he will always choose the time and the place for maximum impact. The character will usually be alone when he does, with no other prying eyes to catch sight of him. He will stick to the shadows and stay partially hidden, not allowing the characters to catch a good look at him. As described in *Way of the Dragon*, he's more of a presence in their minds than a physical form, and will leave them with powerful impressions rather than a tangible image. And under no circumstances will he reveal himself to the Kolat, or to those who might report to the Kolat. He knows the conspiracy completely, and won't give them any advantages by revealing who his servants (i.e. the PCs) are. As an ally, Togashi will be unpredictable and frustrating at times, but he won't give them away to their enemies. He's too

smart for that. See *Way of the*

Dragon, pg. 57 for more information on how to play Togashi.

Yasuki Taka may be another potential Deep Throat to help the characters. Like Togashi, he knows a lot about the Kolat, and can provide them with a great deal of information about their adversaries' plans. Unlike Togashi, he's not a god, which means the conspiracy can kill him if they discover his duplicity. He will accordingly move with much more caution before approaching the PCs with an offer.

Taka has amassed a network of followers whom he uses against the Kolat. He will most likely contact the characters through one of them, rather than show up himself. Overall, the experience will be much more clandestine than speaking with Togashi would, with much more caution and forethought. The follower chosen to contact them will insist on meeting under his terms, to ensure the Kolat don't discover him. It will often be in a remote location, or else somewhere so crowded that no one will take notice of him. Under no circumstances will he reveal who he's working for. He might not even know, or believe that someone besides Taka is pulling the strings. That way, if the characters are compromised, it never reaches back to him.

Contact with the little Yasuki will be sporadic, and it will take quite a while to engender his trust. At first, the players will be solicited for one-time only missions. Like Togashi, Taka will give them information only: enough to speed them on





their way, but not more than he thinks they need. He'll be more direct about it (at least, as direct as communicating through a proxy can be), and will provide hard information like times and dates rather than riddles to be interpreted. He can also provide things like money and papers if they need them: something more than Togashi would. Again, such objects will never be traceable to him.

Assuming the characters trust him enough to take the initial offer, he will then observe them to see how they perform. He'll watch for signs of infiltration among them – if someone is a sleeper, for example – and cut them loose if he suspects they have been compromised. If they succeed and stay alive, he'll continue contacting them for jobs he think they're capable of – again providing only what he feels they require. Continued success will equal continued contact, and more jobs against the Kolat.

As time goes on, he'll watch to see what they do with the tidbits he drops to them. Will they sit around and wait from him to tell them everything? Or will they take the initiative, using what they have learned to take further action against the conspiracy? If they prove intelligent enough to draw their own conclusions, and don't depend on him to lead them around by the nose, he may trust them with more important operations. He might even choose to reveal who he is, although that would take a long time, and depend on a) how successful the players are and b) how little the Kolat know about them. Taka, like Togashi, should be a source of support and information, not a Kolat cure-all. He can give them the tools they need to fight back, but can't tell them how to use them, or bail them out if they get into serious problems. He's too busy watching his own back to worry about the characters.

Information on Taka can be found in *Way of the Crab*, pg.73, and also elsewhere in this book.

THE GOLDEN RULE: DON'T PUSH TOO HARD

Playing a Kolat campaign means stressing how powerful and influential they are. Presenting them as all-knowing and all-seeing is important to the atmosphere. But unless you want the entire campaign dominated by cloak-and-dagger paranoia, it's important to keep the Kolat in the proper perspective. Rokugan is a rich and diverse setting: there's a lot going on that has nothing to do with secret conspiracies or ruling the world.

The Kolat shouldn't overwhelm all those other elements; they're intended as a fun and engaging adversary for the players, not the sole driving force for a campaign.

In *GURPS Illuminati* and other conspiracy-based games, the mysterious organization behind it all is often very powerful. They control entire nations, can move about at will, and strike with virtual impunity. It makes those hunting them feel like bugs in a petri dish. This isn't quite the case with the Kolat. While they have gained much ground and can exercise great power in certain areas, they can't do everything. Countless people remain free of their influence and history proceeds with or without their input. They're not all-powerful and they're not infallible. There's room in the campaign for countless other developments completely out of their hands.

This doesn't mean they have to appear weak or ineffectual, or that the players shouldn't think they're all-powerful. Perception is everything to the Kolat and they can unsettle the strongest minds if they want to. A strange piece of writing on the characters' wall at night might not mean anything to the conspiracy. But the PCs won't know that, and will constantly wonder what it means... By keeping the Kolat hidden, you remove the players' sense of perspective. That way, they can appear as all-encompassing as you need them to be without disrupting the flow of your other storylines.



Hunting a conspiracy is one thing. But what if you were a part of it, acting to fulfill their fiendish schemes? Or worse, what if you didn't know you were serving it: an unknowing puppet dancing to an unheard tune? Characters fighting against the Kolat at least have the benefit of clear moral boundaries – they're good, the conspiracy is evil,

TRUTH BEHIND THE LIES

"Divinity is a lie. Or rather, selective divinity is a lie. All humanity – from the Emperor to the lowest *eta* – is fated to die, and yet all return through the wheel of reincarnation. In that sense, all of us are mortal and immortal at once. All of us are divine. Why should the Emperor claim more than that?"

"One day, we will stop the wheel of reincarnation forever. And then we will see what true divinity is."

– Shinjo Yokatsu

WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE LUCHI III

Along his journeys, Iuchi also discovered a new form of magic from the lands of the heartless sorcerers.

Instead of summoning power from the elements, the sorcerers instead drew power from words inscribed onto talismans. Iuchi learned these inscriptions were of words (supposedly) spoken at the time of creation. By inscribing them (and combinations of them) onto precious stones and materials, the sorcerer was able to summon the power of the universe itself.

Iuchi stole this knowledge (he barely escaped with his life), and spent the rest of his life mastering it. His work would be passed on to his best student, Iuchi Tsubei, who perfected it. Now, the Unicorn art of talisman magic is the envy of every shugenja in Rokugan – at least those who do not tremble at the thought of invoking the power of the words of creation.

and ne'er the twain shall meet. But once you cross that line, once you serve – willingly or unwillingly – the conspiracy's purpose, things can never be the same. As unsettling as a Kolat-hunting campaign can be, playing on the other side is even worse...

If you wish to make your PCs Kolat tools, take great care in how you do it. The Kolat are the ultimate control freaks; those in their clutches must do exactly as they say or risk instant death. Playing a character who must constantly dance to someone else's tune isn't everyone's cup of tea. Most players rebel at having their characters' lives dictated solely by outside forces. Nevertheless, there are many intriguing possibilities to running a PC agent, which can bring the full impact of the Kolat home as nothing else can. But in order to pull it off, you'll need to follow certain careful rules.

Above all, it's important to ensure that the players have an enjoyable experience. Fear and uncertainty can be great fun, but they can also be stifling if strait-jacketed on. Like the Kolat-hunting campaign, the Kolat PCs campaign depends upon atmosphere to make it run properly. Conspiracy members suffer from fear and uncertainty even more than those opposed to them. The Kolat base themselves on remaining

hidden. Even their own operatives don't always understand what's going on, which can create a great deal of anxiety. How you address that anxiety as a GM will determine if playing a Kolat is fun... or just a drag.

Free will plays a pivotal role in Kolat-based games. The issue can be summed up in a single question: are the PCs in control of their actions, or are they being manipulated against their will? The unsettling implications of that can send a thrill through the most jaded player, and form the basis for a great Kolat PC campaign. It's important, however, to leave it hanging for as long as possible. Answering it causes no end of problems, and can destroy the atmosphere before it gets started. Players like being in control of their characters' actions. They like acting as they please and doing what they want without being forced by others. The Kolat, however, are very big on control, and can force characters to dance to their tunes like puppets. Nobody likes playing a puppet. It's constricting and limited, and can lead to maddening frustration. Similarly, knowing that your character is free of all influence removes the anxiety that comes with playing a Kolat, and defuses the campaign's atmosphere. Defining the characters' free will, unequivocally one way or the other, is poison.



WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE LUCHI III (CONTINUED)

Upon their return to Rokugan, the Luchi shugenja were alarmed by the proliferation of fortunes in their absence. They consider this deification of mortals at once arrogant and decadent, and the method of spell casting used by the Rokugani to be degenerate and muddled. It is not without a wry smile that they realize that they are now seen by the other clans as untrustworthy and arrogant in their own right, and full of barbarian tricks. The twists of fate are curious indeed.

If, on the other hand, the delicate question of who's really in charge can hang eternally over players' heads, then the experience will be much more entertaining. If you cast their actions into doubt, make them wonder at who may be pushing their buttons, then you have something cool. Rather than feeling pushed and pulled like lab rats, they'll be fearful and questioning. *Could I be serving a dark cause? Could my actions be at the behest of someone else? I may never know, and that scares me.* By keeping the players in the dark about who their characters are serving, they can continue to act freely without sacrificing the sense of mystery and horror that the Kolat represent. The Kolat are unknown. Their relation to the PCs and the extent to which they control them should remain equally unknown.

Getting Started

With all of this in mind, the GM should decide the exact relationship between the Kolat and the PCs who serve them before beginning the campaign. From a realistic standpoint, the characters should be unknowing dupes, serving the conspiracy without being aware of their actions. A daimyo or other superior could actually be an active agent, and use them as pawns to fulfill specific schemes. They would then blissfully go about their duties, believing with all their hearts that they serve their Clan, their Emperor, or some other legitimate cause.

The trouble with this is that the players won't be aware of such manipulation. You might send them on missions designed to fulfill a Kolat goal, but they won't be able to know what they have done – not without destroying their usefulness to the conspiracy. You may want to drop hints as to who they really serve; but if they ever uncover the whole truth, they're apt to be resentful, which would likely turn the campaign into a Kolat hunt as discussed above. Players can't enjoy being part of the conspiracy if they don't know about it, and knowing about it terminates their status as dupes.

The best way to salvage this is to force the party to continually question their own free-will – even after they've learned who they serve. They may have discovered their superior's allegiance and turned the tables on him, but how do they know that isn't exactly what the Kolat want? How can they be sure that their future actions weren't planned and choreographed by the very

organization they thought they had escaped? With those questions in place, you can then run them through any number of mundane adventures, each one dripping with Kolat menace. Every once in a while, drop playful hints that the conspiracy is still around – and that the characters may be as subservient to it as they ever were. With the right balance, it will lend the proper sense of foreboding to the campaign, which is all you really need where the Kolat are concerned.

Another solution (and perhaps a better one) is to make one or more of the PCs a knowing agent, or at least more deeply entrenched in the conspiracy than an unknowing dupe would be. That way, he or she can follow orders and guide the other characters if necessary, while always being aware of who and what they serve. That way, there's no need to hide their true masters from them, and they can go about being as sneaky as they want with a clear conscience. There are two ways to handle this approach, although one is infinitely preferable to the other.

An Entire Party of Agents

The Kolat rarely work together in groups. It squanders resources and tends to leave operatives more vulnerable to discovery. Nevertheless, a group of players gung-ho to serve the conspiracy may demand that they all be Kolat, which would make a big exception to the conspiracy's rule. The players must understand that their characters are fanatically devoted to the cause and must serve it with devotion (See the *How Did I Get Here* section, below, for background ideas). If this is the case, then assign a Kolat superior to the group – one who gives them orders and feeds them what they need to know about the conspiracy. He or she will probably be a member of the Ten Masters, and will be the only Kolat the PCs come into contact with. As far as they know, he or she is the whole conspiracy.

For most of the time, the party will go about its business as normal: serving their daimyo, performing standard samurai duties, etc. But every now and again, their superior will contact them and order them to undertake an operation. See the "Stopping a Kolat Operation" section above for ideas on the sort of missions they could

WAY OF THE UNICORN: THE LUCHI IV

Luchi shugenja are more open-minded and willing to experiment than the shugenja of most other Clans. They have learned from experience that there is no "one true way" to do magic, but many different variations and methods which can be used, altered, combined and adapted to create magical effects.

They tend to be very ambitious and drive themselves relentlessly in everything they do. They constantly strive for improvement in all aspects of life, and believe that much can be gained by trying new things and learning from experience.

Tradition is not a rigid and absolute rule to be strictly adhered to, but rather a foundation, a base of knowledge and wisdom to be absorbed and added to. The teachings of the Luchi school are constantly changing and evolving, each new student contributing a vital new input and perspective.

be assigned. There will be a specific timetable involved – a date by which they must succeed, or a window after which they cannot act – but other than that, they will be allowed to plan and execute it as they see fit. As long as it comes off, the Kolat don't care. Refusing the assignment is not an option, of course, nor is deferring it until a later date. The planning and execution of such an operation should form the basis of an entire adventure. Several sprinkled liberally throughout the campaign will give the players a full feel of what it's like to be a Kolat, and perhaps allow them to shed some light on the course of their Great Plan.

Parties of Kolat don't tend to work very well. While they give everyone a chance to play with the conspiracy's toys, they don't fit well with the menace and mystery that the Kolat embody. It goes against form to have so many knowing agents so close to each other, and in the end, it isn't very different from any normal campaign. You're simply substituting the characters' loyalty to the Emperor with loyalty to the Kolat, making the conspiracy just one more faction among many. You could play a group of Scorpion ninja or Crane infiltrators and achieve much the same thing.

A Single Agent in an Unknowing Party

This is by far the most effective way of bringing a Kolat PC campaign to life without losing the underlying themes. Here, the characters are all normal, unsuspecting samurai – all save one. He acts every part the loyal companion, and serves with the zeal and dedication everyone expects. But he also has an agenda assigned to him by the conspiracy, and may use his unwitting companions to help achieve it. The other players may never learn of his true nature, and never know who their friend's PC truly is. And if they do, they'll have some tough choices to make...

As a general rule, only one PC in any given party should be a Kolat. More than one threatens to divide the party into camps, which leads to recriminations and hard feelings. One agent is easier to keep in line, and provides a sense of individuality that will keep others from feeling left out. It's also the way Kolat do things. They

represent only a tiny percentage of the population, and the chances of two active agents being so close to each other is rare in the extreme. One Kolat per party is usually more than enough.

That being said, be very careful in deciding who should play an agent and why. This is a character who may deceive and manipulate his fellows, who will pull the wool over their eyes at every opportunity. Not even the Scorpion are so underhanded (nobody trusts the Scorpion, after all, while a Kolat may be the most trustworthy person in the party). A Kolat player needs the maturity to handle that thoughtfully, without destroying party harmony. Don't let someone do it if they're going to be a jerk about it. Being a Kolat is not about being a jerk to your gaming friends, or letting one player hog the limelight of a campaign. It's about one character, a lot like all the others, who happens to have a secret – the biggest secret anyone's ever known. And if the player can't handle that in a fair-minded fashion, don't let him try.

In order to ensure that the prospective Kolat player has the right attitude, talk to him or her about it beforehand. Ask why they want to play a Kolat and what they'll do as one in the campaign. If they're on some kind of power trip, or just think the Kolat are cool, dismiss the idea. On the other hand, if they're interested in something more serious-minded, like conflicting loyalties or the unsettling nature of being a pawn in a larger game, it will probably work out a lot better. Establish the character's motives beforehand (the charts below can help), and ask how his status as a Kolat will affect his relations with the other PCs. It's probably a good idea to give the character some remorse about manipulating his fellow samurai, or genuine loyalty towards the other PCs. That may lessen the impact if the others discover who he *really* is. Use your best judgment and don't be afraid to pull the plug if you think it won't work. (If the players wonder why you were asking them about Kolat, just tell them that you were thinking about including some adventures around them, but decided to take the campaign in a different direction.)

Once you've determined that the player is up for it, and the particulars of his Kolat character have been established, the fun can begin. As with the group campaign above, the PC agent will have a superior – probably one of the Masters – who gives him assignments and directs him towards certain goals. This superior will never

BLINDNESS

"What a man believes is rarely what actually is. Humanity lives with blinders on; it is the only way they can cope with their existence. The Kolat must eventually remove those blinders, and show man how beautiful the world can truly be. Until then, we will use his blindness as we would any other tool: to better prepare him for the future."

— Ikoma Soko

reveal himself to the other characters, and will instruct his underling to do the same. If seen together, they should have a plausible reason for being together, one that will never raise the other characters' suspicions. The Master is the only contact the agent has with the remainder of the conspiracy, and he or she will not know about any others.

The agent will also have access to some of the Kolat's recourses: increased cash, thugs on demand, criminal contacts and support from unknowing dupes if need be. He or she had better have a good explanation if the others ever discover these resources: it won't do to have a pious shugenja with hordes of illicit money at her disposal. (The player should think about these sorts of issues when first creating the character; any Kolat worth his salt would have an explanation at his fingertips.)

As with the group campaign, the PC agent will be left alone most of the time to pursue his or her

"normal" life. But every now and then, the Master will appear and deliver an assignment to carry out at the Kolat's behest. It will often involve the rest of the party: getting them to perform some act or assist in some scheme that they excel at. The PC can couch the mission in any terms he or she likes, as long as it convinces the other characters to follow along. It could be "at the behest of the Emperor", or as a favor to a "friend" of the agents. The Kolat player will have a great opportunity for role-playing here: how to couch the mission in such a way that his or her fellows will go along with it and not suspect him or her of duplicity.

If the Kolat want the other characters involved, then the mission probably won't conflict with their existing loyalties — they won't be asked to kill their own daimyo, for instance, or betray a trusted friend. The conspiracy would, however, be willing to deceive the PCs if it gets them to comply. They might not normally want to kill

their own daimyo, but what if they believe he's practicing maho? If the Kolat requires such deception, it will be up to their PC operative to pull it off. They will help construct evidence if need be, and even plant it if the PC likes, but selling the fabrication will be up to him or her.

In either case, the result is the same. The characters will be involved in the conspiracy's dirty work, and may be duped into performing some pretty horrible acts. As long as they think they're in the right (and the agent in their midst can convince them it's all okay), they'll keep at it. The party will effectively become Kolat dupes, and can be used for any number of missions the conspiracy feels they are qualified for. At least until they learn that something's wrong...



CORRUPTION

"Corruption is a useful tool for control, but little else. A corrupt man is ignoble, which hurts our cause. On the other hand, he is malleable, which helps our cause. We must learn to make malleable men just so that he may transcend corruption. The day we need no longer depend on human weaknesses, that is the day our destiny will be realized."

— Chinoko

Discovery

At some point or another, it's entirely possible that the party will discover their companion's little secret. How they react is up to them, but as the GM, you should be prepared for anything. If the agent has treated his fellows respectfully, and hasn't deceived them inordinately, they might feel inclined to forgive him. On the other hand, no honorable samurai would let such a threat to the Emperor live – even if he were a friend. Anything is possible, and reactions will vary wildly from campaign to campaign.

Keep in mind also that the Kolat don't wish their presence to be known. If the rest of the party learns of them – even if they're inclined to forgive their Kolat friend – they will immediately become a security risk to the Kolat. The party may find itself on the run from sinister forces, while the agent in their midst tries to sort out where his loyalties lie. With luck, he may be able to convince his superior to let them live. Or he may decide that they indeed represent a risk, and help to hunt them down. Either way, he's going to have to be careful, lest one side or the other string him up as a traitor.

If you wish, you can help instigate this conflict by providing the Kolat character with an immediate moral quandary. The master will appear to him or her and deliver an order requiring the rest of the party's death (a suicide mission of some sort, where the players are lead unwittingly into extreme peril). The PC agent will have to decide if his dedication is worth sacrificing his friends... and then live with the consequences.

All of these scenarios contain dangers to party unity. If not handled properly, they can easily result in hurt feelings and recriminations among the players. As the GM, you must be prepared to present the awful truth about the PC agent as delicately as possible. Keep in mind that the purpose of the exercise is to have fun: the other players should be intrigued and fascinated by their friend's revelation, not angry at being used. The deception needs to stay in the the game universe and not spill out beyond it. Keep that in mind as you handle the PC's "coming out," and make sure everybody plays nice.

Conspiracy Heritage Tables

...OR HOW DID I GET HERE?

If you have a party with a Kolat in its midst, there are some serious questions to be answered. Where did he come from? What drives him to do what he does, and how was he shaped to believe in such a strange philosophy? How did the Kolat sink their claws into him, and what sort of tool do they consider him to be? Before a Kolat campaign can begin, you'll need to answer these questions and provide a firm background for your operative(s). These charts can help you.

Some players will want to play a Kolat, and petition you to create one. If that's the case, you're welcome to work out details with your would-be conspirator. The charts can give you ideas on how to start. Feel free to select an appropriate background, determine it randomly, or ignore the whole thing in favor of your own ideas.

But you may wish to add a certain amount of mystery to the process of Kolat creation. You might not even want to give players any choice in the matter. After all, members of the conspiracy usually have no say in whether they join or not. By the time they were old enough to make a rational decision, their ideology was ingrained and they were servitors of the cause. GMs who want to deny their player(s) any freedom of choice should roll randomly on the charts to determine exactly what the Kolat did to the characters. Note that in some cases, the character may not be aware of the conspiracy's influence. The GM should make all rolls in private, and then decide how much the player (and his character) knows.

In any case, the charts on the next few pages should be used at your discretion. Again, make sure the player in question wants and/or can happily handle being a Kolat before rolling on them.

HERITAGE TABLE 1

IS YOUR CHARACTER A KOLAT?

(Roll percentile dice or choose)

Roll	Result
1-99	No
100+	Yes

Unicorn and Yasuki characters add 2 to their rolls.

Note: The Kolat are very rare, numbering far less than one in one hundred Rokugani. As "important" samurai, player characters have a better chance of being noticed than most. Others in the Empire (i.e. NPCs) are much less likely to be in on the conspiracy.

All Kolat characters start with the Disadvantage Dark Secret. They gain no Bonus Points for this Disadvantage. If discovered, the character will not have to commit seppuku (few outsiders will know what to make of it), but the Kolat will have them killed, so the end result is the same.

Additionally, Kolat characters who are aware of their status should all take Investigation and Stealth scores of at least 1, and Sincerity scores of at least 2. A high Willpower Trait and the Advantage Higher Purpose are also recommended.

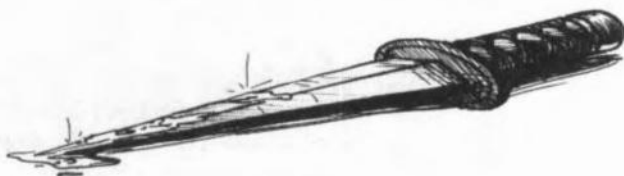
HERITAGE TABLE 2 - CURRENT STATUS

Roll	Result
1-3	Experienced Agent: You've been around long enough to have run a few operations for the Ten Masters. They've shown enough confidence in you to allocate some resources, and to turn to you when they need something done. Start with 10 additional Koku and two Minor Allies (duplicates) of your choice. They are to be used only to further the Kolat cause; failure to abide by this condition will be punished. If outsiders uncover these resources, it should be considered discovery of the character's Dark Secret, with all attendant punishments. Good Kolat keep their affairs hidden.
4-8	Untested Agent: You were indoctrinated into the Kolat, and have dedicated yourself to their cause, but they haven't seen fit to call on you yet. You don't have access to any of the conspiracy's funds, and you don't even know who your superior is (although he'll make sure you know when he calls on you). Sooner or later, you'll get a mission. For now, you're concentrating mainly on keeping up appearances and allaying suspicion.

(Continued)

HERITAGE TABLE 2 - CONTINUED

Roll	Result
9	Sleeper: Congratulations. You're a walking time bomb. Somewhere along the line, the Kolat got to you and turned your brain inside out. Now, they're just waiting for the right time to turn you loose. You believe yourself to be completely normal and go about your life blissfully unaware of the triggers in your brain. But when they snap their fingers, you'll do <i>exactly</i> as they say. Players with sleeper characters shouldn't know their status (if the characters are unaware, their players should be as well). The GM should determine what exactly the Kolat have conditioned the PC for (roll on Table 6 to get an idea), and a specific trigger to "activate" him or her (a whistle, a repeated haiku phrase, etc). When the time is right, an active agent will say the magic words and step back. Sleeper Kolat don't roll on Tables 3 or 4, but the GM will have to invent the time and circumstances surrounding their abduction. The GM should also secretly assign new skills and advantages to the character, designed to assist in the mission (a sleeper to be used for an assassination will have a high weapons skill, for example). These skills can only be used when the sleeper is active.
10	0 Dupe: You weren't given the whole story when they trained you. You think you're a part of the plan, but in truth, you're just bait to be used and thrown away. Your superior cannot be one of the Ten Masters (GMs: create an agent to serve in their place), but you won't know that. Your missions will be used to sow confusion and draw attention away from the important plots. They will be dangerous, foolhardy, and serve no apparent purpose. But hey, you're a Kolat. Anything to serve the cause, right? Players with dupe characters should not be told that they are dupes. As far as they're concerned, they're completely in on the plan.



HERITAGE TABLE 3 - HOW WAS YOUR CHARACTER INTRODUCED TO THE KOLAT?

Roll	Result
1-2	Family Member: Some immediate relation to you (a parent, an uncle or aunt, an older sibling) has sold you out to the conspiracy. They told you the way the world really was, and made you promise to keep what you had learned a secret. The Kolat seem like a part of your family identity, and you will do whatever it take to maintain your "family's" honor.
3-7	Sensei: A formal instructor, or some other authority figure, took you aside for some "special" training as you grew up. The philosophies he taught took hold of your imagination, as did the training techniques he emphasized. Other adults told you to listen to your teacher, so questioning him was never an option. And besides, the things he taught were much more interesting than what the other children learned.
8-9	Daimyo: You were brought to a nearby castle at the behest of the local daimyo, who wished to oversee your development personally. You felt privileged to be chosen for such an honor, and never questioned why the daimyo wanted you to learn some slightly different ideas. During your <i>gempukku</i> , you pledged your life to his cause - and you meant it in more ways than one...
10	Other: Someone outside of the traditional authorities bonded with you and showed you the light. It may have been your mother's <i>yojimbo</i> , or an advisor in the castle where you lived. But they took a shine to you and you returned the favor. You became the best of friends; better than friends, for this one was a grown-up and had more authority than you. Then one day, your friend took you aside and told you the biggest secret in the world... Kolat characters approached in this manner cannot take or roll the "Sequestered Study" result on Table 4.

HERITAGE TABLE 4 - WHAT DID YOUR TRAINING CONSIST OF?

Roll	Result
1-2	Secret Instruction: You learned the Kolat way of life right under society's noses. Your teacher approached you in secret, during times when you wouldn't be seen, and told you what you needed to know. You didn't get much sleep as a child; your nights were spent studying the conspiracy's ways. You got very good at lying about those times when you were missed, which helped prepare you for the lies you'd have to spin as an agent. All of it made you quite used to living a double life; by now, it doesn't bother you any more.
3-6	Sequestered Study: The Kolat arranged for you to study somewhere special, where very few students had the privilege to attend. But it wasn't the distant school or remote monastery like those around you were told. You were blindfolded and taken to the Hidden Temple, where you could be made a Kolat without the distractions of outside life. For years, you studied and trained with other agents, openly learning what others had to glean by stealth and guile. They gave you the skills expected of someone in your standing (bugei for samurai, spell-casting for shugenja), but also things that no outside school would ever teach. You returned to your old life following your <i>gempukku</i> ceremony, fully indoctrinated and ready to serve. The lack of pretense at the Hidden Temple allowed the conspiracy to fully indoctrinate you. You're particularly devoted to the cause, but you spent a long time away from the outside world. It's left you a little awkward in social situations. Most people blame it on the "monastery" you supposedly studied at. For the first year after returning from the Temple, all rolls involving social interaction are made at -1 on the die.

(Continued on next page)



HERITAGE TABLE 4 - CONTINUED

- 7-8 **Subliminal Encoding:** You received the basics of Kolat life from your teacher or mentor, but the majority of your training took place without conscious thought. Every night as you lay asleep, thoughts and ideas were placed in your head by dreams, hypnosis and other methods. You were never quite aware of how you came to know these things, only that they were right somehow. You only have the vaguest memories of being trained; as far as you're concerned, the skills were there all along.
- 9 **Torture:** You didn't take to the Kolat philosophy as well as they wanted... so stronger methods were used. You were abducted multiple times and returned before others were aware you were gone - usually during the night, or while on "training" trips far away. You were then subjected to horrors of the mind and body that left you utterly open to the conspiracy's whims. In the beginning, you wanted to tell someone what was happening to you, but you couldn't. The Kolat wouldn't let you. As things went further, your conscious mind learn to reject the memories of your torments and you forgot about them. But your twisted dreams spoke of the agonies you suffered, and the tortures continued even as you denied them. By the time they were done with you, you would have done anything they said... anything at all. The torturers who conditioned you did their jobs well. As far as your conscious mind is concerned, you love the Kolat and will do anything to further their cause. But beneath the surface, a few scars still exist... and they're tearing your unconscious mind to shreds. You suffer from bad dreams every night, and wake up bathed in sweat each morning. You cannot ever purchase the Meditate Skill.
- 10 **Mixture:** Your training included a combination of the above techniques. Roll twice on this table, taking both rolls. Reroll all 10s.



HERITAGE TABLE 5 - NUMBER OF OPERATIONS PARTICIPATED IN

(Ignore if Untested Agent)

Roll	Result
1-3	1
4-6	2
7-8	3
9	4
10	5 or more

HERITAGE TABLE 6

TYPE OF OPERATIONS PARTICIPATED IN

These are very basic descriptions. "Stopping a Kolat Operation", above, contains more details on most of types of Kolat missions, and you should fill in specific details about the character's particular missions on your own: who was involved, how well the PC performed, etc.

Roll	Result
1	Kidnapping: The character needed to engineer someone's abduction, either to turn them into a sleeper, or just to get them out of the Kolat's hair for a while.
2-3	Assassination: Someone in the wrong place got in the way of the Kolat's plans. The character helped dispose of him or her permanently. Usually, such assassinations are made to look like accidents; otherwise, sleepers are usually employed. In any case, the operation gave the character a good chance to see how ruthless the conspiracy can be.
4	Replacement: Someone was removed and replaced with an almost identical duplicate for a short but vital period of time. The character may have been involved in the insertion or extraction as well as securing the replaced target while he was in Kolat hands.
5-6	Forgery: The Kolat will often replace and/or alter important documents, usually with devastating results. The character had to make the switchover cleanly, and possibly ensure that the new documents has the desired effect.
7-10	Advice and Manipulation: A simple and usually long-term operation, as the character attempted to alter a particular subject's opinion or political stance. It involved quietly giving advice, manipulating events, or even crude methods like blackmail. In most respects, this is like typical Rokugani politics. The only difference was whose ends the character really served.



Chapter Five



Who's Who

KAGE'S WIFE

Kage's description in *Way of the Lion* (Pg 62-63) states that he was once married to the Emperor's cousin, Hantei Arumihime. It also states that she died from "the plague" a few years after the birth of the Emperor's son. Canny readers who know something about Kage may have suspected there was more to the story than met the eye, and so there is. Arumihime wasn't killed by the plague, as most Rokugani believe. Kage poisoned her.

The Kolat had desired to get close to the Hantei for a long time, to better orchestrate their downfall. Akodo Kage's high social status made him an ideal candidate to enter the Imperial family. Through agents and advisors, they suggested a match between Kage and the young Arumihime. Hantei the 38th was pleased with the idea – he thought very highly of Kage – and gave his blessing to the union. The pair were wed on a glorious spring day, and the marriage became the social event of the season.

(continued on page 87)

Chapter Five: Who's Who

The Ten Masters

The Ten Masters dominate all aspects of the Kolat's existence. Those below them are just pawns, working to serve their ends. For all intents and purposes, they are the heart of the conspiracy.

All Masters have the disadvantage Dark Secret (the nature of which should be obvious). Discovery of this secret means certain death, both from loyal Rokugani and fellow Kolat. Of course, no Kolat master has been discovered in almost a thousand years, so they don't waste time worrying about it. On the flip side, they all have the advantage Major Allies, representing the conspiracy's support for their actions, and Higher Purpose, representing their dedication to the Great Plan.

KAGE – THE TEACHER

EARTH: 6

WATER: 4

Perception 6

FIRE: 4

Intelligence 6

AIR: 5

Awareness 7

VOID: 3

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 5

Skills: Kenjutsu 5, Athletics 3, Hand-to-Hand 5, Defense 4, Battle 4, Investigation 2, Shintao 3, Acting 4, Commerce 4, Courier 2, Etiquette 2, Law 2, Intimidation 2, Manipulation 5, Oratory 2, Sincerity 5, Lore (Bushido) 2, Lore (Burning Sands) 1, History (Kolat) 5, Stealth 2

Honor: 4.2 (0.5)

Glory: 6.2

Advantages: Higher Purpose, Leadership, Major Allies, Blackmail (countless), Crafty

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Dependents (Toturi, Hiroru), Proud, Sworn Enemies (the Shadow, the kami, others)

First among equals, Akodo Kage holds the unspoken leadership of the Kolat movement. While the Ten Masters traditionally act in unison, with no single member following any other, Kage always seems to lead the way. Others defer to him almost without thought, for his wisdom illuminates everything it touches. He embodies the conspiracy's desires for the ascension of man. No one is more dedicated to the great plan; no one is more cunning at plotting its course. And now, he finds himself in a position to unseat the Hantei dynasty after almost ten centuries of uncontested rule. The Kolat is eternal, but in the current era, it has found a personal champion in the form of the Lion's revered sensei.

The Akodo family had groomed Kage from an early age as a bushi and a leader of men. He had a sharp mind and an immense understanding of martial skills, as well as a propensity for battle that the Lion thrive upon. He had become sempai (senior student) to the most prestigious Master in the Akodo school, and his military career (both with the Lion armies and the forces of the Emperor) shone above all others. As he grew older, he became a skilled diplomat, a relative by marriage to Hantei the 38th... and yes, a sensei to the next generation of Lions.

The Kolat guided all of his actions from the beginning. His secret teachers worked feverishly to indoctrinate him into the conspiracy, for the Lion were notoriously difficult to infiltrate. He represented a great inroad if they conditioned him properly. They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. In the Kolat, Kage saw an opportunity to make history – to have a more profound effect on Rokugan than any of the countless Lion who came before him. Why be remembered as one more statue in the Hall of Ancestors when you can have a hand in the shaping of the universe itself? Kage embraced the cause as a man possessed; his ascension to the Ten Masters was only a matter of time.

Today, Kage has his fingers in just about everything. Through teaching at the Akodo school, he earmarks future Kolat for conditioning techniques. In his capacity as Lion ambassador, he has blackmailed and manipulated countless courtiers into performing his will. He even

managed to slip into the Hantei lineage and was discussed as a potential successor at one point. As a Kolat master, he oversees it all with masterful foresight, orchestrating moves and countermoves like an artist born to the medium. In his thirty-odd years as a Kolat Master, he has advanced the cause more than any in recent history.

Now in his fiftieth year, Kage appears every inch the Lion sensei. He wears his graying hair loose around his shoulders, while a thick mustache frames his mouth. He tends to wear simple robes of gold and brown, and carries a wooden boken at all times. (He saves his daisho for formal occasions). His body is large and well-muscled, the result of constant exercise, and his warrior's skills remain at their peak. The other Lion look upon his with pride, never suspecting the serpent that lurks in his breast.

He currently focuses his attentions on two former students of his: the bookish Akodo Toturi (currently Lion Champion) and the renegade Matsu Hiroru. Toturi, he believes, holds the key to unseating the Emperor. The time is rapidly approaching to put Togashi's ancient prophecy to the test, and see if the last Akodo will spell the doom of the last Hantei. Kage believes that Toturi will be the last of his family line, following the deaths of his father and brother; while a few lesser vassals exist, they will stand or fall with their daimyo. That makes Toturi the fulcrum of Togashi's prophecy; the key to finally undoing the Hantei.

The boy honors his former sensei and will do almost anything Kage asks of him. By placing him in the right place at the right time, Kage plans to engineer his dishonor – then watch what happens. Somehow, he suspects that Toturi may be more than a simple dupe, and that his former student will surprise them all in ways no one can predict. For now, he simply waits for the right moment to set the plan in motion.

While Toturi is a useful tool, Hiroru has a much more complicated relationship with his old master. Kage used his influence to lure the boy away from the Matsu school, and

spent seven years training him to be an unknowing Kolat agent. Hiroru was a quick learner and took to the Kage's philosophy well, for he rejected the traditional Rokugani notions of honor. Kage took care never to reveal who he really worked for, instead couching the Kolat philosophy in terms a Lion could accept. When Hiroru came of age, he went to work for Kage, and had soon completed a series of successful operations. As a samurai, as a spy and as a saboteur, he served the conspiracy well – even though he had no idea who he served.

Then trouble arose. Kage ordered his protégé to begin a romantic liaison with Isawa Nosuriko, a gentle shugenja betrothed to the Crane Doji Kuwanan. Angry at the Crane for a recent victory against the Lion, he readily agreed to the mission and soon had the girl in his arms. Then, just before her wedding to the Crane, she committed





suicide by hanging herself in her room. Hiroru was shocked, and confronted Kage about it immediately thereafter. In the altercation which followed, Hiroru injured his old master and fled into the night. He has not been seen since.

This would appear to be a blunder on Kage's part, for losing such a valued commodity as Hiroru must have set the conspiracy back quite a bit. Those who know, however, believe differently. Now on his own, Hiroru has begun a crusade against the mysterious ninja – those who swear allegiance to the Living Shadow. He has had some success against this dangerous foe, sending numerous ninja to their graves where others have been slaughtered or worse. Did Hiroru begin this crusade on his own? Or was he sent on it – perhaps unknowingly – by his revered sensei? Only Kage knows for sure, but with the Kolat, there are rarely any coincidences. Hiroru may believe himself free, but his master's hand can

clearly be seen guiding his movements.

For more information on Toturi, Hiroru and their erstwhile sensei, see *The Way of the Lion*, pg 62 and 73, and *The Way of Shadow*.

YOKATSU — THE DAIMYO

EARTH: 4

Stamina 5

WATER: 4

Strength 5

FIRE: 3

Agility 5

AIR: 3

Reflexes 5

VOID: 4

School/Rank: Shinjo Bushi 5

Skills: Etiquette 4 (1 for appearances), Singing 2, History (Burning Sands) 4, History (Rokugan) 2, History (Kolats) 4, Horsemanship 5, Lore (Horses) 4, Shintao 2, Battle 4, Kenjutsu 5, Animal Husbandry (Horses) 3, Horse Archery 5, Sincerity 5, Stealth 3

Honor: 4.5

Glory: 8.1

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose, Quick Healer, Way of the Land (Unicorn), Major Allies

Disadvantages: Dark Secret

Shinjo Yokatsu leads the Unicorn Clan as their Champion. He has also sat on the Ten Masters since he came of age, and placed his entire people at the conspiracy's feet. Yokatsu grew up surrounded by Kolat; as far back as he can remember, they have dominated his clan, although few seemed aware of it. From his standpoint, there were never any divided loyalties: the Kolat were the Unicorn, and the two existed for one purpose. By guiding the conspiracy to greatness, so too does he guide his people along the same path.

As he was growing up, he used his love of travel and the open plains to disguise his visits to



the Secret Temple. Nobody questioned his desire to "roam about"; it's practically a Unicorn birthright. Whenever he returned, he told brilliant stories of where he had been and what he had seen – clever lies, spun from whole cloth. In truth, he would often make a beeline to the Secret Temple, so as to spend as much time there as possible. His famous two-year journey before his *gempukku* was nothing more than an extended visit with the other Masters, intended to solidify their plans for the Unicorn. He told his grandfather he had visited the Burning Sands in that time; the old man never thought to doubt him.

He controls his clan with deceptive ease, and has never needed the delicate subtlety that other Kolat cling to. The most prominent daimyo beneath him are all in the Kolat's camp, and they command absolute obedience from their followers. He has become quite used to explaining Kolat goals as Unicorn goals, hiding long-term plots behind "the best interests of our clan". Thanks to the agents under him, none of his clanmates suspect who they truly serve. The illusion is seamless.

Yokatsu frowns on the creation of sleepers within his clan, but realizes their necessity. As wanderers, Unicorn can easily be abducted and conditioned without anyone suspecting their absence. The endless plains create a fine memory to hide their conditioning under, and their ceaseless wandering ensures that they can be anywhere without raising suspicion. Even so, Yokatsu does his best to protect them, and ensure that when the time comes, they perish with honor.

He has learned to play on others' perceptions of him as the "barbaric Unicorn", and often deliberately makes social gaffes in court. To the Empire, he epitomizes the his clan's naivete: a proud child, highly skilled but useless in the business of the Emperor's Court. The Crane and Scorpion smirk at his awkward apologies and the crude way he hides his embarrassment. He has become famous for his rough honesty, as well as his "incompetent" lies, which a child could see through. Most people assume he is incapable of lying, that he lacks the skill necessary to deceive others. In truth it's all a clever smoke-screen, designed to hide his true nature. Yokatsu can lie better than most Scorpion. But by playing the clumsy barbarian, he makes everyone around him feel smug and superior; the better to keep them complacent.

His "awkward honesty" has also endeared him to his clanmates, which helps him control them more. Most Unicorn feel a deep affinity with him, even beyond the devotion of a samurai to his lord. They see honor in his façade – true honor, not the false mask that others hide behind – and would gladly die for him, no matter what the reason. When the time is right, he cheerfully allows them to do so, taking care that their sacrifice serves the "clan's greater interests", of course.

Yokatsu is a short, stocky man with bandy legs and a rolling gait. He presents the clever impression of a cautious leader: thinking before he speaks, weighing others with his eyes, etc. His obvious discomfort in social situations adds to the image, as do his easy curses and wild open laugh. Beneath it all lies a cold calculation, a detached intelligence whose only concern is the fulfillment of the great plan. His strained eyes reveal it to anyone who looks; but those who do never realize what they see. After all, what could an open-faced man like Yokatsu possibly have to hide?

For more information on Shinjo Yokatsu, see *The Way of the Unicorn* pg. 62.

KAOUTA — THE GEISHA

EARTH: 2

Willpower 5

WATER: 2

Perception 5

FIRE: 2

Intelligence 5

AIR: 3

Awareness 6

VOID: 3

School/Rank: none (geisha)

Skills: Acting 4, Dance 3, Etiquette 5, History (Kolats) 4, Music 5, Poetry 4, Shintao 3, Sincerity 5, Tea Ceremony 5, Knife 5, War Fan 2, Herbalism 3, Locksmith 4, Seduction 5, Stealth 4

Honor: 0.5

Glory: 0

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose, Read Lips, Voice, Major Allies (fellow Kolats, others)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Social Disadvantage (outside the Hidden Temple only)

Kaouta was orphaned at an early age. Her mother, a respected geisha in one of the Crane's bigger port cities, died suddenly when she was a little girl. Left in the geisha house to fend for herself, she earned her keep by sweeping up and performing other menial chores. The women who

KAGE'S WIFE (CONTINUED)

The Kolat were happy with the arrangement. It put Kage in a position close to the Emperor's heart, and made him privy to a great deal of sensitive information. Hantei the 38th was old and his line was small. He had no heir to give his throne to, which made cousins like Arumihime much more important. Considering how favorably the Emperor looked upon Kage, many assumed that the Lion would assume the throne if a child were not borne soon. Kage and his new wife were welcome additions to the court at Otosan Uchi, and everyone commented on how happy the couple seemed together.

In truth, Kage couldn't have cared less about his wife. Arumihime was a bright woman, but somewhat naive, and never saw through her husband's facade. She believed he was everything he appeared to be and came to love him very deeply for it. Up until the time of her death, she thought he felt the same way. To Kage, however she was just a means to an end – a way of putting a Kolat on the throne. He smiled warmly at her, said the right things at the right time and made her believe everything he said. All the while, he waited from the Emperor to die.

(continued on page 91)

worked there took a liking to her, and grew to love her as a little sister. One in particular protected her as no other would. This geisha became a surrogate mother, someone she could depend upon above all others. And at night, when the samurai clients slept and the house was silent, she would take young Kaouta aside and tell her the most wondrous things. Stories of corrupt gods, subjugated humanity and a great plan to set things right...

Through her geisha protector, Kaouta became indoctrinated into the Kolat. By the time she was old enough to become a geisha herself, she was one of the most active contacts in the entire organization: a seemingly unending source of leads and information. She could ply the skills of her chosen profession like no one else, and would listen intently as samurai unraveled all their worries into her ear. Other geisha found her sympathetic and approachable, and openly shared

what they knew. And if the Masters needed someone out of the way, she could arrange for tragic accidents at the drop of a hat. Her fanatical devotion hid behind a calm and indifferent facade, and her unquestioning obedience walked hand in hand with an insidious intelligence.

The Kolat rapidly came to rely upon her loyalty, cunning and devotion, far beyond what they afforded any normal agent. When an opening appeared in the ranks of the Ten Masters, there was no question who would fill it. This little girl could not be wasted on lesser duties a moment more than necessary. She proved eminently suited to the position. While she rarely stayed at the Temple for any great length of time, her hands-on approach and keen experience made Rokugan's geisha houses a hotbed of conspiracy activity within a few months. She became a prime intelligence-gatherer and often corrected her older and more experienced colleagues with unerring accuracy. And she achieved all of it at the tender age of 25.

Today, Kaouta is considered one of the most desirable geisha in the Empire. Her client list includes the most powerful daimyo and even members of the Imperial Family. She owns dozens of her own houses and is wealthy enough to afford dozens more, but hasn't shown any inclination to give up her current status. She prefers to stay a simple geisha, which only heightens her desirability. And this is exactly what she wants. She can pry secrets out of the most stubborn target, and leave him begging to do so again. A seemingly endless parade of them have professed their undying love to her, even while telling her things that will someday destroy them.

Through her wealth and prominence, she has amassed a network of geisha – some active agents, most merely thrilled to be working for her – to serve as her eyes and ears, and to dispose of clients on occasion. Geisha houses under her control serve as safe points for training new agents, holding kidnapped targets, and numerous assassinations, as well as the normal business of entertaining samurai. The Scorpion believe she has some criminal connections, but that is all – and no one else has come near to discovering her true power. She takes several weeks every year to “rest and meditate”, during which time she travels to the Hidden Temple and coordinates with her fellow Masters. They invariably defer to her in matters



of court intrigue and the unspoken desires of the samurai caste.

Kaouta appears as a porcelain-faced woman, dressed in the brightly-colored robes of her profession. Her fragile flower exterior hides a steel core, one which none save the Masters have ever seen. With the exception of Bayushi Kachiko, no one can match her skills at deception and manipulation. She never displays any genuine emotion, although she can laugh and sigh such to make the heavens weep. Her heart is cold and pragmatic, and she always appears with the calm of a windless sea. Nothing, it seems, can rattle her. She moves with the seductive grace of a crane, and always knows what to say to set people at ease. Most who haven't met her dismiss her as just another geisha, and she does little to refute them. Her clients know better – or at least, they think they do.

CHINOKO — THE TRIGGER

EARTH: 2

Willpower 4

WATER: 3

Perception 4

FIRE: 3

Intelligence 6

AIR: 3

Awareness 4

VOID: 4

School/Rank: none (criminal)

Skills: Athletics 3, Commerce 5, Courtier 5, Defense 3, Disguise 5, Etiquette 3, Forgery 2, Hand-to-Hand 2, History (Kolai) 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 5, Law 3, Poison 2, Seduction 4, Sincerity 5, Stealth 4

Honor: 0.5

Glory: 2

Advantages: Major Allies (Kolai, criminals, others), Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose

Disadvantages: Brash, Dark Secret

Kaouta had a reasonably sheltered upbringing, considering the circumstances of her birth. Not so her counterpart Chinoko, referred to as "The Trigger" by the other Masters. Born in squalor, she survived through petty crime on the streets, living a desperate existence on the fringes of society. She saw death and horror on a daily basis, enough to shatter any concept of honor or class. Then the Kolai took her in and made her a part of something larger. With nothing else to cling to, she embraced their philosophy as a way out of the sewer she called home. The conspiracy gave her

the tools she needed to master her life, the world around her, and the destiny of the universe. She repaid it with her soul.

Chinoko is currently the madam of a criminal empire, controlling gambling, opium dens, and countless other vices. She has lackeys in a dozen cities, gathering all the sin and vice they can



under her control. Her contacts with the Yasuki prevent her from suffering any direct persecution, and her contacts with the Kolai ensure that her interests remain hidden from the bulk of Rokugan. She earned her position by killing a prominent crime boss, who had taken her as his mistress, then quickly consolidating power and taking his organization further than he could have ever dreamt. She considered it all a thank-you present to the Ten Masters for allowing her into their ranks.

In addition to her criminal activities (which, it goes without saying, all serve the Kolat's ends), she has also taken charge of sleeper placement and activation. Once a sleeper is selected, trained kidnappers in her employ abduct them and turn



them over for processing. After the Mind Breaker or one of his assistants is done, she then arranges for the sleeper to be smoothly returned to society. When the time comes to activate him or her, she usually does it herself, although lesser agents will do so if the occasion is minor enough. Kolat close to the sleeper arranges for her to gain access at the right time – just long enough for her to deliver the activation trigger. She claims that none save a Master should conduct sleeper activations, and the others agree. Secretly, though, she revels in the power it gives her – her one

indulgence. Once set in motion, a sleeper is difficult to stop, and she tries to stay in the area to watch her “toy” perform. If she can't view it personally, she'll use the Oni's Eye.

Where Kaouta is a porcelain flower, Chinoko is an iron dragon-lady – ruthless, intimidating and completely set in her ways. Nothing matters to her save the conspiracy, and she will destroy anyone who tampers with its great plan. She serves a “legitimate” role in society as a geisha madam, which only hides her criminal activities (which in turn, hide her Kolat affiliation). The position fits her disposition. She's a tall, severe-looking woman of forty, her beauty only just beginning to fade. She has a lithe, sinuous body corded with muscles, the result of obsessive exercising. She usually dresses in tight black robes accented by strange jewelry from the Unicorn lands; they make her look dangerous and exotic. On occasion, she can disguise herself to appear as almost anyone, and has become quite skilled at it. To those beneath her, she acts with unbending authority, barking orders and expecting obedience as a matter of course. Her fellow Masters receive a little more deference; they're the only people she considers equals, and the only ones who share her passion for the great plan. She sneers at honor and openly mocks the “hollow” values of the samurai, longing for the day when their empty system can be tossed aside forever. It adds constant fuel to funeral pyre of her spirit.

KOREKADO — THE MAGICIAN

EARTH: 2

Willpower 5

WATER: 3

Perception 6

FIRE: 2

Intelligence 6

AIR: 4

VOID: 5

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja 5

Skills: Calligraphy 4, Forbidden Knowledge 5, History (Kolats) 6, Investigation 5, Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Shintao 4, Sincerity 2, Theology 5, Stealth 2

Honor: 2.5

Glory: 4.3



Spells: any the GM feels is appropriate: see the list on page 47 for ideas.

Advantages: Major Allies, Higher Purpose, Magic Resistance (6 points)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Compulsion, Lame, One Eye

The Kolat had groomed Isawa Korekado from an early age for a position among the Masters. His brain was keen and his heart unmoving. Even as a child, he seemed cold and distant, which made him perfect fodder for the conspiracy. They arranged for him to study far away from the Isawa lands, where his impressive shugenja skills could be molded in the "proper" direction. News of his death reached his parents soon after his *gempukku* ceremony; he arrived at the Hidden Temple as his funeral was underway at Kyuden Isawa.

Since then, he has worked to uncover the mysteries of the spirit world, cataloging and collating his former clan's deepest secrets. He has done a great deal of research himself, and developed spells that none save the Kolat know anything about. He knows his limits, however, and leaves the truly dangerous magical inquiries to his Phoenix dupes. Even so, he has occasionally pushed too hard, and released things best left undisturbed. The scars on his body bear witness to the price he has paid.

The other Masters defer to him on matters of the spirit world, and his rapport with the kami is uncanny. Almost all of the active agents under him belong to the Phoenix Clan. None of them have ever seen him face-to-face: he contacts them in their dreams or through the Oni's tears. Their job, as far as he is concerned, is to keep him appraised of any magical developments and ensure that the Masters have access to all the esoteric knowledge they need.

Korekado hasn't left the Hidden Temple since he was a young man, and his manner clearly shows it. He pays little attention to social niceties and often snaps at those he feels are in his way – which is almost everyone. He uses the Oni's Eye more than any other Master, and has become consumed with viewing as much as he can through it. Early on, it allowed him to peer into the darkest recesses of the Phoenix libraries. As the years went on, he spread his vision further, until he was literally looking into every corner of Rokugan. It reached a point where he refused to leave sight of the Eye, giving up sleep and meals to gaze into its depths. Through a staggering

effort of self-will, he eventually was able to tear himself away, and vowed to steer clear of it except when necessary. Its absence in his life has made him even less sociable however, and he has flown into fits of rabid temper on occasion. The Kolat's servants at the Temple make it a point to steer clear of him.

Despite his increasing instability, he remains in his position and continues to provide valuable advice to the other Masters. He knows it is only a matter of time before they replace him, however, and has accepted it as inevitable. The Kolat will continue as they always have.

Korekado is a grizzled shugenja in his mid-fifties, tough and mean. Scars criss-cross his body and one eye has been permanently sealed shut. He shaves badly, and a scruffy beard covers his chin most days. He wears the tattered robes of the Phoenix clan, though more as an affectation than from any loyalty to his former family. His motor skills have begun to fail in recent years, and he has taken to carrying a cane. Korekado's mind remains sharp and observant, however, and he uses a bad-tempered wit on anyone who gets in his way. He quite likes the reactions it produces.

SHIMURA — THE MIND BREAKER

EARTH: 2

Willpower 5

WATER: 2

Perception 6

FIRE: 3

Agility 4

AIR: 3

VOID: 2

School/Rank: none applicable (torturer)

Skills: Calligraphy 2, History (Kolat) 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 5, Medicine 5, Knife 3, Herbalism 5, Poison 5 Shintao 3, Torture 5

Honor: 0

Glory: 0

Advantages: Major Allies, Ambidextrous, Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose, Voice

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Insensitive, Social Disadvantage (outside the Hidden Temple only)

The Kolat don't trifle with the Kuni family as a general rule. They're isolated from the rest of the Empire and obsessed with the worthwhile business of destroying Fu Leng, so the conspiracy usually lets them be. With Shimura, however, they made an exception. News of the boy's cruel intelligence reached an agent on the Kaiu Wall,

KAGE'S WIFE (CONTINUED)

Fate, however, had other things in store, and even the Kolat could not stop the birth of a king. Hantei the 38th finally bore a son, and Kage's status shifted dramatically. The all-important Hantei cousins – who once may have determined the next Emperor – became minor relatives once again. There was now a direct line to the throne, and their positions meant very little.

Kage found himself relegated to the status of minor nobleman. He still had the Emperor's ear and was welcome at Otosan Uchi, but his path to power had been permanently closed. The all-important marriage had become a hindrance.

Being a Kolat, however, he did not despair. The conspiracy had contingency plans in case their gambit failed and the time had now come to put them into effect. Kage would free himself from his marriage vows the only way possible.

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who decided to investigate the matter for himself. A tragic death struck the child's family soon thereafter, as their half-built tower burned to the ground. Such occurrences are not uncommon in



the Kuni wastes, and the other Crab assumed the boy had died in the blaze.

The Kolat kept him at the Hidden Temple where they trained him extensively in mind-altering magic, memory manipulation, and eta torture techniques. They transformed him into a tool for conditioning other agents, creating sleepers, and countless less savory operations necessary to keep the conspiracy running. He surpassed his teachers' expectations and joined the Ten Masters immediately upon coming of age (*gempukku* for him was a little different from the standard definition of the term). They christened him "The Mind Breaker", and the title has remained with him for over fifty years. Even the other Masters are sometimes hard-pressed to remember his real name.

Shimura is the most openly pragmatic Kolat leader. He has no strings to pull, no web of plots and followers to manipulate. The agents under him specialize in kidnapping and brainwashing techniques, and work only to procure new subjects for him. He does his job by destroying the wills of his targets, shaping minds and personalities to whatever the Kolat wish. It's very direct and hands-on, unlike the diffuse and tangential manipulation that the other Masters engage in. Considering his function, however, there aren't many other options.

In his chambers beneath the Hidden Temple, he has a wide variety of torture devices, procured from eta masters, Scorpion interrogators, and the mysterious lands beyond the Burning Sands. He can use each with exquisite skill, and apply them to invoke any emotional response he wishes. His methods are gruesome and horrifying; even the other Masters dislike watching him work. But he lost his squeamishness for touching human flesh very early in his life, so torture holds no inhibitions for him. Coupled with an uncanny insight into human desire, he can turn the hardest Matsu into a whimpering pile of blubber, or shape an unbending personality into mindless mush.

Shimura considers himself a "sculptor of humanity", creating obedience, false memories, even an entirely new personality through the careful application of pain and relief. He can leave subliminal orders beneath a mind unaware of their existence, or bring a target's lifetime of experiences crashing down around his ears. While not as skilled as he, his followers apply a similar zeal to their work, and can achieve much the same results. When a subject cannot be brought to the Temple for conditioning, he depends on them to manage the process in another location.

Shimura is old, older even than Korekado. At seventy years, he has been a Master longer than anyone in the conspiracy can remember. Thin wisps of white hair frame his bird-like skull, and his skin is wrinkled and liver-spotted. He wears simple, loose-fitting robes, leaving his hands and arms free to perform their work. Despite his age his skills remain as sharp as ever, and his hands never shake – perfect for the duties he relishes so much. He loves his work, but never allows emotion to cloud his judgement. He speaks calmly and clearly on all matters – even those too horrible to contemplate. His cruelty comes out

like that of a scientist: objective detachment and emotional blankness. No one has ever heard him raise his voice.

Shimura hasn't left the Hidden Temple in over twenty years, and often depends on the Oni's Eye to show him the rest of the world. He has recently shown signs of addiction, although not nearly as acutely as Korekado. He is very aware of the danger the Eye now presents to him and has vowed to stay away from it, instead devoting himself fully to his work.

AKAE — THE MONEYLENDER

EARTH 1

Willpower 3

WATER 4

Perception 6

FIRE 1

Intelligence 5

AIR 3

Awareness 5

VOID 3

School/Rank: Daidoji Courtier 5

Skills: Appraisal 4, Calligraphy 4, Courtier 5, Etiquette 4, Heraldry 2, History (Rokugan) 3, History (Kolai) 4, Hunting 2, Law 3, Manipulation 5, Music 1, Oratory/Rhetoric 4, Painting 1, Political Maneuvering 5, Shintao 3, Sincerity 5, Tea Ceremony 2, Commerce 5

Honor: 5

Glory: 6

Advantages: Major Allies (Kolai), Major Allies (Crane), Blackmail (many), Higher Purpose, Inheritance (Crane lands), Social Position (daimyo), Wealthy (10)

Disadvantages: Bad Health (fat), Dark Secret

The Kolai have a delicate balance within the Crane Clan, which they treat most carefully. If they push too hard, the clan becomes troublesome. But if left alone, they could pose a considerable economic threat. Because of this, they require a constant presence within the Crane, a presence who knows how to manipulate them without drawing attention to himself. A presence like Doji Akae.

Like most of the other Masters, Akae came into contact with the conspiracy at an early age. The son of a prominent Doji

daimyo, he stood to inherit a considerable fortune when he came of age. His father controlled fishing ships, silk merchants and sake works throughout his province, in addition to the clan's resources and political clout. As the eldest son, Akae would someday control all of it. The Kolai already had agents within the family, but the boy provided a chance to seize direct control. Through a series of tutors and servant caretakers, they instilled their philosophy into him, and groomed him for another prominent position — as one of the Ten Masters.

Since then, Akae has risen to become everything the Kolai hoped for and more. He took his father's position at age twenty-one and immediately turned his family's holdings over to the Kolai's machinery. He replaced troublesome



KAGE'S WIFE (CONTINUED)

The poison which struck the woman down was cunning and all but undetectable. It had been transported at great cost from the Burning Sands, and appeared indistinguishable from the dreaded plague that swept through Rokugan from time to time. Arumihime herself believed she had been stricken with the disease, and quarantined herself from any human contact. Because Kage knew he had

nothing to fear, he demanded to be with her during her final days, but she refused. Her soul could not rest knowing she had doomed her husband as well. She died alone, in a sequestered room of a remote palace. Kage launched into the role of grief-stricken husband, and none doubted his sincerity. After all, he had been willing to risk infection just to be with his wife; he must have loved her very much.

With Arumihime out of the way, Kage was free to pursue other courses of actions. He returned to his role as Lion sensei, and kept an eye out for potential recruits. He knew that the royal succession wasn't the only way to bring down the Hantei, and with his marriage permanently nullified, he now had the freedom to try again...

servants and underlings with more pliable dupes, and ensured that the conspiracy agents already within the system received powerful appointments. He increased Crane clout in the mercantile trade and aggressively promoted the rise of the merchant class. And through heavy politicking, he lobbied for aid within his own clan and the noble houses of the Hantei. All of it served the Kolat's plans perfectly.

Among his more controversial ideas was the concept of "moneylending", whereby a wealthy man would allow others to borrow his koku in exchange for payment at a later time. Some of the Crane nobles are shocked at such blatant manipulation, but others see it as a powerful political tool and a means of controlling less fortunate clans. Cynics in the clan noted that the Yasuki family quickly established moneylenders of their own once the idea spread to them. If the Crane don't follow it up, they claim, the Yasuki will establish an unassailable position in this new niche. Honorable or not, Akae's idea is too lucrative for the Crane to pass up.

His position as vassal daimyo is prominent if not dominating, and through it, he can influence his fellow clanmates. While the Kakita family (and some of the Doji as well) sniff at his base mercantile interests, he has brought considerable revenue to the clan, and remains well-connected politically. Other Crane listen to his opinions, and even the Champion has deferred to him on business matters in the past. And of course, he never uses his resources in any way that would dishonor his clan or his Emperor. As long as he remains an asset, the clan seems willing to forgive his "base" philosophies, and even listen to his opinions. He forms the doorway through which the Kolat can infiltrate the Crane – prominent, but not so overpowering as to draw suspicion.

Of all the Crane daimyo, Akae is the most vocal opponent of the Yasuki family. He constantly calls for economic war against them, admonishing his superiors to "wipe their stain from Rokugan forever". His saber-rattling keeps competition between the Crane and Yasuki fierce – which, of course, increases the clout of Kolat interests on both sides. His Crane colleagues would be shocked to learn that some of the very Crabs he denounces are strong partners in his plans, and desire economic war as much as he does.

Akae is a corpulent, porcine man, bloated with the indulgences of his station. Eating holds a

special place in his heart: an indulgence that rarely leads to political danger. He wears the finest robes he can procure, which billow around him like a peddler's tent. His eyes have a sleepy, half-closed look that lead some to dismiss him as ignorant – a misconception he uses to devastating effects. While not appearing particularly Machiavellian, he has immense political clout, and knows how to wield it to get what he wants. Of the current Masters, he is the most heavily entrenched in "normal" society, and rarely finds the time to travel to the Hidden Temple. He stays in contact through the Oni's Eye and go-betweens from elsewhere in Rokugan.

AL-HAZAAD — THE QOLAT

EARTH: 4

WATER: 3

Perception 4

FIRE: 5

AIR: 5

VOID: 3

School/Rank: "Mirumoto Bushi" (actually trained in technique beyond the Burning Sands; use Mirumoto school as equivalent) 4

Skills: Acting 4, Archery (Unicorn) 4, Athletics 5, Bard 3, Calligraphy 5, Commerce 2, Defense 4, Forgery 5, History (Burning Sands) 4, History (Qolat) 3, Horsemanship 3, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Burning Sands) 5, Medicine 3, Sincerity 4, Scimitar 5, Stealth 4 Wrestling 3

Honor: n/a

Glory: 0

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Major Allies (Qolat), Clear Thinker, Higher Purpose, Perfect Balance

Disadvantages: Black Sheep (gaijin), Dark Secret, Obligation (to his Kolat hosts)

For all their schemes in Rokugan, the Kolat have not forgotten the lands beyond the Burning Sands or their brethren working there. The Ten Masters keep an eye on their Qolat cousins laboring there, and ensure that the two branches of the conspiracy move in the same direction. As self-contained as they are, the Qolat rarely need help from the Hidden Temple. But occasionally, one of them has visited Rokugan, either to confer on particularly important operations, or to find sanctuary from enemies who have come too close. The enigmatic al-Hazaad is one of them.

Details of his life in the Burning Sands are sketchy; he reveals little of his background, and paints his explanations in broad strokes devoid of

details. Al-Hazaad comes from a huge city named Medinat 'al Salaam, supposedly even greater than Otsan Uchi itself. Rife with factions and intrigue, it has become a perfect breeding ground for Qolat agents. As a native of Medinat's streets, al-Hazaad became intimately familiar with its political structure at an early age. The Qolat singled him out for his insight and ruthlessness, and took it upon themselves to train him in their ways. As he grew up, he learned to infiltrate and manipulate those around him, to shape Medinat's power structure to the conspiracy's liking.

Beyond his indoctrination, the Rokugani know little of his history with the organization. Medinat politics follow strange patterns, and obey dictates that they cannot understand. Such are the immense cultural differences between the Emerald Empire and the rest of the world. They do know however, that he was a prominent player in that tangled web, and worked tirelessly to further their common cause. Other Qolat spoke of him in glowing terms, and praised his "fatal efficiency" to their comrades in Rokugan.

Then, something went wrong. Whether some normal political scheme went awry, or his true nature had been discovered, his true allegiance became known. He was forced to flee the Burning Sands and come to Rokugan, flying on a mystical carpet to cover thousands of miles in a few short days. He appeared out of the sky above the Hidden Temple, and demanded sanctuary from his fellows. He has remained there ever since.

While initially unsettled by his presence, the others have come to accept al-Hazaad as a valuable asset. Since arriving, he has spent his time training agents in the philosophy and science of his land. The people of the Burning Sands have strange customs, but some have proven immensely useful to the Kolat – the concept of numerology, for example, and engineering advances from a nation called "Sin-pet". Under al-Hazaad's tutelage, the Kolat have begun

applying them in their own operations, with impressive results.

In addition, he has stayed in contact with his fellow Qolat through the Oni's Eye, and helped strengthen ties between the two sects. On several occasions, his connection has allowed the Kolat to send rapid aid to their brethren, and vice versa. It has salvaged some very important operations on both sides of the mountains. Because of this, and because of his immense political acumen, al-Hazaad was eventually granted a seat among the



OTHER KOLAT

Agents below the masters could be anyone, in any capacity at all. They represent all facets of society, from Clan daimyo to the lowliest *eta*. The only similarity between them is their fanatic devotion to the cause and their ability to keep it hidden at all costs. All Kolat have high scores in Sincerity and at least a modicum of Stealth, in addition to the various skills expected of their stations.

Most have mental traits which are higher than their Rings. Use sound judgment when creating them and remember that they are all very good at hiding their true allegiance.

The templates in the appendix following this chapter provide good examples of lesser Kolat agents. Feel free to copy them for your own campaign, or use them as basic templates to create new Kolat agents. They are intended to be used as NPCs, and should not be available to players.

Ten Masters for the duration of his stay. He has accepted the position with honor.

Al-Hazaad remains permanently within the Temple, save for a few occasions where he goes out flying (no one knows where he travels during these journeys and only his fellow Masters have the courage to ask). His foreign accent and bizarre personal customs make him conspicuous, even in the Unicorn Clan. Rokugan's intense xenophobia means he cannot show himself without raising countless questions, questions the Kolat do not want answered. Like all Kolat, he is clever and persuasive, and though foreign, remains fanatically devoted to the conspiracy's plans. His fervor has allowed the other Masters to trust him, even though he is *gaijin*. Despite his newfound power, and despite his rapid immersion into Kolat operations here, he misses his homeland. He longs for the day when the Oni's Eye tells him that his enemies are dead and that he may return to Medinat 'al Salaam. Until then, he repays his hosts by serving them to the best of his abilities.

Like all Kolat, al-Hazaad is intelligent and cruel, applying pragmatic objectivism to devastating effect. He lacks the Rokugani taboo of hiding one's emotions, laughing, crying, and raging with unsettling ease. He has comfortably settled into his teaching role and rarely interacts with agents outside the Temple (although many remember him from their training). The other instructors at the academy answer to him, although he defers issues of Rokugani culture to Kage. The natives know their own land better than he does.

He is acutely aware of his foreigner status, but chooses to flaunt it rather than hide it. Feigned deception, he claims, would insult his fellows, and besides, his bearded face and wide brown eyes mark him as *gaijin* regardless. He dresses in the clothes of his native land: turbans, wide sashes and a blade he calls a "sim-i-ta" tucked into his belt. On warm days, he goes bare-chested, and on cold ones wraps himself in animal skins. Newcomers to the Temples stand in awe of his presence; one look at him, and they know the Kolat truly mean to rule the world. He enjoys the respect they give him.

EMON — THE SHADOW'S BANE

EARTH: 3

Willpower 7

WATER: 3

Perception 4

FIRE: 4

Intelligence 5

AIR: 3

Awareness 4

VOID: 6

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 3

Skills: Archery 4, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Forgery 3, History (Kolats) 3, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 4, Lore (The Shadow) 3, Meditation 3, Mimic 4, Poison 3, Shintao 3, Sincerity 4, Stealth 4

Honor: 1.5

Glory: 1

Advantages: Major Allies, Clear Thinker, Heart of Vengeance, Higher Purpose, Luck

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Sworn Enemy (The Shadow)

Nineteen-year-old Shosuro Emon has only just been indoctrinated into the Ten Masters, following the sudden death of his predecessor. The Kolat had planned to use him as a more active agent, but considering his area of expertise, the Masters ultimately decided to place him in the Inner Circle. You see, Emon has had first-hand contact with the Living Darkness... and lived to tell the tale.

Emon's brother Takashi belonged to the Shosuro ninja school, and received high marks for his zeal. One day, as is the custom, a group of mysterious men visited the school and took several initiates away with them when they left. Takashi was among them. The young Emon missed his brother terribly, but soon learned to live without him. The Kolat had approached him just before Takashi left, and were already indoctrinating him into the cult. With their strange new visions swirling in his head, he eventually forgot how much his brother's absence ached.

Then one evening, a few months before his gempukku, his brother returned. He came to Emon's window like a raven in the night, looming out of the darkness above the young man's bed. Takashi's face was hidden by a black mask, but Emon recognized the whispering voice behind it. The former ninja spoke of serving a new master now, of seeing a plan far larger than the Scorpion and their games. He spoke of the power his new master had given him, and of spreading it so that it encompassed the whole of the world. He wished Emon would join him in his new life, and had come to take him away. The he pulled off his mask, and revealed a face as smooth as stone. The

Shadow had wiped his identity away, leaving a blank-faced monster in its place.

Emon, however, was ready. While shocked and horrified at what had happened to his brother, the Kolat had prepared him for it. They knew that the Shadow had taken Takashi and suspected that he might return to claim members of his family. As the ninja advanced menacingly towards his brother, the conspiracy's conditioning took over. He pulled a shard of crystal from around his neck, and plunged it into his brother's face. It uttered an inhuman screech and fell backward, dissolving into a puddle of formless muck. Emon watched as it curled away from the crystal and finally vanished, then smiled at his work. The Kolat would be pleased.

Since then, he has worked tirelessly to root out and destroy the Living Darkness wherever it appears. Allowing the Scorpion to believe him dead (snatched away by his brother) has left him free to pursue the Kolat's agenda full-time. He has made the connections between the Shosuro school and the Shadow, and keeps tabs on those whom the strange men take. (Kolat agents who follow them have never returned, however, so he still does not know where they go or what happens to them.) He has also orchestrated several "baiting" operations designed to draw Shadow minions into the open and destroy them. They have proven spectacularly successful, increasing his stock in the conspiracy greatly. He has even managed to infiltrate the hidden Kitsuki libraries, using the Oni's Eye to peer into their forbidden texts. His iron will and fanatical devotion to the Kolat prevented him from succumbing to the Shadow's insidious mental invasion, and he relayed a great deal of information to the Masters. When his predecessor on the Inner Council died, he was selected to replace him.

Now, he coordinates the Kolat's efforts against the Shadow, standing in the forefront of their hidden war. He uses his former clan whenever he can, appearing as a number of different samurai and courtiers. The Scorpion's penchant for intrigue serves him well in these instances; while

many question him, few suspect his real agenda, and most are content to let him be (after all, whatever he's doing ultimately serves the clan, doesn't it?). Secretly, he condemns the Scorpion as fools, dancing to the Shadow's tune even as they make so many others dance to theirs. He quietly



mourns for Takashi, whom he truly loved, and blames his old clan for sacrificing him to such a creature. The Kolat are the fulcrum for his revenge.

Emon is young and handsome, with long dark hair and a Scorpion's black eyes. He tends to smile to himself, as clever thoughts and ideas pass through his mind. Others find the habit disarming, and he's learned to take advantage of it. He makes a point of never wearing the Scorpion's trademark mask, except when impersonating one. He detests the tradition, calling it "sanctimonious hypocrisy" that hides the

clan from their own fears. For him, his own face is mask enough.

Needless to say, his skills at deception are unparalleled, and at the tender age of nineteen has kept spymasters twice as old completely in the dark. He displays a keen sense of tactics and ruthless efficiency, which he uses to pursue his



old enemy wherever it may lie. To him, the Shadow is the only foe as deceptive as he – and the only one truly worth his attentions.

For more information on the Living Darkness, see *The Way of the Shadow*.

SO KO THE GUARD

EARTH: 4

Willpower 5

WATER: 4

Perception 5

FIRE: 4

AIR: 4

Awareness 5

VOID: 3

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 3

Skills: Archery 2, Athletics 3, Bard 2, Battle 2, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Heraldry 4, History (Rokugan) 3, History (Kolai) 3, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 4, Sincerity 4, Stealth 4

Honor: 4

Glory: 5

Advantages: Balance, Natural Leader, Major Allies, Higher Purpose, Read Lips

Disadvantages: Dark Secret

The Kolat know they can never unseat the Hantei without the backing of the people, but that doesn't mean they don't keep tabs on them. The intrigues of the Imperial Court are a hotbed of raw power, and the conspiracy would be ill-used if it did not take advantage of it. Spies infest the diplomats at Otosan Uchi, agents orchestrating countless plots and schemes. An "Imperial Operative" has sat on the Kolat's Inner Council since it was founded, but the current one is a little different. She's no diplomat or courtier, but a member of the Imperial guard – a simple soldier who sees and hears more than any six nobles under her.

Born Ikoma Soko in the Lion lands, the young girl spurned her librarian family and sought the life of a samurai-ko. Like her cousin Tsanuri, she was permitted to train as a warrior, learning bushido from the revered Akodo house.

In a sense, she was luckier than Tsanuri, who had to study under the bookish Toturi. Soko received special tutelage from Akodo Kage himself.

Upon her *gempukku*, she applied for a position among the Imperial Guard, and thanks to her sensei's connections, received one. She spent the next seven years in the Imperial Palace, watching and listening to what went on around her. She advanced quickly through the ranks, and was

soon coordinating the spies and agents in the courts around her. No one suspected that the diplomats she guarded were often her subordinates; soldiers in the Imperial Palace are all but ignored by its inhabitants. By the time a new position in the Ten Masters showed up, she had the conspiracy's entire Imperial operation under her thumb. With Kage's support, she was selected to the Inner Council.

Soko currently divides her time between the palace and the Temple, keeping the facade of Imperial Guard wherever she goes. Her "selfless allegiance to the Emperor" – echoed by countless courtier followers – has earned her a command status, and she now lead a unit of almost one hundred troops. Her position allows her to occasionally "escort" diplomats from the Imperial City, thus masking her visits to the Hidden Temple (the diplomats she escorts are usually her own underlings). And all the time, she watches the Hantei family, waiting for opportunities to undermine their rule. She pays close attention to

the Otomo family, and makes sure her underlings deflect them away from any pertinent operations.

Soko is tall and proud, like many Lion women. She wears her Imperial armor whenever she's seen in public, and keeps her long hair bound tightly to her head. At the Hidden Temple, she allows it to fall free, differentiating her "true" self from the facade. Her bright eyes bore holes in their subjects and she speaks with the quiet force of absolute authority. Unsuspecting courtiers assume that her intensity comes from her unflinching devotion. Those who know find it frightening. Soko holds one of the most important posts in the entire conspiracy, and the responsibility weighs heavily on her. Despite her confidence, she tends to defer to her old master during Kolat meetings, and occasionally consults him for advice. Kage's words help maintain her confidence, and keep her focused on the Kolat's overall plans. She senses that a move against the Hantei may be possible soon, and hopes to be there when the hated dynasty finally falls.





CALL
AAN 99

Appendix



Character Templates

Crab Merchant

You've got to get some money together. That gambler in the River quarter: he owes you a fair amount. And that ship captain who lost an entire cargo of silk: he still has to make amends. You'd better tie up those loose ends soon, or the bosses will tie them up for you. And you don't want that.

Merchants aren't like samurai. Their codes are different, their sense of honor somewhat... skewed. You always understood that, even before the Kolat began training you. Currency was your katana, the marketplace your battlefield. And though everyone thought you played by the same rules as the rest of society, you know that just isn't the case. In your game, everyone understands that.

Sometimes, it's necessary to bend the rules a little. Business demands it. So you forge some papers, pay off some magistrates, even arrange for some stolen goods to find a buyer. Occasionally, it gets nasty; a competitor's shop needs to have an unfortunate accident, or an underling needs a reminder of who's in charge. All part of the merchant's life; at least, that's what the bosses told you. Usually, you're the one who makes sure people understand that. Rough them up when they get complacent, bloody their nose when they need it. You've been doing it ever since you came of age, and have come to crave it like a drug. It makes you feel good. Powerful. And you know your superiors approve of your work.

Only now, the shoe's on the other foot. One of your underlings botched a job, and the magistrates came down on him hard. You managed to straighten it out, but it cost you every asset you had... and now the bosses say they need some koku fast. Sure, they know about the magistrates - they know almost everything - but they don't care. And if you can't deliver, then they might find somebody else who can do your job more efficiently.

Wasn't there a woman in Ryoko Owari who owed you some money? You should find out. It's very important.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Crab Merchant

Clan:
Crab

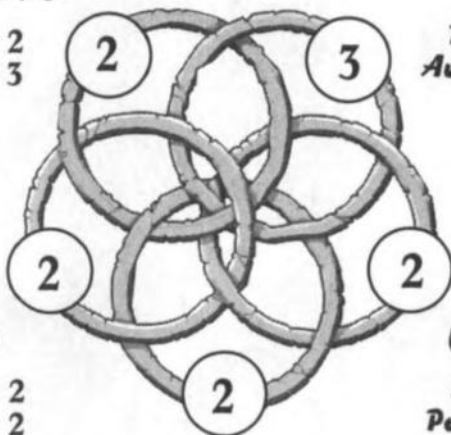
Profession:
Bushi

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 3



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 132

Techniques

Primary Weapon

Wakizashi 2k2

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

15

Skills

Etiquette	2
Heraldry	1
Sincerity	3
Investigation	3
Manipulation	2
Lore (Kolai)	1
Defense	2
Commerce	3
Craft	2
Gambling	1
Sleight of Hand	1
Stealth	1

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

School: Yasuki Merchant

Rank: 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Allies +2
Blackmail
(GM's choice) +3
Dark Secret

Glory: 1

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Honor: 0

☒☒☒☒☒☐☐☐☐☐

Experience Points:

Crane Mastermind

It's very easy, you see. First visualize your goals. Then decide what it takes to meet them. If you have the right people at your disposal, you can accomplish anything.

You were part of the Kolat as long as you can remember. Your father belonged to the cult, and dedicated his entire life to realizing its goals. You were brought up knowing that the Kolat's philosophy was the only truth in this world. You learned how to deceive others, to disguise your true intentions, and all skills the conspiracy required. But most important was the plan, the overriding dream that your father lived and died for. By the age of five, it had become your dream too.

When your father lay on his deathbed, you came to him and swore to keep his beliefs alive. You promised to serve the Kolat as none had before, and ensure that they knew how devoted your family was.

It took a little while. You had to prove yourself to the Ten Masters, and your father had set a high standard. It started with small missions, things you handled quite easily. It moved on to bigger and bigger things, until you had a cadre of agents beneath you. Spread across Rokugan, they were trained to complete any mission the Masters might have. You have become very adept at planning: at recognizing what needs to be accomplished and assigning the right men to do the job. You remember details with unerring accuracy, and can organize entire missions in your head, down to the last minute detail. Every assignment has been successful, and you've never left so much as a slip of paper as evidence. Whenever the Master need something done, they think of you first. You're certain of it.

You're quite satisfied with your mundane life. As a minor daimyo, you receive all the benefits of the noble class with none of the drawbacks. Your province is prosperous, the peasants beneath you well-fed and happy. For any other man, it would be a good life. But behind closed doors, you wait in gleeful anticipation for the next time the Masters make contact with you. In the end, the work you do for them is the only thing that holds meaning in this world.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name: Crane Mastermind
Clan: Crane

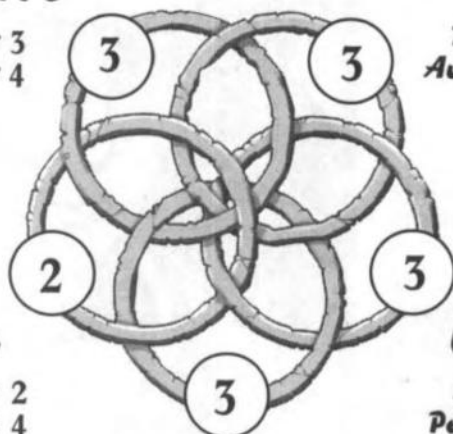
Profession: Courtier

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 4

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 4



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 4

Water

Strength: 3
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Primary Weapon

None

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

15

Skills

Courtier	3
Sincerity	4
Intimidation	3
Etiquette	3
Heraldry	2
Manipulation	4
Oratory	4
Lore (Kolai)	3
Meditation	2
Mizu-Do	4
Law	3
Stealth	2

Insight: 177

Techniques

The Perfect Gift
A Whisper From the Soul
Test of Honor

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

School: Doji Courtier

Rank: 3

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Benten's Blessing	+2
Clear Thinker	+3
Precise Memory	+3
Wealth	+4
Higher Purpose	+2
Social Position	+5
Dark Secret	

Glory: 3



Honor: 3



Experience Points:

Dragon Pawn

You're in terrible danger, and have been ever since you returned from the Hidden Temple. How could the Masters have been so thoughtless?

In the beginning, you thought it was an honor. In the beginning, you felt privileged to be in such a position. You were one of the few Dragon inducted into the conspiracy: the front line of their infiltration into the northern mountains. They told you how important you were, and what the dangers someone in your position would face. You understood, or thought you did, and pushed yourself. You honed your will to a fine edge, mastered every deceptive technique you could. By the time you arrived in the Dragon foothills to take your post, you felt strong enough to bring the entire clan to its knees.

All of that ended the day Yokuni came to visit Mirumoto castle. He took one look at you and he knew. He *knew*. His glowing yellow eyes bored into your soul and tore your carefully crafted facade to the wind. It was all you could do to keep from screaming his name and confessing everything right there.

He said nothing, however. Not to you and not to your superiors. And in the end, that was the worst part. He kept your precious secret, made sure that no one suspected your true allegiance. He left you there to continue your work. But every night, you can feel his eyes boring into you, and you know that one day he will return to properly address your disloyalty.

You have no one to turn to, no one you can trust. Your superiors in the Kolat give you instructions and you obey them to the best of your ability. They seem to be pleased with your progress. But you can't tell them about Yokuni. Nor can you confide in any of your fellow Dragon, who would surely have you killed as a traitor. The unshared secret is devouring your soul.

You pray Yokuni will come to you soon and end your torment. As much as you fear it, the thought of his justice is all that keeps you from madness.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Dragon Pawn

Clan:
Dragon

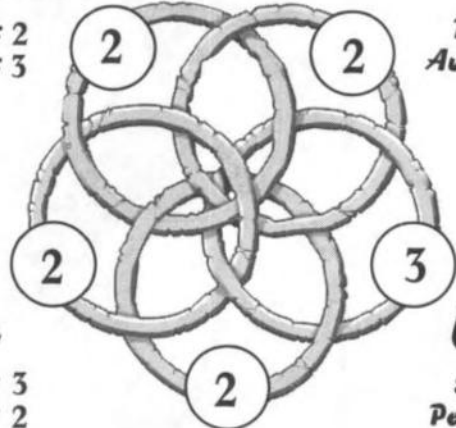
Profession:
Diplomat

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 3



Earth

Stamina: 3
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 3
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 135

Techniques

Kitsuki's Method

Primary Weapon

None

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Courtier	2
History	3
Law	3
Heraldry	3
Poison	2
Herbalism	2
Lore (Kolai)	1
Kenjutsu	2
Nazodo	2
Ichi Miru	2
Stealth	1
Sincerity	2

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

School: Kitsuki Magistrate **Rank:** 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Clear Thinker	+2
Read Lips	+2
Dark Secret	
Dark Secret	-5
(Togashi knows)	

Glory: 1

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Honor: 2

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ □ □ □ □ □ □

Experience Points:

Lion Sleeper

It's terrible what happened to the daimyo. In his own palace, and under constant guard... to be killed like that is a great dishonor. You're sorry you had to be here for it.

As a young girl, you suffered from bouts of sleeplessness, but you were strong and never let it bother you. In time, you forgot all about it. You were betrothed to a prominent Ikoma courtier just before your *gempukku* – a fine match. The Lion was a clan of battle and blood, but it needed finesse too, and you were thrilled to be a part of it. The diplomat's life was exciting and romantic, and you did everything you could to assist your husband in fulfilling his duties. Your parties were praised throughout the province as masterpieces of hospitality. Your singing and flower arrangements were marveled by the courts. Once, you even hosted the Emperor's niece during a visit to the Lion lands. As a social butterfly, you were an unequivocal success, and each new triumph increased your husband's standing. In time, he became one of the most influential diplomats in the clan.

That's why the daimyo invited the two of you to his palace. He was engaged in delicate negotiations with the Crane, and needed your husband's expertise. In addition, he heard that you had composed a new haiku, and was eager for a personal reading. You were thrilled beyond words.

Now, of course, he'll never hear it. They found him last night, strangled in his bedclothes. The guards on duty swore that no one approached in the night. The only way an interloper might have entered his chambers is through the window, which would require an eighty-foot climb up a sheer stone wall.

It's awful, truly awful. And very upsetting for you. You don't want to think about the terrible nightmare you had last night.

...or the blood-soaked washbasin next to your bed.

...or the piece of the daimyo's kimono you found in your hand this morning.

Best to put that out of your head. They probably don't mean anything, anyway. After all, it's not like *you* killed him.

Is it?





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Lion Sleeper

Clan:
Lion

Profession:
Courtier

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 3

Primary Weapon
None

Primary Armor
None

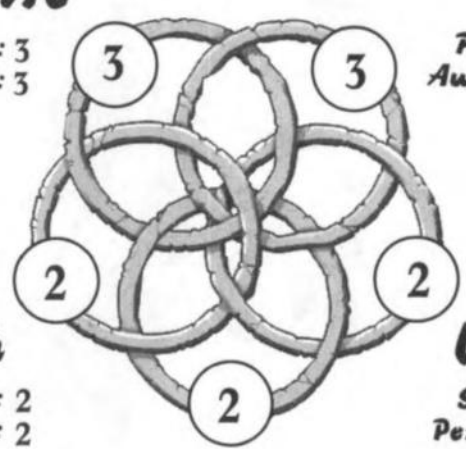
TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)
10

Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2



Void

Void Points Spent:

Techniques

- Poetry 2
- Ikebana 1
-
-
-

Skills

Parentesis in		Courtier	4
Sleeper mode only		Calligraphy	3
(Athletics)	4	History	2
(Stealth)	4	Meditation	2
(Knife)	4	Ikebana	2
(Cipher)	2	Shintao	3
Defense	1	Sincerity	3
Etiquette	4	Tea Ceremony	3
Hand-to-Hand	2	Poetry	4
Heraldry	4		

Insight: 157

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

School: Kakita Artisan **Rank:** 2

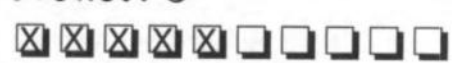
Advantages/ Disadvantages

- Social Position +10
- Different School +5
- Dark Secret
-
-
-

Glory: 2



Honor: 3



Experience Points:

Phoenix Collaborator

The other Asako don't understand, but their goals and the Kolat's are very similar. They want to transcend to godhood, to find divinity in man. The Kolat want the same thing. If the Asako could understand that, they'd make powerful allies.

Your duties here in the Phoenix lands are much different than elsewhere. There's no espionage, no manipulation of those around you. You're expected to conduct research, nothing more. Every now and then, Master Korekado will contact you and ask how your work is progressing. You smile and explain your latest riddle to him, and he goes away.

It's that simple. There are no murders and kidnappings, no horrors in the night. Just the sharing of what you have learned with someone else. You know that the Kolat can't be involved with anything unsavory; they're far too enlightened. And you don't have any problems revealing your family's secrets to them, for you know it will help them to reach perfection sooner. Isn't that what the Asako want? To help mankind reach their highest potential?

While you keep the Masters informed, you have progressed along the Path of Man admirably. The other Asako marvel at your progress, and occasionally come to you for advice, which you dole out cheerfully. Anything to help a fellow family member. And if your words are laced with certain subtle references to Kolat philosophy, what of it? They need that wisdom, for only through it will they attain enlightenment.

When you are further along the Path – when your powers have grown – you hope to be able to share the Kolat's vision with others. Korekado has forbidden it, of course, and you would never disobey a Master, but someday soon, he may change his mind. You're sure that the other members of the family will embrace the conspiracy as you have. They're so much alike that they can't help but become one. Their ranks will swell and both sides will be that much closer to realizing their goals. It would be a great day, and you hope that you live to see it. On the Path you travel, that's more than likely.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name: Phoenix Collaborator
Clan: Phoenix

Profession: Henshin

Primary Weapon
None

Primary Armor
None

TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)
 10

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 3

Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 4

Water

Strength: 3
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Skills

Calligraphy	2
Cipher	3
Defense	1
Hand-to-Hand	1
History	3
Lore (Kolai)	3
Lore (Path of Man)	3
Medicine	1
Meditation	2
Shintao	2
Sincerity	3
Stealth	2

Techniques

Rank One: the Riddle of Water

Insight: 146

School: Asako Henshin **Rank:** 1

Advantages/Disadvantages

Higher Purpose +2
 (to bring the Asako into the conspiracy)
 Dark Secret

Glory: 1

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Honor: 2

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Experience Points:

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Scorpion Geisha

Secrets, secrets, so many secrets. Sometimes it makes your head spin to think of them all. There's the secrets you let slip to your fellow geisha, the secrets you tell your Scorpion superiors... and then there are the real secrets. The ones that matter.

You were never special as a child: just another geisha in training, a spy to be used as your clan thought fit. You never felt loved or appreciated by the superiors, and they never seemed to notice all your hard work. What's one more geisha in a clan full of them? But there was someone... an older woman in the house you were schooled in... who understood. She told you what a special person you were, and showed you how to do things you never seemed capable. She gave you a purpose, and let you know just how important you were to it. She made you a Kolat right under her superior's nose, and no one every suspected a thing. Your Scorpion bosses thought they were sneaky. But by the time you came of age, you were ready to show them what sneaky really was.

As a geisha, you hear a lot of things: stories told by drunken samurai, messages left unguarded by sleeping courtiers, things like that. Most of them go straight to your madam, to be turned over to the Bayushi family. But sometimes – your secret friend lets you know when – you change things a little. Switch the details on an important document they want. Let the wrong piece of gossip slip. A few times, you've even made something up, a flat-out lie to feed the Clan. You're so good, they never know the difference. The real information goes to the Ten Masters; they'll put it to better use than Shoji or Kachiko anyway.

It can be very confusing, keeping track of all your lies. You know that the Kolat are the only real truth, and that helps, but it's still difficult. Sometimes you think that cold hard facts don't exist anymore: only different lies and the people who believe them. The Scorpion say that is the nature of life, and praise you for realizing it. You wonder how kind those words would be if they knew where your loyalties truly lay.

It makes you giggle just thinking about it.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Scorpion Geisha

Clan:
Scorpion

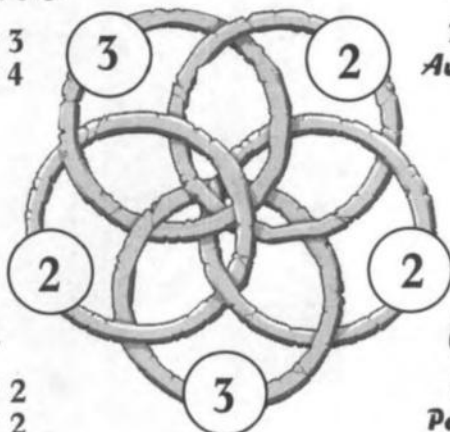
Profession:
Geisha

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 4

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 3



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 4

Void

Void Points Spent:

Primary Weapon

None

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Acting	3
Conversation	3
Dance	2
Etiquette	3
Forgery	1
Locksmith	1
Music	3
Poison	1
Seduction	3
Sincerity	5
Stealth	2

Insight: 147

Techniques

A Scorpion Has A Thousand
Faces

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

School: Shosuro Butei

Rank: 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Benten's Blessing	+3
Voice	+3
Read Lips	+2
Precise Memory	+3
Dark Secret	

Glory: 0



Honor: 0



Experience Points:

Unicorn Assassin

For you, there never was any difference between the clan and the Kolat. Their goals are the same and so, you have discovered, are their methods. By serving one, you invariably serve the other.

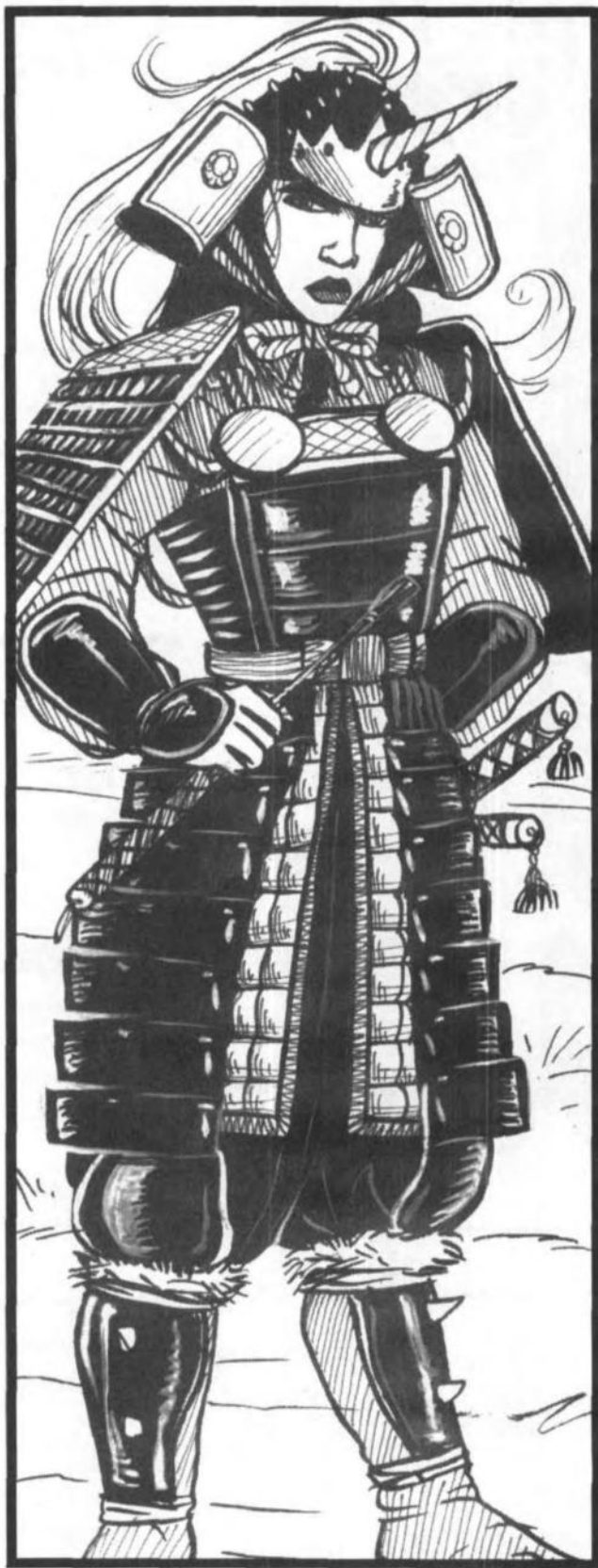
Your parents didn't understand, of course. You were taught to expect that. Not everyone in the Unicorn was as enlightened as you were, and they had to be shielded from the truth. For their own good, of course. Mother and father never knew about your special sensei... about your midnight training sessions... about the words from your lord Yokatsu that only you could hear. To them, you were just another student at the Otaku Battle Maiden school: honorable to be sure and cause for them to be proud, but no different from any other samurai-ko in your class.

You knew better.

After your *gempukku*, you were assigned a scouting duty along the Unicorn border. Untamed tracts of vast plain, empty and unknowable. They would need to be patrolled by someone skilled and self-reliant; after all, it's hard to get out there, and your superiors won't be able to check on you very often. With all that time alone, no one notices if you disappear every now and then. It's better that way.

Every now and then, your superior calls, using dreams and magic to give you instructions. The message only comes when you're on patrol, weeks away from your unknowing fellow. He always tells you to kill someone: a clerk, a diplomat, a fellow samurai. It never matters who it is, and you never know why they need to die. Frankly, you don't care. All that matters is that it serves the cause. The blood on your hands is a secret badge of honor, a mark of pride that only you can see.

Sometimes, late at night, you wonder what all the secrecy is about. To your way of thinking, all samurai should be as honorable as you. After all, doesn't bushido teach loyalty to your lord? And if your lord happens to be Kolat, does that make your duty to him any less important? Few people would see things as clearly as that. But you've always been different.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Unicorn Assassin

Clan:
Unicorn

Profession:
Battle Maiden

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 4
Awareness: 3

Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 3

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 146

Techniques

Riding in Harmony

Primary Weapon

Fine katana 4k2

Primary Armor

Light Armor

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes $\times$ 5 + Armor)

20

(25 with armor)

Skills

Battle	2
Courtier	1
Defense	2
Etiquette	2
Horse Archery	3
Horsemanship	3
Hunting	1
Kenjutsu	3
Meditation	2
Shintao	2
Sincerity	3
Stealth	2

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

School: Otaku Battle Maiden **Rank:** 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Strength of the Earth +2
Absolute Direction +1
Luck +3
Dark Secret

Glory: 1

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Honor: 3

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Experience Points:

Ronin Isolated Soldier

The worst thing a wave-man has to face is the loneliness. Not the dishonor or the shame, or even the constant dangers, but the simple lack of belonging. No mon. No family. No proud ancestors or famous heroics. Just you and your katana, alone forever.

That's why you serve the Hidden Temple so fervently. You've seen how those other ronin live and you want no part of it. The conspiracy took you in at an early age, and gave you those things you never thought you'd have: purpose, belief, a sense of being part of something far greater than you. For that, you owe them your life. More than that: you owe them your soul.

You were trained in weapons, as well as any clan member could hope to be. You learned how to defend the Temple, and how to make sure that lesser conspiracy members didn't poke their nose in the wrong places. In time, the valley around the Temple became your only world. You didn't mind; you haven't seen any of the rest of Rokugan since you were very young.

Your job is to protect the Temple, and occasionally guide visitors through the treacherous pass that leads to it. You've never crossed the whole path at once, and you know you couldn't trace it if you had to. That's all right. It keeps things safe, and you know that the conspiracy's enemies mustn't learn how to cross it. And if perchance they should reach the valley and the Hidden Temple it houses... you know the landscape like the back of your hand. They wouldn't live long enough to tell anyone.

It's a fairly dull life, all in all. Combat is rare and you've never had to fight a real enemy. You've presided over a few executions and once had to discipline a recalcitrant underling by removing his hand. Hardly the rampant bloodshed that most bushi live with. But you don't mind. You have a purpose, and you're well-trained to uphold it – even if you've never faced a true test of your abilities. When and if one comes, you'll be more than ready. You belong to something that won't allow you to fail.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Isolated Soldier

Clan:
Ronin

Profession:
Bushi

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 3

Primary Weapon

Katana 3k2

Primary Armor

Light

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes $\times$ 5 + Armor)

10

(15 with armor)

Earth

Stamina: 4
Willpower: 3

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Skills

Archery	1
Athletics	2
Battle	1
Defense	3
Intimidation	1
Kenjutsu	3
Meditation	1
Shintao	1
Stealth	2
Yarjutsu (Sasumata)	3

Insight: 127

Techniques

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

School: None

Rank: nil

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Higher Purpose	+2
Quick	+3
Obligation	-4
Dark Secret	

Glory: 0

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Honor: 2

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Experience Points:

Way of Shadow™



Legend of the Five Rings™



Fear the Darkness.

Now Available

The Winter Court

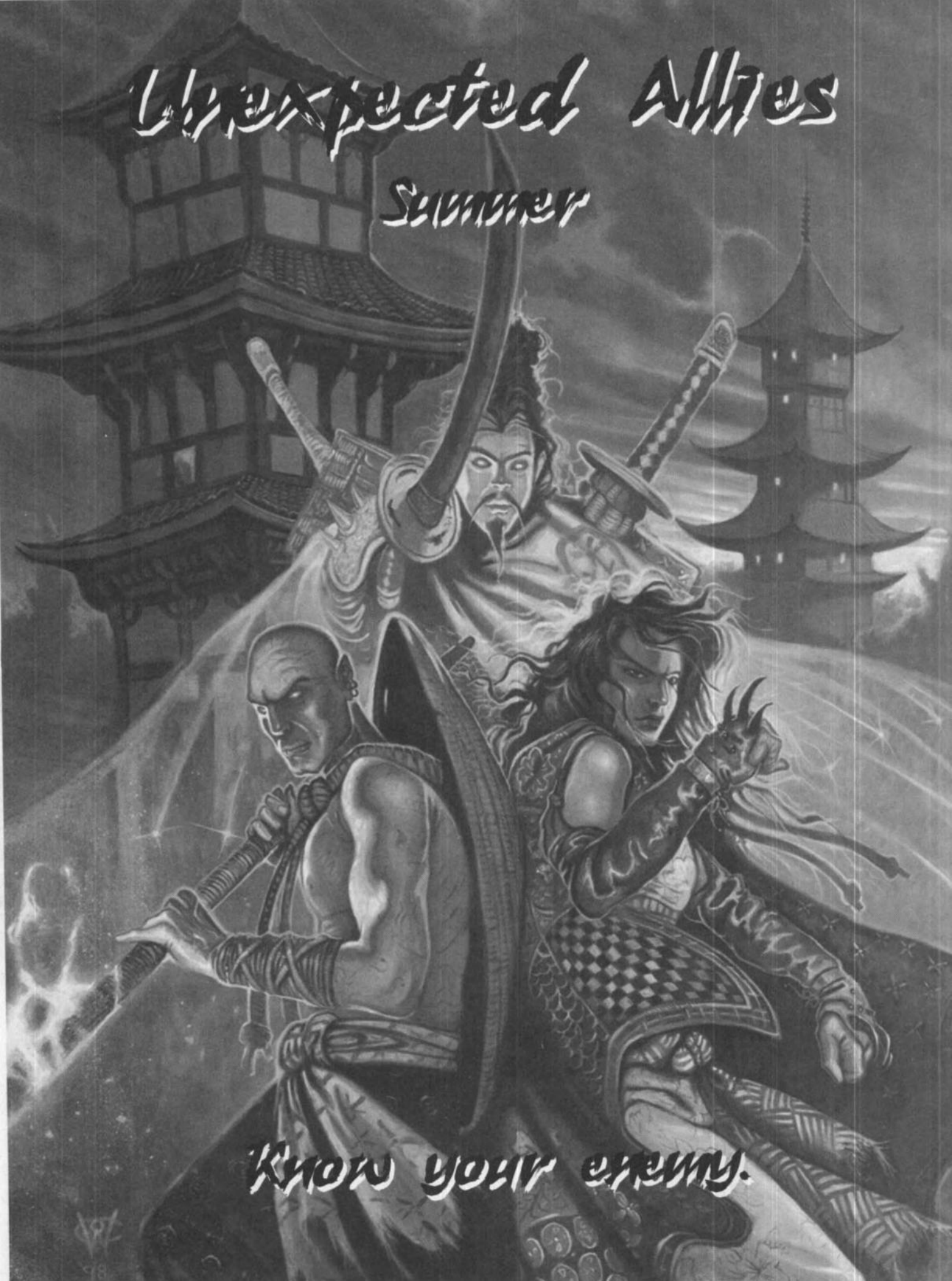
Welcome to Kyuden Seppun.



Now Available

Unexpected Allies

Summer



Know your enemy.



The Merchant's Guide to Rokugan™

**Taka's acquiring lots of koku.
Want to help?**

Merchants. Heimin. Honorless koku-grubbers who prey upon human weakness. The vendors and dealers of the Emerald Empire have always been sneered at by the powerful nobles above them. But times change, and the value of koku has risen more than most would care to believe. While still hampered by class and social position, the merchants have gained power of their own — power that even a samurai would balk at. From the opulent palaces of the Crane to the distant steppes of the Unicorn, they ply their wares: changing fortunes with every deal and controlling fate in ways no warrior ever could. Can your honor resist the call of cold, hard cash?

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